

Socialist councillors make a difference...

EXCEPT FOR twelve months in 1998-99, the Telegraph Hill ward area has had at least one Socialist Party councillor representing it on Lewisham council since 1995 when Ian Page, previously a Labour councillor, was expelled from the Labour Party for opposing cuts in services. Then, in December 2003 Chris Flood joined Ian on the council after a by-election victory.



Chris Flood & Ian Page - over the last eleven years your Socialist Party councillors have had a record second to none of fighting for the interests of local tenants and leaseholders...

- Campaigned with residents of the Honor Oak estate to win £14 million publicly-funded refurbishment money, after the council originally withdrew funding.
- Led the 'Save Lewisham Housing' campaign in 1999, stopping the privatisation of 7,500 council homes in the Brockley and Ladywell areas.
- Campaigned with leaseholders against extortionate £20,000 refurbishment costs including asbestos removal.
- Supported tenants against the closure of the local housing office on the Honor Oak estate, which is still open today (although with reduced services).
- Fought with Housing Association tenants to make sure services were maintained.
- Supported tenants on re-housing and refurbishment problems, following demolition and refurbishment on the Kender estate. Backed residents in the new Housing Association properties in setting up a tenants association.
- Regularly attended tenants association meetings in Telegraph Hill ward, including on the Honor Oak estate, the Honor Oak Sector J, the Kender Housing Association TA and the Somerville estate.
- Supported tenants in different blocks to force the council and contractors to meet and take up repairs and poor refurbishment work - including on the Honor Oak estate, Hutchinson House, Hathway House, Crossway Court, and Fern Court.
- Regularly attended meetings of the North West Housing Panel, the consultation forum for tenants associations in NW Lewisham - the only councillors out of the nine in the area who have done so.
- Helped residents daily with re-housing, repairs, council tax and other problems.

Your Socialist Party councillors' surgery times

Chris Flood
Telephone 020-8694-3623
Email: chris.flood@mac.com

Ian Page
Telephone 020-8692-0435
Email: ianpage_sp@hotmail.com

First Saturday of the month
11am to 12noon at Honor Oak
Community Centre, Turnham Road,
Honor Oak estate, SE4

Third Saturday of the month
10am to 11am, Telegraph Hill
Centre, Kitto Road, New Cross,
SE14

Third Monday of the month
6pm to 7pm, Sector J Clubroom,
off Coston Walk, Honor Oak
Estate, SE4

Third Monday of the month
6pm to 7pm, Sector J Clubroom, off
Coston Walk, Honor Oak Estate,
SE4

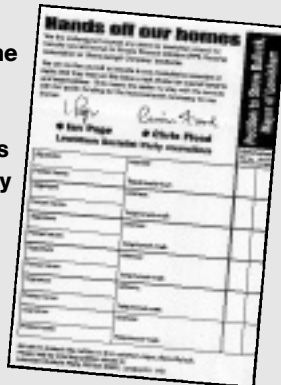
Have you signed yet?

THERE IS no reason why the government can't bring council homes up to 'decent standards' while keeping them as council homes.

Lewisham council estimates that it needs an additional £170 million over the next five years for home improvements. That sounds a lot but it is less than the amount the government spends every thirty-four days keeping troops in Iraq!

So why can't Lewisham's New Labour council insist that a New Labour government gives it the money needed without transferring its homes? But New Labour, locally and nationally, won't stand up for tenants and leaseholders unless they're forced to.

That's why Ian Page and Chris Flood launched the 'Hands Off Our Homes' petition demanding a real housing choice for tenants and leaseholders. The option to stay with the council, with full public funding to meet the 'decent homes' standards. Have you signed yet?



www.socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777
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Hands off our homes!

Lewisham's transfer plans CAN be stopped

FOR OVER 18 months Lewisham's New Labour council has been pushing plans to transfer homes from council ownership to new landlords. All council tenants and leaseholders (council home owners) will be affected.

The council has to bring its housing up to national 'decent standards' by 2010. It claims that it can only get the extra investment needed by hiving off our homes under one of three 'options': selling-off homes to housing associations; private finance initiatives (PFI); or setting up an 'Arms Length Management' company (ALMO).

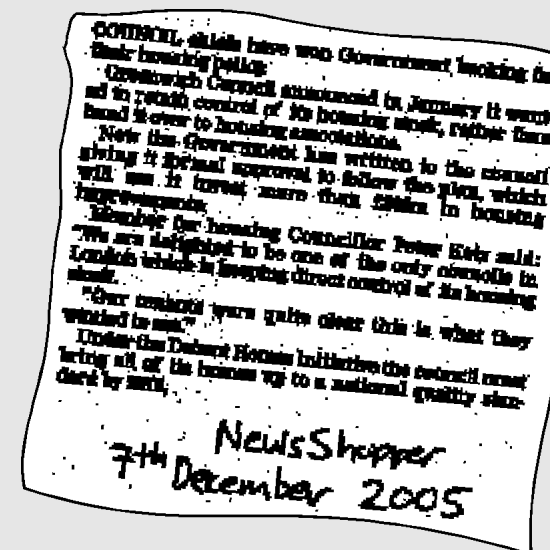
But all these 'options' will ultimately mean higher rents and service charges, less say by tenants and leaseholders, and less secure tenancies. They are, in different ways, steps to the privatisation of council housing - just like the railways and many other public services have been sold-off to private companies who put profits before peoples' needs. But the New Labour councillors can be stopped!

