A grassroots campaign taking action against mammoth fuel bills and working towards an affordable, sustainable and democratic energy system

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Fuel Poverty Action's response to the Labour Party's Green Recovery Consultation
26 June 2020

FPA is a grassroots organisation working very closely with people having trouble with their heating systems and/or energy costs, including many social housing estate residents, pensioners, and disabled people. We beg you not to make the mistake of assuming that because working class people are being hit hard in the pocket, are going cold, or going without food so they have money to keep newborn babies warm, that they therefore "can't afford" to care about the climate and just want cheap fuel. No -- many believe that the climate emergency and the fuel poverty crisis can be solved simultaneously, if the will is there to insulate at scale and bring in renewable energy and heating systems, again, at scale and fast. In addition, people want pricing to be fair, so they are not paying more per unit of energy when they cut down and use less.

This sense of urgency has only been heightened by the virus, which has also increased people's sense of what state intervention can do, and what resources can be found when the will is present. Most immediately, as spelled out in a PHE report from 2014 "There is clear evidence on the links between cold temperatures and respiratory problems. Resistance to respiratory infections is lowered by cool temperatures and can increase the risk of respiratory illness. Cold temperatures have been found to impair the functioning of the lungs . . ."[1] Even before Covid-19 the death toll from cold homes was huge, averaging 10,000 people per year in a country with massive accumulated wealth. This is already totally unacceptable, but is likely to increase exponentially if the health crisis continues into next winter and beyond, and combines with a recession, overwhelming not only the NHS but local authorities and housing services.

Energy and home heating and insulation policies must therefore be prioritised in terms of funding and urgency, and must also be effective, not wasting time or money on half measures, failures, or a reluctance to change from incumbent systems (like gas) to the renewable and energy efficient infrastructure of the future. And it must always be a priority to ensure that people are not cut off either physically or financially from the heat and power they need.

Below we offer policy proposals for

- energy efficient homes
- sound heating systems

[1] See also Tackling Fuel Poverty: the Implications of Covid-19, Fuel Poverty Research Network, May 2020

- renewable energy
- an affordable pricing structure
- a Care Income.

We then approach your questions on

- ensuring the quality of jobs (unions working with residents)
- sector-specific support maintaining climate objectives
- regional impacts
- habitats
- information needed (home energy audits)
- public and private investment and ownership (in relation to housing and heating systems)
- empowering local communities.

Q1. What sectors do you believe are the priorities for investment from government, for a green recovery programme to build a stronger, more resilient future economy? How can this investment reduce regional inequalities as well as address the climate crisis and environmental degradation? And what science and technologies do we need to invest in?

The priorities we are most concerned with are energy efficient homes, sound heating systems, renewable energy, an affordable pricing structure, and care.

1) Energy efficiency.

We believe the Labour Party was right to make "Warm Homes for All" a key part of its programme and election platform. With an average of 10,000 deaths a year even before Covid-19, it is clearly an urgent priority for people's health and well-being, and also financial survival. It is equally vital for bringing down climate emissions. This means

a) Retrofitting homes with insulation and draft proofing measures. The programmes available up to around 2012 have been decimated with no replacement. But the need now is to go very much further, rolling out retrofitting through whole communities on a massive scale, and moving straight to a high standard, rather than coming back repeatedly (at great cost in money and inconvenience) to implement gradually rising requirements, while people continue to die in cold homes. This must include stringent requirements on private landlords, backed up by security of tenure and rent controls to protect tenants seeking better standards.

   It is crucial to ensure that retrofits are appropriate to the particular building, its residents' needs, and the geography, weather conditions etc and are carried out by skilled and supervised workers with meaningful guarantees and healthy, natural, non-flammable materials. This is to avoid not only more catastrophes like Grenfell, but the many cases of ill-advised or poorly installed retrofits that have caused damp, cold and misery in thousands of homes (see eg victims organisation CIVALLI, Hansard, and "Safe as Houses" by Stuart Hodkinson.)

Residents must be actively consulted and listened to: empowered, including in relation to private landlords. We support work being brought in house, but in any case local authorities must have the power and the resources to certify work and to deal with any problems, acting for residents.

