

its demand BALANCED DEBATE ON ALMOs resources for both sides of the argument

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investment and the long term risks for the future of council housing are the key issues – not getting awards for meeting government targets.

● Camden's executive has ignored the democratic decision of the Joint District Management Committee (elected tenant reps from across Camden) on April 28th 2003 to 'not support the formal bid for ALMO'. They now plan to pre-empt a tenants' ballot by going ahead with selecting a Shadow Board and restructuring the housing department to align it with an ALMO.

● The ALMO reference group set up by the Council, to ensure an all-sided debate on the ALMO issue, has in effect been used by the Council to rubber stamp the government's timetable, creating a public impression that tenants have been involved in putting together a formal bid to the government. This is not the case which is why the Joint DMC voted against supporting the bid.

● The Council is deliberately bypassing our TAs and the DMCs which are the recognised channel for consultation on policy issues affecting Camden tenants and residents.

● We are committed to ensuring that there is a fair and equal debate for both sides of the argument before the vote in December. We expect all forums and committees that are constituted to act on behalf of council tenants to uphold these democratic decisions.

● We endorse the Joint DMC's decisions including the ALMOs that the council fund a 'vote against ALMOs broadsheet' to re-balance the debate after their one-sided pro ALMO Special Housing News. We also support the resolutions to demand that the council fund an independent expert to work with us to investigate the financial options and alternatives available.

● We support the campaign to win direct investment in council housing – with no strings attached. We will organise tenants meetings and distribute material to publicise this campaign and make sure the case against ALMOs is properly put to guarantee a genuinely balanced debate.

Chair
Douglas Bateman, Sec
IMC
Ray Adson, Washan James and Bremer
Group: Stuart Tappin, Chair & Adrian Finer
Secretary
Bromwich Est WRA, Liz Wheatley, Rep
Prisoners HR Q RA, Jackie Whitebridge,
Chair DMC Rep Group
HRA, Jim Tynes, ex Camden Councilor
Nagels Park Estate, Laraine Ruffal, Chair
Nagels Park Estate, Carol Wang, Chair
Mallard Park
RA, Alice Whitty, Kim Price, Eileen Yates, Clifford



Read between the lines

We believe that establishing the ALMO offers us an opportunity to enter a more dynamic phase of partnership with local Housing Associations, working together as providers of social housing with the Council as strategic body for all. The Housing Department will facilitate bringing together initiatives between Associations and the ALMO.

Source: LB Camden Round 3 ALMO Bid Para 5.1.

ALMO MEANS CUTS

While declaring that an ALMO will not make cuts to our existing service, the council has been planning in secret to "restructure" the housing department ready for an ALMO. By job losses of front line staff are involved.

The council are restructuring the Repairs and Renewals Service to bring together operational and managerial structures of both departments. They are hiring new Surveyors, Project Officers and Accounting Staff. With an ALMO, we will have yet another layer of management which is also subject to more MONITORING by the Council and TENANTS and RESIDENTS.

Management costs will INCREASE as staff on the ground actually doing the work DECREASES.

Art Brown, OMC Rep, Wells House TRA

WHAT'S THE COUNCIL'S JOB?
The council seem to always be pushing down government policy down the throats of council tenants. Aren't they supposed to be representing our interests and putting pressure on government?

THE ALMO BOARD – TENANTS' POWER OR JUST ANOTHER QUANGO?

Camden Council claim that ALMOs will give tenants more power through having representatives on the board. BUT...

Tenant board members will be in a minority. Tenants will have their hands tied tightly by company law (they will not be able to act as 'representatives') and will not be accountable to tenants.

The elected council will also be left of the hook, claiming 'it's the ALMO running it now' – ending the unique relationship between council tenants and their landlord. There will be five unelected 'independents' on the board, accountable to no one. The same board structure is used in housing associations, where the experience of tenant board members is well documented. Council housing is being run by a quango isn't

It is a disgrace that the council is trying to push through the ALMO and depriving tenants a fair debate. Camden UNSON is a club that we can make a contribution to democracy by helping to fund this broadsheet so that tenants can read the case against ALMO.
Mandy Berger, UNSON Convenor for Camden Housing Department

Camden claims that meeting the 'decent homes target' on time is critical. But how many government targets get changed, overrun or are quietly forgotten? It's just a ploy to get an ALMO set up.

Decent council housing is an essential public service. We support the Defend Council Housing campaign to demand direct investment to provide decent and affordable, secure accommodation provided by a democratically accountable council. Council housing is not a luxury, but a necessity.
Robert Laurie, Secretary, Camden Trade Council (the TUC affiliated grouping of Camden's trade unions)

Our Councillors seem to have forgotten who elected them and why. ALMOs are not wanted, tenants see them as the thin end of the wedge in getting rid of council housing. We need more council housing not less. Our Councillors should stop pandering to Central Government and concentrate on carrying out what people in the borough elected them to do.

Jacqui Jeans, Tenant, Lissenden Garden



an accident. Unelected quangos, boards and partnerships have existed for many years and all their talk of empowerment and stakeholders hides a very different reality. Here's a view of one such board in Kilburn:

For one look forward to the day this undercurrent, non-Kilburn resident, non-accountable Single Regeneration Board ends. They use Soviet-style tactics including the ejection of the public from meetings, dismissing residents from committees, censoring the minutes and secretive agendas and accounts."
Graham Bacon, writing in the CNU 15/05/03

If the ruling management board contains council worthies, miscellaneous city financiers and business consultants and a couple of tenants to make it look good then what we have is a housing association with a new and sexy makeover. For council tenants the reality may turn out to be bleak.
Peter Rutherford Chair, WHHA Tenants Association (in exile)

Some tenants will be able to make a difference sitting on the ALMO Board. But the law makes it clear they are obliged to look after the financial interests of the company – not represent the interests of tenants.

MS because it's the only way to get the repairs and improvements use the Council is keen to get another government award?

The trade union view

People work for the housing department because we want to provide a first class council housing service we can all be proud of.

It is frustrating for UNSON members as for tenants when our job is made harder by lack of council funds and the loss of staff and growing numbers of senior managers whilst front line housing jobs are cut.

It is a scandal that the council is now proposing another reorganisation. A call centre for housing repairs will be a less personal and accountable service and loss of local knowledge. While the council has tried to avoid consulting tenants, its internal documents make it clear that the real reason for these changes is to prepare for the ALMO.

defending decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing is not just because we work in housing. Many of our members in other council departments, in the NHS, colleges and schools are also council tenants. Many more are council tenants who are interested in seeing private housing closed.

This government is clearly committed to privatising public services. The claim that ALMO is not privatisation is hollow. It is the housing equivalent of Foundation Hospitals, top-up fees for universities and other New Labour moves to undermine our public services.

Are we to believe a government that wages war without any evidence of weapons of mass destruction when they tell us ALMO is 'not about privatisation'?

The council claim that workers' jobs and conditions will be TUPE protected. But many workers in other council departments, the NHS, railways and elsewhere have found this is not the case. In Kinkadee and Derby, ALMOs are planning to opt out of TUPE and sack workers next year. This would lead to the privatisation of other council functions and undermine the whole principle of local accountable services.

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Mandy Berger, UNSON Convenor for Camden Housing Department

UNSON's commitment to