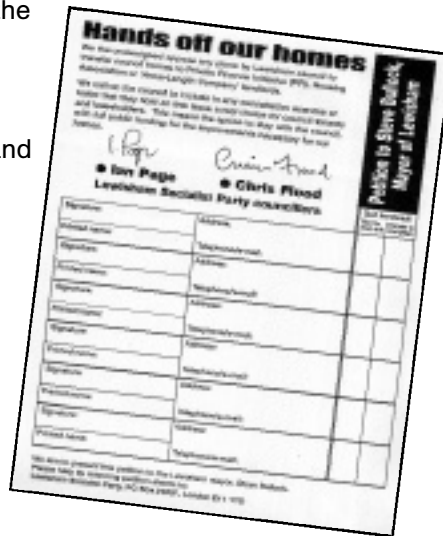


# Hands off our homes!

THERE IS no reason why the government can't bring council homes up to the standard that it has set for 2010 if it invests in repairs and maintains local authority control. (See article by councillor Chris Flood on inside page) 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 untaxed profit made in **just one week** by the HSBC bank!



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, always puts private profit before peoples' needs. They won't stand up for tenants and leaseholders - and Lewisham residents looking for rented property - unless they're forced to.

That's why Ian Page and Chris Flood have launched the 'Hands Off Our Homes' campaign, including a 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.

■ **For details, or if you want to sign the petition, contact the campaign at the Socialist Party address below.**

## Your Socialist Party councillors' surgery times

**Chris Flood**  
Telephone 020-8694-3623  
Email: [chris.flood@mac.com](mailto:chris.flood@mac.com)

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

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

**Ian Page**  
Telephone 020-8692-0435  
Email: [ianpage\\_sp@hotmail.com](mailto:ianpage_sp@hotmail.com)

**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

## ▶ Stop the ID card tax!

AT NOVEMBER'S council meeting Chris Flood and Ian Page moved a motion opposing the government's plan to introduce ID cards. The government itself reckons the cost will be £5.8 billion - with everyone paying a £93 charge for their card. But most independent experts predict the costs will be far higher, perhaps five times as much. And service-providers, such as Lewisham council, will have to meet those extra costs.

None of the New Labour councillors tried to defend ID cards. Or disputed the impact they could have on council services and community relations. But they all voted against the motion - because that's what they were told to do by their New Labour chiefs.

## ▶ They ARE all the same...

THE Socialist Party has often said that the main parties are, at bottom, all the same. And Lewisham's councillors are doing their best to show that we're right! November's council meeting heard that Whitefoot ward councillor Carl Kisicki, elected as a Liberal Democrat, has now switched to New Labour. So much for the Liberals' claim that they were the real alternative to Labour in Lewisham.

But really, it's not much of a jump. All the establishment parties support the recent proposals to increase the pension age to at least 67, for example. They all back the Tory 'free market system', which puts the profits of the super-rich ahead of the interests of working people. But we don't. The Socialist Party is different.

## 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.**

[www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)  
020 8988 8777  
[info@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:info@socialistparty.org.uk)



# ▶ Keep 'the market' out of public services!

IT'S NOT rocket science is it? When private companies get involved in public services, profits come before people.

After all, making maximum profits for shareholders is what 'the market economy' is all about.

That's not to say that individuals who work for private companies don't want to deliver a good service. But the 'market mechanism', the pressure to constantly undercut competitors, to drive down wages and staff conditions to boost the profit-loss balance sheet, etc gets in the way. The consequences for public services are clear to see:

- Hospitals and NHS health trusts have been told to make £700 million cuts this winter. Wards will close and staff vacancies will be unfilled, to 'get them ready' to compete with private hospitals next year.

- A new survey shows that pupils from less affluent families have been pushed out from privately-sponsored 'Academy Schools' (anxious to keep a 'competitive advantage'), compared to the local education authority schools that they replaced.

- The recent court case into the Hatfield train disaster heard that rail privatisation was directly responsible for the faulty maintenance that led to the devastating crash. Cost-cutting companies competed with each other while safety suffered.

If there's one thing that makes the two Socialist Party councillors, Ian Page and Chris Flood, different from the main parties on Lewisham council - Labour, the Lib Dems, and the Tories - it is their determination to put people before profit. This newsletter explains some of the campaigns Ian, Chris and the Socialist Party have been involved in to keep our public services public. If you can help in any way - or you want our help in your campaign - get in touch.



