



# AXE the HOUSING ACT

CONTROL RENTS  SECURE HOMES FOR ALL

# AN AUTUMN STATEMENT FOR HOMES

## 23rd November 2016

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

*Today the government will announce how it plans to spend our money in the coming year. There are many priorities, but we fear the Autumn Statement will not address them. Our country is increasingly unequal and divided. We have an acute housing crisis, with higher costs, growing insecurity, homelessness, overcrowding and disrepair. Successive governments have failed to tackle the problem. Instead, recent policies have made the*

- **Control rents not benefits**
- **Invest in homes not private landlords**
- **We need a new generation of energy efficient not for profit homes for rent**
- **Repeal the discredited and unworkable Housing & Planning Act 2016**

*situation worse; the latest example is the Housing and Planning Act 2016.*

*If implemented, the Act will push up rents, reduce security of tenure, lead to*

*market sell-off of thousands of social rented 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. A broad alliance, including tenants of all tenures, trade unions, housing professionals, academics, faith leaders, councillors, MPs and Lords, are calling on the government to think again.*

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The Housing Act is fundamentally unfair, unworkable and must be repealed. We need to replace it with a national housing strategy that helps create a more just and equal housing future based on rent controls and secure homes for all. Our Autumn Statement gives some ideas for how we can do that. We welcome other suggestions and contributions.

● **Investment** in council and other really affordable homes for rent is vital – we need more not less. More council housing and other social rented 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, ‘green’ housing brings the economy a £3.50 gain for every £1 invested.

● The Act attempts to redefine social renting as ‘emergency’ or ‘temporary’ housing, by ending secure tenancies for council tenants and imposing means

testing. To sustain stable, diverse and cohesive neighbourhoods, rural and cities, we need genuine mixed communities with homes for the people who clean hospitals and deliver babies, work in factories, teach and assist in classrooms, grow and 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 seeks to **protect permanent tenancies** for council and housing association tenants and calls for **more security**, and the scrapping of six-month Assured Shorthold Tenancies, **in the private sector**.

● Less security of tenure means more **social cleansing**. Entire neighbourhoods are being stripped of their vital social networks and character as people on average and low incomes are priced out. Often this happens under the bogus guise of ‘estate regeneration’. Our Autumn Statement calls for the **suspension of**

**estate demolition** programmes and investment in new and existing council housing, without strings attached. We need to redirect funding into bricks and mortar, instead of using public money to support high rents and house prices through current subsidies and tax breaks to developers, financiers and landlords and to ‘Starter Homes’.

● People are being pushed out of their homes and communities by high rents and benefit cuts and caps. Almost half of those currently receiving benefits are in work and £9 billion of public money goes straight to private landlords. We need to scrap the Bedroom Tax and draconian benefit caps, ‘work suitability assessments’ and other policies that waste public money and scapegoat the poor, disabled, women and children for the housing crisis. Our Autumn Statement says **restore rent controls and 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

*‘Renting has been too insecure for too long. Renters urgently need more rights and protection. Wages aren’t rising and many of us can’t afford to buy, even if we wanted to. We need to live in homes of a decent energy standard, with access to healthcare and decent schools, and without threat of eviction. In a first world country of such wealth, that should not be too much to ask. Property speculation at the cost of our communities must be stopped.’*

● Nicole Holgate, Butterfields Tenants Association

*‘Instead of dismantling social housing, we call for the consolidation and expansion of existing housing coops and the creation of new housing coops, as a key aspect of addressing urgently needed social housing.’*

● Niall Mulholland, London Cooperative Housing Group

*‘We need a Housing Act that meets the needs of millions, not only the few, and offers a genuinely sustainable alternative to the endemic uncertainty of the housing market. The Prime Minister has said she is committed to leading a government for the many, not the few. The Housing Act stands in*

*contradiction to this and we urge the Government to think again.’*

● Rt Revd Adrian Newman, Bishop of Stepney; Rabbi Herschel Gluck, OBE, Chairman of the Arab-Jewish Forum; Sanjay Jagatia, Director/Secretary General, Hindu Council UK; Most Revd Peter Smith, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Southwark; Revd Michaela Youngson, London District Chair, Methodist Church; Harun Rashid Khan, Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain and others: (see Open Letter from faith leaders, [www.axethehousingact.org.uk](http://www.axethehousingact.org.uk))

*‘The housing crisis is causing huge social damage. Our members see it every day. The cost of trying to repair this damage is much more than the cost of investing in decent, secure, affordable homes.’*

● Guy Shennan, Chair British Association of Social Workers

*‘The Housing and Planning Act is getting us further away from seeing housing as a social need and moving us farther towards the market view – and that is a disaster for ordinary people.’*

● Ken Loach, film director

*‘Pay to Stay is really a tenant tax. It’s not my fault governments haven’t been*

