

**Response to All-Party Parliamentary Group for Council Housing Inquiry into the current and future demands for council homes**

London Tenants Federation (LTF) is a membership organisation bringing together a range of borough, neighbourhood and London-wide federations and organisations of tenants (including leaseholders) of social housing providers (both council and housing association). Our membership also includes the London Federation of Housing Cooperatives and the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations. Together these organisations form our decision-making membership focused on strategic housing, planning and regeneration policy.

We also have individual tenants' and residents' associations, tenant-managed organisations and cooperative members. These along with individual social housing tenants are able to engage in a wide range of LTF meetings and events that feed into the LTF members' decision-making processes.

LTF members engage in Examinations in Public of the London Plan, respond to regional and national consultations related to housing, planning and regeneration and at times are invited to engage in London Assembly Housing and Planning Committee meetings. LTF is a member of the London Housing Panel.

We often produce tenant-led policy alternatives, significantly including the London Tenants Manifesto for a Positive Future for Social Housing in London (published in January 2021).

We begin our response with some points based on London Tenants Federation policies, which are arrived at by consensus, and some information on the London situation overall, relevant to the five questions posed.

Tenants have experienced changes to public housing over the past 40 years. These changes include severe cuts in public funding and the failure of the market alternative to deliver the homes that most people can really afford.

One of the things London Tenants Federation argues for is a return to large-scale publicly funded provision of good quality social rented homes, where people can comfortably raise their families and from which household members can play an active role in their communities.

This approach looks to sustainability in its widest sense: economic, environmental and social.

Between 2005 and 2018, an additional 397,000 homes were built in London. Just 12 per cent were social rented, an average of 3,801 each year (Annual Monitoring reports of the London Plan). In 2019/20, of 38,577 homes of all types delivered in London, 30,387 were market homes. Only 822 were social rented ('Only two per cent of new and additional homes delivered in London in 2019/20 were social rented', LTF, November 16, 2022). Social rented includes both council and housing association homes.

The Mayor of London's assessment of Londoners' housing needs in 2017, the last time such an assessment was completed, showed that to address existing unmet need and that of newly forming households in the capital, a total of 65,878 additional homes would have to be built each year from 2016-41. 30,972 (47 per cent) would have to be social rented. London's unmet housing need was 78 per cent social rented (2017 London Strategic Housing Market Assessment). There is no doubt that the need has only grown since then.

The contrast between what is needed and what is being built is clear. In addition, social tenants' rents contribute to paying off interest on loans taken out by their landlords to build new homes, many if not most of them not social rented. This takes money away from the amount available for upkeep and refurbishment of social tenants' homes.

Between 1980/81 and 2019/20, 311,305 London homes were sold via Right to Buy, 42 per cent of them (130,748) now being privately let (Inside Housing: 'London Councils Spend £22 million a year renting Right to Buy homes').

Stock transfer of council homes to housing associations, driven particularly through the government's Decent Homes programme, took place mainly in the 2000s. We

assess that more than 188,500 London council homes were transferred to housing associations by 2010.

Since 1997, 55,000 London council homes on 166 estates have been demolished and 131,000 tenants and leaseholders have been displaced (Professor Loretta Lees's ESRC grant funded research: Gentrification, displacement and impacts of council estate renewal on 21<sup>st</sup> century London). Over 35,000 homes on 100 plus London estates are at risk of demolition (Estate Watch).

19,960 London social rented homes were converted to 'affordable' rents from 2012-20 (GLA Affordable Housing Statistics).

In 1981, 35 per cent of London homes were social rented (mostly council). By 2019, the capital's total housing stock had grown by around a million, yet the number of social rented homes had fallen by 146,000. Just 23 per cent of all London homes are now social rented (MHCLG table 100: number of dwellings by tenure and district). Despite its greater insecurity, lower level of regulation and higher cost, 27 per cent of London households live in private rented homes.

This comes at a time when high costs of buying and renting privately, and reduced incomes, higher costs of living and greater job insecurity for many people on below median incomes, mean social rented housing is the only kind which meets their needs. For the three months ending February 2023, the highest unemployment estimate in the UK was London at 4.7 per cent (Labour market in the regions of the UK: April 2023, ONS).

Unfortunately at the same time public subsidy has been increasingly levered in to prop up a failing housing market through schemes such as Help to Buy, Starter and First Homes, and shared ownership. All these types of home are far beyond the pockets of most Londoners.

