

We can stop them



Celebrating the 77% No Vote against ALMOs photo Andrew Wiard

How Camden DCH ran their campaign

Organising an effective campaign isn't rocket science but it does need thinking about carefully.

We held open campaign meetings to discuss strategy, material and activity. These meetings involved tenants reps, individual tenants and union shop stewards. We got a good response to a "this campaign needs your help" byline on posters, leaflets and letters in the local paper.

The campaign was tenant led but Camden UNISON was involved from the start. Working together stopped the council playing divide and rule—setting tenants and workers off against one another.

We mailed every TA rep (where we could get names and addresses) and requested the opportunity to speak at TA meetings. The arguments against ALMO were also put at every meeting of the council's formal consultation structure—the five District Management Committees and the Borough Wide Forum.

But we also kept our independence. Some tenants groups are susceptible to arm twisting and blackmail by the council.

The key is to campaign on the streets and estates to make sure that all tenants hear the reasons to oppose an ALMO.

In the first stage of our campaign we produced a statement arguing there should be a 'fair and balanced debate' with equal resources for both sides to put the arguments and a guaranteed ballot. We got

tenants reps and councillors to sign up (including some who supported ALMOs) supporting this basic democratic principle. Whilst the council never agreed to the 'fair and balanced debate' they were eventually forced to concede a ballot.

Good organisation is essential. For each of the five districts we had a tenant and trade unionist re-

We kept the local papers full of letters to encourage the debate and, particularly in the run up to the ballot, ran paid adverts sponsored by UNISON.

Don't assume everyone reads leaflets put through their door. We found stalls in high streets and markets, leafleting churches and mosques and talking to parents picking children up from school was really effective as well. So was getting the campaign poster stuck up on entry doors and bin chambers across estates (use tape and blu-tac—not glue).

It all helped convince tenants that we are a collective force to be reckoned with and voting NO was worth doing.

The union role was important. Management always try and blackmail housing workers to support their proposals too.

Shop stewards held union meetings to counter management's arguments in favour of an ALMO, to put the case against and give union members the wider picture. As a result caretakers refused to take down campaign posters and office staff didn't put pro ALMO stickers and material in all letters as instructed by management.



Offering help on one of the campaign stalls

Finance is crucial: we received donations from many TAs and individuals but also received financial support from UNISON to help pay for campaign leaflets, broadsheets and adverts in the local press.

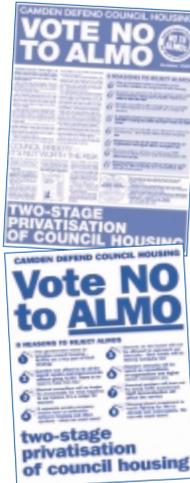
Going round with loudspeakers on a car was really effective and raised the profile of the campaign.

You can do it too!

Copies of Camden and other local broadsheets, leaflets and posters can be downloaded from www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Campaign guide

- Build a broad based campaign bringing together tenants, trade unionists and where possible councillors and MPs
- Get tenants reps and councillors, whatever their views on stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs, to sign a statement demanding a fair & balanced debate and a formal ballot for all tenants
- Produce clear material that puts the case against privatisation and argues for a fourth option of direct investment
- Leaflet every home but also have stalls at markets and high streets and give out material at churches, mosques and parents outside primary schools
- High visibility is important: get posters up on every estate and street, and borrow a loudspeaker car to tour estates
- Send letters to the local press, organise lobbies or stunts to get publicity and ask trade unions to sponsor adverts to put the arguments across
- Hold debates and public meetings ask campaigners outside your area, including MPs, to speak



Tenants and workers resist the blackmail

Councils pushing privatisation try to blackmail tenants: they tell us the only way we can get repairs and improvements is by accepting privatisation

They try the same blackmail tactics on council workers, telling them their jobs depend on getting the extra funding. Council managers threaten that a No vote would mean redundancies, cuts in services and office closures. In Wrexham staff have been told that if the proposed transfer is defeated 35 jobs will go.

They produce business plans with figures manipulated to back up their arguments, and use these to run scare stories aimed at tenants and council workers.

They fear a united campaign by tenants and trade unionists and try to divide and rule, playing us off as though we come from different planets.