*building enough homes.*

*Where are my grandchildren going to live?’*

● Janice Sweeney, council tenant

*‘Social housing is critical if we are to house people who are homeless or at risk. But the availability of social rented council housing has halved since 1994. We’ve got 69,000 people already currently living in temporary accommodation and more than a million extra on council waiting lists. If we are to succeed then we need to address the gaps between household incomes and spiralling rents, and resume our role as a major builder of affordable homes.’*

● Lord Porter, chair Local Government Association ([www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7953943/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7953943/NEWS))

*‘The Housing and Planning Act in England will lead to a lack of genuinely affordable homes, drive up rents and housing costs and could subject thousands of people to rent arrears, financial hardship and poverty. Many of our members, providing essential public services to communities, are tenants and could be forced to pay up to*

*market rent and/or lose secure tenancies. Others will struggle to afford to rent or buy a home near their place of work leading to longer commuting distances. The Government needs to rethink its strategy and build more homes of all types, particularly social and affordable housing, to lower housing costs and alleviate the housing crisis – and not plan to sell off social homes and decimate affordable housing stock which people depend on.’*

● Sylvia Jones, Assistant Policy Officer, UNISON

*‘Figures from the UK Department for Communities and Local Government show that more than 73,000 households – a growing population bigger than the city of Oxford – now live in emergency accommodation. That represents a nine percent increase on a year earlier, and a rise of more than 50 percent since 2010. Of those, 20,000 households, almost a third, are forced to live outside their home borough.’*

● Matthew Ponsford, This is Place, 4th November 2016

*‘We should be asking this government to abolish this Act and instead invest in a social*

from Right to Buy sales, borrowing at prudential rates and using the full proceeds of rents. Contrary to the myth peddled by politicians and the media, council housing is not subsidised – the biggest subsidies go to landlords (see Shelter report, and for more detail John Hills 2007). Instead our Autumn Statement says we should allow **councils the freedom to invest** to build and maintain homes that meet need.

● Private property developers are profiteering from the housing crisis. They use secret ‘viability assessments’ to get planning permission and build homes few can afford, often bought by investment companies, and many then left 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 an initial 10 plots of **publicly-owned**

**land** that could provide 4,631 new homes. Other land owned by us – such as the Holloway Prison site in north London – has the potential to make a real contribution towards solving 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 to ensure new housing development meets local housing need.

● Housing decisions and services work better when they’re accountable to local people. Our Autumn Statement calls for genuine consultation, representation and participation by **tenant and resident organisations**.

● We need housing rights for all, including particularly for the **homeless** and for **Gypsies and Travellers** who

have seen them taken away over recent years, including under the Act. We back 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 now have to spend well over 30% of their pay on rent or housing costs, or have to spend lots of time and money on long commutes. Even the CBI says that housing costs are having a negative impact on business, the economy and society. Our Autumn Statement calls for a **new definition of ‘affordable’ housing** based on what two-thirds of people can afford at a maximum one-quarter of net income.

*housing building programme which will provide jobs and extra rent revenue for cash strapped councils and address the worsening housing crisis.’*

● Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations, chair Cris Claridge

*‘Generation Rent is calling on the Chancellor to accept that throwing subsidies at property developers won’t bring down the cost of housing, and that investing in homes for people in the greatest need will help us all. He should also ensure that the tax system encourages investors to make decisions that help fix the housing crisis rather than exploit it – recent measures on landlord taxation made a good start. More immediately, private renters need greater security over their homes, which would ease the desperation for people to buy.’*

● Generation Rent

*‘We need to keep up the pressure on government – and keep pointing out that social housing pays for itself.’*

● Dawn Foster, journalist

*‘I’ve witnessed the devastating effect this country’s broken housing policy is having. Many of those I work with are living in*

*poor quality, overcrowded homes which they’re struggling to afford. The Tory Housing and Planning Act threatens to further punish these families by driving up rents and stealing the last council housing from them.’*

● Dean Ryan, youth worker

*‘It’s no exaggeration to say that there won’t be anything we would recognise as social housing left if the Housing and Planning Act is allowed to operate.’*

● Paul Kershaw, chair Unite trade union housing workers branch

*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’. Inflated and unjustified ‘historic’ debt levels were then loaded onto councils as part of a ‘self-financing’ settlement in 2012, and this debt undermines the prospects of council house building.*

*‘The post-War building boom was one of the most successful government interventions in recent history. The case for building more council homes and homes for social rent is*

*stronger now than it has ever been. I have argued for some years that government investment in social rent homes and freeing up councils to build again is the only way to solve the housing crisis and build the number of homes we need. They did it in the 1950s, so there is no reason why we can’t do it today.’*

● Tom Murtha, board member of Plus Dane and chair of Emmaus, Inside Housing, 22nd September 2016.