Councillors Chris Flood & Ian Page - see back page for surgery details

# Socialist News

An update from your Telegraph Hill ward  
Socialist Party councillors  
Chris Flood and Ian Page



## Inside:

▶ **Education not for sale**  
A local teachers' leader explains what Tony Blair's 'reforms' will mean for our schools

▶ **A new school for North Lewisham**  
Campaigners have identified other sites but the council still wants to knock-down Ladywell swimming pool

▶ **Hands off our homes!**  
Lewisham's plan to transfer its council housing - the beginning of the end for democratically accountable social housing - affects us all

▶ **Your campaigning councillors**  
How to contact Ian & Chris

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](mailto:info@socialistparty.org.uk) [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)

# No to a dog-eat-dog education system

EVERY PARENT wants their child to have a decent education that meets their individual needs and interests, regardless of their background. That will never be achieved by a divided system where high-status schools can pick and choose pupils at the expense of their neighbours. But that is exactly what Tony Blair's new Education White Paper is proposing.

Of course some state schools have always enjoyed a higher reputation or a more privileged intake. But agreed comprehensive admissions policies planned by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) at least attempted to level the playing field. Years of under-funding, however, and the introduction of Grant Maintained Schools and Academies - by Tory and New Labour governments - have opened a widening gap between the most popular schools and those caught at the bottom of the league tables. Blair's plans threaten to open that gap into a chasm.

Every secondary school will be allowed to become a "self-governing independent school" with its own assets and admissions policies. Some schools would expand, leaving others to go to the wall. Businesses will be able to sponsor groups of schools so that they can push their 'brand' against their rivals.

In short, Blair wants to unleash the 'free market' on education. He wants to create a dog-eat-dog system where schools are free to compete for the pupils that will boost their league table position. Forget 'parental choice', it will be the schools doing the choosing.

Millions of workers know only too well what the 'market' means for pay, jobs and their quality of life. Working people and their families suffer to boost the chances of the wealthy. Now that class divide will be driven firmly into our children's lives even when they are at school.

It seems that the education White Paper shook the conscience of even some of Blair's cabinet. Perhaps MPs like John Prescott can still remember how millions of working-class youth were dumped into second-class secondary moderns by selection and the 11-plus. It's not something that Blair or Education Minister Ruth Kelly could recall, however - they were educated at fee-paying private schools!

Prescott might voice his concerns in private but won't risk his New Labour career to organise serious opposition. Instead parents, school students, staff and unions must mount a united fight to defeat Blair's divisive plans.



**Martin Powell-Davies (secretary of the Lewisham Association of the National Union of Teachers), writing in a personal capacity, explains what Tony Blair's 'reforms' will mean for our schools.**

## A new school for North Lewisham

THE SAGA of a secondary school for the north of the borough is well known to local parents.

Firstly, New Labour's failed 'Fresh Start' policy led to the closure of Telegraph Hill school. Next they bulldozed down the refurbished school building in Wallbutton Road to build the new Crossways 16-19 Centre - but without first making sure there was a suitable alternative site for a new secondary school.

Now the new school's future may be at risk due to the Labour council's arrogance in insisting on the Ladywell swimming pool site. And justifying this, in its bid for government funding, by stating that the greatest need for school places is in the east of the borough and not the north!

It's disgraceful that the Labour government forces councils to compete with each other for funds to build much needed schools. But Lewisham's bid isn't helped by its plan to knock down the Ladywell Leisure Centre - recently refurbished at a cost of £2 million - and site the school in the wrong place!

Whatever the outcome Ian and Chris will continue to fight for a new school and demand the council fight for funding. If Lewisham Labour council can afford to spend £12 million on consultants over the last 12 months it can certainly afford a new school!



*Ian and Chris have backed the campaign for a new school in the north of the borough from the start*

### Building subsidence in Wallbutton Rd

THE COUNCIL bulldozed the old Telegraph Hill school and built a new 16-19 college in double-quick time for political reasons - to stop the site becoming an obvious focus for the new school campaign. In contrast residents in nearby Wallbutton Rd, where a number of houses and flats have serious subsidence and disrepair problems, have waited several years for action. Ian and Chris are working with local residents to make sure that repairs to their homes are now given the same level of commitment by the council as was given to the college site just across the road.