In addition to the work of retrofitting homes that have never had much insulation fitted, there is now the huge job of removing flammable cladding and insulation from many many thousands of homes. This urgent need has been highlighted by Grenfell United, by our own SCIN campaign for Safe Cladding and Insulation Now, and by the more recent campaign run by leaseholders in UK Cladding Action Group and Inside Housing. The hundreds of buildings over 18M high with ACM cladding like Grenfell turned out to be the tip of the iceberg. Even the government has now recognised the need to remediate buildings clad in other flammable materials like HPL -- although some key materials, like timber and expanded polystyrene have not yet even been tested -- and buildings under the arbitrary 18M limit, notably including care homes.

Then there are the other works discovered to be necessary when cladding is removed from the buildings constructed for profit by private developers without independent supervision on site. When the facade comes off, we can see everything from missing fire breaks and loose window frames to cracks and general poor construction, plus faults in insulation, thermal bridging, and more. And there is the need to replace cladding and insulation block by block -- and preferably floor by floor while it is removed -- to avoid leaving residents exposed to cold, wind and rain. This work will require a very large, well-trained labour force, over a period of many years, while at the same time work is going on to insulate other housing. It cannot wait.

b) Ensuring that new homes are built to a net zero carbon standard that will both keep people warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and eliminate the huge carbon emissions due to poorly constructed buildings. This means not -- as the government plans -- allowing medium to low standards now, with a necessity of then upgrading, as per their Future Homes Standard. Local Authorities in particular should be able to impose higher standards than that required by national government. Again, the toxicity and fire-safety of materials and adequate supervision of both planning, design and construction are all crucial.

c) Reversing present policies which favour “regeneration” often by private developers and accompanied by demolition and loss of council and other social housing. Unless really irretrievable, retrofitting housing is almost always better for the climate than building new, because of the huge climate cost of construction, concrete, etc. For residents, the loss of their community is devastating, even when some of them are eventually allowed to move back, often at higher rents. And community is how people survive through fuel poverty and through illness. This has been very visible in the Coronavirus crisis, as neighbours and relatives have brought food and other support (see below re Care), but also because of the loss when, for example, mothers can no longer send their children to grandparents to keep warm or to have a bath.

d) Energy efficiency of appliances is also important. At present, it is people with less resources who are most likely to have equipment that guzzles gas or electricity -- and which may not even be safe.

2) Heating systems

With the end of the era of gas boilers, two technologies are coming to the fore -- heat networks and heat pumps. In addition, solar panels have huge popularity among people of all classes: those who can currently afford them, and are in a position to install them and those who presently cannot.

Heat networks (also known, less accurately as District Heating") have been brought in slowly and haphazardly in the UK with a financial model that frequently guarantees high costs, and with all sorts of perverse business incentives, and a lack of essential skills and understanding of design, installation, management and maintenance. The result is that while some networks do fulfill the promise of bringing down both costs and climate emissions, many are expensive and unreliable, and some totally dysfunctional, and there is little that residents can do in their own defence. Some live with constant outages of both heating and hot water, and end up going to shower in local gyms, or paying huge sums for electric space or water heating during the frequent breakdowns. Moreover, most networks are currently based on burning fossil fuels, with or without combined heat and power (CHP), and biomass boilers or even CHP that are written in, in order to get the plan through planning permission turn out never to be used. (See here for our numerous submissions on these issues to BEIS, the GLA and CMA, and a less technical summary of issues.

Heat pumps have similarly often ended up being installed where they are not appropriate because of the inadequate insulation common in UK housing stock, and residents then find bills spiralling as direct electric heating kicks in to fill the gap. There have also been major problems with noise (talk about quality of life!) and with how much internal space is taken up by the unit. The government now seems to be set to promote air source over more expensive ground source heat pumps -- no real saving as they tend to last a much shorter time. Meanwhile, the deployment of *any* renewable heat technology is painfully slow, leaving the UK miles behind most of Europe, with no plans to change that any time soon.

FPA have worked hard with tenants and residents to try to get these problems resolved on both private and social housing estates, but given the current fragmented and privatised framework, and the lack of regulation in district heating (this is now promised but will not address key issues), it is painfully hard to make progress. What is needed is integrated, planned provision of heating, that crucially takes into account both the current state of housing -- and realistic, definite and scheduled plans for swift improvement.

Energy efficiency will transform the investment and heating choices that need to be made: in most conditions passive house standard homes need very little heat. .