*‘Council housing, paid for many times over in rental income, is being stolen again by government policy. Many of our members have told us how worried they are by the Housing Act, some are affected doubly, as tenants and also housing staff. Rents will increase, secure tenancies removed, lives made insecure.’*

● Liz Brennan, UNISON Cambridge City and South (Branch Secretary)

*‘Increasing investment in genuinely affordable housing would enable more households to move out of the private rented sector, and so reduce housing benefit expenditure. Initial analysis by Shelter suggests that if eight per cent of claimants in private rented housing moved to*

*affordable social homes, the DWP would recover £200 million in savings. If 500,000 tenants, or 40 per cent of claimants, were able to move across, savings could be as high as £1 billion.’*

● Bricks or benefits, Shelter report, [https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/436275/Bricksorbenefitsfullreport.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/436275/Bricksorbenefitsfullreport.pdf)

*‘We want to challenge the assumption of public sector organisations that available land should always be sold at the highest value possible – this is wrong and counteractive to serving the interests of local communities. A proportion of available land needs to be put back into social and council housing provision at a zero cost.’*

● Sarah Daley, Sustainable Homes

*‘The 2014 British Social Attitudes survey showed that 56 per cent supported new homes in their locality (rather than a million miles away, as is usually the case), twice as many as in 2010.’*

● Daily Telegraph, 28 September 2016

*‘We’ve set up a housing forum in Canterbury because we’re getting a lot of fallout from London, which is pushing up our*



# An Autumn Statement for homes, jobs and communities

- Repeal the Housing & Planning Act 2016
- Regulation of private renting to include controlled rents, secure tenancies and an end to no-fault and retaliatory evictions
- Invest in council housing – remove the artificial debt burden and free councils to develop secure homes at social rent
- Stop estate demolition – sound existing homes should be modernised and made energy-efficient
- Councils' housing plans and targets must match local need for really-affordable homes for rent
- Suspend the Right to Buy
- Scrap the Bedroom Tax and benefit cuts
- Housing benefit to cover average rents
- Housing cannot be classed 'affordable' if two-thirds of renter households in an area cannot afford it (i.e. if housing costs amount to over one quarter of net disposable income)
- Housing associations must be subject to democratic oversight and regulation
- Genuine involvement of tenant and resident organisations and those in housing need, with support to encourage real participation in decision making
- Respect the traditions of Gypsies and Travellers and provide suitable sites needed
- Act to enforce the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights which enshrines the right to adequate housing
- Restore full local, democratic and transparent planning powers
- Publish full details of viability assessments for all developments
- All new housing development to include at least 50% really-affordable housing for rent
- Public land used for housing to provide 100% publicly-owned, really-affordable homes

*house prices, our rents. I'm concerned too about insecure tenancies. It's going to push more and more people into poverty.'*

● Vanessa Hill

*'They are reducing council housing at a time when there is greater need for it. I think it's absolutely disgraceful, it sharpens inequality. The Housing & Planning Act does nothing to address the housing crisis – in fact it makes it worse.'*

● Rob Behan, London Teachers Housing Campaign

*'In Dover there is hardly any council and housing association housing left. What were family houses are now all made into multi-bedsits and flats, all private. And the talk is all of it being refugees and migrants – sorry that's not true. Migrants never started the housing crisis: it's been made by political heads. We can unmake it with good sensible policies.'*

● Rebecca Sawbridge, Dover resident

*'I'm worried about the Act because of the impact it will have on local authorities' ability to meet the housing needs of their areas. I would like to see the Government properly understand the need for rented accommodation for households in London, and subsidy for that accommodation. At the moment Tower Hamlets council is building council houses and we are trying to build these at social rents as opposed to 'Affordable Rent'.'*

● Rachel Blake, London Borough of Tower Hamlets councillor, Cabinet member for Development

*'Social housing is something to be proud of. My partner and myself earn a reasonable salary. We've lived in social housing since our 20s. Now near retirement when I can't get a mortgage, I'd be facing a huge rent hike. It's frightening.'*

● Phoebe Watkins, housing worker and tenant, Camden

*'I've seen governments constantly trying to change the rules and tenancy agreements, all in favour of landlords and against tenants. If you remove community by changing the rules, so you are only allowed to stay for two years, how can you put your roots down? How can you say you're from here? You can't.'*

● Peter Forrest, Council tenant, Kent

*'The Housing Act attacks the people least able to defend themselves: the poor, the unemployed, those with mental and physical health difficulties. It is divisive, cruel and designed to damage. People died in world war two for our welfare state, so we should not let the Government destroy it bit by bit through the back door.'*

● Noel Marcellus Kalitsi

*'When my children were small I was homeless twice in one year, with two small children in my arms. When you get council*

*housing, obviously you believe that is a secure home that you've made. This Act is no longer just nibbling away at funding, it is a deliberate onslaught. You can see as homelessness increases, it's undermining the person's potential, putting them where they can't achieve anything, and then accusing them that can't achieve.'*

● Fay Roberts, council tenant Southwark

*'Housing Justice calls on the Chancellor to invest in social housing and not simply leave the solution to the market. The government is failing to invest in genuinely affordable and social housing. Figures released on 17th November 2016 show a 52 per cent drop in investment across all tenures in just the last year, at a time when consensus has built to say that we cannot go on like this, that more, not less, is needed.'*

● Alison Gelder, Chief Executive Housing Justice