

# Policy Motions

## 1. Developing local social and affordable housing strategies

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### 1. Preamble:

a. Affordable and social housing in the UK has been systematically undermined at every level, by central government decisions, the removal of restrictions on developers, the decline in support for local councils to replace housing stock, and the unfair financial pressures on users of social and affordable housing, such as increasing rents and the spare occupancy charge.

b. While private ownership is falling precipitously (down 14% in Greater Manchester since 2003, for example), the uptake has largely been through increasing levels of private rental (up from 6% to 20% in Greater Manchester in the same period). Private rental increases the proportion of income spent on housing, increases uncertainty due to short-term contracts, makes it harder for people to afford ownership in the future, thus reducing wealth across the country, with negative implications for both individuals and the State.

c. Good practice in Liberal Democrat run councils has been one of the factors partially mitigating the damage caused by these practices. Conference notes examples such the policy introduced at Stockport Council under Liberal Democrat control which meant that tenants were protected from the worst effects of the bedroom tax through the establishment of a support fund within the Housing Revenue Account, currently assisting almost 900 tenants who are willing to move but for whom the council's ALMO do not have suitable, smaller accommodation and which will wipe out the rent arrears caused by the bedroom tax to enable them to move once suitable properties are available.

d. A more coherent and cohesive approach to the affordable and social housing market is required, allowing local councils to replace and increase housing stock, where required. This requires policy development on all of the above factors, recognising that a partial approach would be undermined by the other factors currently destabilising the affordable and social housing market.

### 2. Conference Notes:

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) assertion that the UK is facing a "critical rental shortage" with at least 1.8 million more households looking to rent rather than buy a home by 2025, necessitating a building programme to focus on providing for tenants, as well as affordable homes for first time buyers

### 3. Conference Endorses:

a. The party's policy support for a target of building 300,000 per year, with particular focus on government agencies directly commissioning housing for sale or rent; for Local Authorities to develop a plan for 15 years of housing need; and the removal of the right to appeal for developers where planning decisions are in line with the local plan.

b. Liberal Democrat Treasury Spokesperson Baroness Susan Kramer's call to support achievement of this goal through a 45 billion pound investment in house-building, enough to build an additional 150,000 homes a year for five years as part of a wider fund to deliver on the infrastructure the country desperately needs - roads, rail, broadband, schools and hospitals.

c. The RICS' call for:

- i. Private house builders to be encouraged to build specifically for the rental sector
- ii. Pension funds to be given tax breaks to fund large scale rental property development

iii. Councils to be encouraged to release brownfield sites for the building homes for rent

#### **4. Conference proposes:**

- a. The introduction of measures that address local authorities' failures to achieve affordable housing targets of 35–50%. These would include:
  - i. A more open viability assessment process, on projects of over 10 houses, that would enable more rigorous oversight and scrutiny of developers' viability studies which seek the waiving of affordable housing targets
  - ii. A requirement on such developers to provide evidence of actual viability with profits over and above the predicted level being subject to a levy which would go into a fund for local councils to commission affordable and social housing;
- b. Improved monitoring of the depletion of affordable and social housing stock so that local social and affordable housing targets that better reflect local need can be set and giving local councils the right to suspend right-to-buy provisions in circumstances where there is a shortfall in the provision of equivalent numbers of replacement social housing stock.
- c. Addressing shortfalls provision of affordable housing arising through the process that allows for the offsetting of affordable housing provision to other sites and or boroughs by requiring councils to ensure that any offset housing is allocated to sites in a accordance with a strategy that:
  - i. Retains an equivalent mix of housing within a given area.
  - ii. Provides equivalent, or better, access to local amenities such as schools, transport infrastructure and employment opportunities
  - iii. Ensures that the offset housing can be completed within the same time period as the main development.
- d. Recognising the distinction between social rent (a percentage of income) and affordable rent, (a percentage of local market rates) to allow councils to maintain a review of the difference between affordable rent and social rent so that where there is a widening gap between affordable rent compared to social rent, councils can be given more flexibility in raising money for commissioning of social housing provision.
- e. Address the issue of right-to-buy homes returning to the rental market as private rental properties, which councils may then have to rent back to meet their statutory duties,(in effect subsidizing landlords through the benefits system),by introducing a covenant on all right-to-buy properties that prevent their onward sale to investor landlords.
- f. Address the under-occupancy issue which led to the introduction of the bedroom tax by;
  - i. Prioritising provision of suitable alternative housing,
  - ii. Providing support funds to assist relocation of tenants who are prepared to move once such properties are available.