● There ARE other options which the council could take if they choose to. Next-door Greenwich council got the go-ahead to spend £200m on council home improvements after tenants and leaseholders rejected the idea of transfer to Housing Associations or ALMOs.

● Protest works! Even tenants in Tony Blair's own constituency in Sedgefield, by a 60% majority, stopped plans to transfer their homes to a housing association. Here a big majority of tenants and leaseholders are signing the 'Hands Off Our Homes' petition, launched by the Socialist Party councillors Ian Page and Chris Flood, demanding a real housing choice - the right to stay with the council, with full public funding to meet the 'decent homes' standards.

● We can vote No to housing transfer! Lewisham council is up for election this May. What better way is there to send the message - hands off our homes!

If Greenwich can say no to homes transfer...



...why can't Lewisham?

JUST BEFORE Christmas it was announced that next-door Greenwich council had got the go-ahead to spend £200m on council home improvements - having earlier in the year rejected transfer plans. At that time the Socialist Party councillors Chris Flood and Ian Page argued that Lewisham should follow Greenwich's example, give tenants the choice of staying with the council, and call on the government to give Lewisham the money needed for 'decent standard' homes. But their motion was defeated by the New Labour, Tory and Lib Dem councillors. Why? If Greenwich can say No to transfer, why can't Lewisham?

Local Socialist Party meetings

Come along to discuss with Lewisham Socialist Party and our two councillors at our weekly meetings.

The Lewisham branch of the Socialist Party meets every Thursday at 7-30pm at the Toad's Mouth Too Café. The café is near Brockley station on Brockley Road, just after Brockley Cross.

I would like to join the Socialist Party get more info sign the Hands Off Our Homes petition

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone..... E:mail.....

Send to Lewisham Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD. Phone: 020 8988 8777

e-mail: info@socialistparty.org.uk www.socialistparty.org.uk

Vote



**Lewisham
council elections
May 4th**



What do Lewisham's 'housing transfer' plans really mean?

▶ What will happen to rents?

Rents will rise after transfer. Rents in Wyre in Lancashire, for example, rose by 56% in seven years after council homes were transferred there. In all, 15 of the 20 fastest rising housing association rents in England from 1997 to 2004 occurred in areas where council homes had been transferred.

▶ But aren't all rents going to rise?

The government is pushing councils and Housing Associations to 'equalise' rents for similar properties by 2012 ('equalise' up, of course, not down). The 'target rent' will be based on the market values of London properties and London earnings, which will mean higher rents for social housing here than elsewhere!

▶ So rents will go up anyway?

Not necessarily! We can elect councillors who could refuse to make massive rent rises! The Socialist Party councillors will oppose all rent increases above the rate of inflation. But if our homes are transferred to a Housing Association landlord, we have no say over what they do.

▶ What about major works charges for leaseholders?

Where repairs and improvements - including 'decency standards' works - cost more than £10,000 per property, councils have the power to 'cap' charges to leaseholders to this amount over any five-year period. If Lewisham's New Labour councillors refuse to use these powers they can be voted out. But Housing Association or ALMO boards can't be voted out.

▶ But won't tenants and leaseholders have more say?

There are tenant reps on Housing Association, PFI company or ALMO boards. But they are in a minority, dictated to by New Labour appointees and board members representing commercial interests.

Elected councillors can always say no to rent rises or service charge hikes, and insist on better housing services - if they're prepared to fight for tenants and leaseholders! And ultimately if we don't like what our councillors do, we can always elect new ones. No Housing Association or ALMO board, however, has ever been voted out of office!

▶ Aren't housing associations non-profit organisations?

They are, but they borrow money from banks and finance companies (at commercial interest rates) to fund their activities. This means that, like other commercial organisations, they can find themselves hit by unanticipated financial pressures and even go bust. That's why their lenders insist on business

How much is all this costing?

MAYOR AND CABINET		Item no.9
Report Title	Lewisham's Decent Homes Strategy	
Key Decision	YES	
Ward	ALL	
Contributors	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR REGENERATION, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR RESOURCES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES, HEAD OF LAW	
Class	Date	9 November 2005

17.7 To date the Council has identified £5.4m of costs that will be required to set up the options outlined above.

PLANNING TO privatise our homes doesn't come cheap, with all the glossy leaflets, highly-paid 'independent consultants' etc. Last November an official report revealed that the total cost to Lewisham council of organising the transfer would be at least £5.4 million. How many home improvements could have been funded for that?

representation on their boards - and make sure that commercial interests come before tenants' needs. Banks aren't charities - they lend money to make a profit!

