

Housing, Local Government and Transport | Annual Report

Membership 2016/17

HM Opposition

Andy McDonald MP*

Roberta Blackman-Woods MP

John Healey MP

Andrew Gwynne MP†¹

NEC

Jim Kennedy *

Jamie Bramwell

Nick Forbes

Andi Fox

Wendy Nichols

CLPs/Regions

Cllr Rufia Ashraf

Lorraine Beavers

Emma Burnell

Lyndsay Clelland

Cllr Nicky Gavron

Neil Guild

Carol Hayton

Helen Hughes

Cllr Sandy Martin

George McManus

Brenda Weston

Katie Weston

Affiliates

Neil Andrews

Mick Carney

Collette Gibson

Sarah Gill

Tony Woodhouse

Elected Reps

Cllr Angela Cornforth

Julie Elliott MP

Lucy Powell MP

Sharon Taylor

* Co-convenor

†¹ Replaced Teresa Pearce MP

Policy Development

Prior to November 2016, housing, local government and transport policy issues were discussed in two policy commissions: Communities and Transport. This year the policy areas that fell under the remit of the Communities policy commission have been split over two new commissions: the Housing, Local Government and Transport Policy Commission and the Environment, Energy and Culture policy commission.

In September 2016, Diana Holland led the Transport Policy Seminar at Annual Conference in Liverpool. Andy McDonald MP (Shadow Transport Secretary) and Daniel Zeichner MP (Shadow Transport Minister) attended the meeting and discussed a range of topics with delegates. Discussion points included: taking the railways back into public ownership; giving local authorities greater powers over bus services; and airport expansion. There was also an interesting discussion on getting more freight off our roads and onto the rail network.

Jim Kennedy chaired the Communities Policy Seminar. Teresa Pearce MP (Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government), Kelvin Hopkins MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport), Rachael Maskell MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Barry Gardiner MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change) all attended. Delegates raised a number of important topics including increasing investment in flood prevention systems, affordable housing and cuts to local government.

National Policy Forum representatives from across the country met in Loughborough on the weekend of 19 and 20 November 2016 to discuss key policy issues and set the policy development direction for the year to come. There were three dedicated breakout discussions on housing, local government and transport. Representatives discussed issues including: the need to build more council homes; guaranteeing long-term, stable tenancies, with genuinely affordable rents; building more eco-friendly housing; reforming council tax; and tackling the 'buy to leave' market which is leading to an empty housing crisis. Discussions also drew on submissions members made directly to Representatives. On transport topics raised included: greater investment in

transport infrastructure such as Crossrail 2 and HS2; promoting hybrid and electric vehicles; and a strategy to build an environmentally friendly, accessible, affordable, integrated and accountable public transport system with decent employment standards. Following the meeting in November, a document was produced summarising the topics of debate from the NPF weekend. Devolution, improving transport services, reforming the private rented sector and building more council, social and affordable homes were identified as key priorities. These priorities formed the basis of the consultation document produced by the Commission in March.

The newly convened Housing, Local Government and Transport Policy Commission held its first meeting at the beginning of February. Members considered submissions received, the housing composite and motions that were ruled contemporary and non-contemporary from Annual Conference 2016. These included points on taxis, road investment and local government finance. Discussions also centred on the ten pledges that Jeremy Corbyn announced at Annual Conference. It was noted by Commission members that submissions once again demonstrated that housing was a particularly important issue for Party members with concerns around the Right-to-Buy scheme a key topic of debate. Representatives also raised submissions which touched on the possibility of reopening closed railway lines and integrating different modes of transport. There was detailed consideration about the need to make sure that transport services are accessible to disabled passengers which is a key concern for the Commission.

The Commission met again at the end of February, attended by Shadow Ministers from all three departments. Members considered submissions including points on taxis, particularly the effect of the so called 'gig economy'. Representatives raised concerns around taxi licencing, pollution produced by idling cars and the workers' rights of those that work for taxi companies. There was a discussion about the impact of new technology on the taxi industry, the effects of modernisation and cabin crews' rights and conditions, including the recent strike action by BA staff.

Members of the Commission were keen to see discussions around the 'gig economy' and digitalisation play a role in Labour's 'Workplace 2020' review. Submissions also guided the Commission to discussing the Government's piecemeal devolution plans and Labour's approach to cycling and walking initiatives. The Commission debated the effect that leaving the European Union will have on housing, local government and transport. Concerns were raised from submissions that tourism and the aviation industry would be affected, that there would no longer be EU funding for affordable housing and local authorities would lose regional development funding. There was a discussion about the draft consultation document. Members of the Commission agreed with the key themes of the document which were originally proposed by the NPF meeting in November. Commission members expressed their interest in holding consultation meetings with Party members and members of the public more widely over the coming year.

