

MAKING OUR VOICE HEARD

Keir Starmer has been reported as saying that Labour has “put to one side” the 2019 General Election Manifesto and that the Party would be “starting from scratch”.

LHG sincerely hopes this is not the case as there are very few points in the 2018 *Housing for the Many* document which we would not wish to include.

Labour had already developed a very strong set of housing policies, thanks to the hard work of several Shadow Housing Ministers and Shadow Secretaries of State, including John Healey, Thangam Debbonaire, Lucy Powell and the late and much-missed Jack Dromey. It was these policies that were ready for inclusion in the 2019 General Election Manifesto.

We believe that our already well-developed housing policy must form a central part of the Party's offer to the electorate, together with new proposals to put right the further damage to the sector brought about by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

LHG Fringe meetings 2022

LHG will host two fringe meetings at this year's Labour Party Conference.

'Homes for Whom? How do we meet housing needs for all in the next decade?' is being organised with the Society of Labour Lawyers and will focus on how to meet housing needs in the next decade. The cost of homes for sale or rent and the rise in other basic costs is creating a perfect storm in which even more people will be struggling to find and keep decent home in an area where they want to live.

Our speakers will come from across the spectrum of political activists, commentators, and policy-makers.

Our second fringe meeting will examine ***Labour's plan for improving fire safety.***

Speakers include the Fire Brigades Union, groups representing leaseholders and disabled people, fire safety experts, and a respected journalist who has repeatedly drawn our attention back to the Grenfell disaster and its causes.

Both meetings are being held outside the secure zone. All Labour Party members welcome. For full details, see page 2 article "LHG at labour Conference in Liverpool".

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LHG AT LABOUR CONFERENCE IN LIVERPOOL

Homes for Whom? How do we meet housing needs for all in the next decade?

(Organised with Society for Labour Lawyers)

Monday 26th September 7.30-9pm (doors open 7pm for light refreshments)

Venue: Liverpool Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool, L1 3BT

Chair: Cllr John Cotton, LHG Chair

Speakers

Matthew Pennycook MP (Shadow Housing Minister)

invited

Cllr Jayne Kirkham (Labour Coast & Country)

David Watkinson (Society of Labour Lawyers)

Emma Saunders (Labour Campaign for Council Housing)

Jonathan Webb (IPPR North)

Elsie Blundell (Chair LHG North West Branch)

Labour's plan for ensuring fire safety in all our homes

Tuesday September 27th 6.30-8pm (bar opens 6pm)

Venue: MerseyMade - Unit 2, Chancery House 98 Paradise Street, Liverpool, L1 3HJ

Chair: Cllr Rachel Blake, LHG Vice-chair

Speakers

Georgie Hulme & Sarah Rennie (CLADDAG)

Andrew Fox-Hewitt (Fire Brigades Union)

Liam Spender (End Our Cladding Scandal campaign)

Peter Apps (Inside Housing)

Dr Stuart Hodgkinson (University of Leeds)



CONFERENCE MOTION: LABOUR'S PLAN FOR SOLVING THE HOUSING CRISIS

Conference believes:

Long-term, sustainable programmes of house-building and renovation are the key to avoiding homelessness, fuel poverty and poor health, providing homes that are built to high standards and that are genuinely affordable.

Building sustainable council homes should be the priority, essential to support the implementation of the human right to housing.

Only a Labour Government will co-ordinate all the agencies of government effectively and economically, bringing together training for construction staff in new Green Jobs and reliable supplies of good quality materials.

Reducing carbon emissions from homes is a core part of reaching Net Zero.

Conference resolves that a future Labour Government will:

Build sustainable council homes at scale, supported by access to sufficient, reasonably-priced land for councils to build new homes, under an accountable and responsive planning regime

Reform the private rented sector

Reduce the bureaucratic burden of planning decision-making on local authorities, prioritising positive plan-making and streamlined decision-making.

Secure reliable supplies of energy through an industrial policy and investment in renewable energy infrastructure and distribution networks.

Invest in a programme of energy efficiency works across all housing tenures, with local authorities at the heart of delivery

Introduce legislation to ensure housing becomes a human right

Reform the leasehold tenure

Introduce regulation for management and maintenance standards in social housing

Support all residents living in buildings requiring fire safety works so that they are not left with unaffordable costs through no fault of their own, and ensure works are completed.

