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the door!**

a million voices
for a million homes



a million
voices
for
public
services

Campaign for affordable housing

UNISON
West Midlands

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Foreword by Dave Prentis UNISON GENERAL SECRETARY AND Roger McKenzie UNISON REGIONAL SECRETARY

This publication is part of a campaign in the West Midlands under the banner of our national “million voices” campaign.

With many thousands of our members working in public housing we have direct experience of the statistic that shows that there are a million fewer homes available for rent from councils and housing associations than there were in 1979. That is why we have started our campaign “a million voices for a million homes”.

UNISON has been campaigning for many years to make affordable housing a key priority. Everyone has the right to a decent home – a home that is affordable, warm, secure, free from damp, well maintained and accessible.

We welcome the recent decision by Government to start building Council houses again. Investing in house building makes social and economic sense and stimulates the economy by providing jobs in the construction industry.

We are pleased by the outcome of the YouGov poll that we commissioned which shows that almost four fifths of adults in the West Midlands think that affordable housing should be a priority election issue. **UNISON** calls on candidates of all parties to say how they are going to address this.

UNISON West Midlands has launched an on-online petition calling for more action to address the shortage of affordable homes which we hope that tens of thousands of members of the public will sign up to so that we can increase

pressure on the decision makers to make affordable housing a priority.

UNISON also recognises that the issue of affordable housing is complex. It is important not to repeat the mistakes of recent history when priority was given to the number of ‘units’ that could be built rather than whether they were fit for the future. This is why in producing this publication we are proud to have teamed up with the Town and Country Planning Association, Age (UK) and the Empty Homes Agency charities to look at those aspects of the issue in which they have particular expertise.

We hope this publication and the campaign which it launches will do much to stimulate the debate about, and the commitment to, the provision of affordable housing.



Dave Prentis
General Secretary
UNISON



Roger McKenzie
Regional Secretary
UNISON
West Midlands



Affordable Housing Should Be Election Issue

SAYS NEW POLL

UNISON has been campaigning for affordable housing to be a key political priority over a number of years. A new poll of people living in the West Midlands region, commissioned by the union, shows that we are far from alone.



The poll, carried out by YouGov, found that almost four fifths of adults in the West Midlands Region (79 per cent) think that affordable housing should be one of the priority issues that political parties seek to address as part of the forthcoming election campaign.

Three in ten respondents (30 per cent) said that they would be more likely to back a party at the election if it promised to deliver more affordable housing. Those living in the private rented sector (9 per cent of total) are more likely (45 per cent) to back a political party that promises to deliver more affordable housing. The results showed: -

- 66 per cent of respondents gave strong backing to the idea that local authorities should purchase some of the 62,000 privately owned empty properties in the West Midlands and to let them for affordable rents.
- Affordable housing is a priority issue *and the poll shows* how people living in the West Midlands are coping with current housing costs. One in five respondents (20 per cent) indicated that they are worried that their housing costs are too high relative to their income, though that figure rises to almost one in four of those who have a mortgage (24 per cent) and three in ten of those in the private rented sector (30 per cent).

- Of those people with a mortgage (the biggest single group – 41% of the total), more than one in four (26%) is in a household that pays out more than half of its total net income on housing costs each month. More than one in ten households (11%) pay out more than 70% of their net income on their mortgage.

Addressing the need for affordable housing is never going to be straightforward in the best of times, let alone during a recession.

UNISON's poll in the West Midlands shows there is support for housing being a priority issue for politicians in our region and that there are political dividends for those who step up to the mark.

The poll also shows the precarious nature of housing for a significant proportion of the population in the West Midlands as a consequence of the house price bubble.

Addressing the affordable housing crisis will help to guard against such problems and their far reaching economic consequences repeating themselves.



Affordable Homes

Despite the recent fall in house prices due to the recession, it is still difficult for families and young people to buy their own home. House prices have doubled in real terms in the last decade. There is a huge unmet need to provide more affordable homes both to rent and to buy.