With these provisos, and resident consent, we believe that both heat pumps and heat networks have major roles to play. They could be particularly effective in **combination** -- we recommend the submission from John Macadam at UCL -- so long as residents don't end up

paying for two systems side by side, as has happened in some places where the renewable energy is not enough.

Solar panels, meanwhile, are often sidelined in discussions of high-investment large-scale solutions, and are omitted from the government's planned Clean Heat Grant scheme which is due to replace the Renewable Heat Incentive in 2022. We are hearing strong demand from people on housing estates who can't understand why they are not mandatory on every new building. The Feed in Tariff established their monetary value in many people's minds, and people cannot understand why they are not everywhere -- PV and/or thermal. They could potentially fill the gap -- primarily for hot water -- in homes where energy efficiency nearly removes the need for heating, where district or communal heating is not wanted in the summer and often leads to overheating as the pipes stay hot, or where heat pumps are not quite adequate to meet need. And such (relatively) "free" energy could subsidise heat for people who need more than the average, for reasons of health, or age, for example; this has been done, with community-owned wind power, in Europe, eg Belgium.

Controls and optimization A huge amount of heat is wasted, and large extra costs incurred by people using heating systems of all types, because the controls are not user-friendly and because systems are not optimised using available technology (eg the software developed by Hysopt for heat networks and heat pumps, to sort out hydraulic issues, balance systems etc.) Even thermostatic radiator valves can make a huge difference at very low cost. Room thermostats, meanwhile, are often unsuitable for older people who have less supple fingers, can't see the tiny or low-contrast numbers, and do not have digital minds. Even people who do not face these obstacles often find thermostats too complicated to use effectively. This cannot be right.

3) Energy sources

FPA are not experts on the various alternatives now being explored. But we must report widespread popular horror at the way electricity prices are to be forced up to make sure investors in nuclear power get their strike price, when nuclear power has such potential for harm, and renewable alternatives get so little investment. We are almost equally appalled at the promotion of carbon capture and storage as a way to keep fossil fuels burning.

Closer to home, hydrogen has been promoted as an alternative to "natural gas". From householders' point of view the need to convert appliances and pipes to use more than a small proportion of hydrogen in a mix is a real obstacle. In addition, the vast amount of electricity needed to produce hydrogen that is "clean" should be a gamestopper -- that power would be far better used for heat pumps. Saving jobs in an incumbent industry (gas) should not trump the creation of jobs in genuinely renewable energy, and creating the heating systems that work best to get us through coming hard times.

We believe solar power, wind, geothermal energy (perfect for heating in some placas, including ex-mining areas), and other resources including waste industrial heat are the real solutions, with heat pumps opening up many more options.

4) An affordable pricing structure for guaranteed heat and power

While they do not appear in your questions, living standards are as important as employment, and support for households is as important as support for business.

For people to be able to afford to keep warm, the long term solutions are housing, heating and energy infrastructure, as above, but these are relatively long term projects, even if expedited as they should be. In the meantime, the issue of pricing has to be addressed.

Given the health emergency, and the general insecurity of a world with oil wars, unstable global politics and prices, a pandemic, and rapidly accelerating climate change, FPA have intensified our work on a proposal which we first submitted to the Labour Party last year (briefing here). This would reverse the present perverse pricing structure, under which, because of the standing charge, people pay more per unit if they cut down their energy use, whether they cut down for climate reasons or because they cannot afford it.

The standing charge hits people particularly hard when their usage is very low, or when they go to top up a prepayment meter in the autumn after a summer break. We have proposed that instead of this automatic base of payment, there should be an automatic provision of a base level of energy, free for all, and paid for -- in whole or in large part -- by increasing the tariffs on energy used above this basic amount.

There is much to be worked out. Notably, while the higher tariffs would have the welcome effect of discouraging energy profligacy, they could also hit people who need higher amounts for reasons of health, age, or housing. We are discussing ways of combining the payment structure with energy efficiency provision and the use of solar panels or other renewable sources, potentially community owned, to supply the extra needed by some households.

The idea has obvious advantages in times of such great insecurity -- insecurity in prices, including energy prices, in incomes, and in health. It has been received with interest, both in Europe and in discussions with people in the Labour Party and the Green Party, and in a series of discussions with social housing residents and pensioners, including at the NPC's Pensioners Parliament. It needs much more work before it can be promoted with confidence, and we would be very glad to discuss it with you.

