



CEC Charter for Housing 2017



GMB CONGRESS 2017

CEC CHARTER FOR HOUSING



Background

GMB Members and their families continue to face problems in the housing market in all parts of the country as house prices are increasing more than wage growth. GMB supports the fourth option (direct investment) as house ownership should be as a home not an investment

Despite the implementation of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the consultation on the Governments White Paper “fixing our broken housing market”, there continues to be a need for a radical rethink on housing policy and the Government needs to have a more robust and comprehensive Housing Strategy.

The new Housing and Planning Act 2016 has done little to address matters and provides for the selling-off of existing council and housing association homes – with no replacements for rent. The Act removes public funding away from affordable homes for rent and, does nothing to improve security or control rents for private renters resulting in rents and waiting lists being pushed up. Furthermore, it removes council secure tenancies for all transferring, as well as for new tenants.

More house building

Housing supply has failed to meet demand & regional imbalances hence a need to look at geographical pattern of housing provision and stop government prioritising in South East over the North. It is urgent that we build more houses and in the White Paper, the Government pledged to build a million new homes by 2020. However last year the total number of newly built houses was still less than 143,000, while the level of new affordable house building has hit a 24-year low.

The GMB CEC Special Report on Housing 2014 laid out a detailed long term strategy for making affordable housing a central part of the Governments economic and social strategy. We called for a target of 250,000 new build homes to be built a year with at least 80,000 to be in social housing plus a minimum of 30,000 empty homes brought back into use. This needs a major programme of house building and we need concrete steps to achieving building targets.

The Government needs to stop “dithering” and start building houses in areas that people can afford to live in and we need to see all sectors—private house builders, housing associations and councils—firing on all cylinders to build the homes that we need. In addition, people owning second homes mean that there are less housing stock available for our members.

Any Housing Strategy should be aligned with an Industrial Strategy ensuring that infrastructures are also in place, such as schools, broadband, and transport links. This capital investment will boost the economy and create much needed manufacturing jobs.

We are in favour of more social housing and for local authorities to undertake new build and refurbishment strategies. We recognise that many young people have been priced out of access to housing and are forced into the high priced privately rented housing.

Existing housing stock must be brought up to a decent living standard and any new housing should be built to the highest environmental and energy efficient standards, and subject to the National Code for sustainable homes.

Where to build

Sustainable development for housing should be maintained but planning priority for new schemes should be on brownfield sites and marginal agricultural land. There are plenty of brownfield sites and plenty of low grade agricultural land without environmental restrictions that could be used without concreting over the countryside. Green Belt land should only be used for building if it is replaced by an equivalent increase in Green Belt land elsewhere. Also, we should prevent houses being continually built on floodplains. All new build properties should be built to protect against flooding where an area is at risk.

GMB condemns the selling off of social housing by foreign investors or homes being demolished for redevelopment. The Government’s Estate Generation National Strategy seeks to transform neighbourhoods but in reality this regeneration has meant building expensive private dwellings which local people would never be able to afford and the new homes are likely to be cramped. We are opposed to the demolition of Council Housing estates to make way for property developers to develop housing for sale that are unaffordable to the residents in the estates being knocked down. We welcome the local community being fully consulted say in any future proposals. This is in line with the Mayor of London’s manifesto promise which states that any redevelopment of social housing should be carried out only when residents have had their say and should be by a ballot of the estate.

The 2014 CEC Report outlined the need for discussions with Pension Funds for higher levels of investment in affordable housing and consider whether legislation is needed to incentives pension funds to allocate a minimum proportion of investments to affordable housing.

Housing Controls

- Housing is now a devolved matter in all three devolved administrations. The 2014 Report discussed this in detail and outlined that there should be one Government Department responsible for Housing Policy and Control for England
- Council housing should be kept under local authority control and control and management should be returned to local authorities and they should keep the revenue from rents
- We believe there should be a greater role for the public sector including the introduction of legislation to give Local authorities a new power to impose penal Council Tax and to acquire compulsorily and refurbish homes that have been empty for more than six months continuously, including office blocks suitable for conversion and second homes that are continuously empty.
- We call for a return of all capital receipts to allow investment and building of Local Authority homes.
- GMB are opposed to outsourcing social housing stock by Local Authorities. We note that there is a lack of emergency accommodation for serious emergencies experienced by tenants. Councils have a social responsibility to ensure landlords have emergency procedures in place for such events.

Right To Buy

- GMB condemns the policy of Right to Buy which resulted in a shortage of housing stock.
- We seek the introduction of legislation to ensure that all future Right To Buy sales are replaced like for like and done for one by new social housing; and that all sales and discount offers have to be judged by the local authority against the housing needs of the area; and adjust criteria of eligibility.
- The Government's Help to Buy schemes have only helped a relatively small group of people. GMB calls to redirect such schemes from Help to Buy to Help to Build

Rents/ Landlords

- GMB deplores those private landlords who put profit before need. House ownership should be for a home and not as an investment
- Wealthy landlords continue to buy homes and leave them empty, GMB says that properties left empty should be compulsory purchased and transformed into desperately needed homes
- Private landlords need to commit to minimum standards of provision, charges and services to tenants in particular the care and maintenance
- Key public sector workers can't afford to live near their workplace, and so there needs to be extra support. GMB call for key worker status definition to be widened, it is too restrictive and should include key public sector jobs/ frontline workers and utility workers
- Rents should be affordable so there needs to be a fundamental review of Social Housings "affordable rents" policy
- GMB supports regulation of the Private Rented Sector including action to regulate landlords and introduce "rent control"
- We seek to introduce legislation requiring local authorities to introduce registration of private landlords with rules requiring minimum quality of premises and protecting tenants from arbitrary rent increases and eviction with reserve powers to regulate rents.
- We support the Right to Rent and if owner occupier defaults on mortgage/ falls into arrears, they should be given chance to rent/ right to remain

Housing Benefit/ Welfare

- We oppose caps on housing benefits and call for the halt of the integration of Housing Benefit into Universal Credit
- Homelessness is a national crisis- the number of people sleeping rough on our streets has more than doubled there needs to be a concerted effort to reduce this and GMB call for more support including supporting the Labour Campaign to End Homelessness.