As highlighted in the Chartered Institute of Housing's UK Housing Review 2020, the government provides three times more subsidy to prop up private market priced housing than it does for all types of housing described as 'affordable' including shared ownership. Distribution of planned government subsidy for new housing

2019-24 was £53.14 billion for private market, first time buyers and infrastructure; £17.98 billion for affordable and low cost home ownership.

The March 2020 budget promised additional funding for affordable housing. This amounts to a £0.5 billion annual increase for 2021-26, compared to the previous three years but does little to change the overall picture.

The question of shared ownership needs to be considered in the context of the whole concept of 'affordable' housing. At one time 'affordable housing' just meant council or housing association homes with low rents. With the introduction of intermediate housing, key worker housing, affordable rent, London Living Rent, London Affordable Rent, shared ownership and even types of home for outright sale being considered 'affordable', the term has lost any relationship to housing supplied on the basis of need and at rents people on median to low incomes can afford. London Living Rent, for example, is aimed at households earning up to £60,000 a year who want to buy a home. Shared ownership is aimed at households earning up to £90,000 a year.

Yet councils, housing associations, and other developers can meet their obligations to build affordable housing by producing any of these types of housing.

Shared ownership has always been the most popular choice for developers in terms of delivery of affordable housing, more accurately described in this case as sub-market. The promise, however, that this housing type is a stepping-stone to full ownership has always been challenged. And increasingly the tenure has been exposed as creating hardship for shared owners, in terms of the cost of repairs, the security of the tenure and purchasers' ability to sell.

From every point of view what are desperately needed but not being delivered are social rented homes. Council homes have the great advantage of being genuine public housing, whereas housing associations are private bodies which have increasingly become deliverers of market housing or at best sub market housing which does not meet the need for social rented homes.

Tenant representatives from eight London boroughs answered the five questions posed by the APPG, speaking to their respective council housing contexts. In the

section of our submission below, we have pulled out the key themes appearing across their answers, in order to best highlight both the similarities and differences between the challenges tenants are facing throughout London. The contributions of the tenant representatives are in italics. They do not always represent the consensus view of London Tenants Federation, but we felt it was important that the APPG have their views available unmediated, and we thank them very much for taking the time and trouble to respond to our call for contributions.

### **Question 1. How important is council housing in addressing local / general housing need?**

Council housing is of utmost importance in addressing housing need – both locally and generally. The cost of buying a home and ever-increasing market rents mean that Londoners are increasingly unable to afford to live in the city even if they are fully employed and have jobs here.

*Council housing is very important in addressing housing need, along with a range of other social housing options. Some council housing should also be allocated to public sector workers (e.g. emergency services etc.) as buying a house in London in general is beyond the means of many working people. – RB Greenwich tenant.*

*[Council housing] is absolutely essential because in the [London] Borough of Hillingdon, council housing has been reduced considerably. On the whole, however, it is in better shape than housing association housing in Hillingdon. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

*[It is] essential. We have four generations on this estate where I live. And I would say that Hammersmith and Fulham is one of the areas to welcome the Windrush generation, because we have more Afro-Caribbean people in the borough than any other population besides, perhaps, an indigenous London population. A lot of Northerners. And we have a good reputation of taking in refugees in this borough. So [council housing] is absolutely crucial to addressing local need.*

*You'd have to include housing associations in that, and there's a reasonably good relationship between housing associations and the council – even the ones that haven't been popular in conversation like Notting Hill Genesis. Hammersmith and Fulham*

*managed to do a better deal with them in Hammersmith and Fulham than possibly other boroughs. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

A tenant representative from Hackney provided a comprehensive economic breakdown, which emphasises that private, market rent housing is unsustainable and council housing is essential for ensuring secure housing for all.

*The average rent for a two-bedroom flat in Hackney in 2022 was £2,600 per calendar month, up 14 per cent from 2021. In October 2019, the median market asking rent, as a proportion of median income for two people in Hackney, was 38 per cent; in October 2023 it had gone up to 44 per cent (Guardian from TwentiCi annual survey of hours and earnings). So the proportion of income for people on lower than median earnings, or single people, was higher.*

*In 2022, there were 532 approaches to the council for housing by homeless young people between the ages of 17 and 25. This compares with 119 in 2018.*

*Only social rented housing addresses the needs of all these people, on grounds of rent level and security of tenure. Council housing is preferable to housing association housing, because it is public housing, has secure rather than assured tenancies, and is under greater democratic control. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

*The need for good [quality], affordable housing has never been greater. Single people on Band C have no chance of ever getting a home until more social housing is built.*

*Private landlords can charge whatever they want, and many do no repairs, unless the council gets involved. – LB Haringey tenant.*

A tenant from Hillingdon builds upon this:

*Housing associations need a lot more controlling. They're all pretty bad and most of our tenants here, if they could have good council housing, that's where they would choose to be. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

A Hammersmith and Fulham tenant also speaks to the needs for housing for many of the same people that London relies upon to function.

