

# HOUSING

## A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

This has been a big year for housing. The pandemic and its knock-on effects have changed the way we see our homes, exacerbating problems we have known of for years but also showing how we can respond quickly to an emergency.

Housing and homelessness policy areas have changed radically over the last 12 months. My work has been dominated by the pandemic: confronting the government on homelessness, calling for greater protections for renters and drawing attention to inconsistencies in government support schemes.

In 2021, I will continue these and hold the Government to its promises following the Grenfell Tower tragedy and pushing for zero-carbon, high quality housing. The Government must recognise that zero-carbon housing is essential to meeting its net-zero emissions targets.

Over Christmas, I'll reflect on my central priority - ensuring that everyone has a decent place to live. This is fundamental to Labour's vision to make this country a great place to grow up and grow old in. I look forward to continuing to work with you to make this a reality. I hope you enjoy a much-needed break. See you in 2021.

**Thangam Debbonaire MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing**

## ELECTION BATTLEGROUND 2021

Next year looks to be a busy one in the number and variety of seats up for election. Additional contests are due to those postponed from 2020 under the Coronavirus Act 2020. Those elected "a year late" in 2021 will serve three-year terms so as to maintain the four-year electoral-cycle.

All **County Councils** have elections this year.

36 **metropolitan boroughs** have elections. Rotherham, Doncaster & Salford have all-out elections but there are none in Birmingham. All the others have one councillor per ward postponed from 2020, plus by-elections.

**Unitary Authorities:** 13 have elections for all councillors while 15 others elect only one third of councillors. Directly-elected mayors will be chosen in Bristol, Doncaster, Liverpool, North Tyneside, Salford.

The **London Mayor** and the **London Assembly elections** are also due.

The **Combined Authority Mayors** for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough,

Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West of England, West Yorkshire are up for election.

62 out of the 182 **Non-Metropolitan District Councils** will hold elections for one third of councillors

All 129 members of the **Scottish Parliament** and all 60 members of the **Senedd Cymru** are scheduled.

All four **police and crime commissioners in Wales** are up for election.

For more information see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_local\\_elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_United_Kingdom_local_elections)

## IN THIS ISSUE

Page 1: Election battleground

Pages 2, 3: Stopping evictions

Page 4: Council Homebuilding for the 21st Century

Page 5: Heated argument

Page 6: Health Inequality

Page 7: Burning issue

Page 8: Who we are

# STOPPING AN EVICTIONS EXPLOSION

The Government's 'circuit break' on housing evictions was merely a sticking plaster, failing to protect those most in need, safeguard their homes and build a stable foundation, strong enough to weather the turbulent times ahead.

A year ago, the word 'Coronavirus' was almost unheard of. In retrospect, life appeared to make sense and societal problems continued to dominate for the many less fortunate, not the privileged few.

Nothing could have prepared us for the massive bombshell in 2020 and how the pandemic would exacerbate the already prevalent socioeconomic inequities in the UK.

## Widespread deprivation

So it will come as no surprise that research shows basic housing needs are severely impacted by this pandemic, extending beyond the traditional cohorts of deprivation.

We have seen a significant rise in the working poor - people on furlough and reduced working hours - struggling to make ends meet, including rental liabilities and mortgage repayments.

According to government figures at the end of June 2020, 98,300 homeless household were living in temporary accommodation, an unprecedented rise of 7% in just three months from 92,190 households at the end of March, and a rise of 14% in a year.

## Risk of homelessness

Between April and June 2020, 63,570 households approached the local authority and were found to be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The most common triggers of homelessness during the initial lock-down period were households no longer able to stay with family and friends (33%), domestic violence (11%) and the

loss of private tenancies (lower at 11% due to the moratorium on evictions).

**Shelter estimate an eye-watering 320,000 renters have been newly plunged into rent arrears since the start of the pandemic.**

The London School of Economics reports that an estimated 55,000 households were given notice to leave their homes by private landlords during the pandemic and that around 700,000 may fall into rent arrears in the next 12 months.

**Disturbingly, just last week the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published findings showing a high proportion of renters were already reducing spending on essentials, with 70% spending less on food and 49% spending less on heating and electricity. For those with children, 39% were spending less on children's food and nappies.**

In response to the outcry, a ban on evictions was introduced by the Government as part of a series of housing support measures under the *Coronavirus Act 2020*.

