

Notes on London's housing crisis

London borough council housing has 50-year waiting list

Allison Smith
9 December 2016

London's Barking and Dagenham borough has 50-year waiting list for council housing

In the historically Labour Party-controlled east London borough of Barking and Dagenham, property prices have increased 40 percent since 2008, and homelessness has increased by 350 percent since 2012.

Since 1980, the borough has lost 50 percent of its council housing stock, most recently through the right-to-buy scheme. Despite being among the top 10 most deprived boroughs, it has not increased the availability of council and affordable housing. The borough, which has 50 times more people on the waiting list than available properties, has a 50-year waiting list for council housing.

Home Office threatens to deport rough-sleeping European Union migrants

This spring, the United Kingdom Home Office issued updated guidance that makes rough sleeping grounds for "administrative removal" (deportation). The guidance enables enforcement agencies to deport European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who are sleeping rough, even if they have been in the UK for less than three months or are otherwise exercising their Treaty Rights, including people who have permanent residence status.

Even before the rough-sleeping guidance was issued, the Home Office Immigration Enforcement in London was working to deport rough-sleeping EEA nationals. In 2013, Paul Wylie, head of Home Office Immigration Enforcement in London, stated, "[W]here foreign nationals with no permission to be in the UK refuse to return home voluntarily we will take action to remove them. This includes those from within the European Economic Area who have been in the country for longer than three months and are not working, studying or self-sufficient, as required by EU law."

Employers offering minimum wage and zero-hour contracts exploit many migrants entering the UK for work. Precarious working conditions, coupled with the staggering increase in the cost of living and cuts to social welfare, have forced many

migrants into homelessness.

London charities worked with Home Office to deport rough-sleeping migrants

A new report by the Greater London Authority reveals that former London Mayor Boris Johnson paid local homeless charities, including Thames Reach and St Mungo's, to help the local government deport rough-sleeping non-UK nationals in a payment by results scheme. The Social Impact Bond programme used methods such as forced removals from the country to eliminate more than 800 "entrenched" rough sleepers from London streets.

In 2013, the United Kingdom Border Control worked with six London boroughs in threatening immigrants to "go home" or face arrest. The campaign was aimed at diverting attention from the real socio-economic problems caused by the government's austerity measures, by dividing workers along ethnic lines in order to impose further austerity.

St Mungo's charity threatens London tenants with eviction notices

Weeks ago, St Mungo's, a homeless charity and housing association in London, handed out Section 21 eviction notices to tenants living in the charity-owned Arlington Flats in the south London borough of Lewisham. The notices said many of the residents were being evicted because "their circumstance has changed."

Some residents worry that they will have no place to go, as they have been told by Lewisham Council that they will not be on the priority list for housing.

Section 21 is the first step in the eviction process. Under pressure from charities and residents, St Mungo's spokesperson, Kellie Murphy, said that no tenants will be evicted in November, as

planned. However, St Mungo's will not assure help to all tenants. "Rather, we want to agree with people their personal tenancy situation and plan next steps, if appropriate, from there," she said.

One of those sent eviction notices told the politics.co.uk web site, "I'm so stressed out about this. I've got no place to go, but St Mungo's have basically told me that I have outstayed my welcome. They told me to go to the local council for help. I have done that, but they've told me I would not be classed as in priority need to be housed."

According to Trust for London, nearly 12 percent of workers in Lewisham receive out-of-work benefits—the fourth highest in London—and 63 percent of Lewisham students qualify for free school lunches. Life expectancy in the borough is lower than the London average.

London Underground management describes homeless as "dirty" and "smelly"

A recent guidance memo issued by London Underground management advised staff that "vagrants" gaining access to the Underground "are often dirty and smelly, but in reality, they are usually fairly amenable to being moved on, although there is always the exception."

Management also encouraged staff to immediately call police and ensure the CCTV cameras are functioning to document them.

After the memo was leaked to the media, it was roundly condemned as inhumane, forcing London Underground's chief operating officer to apologise.

In recent years, Transport for London (TfL), which operates the London Underground, has partnered with enforcement agencies to decant homeless residents from TfL properties. They have often used harsh methods, including hacking apart the Embankment underground garden space, sending bailiffs and police to evict a dozen homeless migrants living in the Hogarth roundabout in Chiswick, and threatening to sell off TfL land where a homeless camp had been erected.

Increase in the number of homeless veterans

The sharp increase in joblessness since the 2008 economic crisis began has led to a significant rise in the number of youth and young workers enlisting in the armed forces as a way out of poverty.

However, after military service, severe medical and emotional needs lead many veterans to become homeless and dependent on food banks. Some even end up in prison. These problems are exacerbated for homeless veterans in cities like London because of the staggering cost of living.

According to government statistics, as many as 4 percent of the homeless population report having a military connection. This is

consistent with the Veterans Aid charity, who found that only 94 to 95 percent of those who leave the Armed Forces are able to settle into employment in civilian life

Welfare benefit cap threatens children with homelessness

Research by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) reveals that the UK government welfare benefits cap, reduced by as much as £6,000 this year, will make private rents unaffordable for many families and could lead to as many as 300,000 homeless children.

It is expected that 22 percent of families with two children will lose as much as £25 per week in private rentals. More than 10 percent of families will lose between £26 and £50 per week, leaving thousands one redundancy or period of ill health away from being homeless.

The research shows that in London, even though the benefit cap at £26,000 is £3,000 higher than elsewhere in the country, families will not have enough to fully compensate for the higher cost of housing. As a result, some 18,000 families will be affected in the capital, with as many as 17,500 hit in the South East.

CIH Chief Executive Terrie Alafat said, "We are seriously concerned that this could have a severe impact on these families, make housing in large sections of the country unaffordable and risk worsening what is already a growing homelessness problem."

London housing crisis "hotspots" popular with holidaymakers

Residents and charity workers in London are concerned that areas including Tower Hamlets and Hackney will continue to have a chronic shortage of long-term, affordable accommodation—in part because of the popularity of holidaymakers looking for alternatives to the hotel market on private rental sites such as Airbnb.

As an example, in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets, landlords can earn as much as £151 per night on Airbnb, whereas long-term rentals earn an average of £568 per week.

Tower Hamlets Council reports that 20,000 residents are on the council housing waiting list.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact