



Issue
3

Housing Special

Stroud

Views & Burlblings

Voices from the Five Valleys

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Freeeee-K Out!

MP UNVEILS TORY HOUSING VISION AT STROUD EVENT

CARMICHAEL TO SPEND ONE NIGHT HOMELESS AS CHARITIES WARN COALITION CUTS COULD PUT 8,000 ON THE STREET

BRITISH PROPERTY FEDERATION CALLS BENEFIT CUTS "RECIPE FOR DESTITUTION"

By Housing Editor Ren Tistrikes.

“Visible Homelessness” – people living on the streets rather than “sofa-surfing” – is estimated at 8,000 people in the UK. Recently, seventeen charities sent a joint letter to the Coalition Government, arguing that current policies and proposals will cause homelessness to double. One signatory to the letter, Howard Sinclair - Chief Executive of homelessness charity Broadway said: “We have seen rises of 11% in the last three months in rough sleeping in the capital, but the point is that this will all be dwarfed by a single change in housing benefit in 2012”.

Proposals

From 2012 under 25's will not be paid housing benefit for single-bedroom flats – benefit will be reduced to only cover the costs of a room in shared accommodation. According to the government's OWN figures, 88,000 people will thus lose an average of £47/week. Are there enough rooms in shared accommodation? Is shared accommodation always appropriate for vulnerable people? Just two questions the government doesn't seem to have considered.

Iain Duncan Smith has also proposed that housing benefit will be cut by 10% for anyone who is unlucky enough to be on jobseekers allowance for more than a year. This will take effect regardless of any reasons for being unable to find a job, and of personal circumstances – including being formerly homeless, or having been forced off



“Do my cuts look big in this?” asks local MP

incapacity benefit by unfair new assessment procedures carried out by private companies. Finally, the government intends to bring in a “cap” on the amount of Housing Benefit that can be paid, which will force poorer people out of areas where house prices and rents have become inflated. Homelessness charity Crisis has estimated that nationally over £600 a year will be lost for some of the poorest households in the country. Green Party District Councillor Philip Booth contacted Crisis and discovered that their research shows that 1,200 households will be affected in Stroud District. In Brighton, Green MP Caroline Lucas has pointed out that locally the cuts are equivalent an income tax rise of more than 4.5%. The Conservatives claim that reductions in housing benefit will lead to Landlords kindly lowering their rents. This kind of thinking shows how far removed from everyday life our Cabinet of Millionaires is, and how economically illiterate they are. Many

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MP UNVEILS TORY VISION OF HOMELESS FUTURE CONTD.

landlords own property on 'buy-to-let' mortgages. Are the banks going to generously agree lower landlord's mortgage payments as well? The vast majority of landlords are in it for the money – are they going to voluntarily become benevolent givers of gifts for no real reason? Isn't it economic orthodoxy that prices rise with demand – and isn't demand for rented accommodation rising as people struggle to keep up with mortgage payments and switch to the rental sector to avoid negative equity?

Stupid or evil?

We could ask why the Tories are not using rent controls to reduce the cost to the exchequer of housing benefit? Given that social housing makes rents affordable, another solution could be to take housing into social ownership or at least build new social housing. Or the government could seek to improve pay so that rents become affordable. What are the Tories doing? They refuse to consider rent controls or seriously address social housing as these solutions do not fit with their free market ideology. Rather than attempt to increase wages, the coalition is actively pursuing a policy of increasing unemployment and pushing through below inflation public sector pay increases in order to depress wages.

The last government failed to tackle the problem of an acute shortage of affordable social housing for the lower paid, it looks like this government is hell bent on making the problem much, much worse. The Coalition policies are purely ideological – for them housing benefit is an example of a "nanny state", for the rest of us its a necessary social support to help people survive in a vicious capitalist "market" that treats shelter as an expensive commodity rather than a basic human need. In Tory run Hammersmith and Fulham 12 homeless shelters have recently been sold to large property developers. Meanwhile, in the private sector, a national Housing Association has issued redundancy notices to all its 200+ 'Housing Support' staff.

Housing Minister Grant Shapps makes a big deal

out of the fact that the Coalition has "entirely protected homelessness funding at £400m in the spending review, and took deliberate steps to protect this central funding so that the impact of cuts do not fall on those most in need".

However, this funding is not ringfenced - councils do not have to spend it on supporting the homeless. More importantly, the post-cuts sum is the same (real terms less than) the amount supplied pre-cuts. The idea that this money was enough before the cuts is questionable, that it will be sufficient to deal with the new levels of homelessness that will result from the Coalition's wide attacks on security of shelter is ridiculous. Well known London based homelessness charity St Mungos claim that their data shows rough sleeping numbers are already rising, and say they are "deeply concerned that the picture will worsen in the year ahead".



Local 'Save Our Neighbourhoods' Campaign

Jess Sim, a council tenant from Summer St, Stroud has launched a campaign against the Government's November 2010 White Paper: 'Local Decisions: a fairer future for social housing'. This will undermine secure tenancies and increase rents for council tenants. New tenants will have a maximum tenancy of 2 years so the make up of communities with social tenants will change affecting both tenants and residents. The campaign is collecting a petition demanding that Stroud District councillors vote against and refuse to implement the proposals. People are also being encouraged to contact Council Cabinet member for Housing Debbie Young (cllr.debbie.young@stroud.gov.uk) and their District Councillor (to find them go to 'where I live' on the SDC homepage), to let neighbours know about the proposals, and to ask the tenants representative of your community association to voice your views at council meetings or get involved and attend them yourself. Contact stroudagainstthecuts@yahoo.co.uk or ring Chris Moore on 07810 732379

COUNTY COUNCIL ON BACK FOOT AT CONTINUING CAMPAIGN WINS CONCESSIONS

Earlier this week, Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries issued a statement in response to a revised version of the County Councils proposals attacking the county's library service. The full statement is available online, but we reprint most of it here:

"While we welcome the revisions announced today, they go nowhere near far enough. They do not alter our position, and we repeat our call for an urgent independent and transparent review of these plans.

