

The Housing Crisis 100 Years on: “Time to invest in a new generation of quality homes”

INTRODUCTION: THE HOUSING CRISIS – A HUNDRED YEARS ON

31 July 2019 marks the 100 year anniversary of the introduction of the Addison Act, formally known as the Housing and Town Planning Act. The 1919 Act, named after the then Minister of Health, Dr Christopher Addison, sought to provide “homes for heroes” after WWI. The Act sought to build 500,000 new homes for working class people within three years across the whole of Britain. Subsequent Acts - the Housing Act 1924, which gave grant funding to local authorities to address acute housing shortages; and the Housing Act 1930, which obliged local authorities to clear slum housing and provided further subsidy – empowered councils to build a total of 1.1million homes during the 1920s and 1930s.

Since 1919 the only times we have built sufficient homes to address housing need across the nation has largely been due to major council house building programmes. A hundred years later the nation faces another crisis. We are simply not building enough homes – particularly social rented homes - to meet housing demand. The crisis has led to spiralling rents and house prices across the nation, causing an affordability crisis for public service workers and citizens on modest incomes, who struggle to afford to rent or buy a decent home.

With housing now the largest single demand on household incomes, it’s crucial that all councils are enabled to build at scale again. However, the focus of government policy and public expenditure has been directed at promoting home-ownership instead of addressing housing need. Further, councils face many challenges, including funding cuts, austerity and government housing policies, which have led to the stealth privatisation of social housing. This means less investment in training new and existing workers, fewer workers doing more and with fewer resources, a challenging bargaining position for public service workers, who deserve a pay rise, all compounded by facing the same affordability crisis experienced by those citizens they serve.

A hundred years after the Addison Act, it’s time for the government to address the twin issues of housing supply and affordability, which underline the causes of poverty and homelessness. Building more council homes will help people on waiting lists access a home, help to tackle homelessness and over-crowding, reduce the housing benefit bill and make housing more affordable for everyone.

The government must provide councils – and housing associations – with the funding and resources needed to build **“a new generation of quality homes”** for people to live in, ensuring that there are secure, decent, safe and truly affordable homes for all.

HOUSING CRISIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CITIZENS AND PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS

The inaction of consecutive governments to tackle the twin issues of supply and affordability across the housing system has meant that both social housing and home-ownership have become increasingly inaccessible. As a consequence, growing numbers of people, including the young, single adults and vulnerable people, are forced to rent in the private rented sector where they often face high rents, insecurity and poor quality housing. In most parts of the UK, the price of renting a home has risen steadily, while public sector salaries have not. This rise in rents combined with pay cuts, is subjecting many to extreme housing stress, including overcrowding, rent arrears, financial hardship and poverty.

UNISON's 2018 report, [Nothing going on but the rent: the housing cost for public service workers in England](#), highlighted the high cost of renting for public sector workers in England. It looked at how much public sector workers spend on rent across five public sector jobs: a porter in NHS England, a special needs teaching assistant, a refuse driver, a nurse and a police community support officer (PCSO), and how much of their monthly salary they have to spend on rent, depending on where they live. The report found that average rents were unaffordable in many regions, especially for people working in low paid jobs such as hospital porters and teaching assistants. In six out of nine English regions, rental costs are more than a third of workers' monthly wage.

In many parts of the country house prices have risen dramatically while median annual earnings (£23,327) are still 3.2% less than in 2008 (£24,088). According to the Halifax the average deposit needed by a first-time buyer is now £32,000 (over £100,000 in London) and 60% of first-time buyers are taking out mortgages that last longer than 25 years.

UNISON's 2018 report, [Priced Out: home ownership and public sector workers](#), shows that owning a home has become virtually impossible for many of our public sector workers - including NHS cleaners, teaching assistants, librarians, nurses and police and community support workers – living in the majority of local authority areas across England, Scotland and Wales. The report shows that saving the money for a deposit on a property would take decades or more than a century for public service workers in some parts of the country.

The consequences of house prices increasing faster than earnings are numerous: delayed access to the owner occupied sector, an increase in the number and length of time adults live with their parents, delays to couples starting a family, an increasing divide between families with housing wealth and those without, and long and costly commutes because workers can't afford to live near their places of work.

With increasing numbers of public service workers priced out of the housing market – and in extreme housing stress - it is clear that the private sector alone cannot be relied on to provide the level and quality of truly affordable housing the country so desperately needs. A key component of any solution must be the return of major public sector house building programmes.

TACKLING THE HOUSING CRISIS

As we mark 100 years of council housing UNISON wants to see:

- A national house-building programme led by councils to build at least 100,000 social rented homes per year for workers on modest incomes
- Long-term funding certainty for councils – alongside housing associations - to enable them to build in-house capacity, develop skills and expertise and invest in new and existing homes
- A new definition of “affordable housing” linked to the incomes of people in the lowest income distribution, not market prices, to ensure homes are truly affordable
- The Government deliver on its commitments set out in the Social Housing Green Paper, including plans to reform the Right to Buy, and plans to establish a new redress, consumer and regulatory system in social housing
- The Government to overhaul the private housing system to improve rights for tenants to make private renting more stable and affordable, and to improve the quality of housing, including plans to empower councils to introduce borough-wide private landlord licensing schemes
- Secure tenancies in council homes, housing association homes and in the private rented sector
- An end to the privatisation of council housing stock, services and jobs, including abolishing the Right to Buy and ending the conversion of social homes to “so-called affordable rents”

UNISON is campaigning for more housing that is affordable to our members, their families and the wider public; as well as campaigning to safeguard social housing and the workforce who deliver this essential public service.

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- UNISON Housing Website: <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/community/key-issues/housing/>