

People Centred Housing and Homelessness Policies

March 2019

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This paper sets out the housing policy demands democratically agreed SHAC under the broad aim of providing widespread, affordable social housing and rolling back the commercialisation of the sector, particularly housing associations.
- 1.2. It places the needs of people rather than profits and surpluses at the heart of housing policy.
- 1.3. The paper was produced following extensive consultation with individual tenants, residents, leaseholders, housing workers, and housing activists, as well as their representative bodies. We are grateful to all who made a contribution.

2. Housing Provision, Operation and Regeneration

- 2.1. Government must fund local authorities to build 100,000 social rented homes per year.
- 2.2. Tenants in housing associations must have the right to transfer to a council or set up an independent cooperative if they wish.
- 2.3. All social housing must be built by local authority direct labour.
- 2.4. Empty homes must be requisitioned for use by homelessness or councils for the provision of homelessness support services or social housing.
- 2.5. Public land must be used for council house building or cooperative housing rather than private housing schemes.
- 2.6. A nationalised bank must be established to provide funding for public infrastructure projects, including the development of social housing.
- 2.7. Councils must be given powers to compulsorily purchase properties within their local authority area that have been empty for nine months or more should they wish to do so.

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- 2.8. All office-to-residential conversions must make significant provision of affordable housing at social rents or sale at affordable rates.
- 2.9. Repeal the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which made squatting in a residential property a criminal offence from September 2012, and enhance squatters' rights such as the 1977 Criminal Law Act which made it illegal to threaten or use violence to enter a property where someone is present and opposes the entry.
- 2.10. There must be binding ballots of local people before any regeneration scheme proceeds, including schemes involving the demolition of tower blocks.
- 2.11. The area of operation for a housing association will be constrained to certain well-defined geographical regions and their size restricted to reflect the communities they purport to serve.
- 2.12. All housing placements must be suitable for the residents concerned.
- 2.13. Leaseholders must be given the legal right to buy the freehold for their property at reasonable rates.

3. Funding for Housing and Homelessness Services

- 3.1. The 2012 debt settlement for council housing must be restored.
 - 3.2. Funding for agencies working with rough sleepers must be restored to a level sufficient to deal with the actual levels of homelessness in Britain.
 - 3.3. The practice of 'payment by results' funding methods for homeless services such as 'Social Impact Bonds' must cease, and be replaced with sufficient grant funding.
 - 3.4. The freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) must end.
 - 3.5. The deeply flawed Universal Credit system which is exacerbating the housing crisis must end, and be replaced with a humane and effective welfare system.
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- 3.6. Local authority cuts must be reversed to ensure adequate provision of services. Labour local authorities must set legal 'no cuts' budgets as a basis for a mass campaign against cuts.

4. Democratisation and Accountability

- 4.1. Housing associations must have an independent and democratic tenants' organisation, with adequate facilities to meet and to function.
- 4.2. Membership of all housing associations must be open to its residents and junior staff members.
- 4.3. Secure tenancies must be restored for housing association residents.
- 4.4. All residents must have the right to manage.
- 4.5. At least 70% of the board of a housing association must be elected by residents and representatives of the non-executive staff body, including trade union representatives wherever unions are organised.
- 4.6. Resident and staff representatives must be provided with governance and finance training appropriate to the level of board oversight needed.
- 4.7. All board members must be subject to recall by the residents if they are not properly performing.

5. Housing Association Management

- 5.1. The ratio between the highest paid employee and the lowest paid employee of housing associations should be no more than 6:1.
- 5.2. All employees and the employees of housing association contractors should be on the hourly local living wage.
- 5.3. All housing associations should recognise at least one trade union, determined by a ballot of the staff.

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5.4. Housing management staffing levels, management practices and job roles must ensure that safety critical roles are adequately resourced.

6. Repairs, Maintenance and Safety

6.1. There should be a balance struck between housing associations' ambitions to build more social housing and the aim of being good landlords, maintaining assets properly and providing good services to their existing tenants.

6.2. The minimum stock condition standards for property owned or managed by housing associations must be tightened and must reflect aspirations to alleviate fuel and utility poverty wherever possible.

6.3. Sprinklers and other safety measures must be implemented immediately, with full funding from central government.

6.4. All tower blocks must be made safe immediately, regardless of who the landlord is.

6.5. The Grenfell survivors must be supported through the inquiry process including forming a parallel people's inquiry if necessary, and an immediate application of the recommendations arising from both the public and any people's inquiry.

6.6. Housing associations must make fire risk assessments publicly accessible.

7. Rent and Service Charge Controls

7.1. Effective rent controls must be introduced to the housing association and private housing sectors. The 1977 Act with rent controls is still on the books and can be used with immediate effect with the reintroduction of secure tenancies.

7.2. All local authorities must maintain a publicly accessible register of private landlords necessary.

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7.3. Legislation must be introduced which requires full transparency on service charges, and protects tenants against steep service charge increases.

8. Sectoral Oversight

- 8.1. The powers of the social housing regulator will be expanded to restore oversight of housing association management, disposals of assets, and organisational mergers.
- 8.2. The powers of the Social Housing Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman will be enhanced to enable greater intervention on behalf of tenants whose concerns are being ignored.
- 8.3. Housing associations, cooperatives, and firms awarded public sector construction projects must be free from blacklisting.
- 8.4. Planning regulations must be changed to reduce the powers of property speculators.
- 8.5. The Freedom of Information Act must be extended to cover housing associations and their sub-contractors.
- 8.6. Building regulations must be updated to improve building safety. This will be done in conjunction with the Fire Brigade and other emergency services. Funding must be provided to these services for conducting adequate fire and other building safety checks, and to improve access for emergency services.
- 8.7. Fire and other emergency services must be given funding to ensure that they have all the necessary equipment for dealing with emergencies in all types of stock, including high rise blocks.
- 8.8. Information sharing on migrant rough sleepers must be restricted to ensure that client confidentiality is maintained. Homelessness agencies and funding bodies must be given responsibility for reviewing how information on migrant rough sleepers is used.