

Crumbling Foundations

A Report into Labour's Failures in Social Housing

Key Findings:

- After over a decade in power the Government has failed to build more homes and it has dramatically failed those on the growing council house waiting list.
- Almost 1.7million households are now on the social housing waiting list¹.
- This has increased by 64% in the last ten years, and by 40,000 in the last year alone.
- The number of homes built by local authorities has collapsed to just 283 in 2006².
- 130,000 children are homeless – double that of ten years ago – most as a direct result of the lack of social housing³.
- Private house-building has also fallen in the last year.
- Just 53% of the dwellings built in 2006/7 were houses – down from 80% in 2000/1⁴. Creating a glut of flats and not enough family homes.
- The Government is failing to meet their target of building 200,000 homes per annum – just 167,577 were built in 2006/7⁵.
- The Government has no realistic chance of meeting their target of 3 million homes by 2020

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/144458>

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141242>

³ www.shapps.com/reports - *There's no place like home* (December 2007)

⁴ <http://pubs1.tso.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080227/text/80227w0007.htm#08022781000018>

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141239>

Failing to help the most vulnerable families

The Labour Government came to power in 1997 promising to provide “opportunity for all.” This has become a mantra, repeated time and time again by Labour ministers frantically trying to defend worsening conditions experienced by those who brought them to power.

Housing is a stark example of how Labour has failed those who are most in need; thousands of families desperate for decent affordable housing that offers security, permanence, a sense of belonging and of society have been let down. This Government has overseen a period where less social housing has been built than under either of the two previous Conservative administrations.⁶

The Social Housing Waiting List has grown hugely since Labour came to power so that nearly 1.7million families do not have a suitable place to call home. This report reveals just how bad the situation is getting, particularly in hot spots like the North West and South East.

Despite warnings the Government has employed policies which have exacerbated the housing crisis, ignoring the advice of housing experts and even its own MPs.

An independent review, commissioned by the Government and published in Feb. 07, by Professor John Hills of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at LSE, ‘Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England’ shows lack of foresight by the government.⁷

‘...part of the pressure on social housing was relieved in the 1980s and 1990s by the supply of vacant properties, resulting from some moving out of the sector and from elderly tenants who died. However, in the last five years the number of lettings available for new social tenants has fallen rapidly – from about 250,000 each year in the 1980s and 1990s to 170,000 in 2005 – as it has become harder for existing tenants to afford to move out and as the age structure of tenants has become younger.’⁸

Karen Buck, Labour MP for Regent's Park and Kensington North, said she was concerned Ms Flint [regarding a recent policy announcement by the Housing Minister] implied social housing was the 'problem, not the solution' to issues of poverty and employment⁹.

⁶ (DCLG, Live Tables: Housebuilding, Table 241, as of February 2007; figures for social housing completions in UK, 1979-80 to 2005-06).

⁷ www.lse.ac.uk/collections/pressAndInformationOffice/newsAndEvents/archives/2007/JohnHillsSocialHousingReport.htm