NOT A ONE-TRICK PONY

Labour Housing Group doesn't think of itself as a "single-issue" campaign, even if its focus is clearly on housing. "Home" is not the limit of our interest, just its centre and the more it becomes apparent that the lack of decent, secure homes gnaws at the heart of society, the wider our understanding and intervention needs to be.

As a society, we have long known that poor housing can have terrible implications for health, whether it be through inadequate heating and ventilation, deadly fires such as those at Lakanal House and Grenfell Tower, or even collapse as at Ronan Point. And yet we let those conditions persist.

Homes of the wrong type, built in the wrong place – such as flood plains and clifftops – are not only further hazards but also a terrible waste of resources at a time when we know we need to create efficient, sustainable homes.

Ownership of land and regulation of what may be built on it is crucial, particularly as the Tory Government has published plans to give developers a virtually free-hand while social landlords struggle to find land to build upon.

Lack of secure housing is a profound underlying cause of anxiety for children as well as adults. Talk to the headteacher of any school with children who lack a permanent home and you will soon hear what a constant struggle it is for them to learn and build relationships. Social workers will affirm the same and more.

LHG believes in the critical role of local authorities in assessing the many and varied needs of their communities and seeking to provide for them, particularly the most vulnerable. Hence our focus on providing Council homes. But even 100,000 new council homes a year will not be sufficient for the many people needing better homes, which is why social and private landlords must also be required to step-up. We will need more competent and ethical landlords than just the Council itself to meet such needs.

This is unlikely to happen of its own accord and, once again, it will take legislation – and enforcement action by local authorities – to raise expectations and improve outcomes.

Finally, we need to win over far more than those on the liberal left to treat Housing as a Human Right which must be extended to us all.

For all these reasons, the Labour Housing Group's motion to Labour Conference this year is broad and ambitious in its scope.

We're keeping our eye on the (very) big picture.



It's a wonderful life

On release, this Hollywood classic didn't break-even and was not a critical success, but once its copyright was allowed to lapse, it became a Christmas fixture and remained a favourite of its star, Jimmy Stewart who plays George Bailey, the manager of the local Savings and Loans (building society).

Following a crisis, customers demand their savings, but George is able to persuade that their savings are secure in the bricks and mortar of their homes.

The story shows how mutuality offers communities more than the town's exploitative banker.



FIXING THE BROKEN HOUSING MARKET

Private renting in England

In England our broken housing market continues to wreak havoc on the private rented sector. With the lack of social housing and long council waiting lists, it is no wonder that many renters have little choice but to seek out private providers.

To further compound these issues, the Covid19 pandemic has reduced house-building, with at least 100,000 fewer homes due to be built by 2023 according to the Local Government Association^{†1}.

In England more people rent privately than from council and other social housing providers.

Nearly 19% of all households live in the private rented sector, which makes up around 4.4 million households in England. For comparison 17% (4.0 million) live in council or housing association homes) while 65% (15.4 million) own their own home^{†2}.

This rapidly growing - but poorly regulated - sector of the housing market brings many challenges. For those on lower incomes the Local Housing Allowance is wholly inadequate, making private renting unaffordable.

For many tenants, choosing between heating, eating and paying rent is the norm. The charity Crisis suggests that 97% of areas in England, 82% in Wales and 67% in Scotland were unaffordable for single people, couples and small families even before the pandemic^{†3}.

A growing shortfall

For those already unfortunate enough to face these challenges, they will encounter even greater obstacles with the rising cost of living crisis.

According to the *National Registered Landlords Association* (NRLA), official data indicates that 56% of renters who rely on Universal Credit and other state benefits experience a shortfall of £100.00 each month.

Failure to pay such a shortfall will undoubtedly lead to rent arrears and the risk of eviction.

In contrast, those in Council tenancies receive Housing Benefit that generally cover the rent payments in full.

With the cost of living crisis, low incomes and the lack of security of tenure, it will come as no surprise that renters fear losing their homes.

As well as falling into rent arrears, some renters are too fearful to speak up about poor housing conditions and health and safety risks in their homes.

Local Authorities have limited resources to compel landlords to carry out repairs and enforcement is rare in some areas.

Moreover, very few legal professionals are working in housing, so 'advice deserts' are growing throughout England, enabling rogue landlords to rent shoddy housing with impunity.

