



Gordon Brown promises government action on housing

New Prime Minister Gordon Brown has pledged to make housing a top priority for the new government.



Gordon Brown has promised that housing will be a priority for his government

In events leading up to his election as leader of the Labour Party and appointment as Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has stressed repeatedly that he wants to see more houses being built – both in the private sector and the social housing sector.

Brown has openly acknowledged that housing is an area that the government has neglected over its first 10 years resulting in today's situation where the number of

families living in temporary accommodation has more than doubled, 500,000 families are having to endure overcrowded housing and almost 1.7million people are on council housing waiting lists. He also acknowledged that house prices for first time buyers have gone up by over 300% over the same period so that now only the very rich or those with parental help are able to contemplate buying.

In addition, Brown has cited government figures that show that 223,000 new households are formed a year but only about around 170,000 new homes are built. This results in the house price increases which make housing unaffordable for the majority of the population. This also contributes to the housing and homelessness problems that Housing Justice CHAS housing advice centres deal with on a daily basis.

The new Prime Minister has said that he will use the Comprehensive Spending Review, due in

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September, to increase affordable house building both to enable families to buy shared equity housing and, more crucially, to finance the construction of social housing to rent.

Candidates for the Deputy Leadership of the Labour Party all also stressed the importance of building more houses and especially stressed the importance of building more affordable housing, especially social housing for rent and reforming the current system of council housing financing so that councils are able to take a more active role in providing housing for those most in need.

Comment



We live in exciting times!

For the first time since the current Labour government was elected in 1997, housing will be near the top of the Prime Minister's list of priorities. The new Prime Minister Gordon Brown has acknowledged that the government got housing wrong over its first 10 years, resulting in today's situation where housing is unaffordable for most people and hundreds of thousands are having to endure homelessness and bad housing.

We hope that the new Prime Minister will live up to his promises and through the Comprehensive Spending Review, due in the autumn, commit the government to finance the building of more social housing to rent. As well as building the new homes, the government must commit itself to building community facilities so that their long term goal of building 'sustainable communities' can be achieved.

We live in the fourth richest economy in the world – it should not be too difficult to ensure that everyone has a home that meets their needs.

Alison Gelder, Chief Executive, Housing Justice.



Agenda for Brown

Housing Justice believes that the new Gordon Brown-led government must address the following housing and homelessness problems urgently.

- Provide permanent homes for the 87,000 homeless families in England and Wales living in temporary accommodation. These are families who have been accepted for rehousing by their local authority but who have to endure living for months, if not years, in often unsafe and insecure temporary accommodation.
- Complete reform of the 1935 statutory definition of overcrowding. The 1935 definition, which still applies today, assumes that families can use living rooms and in some cases, kitchens as bedrooms. The 2004 Housing Act committed the government to redefining this outdated standard but the government has yet to bring forward concrete proposals.
- Provide homes for the estimated 500,000 families living in overcrowded accommodation – under the likely new definition of overcrowding, the 'bedroom standard', 500,000 families with approximately 1 million children would be judged to be living in overcrowded accommodation and so eligible for rehousing.
- Look at extending the successful Decent Homes programme from social housing to the private rented sector where many of the most vulnerable people in society live.
- Build more homes for the 1.7million families on council house waiting lists.
- Ensure that new housing is the right size – developers in recent years have concentrated on building one and two bedroom housing when the greatest housing need is among families. We desperately need more three, four and five bedroom houses.
- Ensure that community facilities are provided alongside any new housing developments to build sustainable communities – housing on its own is not the answer: people need transport, jobs, services, school and community buildings if the area is to become a community rather than a dormitory.
- Ensure that local authorities fulfil their duties under the 2004 Housing Act to provide sufficient sites to meet demand from Gypsies and Travellers in the local area.
- Reform the housing benefits system which still discriminates against young people under 26 years old.
- Review the proposed reforms to legal aid to ensure that solicitors are able to take on complex housing cases.

Starter Packs news

Housing Justice and the national Furniture Recycling Network organised a residential conference in May for groups to learn more about running Starter Pack schemes.

Sarah Findlay of Starter Packs Glasgow led the conference giving interesting insights and practical details from her experiences in Glasgow. Those attending were also able to share information as many groups found they were facing common problems.

Starter Packs are boxes of essential household items such as cutlery, crockery, bedding and saucepans collected for distribution to formerly homeless people moving into their first homes. They are practical help that organisations such as churches

can offer which complements local authority provision helping to turn a house into a home. They also promote recycling as people can donate unused items knowing that they will be put to a good use. Certain items like duvets and pillows are purchased new – as Sarah said we must ask ourselves “would I use it myself?”