# Lewisham's homes transfer affects us all

**Councillor Chris Flood argues that New Labour's plan to transfer council housing to new landlords - the beginning of the end for democratically accountable social housing - affects us all.**

THE INCREASING lack of affordable quality housing in Britain is one of the biggest social issues of our time. Today, the option to buy a property is out of reach for many. Average house prices are now almost six times the typical salary of a nurse or fire-fighter.

Existing homeowners are affected. Many of them could not now afford to buy where they live, even in areas that ten years ago were cheap parts of Lewisham. Homeowners find they can't afford to move as their needs change. Future generations face a huge burden of debt - on top of student loans - just to afford somewhere to live. In reality, having a mortgage for many has become an expensive way of renting from the bank!

Meanwhile there is continued demand for rented property in London - the number on our waiting list stands at around 16,000 and continues to grow. Lewisham council's solution to this crisis? To try to transfer all its homes to new landlords!

Councils nationwide have been instructed to bring their housing up to national 'decency standards' by 2010. But the government says councils can only get extra investment by hiving off their homes under one of three 'options': selling-off homes to housing associations; private finance initiatives; or setting up an 'Arm's Length Management' company (ALMO).

### Higher rents, less accountability

Lewisham's New Labour council intends to pursue all of these. This will mean higher rents, less accountability, and less secure tenancies.

With ALMOs millions are wasted setting up new offices, on consultants and huge salaries for top managers. The Ashfield ALMO, for example, cost £2 million to set up. ALMOs also undermine democratic control by binding the few tenants 'reps' on the board to corporate responsibility (putting the company's interests over the tenants' interests). Tenants are in a minority, allowing them to be outvoted at every turn.

After two years, the Westminster ALMO ran out of money and tenants were told their estates would need to be sold off to provide money for repairs. The Hillingdon ALMO sold off 500 empty homes without a ballot.

Housing Associations are increasingly run like businesses with higher rents and less accountability. Look at London and Quadrant Housing Association's decision to build on Deptford Park, against Deptford people's wishes. They won't listen now so how will they be held to account on other important issues in future? Ultimately we can elect new councillors but we can't change Housing Association bosses!

All these 'options' are different means to the end of council housing. Once again, the triumph of Tory policies in the hands of a Labour government!

Ian Page and myself have launched a 'Hands Off Our Homes' campaign, including a petition calling for real housing choice (see back page). We have also successfully demanded compulsory purchase orders on a number of absentee and neglectful landlords, and consistently campaigned for the building of more council homes that would stay under the control and ownership of Lewisham residents.

There is a real alternative that can turn the tide on run-down council stock, poor housing conditions and increased homelessness. Why not join us in our campaign?

- No sell-offs, stock transfers, or ALMOs. Stop the privatisation of housing.
- For a fully funded house building programme to meet the demand for new housing.
- For a properly funded programme of repairs and regular maintenance. Force the government to give us the money for improvements and for building new homes.

## What are they afraid of?

EARLIER THIS year Chris Flood and Ian Page presented the motion printed below to Lewisham council, calling for tenants and leaseholders to be given the chance to say whether or not they wanted to remain with the council. All the main parties' councillors - Labour, Lib Dem and Tory - voted against. Why don't they want people to have their say?



*Chris & Ian get coverage in The News Shopper for their motion to let tenants & leaseholders decide on transfer plans.*

"THIS COUNCIL notes that Greenwich council recently decided to retain its housing stock after conducting a consultation on the future of its social housing. Lewisham's current consultation exercise is flawed as, in contrast to Greenwich, it does not offer tenants and leaseholders all the available options open to them. Lewisham's consultation, if unchanged, will provide the basis of a policy to privatise Lewisham housing.

A further loss of housing stock and democratic control is not in the best interests of the people of Lewisham and will result in further inappropriate decisions by social housing providers like London & Quadrant, as seen in the recent announcement to build on Deptford Park.

Lewisham council agrees to expand its current consultation to include asking all its tenants and leaseholders if they want social housing stock to remain under council control, with adequate funding".

The motion was defeated. What were they afraid of?