▶ Isn't funding guaranteed if we transfer?

Not at all. In 2003, for example, some government grants to Housing Associations were scrapped at seven weeks notice, forcing even big organisations like the Peabody Trust - with 18,000 properties - to drop improvement plans and sell-off homes. John Prescott has told Housing Associations to find £830m annual 'savings' - 8% of their budgets - by 2008. A sign of things to come.

▶ What about ALMOs?

Under an 'Arms Length Management' company (ALMO) homes are still council-owned, at first, but are managed by the ALMO company, with 'independent' business directors on the board. If the ALMO passes a 'best value' test next year, it would be able to bid for limited government funding for home improvements. Later on, as the National Federation of ALMOs is proposing, the ALMO company could become completely independent of the council - privatisation in stages.

▶ Will there be a vote before our homes are transferred?

Tenants have a legal right to a ballot before a transfer to a Housing Association. But although the government recommends a ballot, there is no legal requirement to have one before an ALMO can take over your home. That's one reason why Lewisham's New Labour council is setting up an ALMO! Scared of giving us a chance to vote yes or no to privatisation, they prefer to sell off our homes in stages.

May's local elections could be your only chance to vote against transfer!

▶ Will tenancy rights change?

Transferring to a Housing Association - or if the ALMO later on becomes a 'stage two' ALMO company completely independent of the council - means a change from a 'secure tenancy' to an 'assured tenancy'. While some things won't change at first - the right to a housing exchange, for example - 'assured tenants' can be more easily evicted.

And Housing Association evictions have risen recently as commercial pressures increase. A Citizens Advice Bureau report showed that, in 70% of cases, proceedings began before checks were made whether there had been housing benefit problems.

▶ But if rents rocket, won't housing benefit help?

Not only is the government aiming to end council housing, it is also discussing ending housing benefit in the future. Last year a 'pilot scheme' was tried, replacing housing benefit with a 'housing allowance' to cover the standard rent in the area. If the actual rent is higher than the 'housing allowance' and you can't pay the difference, their argument goes, that gives you an 'incentive' to move to 'more appropriate' housing!

▶ Can the government afford to improve council homes?

Yes! After all, if the money's there for Housing Associations, PFI contracts or ALMOs, why can't it be made available for the council to fund home improvements?!

In fact, the government will not save money by privatising council homes - at least in the short term. The National Audit Office calculates that it costs £1,300 more per property to make 'decency standards' improvements by transferring homes than it does by using public money! But Tony Blair's New Labour government has a bigger agenda than the best way of improving our homes.

▶ Why is New Labour doing this?

Alongside the National Health Service (NHS) and free state education, council housing has been an important part of the welfare state. It has protected people against a 'free market' in housing - big landlords and housing companies whose real interest is not meeting housing needs but private profit.

But now all the establishment parties support the Tory 'free market system', which puts the profits of the super-rich ahead of peoples' needs. Last year's budget, for example, set out plans for new American-style 'real estate investment trusts', to provide tax breaks for property companies to make more money from residential properties.

'Market competition' may be OK in helping people decide which toothpaste to buy - but having a good quality, affordable and secure home should be a fundamental right, not a by-product of a company's search for bigger profits.



Meet the new landlords... if we don't stop the ALMO!

RECENTLY THE council sent out a letter announcing that a 'shadow ALMO board' had been appointed, with the aim of setting up an ALMO company over the next few months. While there is no doubt that the tenant and leaseholder reps - a minority on the board - have become involved with the best of intentions, who are the other board members? And who elected them?

One of the business representatives who will be managing our homes - unless we stop the transfer - is from a company called **Impart Links Ltd**. Their website describes them as "a specialist partnering consultancy providing services to all sectors of the construction industry", including contractors, developers, suppliers and sub-contractors, operating throughout the UK from offices in London, Somerset and Herefordshire. 'Getting best value' for a contractor - higher profits - isn't the same, however, as getting best value for tenants.

Then there is a business analyst on the ALMO board from the **Horizon Housing Group**, an "umbrella organisation for a number of social landlords and businesses" managing 15,000 homes in London, Surrey and Sussex. Tellingly, a couple of years ago a "poor Audit Commission Inspection result at SLFHA Ltd", one of the members of the Horizon Group, led to "SLFHA Ltd and the Group being put into Intervention Level Supervision by the Housing Corporation". Shouldn't we have a vote on whether we want Horizon business analysts to manage our homes?

Another company rep is from the **Richmond Housing Partnership**, a property management company based in Richmond and Hounslow. And then there is a representative from **London and Quadrant Housing Trust**. London and Quadrant was the Housing Association that decided to build a 38 plot development on Deptford Park, the only green space between Southwark and Greenwich parks, despite the wishes of a majority of residents in the area. And they told us that an ALMO would give tenants and leaseholders a bigger say...



Ian Page and Chris Flood support 'Save Deptford Park' campaigners protesting outside London & Quadrant offices. L&Q didn't listen to residents then, so why will they in the future?