*A lot of workers that contribute to the infrastructure of this city, like bus drivers and NHS workers, usually need to live in Zones 1 – 3. So having council housing within that inner belt, not in Zones 5 and 6 – you can't operate anything without social housing. This also includes tube drivers and cleaning and caring roles – you have to be available in the early hours of the morning. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

**Question 2: Does your area still have directly-owned council housing? If not, do you think new/acquired council homes are needed? Please say why.**

There has only been complete stock transfer of formerly-council-owned homes to housing associations in four London boroughs: Bexley, Bromley, Merton and Richmond. The other 28 boroughs and the City of London have had stock transfer to varying degrees – some have partially transferred their housing stock. Additionally, some London boroughs have established ALMOs (explored further in Question 4). Tenant representatives agree that new/acquired council homes are necessary.

*Greenwich does still have directly-owned council housing, owned by the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The local authority is building more council homes and encouraging downsizing where possible to address the demand on the housing list. – RB Greenwich tenant.*

*My borough has built new social housing – flats, as there is no room for houses. Still not in sufficient numbers to make a major difference, but a step in the right direction. – LB Haringey tenant.*

Notably, waiting lists are insufficient for measuring housing need, as many people who are too far down will be cleared from the list after being determined as unlikely to ever receive social rented housing.

*3,000 households in Hackney are living in temporary accommodation. In 2021 there were 13,400 on the Hackney Council waiting list, which had already been cut some seven years previously, and was then cut again to around 8,500. This was no indication of the need for council housing but because there was no council housing to give them. In 2019/20, 409 council tenancies became available for offer. In 2020 people typically waited 12 years for a two-bedroom flat. Instead of being on the waiting list, people were*

*to be offered 'personalised support to explore other options to find a home', a process which actually redirected households into insecure, expensive, poorly regulated private housing. In addition, very few if any properties are available to people on Local Housing Allowance. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

*The actual recorded waiting lists require more than existing stock. I know that because we are doing an existing stock survey. I know that we have 12,500 existing stock units, but we are doing a lot of new builds. The new build ratio though – the desired thing in the London Plan is 50 per cent ['affordable' housing – Mayor of London, London Plan Guidance: Affordable Housing, May 2023] but we still have people coming to the design table. Inclusive Design Review Panel begins the table with 35 per cent [affordable housing] and we challenge them on that.*

*But also the population has changed. So often we have three generations living under one roof during the pandemic. Some families couldn't go to their older people, so their older people surrendered their housing and came to them. And they didn't go back to their previous homes after Covid. So you have to accommodate that some of these people really need to upgrade to larger accommodation. So it is existing stock, new builds and home swaps. And Home Swappers doesn't work. It doesn't work for people who have complex and additional needs.*

*There's a need for actually identifying real needs, but you have to keep tenant audits up to date. And do surveys that are actually generated by the people themselves, and not by councils or data collection agencies, where you develop a set of questions that really let people say that they are overcrowded or under-occupying. Then you build what you actually need.*

*They are lying by omission. An important piece of information has been let slip that the newest new build, which I am moving to, is put down as 50 per cent social housing out of 131 or whatever has been built. Around 35 is social rent, we're not being told how many are affordable rent, but we have discovered that there is an entire block of 'Buy-to-rent', which means leaseholders will own them and will rent them out at whatever rent for whatever period. We do have leaseholders here with existing stock, but generally they have to come under the tenancy rules which say they can't do things. But with the new builds, we have no idea. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*



**Question 3: If your area has council housing, what condition is it in, what investment is needed, and what is stopping that investment?**

Tenant representatives addressed disrepair and managed decline.