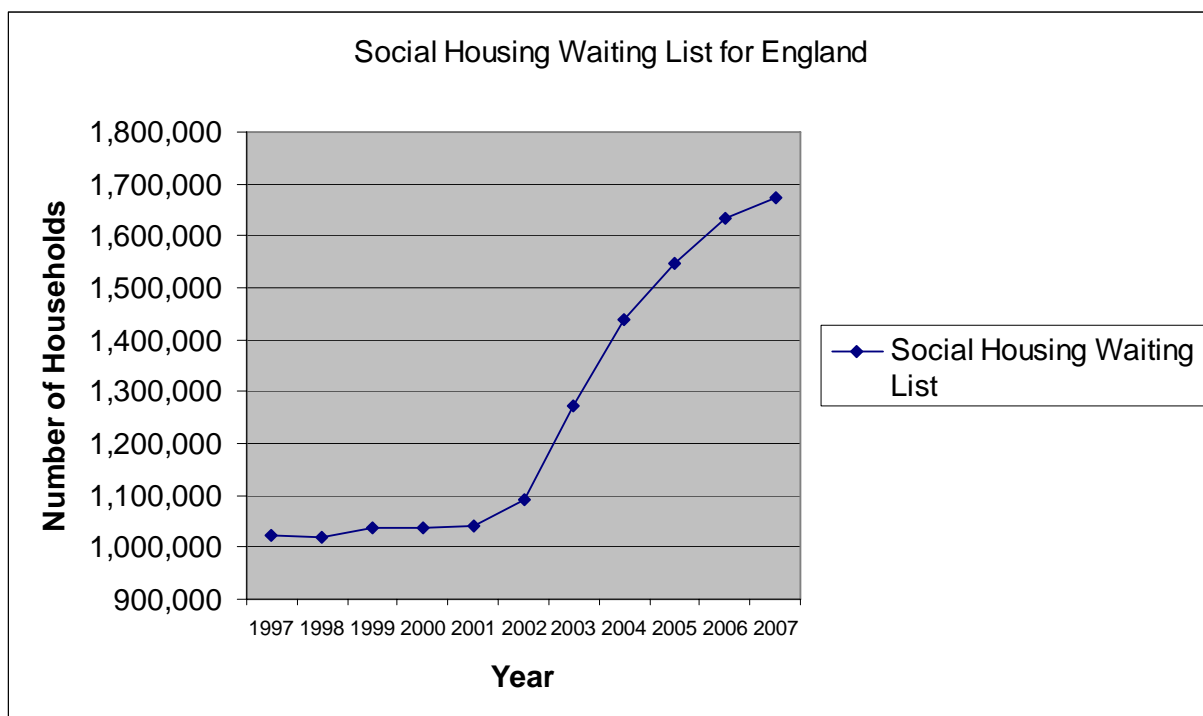
⁸ http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEREport34_summary.pdf

⁹ <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/article/?id=1449910>

The Social Housing Waiting List has increased virtually every year since 1997. In the last year alone the number of households left in limbo waiting for help with housing their families increased by over 40,000.

Fig. 1 - Number of households on the waiting list in England

England	
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	1,021,664
1998	1,020,229
1999	1,036,751
2000	1,038,720
2001	1,039,265
2002	1,093,342
2003	1,270,675
2004	1,437,735
2005	1,547,280
2006	1,634,301
2007	1,674,421