5) Care Income

As many thousands of jobs are lost due to the climate crisis, automation, recession, or for whatever reason, we believe the economy should be reoriented completely. The virus has forced us all to reconsider what is really important to us, making this an ideal time to shift focus to what we really need, rather than growth -- or jobs -- for their own sake. In addition to switching from polluting industries and the military to climate jobs - rebuilding the country's energy infrastructure and housing[2], and restoring the decimated public service sector, we

[2] We hope you will seriously consider the call for a National Climate Service.(NC) -- for instance as promoted by PCS, with further ideas from Possible.

believe this switch should include financial support for the unpaid caring work that has always been the foundation of every community.

This work, much of it done by women of all ages, has been taken for granted down the generations, but it has been more visible and more valued in the Coronavirus crisis. In every disaster, in every country, people surge forward to do the work of caring for their community, often without the resources or basic protections they need. Here and now, many people -- both adults and children -- have been left to care for parents, partners, or other family members up to 24/7, with no relief, as formal care has become unsafe or is withdrawn.[3] On an even larger scale there is the work of caring for children, which has likewise increased exponentially, during school closures. And many more people than before have cared for their neighbours, and organised mutual aid and communal kitchens.

We support the call in the Green New Deal for Europe for a Care Income, which would recognise the value of caring work and reward the people who do it, in line with the call of many grassroots women's organisations in both rich and poor countries who for decades have insisted that, independent of any other payment, this work should attract a living wage. The National Pensioners Convention, with whom we work closely, has also called on the government to *"invest in the future by: . . .• Creating an income for 'informal carers' – those who save the government billions of pounds each year for the pittance of carer's allowance or in lots of cases, nothing at all."*

Caring work is essential to many people's survival, including large numbers of those at most risk from fuel poverty. It is skilled, and satisfying, creating not GDP (while unpaid) but health and love -- although the lack of payment and poverty can certainly strain relationships. It is super-low carbon, non-polluting, and it cannot be off-shored. A care income would go directly to the point of greatest need, and finally resolve a centuries-old injustice.

In considering how people can be supported in the present crisis, we hope you will put this proposal on the agenda.

Q2. How do we support people who have lost employment during this crisis to move into environmental growth sectors? How can we ensure that such jobs are decently paid, with quality training, and offer representation by trade unions? What lessons can be learned from past programmes current support and international examples?

An effective retrofitting and zero carbon new-build programme means investment, training, and local jobs doing work that is meaningful to everyone. Cuts to Feed in Tariffs in 2015 saw 12,000 workers come out of the solar industry overnight. The same thing happened when retrofit programmes were ended or made dependent on private investment, in 2012-13. A massive expansion in both energy efficiency and heating would in itself provide jobs for many people who have lost employment. And trade union involvement and local authority direct works and supervision would be critical to standards, both for workers and for residents.

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[3] As Liz Kendall told Matt Hancock, Prior to the pandemic**,** there were 9 million unpaid family carers in the UK...'Since the outbreak, 70% of carers say they are providing even more care than normal: an average of 10 extra hours a week.'

An additional proposal is for residents and trade unionists to have more regular channels of communication and collaboration *with each other,* over local issues and projects.

Experience has shown that residents' involvement and ongoing power to complain effectively is crucial to maintaining standards in housing. Very often their most reliable information about what is wrong, what is being done, and what is planned for their homes, comes from conversations between residents and the workers on site -- builders, plumbers, and heating engineers. A substantial number of residents have experience themselves in the construction industry; others are well informed about heating systems, or, for example procurement, or insurance. Low standards of safety for workers on building sites go hand in hand with poorly constructed buildings. The handling of substances like asbestos in refurbishment or installation of new heating systems can endanger both. And too often work goes ahead which both residents and the workers involved say is "crazy", or just misses an opportunity to do something else at the same time, cheaply and easily.

Putting TRAs in touch with relevant trade unions, worker activists and TUCs could empower both. Local Labour parties would be well placed to facilitate such exchanges. They sometimes already take place informally, at Labour Party meetings, or, for instance through Whatsapp groups on particular campaigns, through housing campaigns, or other configurations. The Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC), established by housing workers, has done crucial work. But regular, transparent and recognised lines of communication going beyond social housing, and including more workers in manual building trades, would be a great advantage to both sets of people, who are often confronting the same management.

