

We can stop them



Campaign guide

- Build a broad based campaign bringing together tenants (reps and individuals), 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 of all tenants'
- Produce clear material that puts the case against privatisation and explains how the 'fourth option' of direct investment can be funded
- Leaflet every home but also have stalls at markets and high streets and give out material at churches, mosques and to parents outside primary schools
- High visibility is important: get posters up on every estate and street, and borrow a car loudspeaker 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

Campaign checklist

- Find out what the council is proposing—read the council's 'options appraisal' report, 'business plan' and minutes of meetings. Ask local journalists, councillors and trade unions to help get information.
- Identify what repairs/improvements the council is proposing, the cost and the funding gap the council claims exists. Is this a reasonable estimate, how much can they do using existing funding and are they deliberately trying to make the picture worse to blackmail tenants?
- Organise a local DCH meeting to plan the campaign. Involve tenants, trade unionists and, where possible councillors and MPs too.
- Produce a good local leaflet/broadsheet to distribute to every home (Contact DCH for help, suggestions and experience from other areas).
- Approach local unions for financial support. Many unions have special regional and national funds that local branches can apply to. Depending on the council's timescale you will need to plan out and cost several leaflets/broadsheets to respond to their propaganda.
- The earlier you start campaigning the better. Councils are now regularly holding the ballot earlier than publicised to try and outmanoeuvre the opposition.

Tenants and workers—resist the blackmail

Councils 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 were told that if the proposed transfer was defeated 35 jobs would go.

Manipulated figures in business plans are used 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, as though we come from different planets.

Tenants and council workers have a common interest in defending council housing. We need to confront 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!

Organising an effective local campaign

An effective campaign needs some thought and planning.

Local campaigns need to be broad based and involve tenants (reps and individuals), union members, other activists and, where possible, local councillors and MPs, who are opposed to privatisation of council housing.

Campaigns should be tenant led but working closely with the trade unions stops the council playing divide and rule, setting tenants and workers off against one another.

The council will sometimes have knobbed tenants association reps with a mixture of flattery and intimidation. Don't give up just because of a few individuals. Mail every TA rep regularly and ask to speak at TA meetings. Try also to attend and speak at any 'consultation' meetings or steering groups the council sets up.

Argue that 'real choice' means tenants hearing both sides of the argument—not just one side!

The key to campaigning is on the streets and estates. This is the only effective way to answer questions, ensure all tenants hear the arguments and directly challenge what

the council or their so-called Independent Tenants Advisor are saying.

Going door to door helps find people who want to get involved and will help leaflet their estate or organise a local public meeting.

Good organisation is essential. Get different people to take responsibility for distribution in each area. Try and pair up a tenant and trade unionist to maximise coordination. Where possible get tenants' associations to do their own estates and involve community centres, clubs and other local organisations too.

Letters to local papers encourage the debate and, in the run up to the ballot, paid adverts (sponsored by one of the unions) get the message across. Local radio and TV are increasingly interested if you give them a good story.

To stop the council intimidating housing workers it is important that the council unions hold meetings of their members as early as possible. All the council unions oppose housing privatisation. They can provide speakers to explain the union's national policy and many have special campaign funds to help branches who want to produce local material to distribute to their members and to all tenants.

WE WANT DEMOCRATIC DEBATE

Millions of pounds of tenants' rents and council tax is poured into pro-privatisation propaganda to get the result the government wants. In almost every case councils blatantly put one side of the argument.

What are they afraid of? Why don't they allow a democratic debate?

The District Auditor has now found against two councils for spending public money to unlawfully persuade tenants (in Bath & North East Somerset and in Wiltshire).

The BNES chief exec argues that if the district auditor was correct, 'then given what I have seen in other councils up and down the country the same would most certainly have to be said of them'.

Keith Hill promised London Tenants Federation (Dec 2003) 'Tenants need to be presented with equal information about the pros and cons of the various options for which they are being consulted. That is absolutely the principle that we as government and we as ministers conform to.'

Unfortunately this is not what happens.

The ODPM Select Committee agree 'the requirement for tenant consultation and approval should be identical regardless of whether a Local Authority intends to go down a PFI, ALMO or stock transfer route.'

If the government genuinely believed in 'tenants choice' they should tighten the ODPM regulations to make a 'fair and balanced' debate mandatory.



Celebrating the Camden 77% No Vote against ALMOs photo: Andrew Ward

What you can do

- Organise a delegation of tenants, trade unionists and councillors to attend the conference on 29 October (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 EDM 1337, 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

ORGANISE A DELEGATION TO THE CONFERENCE

DELEGATE FEES: Tenants £5 / Trade unions, councillors, others £12

AFFILIATE

TENANTS/COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS local £10; regional £25; national £50
TRADE UNIONS local £40; regional £100; national £250

ORDER MATERIAL

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