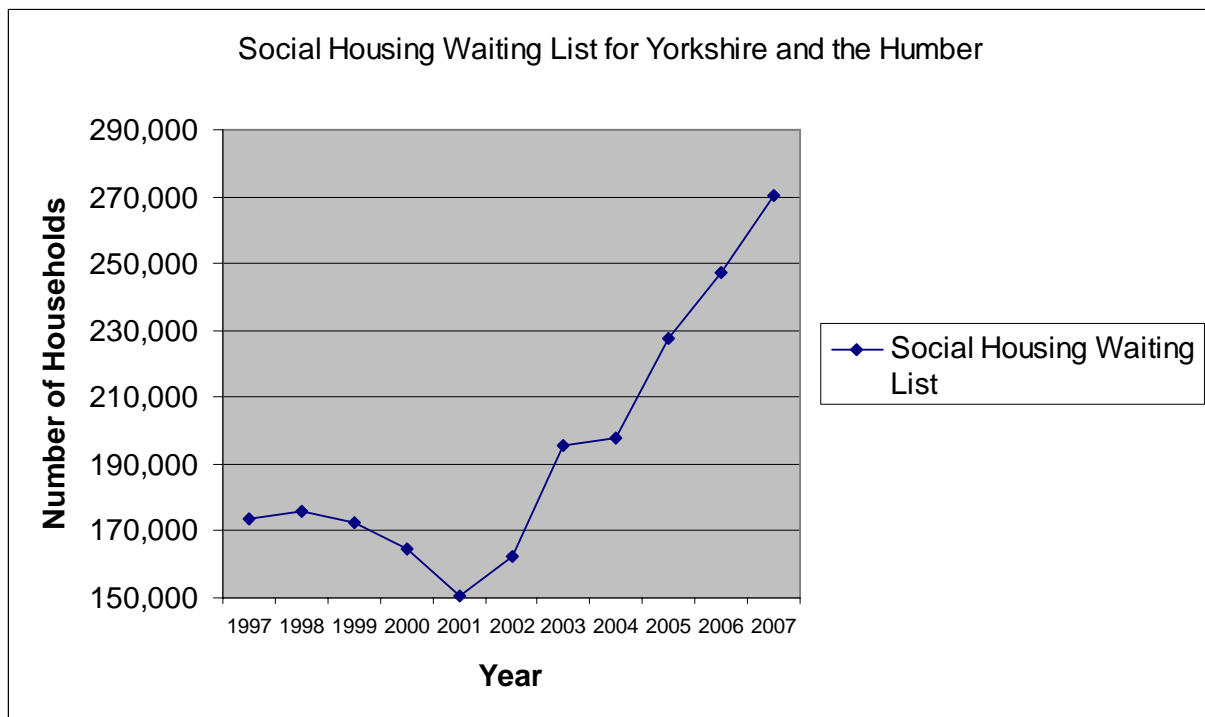


Many parts of the country are seeing huge increases in the numbers of families waiting to be housed. London and the South East are being particularly affected whilst the Housing Minister's own constituency, Don Valley, is situated in Yorkshire and Humber, one of the worst-hit areas.

In Yorkshire and Humber the number of households on the waiting list has increased by nearly 10% in the last year alone and over 55% since the Government came to power.

Fig. 2 – Number of households on the waiting list in Yorkshire and the Humber

Yorkshire and the Humber	
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	173,749
1998	175,608
1999	172,221
2000	164,359
2001	150,386
2002	162,365
2003	195,742
2004	197,646
2005	227,430
2006	247,499
2007	270,070



London has seen an increase of over 150,000 families – over 84% - on the housing waiting list since Labour came to power whilst the South East has seen its list double, increasing by over 100,000.

Fig. 3 – Number of households on the waiting list in London

London	
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	181,080
1998	177,118
1999	194,872
2000	196,995
2001	211,469
2002	226,789
2003	242,389
2004	279,729
2005	309,072
2006	331,230
2007	333,857