In addition, positive collaboration between workers and residents' organisations could do much to prevent or defuse the often toxic relationships between harassed, low paid, badly treated construction workers on the one hand, and on the other, tenants who are at their mercy and whose rights to privacy, cleanliness and respect can be totally ignored.

Q3. How should sector-specific support for business during this crisis be used to both protect and promote employment and to pursue our climate and nature objectives?

FPA strongly supports the principle of returning energy supply into public hands. Our comments below are for the current situation, where that is clearly not on the government's agenda.

We note that your question is about employment on the one hand and climate change on the other, but assume that you also intend to protect people using energy as well as the workers generating or distributing it.

It would be a travesty for the Labour Party to support the oil and gas industry with taxpayers' money -- as one tenant put it, "making us pay for what's killing us". But at points of crisis there can be a need to support utilities indirectly by helping people pay bills for energy that they otherwise could not afford.

Currently the support offered to desperate customers is generally in the form of a loan which will need to be repaid, whether it takes the form of extended credit on bills, and preloaded keys or cards for people with prepayment meters. Many people therefore are holding back and not using heat or power that they need. This brutal self rationing, or "self-disconnection", will no doubt increase in the winter. There is very limited funding available to actually write off bills or offer free credit on a prepayment meter as opposed to just postponing the problem.

But it is also important not to subsidise the fossil fuel industry. After all, these suppliers are the same companies that have allowed 10,000 deaths a year from people who could not afford their bills, have broken into homes to impose prepayment meters, and have lobbied for fossil fuels.

You are no doubt aware of the international consensus on this question, eg the COVID-19: Ten Priority Options for a Just, Green & Transformative Recovery from from "Partners for inclusive green economies" which includes several UN bodies, the ILO and the OECD among others. While outlining the conditions that some countries have placed on state support, they say:

***"Structure fiscal stimulus and financial aid packages to accelerate the transition to a fair and green economy - not to undermine it**. For example, in response to COVID-19 governments can provide tax measures such as deferral or relief for vulnerable communities and industries . . .*
Accelerate the energy transition and tackle fossil fuel subsidies. Ensure recovery accelerates and broadens the achievement of Nationally Determined Contributions (NCDs) under the Paris Agreement, and that social, economic and health system resilience are prioritised in updated NDCs. According to the IEA, low oil prices offer a unique opportunity to remove fossil fuel subsidies, which are economically as well as environmentally damaging; Nigeria's decision to scrap its subsidies is expected to save the government at least $2 billion a year. The African Union has committed to advance renewable energy across the continent, where 600 million people do not have access to electricity, as part of the region's response to COVID-19."

The OECD's own statement, From Containment to recovery: Environmental responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic Is still more explicit:
"Make sector-specific financial support measures conditional on environmental improvements where possible. The use of financial support measures such as preferential loans, loan guarantees and tax abatements could be directed towards supporting stronger environmental commitments and performance in pollution-intensive sectors that may be particularly affected by the crisis."

These criteria are not being followed by the government, which has made money available to major suppliers via CCFF with no conditions that we at FPA are aware of (so far we know of Iberdrola accessing it), and to smaller/less profitable suppliers via a £350m loan with some conditions eg no dividends, but nothing related to the climate, and then a further £100m, again a loan, to be paid back from our bills!

We understand that if a large number of suppliers went to the wall, the domino effect could overwhelm Ofgem's ability to step in, and customers could be left without fuel or power. But part of the problem for this privatised industry is that it is not fit for purpose, and another part is that people cannot now afford to pay their bills. The least that we would expect is for any monies to be used to bail out not companies but people. People's Energy has proposed a government fund that could be accessed by suppliers when a customer cannot pay. Direct help to hard-up households, rather than handouts to businesses which leave their customers out, is the least that we should expect from state money. But we also believe that since such money would still function as a bail out to suppliers, it should have stringent conditions on it, in relation to commitments to customer service, energy efficiency, jobs and training guarantees, and transition away from fossil fuels.

Q5. Given the regional and area-based impacts of this crisis, what role can a green recovery play in mitigating these impacts? What are the lessons of past environmental interventions in terms of local and regional impacts?