*Most of this borough's [LB Haringey] stock is old, which brings problems and impacts the already high repairs budget: mould and damp issues, drainage, flat roofs, fire regulations, etc. Some parts of estates will be demolished, and replaced with new builds with higher rents. Not as many properties will necessarily be built. This causes all sorts of problems. The Decent Homes programme was not that 'be all' that residents were led to believe it was. Goal posts were moved, money wasn't there. Poor quality products were used, and kitchens and bathrooms haven't lasted. – LB Haringey tenant.*

Similarly:

*Many of the council homes are in need of repair or refurbishment as a result of decades of underinvestment in the sector. The main thing stopping investment is lack of funding. Councils have had their government funding severely cut. A recent further factor has been the rise in costs of building materials and building work. When the housing revenue accounts were transferred to the local authorities, some councillors and council officers thought this would result in an improved financial situation but it has not.*

*I can give an example of a neighbouring housing estate built in the 1980s where residents approached the council, their councillors, and us as a neighbouring tenants' association a year and a half ago because of the poor state of their doors and windows which do not keep out the weather. This was particularly bad last winter when energy costs rose very sharply. Finally the replacement of their doors and windows has been agreed by the council but the work is only just starting and will not be finished in time for this winter either. I can't help suspecting this would not have happened at all if we had all not kept on about it. So that makes me concerned that this may be a widespread problem. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

*There is this idea that you run things down so badly that they are forced to think of drastically alternative options [eg. estate demolitions]. I remember an estate – Decent Homes threw out a lot of stuff about investment, which was mostly cosmetic stuff – and it had certain blocks where the heating pipes inside the concrete would constantly blow*

*every time you put a new boiler in. Putting in a new kitchen or bathroom was a waste of time because the roof leaked like crazy and to redo the heating system, you needed to pull the thing down and start again. In some estates, the roofs are somebody's balconies, which leak like sieves. – Waltham Forest Cooperative tenant.*

Notably, one housing association tenant shares that, while council housing is still facing disrepair and managed decline, in their borough it tends to be in better shape than much newer housing association housing:

*Straightforward, isn't it? Council housing is more quickly repaired and dealt with, and in better condition than some of the housing association stock, without a doubt. Council housing has insulation. Some housing association properties are without insulation, and with mould. Council housing properties are better looked after than the housing association ones. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

*Most of the estates in Westminster need some serious investment. We all know about zero carbon targets. We have completely outdated wiring across estates – some of them go back to the first generation when electricity was actually put into those estates. And the copper has an ageing factor, so there are certain risks attached to it. And it's overloaded in a lot of cases, because all systems – plumbing, electricity, gas – were put in for much lower use. We now have flats with multiple computers running at the same time, and electric cookers, printers, washing machines, tumble dryers – it leads, in some cases, to overcharging and blackouts in blocks.*

*We have some estates, like mine, where we have been asking for double glazing for 30 years. It needs to be done now. The insulation in the roof was under a lot of pressure. It was done a couple of years ago, but not up to standard. It was done cheaply, with cheap materials. All this is creating huge, additional costs that will hit council housing on the other side. – City of Westminster TMO tenant.*

Properties are inconsistently looked after or neglected in some local authorities:

*The condition varies. I went on a tour of council estates in different areas of the borough a few years ago. Some blocks are not in good condition (in Woolwich) and need structural building repairs, painting and decorating inside stairwells and on landings. Other accommodation is in good working order, so there is a real mixture*

*here. Maintenance is important to avoid blocks and estates falling into decay, decline and ensuing anti-social behaviour. – RB Greenwich tenant.*

Mismanagement of existing funds was identified as a problem which needs to be addressed. Such mismanagement is connected to faulty repairs and poor contractors.

*My council owes lots of money. It has misspent lots of money. We have bad situations with contractors doing repairs on existing stock. All the residents who are working on resident involvement teams – like the estate services working group, or the fire regulations, building safety and repairs group – often have to point out the flaws in service provision. We've let go several contractors. We now, after something like ten years of nagging them, got involved in looking at contractors, making comments on contracts, and getting into the swing of procurement and letting residents sit on – when the contracts go out – who is going to be given the go ahead. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

*With the last planned maintenance on our estate, I felt that it was actually making so many more problems than we had before. It was almost making our blocks ready for demolition in the near future. I thought, 'Am I being paranoid?' But you know, I don't think I am. I do think that they've actually worked it and the council didn't step in to defend the residents when we were complaining. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham resident.*

Stories of tenant concerns being dismissed by local authorities are very worrying, especially after Grenfell.

Tenants agree that more funding from central government is necessary, and that under-investment in social housing by central government – and in many cases by local authorities as well – is to blame for existing disrepair and decline.