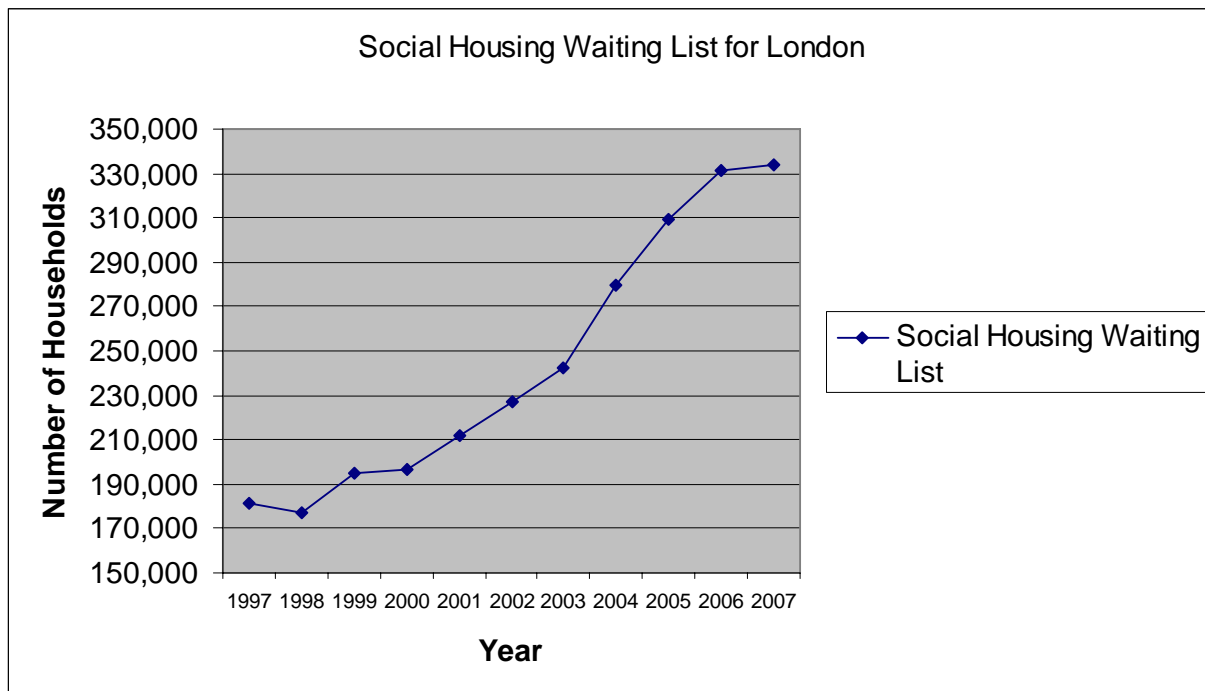
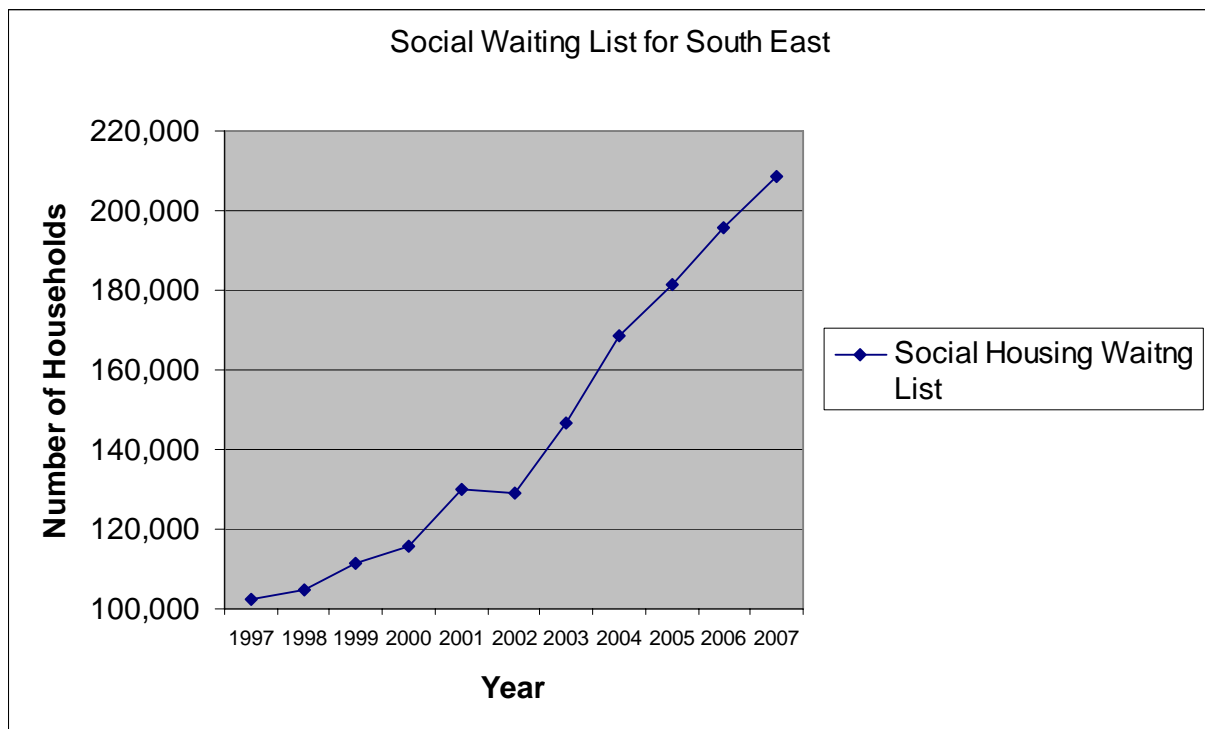


