

## Manifesto: Housing Campaign 2024

### 1. Why are we working on this?

Our work on Housing started in the summer of 2015, with parent leaders of a primary school living within the St George's estate in Newtown. Through [neighbourhood organising](#), we were able to secure a regular housing surgery at their school attended by a council officer committed to following up on repairs not completed by the council's contractor. This led us to develop an understanding of how families were struggling to navigate help and support as the council closed neighbourhood offices and moved online.

On International Women's Day in March 2018, [with over 500 families & civil society leaders](#) in the Birmingham Town Hall, we called for a set of [Citizens Guarantees to tackle Child Poverty](#) as a legacy of the Commonwealth Games. This included building community land trust homes on or near the athletes village.

In 2019, at our Spring Delegates Assembly, our member organisations [launched a listening campaign](#) in preparation for the 2020 Mayoral elections. During the course of the year, we had over 1,000 face to face conversations across our communities, where we identified 'poor housing' as a top issue affecting families. Later in December of that year, we conducted a [Christmas public action](#) to highlight the housing crisis in our city with a rising number of homeless families in emergency & temporary accommodation.

In 2020, with the mayoral elections postponed because of the pandemic, we teamed up with Birmingham City Council's Public Health team to respond to the disproportionate number of people in our communities dying from Covid. The virus was able to spread more easily, [as many of our families lived in poor housing](#) whether in private or social rented sector. We raised alarm about the impact of the virus to the rising numbers of families in Bed & Breakfasts Hotels (B&Bs) and temporary accommodation.

We are pleased in February 2020; the Combined Authority became the first of any region to [define 'affordable housing'](#) as based on paying no more than 35% of salary on housing costs.

Ahead of the last Mayoral elections in 2021, we held an [online Mayoral Assembly](#) attended by Andy Street & Liam Byrne where we pinned our asks from the need to build community land trust or affordable homes to building social rent family homes.

At this event [Andy Street](#) shared the achievements of building affordable homes for sale and committed to securing a Housing Deal with Government to build homes for social rent. Liam Byrne confirmed [Birmingham City Council plans to spend £346 million on building 2708 homes](#) by 2029 (no breakdown on how many will be for social rent), and if elected will double the numbers of homes built for social rent every year in the region. See their pledges in [full here](#).

A year later, in 2022, at our [Commonwealth Games Legacy Assembly](#) attended by over 350 people joined by the Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, we renewed our calls for the [building of social rent family homes](#) as a legacy of the Games. We were unable to obtain any figures on how many were in plans for Perry Barr and beyond. Also, that year, in our Principal Partner: University of Birmingham's [prediction of the greatest rise in homelessness](#) within the Midlands, 3 of the top 6 constituencies are where we have member organisations.

## 2. Case studies

Mums [‘Maryam’](#) (Birmingham Live) and [‘Denise’](#) (SKY News) have endured terrible experiences living with their children in cramped B&B rooms (minus breakfast). The children travelled across long distances in the city to attend school and relied on fast food places for dinner at the end of the day.

Schoolboy Isaac shared [his story](#) (27mins in) at our online Mayoral Assembly ahead of the 2021 regional elections and in the [Birmingham Mail](#) he challenged the candidates to take action as if he was Mayor he would ensure no child grows up in emergency/temporary accommodation. He still lives in the same temporary flat today.

Another schoolgirl, [Tahani challenged](#) the leaders of the main political parties on what they’ll do to build social rent homes at Birmingham Live’s Online Hustings ahead of the local elections in 2022. She said:

*“Every day on the way to school, we can see the big developments going up here, because of the Commonwealth Games. Our family have been in the city’s homeless system being moved from B&Bs to temporary accommodation at least 4 times over the past 3 years.*

*We can’t afford the expensive apartments you’ve built for what was going to be the Athletes Village. Nor can we dream of buying the houses you’re selling in Perry Barr. So, if you become the Leader of Birmingham City Council, how will our family and many others like us benefit? Will we get a family home on social rent?”*

Two months later, at our [Commonwealth Games Legacy Assembly in](#) June, [Tahani challenged](#) the Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council on maladministration as well as for its record on building social rent homes.

This [thread](#) by one of our member community groups vividly describes the range of issues affecting households with the Council as their landlord.

This [thread](#) by us describes the experiences of one of our families struggling to get her housing association to carry out repairs and tackle mice infestation.