The conference decided to create a national network for Starter Packs, which Paul Smith of FRN agreed to host. This will be free to join for groups setting up Starter Pack schemes with an online forum and



network to enable groups to contact each other to share learning and experience. The momentum generated by this event will ensure that we'll be hearing a lot more about starter packs in the future!

If you or your church would be interested in thinking about setting up a Starter Pack scheme or for further information contact Alastair Murray at Housing Justice or register with the Furniture Recycling Network www.frn.org.uk

You are invited to a Housing Justice UNLEASH event on Thursday 19 July 2007

Action on homelessness: a hand out or a hand up?

Voluntary church and faith groups are good at giving essential help like food and clothes to people who are homeless and excluded.

Is there a tension between meeting immediate needs and encouraging people toward independence? How best can we help people move on from homelessness? And who decides? What do you think? Join in and share your point of view!

This will be a major event for churches and all concerned with housing and homelessness, using innovative Open Space Technology to explore this important question.

This event will be held on Thursday 19 July 2007 9.00am–5.00pm at St Paul's Church, Robert Adam St, London W1U 3HW (nearest tube: Bond Street).

Suggested donation: £5 to HJ members/free to unwaged.

For further information see the Housing Justice website or contact Ellen Byrne on 020 7723 7273, e.byrne@housingjustice.org.uk



Just Housing: banking on Housing Justice

Did you know that there's an easy way to use your savings to help support Housing Justice's work, while providing essential finance for Christian-led housing projects?

For nearly 10 years Housing Justice has run a special savings account, in partnership with ethical banking specialists Triodos Bank that does just that. Triodos has a unique approach to banking that links people's savings with business and charities that benefit people and the planet, from community groups to renewable energy schemes. The Just Housing saver account provides a pot of money, which is lent to housing projects at competitive rates. Savers get a healthy return on their investment, while each year Triodos makes a donation to support Housing Justice's campaigning work. Over £70,000 has been raised through the account in this way since its launch in 1998.

It's a simple but effective arrangement that connects savers' money with a cause that's close to their hearts. And because Triodos Bank promises money saved in the account will only be lent to Christian linked housing

organisations, savers know exactly where their money's working. Over £4 million is deposited in the Just Housing account, providing a valuable source of finance for UK projects helping to develop innovative solutions to prevent homelessness.

Caring For Life in inner-city Leeds is one organisation which benefits from this special relationship. It's a Christian charity that protects and supports vulnerable young adults from the Leeds area and further afield. Through its farm and sheltered accommodation, CFL have given structure and stability to the lives of countless homeless people. For many, homelessness is only the latest in a long line of difficulties, from psychological problems to drug and solvent abuse.

Together, the combination of a safe, secure residential home and the work experience provided at the farm offers a structured environment providing a sense of achievement and self respect.

Training at the farm includes agricultural and horticultural projects, conservation work, carpentry workshops, arts and crafts and office skills.

Another of CFL's projects in Leeds, Wendy Margaret Home, meets a growing need for sheltered accommodation for young, single homeless women. The home was established with the support of a Triodos Bank loan, using money saved in the Just Housing account.

Triodos Bank wants more of the projects Housing Justice supports to benefit from money saved in the Just Housing account. It actively encourages Christian linked housing organisations that would like to borrow at competitive rates to get in touch. For further information call Sue Cooper on 0117 980 9718 or email business@triodos.co.uk.

To find out more about the Just Housing account call Triodos Bank free on 0500 008 720 or go to www.triodos.co.uk/justhousing



Caring for Life has benefited from Just Housing money

Triodos Bank
and
HOUSING JUSTICE
Christian vision in action



Action Week on Poverty and Homelessness

27 January – 3 February 2008

Planning is continuing for next year's major event incorporating Homelessness Sunday which we hope will highlight the experiences of those who are suffering from poverty and bad housing and homelessness in Britain today.

Entitled Opening Doors, Opening Hearts the action week is a collaboration between Housing Justice, Scottish Churches Housing Action, Church Action on Poverty and the Church Urban Fund. It aims to gather first-hand evidence of poverty and bad housing which we can take to government and demand action.

We are hoping that across the country, local churches or Churches Together groups will work with local projects, advice services and other agencies to organise 'poverty hearings' or hearing style events so that we can hear the voices and stories of people experiencing poverty and homelessness in their own towns and neighbourhoods.