Fig. 4 – Number of households on the waiting list in the South East

South East	
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	102,578
1998	104,913
1999	111,425
2000	115,901
2001	129,924
2002	129,234
2003	146,880
2004	168,725
2005	181,196
2006	195,700
2007	208,419



In the Eastern Region too, there has been an increase of around 75% and my constituency of Welwyn Hatfield is a prime example of the situation in many MPs' constituencies – both Conservative and Labour.

MPs across the country have experienced the frustration of desperate families coming to surgeries with stories of being homeless or nearly homeless because of the acute shortage of accommodation. These families often rely on the kindness of family and friends but do not want to keep being a burden.

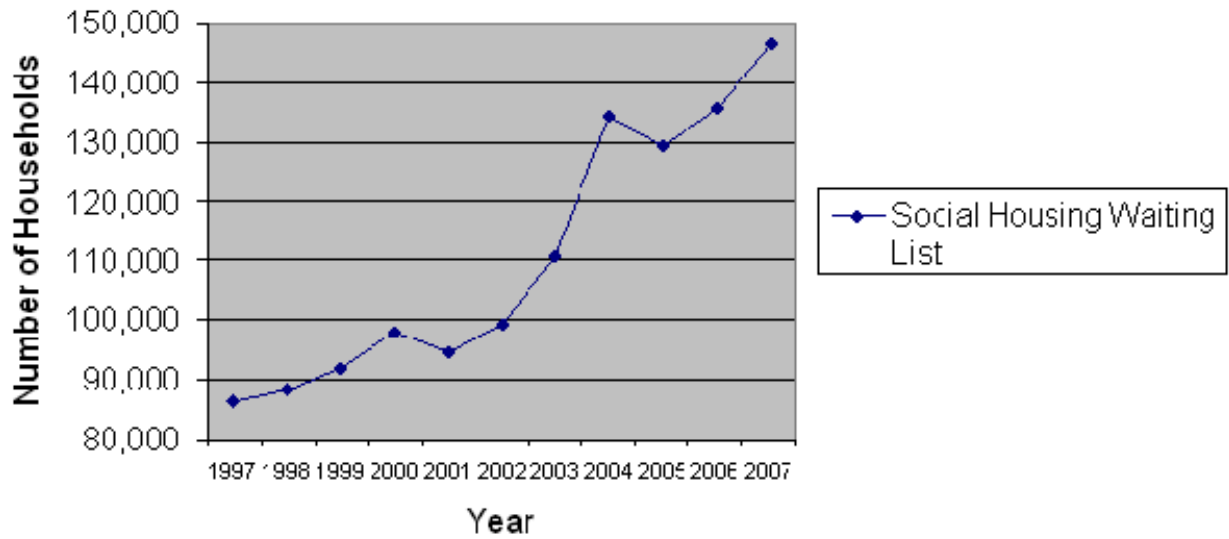
Fig. 5 – Number of households on the waiting list in the Eastern Region

EAST	East
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	86,424
1998	88,491
1999	91,948
2000	98,068
2001	94,846
2002	99,492
2003	110,968
2004	134,305
2005	129,184
2006	135,444
2007	146,252