*Some of the reasons for [decay, decline, disrepair, anti-social behaviour] are under-investment, not just from central government, but also local authorities prioritising spending on other areas instead of their housing stock. There need to be more schemes where the council allocates funds to renovate and update flats internally, with more frequent upgrades. – RB Greenwich tenant.*

*Money needs to be put into [council housing] and more specific money needs to come from central government to ensure properties are kept in good order. They can't keep cutting funding from the central government. It's outrageous. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

*I can't see how the councils will [build new council housing] until they are funded by central government. I would much rather see a reduction in housing associations – who answer to no one – and regulators who have no teeth, and see more council housing under someone with accountability and enforcement ability. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

*Funding must come from central government. Planning for 'deluxe apartments' / flats must have a higher percentage of social housing or they should not be built. – LB Haringey tenant.*

This speaks to the problem of manipulation of viability assessments by developers, who shirk any guidance around building more social rent homes by claiming that doing so would make the entire scheme a poor investment. The prioritisation of profit over housing is a key part of the problem.

Similarly:

*They were supposed to build 11,000 homes, but it's all a big lie. They can only build 3,000 which isn't good. And we've got our campaign on empty homes still [homes have been decanted ahead of proposed regeneration projects]. - LB Southwark tenant.*

As London Tenants Federation established following our 2021 Conference, one of the major types of investment needed in social housing concerns retrofitting existing properties to meet challenges of the climate crisis and ensure the UK achieves its carbon net zero goals. The report from this conference can be downloaded from our website. Relevant points from this report include:

- There must be sufficient government funding for net-zero works to social housing tenants' homes to avoid any shortfalls in funding for essential fire safety works or day-to-day repairs. Net-zero works will provide a wide societal benefit, so the costs must come from general taxation, not social tenants' rents and service charges.

- Net-zero works must improve the conditions of social housing tenants' homes, including reductions in energy costs and addressing fuel poverty.
- Demolition must not be considered an option for supposedly 'hard to retrofit' homes. It is environmentally, socially and economically damaging, especially when embodied carbon is taken into account – which it must be – in seeking to attain net-zero.

Lack of funding is also, as a tenant from Hackney raises, a matter of accessibility equity.

*Another effect of the shortage of funding has been the closure of all the local housing offices. This means to get problems solved, tenants have to go to a central Hackney building, or go online. Both of these alternatives create problems for many tenants who used to go round the corner for in-person help. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

**Question 4: What is your experience of stock transfer, PFI, ALMO, SPVs or other alternative mechanisms to build and manage council (or former council) housing?**

*We had an ALMO, purely to access government funding for the Decent Homes programme: getting 3-star status and delivering the Decent Homes programme. It was brought back in house last year after a vote. – LB Haringey tenant.*

A housing association tenant from Hackney – whose former fully council-owned estate was demolished and completely rebuilt and is now split between four different landlords (three housing associations and the local authority) – shares their experience:

*In the 2000s a number of council estates were transferred to housing associations, for example, as a result, Sanctuary housing association now owns the Morningside, Old Gascoyne, Old Kingshold and Shore estates. The council only has very limited ability to influence the activities of the housing associations. A number have shifted their emphasis to building market housing. Some do not encourage tenant organisation. Housing associations have also been allowed to change tenure on a certain number of properties when the property becomes empty from social rent to so-called affordable rent which is up to 80 per cent of market rent. So we have people on similar low*

*incomes living next to each other but paying very different rents, and a loss of social housing.*

*A few years ago the council transferred the management of its homes to a private company. The first thing this company did was, quite rudely, refuse to print our tenants' association notices, something the council had done up to then. After a few years the management was taken back in house. Hackney also transferred its properties to an ALMO for a while but has now brought them back in-house. It's difficult for the ordinary tenant to get to the bottom of the effects of all this, for example on numbers of staff.*

*I can say from personal experience that running a tenants' and residents' association (TRA) on an estate with four landlords is a lot of work. But the alternative of us all being divided between four tenants' and residents' associations is much worse. Or the more likely alternative of some having a TRA and others not. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

A Hillingdon housing association tenant recounts their own experience as well:

*Over the years, I've worked closely with our councillor, and she was against [stock transfer]. Some of the council housing was transferred to different housing associations within the borough. I know that the council has come to regret that.*

*There was retirement living that was council-owned, that was passed to A2Dominion and they've had nothing but trouble since that happened. Stock transfer was the maddest thing that was ever done. There is no proper control of the housing associations; they have become huge, they have become profit-making.*

*They charge whatever they want for service charges and the like. There is no consistency – it's a complete nightmare. On different properties, there is a central boiler system for a group of tenants. Nothing seems to be uniform. Service charges are not all even, even if you have the same home layout. Our housing association is totally incompetent; we have to challenge them all the time. – Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

