

Camden tenants demand A FAIR & BALANCED DEBATE ON ALMOs with equal resources for both sides of the argument



The undersigned, tenants reps and individual tenants, are alarmed that Camden Council is misrepresenting the debate around Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and manipulating the process to try and fix the outcome.

● Many of us believe that ALMOs have striking similarities with Foundation Hospitals and other quangos which undermine our public services and are part of the government's wider privatisation agenda. This risk needs proper debate.

● Calls for more direct investment in council housing are growing. 115 MPs have signed a Commons motion and tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs from more than 60 areas took part in the 1,800-strong rally and lobby of parliament in January. The campaign has already won changes in government policy. Much more can still be won.

● Camden Council is not conducting a 'fair and balanced debate'. Housing News has continually pushed a pro-ALMO line. The latest Special Housing News presented a one-sided position and misrepresented the financial alternatives.

● The option of using substantial existing resources and continuing to campaign to win further concessions from the government to allow direct investment without strings is dishonestly described as 'stay as you are'. We need to win more money to carry out all the improvements we need but it is not true that Camden housing is in crisis. The most urgent major works as part of a significant capital programme is not in doubt.

● Even Camden's own Business Plan recognises existing resources will support a major capital programme. It says that 60% of tenants' homes will meet the government's decent homes target in full and the remaining homes will meet most (75%) of the target by 2010 using existing resources – without an ALMO.

● The repairs and improvements that Camden tenants want are not the same as the government's 'decent homes' definition. For tenants the benefits of

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 demand that the council call a case 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.

Signatories already include: Dave Rodgers, Chair Gospat Oak DMC; Brian Pageant, Chair Kenbar Team DMC; Fran Haren, Chair Camden Iron DMC; Paul Timmins, Joint Secretary Ampthill Square; Dr Alan Walker, Chair & Jane Ince, Sec. Sec. Peckwater Estate TRA; Lesley Fox, Secretary DMC; ACP & Waples Majed Chair; Rempier House TRA; Cathy Potts, Secretary DMC; Rep; Tipton/Berling/Hawtree TRA; Ann Brown, DMC; Rep; Welle House TRA; Frans Cassen, Sunham Tenant; Petra Dando, Winstling Island; Derek Jernam, Sec DMC; Rep; Keston/Kensington/Wilmington TRA; John Longman, Chair DMC; Rep; Michael Aghvord; Secretary Ingestre Road; Dr. John Hockley, DMC; ACP & Saddle Alan Camden Sq Area TRA; Irene McGrath, DMC; Rep; St Albans Villas TRA; Mary Adameson, Chair DMC; Rep; Brookfield

TRA; Douglas Bateman, Sec DMC; Rep; Agar Grove TMC; Ray Adameson, Blenheim Tenant and former mayor; Stuart Tappin, Chair & Adrian Fisher, Secretary Brunswick Est TRA; Lu Whitley, Rep; Princess Hill C; Dr. Jackie Whittingham, Chair DMC; Rep; Sander TRA; Jean Stally, Secretary DMC; Rep; St Silas TRA; Councillor Roger Bucknall; (Cory) Sowers; Miranda Martin, Chair Churchway Estate TRA; Pat Miller and Jason Quill, DMC; Reps; Three Fields TRA; J Taylor & Jackie Holloway, DMC; Reps; Gallop Place TRA; Robert McMahon, Chair & W. Proke, Sec; Cooper's Lane TRA; Jim Turner, ex Camden Councillor (Lab); Regents Park Estate; Lorraine Hall, Chair; Russell Aurness TRA; Carl Wang, Chair; Matfield Park TRA; Alice Whitby, Kim Place; Eileen Yates, Cayford

Houses; TRA; Peter Creek, Barchon Low Rise Tenant; Narel Hagan Chowdhury, Chair; Camden Street/Admiralty Tenants Association; Denis Lacey, ex Camden Councillor (Lab) and mayor; Paul Negrifoglio, ex Camden Councillor (Lab); G (Barry) Sullivan, Director; Camden Iron Neighbourhood Advice Centre; Councillor Gerry Harrison (Lab); Barry Allen, Chair & Liz Nicoll, Sec; Sunrise Estate; TR; Sara Eiches, Chair; Matthew Davis, DMC; Rep & Valerie Nicholas-Town, Ganges Est TRA; Dee Lynch, Sec & Diane Lynch, Chair; Westcroft Estate TRA; Simon Joyce, Chair & Una Doyle, Secretary; Camden Socialist Alliance; Norah Coyne, Secretary; Millard; Heybridge & Rowall TRA; Dave Lewis, Chair DMC; Rep & Simone Lewis, Joint Secretary; Barchon Low Rise TRA; Eddie O'Dwyer, Chair; Harding & Belmont TR.

Are we being sold ALMOs because it's the only way to get the repairs and improvements tenants want or because the Council is keen to get another government award?

Who said this and when?

1) In answer to your last question on offering 'appropriate' facilities for an 'affordable but stable' I am sorry that you see this as a confrontational issue. I have not heard any constructive alternative suggestions from you that we would consider (sustaining). It is highly unlikely that (the council) would fund 'appropriate' or initiative to create opportunities for improvements to Camden's housing.

2) For their tenants and leaseholders it could be a clean case too – offering their major environmental and security improvements that they bring to us, as well as greater involvement in the running of their homes. Our proposals are bold and ambitious enough to meet the challenge we face.

We have a genuine opportunity to raise our sights and achieve higher standards of housing for everyone. These are just some of the ways to open the door to a better housing policy which will benefit you.

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 UNISON members as for tenants when our job is made harder by lack of resources, constant reorganisation and growing numbers of senior managers while front line housing posts are cut.

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

UNISON's commitment to

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 need council housing as an alternative to soaring private housing costs.

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 Trusts, Rep-ops and other New Labour moves to undermine our public services.

Are we to believe a government that wages war without any evidence of weapons or 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 Kirkcaldy and Derby, ALMOs are planned to opt for TUPE protection in some cases next year. This would lead to the privatisation of other council functions and undermine the whole principle of local accountable services.

It is a disgrace that the council is trying to push through the ALMO and changing tenants' a fair debate. Camden UNISON is pleased that we can make a contribution to democracy by helping to fund this broadsheet so that tenants can read the case against ALMO. **Alamy Singer, UNISON Governor for Camden Housing Department**