

Popular opposition grows to London Newham council's social cleansing policies

Our reporters

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On October 20, the “Focus E15 Social Housing, not Social Cleansing” campaign held a meeting on the first anniversary since Newham borough council in east London forced through cuts, provoking eviction notices for 29 young mothers. The meeting brought together campaigns across London in protest of the deliberate policy of destroying social housing.

In early 2013, as a result of budget cuts of £41,000 in funding to the Supporting People programme, financial support for the 16 young parent units was withdrawn from the Focus E15 210-bed hostel. The hostel opened in 1996 and provides temporary accommodation for homeless under-25s.

In response to the cuts, Thames Housing Association issued eviction notices to the mothers living at the hostel.

These attacks are part of £64 million in budget cuts being imposed by Newham's Labour Party-controlled council in 2013-14.

Speaking about the social impact of the cuts to such critical services, Rick Henderson, chief executive of Homeless Link, which represents UK homelessness charities, told the *Guardian*, “They have cut services to the bone, so now even the smallest cuts can tip a service over the edge. These stories will become weekly occurrences if we are not careful.”

Newham council then tried to force the mothers to accept social housing between 70 and 200 miles away, in Manchester, Hastings and Birmingham. These are far away from their jobs, families and support networks that in many cases stretch back over one hundred years.

The mothers demanded they be given new housing in London and be granted secure tenancies. Due to widespread hostility to what would have amounted to the largest single act of social cleansing in Britain, the council were forced to find accommodation for all but

one of the mothers in London.

To highlight the broader issues of social cleansing across the capital, the mothers began an occupation of an empty block of former social housing flats at the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, east London. The estate is opposite the £517 million Olympic Stadium constructed for the 2012 sporting event. The council decided not to renovate the estate but to knock it down. There are only 36 residents left. The mothers who occupied the housing demanded an end to evictions and for the estate to be repopulated.

Newham council threatened to evict them from the occupation within 24 hours, smearing it as “increasingly aggressive”, with Newham Mayor Robin Wales describing the flats as being “illegally occupied”.

The council was forced to retreat from this action due to the widespread support won by the mothers. The occupation ended when campaigners agreed in court to leave by October 7, after successfully highlighting the social cleansing policies of Newham council.

The move by the council against the E15 mothers and their families is further confirmation of the right-wing programme of the Labour Party. Newham council has pioneered social cleansing in London. In 2012, the council, which at that point had some 32,000 people on its housing waiting list, approached over 1,100 housing agencies in a bid to house 500 families. In their efforts to move the families out of the capital, they contacted housing agencies across the Midlands including Stoke-on-Trent, 160 miles away.



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