What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is low cost housing for sale or rent, often from a council or housing association, to meet the needs of local people. The 'low cost' needs to be determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices.



Affordable housing includes social rented, shared ownership and shared equity provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

Who provides it?

Local authorities were the main providers of social housing prior to the creation of **Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)** and despite dwindling numbers, local authorities still have a great deal of social housing. Some local authorities such as Solihull and Sandwell in the West Midlands region have set up **Arms Length Management Organisations**

(ALMOs) to manage their housing. The Government has recently empowered local authorities to begin a new round of council house building which will deliver over two thousand new homes. In recent years a number of councils have transferred ownership of their houses to an RSL. This transfer has made RSLs, more commonly known as Housing Associations, the main provider of affordable housing. RSLs lie between **private landlords** and **local councils** in providing housing to those in need.



What is the size of the problem – in England?

The housing charity Shelter believes that more than two million people find their rent or mortgage a constant struggle or are falling behind with payments and that some homeless households - many with dependent children - wait for years in temporary accommodation.

Affordable Homes

What is the size of the problem – in the West Midlands?

The National Housing Federation has warned that the region is facing an unprecedented surge in waiting lists for affordable housing with households facing years of waiting before they have any hope of being allocated a home.

In 2009 the region had a target of 6,000 new affordable homes but only 5,100 (85%) were completed. This was a considerable improvement on 2008 when affordable house building was 27% below target. **UNISON** believes that the targets themselves are nowhere near the level required to meet the need.

Repossessions

The recession has, inevitably, led to an increase in repossessions. The Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) originally anticipated that 2009 would be as bad for home-owners as 1991, when as many as 75,000 houses and flats were repossessed.

However, throughout 2009 the CML downgraded their forecast to 48,000 and believe this is as a result of 'lender forbearance, government measures and the beneficial effect of continuing low interest rates which are helping most borrowers facing difficulty to keep their homes.'

CML Director General Michael Coogan has stated that: ...“public spending cuts and higher taxes could choke off recovery. So, although we have become more optimistic, we remain cautious about market prospects.”



Empty Homes

There were 72,000 empty homes in the West Midlands in 2008 of which 63,000 were privately owned.

UNISON believes that this is a scandal and that Councils should be given the resources to purchase many of these homes and rent them as affordable housing. The charity Empty Homes Agency, which works with Government nationally to address the issue of empty homes writes:

“In a weak housing market, market pressures alone are insufficient to encourage owners of empty homes to bring them back into use. After the longest housing boom in history, we still have three quarters of a million empty homes and the numbers continue to rise but house building is in the doldrums. With the right financial package, it would be possible to encourage property owners and the building industry to bring substantial amounts of homes back into use, many of which could become affordable housing - partly addressing the undersupply of affordable housing and resolving the social problems caused by vacant and abandoned property.

Today there is little stimulus, indeed there are factors such as council tax discounts (50% in any councils) that encourage owners to do nothing. In addition there are some properties (often those that are in very poor condition and causing problems to neighbours) that will never come back into use unless direct help (and occasionally enforcement) is carried out by local authorities. Many local authorities are skilled and effective at bringing empty homes into use, but in 2009 sixty councils brought no homes into use despite between them sitting on a total of over 60,000 empty

homes, some in areas which have acute housing needs.

We think that what is needed is a fiscal stimulus that encourages property owners to get their empty homes back into use and help for councils and housing associations to enable them to help. To do this we think the government should:

- Offer targeted reduction of VAT on costs of refurbishment of empty homes to 5%. In our view this would turn round the viability of many derelict properties and evidence from EU countries where this has happened shows that the stimulus increases net receipts to Treasury and creates more jobs in construction.



- Remove discounted council tax for owners of empty homes. This will act as an incentive to owners of empty homes to seek rental income from their property and get them into use.

Empty Homes

- Expand the existing Temporary Social Housing Grant scheme from the HCA. Grants should be available to homelessness charities and cooperatives and directly to property owners as well as housing associations to bring empty property into use for social housing.
- Whilst it is clear that Government activity helped reduce

this figure to the lower 2007 figure, it is evident that the credit crunch has raised the bar again leading to further challenges.

