



London Labour Housing Group

LABOUR LEADERSHIP AND DEPUTY LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS 2020

Many thanks for your letter requesting a statement to support my candidacy for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. I am delighted to respond in full.

Please see my statement below:

Thank you very much for these questions. We are in the midst of a housing crisis, and the societal impact of it cannot be understated.

An entire generation of young people and key workers have been locked out of the housing market, meaning they are spending decades of their lives working to fill the pockets of private landlords with no hope of getting a mortgage.

That is particularly acute in London, where if you can't get help from relatives, your chances of owning a home in your twenties, thirties or beyond are almost nil.

Resolving the crisis won't be easy, and it will require substantial government investment, but if we strive to create a more meritocratic society, we simply have to fix it.

As the party of devolution, we must have a renewed focus on delivering power closer to the communities it is accountable to. The Labour Party should also learn from the Labour politicians already in power at a devolved level.

On housing in particular, we have much to learn from Sadiq Khan and his new Deputy Mayor for Housing – Tom Copley.

The house building ambitions of our last manifesto were absolutely right, and something I continue to fully support.

However, we must recognise more widely that we were heavily defeated in December. The Labour Party now has fewer MPs than at any point since the creation of the National Health Service.

If we don't listen to what the public told us, we face becoming a diminishing and perpetual party of opposition.

It is only by changing the Labour Party, and winning a general election, that we can get to grips with the housing crisis.



Some of the questions below are particularly detailed. It is fantastic that the London Labour Housing Group is thinking in detail about how we can come up with innovative and forward-looking solutions.

As a Deputy Leadership candidate, I support the ambitions of the LLHG. While I have done my best to let you know what I think, in some cases these are proposals which should be examined by the next shadow housing team.

Britain hasn't been building enough homes for decades. What specific measures will you take to increase house building?

The first and most obvious way we can and should increase house building is by undertaking a programme of council house building across the country. Council house waiting lists have grown out of control – so much so that families are now only dreaming of being able to get a good quality council house.

I grew up in a single parent family on a council estate in Edinburgh. I know first-hand the benefits that social housing can bring to families in need. The next Labour government has to put its money where its mouth is and invest in building council houses like never before.

We also have to examine the current local planning system, in all parts of Britain, to ensure it is relevant to the needs and desires of our country in the 2020s.

How would you reform the private rented sector to make it more stable and affordable for tenants? Do you support: a. a national register of landlords; b. some form of rent control?

The levels of rent in some parts of central London are beyond ridiculous. It is unaffordable for even higher earners, with people well into their thirties having to flat share because they can't afford to rent their own flat.

The sky-high rents are made all the worse by a contingent of absentee landlords who want to enjoy the benefits of leasing property without having to respond or resolve to any issues within their properties.

In Scotland, my Scottish Labour colleagues are pursuing fairer rents through a Member's Bill.

Our last UK manifesto was right to propose stronger protections for tenants, including the right to a long-term tenancy agreement if tenants wish.

While I understand the desire among some to institute rent controls, we have to be careful about the unintended consequences. Fixing rent controls for existing tenants can lead to it becoming even more difficult for newcomers to a city like London.



We have to tackle the ridiculous expense of rent in London, but in my view the best way to do that is by undertaking a radical programme of house building.

Do you support Labour's 2019 manifesto commitment that we should aim to build 100,000 homes a year for social rent?

Yes. As someone who grew up on a council estate and went on to become a Member of Parliament, I know the benefits social housing can bring to struggling families.

Council house waiting lists have grown out of control, and we must get to grips with this crisis.

The Greater London Authority and G15 group of housing associations estimate that London needs £4.9bn of funding for affordable house building every year between 2022 and 2032 in order to meet our housing need. Would you commit to fund this?

I want to see the housing crisis in London resolved as soon as possible, but specifics around funding are a matter for the next shadow housing team and Treasury team.

Do you agree that estate regeneration schemes should involve no net reduction in supply of social rented homes, and that estate residents should be balloted when their homes face demolition?

There are clearly many housing estates in desperate need of regeneration. Although there is often a stigma around regenerations, if they are done properly, with community involvement throughout, they can bring huge benefit to residents in the long term.

Residents facing the demolition of their own homes, which sometimes have been family homes for decades, should of course be balloted – assuming there are no safety reasons for the buildings to be demolished.

I agree that estate regenerations should always strive to deliver even more social housing, particularly when council house waiting lists are as long as they are.

Do you support Labour's manifesto pledge to end the Right to Buy? If not, what reforms would you make to it?

Yes - Right to Buy no longer exists in Scotland and I support the pledge to end it in the rest of Britain too. At a time when tens of thousands of families are waiting years for council homes, it is right that we focus on how we can retain and expand social housing stock. This problem has arisen because the Tories failed to build enough homes when in power.

Do you agree that affordable housing definition should be based on households not spending more than 30% of net income on housing costs?

That seems like a sensible definition of affordable housing. Again though, this is perhaps an issue the next shadow housing team could consider in more detail.

Would you relax restrictions on building on the Green Belt?

I believe we should prioritise building on brownfield sites before we look to reduce the protections on the Green Belt. It was the 1945 Attlee government that brought in Green Belt protections – a government which built more housing than any other.

We can channel the spirit of Attlee’s government in undertaking the most radical house building programme in generations, without undoing their work maintaining access to the countryside for all.

In Edinburgh, I am involved in several campaigns to protect the city’s Green Belt.

Would you reverse permitted development rights allowing offices, shops, and other employment spaces in dense urban areas to change asset class and be converted into flats without planning permission?

We have to look at a range of measures to tackle the housing crisis. The specific question around permitted development rights should be examined by the next shadow housing team.

How would you secure more affordable housing contributions from private developers through the planning system? How would you change the current approach to viability?

One of the best ways we can increase the number of affordable and social homes is by strengthening the requirements on private developers building medium or large sized estates to include more affordable housing.

The current approach to viability may have to be revised, and that is something the next shadow housing team should look at in more detail.

Would you support devolution to the Greater London Authority and city regions of control over: a. private rented sector regulation; b. Housing Association regulation; c. Right to Buy?

As Deputy Leader, I would set up Labour’s campaign for Britain’s future. That would look in detail at the constitutional make-up of the UK, and whether it is fit for the future.

I am a strong believer in devolution. I want to see more powers out of Whitehall and moved closer to communities.



As part of that, we should examine what greater powers the GLA should be afforded. It's clear that housing policies in London will naturally differ from other parts of the country, where the needs are different, and it seems me only appropriate that regional and local authorities are equipped to deal with that.

The UK Labour Party should also learn from the work devolved and local administrations are already doing, not least that of Sadiq Khan and his fantastic mayoral team.

The Greater London Authority estimates that £574m is needed over the next five years to end rough sleeping in London. Would you commit to fund this?

Although the question of funding is a wider discussion not just for the Deputy Leadership contest, we simply have to end rough sleeping. When I am staying in London I witness the scale of this crisis on my walk from my flat to the Commons.

Under the last Labour government the scandal of rough sleeping was almost eradicated, yet after a decade of Tory austerity it's back with a vengeance. In a country as rich as the United Kingdom, nobody should be sleeping rough.

Will you commit to restoring the previous Labour Government's homelessness safety net for priority groups and to improving support for single homeless people?

Yes. The last Labour government almost eradicated rough sleeping in Britain, but under the Tories that progress has been reversed.

No compassionate society, especially one as wealthy as the United Kingdom, should have anybody sleeping rough.

Please do not hesitate to come back to me should you require any further information.

Best wishes,

Ian Murray MP
ian@murrayfordeputy.co.uk