## 3. Key statistics to reflect the scale of the issue.

- 1) [12,590 homeless children](#) are living in temporary accommodation across the West Midlands (December 2023) -
- 2) 9,405 of the 12,590 are homeless children living in temporary accommodation in Birmingham. The largest figure of any city outside of London.
- 3) [600+ households become homeless every week in Birmingham \(up from 200 in 2021\).](#)
- 4) A [323% rise in severe maladministration findings](#) against social landlords by the Housing Ombudsman (waiting for West Midlands figure)
- 5) The Housing Ombudsman has conducted a [special investigation report](#) on Birmingham City Council in 2023.

- 6) [One in three of Birmingham City Council's homes](#) do not meet the decent homes standard. In May 2023, it received a warning from the social housing regulator for failing to keep thousands of tenants safe.

4. Our track record (particularly how we are working locally and regionally to address the issue and develop solutions including co-design, any strong historic wins on related issues)

As described above, Birmingham Citizens has a strong 9 year track record of campaigning for Housing Justice. We are an active member of Citizens UK's Housing & Homelessness National Action Team developing relationships with MPs and strategic partners ahead of the General Election.

Our local listening campaigns over the years have unpacked not only the worsening of the housing crisis in our city as a result of austerity (benefit caps), the banking crisis, Covid-19, and currently the cost-of-living pressures, but how statutory agencies like the local authority have retreated via constant restructuring of services, leaving our families-in-need feeling they can be 'sent from pillar to post' when seeking help and support.

Whilst we consistently put the building of social rent homes on the public agenda at every turn, we also worked closely in mutual support across our member institutions to directly assist an ever increasing number of vulnerable households turning to their child's school, local place of worship, a voluntary organisation in their neighbourhood or a community business for help.

So our community [organising on Housing](#) includes:

1. Staff & volunteers from member organisations take part in multiple [training workshops](#) put on by our chapter Housing Action Team. These [workshops](#) covered basic housing rights, how things operated in Birmingham and best ways to navigate them to secure a positive result.
2. Our schools & community organisations host open briefing sessions for local families ([Anglesey](#), [Ark Victoria](#) & [Ark Tindal](#)), myth busting with clear info on basic rights and extensive Q&As. Several of our schools hosted advice surgeries ([Ark Tindal](#)) offering parents appointments to secure direct support on their own family's issue.
3. At a major public Assembly on the legacy of the commonwealth games in 2022, we highlighted the importance of access to good basic housing advice by calling for the [commissioning of community advice surgeries](#) in schools, places of worship and local voluntary organisations. We also called on Birmingham City Council to develop a charter of rights on how people with housing need who seek their help can expect to be treated. See explainer [video here](#).
4. Between 2022 and 2023, we delivered an employment support programme in partnership with Aston University and Ashley Community Housing with the aim of helping people to maximise their household income through help with jobs and skills advice. A significant number of the households we worked with were affected by poor housing. Please also see our separate Manifesto on Work which calls for a Community Jobs & Skills Compact.

In January 2023, Birmingham City Council published its [Customer Services Charter](#) on how people can expect to be treated when they seek help; and soon after launched a [£676k grant](#) to fund community advice surgeries in the city. We welcomed both responses to our asks in 2022.

However, in January 2024, using exact webpage links from Birmingham City Council's website, our Housing Action Team of faith, education, voluntary org and social enterprise leaders produced a 7-page dossier (please see enclosed) highlighting some key differences between what is mentioned online to what happens when our families seek help from it. We welcome the council's initial response to us as it seeks to build a collaborative relationship on improving services as part of a new strategy on preventing homelessness.

5. Our policy recommendations (2-3 headline asks with specifics bullet-pointed below)

We call on the next Mayor of the West Midlands to make pledges on the following:

1. Will **building family homes for social and affordable rent** be included within your strategic objectives on housing? If so, how many will be built and where?

*There is currently no mention of plans to build homes for social or affordable rent on the Combined Authority's website.*

2. Will you develop a [Good Landlord's Charter](#) in our region, as piloted in Greater Manchester?

*The steep rise in complaints against social and private landlords along with the reduction in access to local housing advice & advocacy is eroding community trust and confidence as more vulnerable households feel they are sent 'pillar to post' when they seek help.*