

NEW LHG WEBSITE!

Labour Housing Group has an attractive new website. We have been working on this new website over the past year and it is now up and running. What is more, for the first time you can now join LHG, and pay for your annual subscription via Paypal, using the website

Our website address is <http://labourhousing.org/>

The new website will greatly improve LHG's ability to interact with our members, and our ability to communicate and campaign on housing issues both with Labour Party members and the public. It is a great improvement on the functionality of the old website.

We hope you like it!

LHG elsewhere on the web:

Remember we also have an active Facebook Page and a Twitter account @LabourHousing

Both our London and North East England branches are on the Internet.

- LHG London has a Facebook page and a Twitter account at @LHGLondon
- LHG North East is on Facebook and on Twitter at @LabourHousingNE
- LHG North East also has its own webpage at <https://neilabourhousinggroup.weebly.com/>

Ross Houston

LHG AND PROTECTING YOUR DATA

LHG is committed to safeguarding your privacy. At all times we aim to respect any personal data you share with us, or that we receive from other organisations, and to keep it safe. Our Privacy Policy sets out our data collection and processing practices and your options regarding the ways in which your personal information is used.

Labour Housing Group's Privacy Policy is available on our new website (see above) and contains important information about your personal rights to privacy. Please read it carefully to understand how we use your personal data. We may update our Policy from time to time without notice to you, so please check it regularly.

The provision of your personal data to LHG is voluntary. However, without providing us with your personal data, you will be unable to join LHG as a member or take part in our activities.

Ross Houston

NB Individuals must be members of the Labour Party and agree to be bound by Labour Party rules and the LHG constitution

The opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Labour Housing Group

HOUSING

Honorary Patrons: Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Karen Buck MP, Lord Roy, Kennedy and Nicky Gavron AM


LABOUR
housing group
Autumn 2018

The Newsletter from Labour Housing Group

This is a very full edition of LHG's Newsletter, with a lot of opportunity for our members to involve themselves in our work, and reports on our recent activity. It's not all work however - there's an invitation to a reception at the Housing of Commons as well. We have an article by EC member Amanda Pinnock dealing with as aspect of private renting, a major contemporary issue.

LHG Policy Update

Your EC is starting to review and update LHG's housing policies across the board. The starting point of this process is a consultation of LHG's members details of how you can contribute are in the Members' Pages.

Newsletter to go digital

This is the last LHG Newsletter to go out in paper format as a matter of routine. In future it will be distributed by email, unless you ask us to send you a paper copy. So if you haven't yet done so, make sure that we have your email address! If you haven't already done so, send it to LHG's membership officer, Janet Berry, at janetberry@hotmail.co.uk.

L H G DIARY

What have we been doing? Here is an update of LHG activities since the last Newsletter.

- Sought LHG members' views on and submitted a response to the Party's consultation on 'Housing for the Many' Green Paper
- Submitted response to Tory Social Housing Green Paper
- Submitted a contemporary resolution to Conference
- Held a Fringe Meeting at Conference
- Developed and inaugurated a new Website (www.labourhousing.org)

The opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Labour Housing Group

LHG Members' Pages



LABOUR HOUSING GROUP

POLICY DAY

10:30 am — 4:00 pm Saturday 17th November
Newcastle

The Good Space, Pilgrim Street, NE1 6QE
(Floor 2 at Commercial Union House)

Keynote speakers:

John Healey, Shadow Housing Minister

Delivering Labour's radical housing programme

Sarah Longlands, Director, IPPR North

Making devolution work for housing

John Boughton, social historian

Author of 'Municipal Dreams', a narrative history of council housing—from slums to the Grenfell Tower

Workshops: The role of Local Authorities - delivering our vision; Making national housing policy truly local; Tackling skills shortage; Shaping future planning policy; Tenants in the driving seat once again; Let's be radical about private renting!

Sponsored by Unison Northern

Booking through Eventbrite or at
www.labourhousing.org

Lunchbox available from Food Nation
Order in advance for £6 (meat or veg)
www.labourhousing.org

What's Fault got to do with it?