- Therefore, we must continue to deliver increased funding for social housing if we are to overcome this striking challenge in the West Midlands.”

Affordable Homes For Young People

The housing crisis has led to more young adults in their 20s and 30s living with their parents than at any point in the last twenty years. This trend has been identified in the recent 'population trends' (Winter 2009) report by the Office of National Statistics. Indeed, of those young adults still living with their parents, a third of these are directly due to being unable to get a foot on the property ladder.

The housing crisis has trapped a generation. Youth unemployment and high levels of student debt have

contributed to the rise of this demographic. However, even those in work cannot afford to move out of the family home as first-time buyers now face house prices that are, on average, five times average incomes, compared with a multiple of three times 20 years ago.

There are also regional variations with the proportion of young adults living with their parents at its highest in Northern Ireland, the West Midlands, outer London and parts of the north-east.



Affordable Homes For Older People



UNISON asked the national charity Age (UK) for its views on affordable housing for older people:

“The needs of older people are no longer a marginal concern in the delivery of affordable housing. Government figures estimate that by 2026 older people will make up almost half of the increase in the total number of households¹. In the West Midlands we will see an estimated 33% increase in people over 65 by 2025 and a 50% increase in those over 80². At the same time the number of older people suffering dementia in the West Midlands is likely to increase by 45% by 2025.

These demographic pressures mean that we must take our ageing population into account when we plan and design homes and communities.

The social sector has a critical role to play in the delivery of affordable housing to older people, while supporting those who wish to remain at home and contributing to the supply of retirement housing. Building affordable retirement housing will allow older people to live independently for longer and offers significant savings by reducing demand on health and social care services. It also increases the availability of family size housing by giving older people affordable, high quality and low maintenance housing alternatives.

As well as affordability we need to ensure that all new homes in the West Midlands comply with basic design and accessibility standards, such as lifetime homes standards. We need to age proof new homes so that as our needs change we can easily adapt and improve our stock of social housing. All social housing needs to be built within neighborhoods and communities that allow older people easy access to local shops and services with good transport links.

For older people already living in poor conditions we need to extend the Government’s ‘Decent Homes Initiative’ and do more by investing in home improvement agencies and handy person schemes, designed to tackle basic repairs and adaptations. Without intervention, it is estimated that in the West Midlands the numbers of older people visiting hospitals following a fall is likely to increase to 22,000 by 2025. Schemes to carry out basic improvements and energy efficiency measures would benefit older people, provide long term savings, maintain our housing stock and create employment.

1 CLG 2008 – Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – p.11

2 CLG 2008 – Sustainable planning for housing in an ageing population – page 27 (based on DH ‘Projecting Older People’s Population Information System (POPPI) and ONS Sub national Population Projects

Affordable Homes

TENANTS' LEADERS' VIEWS

UNISON speaks to two tenants' leaders to get their views:

Jean Bigby, Chair of Arthur Greenwood Court Tenants' Association, Wolverhampton told **UNISON**:

"There's 57 flats here, there are a lot of children now, we never used to have children in here we used to have a policy. They should make more houses, I mean it does really want a lot more houses for families. How it is now there are kids having kids so I don't know what the answer is really but they could do with a lot more houses to put these families in with children, children need a garden to play in. I don't think there is anything for children in any multi storey flats. Its very rare you find one with a garden for them to play in."

Clive Keen, Chair of the Residents Association & the Scrutiny Panel with Trent & Dove Housing Association, Burton-on-Trent told us:



"Basically throughout my life I've never been in a position to buy. I'm happy with this particular housing association, if there's a little bit of graffiti we remove it straight away, if there's any fly tipping its got rid of straight away. By doing that we've improved the estate, now the stigma is disappearing we're producing nice estates to live on. If you've got a landlord that will listen to you that's fine, if you've got a landlord that will take your money and not give a damn what you're doing it's never going to work, you have to have a two way conversation."