Tenants and council workers have a common interest in defending council housing. We need to challenge management lies. Challenge them to a debate. Take the arguments to all staff and make sure they hear the case against privatisation, the facts of how workers are affected, and the alternative case for council housing.

And don't let anyone forget: the senior managers and consultants pushing privatisation stand to gain major pay rises and bonuses if they succeed.

Don't let them win at your expense!

What you can do

- Organise a delegation of tenants, trade unionists and councillors to attend the meeting on March 13 (see front)
- Hold a meeting in your area with tenants, unions, councillors and MPs to support the 'fourth option'
- Get your council to send evidence to the Council Housing group of MPs
- Get your MP to sign EDM 430 'Investment & choice for council tenants' and join the Council Housing parliamentary group (c/o Austin Mitchell MP)
- Affiliate to DCH and order campaign material to make sure every tenant, trade unionist and councillor hears the arguments against privatisation

AFFILIATION & ORDER MATERIAL

TENANTS/COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS
local £10; regional £25; national £50

TRADE UNIONS local £40; regional £100; national £250

Campaign briefings: £15 per annum

Copies of this broadsheet: £18 per 100; £100 per 1000

'Case for council housing' pamphlet: individual copies £5—£2.50 for bulk orders

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

February 2004

Tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs demand

Direct investment in council housing



20p

Council tenants' opposition to privatisation is hardening. The massive 77% no vote in Camden is another big blow to the government's 'three card trick' of privatisation through transfer, PFI or ALMO. It is now exactly one year since John Prescott's Communities Plan, but resistance is stiff and his attempt to tough it out has made little progress.

We can defeat transfer wherever we mount an effective campaign and spell out the alternative: fighting for direct investment to improve our homes. The most recent No votes in Stockport, Nuneaton, Stroud and Islington prove it. The overwhelming 77% vote against ALMO in Camden shows we can do the same against a proposed Arms Length Management Organisation.

Camden tenants resoundingly rejected this two-stage strategy to privatise council housing. Now they are demanding the £283 million earmarked for the ALMO goes direct to the council for housing.

This result is sending shockwaves through the ODPM, local authorities, policy makers and housing professionals. It gives an enormous boost to the confidence of tenants and trade unionists across Britain resisting similar blackmail.

The failure to tackle the growing housing crisis is drawing increasing criticism from MPs, policy makers and academics. Municipal Journal, the local government magazine, calls it 'The rise and fall of Prescott's housing plan' (MJ 4.12.03).

Up to 200 councils are still refusing to choose a privatisation option. 130 MPs signed the last EDM resolution supporting tenants' demands for direct investment without strings. A new EDM has been tabled in Parliament—get your MP to sign EDM 430 on 'Investment & choice for council tenants' straight her the determined alliance of tenants, trade unions and the councillors, MPs and others who support council housing are a formidable force. We need to pull the growing opposition together to demand a 4th option of direct investment in council housing through an investment allowance.



DCH national conference 2003 in Liverpool



Housing Minister shoots from the hip

MPs expose minister's bluster

The ODPM committee of senior backbench MPs is holding an enquiry into Decent Homes, including stock options and 'tenants choice'. DCH and the Parliamentary 'Council Housing' group of MPs submitted written evidence and DCH and Unison were called to give oral evidence before Christmas.

Roy Irwin, head of housing inspection at the Audit Commission, told MPs councils will have more housing investment options within five years. He thinks:

'something is going to have to give and I doubt if it is the tenants' views.'
(at ODPM Select Committee 16 Dec 03)

Clearly feeling the pressure, housing minister Keith Hill was

put on the spot by the committee.

'Wait a minute there is a fourth way. It's just that you are not prepared to go along with that, is it not?'

Andrew Bennett MP chair ODPM select cttee to Keith Hill MP 28 Jan 04

Hill shocked reporters by indicating he was ready to ditch the government's 'decent homes' manifesto commitment rather than drop the government's dogmatic insistence on privatisation - even when tenants choose to stay with the council.

But tenants won't be bullied 'As British Citizens we fought for the Democratic right to have a choice and I will fight to the end to keep that. Tenants deserve the right to be listened to. We are determined to fight for AND achieve—direct investment in council housing.'