The doctrine of natural order usually dictates that those at fault should be penalised for adverse conduct. However, this is not always the case in the world of renters, where Landlords can swiftly end tenancies when it suits them, so long as basic legal rules are observed.

Today, as the implementation of Universal Credit rolls out, lengthy processing and lack of budgeting skills, coupled with the harsh realities of austerity and the changes in immigration legislation, means that the relationship between Landlords and Tenants is more fractious and the rationale behind tenants being at fault is no longer of genuine concern.

Under the section 21 regime Landlords are afforded the opportunity under housing law to bring Court action to evict tenants with ease from the expiry of the written agreement, and the Courts have no jurisdiction to prevent the eviction, irrespective of exemplary behaviour on the part of the tenant. Unscrupulous Landlords utilise the full extent of these provisions to remove tenants who raise complaints about substandard dwellings, tenants who validly challenge unjust treatment and promote their rights. This Government has poorly attempted to address these anomalies in legislation introduced in 2015.

Many concede the coined phrase of 'no fault evictions' should be repealed to protect innocent renters caught up in an unjust system which acts solely in the interests of the bourgeois landlord owners, who care very little for them. They question why families should lose their homes when they have done nothing wrong. This dilemma was remedied by Scottish legislators in 2017 when bold steps were taken to scrap fixed term tenancies, described by Shelter Scotland as a "new dawn" for private renters, reserving eviction grounds solely to sell, refurbish or if they intend to live there themselves. Croydon Council is reported to be the first Council to support the scrapping of the s21 mechanism due to the growing number of private tenancy evictions putting a strain on their already finite resources.

Adversely the Government's creating what could be described as tenancies for life may harm our already volatile rental market, by discouraging Landlords from renting out properties for fear of being unable to get them back. At a time of increasing homelessness and limited social housing stock to accommodate the growing demand in the UK, this course of action to afford tenants greater security of tenure may not ameliorate the situation.

How then do we balance the interest of tenants offering sustainability, stability and serenity against the backdrop of being held to ransom, so to speak, by wealthy landowners who wield power and influence?

Under current housing legislation the lifespan of private tenancies can last for a minimum of six months, leaving tenants without any real security for themselves and their families. The imminent risk of eviction and the threat of homelessness understandably can lead to severe anxiety and poor mental health and the uncertainty shattering the fabric of family resilience.

Of course some may argue that ownership should permit Landlords to do with their possessions as they see fit, and infringement on their Human Rights is not in keeping with our obligations under the European Convention (for now anyway!) and free enterprise. Conversely tenants' rights also need to be protected, as celebrated in the Article 8 to promote family life, alluding to the right not to have your home life interfered with, including by unlawful surveillance, unlawful entry and arbitrary evictions.

Rather than draconian constraints being placed on Landlords, a welcomed amendment could be to extend the lifespan of the tenancies beyond 6 months to offer a reprieve from the risk of eviction for example 3 – 5 years. This balancing exercise must incorporate the potential harm and precariousness of the environment in which housing law governs.

Amanda Pinnock

LHG POLICY REVIEW

The LHG Executive is beginning the process of reviewing its policies.

We would like to hear from you (briefly) as follows.

1. What do you consider the most pressing issues for Labour's housing policies to address?
2. Where do you think our policies most need updating?
3. In what particular policy areas do you have experience and/or expertise?
Please email Paul Martin at PaulMartin@clara.co.uk with your ideas no later than Friday 30th November.

LHG response to Tory Social Housing Green Paper

As well as a response to the Labour Party Green Paper, *Housing for the Many*, to which many LHG members contributed, in August we also made a statement about the Tory Housing Green Paper. You can read the full statement here on the LHG website and the key points from the press release which are set out below.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy the government said its green paper would be a “*fundamental rethink of social housing in this country*”. Instead, it has been sneaked out in the middle of everyone's summer holidays. It has little of importance to say and holds out no hope that this government will tackle the housing crisis or the stigmatisation of social tenants.

The contrast between the Tory green paper and the one produced by Jeremy Corbyn and John Healey for Labour earlier in the year could hardly be starker. Theirs fiddles at the edges and is going nowhere, while Labour's is a genuine agenda for reform and the re-establishment of social rented housing at the heart of the housing system.