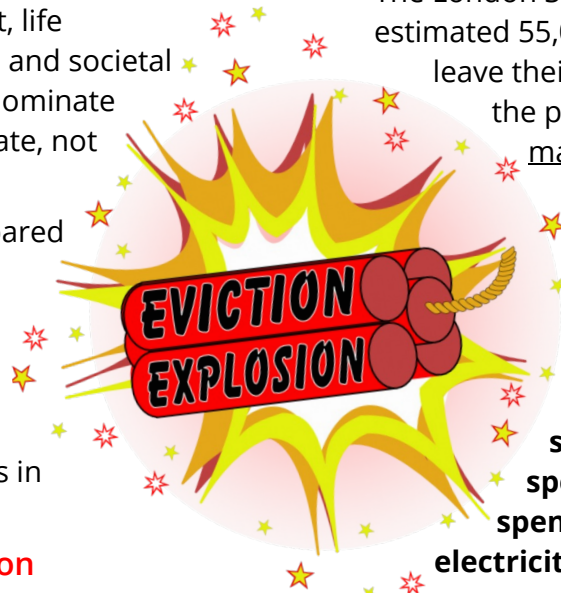
This involved the suspension of ongoing housing possession action in England and Wales for a period of 90 days from 27th March to 24th August 2020.

## More intervention needed

Many welcomed this much needed intervention. Regrettably, the postponement did not extend to all situations, excluding lodger arrangements and other occupiers such as commercial tenancies.

Whilst rapturous applause for our NHS staff rippled through the UK, the loophole affected our nurses, carers and other NHS workers as they were asked to leave by their landlords.

Where government restrictions on eviction did not apply, very few options were afforded to them.



# STOPPING AN EVICTIONS EXPLOSION (continued)

## A reprieve

In June, another reprieve was announced, extending the moratorium for a further two months until 20 September 2020 to accompany the re-opening of the courts and the introduction of the 'tier' system which varies with the severity of the pandemic.

To protect tenants where the public health risk was highest, bailiffs were discouraged from enforcing warrants where the lock-down measures were most restrictive.

Following the introduction of new national restrictions in England, the *Public Health (Coronavirus) Protections from Eviction and Taking Control of Goods (England) Regulation 2020* came into force on 17 November 2020 but offered only limited protection. Those in substantial rent arrears, defined as at least 9 months arrears at the date of the Court Order (and not including arrears accrued after 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020), would be afforded no protection.

Notwithstanding this draconian legal imposition, few Government resources were offered to local councils to ease pressure on already struggling services.

## What now?

Despite recent measures to avert homelessness such as the extension of notice periods for 6 months, more affirmative action is needed to prevent renters from falling into arrears from the outset.

**An early intervention approach should be promoted that can substantially reduce the risk of homelessness, including access to free legal advice and assistance.**

Advice previously given under the *Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012* has been severely cut by the Tory Government and made inaccessible for those such as the working poor.

There are now limited numbers of Legal Aid providers throughout the country. They offer a vital service but are now less able to meet the increasing demand for assistance due to the lack of Government funding.

Without ready access to justice, renters are often ill-equipped to exercise their legal rights, especially when landlords have their own expert legal representatives.

According to Shadow Justice Secretary, David Lammy, *"as we enter an economic crisis which could lead to levels of joblessness not seen since the 1980s, the lack of legal representation will lead to injustice on an industrial scale"*. Moreover, we have seen a cut of 36% to spending on criminal and civil legal aid funding advice over the past decade meaning that legal representation is no longer available to those who need it. More than 37 million people in England and Wales now live in a local authority without a legal aid provider.

To compound matters, HM Courts and Tribunals (HMCTS) has revealed the backlog of court cases at the end of September 2020 stood at a whopping 509,347 in the Magistrates and 48,713 in the County Court. This has left many in limbo, thus prolonging the fear and anguish and exacerbating mental health conditions.

## Labour demands no one will lose their home

Thangam Debbonaire, Shadow Housing Secretary reiterates that "An estimated 700,000 households are in rent arrears. For comparison, that is more than the total number of households in Birmingham and Sheffield combined. Around half of these households are two months behind – in England that means courts would be forced to automatically grant repossession orders.

These numbers should shock government ministers into action. They need to make real changes to housing law and the benefits system so they can keep their promise, that 'no-one will lose their home' because of this crisis".