Impact on health

In October last year, Shelter reported that the health of renters in 1.9 million households in England was being harmed by poor quality housing.

In a poll of over 3,000 renters, Shelter revealed that the most common problems were mental or physical health including those caused by damp and mould (26%) or being unable to heat their homes adequately (26%). They were also constantly struggling to pay rent (21%) and in fear of eviction (19%).

These tenants were three times more likely to say housing was harming their health than those without such problems.

Fuel poverty and poor insulation

To add to the misery, a new analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) found that 3 million 'fuel poor' households that are already struggling with the rising cost of living are having to pay fuel bills that are typically £250 a year higher because of poorly insulated homes.

Tackling the problems

A national landlord accreditation regime is one way to deal with some of these challenges, with accountability and monitoring devolved to local authorities. Such *Selective Licensing Schemes* are already in operation by local authorities in some London boroughs and in Nottingham, Blackpool and Leeds.

These scheme are useful for driving up standards, increasing sustainable tenancies



Cllr Amanda Pinnock
LHG Executive Member

FIXING THE BROKEN HOUSING MARKET (continued)

and resolving disputes such as rent arrears – as well as cracking down on rogue landlords.

Landlords also benefit by having access to local authority services, advice, support and training.

Benefits of a national scheme – Wales

Although such schemes do exist, each may differ according to area and requirements. Some schemes will be more robust than others and in some instances, non-compliance may lead to few sanctions or no punishment at all.

In Wales, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 established the *Rent Smart Scheme*, which requires all private Landlords to operate under a licence. Failure to register can have harsh consequences.

The aim of the scheme is to drive up standards and improve relationships in the private rented sector to benefit both tenants and Landlord.

Conclusion

In England, much might be learned from the consistent approach adopted by our neighbours. At a time when inflation has hit its highest level in 40 years, renters need greater security and high quality, energy-efficient homes to weather the storm ahead.

Amanda Pinnock is a housing law specialist and a member of the LHG Executive

Footnotes

†1. Building post-pandemic prosperity The economic and fiscal case for constructing 100,000 new council homes each year www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09-14%20Arch%2C%20LGA%2C%20NFA%20final%20report.pdf

†2. Ministry of Housing, communities and local government English Housing Survey Private rented sector, 2019-20

WWW.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1000052/EHS_19-20_PRS_report.pdf

†3. Cover the Cost: How in Local Housing Allowance are impacting homelessness www.crisis.org.uk/media/240377/cover_the_cost_2019.pdf
www.england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/health_of_one_in_five_renters_harmed_by_their_home

†4. www.rentsmart.gov.wales/en/home

The Wales Rentsmart scheme^{†4}

The law requires landlords to register their interest for monitoring purposes and to undertake training to ensure they understand their responsibilities and how to resolve disputes.

On completion landlords receive a 5 year licence for a small fee.



Failure to comply with registration requirements could result in criminal prosecution, a fine and inability to evict tenants.

In some instances tenants can request rent to be repaid for non-compliance.

"HIGHEST EVER ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH"

Average private rents in Britain have hit record highs

The average advertised rent outside London is 11.8% higher than a year ago, while in the capital it is up by 15.8%.

In the last three months, rents outside London hit new record, of £1,126 a calendar month. In London a new record average of £2,257, was reported by Rightmove as "the highest ever annual rate of growth of any region".

Yet some individual towns such as Manchester and Chatham in Kent exceeded that.

Average monthly rental payments were 40% higher than 10 years ago. In part, this is because the stock of available rental properties was down 26% compared with 2021.

Source: Rightmove, July 2022.

NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

This is the Labour Housing Group's response to the NPF's July 2022 consultation.

1) LHG's role

As the affiliated organisation promoting progressive housing policies within the Labour Party, Labour Housing Group has been leading discussions for 40 years with LP members on how to solve Britain's housing problems and how we can move towards everyone having a home that is safe, genuinely affordable, and of good quality.

We have worked both with Labour in opposition and Labour Ministers to promote the best ways forward across the country and helped local authorities' housing leads to develop the best responses at local level.

2) Housing's priority

Most importantly, housing needs to be regarded as top of the agenda for the Labour Party! Millions of people are now affected by the cost of living crisis, meaning that they may have difficulty paying their rent, and many thousands are struggling to find anywhere affordable to live, not just those on lower incomes but many others too.

