



# HOMES FOR ALL

AXE THE HOUSING ACT  SECURE HOMES FOR ALL

## After Grenfell, time to invest NOW!

### OUR AUTUMN STATEMENT

(This document is also available on line at [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk) and [www.axethehousingact.org.uk](http://www.axethehousingact.org.uk) where you can also find links to some of the reports quoted below.)

#### Introduction

*“This is the moment to put council housing back at the heart of housing provision. It is time to invest in a new generation of first class council housing. A major council house building and renovation programme will meet the urgent need of the 1.8 million households on council waiting lists.”*

*Council Housing: Time to Invest*, a House of Commons Council Housing Group of MPs report 2009.

This demand was ignored – and the housing crisis has got worse. Under-investment and false economies have seen homelessness rise by 60 per cent since 2011. The National Audit Office says homelessness costs the public sector at least £1 billion a year, and the government’s refusal to adequately address the issue “cannot be considered value for money”.

Tragic evidence of our disastrous housing policy came on 14th June when at least 80 people perished at Grenfell Tower. If the Grenfell inquiry does not address the long-term under-investment in council housing, it will have failed.

On 22nd November, the government will announce how it plans to spend our money in the coming year. After Grenfell, we know that failing to invest in council housing costs lives. Housing investment currently goes in the wrong direction. Three-quarters of government spending

on housing subsidises the private housing market. Most public money for ‘social’ housing is going to shared ownership and so-called ‘affordable’ housing that is nothing of the kind. Housing associations (now called Private Registered Providers) have received over £20 billion in government grants over the last decade, but have failed to build enough of the homes we need.

As we said before the general election in June, we are at a crossroads.

“Recent policies and in particular the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and benefit cuts, are taking us in the wrong direction. Unless these change, millions more will be forced into insecure and unaffordable private renting or homelessness, as non-market housing alternatives are destroyed.”

#### We demand safe homes

The victims of Grenfell died due to decades of under-investment, deregulation and denigration of council housing. After Grenfell, we demand government deliver on its promise to pay for necessary fire safety, and for other improvement work needed to make homes safe. Government has sabotaged funding for housing, and privatised fire regulations – now it must pay to put right the deathly results.

Many of the same issues apply to housing association homes and in the private rented sector (and in many

workplaces) where unscrupulous landlords and employers fail to meet basic safety and repair standards. We need immediate action to reinstate and enforce independent fire safety regulation, to ensure decent, secure, truly affordable and safe homes for all.

#### Housing policy in disarray

Thanks to a strong, united campaign against it, much of the Housing and Planning Act is now stalled (as is the 2017 housing White Paper). But the Act remains a threat and must be repealed. If implemented, it will push up rents, reduce security of tenure, impose market sell-off of thousands of council homes, increase displacement and the break-up of communities while doing little to improve the situation for those condemned to exploitative private renting and homelessness.

Government admits the housing market is “broken”, but offers no solutions. We need a national housing strategy that helps create a more just and equal housing future based on rent controls, more council homes and the right of a safe, secure home. Our Autumn Statement gives some ideas for how we can do that. We welcome other suggestions and contributions.

● Investing in council housing and community-run homes will reduce housing need, and help take the heat out of the housing market. Building homes will boost the economy and can create decent, well-paid jobs and apprenticeships. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has shown that government investment in new, energy efficient housing is good value for money, with the economy gaining £3.50 for every £1 invested.

>>> ● We need genuine mixed communities with homes for the people who clean hospitals, teach and assist in classrooms, cook our food and make our coffee, deliver the post and drive buses and trains. A decent, secure, affordable home should be a right, not a time-limited privilege. Our Autumn Statement protects permanent tenancies in the public sector and extends secure tenancies to housing associations and other private renters, replacing six-month Assured Shorthold Tenancies in the private sector.

● Less security of tenure means more social cleansing, with people on average and low incomes priced out. Often this happens under the bogus guise of estate regeneration. Our Autumn Statement calls for the suspension of estate demolition programmes, the right to a residents' ballot before any large-scale redevelopment, and investment in new and existing council housing, without strings attached.