The primary data, stories and other evidence gathered will be written up and form the basis of a major report to be launched in the autumn of 2008. We will press

political parties to include a pledge to end UK poverty in their manifestos for the next election.

We will be running a series of training days across the country in the autumn of 2007 to equip local groups to run the poverty

hearings. Further information, including dates of the events across the country, will be sent out later in the summer. For further information see the Housing Justice website or contact Judith Maizel-Long at Housing Justice.



Housing Justice AGM

30 October 2007

The Housing Justice Annual General Meeting will consider many of the issues that the Action Week is focussing on. We have invited speakers who are experts in the field of poverty and homelessness to lead an informed debate. The event will also feature interactive workshop sessions.

The AGM is being held on Tuesday 30 October 2007 at St John's Church Waterloo, London – Housing Justice members will receive further information nearer the time. You can also get further information on the Housing Justice website.

www.housingjustice.org.uk

Blunkett praises “inspirational” Guide Neighbourhoods



Former Home Secretary David Blunkett has praised the resident-led approach to regeneration pioneered by the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme co-ordinated by Housing Justice.



Housing Justice Chief Executive Alison Gelder with Hazel Blears MP and David Blunkett MP

Speaking at a Parliamentary reception to launch a DVD celebrating the achievements of the programme, Blunkett praised the knowledge sharing activities of the Guide Neighbourhoods and described the transformations of previously run-down estates as “inspirational”.

With the Stubbin Neighbourhood Association Guide Neighbourhood

situated in his Sheffield Brightside constituency, David Blunkett has taken a keen interest in the programme since its inception. He was joined at the reception by Labour Party Chair Hazel Blears who has the Seedley and Langworthy Guide Neighbourhood in her Salford constituency.

Housing Justice received £4.3million government funding over three years to finance activities to enable residents of neighbourhoods which have achieved successful regeneration to share their experiences with residents of other places who want guidance and support to regenerate their neighbourhoods – so far 15 Guide Neighbourhoods have acted as mentors to more than 120 other neighbourhoods.

The programme has now come to the end of its grant and it is currently being evaluated by the government. Early indications suggest that this will affirm the value of our approach of resident-led regeneration and we hope that a positive assessment will be a springboard for grant applications to other parts of government, and to the growing commercial social responsibility movement.

Guide Neighbourhoods on YouTube

The 10 minute Guide Neighbourhoods DVD is available to watch on YouTube – follow the links from the Housing Justice Regenerate section of our website. Alternatively DVDs can be ordered by contacting Guy Cruls at Housing Justice.

Housing policy update

Legal aid reform campaign continues

The campaign to change the Government’s proposals for reform of the legal aid system (featured in the last Housing Justice News) continues. The campaign was boosted by a report of the House of Commons Constitutional Affairs Select Committee. Over 300 submissions of evidence were received – the vast majority of which were against the government’s proposals. The final report raised concerns about the impact of the reforms and called on the government to radically alter the proposals. The government is expected to come forward with new proposals later this year.

Homelessness continues its downward trend (but is still double 1997 level)

The latest government homelessness figures show a continued falling trend in the numbers accepted for rehousing by local authorities under the terms of the homelessness legislation. In the first quarter of 2007 17,230 families were accepted for rehousing, the lowest level since the early 1980s, but there were still 87,120 families in temporary accommodation awaiting permanent housing – just over double the level when the new Labour Government was elected in 1997.

Funding threat to vital housing advice services continues



In the last issue of *Housing Justice News*, we reported proposed changes to the legal aid system.

In May Vera Baird, QC MP, the Minister for Legal Aid launched the first Community Legal Advice Centre (CLAC) in Gateshead. The CLAC was formed by the forced merger of a Law Centre and a Citizens Advice Bureau bringing together civil legal aid services, funded by the Legal Services Commission (LSC), with social welfare services, funded by Gateshead Council to provide more co-ordinated advice. Advice centres, like the CHAS network of Housing Advice Services, are watching carefully to see whether this development delivers an improvement or a decline in services.

Meanwhile we have to report the sad news that CHAS York has closed after 40 years of faithful service to the community in York. It is a terrible shame that such a vital service had to close when the level of need is clearly greater than

ever, leaving many in need of urgent housing advice. Sadly it looks like this situation is likely to be repeated across the country, though we do have good news from Sheffield Hallam where a new CHAS will be opening.