Affordable Homes And The Challenge Of Climate Change

Climate change is the greatest challenge ever faced by our environment and, for that matter, the human race. It threatens the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

Climate change is caused by the emission of green house gases (mostly CO²) which is created when fossil fuels, such as coal, gas and oil, are burned to create energy (heat and electricity) and power our vehicles.

The Government has passed the Climate Change Act¹ which aims to secure a reduction in emissions of 80 per cent by 2050, with an interim target of 34 per cent cuts by 2020. It has also established a committee to advise the Government on how it should achieve this target and how the effort should be spread across different sectors. This has estimated that approximately 25 million homes in the UK account for around a quarter of the UK's CO² emissions.

1 Climate Change Act, 2008 enacted on 26 November 2008

Affordable Homes And The Challenge Of Climate Change

The Government suggests that emissions from homes need to be reduced by 35% on today's levels by 2022 in order to meet carbon budgets.

This means that emissions need to be cut from existing homes by improving energy efficiency and new homes need to be energy efficient.

Improving energy efficiency

Improving energy efficiency is partly about the personal action that everyone can take in their homes to switch off lights and appliances, to turn heating down and recycle more. It's also about how homes can be refurbished, with better insulation, more energy efficient appliances and heating systems. **UNISON** supports such measures, and believes that to



be effective these should be rolled out on a house by house, street by street basis. We think that such schemes will work best if they are local government led because councils are trusted and know their areas best. We also support such schemes on the basis that they create jobs and help tackle fuel poverty by enabling people to save on fuel bills.

The Local Government Association has estimated that a local authority led energy efficiency programme to provide basic insulation measures to 10m homes at a cost of £5bn would create 20,000 jobs. In addition to this they estimate a further 5,000 jobs could be created in a complimentary programme to provide solid wall insulation to 300,000 homes.



Cross Street South developed for Wolverhampton City Council by Bromford Housing has just won the Building For Life awards and has scored the highest ever, partly for its sustainability features.

Zero carbon homes and Eco towns

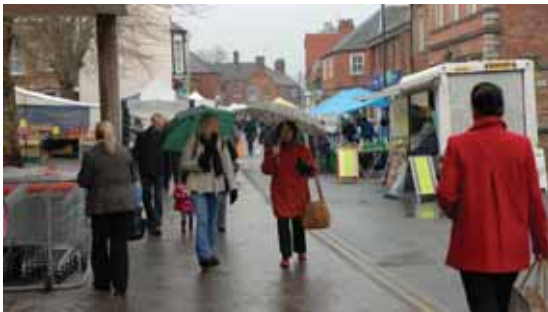
The government has said that all new homes should be zero carbon by the year 2016. They have also promised to build new 'eco towns', which will be new towns designed to meet the need for new homes in a way which is friendly to the environment. Again **UNISON** supports these developments in principle as a way of

creating jobs and homes and helping to tackle climate change. We also believe that it is important that new homes are close enough to where people work to minimise travel related emissions and commute times. In the West Midlands there are plans to build an Eco town at Middle Quinton, between Stratford Upon Avon in Warwickshire and Evesham in Worcestershire.

Affordable Homes And The Workers

In the West Midlands we need more affordable homes that are close to where people work. It does not make environmental or social sense if people can't afford to live close to their workplace. The environment suffers if people have to travel long distances to work and of course the time they spend travelling means they have less time for their families, their children and for themselves.

It is economic madness for either Councils or Housing Associations to be making staff in their development teams redundant when the West Midlands needs more homes – but that is what is happening.



Skills

Good housing management is also about a wide range of staff with different skills and knowledge. Between them they strive to deliver a quality housing service. They include the wardens and alarm workers, the cleaners and caretakers, the plumbers and carpenters, the housing officers and the neighbourhood wardens, the electricians and the gas fitters, the housing benefits staff and the anti-social behaviour teams, the housing support workers and the housing advice team as well as the tenant support workers and housing managers.