Labour must show that it is aware of the way that the housing market has failed people in large parts of the country and show that it has a way forward.

3) Labour's alternatives to Tory policies

The 2019 manifesto legacy

Labour's General Election 2019 Manifesto, in our view, contained excellent housing policies which drew on the work of members, of trade unions, of affiliated organisations like ours, and of the various Front Bench leads on housing and planning.

Labour now needs to build on these pledges and respond to what we have learnt about housing during the pandemic. We must offer solutions to the challenges that have become clear in recent years and provide more depth on the commitments made in the 2019 Manifesto.

4) Tackling the shortage of homes

- Labour's policy is to increase the housing supply. Council house building, the missing solution to the housing crisis, is at the heart of ensuring secure and decent homes for everyone, and will provide a supply across the country of truly affordable, good quality housing with secure tenancies.
- We must highlight the lack of appropriate and affordable land, often due to stockpiling by developers as well as poor current use.
- We need to ensure that affordable homes built to meet local need are restricted to principal home status only and not turned into holiday lets or second homes.
- The construction industry must be reconfigured to meet need rather than profit.
- Homelessness must be addressed and, in particular, the continued existence of rough sleeping and the use of Temporary Accommodation for families.
- Despite the clear shortage of suitable homes, empty properties continue to be a waste of resources and must be acted upon.
- We will end the continuing depletion of council stock by the Right To Buy rather than extend it to Housing Association tenants as the Tories propose.
- Labour will tackle the impact of second homes and short-term holiday lets, particularly where they are encouraged by advantageous arrangements for council tax and business rates.
- Labour will legislate to provide secure, indefinite tenancies as the norm.
- Community Land Trusts offer community-run, sustainable and affordable housing, often on difficult sites in rural areas and deserve Labour's support.

NPF consultation July 2022 - LHG response (continued)

- A national funding strategy is needed and Housing Revenue Accounts must be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- Ensuring housing as a human right is enabled in our legislation would help to fulfil the aim of safe and decent housing for all.
- Local authorities should be relieved of unachievable and undesirable house building targets
- Sustainable homes are what we need and this is not helped by an incoherent approach to retrofitting and renovation. Both Government and the private sector need to uphold their commitments to supply Net Zero new housing.

5) Tenure

- The chronic lack of secure tenancies across the housing sector blights families. Labour must continue pressure to end “no fault” evictions, and will implement a policy of indefinite tenancies as the norm in all sectors.
- Poor quality and non-existent repairs are a major source of misery for tenants and tension with their landlords. But without security of tenure, tenants cannot feel free to complain.
- We will ensure that tenants are able to actively participate in all processes. This will include access to advice, and ensure an effective voice for tenants, locally and nationally, across all sectors.
- The continuation of unfair Leasehold terms must be ended with by the introduction of commonhold tenure.
- Labour needs to learn from the devolved administrations such as Wales’ experience of Rent Smart and institute a publicly-available landlord register so that tenants can provide feedback on landlord’s services and housing quality.
- Home ownership needs to be recognised as a key aspiration for many.

6) Ensuring a safe and attractive environment

Fire safety

- It goes without saying that new housing stock should be free of cladding issues in both the public and private sectors. This can only be guaranteed by tight regulation and close monitoring under Local Authority control.
- Labour in power should also work to provide mortgage lenders with the necessary safety assurances for them to provide mortgages for buildings above six storeys in height.
- Where house owners have existing cladding issues, Labour should support them in making claims on the developers instead of leaving house-owners to pay the full bill.

Protecting the environment

- New high-quality standards are needed to ensure decent housing for all, in all sectors. These should include homes that are safe, and healthy to live in, and meet the needs of all ages and abilities, and promote well-being. The pandemic has highlighted how important it is to consider external space, as well as internal space and minimum space standards.
- Green space is an important aspect of the quality of life and should be a strong contender for prioritisation.

7) Social Security

- Reforming the social security system, including the abolition of the Bedroom Tax and increasing Local Housing Allowance, would help to ensure secure housing for all.

If you would like to make a contribution to LHG’s Housing Newsletter, please email the Editor at pauljmartin@clara.co.uk



GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO FIRE SAFETY STILL INADEQUATE

Michael Gove, former Secretary of State for Levelling up, sought to deflect his leaseholder critics who have been made to pay huge service charges for building defects that they were not responsible for. The Building Safety Act 2022 is the Government's response. The Act is very complicated and many of its provisions are subject to as yet unenacted secondary legislation, so it will inevitably be subject to legal challenges.