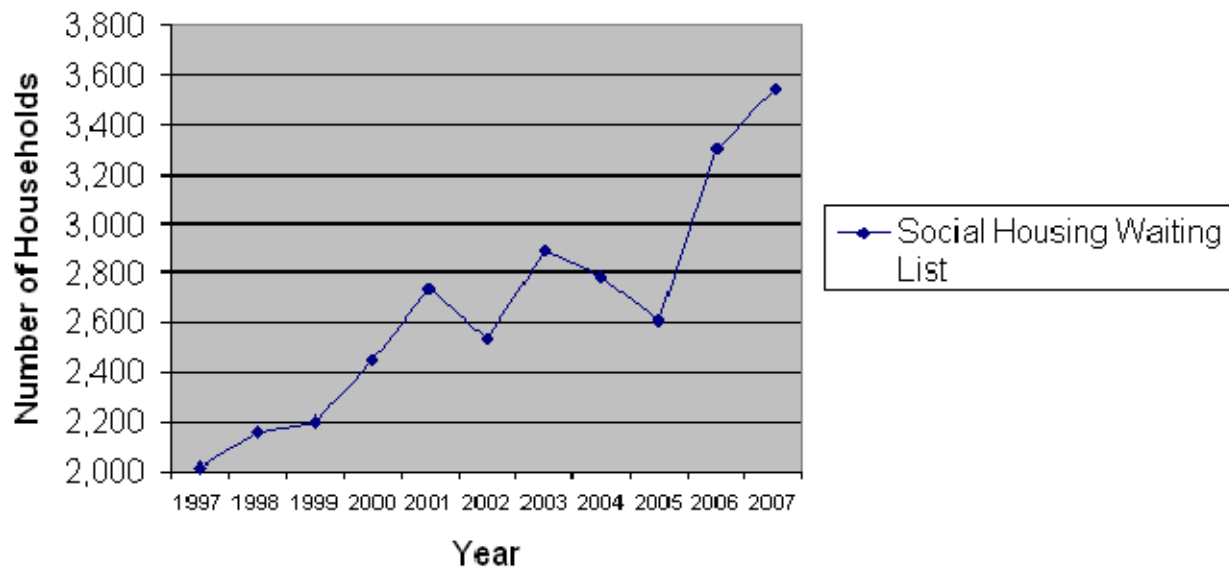
Fig. 6 – Number of households on the waiting list in Welwyn Hatfield

Welwyn Hatfield	
Year	Number of households on the waiting list
1997	2,016
1998	2,157
1999	2,201
2000	2,451
2001	2,736
2002	2,535
2003	2,890
2004	2,787
2005	2,609
2006	3,298
2007	3,542