*Our borough created a defend council homes policy that has a triple lock, so no one can sell stock or take it over and manage it, because we actually did a whole housing commission in which we looked at the feasibility of having another arm's length*

*management organisation – we'd done it once, with H and F Homes. It wasn't managed very well, so we went back in house with a lot of stuff.*

*The only place we are having stock transfer is where they say that community facilities are degenerating and aren't providing the right kind of services of schools within an estate or on the edge of it. They can refurbish those or demolish them, and put some residential above it.*

*There has been a huge stock management thing. It started with Savills and it's moved on to Ridgeway I think. So that gives us all the up-to-date data on what condition everything is in. But what we have noticed as a trend, those of us who are social housing tenants, is that we've gone up from 10 to 15 per cent to a third leaseholders since I moved here 25 years ago. Some people have regretted doing that. Other people have got arguments going on with how long is left on their lease, and they want to sell but have certain restrictions.*

*We have got a huge, contentious consultation around the demolition of community facilities on the centre of the estate, and shoving everyone into one hub. So you are transferring kids who are playing at ground level, on grass, on equipment, hands dirty, into buildings where there will be older and special needs people. There is no access management plan, no agreed thing on who has what spaces.*

*So demolition or transferring stock has a very dirty name when the co-production of it – they're claiming how many people they consulted, or how wide it was – was actually none of that.- LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

A tenant from Westminster shares relevant information about their local authority's approach to homes which were previously part of stock transfer, or sold via right-to-buy:

*With Labour now being in charge of Westminster Council – after decades of anti-social housing and anti-council housing policies causing under-investment, leading to flight and social housing tenants being forced out en masse to the periphery of London or further afield – we have a council that is actively pursuing building new council housing. They actually have a programme where they are buying back privately-owned, former council housing flats. There are quite a number of shared ownership flats that they are*

*buying back in a way that the leaseholders can stay in the flat and become a council tenant [with secure tenancy]. – City of Westminster TMO tenant.*

### **Question 5: What do you think we need to do to secure a new generation of good-quality council homes?**

A number of tenants argue that greater investment is necessary for securing a new generation of good-quality council homes. Greater investment, however, can be understood in a variety of ways – all of which speak to the current dearth of resources available for constructing and maintaining council housing.

*The government needs to fund the maintenance and construction of council and housing association social rented homes, and the repurchase of some of the 40 per cent of homes sold under Right to Buy which are now in the private rental market.*

*However, we also need to stop the processes that reduce the numbers of precious council homes. From 2010 to 2022, Hackney Council built just 464 council rent homes in the borough. During that same 12 year period, they sold 895 homes. That's a net loss of 431 units of public housing. This information was obtained by a Freedom of Information request to the council. Right to Buy is therefore a major factor in this situation.*

*Another factor is the widespread demolition of council housing estates. Since the 1990s a number of Hackney council estates have undergone regeneration. In all cases this has entailed a loss of council social rented housing. In some, such as New Kingshold Estate, which underwent regeneration in the 1990s, this also meant a change of landlord. The totally demolished and rebuilt estate now consists of roughly equal amounts of housing owned by four landlords: three housing associations and the council. Previously it was a council estate so as well as there being an overall loss of social rented housing, there has been a specific loss of council housing.*

*A number of these regenerations are still in progress in Hackney. One example is Woodberry Down, a 64 acre site in north Hackney which originally consisted of almost 2000 council social rented homes. The Consultation Masterplan from Berkeley Homes for Woodberry Down Phases 5 to 8 is currently under consultation. As the document*



*says, 'The regeneration of Woodberry Down was first planned in the 1990s.' That means it has been going on for 20 years already; we are on Phase 3 of 8.*

*A Freedom of Information request submitted by Vice News revealed that in 2002, there were 1,722 homes occupied at social rent on the Woodberry Down estate. In 2020 when the FoI request was submitted, there were 1,269, a 26 per cent fall. ('It's an exercise in profit – the 20-year 'regeneration' plan forcing people from their homes', Vice News, 15.9.20). More recently, Geoff Bell, longstanding Woodberry Down resident, said this: 'During Phase 3, more social homes were demolished than built. There is no indication this will change in Phases 5 to 8.' ('Campaigners speak out over loss of council homes in major rebuild of Woodberry Down estate', Hackney Citizen, 17.11.23)*

*The 2014 revision projected 5,557 homes in all with only 1200 of them social rented. Not one of these will be a council home. Such social rented homes as are provided will be owned by Notting Hill Genesis housing association.*

