

Labour’s “politics of home” and the brutal reality of Britain’s housing crisis

Alex Brown
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At the start of the month, soon to be ex-Prime Minister Keir Starmer published an opinion piece in the *Guardian* championing Labour’s supposed “radical programme of rebuilding”. But the policies outlined in Starmer’s “politics of home” do next to nothing to address the housing crisis in Britain.

In the piece, Starmer reiterates a 2024 pledge to build 1.5 million new homes by the 2029 general election. The figure of 300,000 a year has long been widely regarded as the minimum necessary. It has not been reached since the 1970s.

In its first full year in office, Labour fell well short, with just 231,000 net additional dwellings built across the UK in the 12 months to November 2025. This was a 6 percent decrease on the previous year.

Figures are frequently worst where demand is highest. Of its 88,000 annual housing target, London met just 6 percent by new dwelling starts, or 38 percent by net additional dwellings. None of Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Bristol or Newcastle managed more than 76 percent of their targets measured by net additional dwellings.

To meet its targets, Labour would have to increase building dramatically, in a capitalist market that has no intention of doing so. Construction costs have increased sharply, with the Home Builders Federation reporting that the price of building an average home has risen by over £76,000 since 2020. According to Zoopla, developers claim development is not “viable”—that is, sufficiently profit-making—in almost half the country.

Starmer’s article touts a £39 billion social and affordable homes programme which Labour claims will deliver “a decade of renewal for social and affordable housing”. In fact, it is a drop in the ocean.

The programme is spread over 10 years. When adjusted for inflation, this is an increase of just £1.1 billion annually over the plans of the previous Tory

government—barely a third of the £3.25 billion in extra funding recently granted the military. It will deliver just 30,000 “affordable homes” a year, of which just 18,000 will be for social rent.

According to Parliamentary research, “research carried out for homelessness charity Crisis and the National Housing Federation identified a need for 145,000 new affordable homes per year, and it said 90,000 of them should be for social rent.” Not only do Labour’s plans come up woefully short, their delivery is even worse: just 12,000 social rent homes were delivered in England in the year to November 2025. In London, rules requiring 35 percent of new developments to be affordable housing were relaxed to 20 percent last October.

Housing charity Shelter notes that “One of the reasons social housebuilding has plunged is because councils, who used to provide the bulk of social housing, are struggling to get shovels in ground. A major barrier for councils is the stranglehold of £29bn worth of historic housing debt that was passed onto them by central government in 2012 as part of a council house financing agreement—the terms of which have been repeatedly broken by successive governments.”

Overall, according to Unison, councils will be facing a budget deficit of over £7.4 billion in the 26-28 period, that is expected to increase further in the following years.

Where affordable homes are built, they are frequently nothing of the kind. “Affordable” housing is defined as 80 percent of market rate, with social rent historically sitting at around 50 percent. With average rent prices over £1,300 a month, and over £2,000 in London, even “affordable” rates are out of reach for millions.

Social rent has also become significantly more expensive, dragged ahead of wages by the explosion of housing costs. On average, a worker today must pay the same proportion of their salary (26-28 percent) on a social rent agreement as they did on an unrestricted agreement

ten years ago.

In his article, Starmer blames the housing crisis on “Tory rule”, under which “Children were left languishing in temporary accommodation, too often without proper places to play, eat and sleep. Families were left in limbo on waiting lists for years.”

The hypocrisy is revolting. After two years of Starmer and Labour in Downing Street, four million people are on waiting lists for social housing, with 1.3 million waiting for over a decade. At current pace, it would take over 119 years to clear the list.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 155 percent in the last 15 years, to over 130,000 households: 400,000 people, including 175,000 children—one in every 47 in London. The figure increased by over 7 percent in Labour’s first year in office. According to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Temporary Accommodation, a staggering 104 children in England died between 2019 and 2025 “with temporary accommodation indicated as a contributing factor to their vulnerability, ill-health, or death.”

Sickeningly, private businesses profit from this distress. Last year, councils spent of £2.8 billion securing temporary accommodation. The *i* newspaper reported last February based on information from roughly half of councils that most of the top 20 beneficiaries were private companies, frequently charging high fees for as little as single-room bed and breakfasts with shared kitchens and bathrooms. In some areas, the government money being creamed by private middle-men is driving up local rents—a vicious circle driving yet more workers into insecurity.

Just above these depths of the social crisis are millions of people struggling to tread water. Over two thirds of the British population, more than 45 million individuals, are affected by housing stress.

Rents have soared 40 percent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, meaning private renters in the lowest income quintile spend 59 percent of their gross household income on rent; young people aged 18-24 also spend over half their wages simply keeping a roof above their heads, frequently forced to delay their independence well into adulthood.

For those who do enter the rental market, 619,000 privately rented homes contain Category 1 hazards posing an immediate risk to life. Many families are trapped in these potentially lethal conditions for decades.

This crisis is the product of 50 years of sustained class assault, carried out as a bipartisan project between Labour and the Conservatives. Today, 13 percent of MPs are

landlords, including 44 Labour members, with a personal interest in the continued exploitation of renters.

Margaret Thatcher’s Right to Buy transferred over two million publicly built homes into private hands. Rent controls were abolished. Buy-to-let mortgages and financial deregulation opened housing to speculative investment on an industrial scale.

Blair built on this legacy, introducing Real Estate Investment Trusts exempt from corporation and capital gains tax. Labour also forced councils to offload housing stock to increasingly privatised housing associations and maintained the Right to Buy scheme which has bled the social housing sector for decades. Starmer’s article criticises the outcomes while boasting that his government is “reforming” (placing some small limitations) on the Thatcherite policy!

Starmer is soon set to be replaced as Labour leader and Prime Minister by former Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham. But nothing better symbolises the continuity between them than housing. Burnham funnelled £1 billion in public loans to luxury property developers. Meanwhile, over 18,000 people are without a home across Greater Manchester, with the average person waiting three years to get one.

To end the housing crisis, workers must build a socialist movement against the Labour government and all the right-wing parties of British capitalism. The only genuine solution is the transfer of land and housing into public ownership, to be provided according to need. The banks, financial institutions, and property corporations that have transformed the basic right to shelter into a speculative asset must likewise be expropriated.

A start could be made with the seizure of Britain’s approximately 150,000 empty second homes, and the over 200,000 owned by rich individuals living abroad.



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