

# Swindon Tenants Campaign Group

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To join STCG or for more information email us or ring: 07786394593

## Campaign Group News June 2014

### Swindon Council policy: making the housing crisis worse

**S**windon Council has closed Bands C and D on the Housing list. 7,845 households have been thrown off the list. We've been told that most of them shouldn't be on the list because they can "probably" afford to buy a house, or it would be "more honest" to take them off because they don't stand a chance of getting a Council tenancy. These are just excuses for downplaying the housing crisis in the town, by an administration which supports the government's disastrous housing policy.

Even after these people have been taken off the list there are still 8,272 households on it. 7,205 of them are working age, chasing after around 500 tenancies given out each year. The Council refuses to face up to the fact that the only way to tackle the shortage is to start building new Council housing.

**In supporting government policies they are making the crisis worse.**

- The ruling Conservative group supports the government's 'right to buy' scheme which means we lose more homes year after year; homes that are desperately needed. Three quarters of the homes sold off in 2012/13 were family homes. 67 were sold last year and the number is likely to increase as the government is proposing to cut the qualifying period from 5 to 3 years.
- The Council is proposing to introduce what is laughingly known as "affordable rent", up to 80% of private rents. For a 3 bed house this will mean rent £39 higher than a Council rent, and £61 higher for a 4 bed property.
- It has done nothing to challenge the government's robbery of the 'right to buy'

receipts. Westminster takes 75% of the receipts from homes sold and the Council is left with only £10,000 per home. The government doesn't even allow this money to be spent unless replacement homes built with it are charged at "affordable rent". **The Council accepts this daylight robbery without protest.**

### Get involved – join Swindon Tenants Campaign Group

**T**wo years ago Council tenants showed that they wouldn't be sold a pup and voted down their homes being sold off. **STCG** organised the campaign for a No vote in the ballot. Since then we have managed to win £3 million extra a year for the upkeep of Council homes. We have recently published proposals to tackle the housing crisis. We continue to challenge the Tory Council's support for the coalition government's disastrous housing policies.

But we need more tenants involved. We stuck together in the ballot. We need more people to fight for our shared interests – improving the service provided and campaigning for the building of new homes for those on the waiting list. If you are a Swindon Council tenant why not join? It's just £2 unwaged, £5 waged. You can join our email list – email [stcg@btinternet.com](mailto:stcg@btinternet.com) or ring **07786394593**

Visit our website at

<http://keepyourcouncilhomes.wordpress.com>

### Unaffordable "affordable rent"

**T**he Council's policy means that **we will end up with less Council homes with Council rent than we currently have.** It has applied for government grant to build some new homes but

the grant is so low that the building costs have to be paid for by converting Council homes to "affordable rent". The Council is proposing to build 150 homes, but its programme involves demolishing 83 existing ones, so we end up with only 67 new ones, all at "affordable rent". **In order to pay for this it's proposing to convert 203 existing Council homes to "affordable rent"**.

## **STCG's proposals to tackle the housing crisis**

**S**windon Tenants Campaign Group has put forward a series of proposals to tackle the housing crisis. A Council house building programme is at the heart of that. But we have also put forward suggestions to improve the situation in the private rented sector. The Council has too few resources to police a sector where one third of properties don't come up to the 'Decent Homes Standard'. They have only 3 enforcement officers to deal with complaints and inspect perhaps 15,000 or more properties (the Census recorded more than 14,000 in 2011). We've proposed that instead of investing in building properties for private rent the Council should put resources into regulating the private rented sector to improve its quality.

Read "**Tackling Swindon's Housing Crisis**" at <http://keepyourcouncilhomes.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/stcghousingsubmission.pdf> or write to us or ring us for a copy if you don't have internet access (contact details over the page).

## **Rent increase above inflation**

**S**windon Council ignored the advice of tenants and the **Housing Advisory Forum** by increasing rents by 3.7%, well above the rate of inflation. The inflation rate in September was 3.2% but after that it was much lower. Justifying the increase the Lead member for Finance said that increases at the level of inflation meant that "the housing stock cannot easily be improved or even increased". In fact, but for the efforts of **STCG** and other tenants, we would have had £3 million a year less for the upkeep of our homes.

At the time of the housing ballot we were told that unless tenants voted to flog off the stock the Council would only have enough money to renew 150 bathrooms and 150 kitchens a year, *for the*

*next ten year years*. Yet this year and next over 500 kitchens will be renewed.

Tenants have had above inflation rent increases for a number of years. Such increases will lead to higher arrears as tenants who don't receive housing benefit struggle to pay higher rents whilst the housing benefit bill will increase.

## **One Year of the 'bedroom tax'**

**A**fter one year of the 'bedroom tax' in Swindon there are still 846 households affected. Only 140 have moved to smaller accommodation. Despite handing out 'Discretionary Housing Payments' to some of those affected, nearly half are in arrears. The government's policy was supposed to free up family homes, but it is mostly these homes that are being sold under 'right to buy'. The government is preventing Councils building more homes and pressing them to push up Council rents to the "affordable rent" level.

Last year **STCG** collected over 2,200 signatures to a petition calling on the Council to press for the 'bedroom tax' to be ended. They voted down the proposal. They also cut Council Tax benefit to some of the poorest households. Some of these people got caught twice, having to find money to pay 14% or 25% of their rent and 20% of their CTB.

**We will carry on campaigning until the 'bedroom tax' is repealed.**

## **How can they say we're all in it together?**

*Whilst the poor are being punished for being on housing benefit, in Westminster the political elite are still rolling in the money. Tenant **Andrew Barber** wrote this to point up the difference between how we are treated and they are treated; with apologies to the Sound of Music.*

How do you solve a problem like Maria?  
It seems that her expenses claims are fake.  
How do you solve a problem like Maria?  
She's just another MP on the take.  
How can they say we're all in it together  
If she can dodge the laws that catch us all?  
If she'd claimed JSA  
Or even ESA  
They'd sanction her then send the police to call.  
How do you solve a problem like Maria?  
Prosecute her. Prosecute them all.