*The 'benefits to date' consist of 2,901 homes of which only 654 are social rented. In Phases 5 to 8 Berkeley Homes is proposing to provide only 41.7 per cent 'affordable' housing, of which only 43 per cent will be social rent, the remainder being unaffordable shared ownership aimed at households earning up to £90,000 a year.*

*The Consultation Masterplan says that in the 1990s 'structural surveys showed the estate with 2000 homes was too costly and complex to refurbish'. Much of this housing is still standing in 2023. So how accurate was the estimation in the 1990s and might there have been other motives for the decision to totally demolish? Since then we have become much more aware of the wastefulness and effects on the environment of decisions to demolish rather than refurbish. Such revisions to the plans are hampered by the fact, according to an article in the Hackney Citizen of 20.8.19 ('Handful of leaseholders resist council plans for Woodberry Down development'), that Hackney Council agreed to give Berkeley the Woodberry Down land on a 999-year lease. – Hackney housing association tenant.*

*A tenant from Hillingdon shares that there needs to be improved housing policy.*

*As far as I am concerned, there has to be a proper housing policy. Not tinkering around the edges. Government investment – and maybe private investment as well – to build a*

*whole new generation of social housing council homes, which they then don't sell off unless they've built more. So that we are increasing this going forward, and reducing the amount of housing association properties on the market.*

*A lot more housing is built under competent councils, and if you want to have competent councils, you need to be putting money into them. There are a lot of incompetent councils, and a lot of that is because [the central government] has taken their money away. The more I see of housing associations, the more I think it was the biggest mistake ever.*

*Housing properties have to be properly funded. There is so much corruption and wasted money across the country. The councils would do it better [than housing associations]. I want to see the demise of most housing associations. There is no oversight of them. They just do what they like and they get away with it. They don't improve their properties because if they do it under the current policy, they can't charge more if they actually improve a house. They can only charge more if they repair [via service charge increases, for example]. It is a peculiar and odd situation. So we have a number of properties with missing insulation, lack of ventilators, mould, damp... in brand-spanking-new properties! - Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

Tenants from other London boroughs corroborate this:

*I think we need more investment in infrastructure, decoration, maintenance and repairs; more trees and greenery where council homes are being built. I think we need to use empty properties for social housing, and stop developers from sitting on unused, empty buildings for years. For example: where larger scale developments are left empty for more than six months, councils should have the right to take ownership except in exceptional circumstances. This requires government legislation. - RB Greenwich tenant.*

Representation is another key issue:

*The other problem is that people are terrified. We have a lot of minoritized families who are afraid that if they complain, they'll get kicked out of their housing. - Hillingdon housing association tenant.*

Inclusion must similarly be addressed more concertedly:

*New buildings are meant to be inclusive by design, but we haven't moved the goalposts on the amount of disabled people. It's still at 10 per cent. And if we are following equality access rules, and then the impact rules of building and all the rest of it, we should take that up to 15 per cent [disabled people]. Because you have to embrace the invisible disabilities and ageing frailties. Those can occur much younger than you think, as more people have been diagnosed with auto-immune diseases since Covid, and with other forms of arthritis that are very degenerative. We've got more motor neuron. It's been kept at 10 per cent for a long time.*

*If you have got 50 per cent social housing in a new build, and 15 per cent of that is disability friendly, we might get less exclusion because we still come across disabled people that need to transfer from unsuitable housing but there is just not enough. There aren't any disabled units. And disability has to consider more than just physical disabilities. I am autistic. I've got a different perspective on what is needed to live independently. Autistic people, and neurodivergent people are afraid to mention some of their physical issues, because they are worried that those will then be prioritised and they will end up with housing that isn't autism-friendly.- LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

Safety should be a top priority across the board – both in terms of accessibility and in terms of fire and building regulations:

*The new regulatory framework should give the fire safety responsibilities back to the fire brigade. – Waltham Forest Cooperative tenant.*

Inclusion also means increasing tenant power and access to information:

*Co-design and co-produce! Set up a board, run by residents, to oversee the next ten years of building social housing. Get us on board at the beginning. – LB Haringey tenant.*

*I think this is where scrutiny panels come in. We'd all like to be on a scrutiny panel but it doesn't actually exist. We would challenge the data. We could challenge every single new build. They bring in marketing consultants. They know nothing about design, but they are put there as a smokescreen to stop the residents from having a say, from making our own surveys to collect data.*

*You've got situations where experts are talking about feasibility on building – for instance, flood reports, tree reports, subsidence – you go around with a consultant to do it. They give the report, and then it should be available on public planning portals, or available straight away to resident steering groups and resident associations. We've been asking for two years for a flood report and tree report for the removal of 91 trees on our estate. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

Inclusion also includes language justice.