LHG's statement attacks the two main deficiencies in the Tory Green Paper: no announcement of more funding to build social housing, and a wholly inadequate response to the stigmatisation of social tenants. LHG says: “Tenants must be astonished to read that the key policy proposal for addressing the stigma they often experience is to set up street parties and best neighbourhood competitions.”

The few positive points - a return to proper regulation of consumer standards, and to a tenants' voice organisation of some sort, a review of the Decent Homes Standard and the development of a more level playing field between council and housing association landlords – are an admission that much of the policy since 2010 has been wrong. When Labour left office in 2010 there was a strong regulatory system, proper inspection of landlord services, a national tenant voice. Above all there were high levels of investment in new social housing. That was all swept away by the Tory Coalition Government. And the disastrous Tory Government which followed has so far had to retract its own housing policies not once, but 7 times. They should apologise for getting everything so wrong.

Sheila Spencer

LHG Members' Pages

INVITATION

You are invited to an end of year reception for Labour Housing Group, to be held at the House of Commons, from 6:30pm to 9pm, on **Thursday, 6 December 2018**.

The reception is being hosted by Lord Kennedy of Southwark. Drinks and nibbles will be served.

Please meet outside the gift shop in Westminster Hall, at 6:30pm.

Please allow time to pass through security at the House, and please bring this invitation with you.

We will be collecting donations for LHG at the reception - we suggest £10, and £5 if you are retired, unwaged, or a student.

To help us with catering arrangements, if you will be attending please RSVP to paulre55@hotmail.co.uk by no later than Thursday 29 November 2018.

As space is limited to approximately 60 people in the reception room, we will be allocating places on a first come first served basis.

2019 Annual General Meeting - Advance Notice

The 2019 Annual General Meeting of Labour Housing Group will be held on Saturday 9th March 2019, in London.

Full details of the venue, time and programme will be sent to all LHG Members by post early in 2019. In the meantime, please keep your diary free on March 9th so that you can attend.

LHG Executive 2018-2019

At the AGM on June 16th 2018, LHG's new Executive was elected for the two years to 2020. Your Executive has 12 members from around the country:

- **Janet Berry** – Winchester CLP (*Membership Secretary*)
- **John Bevan** – Hornsey & Wood Green CLP (*Vice-chair*)
- **John Cotton** – Birmingham Perry Bar CLP
- **Ed Derrick** – Newcastle Central CLP (*newsletter editor*)
- **Paul Eastwood** – Hemel Hempstead CLP (*Chair*)
- **Ross Houston** - Finchley & Golders Green CLP (*Treasurer*)
- **Heather Johnson** – Hampstead & Kilburn CLP (*Vice-chair & events organiser*)
- **Paul Martin** – Poplar Lime House CLP (*policy lead*)
- **Amanda Pinnock** – Huddersfield CLP
- **Kerry Pollard** – St Albans CLP (*Secretary June-Sept 2018*)
- **Sheila Spencer** – North Tyneside CLP (*Secretary from September 2018*)
- **Sharon Thompson** – Birmingham Ladywood CLP (co-opted September 2018)

Annual General Meeting 2018 - Report to Members

The 2018 LHG Annual General Meeting was held on June 16th. It was attended by about 20 members who were treated to no less than three really interesting presentations, as well as all the usual AGM business.

A series of challenges for Labour, for local authorities and housing bodies

The first speaker, Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive of Housing Quality Network, spoke about the Labour Party Housing Green Paper, **Housing for the Many**, which he said was good but not ambitious enough on the need for social and affordable housing to be a priority for the next Labour Government. He presented 10 refreshing suggestions for Labour for the future, starting with a commitment to build houses with the best standards and best design, the best safety standards, and the best management. He urged us to make sure that ministers and civil servants are more engaged, and working together, and to tackle the difficult questions about decisions about empty property in London as well as the regeneration of council estates and the role of Housing Associations. He also noted that London local authorities and other London bodies cannot solve London's problems on their own. His final point, that Labour was expected to build a great number of council houses and would be well-loved for this, was music to the ears of most delegates!

