



Policy Discussion Paper

December 2018

Top Ten Demands for the Labour Party

Introduction

This list of demands aims to ensure that the housing crisis in the UK is properly dealt with by an incoming Labour Government. It has been compiled after discussions in various housing groups and tenants' organisations.

Using the Demands

The list can be raised as a motion at your Branch for discussion at your Constituency Labour Party meeting so that it can be passed on for inclusion in the current (November 2018) Green paper on Housing. Send it to socialhousingreview@labour.org.uk and copy it to Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and John Healey (Shadow Minister for Housing). The list can also be sent to the Nation Policy Forum for inclusion in the Manifesto (<https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/commissions/housing-transport>) and be included in a motion to the next Labour Party conference.

If you are a member of a trade union that is affiliated to the Labour Party, you can raise it at your union branch meeting, and if passed, ask your trade union Labour Party delegate(s) to raise it at their next General Committee meeting. If your branch does not currently have a trade union Labour Party delegate, then suggest that your Branch affiliates to the local Labour Party constituency/ies and sends delegate(s) to them. There are 650 constituencies in the UK. If all of the local Labour Parties in each constituency discuss and pass the demands on this list, then they will be included in the Labour Party policy on Housing and as part of the Manifesto to be implemented when Labour is elected to Government.

The Proposals

1. Labour should commit to building 1,000,000 (one million) Council houses by the end of its 1st Parliament.
2. No companies who use black-listing agencies or methods shall be employed by local authorities
3. Future central and local government funding to social landlords for new affordable homes will be based on improvements in transparency and management in their organisations.

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4. Legislation will be passed to ensure that Fire Risk Assessment must be supplied by housing associations to Tenant's Resident's Associations (TRAs).
5. All council and housing association high rise flats must be fitted with sprinkler systems.
6. The government's Regulatory Framework for social housing will be strengthened, repealing the de-regulatory measures of successive governments, and the Regulator of Social Housing's powers to intervene with underperforming landlords will be strengthened.
7. All housing associations and their sub-contractors will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
8. Rent controls (based on average earnings and/or tax council value of properties) should be introduced in order to reduce (year by year over the first term of Parliament) the price of renting to 33% of average UK earnings for all Housing Association properties and properties of private landlords valued at less than £1 million.
9. Councils will be given powers to compulsorily purchase properties that have been empty for 9 months or more, and/or charge a 1000% Council tax charge on such properties.
10. Legislation will be passed to enable leaseholders to buy the freehold for their property at reasonable rates.

Notes to the Demands

1. **Council houses** - On 31 March 2018, the number of households in temporary accommodation was 79,880. Of these, 61,190 included dependent children and/or a pregnant woman. There were 123,130 children or expected children in temporary accommodation. By end of March 2018, local authorities accepted 13,300 households as being statutorily homeless – these are people who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The latest 2017 statistics show that at least 4,751 people as sleeping rough in England alone, although recording inefficiencies mean this is tip of the iceberg. In the 6th biggest economy in the world, these are obscene figures. 80,000 plus properties are needed just to accommodate some of the poorest

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in society. In addition to this, home ownership has fallen to a 30 year low as people are unable to get on the property ladder and the average house costs 8 times the average annual salary. How much better it would be for millions of people if they were moved into 1 million Council properties over a 5-year Parliamentary period. Plus the (reduced) rent they paid would enable the Councils to build more homes and still further improve people's conditions.

2. **Black-listing companies** – Black-listing has been used against trade union activists to prevent them working – often in the construction industry, but other places as well. It is the deliberate victimisation of anyone organising on behalf of a trade union, or taking up workplace issues on behalf of union members. It includes companies sharing information on trade unionists to prevent them securing work. Any company that uses such measures or does not have an active policy to prevent this being used in their company should not be given public money (local or central government funds) to build houses.
3. **Funding** - The Greater London Assembly allocates funding to housing associations (HAs) for new affordable homes, and yet makes few calls upon those HAs. Tenant's Resident's Association (TRA) make regular complaints about their treatment by HA s. Bodies like the GLA should attach strings to the money they give out for the development of housing.
4. **Fire Risk Assessments (FRA)** – HA s have refused to give out Fire Risk Assessment to TRA s. It is mandatory for companies to share their FRA s with Union Safety Reps. It should also be mandatory for HAs to share their FRAs with TRAs.
5. **Sprinklers** - After the tragedy of Grenfell, this is a minimum requirement for the safety of people in multi-storey buildings.
6. **Social Housing Regulation** – Successive governments have reduced the requirements on housing associations as registered landlords. They have also removed many of the regulator's ability to intervene, for example in relation to tenant complaints over poor maintenance and repairs, high service charges, and safety concerns.
7. **Freedom of Information Act (FoIA)** - Housing associations are not subject to the FOI Act and can refuse to answer requests for information about anything. Actual examples of requests for information which housing authorities refused to answer

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include: a) the cause of a fire in a housing association flat, requested by a neighbouring tenant b) whether potentially toxic lead pipes were used for the water supply to a property c) the number of properties empty for more than 6 weeks d) the electricity bill which led a tenant to be charged £1,200 to cover the costs of 6 communal light bulbs and e) the numbers of complaints about repairs

8. **Rent controls** – 1.7 million people pay over one third of their annual salary in rent to private landlords and £20 billion a year of taxpayer's money goes in housing benefits payments to plug the gap between housing costs and household incomes.
9. **Empty properties** – according to <https://emptyhomesuk.co.uk/> there are 1,000,000 empty homes in Britain at any one time. 300,000 of these are classed as 'Long Term Empty' i.e. unoccupied continuously for one year.
10. **Leaseholds** – these only exist in the UK and mean that another party owns the land, that a home is built on belongs to another. No other country has them and unscrupulous landlords can use them to extract high service charges from homeowners.

Drafted by: Brian Madican, 13/12/2018