Gloucestershire County Council says it has listened to the tens of thousands of people who have complained, attended meetings and signed petitions against the cuts in the library service. The result is that one additional library (Cinderford) is to be kept open with many others still to close or be funded by the local community. Furthermore, these revised plans have been announced with four consultation sessions still to be held and an online consultation survey which runs until the 11th February. Are the people attending these sessions and completing the survey between now and then to assume that their views will not be taken into account?"

"Whilst we are pleased that the Council have finally understood the arguments for Cinderford, this does nothing to help those who will be affected by the complete loss of the mobile library service (including some of our county's most vulnerable residents), or the communities of Hesters Way, Matson, Tuffley, Stonehouse, Churchdown, Nailsworth, Brockworth and others whose library services will be closed or severely reduced under these plans.

Community groups are still being asked to take on libraries without appropriate support. The extra funding announced today is "one offs" ... a one-off addition of £100,000 to the book fund [does not] achieve much when the budget has been cut by £1 million in the last 2 years and will be cut by £600,000 a year from now on."

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Saturday, February 5th

Read-in & Speak Out! at Stroud Library

A Celebration of Libraries and Protest against GCC's plans featuring local authors Jamila Gavin, Katie Fforde, Sue Limb, Alice Jolly and Hannah Shaw.

Author John Dougherty will visit Minchinhampton library at 9.30am as part of his tour of Glos libraries. Katie Fforde will be at Dursley 9am, Berkeley 10.30am, Stonehouse 12noon, Stroud 1.40pm. Cindy Jefferies will be at Tetbury 11.35am, and Nailsworth 12.15pm. See:

<http://foclibrary.wordpress.com/>

LoveLibraries National Day of Action.

http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=802



"Public Libraries are priceless, reading is free, bliss is a good book, and a nice cup of tea!"

- Jeff Cloves

Saturday, February 5th: 2-2.45pm

"Deficit Hysteria & Alternatives to the Cuts" Presentation as part of the Read-in event at Stroud Library, Lansdown.

Thursday, February 10th, Ebley, 6.30pm

Budget setting meeting at Stroud District Council Lobby and Protest called by Stroud Against the Cuts. stroudagainstthecuts@yahoo.co.uk

Tuesday, February 15th, London

Defend Council Housing - Mass lobby of parliament www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Thursday, February 17th, Stroud, 7.30pm

Money as Debt: Film and discussion about reforming our money system.

At The Exchange, Brick Row.

Saturday March 26th - National Anti-

Cuts Demonstration called by the TUC

- "March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice". Coaches will go from Stroud.

<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=176812472328977>

"WHERE'S NEIL?" "WHERE'S WALLY?" HUNDREDS MARCH THROUGH STROUD AS MP SAYS 28.6% CUTS TO LOCAL AUTHORITY FUNDING AREN'T BIG



More than 500 people attended a "Save Our Services" March against the Cuts in Stroud last Saturday (29th January). The protest was lively and good-humoured, with music provided by Pete Rosser and John Dougherty (and a fine nameless trumpet player) and loud chants. The rally featured a variety of speakers making impassioned calls for action. A video has been made of the event and can be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYSHcWq-4Y0>, while there are photos from the day here: <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=286436&id=744232127&l=83d4c3c80e>.

Stroud Against The Cuts has an open Coordination meeting on Mon 7th Feb 7.30pm at the Exchange, Brick Row, to discuss what to do next.

The group will have a stall outside Stroud Library from 12 noon on Sat 5th February and is calling for people to join a picket protest outside Ebley Mill on Thursday 10th Feb from 6.30pm, to lobby the Stroud District Council Budget setting meeting which starts at 7.30pm. Seats in the chamber will be open to the public.

www.stroudagainstcuts.co.uk

This weeks *Coalition Clanger* is not a Lying Politician but a footstomping song to be chanted to the tune of the Beatles' Taxman (from their album Revolver for those of you young enough to need to look this up!)

Condemns (A gossamer-thin covering for the same old tory cocks)

Let me tell you how it will be
There's tea for you, champagne for me
'Cause we're the ConDems, yeah we're the ConDems
If your town's feeling rather poor
Expect that we will cut some more
'Cause we're the ConDems, yeah we're the ConDems

If you use the bank you'll meet a crook
If you want to read we'll take the books
If you want to learn we'll charge you fees
If you love the woods we'll sell the trees

Don't ask me what the cuts are for (Ahh Mr. Cameron)
If you don't want to lose some more (Ahh Mr. Clegg)
'Cause we're the ConDems, yeah we're the ConDems.

Now my advice for those who breathe
Prepare for hardship, debts and grief
'Cause we're the ConDems
And you're working for no-one.... but us!
(emailed to us by local greek punk Helen Ick)



Got some juicy gossip? Wannabe wikileaker? Know about people, politics and policy in Stroud, Gloucestershire or beyond? In a trade union or know what's happening in local workplaces? Write and tell us. Send stories, rants, informed speculation and the rest to: [stroudviews \[@ \] aktivix.org](mailto:stroudviews [@] aktivix.org) or Direct Message us on twitter: @StroudViews