## Conclusion

Many believe the temporary ban on evictions does not go far enough, and with the economic recession on the horizon it is even more crucial that clear, well considered steps are taken at the earliest opportunity to safeguard homes.

Amanda Pinnock (LHG Executive Member)

*(Further information on page 4)*

## EVICTIONS EXPLOSION (continued)

### USEFUL QUOTATIONS

#### Thangam Debbonaire

(Shadow Secretary of State for Housing) on rent arrears and homelessness

<http://www.ukpol.co.uk/thangam-debbonaire-2020-letter-on-homelessness/>

**David Lammy** – (Shadow Minister for Justice) on legal aid  
<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2020-05-06.43826>.

### GETTING HELP

**Shelter's free housing advice helpline runs 365 days a year on 0800 800 4444**

#### Citizens Advice

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> can help you understand your rights, particularly if you are negotiating a payment plan with your landlord.

#### Advice4Renters

<https://adviceforrenters.org/get-support> can provide free or cheap legal advice plus representation from specialists.

#### Get Rent Back

<https://www.getrentback.org/> can help you claim money back from a landlord who broke terms of your agreement

#### Justice For Tenants

<https://justicefortenants.org/> can support you in getting an unprotected deposit back.

#### Stepchange Debt Advice

<https://stepchange.org/> offers free debt advice

## COUNCIL HOMES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Earlier this year at our LHG conference, one of our Patrons, James Murray MP, launched the Building Council Homes Project in partnership with Labour Housing Group. Solving Britain's housing crisis will need action for a sustained period on many fronts, including reform of the private rented sector, changes to the mortgage market and financial regulation, and a properly funded welfare state to help people facing homelessness.



James Murray, MP

But no response to the housing crisis is complete without building new homes, and history shows us that we will never build all the homes we need without the public sector taking a leading role. The Commission plans to develop ideas for the next Labour Government to take forward for long term structural changes to enable 21<sup>st</sup> Century home building.

Since its launch in September 2020, the Steering Group has brought together Labour representatives and activists along with housing experts from across the country with backgrounds in different tiers of local government with a track record in council homebuilding.

We are really grateful for the co-ordination support from LHG Executive member Nick Bragger and LHG Secretary Sheila Spencer and very pleased that longstanding Labour Housing Group member Steve Hilditch is part of the Steering Group and leading on the drafting of the final report.

The plan is to produce a report that describes councils' current achievements in building new council homes and identifies the limits on their abilities to build more homes, particularly for social rent, under the current regime.

It will set out what changes would be necessary to enable councils to play a leading role in building the homes we need in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We want to understand what the right relationship should be between local and regional tiers of government and how 21<sup>st</sup> Century council home building differs from previous generations.

**Over the next few months we will be gathering submissions from contributors and next spring we will meet as a project team to consider the detailed direction of the report. We plan to report in September 2021.**

Rachel Blake, Steering Group Chair



# A HEATED ARGUMENT?



In March 2019 the Government announced that new homes would not be permitted to have gas- or oil-fuelled boilers installed from 2025. The main option for alternative heating was heat-pumps, for which they have set a target of 600,000 installations a year by 2028.

## Affordability

Although **Green Home Grants** of up to £10,000 are available in theory, there are hoops to be jumped through even to receive £5,000. (A useful guide can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/ghg2021>.)

As well as the heat pump itself, there are considerable other costs. Typically, radiators operate at a much lower temperature and therefore need to be larger and/or on for a longer period to reach a comfortable temperature.

Another option is under-floor heating, but the cost of retro-fitting it is high. In either case, the building as a whole must be well-insulated.

## Won't there be more "Green jobs"?

This part of the energy industry in the UK is not yet well-developed and most heat pumps are made abroad, notably in Japan.

