

Labour should pressure the government to make a U-turn on council house funding

Model letter to Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner

Dear Keir and Angela

The loss of the general election obviously meant that Labour could not implement its housing policy directly. However, we cannot just criticise the Tory government and passively wait for the next general election. The pandemic has underlined the scale of the housing crisis and the consequences of over-crowded and poor accommodation. The current crisis provides us with possibilities that would have been unthinkable just a few months ago. Under the impact of events the government has executed a series of U-turns including the moratorium on evictions. But it will not be shifted by Parliamentary tactics and verbal criticism. It requires a campaigning movement which connects up with the needs of millions whose lives are going to be disrupted even further by the pandemic, the end of the moratorium, and fast increasing job losses.

We believe that Labour should demand of the government what we committed to at our last conference and in the Manifesto:

- £10 billion annual grant to fund 100,000 social rent council homes a year, and
- Ending Right to Buy to stem the loss of council homes. There are less than 1.6 million council homes left in England.

The Labour Manifesto also included a commitment to review council housing debt. We called on Labour to cancel that debt which is bogus. Tenants have paid more in rent than the historic costs of building programmes. Cancellation would give Housing Revenue Accounts at least an extra £1.25 billion a year towards the maintenance and renewal of their existing stock. It will help out with the backlog of work which has built up during the pandemic. **Labour should be demanding that the government cancel this bogus debt.**

There is a growing consensus on the need for the government to focus on funding social rent homes. The House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government committee says that "A social housebuilding programme should be top of the Government's agenda to rebuild the country from the impact of COVID-19." It has called for £10 billion annual grant to fund 90,000 social rent homes a year. Even the Tory dominated LGA has called for a renaissance of large scale council house building.

"Housing must be a central part of the national recovery from coronavirus. Now is the time for a genuine renaissance in council housebuilding that reduces homelessness, gets rough sleepers off the streets for good, supports people's well-being and is climate-friendly."

If Labour organises a campaign which brings together all those organisations that recognise the need for a large scale council building programme, including the growing tenants movement, it is possible that we can force the government to make a U-turn on council house funding.