Dermot McKibbin

Positives

- Gove has negotiated an agreement with leading developers that they will contribute £5 billion to make good certain defects and a [new building levy](#) on all residential developments will contribute more funds.
- Leaseholders will be given new legal rights to sue developers
- Service charges for cladding costs will be capped, but only for buildings of a certain height.
- There is agreement on setting up a building safety regulator and to improve fire safety standards.

Negatives

The Commons Select Committee on Communities and Housing, on which Conservative MP's are in a majority, is not impressed with the new approach.

- Only leaseholders in buildings over 11 metres in height or which have at least 5 storeys will be included.
- The costs of remediation for non-cladding costs will be limited to £10,000 and £15,000 per home in London.
- There are complicated requirements for leaseholders to qualify for such help.

Five years after the Grenfell tragedy, the Government still does not know how many buildings have historic defects. Without adequate data, Government estimates of £9 billion to pay for cladding costs are worthless.

Labour believes that the Government should set up a comprehensive building safety fund to cover all defects in buildings of any height.

Continuing concerns

The second part of the Grenfell fire inquiry is coming to an end but there are still many outstanding concerns.

- Evidence has been heard that the Building Research Establishment covered up the results on fire safety tests on building materials.
- The Government has announced that it will not implement one of the Inquiry's recommendations so there will be no personal evacuation plans for disabled residents from burning buildings. This decision will attract a lot of criticism from residents and will be challenged in the courts under the Equality Act.
- Recently, a developer announced plans to build a 45-storey tower block in London with only one stairwell, plans that were fortunately withdrawn.
It is hoped that either the new regulator would outlaw such developments or that such plans would be caught by the new powers that the London Mayor Sadiq Kahn is seeking.

The scale of the problem is such that only the Government can remedy the problem, yet it is far from clear how long it will take them to ensure that all dangerous buildings are made safe.

There are better approaches, such as in Victoria, Australia where the state government decided to tackle a similar issue decisively: - the Government first ensures that the works are completed to make the buildings safe and then seeks to recover the money from those who are responsible.

Labour in Parliament has been very supportive of leaseholders in unsafe blocks. Outside of Parliament, the Labour Party has been slow to support leaseholders who are innocent victims of deregulation. Labour needs to pay more attention to the four million plus leaseholders in England alone if it wants to win a General Election.

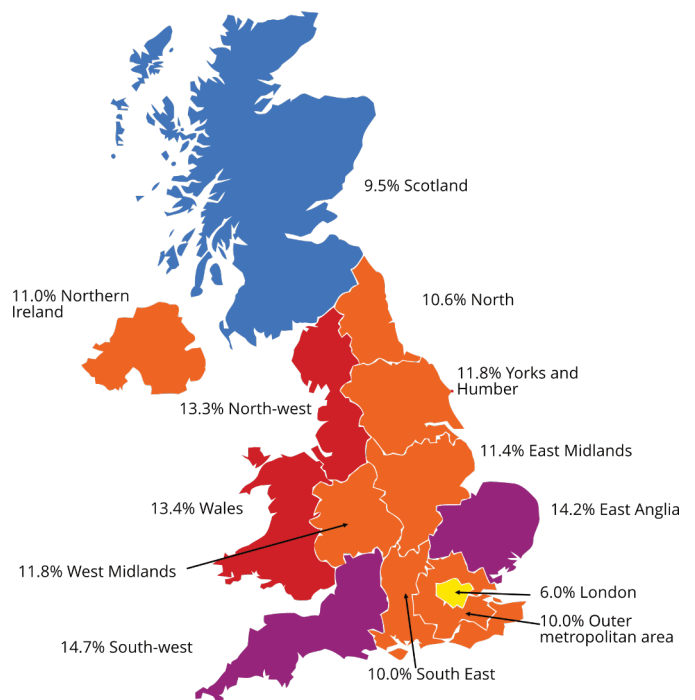
Dermot McKibbin is a member of Beckenham Labour Party and the LHG Executive.

NO LET-UP IN HOUSE PRICES

The Nationwide Building Society's regular survey of house-prices in the UK showed a slowing down for a third month in a row. This was much as expected and said to be due to the weakening economy, cost of living squeeze and rising interest rates starting to have an impact on the property market.

