

# PROPERTY people

the independent voice of housing

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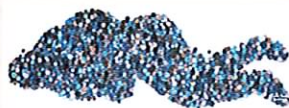
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# Groups 'line up' to condemn HB plans

By Paula Dear

Plans to cut Housing Benefit (HB) from those accused of anti-social behaviour are "discriminatory" and "ill-conceived", according to a large coalition of groups campaigning to stop the move.

In total 27 organisations have written a joint statement, demanding the government scrap the proposals, which were being consulted on until the deadline passed on Tuesday.

The coalition - which includes heavyweights such as the Law Society, Local Government Association and Chartered Institute of Housing - said the scheme will only create further debt and homelessness.

Similar proposals - put forward by Frank Field MP - were rejected by parliament last year. This latest version is part of the government's Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, currently going through the House of Lords.

Although the groups agree that finding ways to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) should be a priority, they say targeting HB recipients discriminates against those already on a low income.

Six housing associations are among the first groups in the country to achieve recognition under the new Investors in Community (IIC) awards, it was announced this week. Modelled on the Investors in People awards, the concept of IIC was developed by Hastoe HA and a pilot scheme has been funded by the Housing Corporation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Castle Vale Community HA, North British Housing, Oxford Citizens

"Where there are dependant children, they will also undermine the government's efforts to tackle child poverty," said the statement.

The group also argues that people carrying out ASB may have mental health problems, drug and alcohol addictions, or have suffered abuse or violence.

"A stable home life is a prerequisite for changing their behaviour."

The coalition's efforts are being backed by Shelter Scotland, which is urging the Scottish Executive to reject Westminster's plans. While tackling ASB is a devolved power, the control of HB still lies with London.

The charity is calling for Scottish politicians to publicly state they will never allow HB sanctions to be used in Scotland.

Director of external affairs for Shelter in England and Wales, Ben Jackson, said: "Increasing poverty and homelessness is not going to end anti-social behaviour. This is a gimmick that may sound tough, but will not deal with the problem."

The coalition is calling for further investment in groups like Shelter's Rochdale Exclusion Project, and the Dundee Families project - both of which challenge behaviour and address the underlying causes.

"The government should concentrate on promoting this kind of approach, and drop their discriminatory, ineffective and ill-conceived proposals to dock Housing Benefit," they said.

■ The statement was signed by: Barnardos, Brent Private Tenants' Rights Group, Centrepoint, Chartered Institute of Housing, Children's Society, Child Poverty Action Group, Citizen's Advice, Crisis, Gingerbread, Help the Aged, Homelessness Link, Housing Justice, Law Society, Local Government Association, Mind, Nacro, National Autistic Society, National Children's Bureau, National Council for One Parent Families, NCH, Priority Estates Project, Scope, Shelter, Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group, Tenants Participation Advisory Group, Tenants Union and Turning Point.

HA, Leicester HA, Threshold Housing and Portsmouth HA were all among the first to be recognised this week. LHA head of regeneration Mike Dalzell (right) said it was "a great honour" to be among the first organisations to be awarded IIC status. "Although 80% of associations carry out activities they describe as community investment, measuring the return is often difficult. IIC helps create a culture where community investment is a priority across all areas".



# GHA confidentiality clause is a 'gagging order' say opponents

A last minute radio and newspaper advertising campaign was launched by Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) this week, to fill three tenant places on its management committee.

The housing association - which took over the city's council housing this year - has embarked on a splurge of publicity before nominations close at 5pm today (Thursday).

But anti stock transfer campaigners have called the elections a "sham" because tenant representatives will have to sign a GHA code of conduct that requires them to refrain from discussing "commercially sensitive" information with the media and fellow tenants.

GHA chief executive Michael Lennon said the management committee would be taking all the "big decisions" on the

future of the city's housing.

"So I am saying 'Come and be my boss' and help shape the future of 80,000 homes city wide," he said.

Elections will be held every year for three of the committee's nine tenant members, covering different areas of Glasgow each year.

Just over £2,000 was spent on the media campaign, involving a newspaper advertisement in the Glasgow Evening Times, and airtime on Radio Clyde and Clyde One.

The housing association had already written to tenants in the relevant areas, and existing members of local housing organisations, encouraging them to stand.

But Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfer (GCAHST) spokesperson Sean

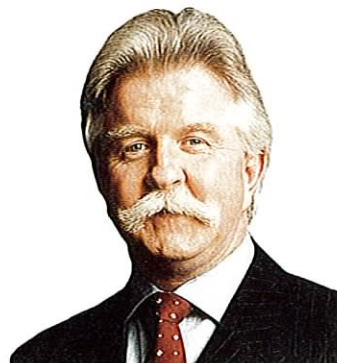
Clerkin, said confidentiality rules would mean tenant members would not be able to discuss important issues with the people who had voted for them.

"These elections are a sham. A code of conduct is reasonable in any organisation, but this is being turned into a gagging order. A clause forbidding people from discussing 'commercially confidential' information could cover anything, from repairs, to demolitions, to GHA's business plan."

But a spokesperson for GHA said they fully expected committee members to speak to the people they represent.

"We would expect a certain amount of loyalty and trust, to enable people to speak freely in meetings, but there is no blanket ban."

He said anyone who has been



ABOVE: Michael Lennon

against the stock transfer was welcome to stand, but confirmed that anyone currently engaged in legal action by or against GHA would not be eligible.

GCAHST - which has launched several legal actions against GHA - is not putting forward a candidate for election.



**LEFT:** Windrush Road on the Stonebridge estate, north west London, has had a complete face-lift thanks to Mode 1 Architects. As part of the regeneration programme led by Stonebridge Housing Action Trust, the original 1970s tower blocks have been replaced with contemporary low rise, high density, houses and flats. Features within the homes include roof lights within chimney enclosures to give additional light to central spaces. Guided by the challenge of reintegrating the estate into the surrounding community, Mode 1 said that the £2m scheme: "Reinterprets the Victorian terraced house into a more contemporary setting".

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