● Some local councils are experimenting with 'Special Purpose Vehicles' (SPV) in a desperate attempt to meet housing need. These schemes are very risky because they rely so heavily on the private sector. Previous experience with Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) has proved bad for tenants and very poor value for money. The SPV in Haringey is threatening large scale displacement and demolition by mortgaging over £2 billion of publicly owned assets to global property developer Lendlease. SPVs are developer led, mean loss of secure tenancies, higher rents and lack of direct accountability via an elected landlord. They are no substitute for direct government investment.

● People are being pushed out of their homes and communities by benefit cuts and caps. These subsidise low pay and high rents. £9 billion of public money goes straight to private landlords. We need to

scrap the Bedroom Tax and benefit caps, suspend the roll out of Universal Credit and attacks on benefits for young people, parents and disabled people. Our Autumn Statement says 'cut rents, not benefits!'

● Local councils are currently prevented from investing in the homes we need by accountancy procedures that stop them using all the money from Right to Buy sales and from rents, or from borrowing at prudential rates. **Council housing is not subsidised.** According to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting 'by 2011/12 councils were paying across to government more than £700 million in "surpluses from council housing"'. Our Autumn Statement allows councils the freedom to invest to build and maintain the homes we need.

● Private property developers are profiteering from the housing crisis. They use secretive 'viability assessments' to get planning permission and build homes few can afford, often sold to investors who then charge very high rents, or leave them empty. Our Autumn Statement calls for the full publication of viability assessments, demands that all new housing developments meet local housing need and that public land is used to launch a national programme of new council house building. The New Economics Foundation has identified 10 plots of publicly-owned land that could provide 4,631 new homes. Other sites, such as the Holloway Prison site in north London, have the potential to help solve the housing crisis for this and future generations.

● The misuse of public land and 'land banking' by private developers show we need more democratic control over planning decisions, not less as the government intends. Our Autumn Statement demands the full restoration of planning powers to elected local councillors and the enforcement of existing rules that

new housing developments should reflect local housing need.

● Housing decisions and services work better when they're accountable to local people. Our Autumn Statement calls for rights to genuine consultation and participation for tenant and resident organisations, and a binding resident ballot before any major estate redevelopment.

● We need housing rights for all, particularly for the homeless, Gypsies and Travellers, whose rights are attacked under the Act. Our Autumn Statement backs the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights which enshrines the right to adequate housing, including protection from arbitrary eviction, demolition and interference, freedom of movement, security of tenure and equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing.

● Housing availability and costs are now a major workplace issue, which is why more trade unions are campaigning for a new approach to housing policy. Too many workers spend over 30 per cent of their pay on housing, and time and money on long commutes. The CBI (the bosses union) says housing costs have a negative impact on business, the economy and society. Our Autumn Statement calls for a new definition of affordable housing based on one-third of net pay.

● Housing Associations (HAs) were set up to provide truly affordable, rented homes, rooted in local communities. They have moved a long way from these founding principles. Mega mergers, over-supply of market homes and lack of transparency mean that big HAs can no longer be considered social landlords. Our Autumn Statement calls for HAs to be brought back under proper democratic control, accountable to their residents, not bankers. ■

## An Autumn Statement for homes, jobs and communities

- Government funding for necessary fire safety improvement works.
- Reinstate and enforce independent fire safety inspection and building regulation.
- Regulation of private renting to include controlled rents, secure tenancies and an end to no-fault and retaliatory evictions.
- Invest in council housing – lift the artificial debt burden and allow councils to develop secure homes at social rent.
- A moratorium on estate demolition.
- Repeal the Housing & Planning Act 2016.
- Landlords must listen to tenants – regulate to ensure recognition and funding of independent tenants and residents associations and federations.
- Councils' housing plans and targets must match local need for really-affordable homes for rent.
- Suspend the Right to Buy.
- End the Bedroom Tax and benefit cuts/caps – housing benefit should cover rents.
- Housing cannot be classed 'affordable' if two-thirds of households in an area cannot afford it (defined as housing costing more than one third of net average income).
- Housing associations must be subject to democratic oversight and regulation.
- Respect the traditions and rights of Gypsies, Travellers and Barge-dwellers, and provide suitable sites to meet need.
- Restore full local, democratic and transparent planning powers.
- All new housing development to include at least 50 per cent really-affordable housing for rent.
- Public land used for housing to provide 100 per cent publicly-owned, really-affordable homes.