Social Housing Waiting List for East England



Social Housing Waiting List for Welwyn Hatfield

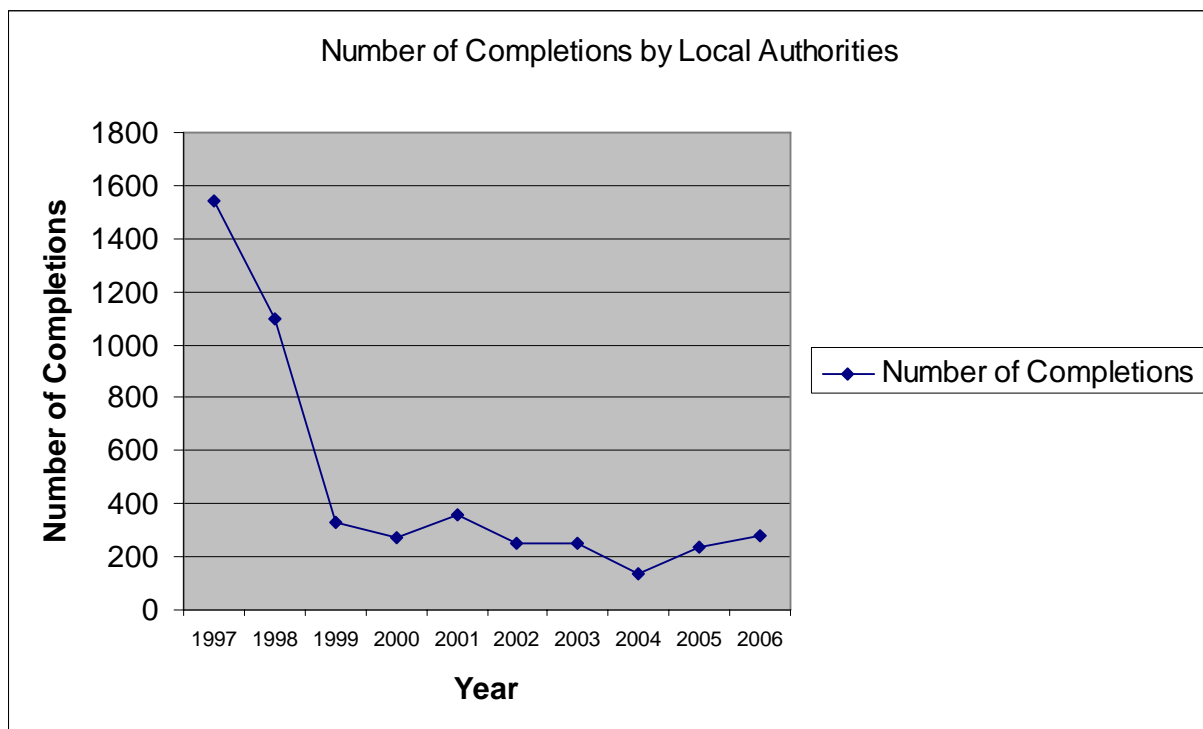


Housing Completions

Whilst the Social Housing Waiting List has risen dramatically the number of homes built by Local Authorities has plummeted from 1543 in 1997 to just 283 in 2006, less than a fifth of the houses built in 1997 are being built today. Whilst London and the South East have suffered huge increases in the housing waiting list just 2 homes¹⁰ were built by Local Authorities in 2006.

Fig. 7 – Number of completions by local authorities

Year	Completions
1997	1543
1998	1095
1999	331
2000	276
2001	355
2002	249
2003	250
2004	133
2005	238
2006	283