Every CHAS in Housing Justice's alliance of Community Housing Aid Services provides expert advice to people in housing need. Most people helped by a CHAS would not be able to get this sort of help from anywhere else. In a typical year, Housing Justice CHAS helps more than 17,000 individuals and families nationwide.

The type of issues Housing Justice CHAS help with are many. Here is just one account, written by a woman helped by Housing Justice CHAS:

"I was at rock bottom. I was beaten up time and time again by my husband. I had massive problems with depression and my

health was poor. I had one child – and another on the way. Every night, I used to wake up crying – thinking of the physical and mental abuse my husband had subjected me to. I was at my wits' end. Fearing for myself and my child, and terrified that the next punch would make me miscarry the baby, I applied to the council for somewhere safe to live. They turned me down. I was devastated and didn't know what to do. That was when I saw a sign for a CHAS – a housing advice centre that said it helped people who had housing problems without making them pay. I saw an adviser who took on my case and battled on my behalf until the Council eventually accepted that they had a legal duty to house me. It was a new start for me. Although I still sometimes wake up shaking when I think of what Laura and I went through. I have no doubt the local CHAS really changed our lives."

Average house could cost '10 times income' by 2026

Figures published by the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit show that by 2026, if current trends continue, houses will cost 10 times average earnings. This new independent body set up by the government to advise on how to make housing more affordable found that between 1995 and 2005 average incomes increased by 92% but average house prices rose by 204% making housing unaffordable to all but the most wealthy. The NHPAU has called on the government to radically increase house building to ensure that housing is affordable for the future generations.

For regular updates on housing, homelessness, regeneration and social policy stories, subscribe to *Housing Justice Digest*, a weekly email bulletin which summarises news from the daily newspapers and the housing, regeneration and voluntary sector press. *Housing Justice Digest* is available free to members of Housing Justice – for more information see our website or contact Ellen Byrne at Housing Justice.



Robina Rafferty awarded Papal Medal

As we were going to press, Housing Justice's first Chief Executive Robina Rafferty was due to receive the Holy Cross Pro-Ecclesia et Pontifice awarded by Pope Benedict XVI. The medal was due to be presented by the Archbishop of Cardiff, the Most Reverend Peter Smith, at Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Marylebone, near to the Housing Justice offices. The medal recognises the contribution Robina has made over 30 years to putting Catholic social teaching into action.

Housing Justice Carol Service 13 December 2007

This year for the first time we have arranged a Carol Service to bring together and thank our supporters at Christmas time. The event will take place on Thursday 13 December 2007 at St John's Church, Waterloo – a church which has a long tradition of offering practical help and advice to homeless and badly housed people. We have invited Streetwise Opera, made up of homeless and formerly homeless people, to contribute to the service. Look out for further information closer to the time.

Marathon team raise thousands

In April we sent congratulations to the members of the Housing Justice Marathon team who, we are pleased to say, all completed the London Marathon raising over £7,000 for our work with homeless and badly housed people. We send thanks to Mike Callanan of Redhill, Surrey, Sally Harling of Bletchingley, Surrey, Gill Hardy of Forest Hill, London, Shaun Hearn of Solihull, West Midlands and Leon Kendall and Richard Powrie, both of Redhill, Surrey, who ran for us.

We will be entering a team in the 2008 London Marathon – if you think that you are up for the challenge please get in contact soon as our golden bond places are going fast. For our team all we ask is that you commit to raising at least £1,000. Alternatively enter the Marathon yourself through the general ballot and run in support of Housing Justice – entry for the race opens in August and you will hear whether you have been successful in December. Further information including links to entry details is available on our website www.housingjustice.org.uk

Forthcoming events

Thursday 19 July

Housing Justice UNLEASH Conference: Action on homelessness: a hand out or a hand up?

9am St Paul's Church, Robert Adam St, central London

See inside for further details

Tuesday 30 October

Housing Justice AGM

10am St John's Church, Waterloo, London

Further information will be sent out to members nearer the time

Thursday 8 November

Service of Commemoration for people who have died homeless in the last year

11:30am, St Martin's in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London.

Thursday 13 December

Housing Justice Carol Service

7pm, St Johns Church, Waterloo, London

27 January – 3 February 2008

Opening Doors, Opening Hearts: Action Week on Poverty and Homelessness.

Flyers will be sent out later on in the summer – see article in this edition for further details.

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Many individuals and churches who care about housing issues and homelessness like to receive occasional mailings from Housing Justice. Housing Justice will never pass your details on to other organisations or bombard you with mail. If however you would rather not hear from us again, please tick here.