

# REPEAL THE 'BEDROOM TAX'

## *The 'Bedroom Tax' – myth and reality*

### **"It's unfair to subsidise people for homes larger than they need"**

The government says it's unfair to 'subsidise' people living in homes 'larger than they need'. Yet in the usual life cycle everybody ends up with 'spare' bedrooms. Why is the government penalising people because their children have left home? Only working age tenants in receipt of housing benefit (HB) are affected. Separated parents sometimes need rooms for their children to stay. Disabled people sometimes need a separate bedroom. Under the 'bedroom standard' people on HB would be forced to move everytime their family composition changes. The government 'can't afford' to 'subsidise' spare bedrooms yet it *is* cutting taxes for the rich and subsidising mortgages for people to buy a home worth up to £600,000.

### **"Living on benefits is a 'lifestyle choice'"**

Contrary to media and government propaganda tenants don't go onto benefit because it's a 'lifestyle choice'. They receive them because of redundancy, illness, disability or because the job they have doesn't pay enough money to live on. Would you like to have to live on £72 a week Job Seekers Allowance and then pay part of your rent from that?

### **"People on benefits are given 'something for nothing'"**

Most people receive benefits of one sort or another during the course of their lives. Most benefit recipients have worked all their lives, paid their taxes and national insurance. **They have paid for the benefits they receive by their social contribution.** They are mostly victims of circumstance. They are not skivers. People move in and out of benefits because of the absence of secure and well paid jobs. In the 12 months up to February 2013, in Swindon there were 5,480 new housing benefit claims, but 5,560 ended claims.

### **"The bedroom tax will free up larger homes for families"**

The government knew that there were not enough small homes for the tenants affected by the 'bedroom tax' to move into. The BBC has just

reported that only 6% of tenants affected have moved. In some areas of the country there are hardly any smaller homes available. In Swindon there are more than in some towns, but even so, only around 140 households have 'downsized'. **There are still more than 800 families having to find 14% or 25% of their rent.** If the government wants to free up larger homes for families why are they allowing them to be sold off under 'right to buy'? Last year 75% of Council homes sold in Swindon were family homes, 3 beds or more.

## *The impact of the 'bedroom tax'*

- Two thirds of people affected are disabled.
- Most of the people forced to leave their home have not done so voluntarily but only because they felt they could not survive financially. Driving people out of their homes has disrupted their lives and moved people from communities in which they were settled.
- Those having their HB cut have been forced to rely on help from their families (if they are lucky) or cut down on food and/or heating.
- Some tenants who have been made ill by the stress created by the threat of losing their homes. Nationally there have been suicides of people unable to cope with the stress and depression resulting from the 'bedroom tax'.
- The government is trying to starve tenants into smaller homes which do not exist or jobs that are hard to come by.

## *Tackle the housing shortage by building new Council homes*

**The 'bedroom tax' should be repealed.** The housing shortage cannot be solved by shifting tenants from home to home. The number of households on the waiting list in Swindon broke through the 16,000 mark in October of last year. The Council's answer was to close down Band C and wipe around 8,000 households off the list. Yet there are still 7,500 households on the priority bands. **The only realistic way to tackle the shortage is to start building a new generation of Council housing.**