Lyn Ralph, Chair Doncaster Federation of Tenants

TENANTS, TRADE UNIONISTS & COUNCILLORS—TELL MPS WE WANT A 'FOURTH OPTION'

DIRECT INVESTMENT IN COUNCIL HOUSING

Come and put the case at a meeting during the Labour Party Local Government Conference

Sat 13 March

Sessions: 11.30-1.30 & 5-7
Friends Meeting House,
Mount Street, Manchester

>>Turn to Centre pages "MPs want evidence"

NO VOTE TO ALMO IN CAMDEN SENDS SHOCKWAVES

The vote in Camden shows we can win when we organise effective broad based campaigns that give tenants the case against privatisation and for direct investment.

Camden DCH involved dozens of tenants reps and individual tenants, Camden UNISON, councillors and ex councillors and other activists. Following the decisive ballot result the council has agreed to back tenants and campaign for a 'fourth option'.

IF WE CAN DO IT SO CAN YOU - SEE BACK PAGE OF CAMDEN DCH



Stop privatisation

No justification for privatisation

Ministers put three arguments to justify stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs.

1 Only way to get improvements

They claim stock transfer brings in private money which avoids extra public expenditure. But government and councils can borrow at lower interest, so public investment is cheaper and avoids the millions wasted on the 'transfer industry' consultants and inflated RSL executive salaries.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee's report on stock transfer (July 2003) said 'The additional cost of transfer is likely to be larger than the £1300 per home calculated by the [National Audit] Office' and transfer has 'led to the undervaluation of the homes transferred so far, resulting in a greater contribution from the taxpayer than was necessary to deal with, for example, the backlog of repair.'

UNISON has also done the sums on the hidden public subsidy through extra Housing Benefit costs. Dave Prentis, UNISON's general secretary told the lobby of Parliament in 2003 'Stock transfer costs an additional £240 million in housing benefits annually because housing association tenants generally receive a higher rate than council tenants... The transfer of one million homes would cost taxpayers an extra £837 million in housing benefits annually.'

In 2003/4 the government planned to subsidise privatisation by writing of housing debt to the tune of £800 million—enough to almost double the £842 million housing investment programme for all councils that year.

2 separating housing strategy from management improves service

They say separation brings benefits but where is the evidence?

Heriott-Watt University found exactly the opposite from their research into the effects of separation after transfer to housing associations. Alistair McIntosh, from the Housing Quality Network who commissioned the report, said "There doesn't appear to be a lot of empirical evidence suggesting that the only correct route is to make a split between the strategic enabling function and the landlord function. It's been carried on without any research or rationality underpinning it."

Inside Housing 11 January 2002.

Separating off housing management - into a housing association or ALMO - with separate company structures and priorities mean co-ordination between services gets worse. '43 per cent of [local] authorities reported difficulties in discharging their statutory housing duties' with post-1996 transfer RSLs, according to Shelter research.

3 Tenants empowered

Housing associations have a very poor record of involving tenants, with few independent tenants organisations. The tiny number of tenant board members are mostly not elected, are unaccountable and bound by business rules and confidentiality clauses. Tenants have been thrown off for rocking the boat. 'Members of the boards of RSLs have the same fiduciary duty to the RSL as any company director.'

(then housing minister Sally Keeble, Hansard 4 Feb 02.)

Places for People (P4P), England's biggest housing association last October kicked out board members after some of them criticised the chief executive and chair.

The Housing Corporation is actively encouraging RSLs to merge and make their boards smaller and more professional.

P4P have just decided to pay their board chair £20,000 a year! Tenants are likely to be the first casualties.



Tenants and trade unionists at the Lobby of Parliament 2003

We want 'Fourth option'—direct investment in council housing

Tenants want direct investment in council housing not the 'three card trick' of transfer, PFI or ALMO. We've had enough of being told this is the only way to get improvements done.

Why should we trade our secure tenure and lower costs to get repairs and improvements we have a right to?

Council housing is the best value and most democratic way to run our homes. Where tenants hear the facts about privatisation and the alternative, they are ready to fight to keep our rights and improve our estates.

As John Prescott's department admitted in its 'blue skies' consultation, council housing can pay for itself—if all the income from rents and 'right to buy' receipts is reinvested. Add the money they currently spend subsidising privatisation through debt write off and their army of consultants, and there would be sufficient to fund direct investment in council housing with no strings attached.