Commission members met in April for their third meeting. The Commission invited people to give expert evidence during the consultation process. Charlotte Aldritt, Director of Public Services and Communities at the RSA, Eileen Short from Defend Council Housing and Alistair Smyth from the National Housing Federation all attended the meeting. In the discussion that followed Commission members reflected on the need to devolve down the funding and responsibility for programmes that look to tackle long-term unemployment. One way to do this is to devolve down responsibility for adult skills which members agreed the current government seems reluctant to do. There was also a consideration of making sure that local authorities have the legal power to tackle rogue landlords. Commission members also raised the idea of ensuring that all homes built on public land are social or council housing and doing more to help first-time buyers onto the housing ladder.

Labour's Manifesto

With the announcement of the snap General Election the policy making process was expedited. Conference calls with the Commission and regional and local government NPF representatives were

held to discuss policy proposals members would like to see in the manifesto.

At the Commission's conference call on the manifesto, NPF representatives listed their priorities for the manifesto by subject area. Commission members outlined a number of policy priorities that members of the Party have contacted them with. Several comments were raised relating to council house building, addressing the skills shortage in the construction sector through quality apprenticeships and homelessness. There were also proposals and ideas on Labour's devolution plans, addressing concerns about the terms and conditions of those that work in our public, transport and construction sector.

Policies and commitments from each of the three department areas were detailed at length in Labour's manifesto. They reflected and built upon submissions and the work of the Commission through the policy development process from this and previous years.

Housing

The dedicated housing section of the manifesto set out the challenge facing a future Labour Government after seven years of failure on housing by the Tories which has seen house building fall to its lowest peacetime level since the 1920s. Building on the work of the Policy Commission and submissions, the Labour manifesto set out a plan to ensure that everyone has a secure home. With homeownership rates falling, Labour committed to building a million homes, including 100,000 council and housing association genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy a year by the end of the Parliament. The manifesto also included proposals to give local councils new powers to build the homes local communities need, insulating more homes, consulting on minimum space standards and keeping the land registry in public hands. Shortly after the manifesto was published, Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Secretary of State for Housing John Healey launched Labour's Housing 'mini manifesto' – 'Labour's New Deal on Housing'. Developing on core ambitions outlined in the main manifesto, it set out a detailed, long-term plan to fix the housing crisis including the biggest council housing programme for more than thirty years, 100,000 discounted FirstBuy Homes for first-time buyers, a consumer rights revolution for

private renters with new minimum standards and three-year tenancies with an inflation cap on rent rises, help for home-owners on ordinary incomes struggling with housing costs, and a commitment to end rough sleeping within a Parliament.

Local Government

The Labour manifesto's section on local communities and local government reiterated Labour's commitment to being the party of devolution. Commission members and submissions highlighted the need to not just devolve powers to local communities but also to devolve funding, a commitment Labour's manifesto made. The manifesto highlighted the slashing of budgets by the Conservatives, hitting local services, from bin collection to road repair, and the loss of important community services such as libraries, youth centres and women's refuges. Labour committed to ensuring local government funding is sustainable for the long term. As part of devolving power Labour will properly resource and bolster planning authorities to put people and communities at the heart of planning. Expanding on the work carried out by not just this Commission but also that which includes the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Labour committed to ensuring that libraries are preserved for future generations with increased funding given to support their work.

Transport

Last year's Transport Policy Commission and this year's Housing, Local Government and Transport Policy Commission were both clear that we need to be investing in a modern, integrated, accessible and sustainable transport system that is reliable and affordable. Labour's manifesto sought to set out policies that will deliver just that kind of transport system. Taking the railway network back into public hands, extending powers to re-regulate local bus services and support the creation of municipal bus companies, protecting routes of critical community value and delivering vital infrastructure to all four corners of our nation were at the heart of the transport section of the manifesto. Submissions also highlighted the importance of tackling cycling safety. Building on the work of the Commission, Labour's manifesto set out plans to make cycling safer and more accessible with national standards to reduce deaths and serious injuries.

Current issues

Building affordable housing

The Commission received many submissions which highlighted the need to build more affordable housing. The Commission is concerned that under the Conservative Government we have seen a cut in investment in housing and an outsourcing of the responsibility for building new homes to big developers. This has meant that since 2010 fewer new homes have been built on average per year than under any governing party in peacetime since the 1920s.

Submissions to the Commission have been clear that we cannot go on like this. Building on the discussions from the Policy Commission, Labour launched a housing 'mini manifesto', 'A New Deal for Housing', during the General Election campaign. As a first step to tackling the affordable house building crisis, a Labour Government will build at least one million homes over five years including 100,000 council and housing association genuinely affordable homes a year by the end of the Parliament, giving local councils new powers to build the homes local communities need and taking action to ensure we have a skilled construction workforce with decent employment standards to deliver these outcomes. Creating the environment to build the affordable homes our country needs is an ongoing concern for the Commission.