Housing workers are part of the local community and their spending is part

of the local economy. Like everyone else they have families to support, mouths to feed, rent to pay or mortgages to meet. Some **UNISON** members have been faced with cuts to their pay, reduced pension entitlements and longer working hours. Cutbacks not only mean a poorer service for tenants and leaseholders they mean higher workloads and greater stress for staff and some people losing their jobs. If their pay is cut they have less to spend in the local economy.



Economic sense

Building new homes doesn't just provide homes for people who need them. It makes economic sense and is one of the most effective ways of creating jobs because it is 'labour intensive'. The House Builders Federation says that for every 10,000 additional homes completed, an extra 15,000 direct house building jobs will be created.

Economists will tell you that:-

- housebuilding creates more jobs than other forms of capital investment;
- for every 10 jobs created by expanding the affordable housing programme at least another 7 jobs will be sustained elsewhere in the economy;

Affordable Homes And The Workers

- investment in affordable housing counters deprivation and fuel poverty, and thereby takes pressure off budgets for health, education, crime reduction;

- housing investment provides a significant boost to the economy but it also reduces housing stress, homelessness and fuel poverty;

- land and construction costs have all fallen sharply making this a good time to invest more in affordable housing.

Of course getting people into work means that more people are paying their taxes and there is less need for welfare benefits, so it makes sense for the taxpayer too.

Funding New House Building

In 1970 - 40 years ago – between them, local authorities and housing associations across the UK were building 150,000 new homes a year. But even those figures represent building at a rate about 50 per cent of the post war peak when 300,000 new homes – largely in cottage estates were built each year. Councils financed that new housing by taking out 50 or 60 year loans. There is no reason why new affordable housing programmes cannot return to the levels seen in 1970.

Affordable Housing needs some ‘public subsidy’ – it always has - either in the form of a grant towards the initial capital costs of construction (known as a bricks and mortar subsidy) or in the form of an income stream (revenue subsidy) that will contribute to supporting the debt charges on borrowing. **UNISON** believes that changes to the way

council housing is financed can unlock the investment that is needed by allowing councils to borrow against their asset base and future rental income streams. It also makes sense for the UK to adopt the same accounting measures and conventions as our partners in the European Union where the rules set a maximum general government gross debt level at 60 per cent.

Registered Social Landlords or Housing Associations have a vital contribution to make too. The financial model that underpinned new Housing Association house building relied upon Associations building a larger share of properties for ‘sale’ to cross subsidise the homes for ‘rent’. The model is discredited. If housing associations are to contribute to the affordable housing that the West Midlands needs, capital grants will be needed.

Funding New House Building

Public expenditure on housing shifted dramatically in the 80s and 90s.

In 1978 about 68% of public spending on housing was 'bricks and mortar' or capital subsidies with just 10% spent on housing benefit or revenue subsidies. But by 1995 capital subsidies had fallen to 27% and the proportion spent on housing benefit had risen to 49%. Since then the share of overall spending on housing accounted for by housing benefit has risen and in 2007/08 Housing Benefit expenditure accounted for £15.878bn in Great Britain. Reversing this trend is another important measure that is needed.



Amarjit Sagoo, **UNISON** Steward at Sandwell Homes welcomes funding for building new council houses

"Housing is the building block of public services and we need to get it right for people. There is a clearly established demand for affordable housing for younger people and larger families in Sandwell that this new development will aim to address.

"The announcements in September 2009 and January 2010 of government

Green light for new house building

The Government launched its Housing Pledge in June 2009 as part of its Building Britain's Future plans. To date over £1 billion has been spent on housing with £6 billion in total to be spent by the end of the programme.

The funding includes an extra £1.5 billion to facilitate 20,000 new affordable homes by 2010 and create around 45,000 construction jobs. The extra funding will mean that Councils and Housing Associations can build around 15,500 new affordable homes for social rental.

It is the first time for many years that Councils have been able to build significant new housing. The money is also being used to help restart construction on stalled construction sites, through Kickstart Housing Delivery.

cash to build a total of 43 new Council houses is just the start here in Sandwell.