Speaker number two (Michael Ware BDO) gave a fascinating insight into the role that public sector housing organisations can have in developing energy solutions. Solutions such as battery banks, ground source heat pumps, and photovoltaic power would not only save consumers money but also make money for local authorities and other public bodies. Given that poorer people pay 3-4 times as much as those who are better off on their energy costs, this is a great time for Labour to invest in a different way to provide low cost energy.

The final speaker was Nicky Gavron, a London Assembly member and an LHG Patron. Nicky chaired a London Assembly Planning Committee investigation into modular construction (**Designed, sealed, delivered:**

The contribution of offsite manufactured homes to solving London's housing crisis, 2017). The research found that modular construction (also known as offsite manufacturing or OSM) could vastly improve the speed of construction, and would help the construction industry to modernise. It is low cost to provide, to heat, and quick to build, good for urban and rural settings, and adaptable. It would allow us to move away from the stranglehold that the big builders have on the industry, and enable us to develop the sector and the workforce at a critical time. Nicky stressed that OSM today is a very different proposition from the 20th Century, with digital design and precision engineering ensuring that outcomes are far better than those of the industrialised, system-built housing of the 1960s.

The report from LHG Executive

LHG officers reported on LHG activity, finances, and membership. Over the past year, LHG had held an event in Birmingham, a fringe meeting in Brighton, and a reception in the Houses of Parliament. Nicky Gavron and Lord Roy Kennedy had been welcomed as the first LHG Patrons. There was a small increase in membership, with 245 paid-up members at the time of the AGM, and the books had balanced, with a small surplus of £479.32 over the year.

For the forthcoming year, the Executive had decided to invest in a new website, and to give more support to branches (currently London and the North East) with new ones developing in Greater Manchester and Birmingham, and possibly the South West.

Discussion of future plans

After the main business, there was a lively discussion about what LHG should be doing, and how, in the coming year. Key points were that:

- LHG should be at the forefront of housing policy development within the Labour Party
- We need to reach out more to LP and LHG members, with a list of speakers, consultation on policy papers, and more joint work with other Socialist Societies with common agendas
- A higher profile generally

Sheila Spencer, Secretary

LHG Members' Pages

Conference Fringe Report

Our Fringe Meeting at this year's Labour Party Conference was held on the evening of Sunday 23rd September at Avenue HQ at the Pier Hotel on Liverpool's waterfront. Despite the Fringe Meeting's clash with other interesting fringe events, and an exceptionally long composing session on the housing motion to go to Conference, it was a well attended and highly sociable evening, with over fifty people present.

(/

th)



The speakers (as shown in the picture above, left to right) were Councillor Danny Beales (Cabinet Member for Regeneration at London Borough of Camden), Melanie Onn MP from the Shadow Housing team, Councillor John Bevan (LHG Executive and Chair of the event), Councillor Sharon Thompson (Birmingham City Council) and Phil Glanville (Executive Mayor at London Borough of Hackney).

The theme of the Fringe meeting was Local Councils leading the way in Tackling the Housing Crisis. Our three Local Authority speakers each gave an insight into what their own Councils were doing to address the need to build housing in their areas despite the Tory Government's continued squeeze on local government and the lack of investment in affordable housing. Their examples illustrated how Labour Councils up and down the country are using innovative ways to address the housing crisis, and exposed the complete lack of support from central Government.

Melanie Onn MP congratulated local politicians on the work they were doing to help resolve the housing crisis and further highlighted the lack of action from the Government. At all levels, where Labour is in power, resources are being put into social housing, including from the London Mayor. She stressed that Labour in power would work closely with local authorities to deliver the housing we need across the country, and that the Shadow Cabinet Housing team is eager to work with Labour Housing Group to develop strong policies that a Labour Government would introduce in power.

The presentations were followed by a lively Q&A session, an afterwards by informal networking. We hope soon to be able to upload speakers' notes onto LHG's new website so that LHG members can get more details of the Fringe meeting.

Heather Johnson