Last year council tenants nationally paid on average £2500 a year in rent. But on average we only got back £1500 in services (£1000 in Management & Maintenance Allowances and £500 in Major Repair Allowances). That means £1000 per tenant was withheld by the government. This is enough to fund the improvements we need.

MPs want evidence

"We floated this proposal [for an investment allowance] in our earlier consultation two years ago and there were simply no takers"

Keith Hill, ODPM Select Committee 28 Jan 2004

The Parliamentary Council Housing group is calling on councils, councillors and tenants to provide evidence of the support for a fourth option of an investment allowance to pay for improvements to council housing.

"The 'Council Housing' group in the House of Commons want to hear what councillors think about the proposal of a 'fourth option'—an investment allowance to create an option for direct investment in council housing," says Austin Mitchell MP.

Send in your evidence now to Parliamentary Council Housing Group, c/o Austin Mitchell MP House of Commons London SW1A 0AA or to council_housing@yahoo.co.uk

Case against stock transfer, PFI and almos

The Case Against Transfer Transfer of council housing to an RSL (housing association or company) threatens tenants' rights.

Council tenants' secure tenancies are replaced with less secure 'assured' tenancies, making eviction easier. RSL rents are higher than councils—17 per cent on average, and the gap is growing despite attempts to close it.

Transfer wastes public money and diverts funds from where they are most needed. Ministers' pretence that tenants are ecstatic about major improvement to their homes following stock transfer are contradicted by research in the Commons Public Accounts Committee's report on stock transfer (July 2003). The report's appendix

shows only a 3% change (81% of tenants satisfied with the condition of home—78% before transfer). Only "85% of tenants considered that housing services were at least as good as before transfer"—even after £millions have been spent by the new landlord.

Satisfaction on rents remain static—but most stock transfer landlords are still within the 5 year rent guarantee period after which rents are likely to rise. Satisfaction with quality of repairs is down (63% against 68%). Figures from Communities Scotland show the number of housing association evictions has risen by 64 per cent in two years to stand at 522 in the year 2000 to 2001. That equates to 3.7 in every 1,000 tenancies, com-

A funding stream to finance borrowing—as provided for PFI or ALMO—combined with councils' new right to borrow (which we were also told would never be conceded) would give councils the means to invest in council housing without the threat and costs of privatisation or setting up separate companies.

As Unison said to MPs, 'A modest investment allowance of £150 million as a subsidy through the RHA in 2004/5, would yield about £2 billion worth of investment. It is the real solution. It reinvests the money captured by the Treasury... We are not asking for new tax money, we are not asking for new borrowing; we are asking for tenants' legitimate rent money to be used effectively and efficiently for the benefit of them, their communities and, just as importantly, the taxpayer.'

Support is growing

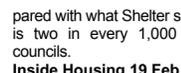
Support for this solution is growing: it is what tenants want, and has support from the major trade unions and from growing numbers of MPs, councillors and policy makers (see column on the right of this page). Government have no economic argument or evidence to challenge this—which is why ministers flounder and then lash out.

Austin Mitchell MP says:

"Tenants who vote for direct council management and ownership of their homes, want direct investment in council housing and we have not heard one coherent argument or evidence against this. Dogmatic insistence on privatisation at any cost will no longer wash. The democratic rights of council tenants must be respected."

The Parliamentary Council Housing group supports tenants' calls for the fourth option of direct investment in existing and new council housing, through a ring-fenced investment allowance. They point out that direct investment in council housing is cheaper and a more effective use of public money than transfer, PFI or ALMO.

That's what council tenants want—it makes economic sense and no amount of blackmail and blustering is going to solve the housing crisis without it.



Unless there is a substantial increase in the number of affordable homes for rent—and council housing is the most efficient way of providing this—many areas are approaching a housing crisis not seen since the post-war era?"

Lynne Jones MP

money are based on 'errors, irrelevant or unrealistic analysis and pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo.' Costs escalate between bid and final contract: reportedly by over 60% in Sandwell.

Risks are effectively underwritten by government with yet more public money. Tenants have no right to a ballot on PFI proposals. Public land is often 'gifted' to developers with homes demolished to increase profits.