"We need to expand the role of council housing and housing association homes to meet the housing needs of ordinary people – of families of all ages."

Increasing Housing Supply In The West Midlands

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) has looked into the problem of affordable housing supply in the West Midlands for **UNISON** and suggests measures to deal with it.



A regular supply of affordable housing is fundamental to well-being and economic prosperity in the West Midlands and across the rest of the UK. Yet for more than 30 years the gap between the number of houses, particularly affordable ones, and the number of people wanting a house has widened. But, as the Prime Minister said in mid -2007, "... putting affordable housing within the reach not just of the few but the many is vital both to meeting individual aspirations and a better future for our country."ⁱ

Despite this fundamental truth there are still not enough affordable houses being built. Monitoring by the West Midlands Regional Assembly found that against the regional target of 7,000 dwellings per year that in 2007/2008 the number of affordable houses built was 27% below target, while in 2008/2009 performance was 15% below target.

The economic downturn will make this housing gap even worse.

Overall demand for housing will grow as people live longer, more people live on their own and the number of people in the region growsⁱⁱ. The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU)ⁱⁱⁱ, who provide expert advice on housing issues to the Government, say that 23,200 new houses are needed annually in the region for the next 20 years if current demand and the backlog is to be tackled.



Many of these houses must be affordable for ordinary working people as new houses become increasing costly, particularly for people on low incomes such as many workers in crucial public services.

Analysis by Shelter^{iv} illustrates the scale of the problem. In Birmingham 19,190 households are on waiting lists, in Coventry it is 22,935 while in Sandwell it is 11,767. These backlogs will take anything from 2½ to 8½ years to clear. The longest wait for a house in the region is 15½ years in Telford and Wrekin.

The shortage of affordable housing dates back to the early 1980s when public funding of affordable housing was slashed and Right-to-Buy sales were introduced. These policy measures not only reduced the amount of affordable housing (especially good quality housing) to rent but the capital receipts were not reinvested in new houses.

i 'Statement to the House of Commons on the draft legislative programme' Gordon Brown MP, 10 July 2007, ii Household Projections to 2031, England, CLG, 2009, iii More homes for more people: Advice to Ministers on housing levels to be considered in regional plans, NHPAU, July 2009 iv Council House Waiting Lists, 2008 – 2009, Shelter – data accessed from www.shelter.org.uk on 19 1 09

Increasing Housing Supply In The West Midlands

Combined with this cutback since the 1980s Government policy has increasingly relied on the private market and 'Section 106' agreements between local authorities and developers to deliver affordable housing. For example out of the 3,077 affordable houses built in the West Midlands in 2006 - 2007, 51% were completed using Section 106 money^v.

What is Section 106? How does it work?

Under S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 contributions can be sought by local councils from developers building private houses or other development. It is increasingly now being used to fund the building of affordable housing.

To work, Section 106 agreements require the cost of land to keep rising to encourage private house building. The economic downturn means this source of affordable housing has dropped dramatically.

To counter this, the Government is taking some action in the short term across the region through its housing delivery arm, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The HCA will invest over £300m with development partners to secure over 7,500 new affordable homes up to 2011 in the West Midlands. Another £100m will be invested in North Staffordshire, Birmingham and Sandwell through the Housing Market Renewal programme to deliver new housing as well as refurbishing current properties.

The Places of Change and the Growth Points programmes will see £87m invested in the region by 2011 to deliver housing.



Where housing development projects are stalled the Kickstart programme has been introduced by the HCA to maintain housing delivery. To date, 35 schemes have been short-listed to receive up to £109 million and a potential to deliver 2,842 new homes in the next few years. However the Government's housing quality design watchdog, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), has expressed concern that many of the schemes on the programme were poorly laid out, are small internally, have inflexible housing types and so do not meet the standards required for public funding.

