

## Holding onto existing council homes and keeping tenants and residents united

We must make the strongest possible case for refurbishment of council homes. If we don't, tenants and leaseholders will continue to be displaced from their communities, public land on housing estates will continue to be handed to developers to build luxury flats and funding for extra new social rented homes that we so desperately need in London will be prioritised for replacing demolished homes.

Plans for regeneration / demolition can go on more many years, in some cases 10- years or more. This is extremely distressing for people who may have to move off the estate, even on a supposedly temporary basis. Older residents who may have lived on your estate for decades and who find that their friends and neighbours are gradually having to leave, often experience deteriorating health problems.

Landlords are required to involve tenants and leaseholders from the early stages of any estate regeneration proposals, but many will already have decided what they want to do before they start any consultation. Tenants and residents will have to work hard to avoid always being on the back foot. We suggest:

1. **If you don't already have a tenants and residents association or campaign group on your estate, set one up.** This gives the opportunity of holding tenants and residents together with one strong collective voice. To make this a reality you will need to be: independent from your landlord, as representative as you can of your estate tenants and residents and fully accountable to them.
2. **Encourage as many of your estate residents as possible to be active in your association or group.** You will need people to: keep their ear close to the ground and talk regularly to their neighbours; carry out door-knocking, surveys or petitions; write newsletters or information sheets; keep up-to-date with what your landlord is agreeing or intending to do through scrutinising cabinet meeting papers and to keep in touch with what other TRAs, groups and supporters. If you don't do this, you will risk burn out and the council suggesting that it is only a few 'usual suspects' that don't support their plans.
3. **Provide regular easy to read information so that everyone living on your estate can make informed decisions about the future of their homes and community.** These could be newsletters distributed to each household or information sheets pinned up in each block of flats. They should include information on reasons to reject estate demolition and alternatives to this, not just what the council or their advisers are saying. You might set up an estate Facebook page to help in distributing this information and encourage discussion. *Use handouts and examples of what has happened on other estates from our website.*
4. **Hold tenant-led and chaired meetings so that everyone on your estate can discuss the issues and hear from invited speakers. Speakers might be from the council and its advisers, but importantly, also those with alternative views to your landlord.** Always provide time for tenants and residents to discuss the issues without you landlord or their advisers being present.

5. **Holding your estate community together is the most important, but can also be the most difficult thing to do.** People may have different views about the demolition and rebuilding of homes, especially if your homes have been neglected by your landlord for some years. Ensure that everyone has a chance to have their say at your meetings. This will help to keep the opportunity of changing peoples' minds open, through informed and reasoned argument. If people feel they can't have their say or that they are being shouted down they will stop coming to meetings and could create divisions on your estate.
6. **Remember your landlord should keep your homes properly maintained. This is what you pay your rent and service charges for.** If they are not, campaign about it. Excuses that future estate regeneration will address any problems, is not good enough. It could be that your landlord is neglecting your estate in the hope that you will support their demolition plans. You could lobby your councillors and send out press releases (with photographs) of the repairs / issues not being dealt with. If this doesn't work you might find a local law centre or housing solicitor who would give you advice on what tenants can do to get repairs done.

Some ways of campaigning against demolition / for refurbishment:

- **Petitions.** These can be a powerful way to show that the majority of your estate households wants refurbishment rather than demolition. For your landlord to take notice of this, ensure that it is just people who live on your estate that are signing.
- **Send press releases and letters to the local press.** Having articles published in local press will reassert what you have already been saying at estate meetings and in your newsletters / information sheets. It may also serve to put pressure on local councillors if they have not supported you. We suggest that you don't invite local journalists to your estate meetings. You could find that if residents are expressing different viewpoints, this is what they will report on, while you may want to demonstrate a united position. Also, a letter from your association, group or individuals published in the local press can sometimes be as effective as an article.
- **Window posters.** These can provide a strong and visible demonstration of strength of feeling. They might also provide the basis for a press release.
- **Hand your newsletters and information sheets directly to residents at their doors (when this is possible) and introduce yourself if they don't already know you.** This will help build trust in your association or group.
- **When to accept offers of help by non-residents.** Sometimes this can be helpful if they are offering to provide information from other estates or help to write newsletters or information sheets. We would suggest, however, that this does not extend to talking to residents at the door. They will not have the same intimate knowledge of your estate as you have and so it could result in the loss of support for your association or group.