The Case Against ALMOs Arms Length Management Organisations are the government's latest tactical means of pursuing privatisation. A separate company is set up to run homes which remain at this stage council owned. The carrot is an uncertain amount of extra funding for five years. If money is available, why can't it go into council housing directly? ALMOs are meeting grow-



"Just as the private landlords saw 100 years ago how they could rip tenants off, so we've seen a whole group of people move into housing with what I can only describe as sticky fingers. See how much money has been going to consultants and others to try and persuade people to vote 'yes'. Let's make sure we win this campaign."

Andrew Bennett MP



"It is outrageous that people are told 'if you go along with what we want there will be lots of money to do up flats and houses, but if you don't the money won't be available'." "It's like holding people to ransom. It's totally morally and politically unacceptable... in the name of dogma and nothing else."

Frank Dobson MP



"Unless there is a substantial increase in the number of affordable homes for rent—and council housing is the most efficient way of providing this—many areas are approaching a housing crisis not seen since the post-war era?"

Lynne Jones MP

"What they want to do is privatise the great bulk of the nation's housing stock. It's absolutely unacceptable and it's not in the public interest."

"So sod the council—come and visit T&G members in the depots. We'll meet together as tenants and trade unions, and we'll win."

Jack Dromey, TGWU Deputy General Secretary

"The Government should return to the principle of financing social housing for rent through local authorities. This would ensure local accountability, would mean new houses becoming available sooner would create employment and be better value for the public purse."

Kelvin Hopkins MP

It is telling that a small group of tenants on a tiny budget could run a small but effective campaign that resonated far more with tenants' own wishes and which was successful.

Cllr Hilary Fowles leader Labour Group Stroud District Council



"Every week in my advice surgery I meet families who are desperate for a decent home."

The Government needs to instigate a massive council house building programme and stop wasting valuable resources on these privatisation, sell-off and transfer schemes."

John McDonnell MP

'Greetings from the whole TUC in support of your campaign. Mine was one of the families that benefited for the first time in many generations from the opportunity of decent housing and it's a cause well worth fighting for.'

Frances O Grady, deputy general secretary, TUC

"We fully support the campaign to get decent, affordable, secure and accountable housing in this country. We are proud to link up with tenants' associations, with other unions, and with politicians to fight to promote decent quality housing."

Mick Graham, GMB national secretary

"What we as a union will campaign for, is decent, secure, affordable and democratically accountable council housing. Council housing not as a last resort but as first class housing for all who need it."

"The only way we'll achieve what we want and keep our housing in the public sector is by winning the ballots—by becoming active, getting groups together who're prepared to go out and argue our case."

Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary



The tenants in Stroud District have shown the way in rejecting LSVT. I hope that Stroud can give hope to those who want a major re-think in Government policy to take place. Hopefully together we can make this happen."

David Drew MP



"What is the sense in a highly rated housing authority being forced to transfer its stock to alternative management and financial control?"

Successive governments have wasted a lot of money pursuing these policies when the money would have been better spent on improving the stock."

Brian Iddon MP



'Real tenants' power is what happens when democratically elected politicians have to listen to a large enough collective voice.'

Council housing is the only form of housing where tenants elect their landlord, and keeping our homes under democratic control is worth fighting for.'

Lesley Carty, Secretary Templar House TA, Camden



"There is a severe shortage of affordable housing throughout the country, because over the last twenty years, virtually no council homes have been built. Meanwhile stock is being sold off—or given away. Only by investing in council housing can we provide decent homes for everyone."

Christine Shawcroft Labour Party National Executive Committee (personal capacity)

"Stock transfer is led by a load of senior officers to the council who see it as the means to a crock of gold. It is led by consultants who get rich and move throughout the country like a load of locusts and carpet-baggers."

The victory in Birmingham was won by getting out on the estates and the streets. Get among your people. Talk to them, get support from your unions and tell them the real facts.

Frank Chance Chair Birmingham DCH

Fourth option—alive & kicking

Camden tenants are no less entitled to decent homes... Labour wants choice in public services—our tenants have made one. They believe in what works—our services do. Two stars is good enough; we got three stars twice. We've exhausted the options.

Dame Jane Roberts leader of Camden Council quoted by Neil Litherland, Director of Housing in Housing Today 30 Jan 04

Q189 Chris Mole MP: Should further options be available than the current four for local authorities in pursuit of the Decent Homes Standard in their stock?