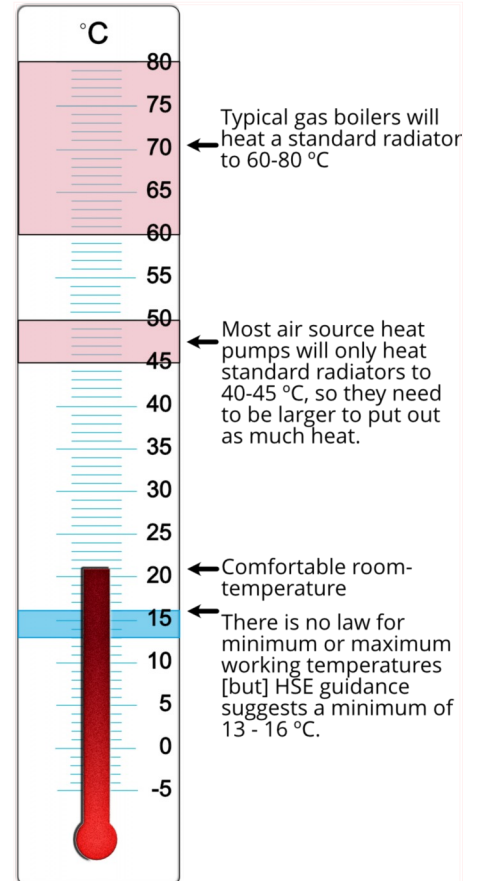
## Aren't there big savings to be made in running costs?

Not if mains gas is available, as the saving over the cost of the electricity for powering an air source heat pump is not significant.

Paul Martin

### ISSUES FOR LABOUR

- How will this affect Labour's pledge to build one million genuinely affordable new homes over 10 years?
- Unless UK manufacturing capacity is greatly increased, how will significantly more "Green jobs" result?
- How does this technology benefit those who live in flats or terraced houses?
- Is this the best use of government subsidies?



## WHAT IS A HEAT PUMP?

It works like an air-conditioning unit in reverse, using a coolant liquid to move heat to where it is required.

There are two main types – air source and ground source.

**Both need electricity to power them.**

## GREEN HOME GRANTS

The *Green Homes Grant* vouchers will be available to:

- All homeowners in owner-occupied homes
- Landlords of private sector domestic properties
- Landlords of social sector domestic properties, including LA-owned homes
- Residential park homeowners

## WHAT ABOUT JAPAN?

Japan has put enormous efforts into alternative energy, due to a lack of oil and gas resources, the polluting nature of coal and the devastation of the Fukushima nuclear incident.

Its post-war success has been driven by close co-operation between Government and industry, stressing innovation and collaboration. It is the global leader in the manufacture of heat pumps and has already achieved 550,000 installations per year.



# HEALTH INEQUALITY IN ENGLAND

In the late 1960's, research into British civil servants showed that if a person was working in a lower-grade role, they were more likely to have health problems - or even die at a younger age.

*This held true even if account was taken of all the factors that might lead to higher rates of disease, for example, smoking or being overweight.*

This large-scale study followed a very stable population over several years. Follow up studies drew the same conclusions and a further study in the in early 1980s which included women found that they, too, were more likely to have health issues if working at a lower grade.

In 2005 the World Health Organisation set up a Commission on Social Determinants of Health which was led by Professor Marmot. This was followed up in 2010 by a review of health inequalities in England and recently the Health Foundation has funded a 10 year follow-up study.

## What do these studies show?

**Being poor is bad for your health, not because of the choices you make but because the issues that you face in daily life are more likely to cause health problems.**

These alarming statistics show dramatic drops in life expectancy in London moving eastwards from the wealthy borough of Westminster.

Years of austerity in social welfare funding have probably reversed the previously rising trend of life expectancy in England (which was the focus of the study).

**All too often, media and politicians talk about lifestyle choices or taking responsibility for one's own health but Professor Marmot's research is clear that this is not about choice.**

The data shows that children living in poorer neighbourhoods have less access to the safe play areas needed for exercise and are also more likely to suffer from asthma due to poor housing

conditions. The ability to buy healthy food at an affordable price and the skills and knowledge to prepare enjoyable meals are key to having a healthy diet.

Too often *children in care* are not taught cooking skills or how to shop on a budget; no wonder they struggle when they must fend for themselves.

We need to give thought as to how to tackle these problems and how a fairer society can ensure people's lives are not blighted by lack of opportunity but instead are able to fulfil their potential to live healthily and happily.