Reforming standards in the private and social rented sector

Many submissions received this year were quite vocal about the state of some housing in the private and social rented sector. However, instead of heeding these concerns, this Tory Government has stepped back. We have seen some dreadful examples of housing standards and abject failures to follow regulations with the most recent example being the tragic Grenfell tower fire. Submissions from Party members and members of the wider public highlighted the effect of a Conservative approach to stripping away protections for people particularly those renting privately. For too many, paying ever higher rents does not even guarantee a decent place to live.

The Commission was rightly concerned and devoted considerable time including receiving expert evidence on the best mechanism to reform



the private rented sector. Ideas from submissions fed into the Party policy making process which as a first step committed Labour to delivering a consumer rights revolution to improve standards, security and affordability for people who rent. Future work of the Commission will look to investigate what more can be done to reform the private and social rented sector and drive up building standards.

Localism and local government

Many submissions to the Commission describe how people feel politics is too distant from them. For many the decisions that have an impact on their lives are made in Westminster and do not reflect their needs and priorities. However at a time when the Government should be taking steps to empower communities, local authorities are being forced to deliver services under tough conditions while a number of powers are being centralised. The Tories claim to champion localism but they have stripped local authorities of their planning powers. Many local planning departments are facing cuts and an increase in the demands on their time. Tory Government cuts are having a drastic impact on services and service users. Local youth centres, support and advocacy services, adult social care programmes, local museums and library services are all closing because of the Conservative Government's assault on local government.

The Commission will continue to examine how devolving some powers such as transport and housing could lead to better service, with supply meeting demand. The Commission believes the Government's piecemeal devolution deals need to devolve down not just responsibilities but funding as well. The Commission will continue to investigate how a future Labour Government can make sure that the right funding is devolved and that all areas that want to access a devolution deal can do so.

Local bus services

Local transport services are vital for our communities, local economies and the environment. However, the Commission heard through submissions received this year that for too many people, the rising cost of fares and cuts to routes is leading to a decline in passenger numbers. Members of the Commission also highlighted the Government's cuts to local government which are having a big impact on transport funding. It is driving up bus fares and adding to the daily travel costs representing an increasing proportion of family budgets.

Submissions stressed the serious damage caused by the Conservatives' privatisation and deregulation of bus services. A first step to tackle this problem argued strongly for by Commission members was the need to introduce a national strategy for local bus services, setting out objectives, targets and funding provisions, a policy Labour later adopted as part of its manifesto. The Commission will continue to examine and address concerns that remain around this important issue.

Submissions

All submissions received by the Policy Commission are circulated to members ahead of the next meeting for consideration as part of our discussions on policy development. In 2016-17 the Housing, Local Government and Transport Commission received and considered submissions on the following topics:

- Access to transport for disabled people
- Airport expansion
- Affordable housing
- Building on brownfield sites
- Bus investment
- Bus powers
- Business Rates
- Buy-to-leave market
- Buy-to-let market
- Canals
- Charging points
- City region control
- Coastal Transport
- Council housing
- Council Tax
- Crossrail
- Crossrail 2
- Cuts to local government
- Cycling & walking initiatives
- Cycling lanes
- De-regulation of buses
- Devolving bus powers to local authorities
- Eco-housing
- Eco-friendly public transport
- Economic impact of transport
- Emissions & air quality
- Energy policy
- Energy standards in new homes
- Farmland
- First time buyers & starter homes
- 'Fit for letting' certification
- Fracking
- Freight to rail
- Green energy from waste
- Help to Buy scheme
- HGV safety
- Homelessness
- Housing and Planning Act
- Housing cooperatives
- Housing costs
- Housing for the poorest areas
- HS2
- Hybrid and Electric Vehicles
- Increasing property ownership
- Insurance cover for tenants receiving benefits
- Investment in infrastructure
- Land Tax
- Land Registry Database
- Letting agent fees
- Libraries
- Local Government models of governance
- London Airport Capacity
- Low-Carbon tax breaks for employees working from home
- Mortgage lending
- National Investment Bank
- Parking policy
- Pedestrian only town centres
- Planning law
- Powers for local councils
- Private rented sector
- Private housing supply
- Private rent controls
- Property revaluation
- Public ownership of the railways
- Public regional banks
- Publically owned letting agency
- Rail freight investment
- Reducing car usage
- Reducing transport fares
- Regional development
- Regional housing policy
- Regional transportation infrastructure
- Regulating the Taxi industry
- Renewable energy to power rail
- Road Safety
- Right-to-buy
- Right to buy discount ceiling
- Rights of tenure
- Rural broadband investment
- Rural School Closure
- Second home tax
- Self-driving cars
- Shared ownership
- Shipping
- Short hold tenancies
- Smaller airport runways
- Speed Cameras
- Social housing supply
- Solar Panels

- Stamp Duty exemptions
- Student accommodation
- Smart land planning
- Sustainable local bus services
- Talking buses
- Taxi regulation
- Toll roads
- Transit Oriented Development