Mr Irwin: I think the answer to that must be yes. If you are asking what are the other options, then it is difficult to see at this stage but, if you go back four or five years, PFIs and ALMOs would not have been an option. If you go back 15 years, transfer would not have been an option. So I think I would work it that new ideas will come into the frame over the next five years.

Q206 Mr Betts MP: Is the Audit Commission looking at whether there should be a relaxation, for local authorities and ALMOs to borrow against their rental stream?

Mr Irwin: We are looking at that. We understand that ODPM and the Treasury are looking at that and it may well be an issue that is picked up in the comprehensive spending review 2004'

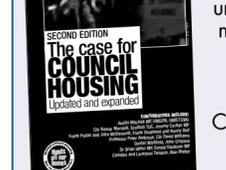
Roy Irwin Audit Commission chief inspector of housing, at ODPM select committee 16 Dec 03

"We could all say would it not be wonderful if every single local authority did not have to transfer because there was money for them all to retain their stock, but that is not where we are unless we can achieve changing the Treasury rules about borrowing."

Sarah Webb Director of Policy CIH to ODPM select committee 9 Dec 03

Decent homes is 'a real test... and one we cannot duck, whether that means looking at community-based models for transfers or improvement programmes to enable councils to achieve excellence—or new options for high-performing local authorities.'

Dennis Reed chief executive of the Local Government Information Unit, Guardian 02 Feb 04



Second Edition The Case for Council Housing Updated and expanded

Yvonne Leishman president Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)

"The rumour and the speculation about a fourth option is just not going away"

Karl Tupling Sheffield head of housing strategy

"We should never say never [to the possibility of a fourth option]... I do not think [tenants] are saying "We are happy with poorer quality property". I think they are saying they want to stay with their local authority."

Lynne Pennington Nottingham director of housing

"Tenants are being asked to make two choices in one vote, for a decent home and for a new landlord—or at least a different relationship to the council. A lot of them are suspicious of this two for the price of one offer... a whole stock transfer industry has been created—at considerable cost to the public purse."

Catriona Graham Powys head of housing

"It is clear that setting up ALMOs moves tenants away from the democratic process anyway, and not having a vote on this issue underlines this... New Labour continues to impose its market forces on an electorate that do not want it."

Ali Hurworth Action Housing Barnsley (personal capacity)

"One year on [from the Communities Plan launch] we are no more convinced that we will have the homes of the quantity or quality that we need in London without positive investment in council housing."

George Fry chair London Tenants Federation (all from Inside Housing 6 Feb 04)

"Tenants deserve choice and security in meeting their housing needs. This means a genuine local choice based on a level playing field for raising investment between local authorities and other social landlords. Councils should be given equal funding preference and be allowed to borrow capital in the same way as housing associations."

Dennis Reed chief executive of the Local Government Information Unit, Guardian 02 Feb 04

DCH pamphlet. 76 pages with contributions by tenants, trade unionists, MPs and academics. Covers the financial arguments against stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs and puts the Case for Council Housing. Essential reading. **Individual copies £5**

PFI & ALMOs show their true colours

Leeds council tenants are paying the price of ALMO and PFI failures. PFI has led to soaring costs and years of delay. Swarcliffe PFI deal was to be signed in 1999—but is now expected in June 04.

Costs involved have gone from £45 m to £100 million in that time.

Leeds set up six separate ALMOs in 2002. In October 03 only two of the ALMOs won 2 stars qualifying them for extra funding.

The other four are getting no money, despite the £1 million in higher pay for senior managers,

plus other costs, already spent to set them up. The total extra money for council housing over two years is less than the Daylight Robbery amount taken by government out of Leeds tenants' rents in that time.

Far from giving tenants more control, chief officers are now saying: 'I will do whatever the Best Value Inspectors tell me to do.' Local MP, Colin Burgon, said in Parliament "No [ALMOs] on the basis that they would be cheated."

14 Oct 2003

Westminster s ALMO is already running out of money. The council has now told tenants on two big estates they will be sold off.

Hillingdon, also an ALMO, has agreed to sell 500 homes over the next five years to a housing association.

The obvious question is why if government has extra money for ALMOs it won't just allow councils to use this money direct?