Karen Bollan (*Fellow of Royal Society of Public Health*)

*Healthwatch Tower Hamlets*

## Useful links:

<http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/about-us/about-professor-sir-michael-marmot>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england/chapter-6-social-determinants-of-health>

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab\\_3](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_3)

<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241502290> (*Housing*)

## NHS England definition of health inequalities:

*"Health inequalities are unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society. Health inequalities arise because of the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions influence our opportunities for good health, and how we think, feel and act, and this shapes our mental health, physical health and wellbeing."*

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ltphimenu/definitions-for-health-inequalities/>

**Professor Michael Marmot** has led research into health inequalities for the past 30 years and was Principal Investigator of the Whitehall Studies which investigated this social gradient in morbidity (illness) and mortality (death).

# BURNING ISSUE - NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL

Burning buildings have a horrible fascination – last year, thousands of Parisians watched *Notre Dame Cathedral* burn for hours. There were casualties among the firefighters, but fortunately no deaths. Recent film footage of it on BBC TV under the *Storyville* banner, showed the significance of the loss and the bravery of the firefighters, but in most respects it is yet another tale of ineptitude in high places.

The UK Health and Safety Executive says that:

*Building owners must carry out a fire safety risk assessment. They must keep it up to date and ensure that adequate and appropriate fire safety measures are in place to minimise the risk of injury or loss of life in the event of a fire. They should identify what could cause a fire to start and the people who may be at risk.*

If that had been done in the case of the Cathedral, it didn't appear in the film.

It seems there were no sensors to warn of overheating in the roof space which was full of ancient wooden beams and known as '*the forest*'.

It didn't look as though there was the necessary equipment to tackle such an enormous blaze or that there were up-to-date plans for evacuation.

**So it was fortunate that the fire took so long to gain a hold.**

Astonishingly, even after the huge spire had collapsed it was decided to send in 20-40 firefighters just to protect the the famous facade.

*This was despite there being no remaining civilians inside to be rescued.*



The main concern seems to have been for holy relics and art treasures that were believed to still be inside in a safe, though the curatorial staff were unclear where that was located and initially lacked the keys.

The film shows the fire chief taking a decision whether to send in the firefighters' - at what looked like appalling risk to themselves - with President Macron standing next to him.

*No pressure, then?*

The film is documentary in style and shows, rather than tells, what happened. What is revealed is a lack of forethought, insufficient detailed, accurate information and inadequate equipment for an inferno on this scale.

*The Cathedral authorities seem completely unprepared for such an event and were depending upon heroic firefighters - or perhaps a miracle - to save their treasures.*

**It was as though they believed the Cathedral was "too holy to burn".**

This fire brigade, the *Sapeurs Pompier de Paris* is part of the French Armed Forces. Their individual bravery is exemplary but they are led by Generals whose motto is '*Save or Perish*'.

Perhaps they should adopt a new one, something more like '*Plan, prepare and be professional*'.

Paul Martin

PS Nothing of this sort could happen here, could it?

## LHG EXECUTIVE 2020

*LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020 for the two years to 2022.*

### Executive members

Andy Bates (co-opted)

Janet Berry

John Bevan

Rachel Blake

Nick Bragger (co-opted)

John Cotton

Ed Derrick

Gerard Heffey (co-opted)

Ross Houston

Heather Johnson

Paul Martin

Amanda Pinnock

Sheila Spencer

Christopher Worrall (co-opted)

## WHAT IS THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP?

The Labour Housing Group is a lobbying group that is affiliated to the Labour Party and dedicated to the development of a socialist housing policy.

You can contact us at  
<http://labourhousing.org/contact> and join us at  
<https://labourhousing.org/membership/>

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

## £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £

If you cannot spare time and energy, you can still help us in our work by making a donation by bank transfer to:

"Labour Housing Group", Account number 50478080, Sort code 08-90-06,

Co-operative Bank, PO Box 1AN, Blandford Street, Newcastle, NE99 1AN.

Of course, you can also send a cheque made payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o **The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS**

**PLEASE QUOTE "LHG2020 CAMPAIGN"**

**For readers new to housing policy issues, *Labour Housing Group* publishes a series of short guides aimed at a wide readership.**

Our six published **Briefings** on current topics include *Homelessness, Rough Sleeping, Affordable Housing, Private Renting Sector, Rural Housing* and *Leasehold Reform*.

They can be found at:  
<https://labourhousing.org/resources/lhg-briefings/>

Forthcoming issues will cover, *Right to Buy, Sustainable Homes* and *Council Homes*.

If you would like to contribute, please email our Policy Officer, Paul Martin at [pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk).

*Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Labour Housing Group.*