But there is no easing in the cost of homes. As Nationwide's chief economist, Robert Gardner said average prices have increased by more than £26,000 in the past year. The average UK house price hit a new record high of £271,613.

Large variances continue between different areas of the country. The south-west of England overtook Wales as the region with the biggest house price rises - up 14.7% year on year. Next came East Anglia, where annual price growth remained at 14.2%.



Many commentators still see "tentative signs of a slowdown", but it hasn't happened yet.

Andy Bates *In Conversation with* Jess Phillips, MP, and Kadie Bennett Wednesday 27th July at 8pm. <https://labourhousing.org/category/events/upcoming-events/>



Kadie Bennett



Jess Phillips



Andy Bates

Jess and Kadie will be talking about domestic abuse against women and girls. Jess is the Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence and Safeguarding and a high-profile campaigner for improved support for women experiencing violence and abuse. Kadie is a lawyer working at Anthony Collins Solicitors which specialises in Family Law. She has expertise in legal remedies for people experiencing abuse.

STOP PRESS! A further *In Conversation With* event is taking place on Thursday 17th August at 7pm, entitled *How can governments enable low-income home ownership?* Our guest is Hal Pawson, Professor of Housing Research and Policy at the University of New South Wales, Sydney and Honorary Professor at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. (See link above.)

LHG EXECUTIVE 2020-2022

LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 12th March 2022 for the two years to 2024.

Andy Bates (co-opted)

Janet Berry

John Bevan (co-opted)

Rachel Blake

John Cotton

Ed Derrick

Gerard Heffey (co-opted)

Ross Houston

Heather Johnson

Paul Martin

Dermot McKibbin (co-opted)

Amanda Pinnock

Sheila Spencer

Christopher Worrall



Labour Housing Group is pleased to have appointed Adam Cantwell-Corn to provide support for administration and communications.

He has a background in journalism and community organising, and is currently studying public policy.

We are extremely grateful for the generous support of two members in particular and the LHG membership in general which has made this appointment possible.

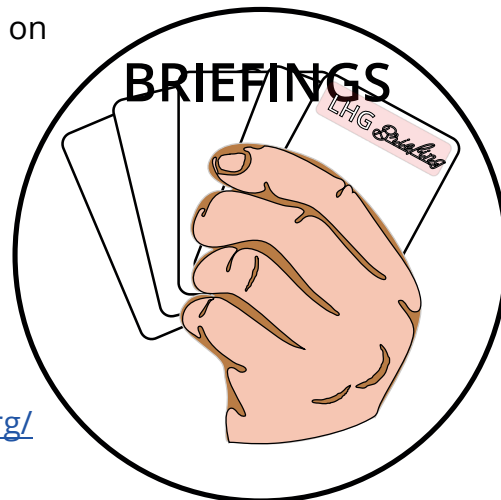
Adam will start on July 11th and can be contacted at adam@labourhousing.org

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

Our 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/>



The latest edition covers *Council Homes*.

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

SUPPORT LABOUR HOUSING GROUP

With a bank transfer to "Labour Housing Group", Account number 50478080, Sort code 08-90-06.

Or make a cheque payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o

The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS

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/](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.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST EMPTY HOMES

Have you had enough of:

Homes standing empty while the numbers of people experiencing homelessness grow?



Second homes investments pushing up rents where you live?

Council estates being run down and demolished to be replaced by short-lets and high cost housing?

Holiday short-lets making housing unaffordable to local communities ?

Green spaces being built upon when homes lie empty close by?

There are over 100,000 families living in temporary accommodation, many of whom are being pushed into the private rented sector, yet over 500,000 homes lie empty as second homes and short lets, or simply have no permanent residents.

Take action on empty homes!

Join the Day of Action on Empty Homes Saturday 22 October 2022

To get involved email: caehcaeh1@gmail.com .

Supported by: Action on Empty Homes Disabled People Against Cuts
Fuel Poverty Action The Green Party Homes for All Labour
Homelessness Campaign London Renters' Rights Peace & Justice
Project Radical Housing Network Social Housing Action Campaign
Southwark Defend Council Housing Streets Kitchen Street Storage
Unite Community London and South East Region Unite the Union
London and Eastern Region