

Resolution Date: 9th January 2018

Resolution Title: Unite's Housing Rights Campaign

This branch agrees that the following motion is submitted for consideration at Unite's Policy Conference in July 2018:

"Since the last policy conference, the housing crisis has deepened and Unite's radical policies to address the crisis have become increasingly popular.

Construction of desperately needed new social housing has all but halted and almost all remaining funding now goes to schemes supporting home ownership which have the effect of enriching profiteering private builders and fuelling house price rises rather than addressing the crisis.

Unfortunately, many housing associations have lost their commitment to the provision of social housing and community services, choosing instead to focus on serving the interests of private investors. Too often they treat both the communities and their employees with contempt, dismantling tenant associations and derecognising the unions that represent their staff. Despite years of historic public sector investment, they now mirror purely commercial property companies.

In June 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire brutally underscored the establishment's disdain for social housing tenants and leaseholders in what was rightly described by Labour's leadership as 'social murder.' It highlighted the cumulative impact of austerity, privatisation, outsourcing, commercialisation and deregulation, and Unite subsequently played a vital role in supporting the victims and drawing out the political lessons. The industrial action taken by housing maintenance workers at Mears in a dispute over pay differentials underscores the rampant exploitation of housing staff whether employed by councils, housing associations or private companies. Unite is once again to be commended for its staunch support for members who organise and fight back.

We reaffirm our commitment to Unite's housing policy, including development of a mass programme of council house building, properly funded by central government grant. Simply relaxing borrowing rules will not provide the necessary investment. We reaffirm our commitment to social rents as the only truly affordable rents for many workers and our opposition to 'regeneration' schemes which result in the loss of social housing and the dispersal of communities.

Through Unite Community, our union has already done much to campaign for the right to decent, affordable housing. At the same time, its industrial branches have fought for the rights of housing, construction and support service workers. The Executive Council is to be congratulated for its approach.

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To develop and coordinate this work, we call on Unite to establish and properly resource its own Housing Campaign Coordination Unit to advance:

- Retrofitting of sprinklers and other safety measures as appropriate with full funding from central government.
- Full updating of building regulations and restoration funding previously cut from emergency services and for conducting fire building checks.
- Review of housing management staffing levels, management practices and job roles to ensure safety critical roles are adequately resourced.
- Review of the Social Housing Regulator's powers, including the ability to intervene on behalf of tenants whose concerns are being ignored.
- Support for Jeremy Corbyn's call for empty homes to be requisitioned for use by the homeless, particularly those made homeless after Grenfell.
- Continued support for Grenfell survivors through the inquiry process including forming a parallel people's inquiry if necessary.
- Ensuring housing associations and firms awarded public sector construction contracts are free from blacklisting and offer their workers full trade union rights including recognition of their chosen union.
- Binding ballots of local people before regeneration schemes proceed, and a mandatory requirement for each housing associations to have an independent tenants' organisation.
- Massive expansion of direct labour schemes.
- Ending the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which drives down the level of housing benefit payable, and repeal of the deeply flawed Universal Credit system which is exacerbating the housing crisis.
- The use of public land for council house building rather than private housing schemes.