What about beyond 2011? How can we boost housing supply, guarantee quality to ensure future proofing and build more sustainable mixed communities? First it is important to recognise that there are no quick fixes but the TCPA would suggest:

- The Government and local authorities must maintain investment to support housing in both the private and public sectors. Cuts in the budget for new build housing

^v Potential Affordable Housing Delivery for the West Midlands: Survey of local authorities, 2008: West Midlands Regional Assembly, June 2008, P7

Increasing Housing Supply In The West Midlands



risks worsening the housing crisis at a time when the economy is starting to recover.

- More land needs to be released with planning permission for development. It must be better managed to increase the supply and variety of new family homes.
- New housing delivery models such as Community Land Trusts or joint public – private ventures where the council donates land in return for an equity share in the housing needs to be investigated.
- The percentage of apartments built must also be reduced in future to ensure sustainable communities are built.
- Where Section 106 agreements are in place, but not delivering housing, they need to be renegotiated as a matter of urgency with adjustments to the tenure mix if required to improve viability.
- Regional politicians need say to groups opposed to new house building that people in the West Midlands need decent homes to live in. This may mean a little more land for housing including previously undeveloped land. We can no longer accept more houses crammed into

small parcels of land or our adult children living at home because there is nowhere they can afford to go.

- New developers of housing must be encouraged through tax incentives or special land deals with help for the emerging self-build sector.

As Kate Barker said, in her Review of Housing Supply back in 2004 (commissioned by then Chancellor Gordon Brown), *“I do not believe that continuing at the current rate of house-building is a realistic option, unless we are prepared to accept increasing problems of homelessness, affordability and social division, decline in standards of public service delivery and increasing the costs of doing business in the UK – hampering our economic success.”*



What Needs To Change?

The Government has announced plans to link efforts to increase the number of new affordable homes with the drive to create jobs.

UNISON believes that these welcome moves need to be built upon.

That's why we are calling for a joined up public sector response to the housing crisis:

- a commitment to deliver 1 million affordable homes across the UK by 2015 to meet the housing needs of people on ordinary incomes
- a better choice for people looking for a home with a wider mix of affordable housing options, independent housing advice and an end to the idea that home ownership is the only game in town
- more support for councils to address the historic under-funding of repairs and maintenance costs
- funding for councils to buy-up and bring back into use empty homes
- a duty on local authorities to build new council homes to meet housing need, support local supply chains and create jobs in their local economies
- help housing associations to build on their historic mission to provide homes and be accountable to the communities they serve by developing a new way of doing business that does not rely on the housing market
- security of tenure for all tenants – in council homes, housing associations and the private rented sector
- stability for all housing workers. Decent pay and conditions for people who work for local authorities (including ALMOs), housing associations and in the private sector are essential to delivering decent quality housing services



Add Your Voice



We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign

- Support UNISON's Affordable Housing Campaign and sign our online petition by visiting:
<http://www.unison.org.uk/housingpetition/>
- Talk to your friends, family, work colleagues and neighbours about these issues.
- Raise your concerns with your employer, local media and political candidates.
- Attend your local community/workplace meeting that we have organised – or organise your own – we can help with materials and speakers.
- Join UNISON today by visiting www.unison.co.uk
- If you work in Housing join our network
www.unison.org.uk/handsoffhousing/news_list.asp

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a million
voices
for
public
services

Campaign for affordable housing

UNISON's 'Unlock the Door' campaign in the West Midlands is part of our national Million Voices Campaign which is calling for a commitment to deliver 1 million affordable homes in the UK by 2015.

There is a huge shortage of affordable homes and already there are 5 million people on housing waiting lists and more than 600,000 families are living in overcrowded homes.



UNISON believes that investing in house building makes social and economic sense. It will create jobs in the construction industry and local building workers spend their wages in the local economy. New Council homes, secure funding for housing associations and security for tenants are all essential if we are to tackle this daunting problem. And the 70,000 homes currently empty in the West Midlands need to be brought back into use for families.

This report by **UNISON West Midlands** identifies the urban and rural housing need within the West Midlands region and challenges decision makers to prioritise dealing with the huge shortage of affordable housing and at the same time give a huge boost to the Region's economy.



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