

# SIGN OUR OPEN LETTER

Tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs across England, Scotland and Wales demand that government stop blackmailing tenants to accept privatisation.

We want the 'Fourth Option': direct investment without

strings to improve our homes and estates. The government promised every tenant a 'Decent Home' – it was a manifesto commitment at the last election.

Sign our open letter to Tony Blair. Tell the Prime Minister we want decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing – for us, for our children and for all those in housing need today and in the future.

Open Letter to the Prime Minister

## 'FOURTH OPTION': INVEST IN COUNCIL HOUSING

Dear Tony Blair,

TENANTS, TRADE UNIONISTS, COUNCILLORS and MPs across the UK call on government to introduce the 'Fourth Option' for council housing – direct investment to improve council homes and estates – as a matter of urgency.

The blackmailing and bullying of council tenants to accept the government's privatisation options of transfer, PFI or ALMOs is provoking widespread opposition and causing deep resentment. It makes a mockery of your rhetoric of 'Choice' in public services.

Tenants are increasingly voting NO – including in your own constituency – despite the lack of a fair and balanced debate and the millions of pounds spent promoting privatisation.

The Labour Party 2005 manifesto promised "By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities." The government's existing policy is failing to meet this commitment.

Your own party conference has twice voted overwhelmingly in support of investing in council housing with an almost unanimous vote last year calling on government to "provide the 'fourth option' of direct investment to council housing provides a crucial alternative Decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing waiting lists are testimony to the scale of the current housing crisis and the popularity of council housing.

The government's policy is untenable. It flies in the face of a wide range of evidence including: the ODPM Select Committee's report on 'Decent Homes' that backed the call for an 'investment allowance'; the Public Accounts Committee who said stock transfer was more expensive; the House of Commons Council Housing group which set out the case for the 'Fourth Option'; and the Audit Commission who called for a 'review' of housing finance. The financial case for the 'Fourth Option' is overwhelming: if all the money generated from tenants' rents and capital receipts; gap funding; waste on expensive consultants and setup costs is ring-fenced there is more than enough to fund direct investment in council housing so all local authorities can meet the Decent Homes standard.

Direct investment to improve existing and build new council homes offers the cheapest, quickest and most popular solution to provide first class, secure and accountable housing that is genuinely affordable for all who need it in 21st Century Britain.

It's time the government listened! Three million council tenants, trade unions and many councillors and MPs demand improvements to council homes and estates and the guarantee of a secure future for council housing.

Yours.....



**Defend  
Council  
Housing**

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# Tenants, trade unionists, MPs and councillors at DCH Conference

**DCH held a national conference on May 22 at the TUC, London. The conference launched the Open Letter to Blair. Here are extracts from some of those who contributed. Workshops covered 'Funding the Fourth Option', 'Case Against Transfer', 'Future of ALMOs' and 'Organising Effective Campaigns'. Full transcripts and background papers at [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)**