*There has to be respectful exchange in expertise. I don't care how many degrees you've got, in civil engineering, design, whatever it is; if you have not lived in social housing, and you are living in private rented accommodation now, you can't really understand what we are talking about. About access issues, and other things. When you use the in-house language [i.e. industry jargon], it's not accessible.*

*Councils will spend money that they've been given, but they won't even share what they got with local residents who are having developments built on their doorsteps. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

Insights from another tenant in the same borough build upon this last point:

*Hammersmith and Fulham is in shambles at the moment. They're doing everything they can to prepare for the changes that are coming into force in April, but they're not taking the residents with us. They keep speaking the 'rhetoric' – 'we've got residents at the heart of all we do' – but we're the last to know anything. So we've got all these changes going on but nobody knows where we are. – LB Hammersmith and Fulham tenant.*

Building upon this idea of co-design, through our joint work with Just Space on Estate Watch – a network of housing estates at threat of or undergoing regeneration – we have published co-produced guidance on tenant-led alternatives to the destruction of social housing. Tenants should be resourced to pursue these alternatives, including the Right to Manage and Neighbourhood Plans.

LTF's retrofit guide raises similar demands around greater and more substantial power-sharing with tenants.

- Meaningful involvement of tenants and their associations and organisations is essential from the early stages of the development of plans for net-zero works to their homes. Tenants are too often recipients of things done to them, when they should be equals in the discussions and processes of decision-making about their homes.
- Social landlords must develop communication and consultation strategies with their tenants about net-zero works to their homes. Strategies must enable tenants to be informed as to the construction sector's widely acknowledged deficiencies of applying poorly functioning materials (e.g. steel and concrete) and made aware of the benefits of low carbon materials. Social landlords (and UK government in turn) must incorporate funding incentives to schemes that utilise natural and ecologically regenerative materials to tenants' homes (whether they are retrofitting or new build).
- Tenants and their associations / organisations must have opportunities to be involved at all stages of decision-making about net-zero works. This includes involvement in writing design briefs for the retrofitting of their homes and the selection and appointment of consultants and contractors who prioritise proposals. Landlords must offer opportunities for tenants' associations and organisations to access independent technical advice, training and peer learning regarding net-zero works to facilitate their full engagement in the processes of net-zero works to their homes.
- Tenants must be respected as experts when it comes to intimate knowledge about their homes, estates and neighbourhoods. Both they and landlords must be seen equally as the caretakers of public and community owned and managed homes of existing and future generations.

While the above points speak directly to the retrofit process – something which is necessary to ensure a new generation of good-quality social housing, as the impact of climate change on existing (and future) housing must be actively and intentionally addressed – the principles within them are widely applicable. Thus, they should be applied in any situation involving council housing, and the development of additional council and social rented homes.

One tenant also raised that council housing presents opportunities for radical and market-leading retrofit and construction. Rather than receiving old technology, council housing presents an opportunity for pursuing climate-change adaptation and zero carbon innovations at a massive scale. Similarly, it has the possibility for setting higher standards for all housing – including that in the private rented sector – which would have wide benefits across British society, and ensure lower costs in the long run.

*Council housing represents a real opportunity to improve standards and actually speak the right language in terms of private tenancies and private landlords. And it would bring new technologies and higher standards to housing. For example, new environmentally and climate friendly paints and materials. The government could use council housing to introduce this and, almost as pilots, force the market to follow, instead of doing it the other way round, where it waits until a technology is cheap and out-of-date before it is bought for council housing and sold to the residents as an 'improvement'. Of course it is an improvement, but it is still inadequate. – City of Westminster TMO tenant.*

LTF has also addressed the need for the construction of more family sized council homes, particularly homes that are four bedrooms or greater. A comment piece on the state of overcrowding as of January 2019 can be found on our website; notably, we quote a London Assembly report published in 2011, 'Crowded Houses: Overcrowding in London's Social Rented Sector', which evidences that the construction of one six-bedroom home has a knock on effect of moving 36 people out of overcrowded accommodation. Overcrowding has only worsened in recent years, and remains a substantial issue in the capital, in both social rented and private rented accommodation. Reducing overcrowding, and providing homes that are accessible for diverse families with varying needs, must be addressed as part of any 'good-quality' social housing.