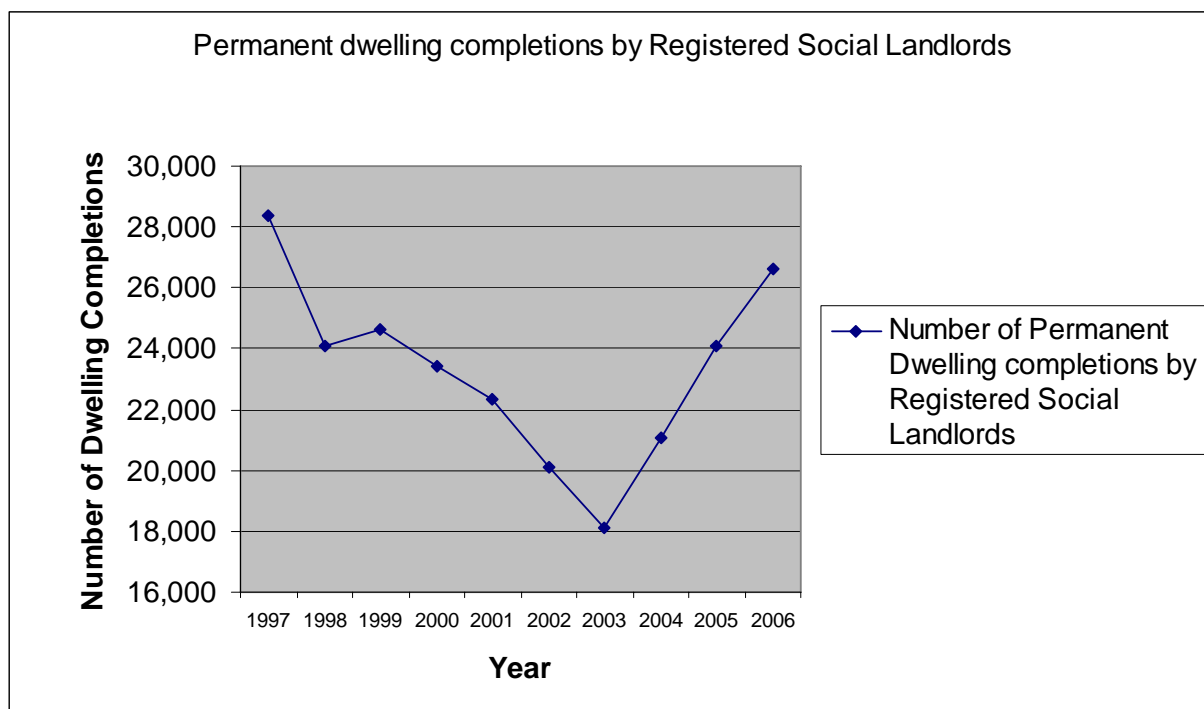


¹⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141239>

The Government has also failed to encourage the building of homes by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) with fewer being built last year than in 1997.

Fig. 8 – Number of completions by RSLs

Year	Permanent dwelling completions by RSLs
1997	28,344
1998	24,097
1999	24,627
2000	23,448
2001	22,332
2002	20,078
2003	18,082
2004	21,044
2005	24,076
2006	26,591



Taking all housing tenures, of 9 regions in England 5 have built fewer houses than in 1997.¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141239>

Causes

The Social Housing Waiting List has grown as a direct result of the Labour Government's insistence on top-down, Whitehall control.

As well as limiting the Right to Buy, the Government now takes 75% of the money raised from each sale from the Local Authorities. This has dramatically reduced the capital receipts that councils can use to build more housing.

By refusing to allow the Right to Buy in Housing Associations the Government has not just prevented Local Authorities from building more houses for those in need in their areas but also limited the number of new homes that Registered Social Landlords can provide – they are yet to meet the same level of house building that they were at in 1997.

All of these factors do not yet take into account the global credit crunch (the figures pre-date the most recent downturns) and the money available for building new homes is already seriously decreasing.

The Government's housing targets do not just look unrealistic, they look absurd and there is absolutely no chance of them being met.

Conclusion

Virtually every MP comes across families struggling with the uncertainty of their housing situation; this Government has let the situation spiral out of control so that millions of families do not have a secure home to live in. These families are left with a feeling of total neglect, without a home to call their own they do not feel like they have a stake in society and all aspiration has been closed off to them.

The details above clearly demonstrate how badly Labour has let down those most vulnerable in our society. Their building rates have been appalling and their centralised, Whitehall-driven housing targets have failed to provide the country with the houses that it needs.

Conservatives believe that decent housing is a matter of social justice and we encourage the Government to adopt the same approach.

Our policy is to extend the Right to Buy, allowing both local authorities and housing associations to use the proceeds of capital receipts to build more homes for those who need them most. We are also keen to reward good behaviour in social housing with an equity stake in a home to create pride in our communities again and help tenants get a helping hand onto the property ladder, freeing up social housing for others.

We want to see more innovative forms of house creation, including the greater use of Community Land Trusts – a measure which the Government recently voted against during the Housing and Regeneration Bill. Encouraging the further use of both CLTs and housing co-ops is hugely important in providing local affordable housing.

To create the family homes that millions of people are desperate for we will empower local communities by stripping out the flawed density targets which force councils and developers to build flats, even where they are unsuitable.

Quotes

"This Government is letting down the most vulnerable in our society and those who thought they would get a good deal from Labour are being hurt the most.

"A record 1.7 million families are now living in hope of being offered a decent roof over their heads, but as the council waiting lists grow they know that their housing dreams are slipping further away.

"What we need are more homes, but centralised Government targets are failing to deliver and it's time for a new approach."