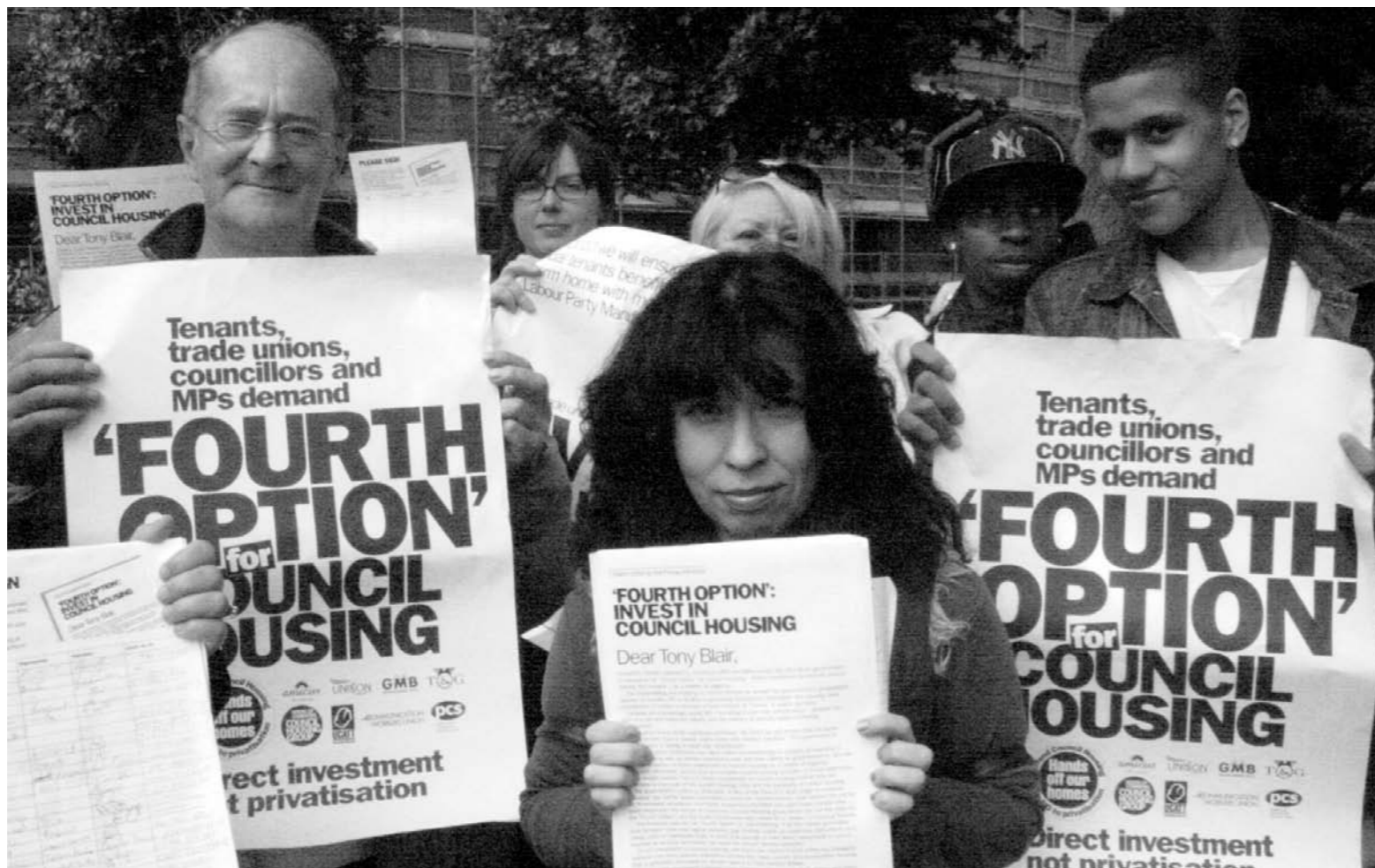


'If tenants vote to stay with their council, why should the council not have the resources to renovate council homes? And on the other hand because we need many more units of accommodation, councils should be free once again to engage in new build with support from government to be able to do precisely that.'

Now, today is very well timed because it happens that we finally have got starting tomorrow, Tuesday, the debate within the party around the future options for councils.

It's not just people like me – it's all of us together, all of us together – having forced that door open in government let's go through that door and win what tenants deserve and that is a genuine choice for the future and councils once again engaging in new build'

**Jack Dromey, T&G**  
deputy general secretary



**Get tenants, trade unionists and councillors to sign the Open Letter to Tony Blair**



'It's time the government listened to tenants. We are paying our rent, councils are trying to run a service, but the money that's needed to keep our homes up to a decent standard is being siphoned off and used by government for other purposes! Really one of the messages today is, don't take us for mugs.'

And however much the government might want to shift the focus, and make us forget about the decent homes promise that they made in the 2005 Labour manifesto, which said that all of our homes would be brought up to a decent standard – we are not forgetting that promise.

So the government needs to listen... we are fighting to defend our estates, and we need the money put back in – which is the essence of what the 'fourth option' is all about – give us back the money that belongs to council housing, and let councils spend it on bringing our homes up to a decent standard.' **Eileen Short, tenant Tower Hamlets**

*"By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities."*  
Labour Party Manifesto, May 2005

Tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs say:

**INVEST in COUNCIL HOUSING**

**Defend Council Housing**



'You can't have money for investment in repairs or improvements unless you privatise, or you go to a housing association or to an ALMO.'

I think this is one of the great scandals of our time. And it's not just we who are saying it... the National Audit Office, in their official government report, says that it costs £1,300 more to carry out exactly the same improvements... in other words transfer is not good value for money, its actually bad value for money, and its official, because it's in a government document.

'...Three or four million people live in council homes: how do you justify prohibiting councils from using their own rental income and the value of their own housing stock in order to support borrowing to fund improvements? '...this is a very powerful campaign which in the end has arguments and demands which are irresistible. So keep with it because in the end we're going to win!' **Michael Meacher MP**

'Our UNISON branch wish to fight. A lot of our members not only work in housing, but we also live in council houses, so we're in double jeopardy.'

We have contacts, we have knowledge, we have ability. And if we want to keep council houses viable like we have had in this country for many many years then we've got to fight for them.'

**Jane Moore, Cardiff**  
**UNISON**

'Having won the vote in Milton Keynes by an overwhelming majority, I don't think that we should rest there... DCH and the ex-ministers we've got in Parliament and the trade unions collectively should be speaking to Ruth Kelly.'

**Cllr Reg Edwards,**  
**Milton Keynes**

'We need to get back to a situation where local authorities are running their own services, that's what it needs to be; if people don't like them, they have the democratic right to get rid of them.'

**Cllr Robin Harling,**  
**Tandridge**

'The principle of local authorities providing decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing remains immensely popular: 1.5 million households on council housing waiting lists are evidence of the demand for council housing.'

Investment to improve existing homes and build new council ones makes economic sense.

We've built an unprecedented alliance of tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs. We've won the argument almost everywhere except in the Cabinet.'

**Austin Mitchell MP**

'If you've got a ballot coming up, fight like hell to persuade people to vote no – the more people who reject it the better chance we have of turning over this stupid policy.'

**Frank Dobson MP**

'Our job now is to unite all those in the 98 authorities retaining their council homes, the 50 odd ALMOs where tenants don't want the second stage of privatisation and help those facing privatisation proposals see the threat off in their area.'

Take the open letter to Tony Blair onto every estate, get trade unionists signing up at work and ask every elected councillor to sign too. Together we'll make them listen!'

**Alan Walter, Camden tenant and chair**  
**DCH**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get tenants, trade unionists and councillors in your area to oppose any plans for stock transfer, PFI or ALMOs – contact DCH for help.
- Organise a meeting in authorities retaining council housing and those with ALMOs to back the campaign for the 'Fourth Option'.
- We all need to win a 'level playing field' to guarantee a secure, long term future for council housing to see off privatisation for good.
- If you're in an ALMO demand that once they've met the Decent Homes standard the homes revert back to the council – oppose plans to transfer the company into the private sector.
- Circulate the Open Letter widely and take it door to door. Ask your MP to sign EDM 48 'Future for Council Housing'.

# PLEASE SIGN OUR OPEN LETTER

Ask all tenants, trade unionists, councillors and MPs to sign this  
**Open Letter to Tony Blair.**  
Return to Defend Council Housing, DCH PO Box 33519, London E8 4XW  
phone: 020 7987 9989 email: [info@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)  
website: [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)



PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY

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