Rural, off-grid communities are often ignored in considering home heating and energy. We note that the government committed to a programme of heat pumps for rural properties - the Home Upgrade Grant scheme - but failed to include this in the budget. In any case heat pumps require well insulated properties, and many rural buildings, including picturesque cottages, are far from that, unless they are being used as second homes for wealthy owners, or used as holiday lets. The first priority is investment in insulation in these often hard-to-treat homes. Bringing rural properties up to standard could be a major source of employment in many areas.

There is also much work to be done cleaning up after fossil fuel and other polluting industries. Mining families in Ffos-y-fran, for instance, while fighting the proposal for a new opencast mine next door (United Valleys Action Group stopped the new mine), were interested in the idea of payment for the work of restoring their community which has lived under coal dust for generations..

Q7. How can measures you are proposing in this recovery and renewal period improve quality of life—for example around walking, cycling and public transport, and improving access to nature? What habitats are you especially concerned about and want to see more support for and focus on?

Indoors, where homes are warm enough in winter and not too hot in summer the effect on quality of life cannot be overstated. This affect not only health and comfort, but relationships, and people's prospects, eg for children and young people who may be forced to study or do homework in one room alongside the rest of the family, pensioners who go to bed early and get up late to keep warm, marriages under stress from inability to pay the bills, and people of all ages who cannot invite friends to their homes.

Outdoors, improved energy efficiency in homes could add greatly to air quality, and heating systems must only be chosen if they are non-polluting.

In addition, attention must be paid to the toxic chemicals now prevalent in both building materials and furnishings, the effects of which on health are now well known but have received little attention in this country.

Green roofs, trees, and reduction in concrete surfaces are all relevant to ensuring that urban homes do not overheat in the coming hot summers, which can be killers, especially for older people. Heat can massively reduce everyone's comfort, productivity, and ability to learn, think and even stay awake.

Q8. In providing responses to 1-7, please can you indicate to us what considerations of cost-benefit analysis are relevant (and, if such analysis has not been undertaken, what sources of information would be necessary to understand costs and benefits); and which institutions would be required to enable effective delivery? In particular what is the role of public and private investment and different ownership models?

Information

The best source of information, both for setting national policy and for responding to the needs of individual fuel poor households, would be energy audits of every home, beginning in areas where the need is greatest. Audits are routinely and quite widely carried out, at present mostly by the voluntary sector. Going far beyond what is often a misleading EPC rating, they look into drafts, damp, mould, energy loss through poor insulation of walls, roof and floor, sufficiency of windows, the heat supply, appliances, and the numbers and ages and health and income of people who live there. Many people's lives have been hugely improved by such audits, even now, when the help that can be accessed as a result is fairly limited. In combination with the measures outlined above, on energy efficiency and heating, and with the proposal on pricing outlined in Q10, they could be transformative. They would also put a government in an excellent position to make policy on the basis of fact.

A quicker and more immediate step would be to give local authorities the funding they need to properly identify buildings with flammable cladding (see also Q1). Inside Housing has highlighted how local authorities have been told to take this essential first step towards getting them remediated: while funds have been made available for this purpose, the money is far too little to do the job.

In addition, information is needed about how people are affected by cold and damp when cladding has been removed but not restored. Despite our efforts (together with Tower Blocks UK) in writing to local authorities and housing associations, there is still no reliable information. Landlords say they don't see people's spending on heat going up by very much when cladding is off. This is because the affected residents do not have the money. (Residents speak about the cold hey are suffering, here)

Public and private housing, energy and heating

The disaster of cladding removal shows up all the fissures and gross injustices of the current model of home building and ownership -- including in homes commissioned by local authorities, and/or used to house social housing tenants. The government's refusal to take a lead in remediation, and particularly their refusal to take on private interests -- especially

developers -- is well chronicled in a recent Inside Housing article.[4] No threat of compulsory purchase to worry recalcitrant landlords (like the absent, often distant, owners of most of Britain's high-rise buildings). No levy on developers to pay for wholesale remediation of existing flammable stock, as in Australia. And no overall state planning to ensure that the most dangerous buildings get cladding off first. Cladding supplier Dr Jonathan Evans,who has acted as a government adviser, "says a list of buildings requiring the most urgent work could have been collated, and approved contractors assembled to carry it out. But the government was not interested in taking on this role." The result is the picture we see today, with tenants and leaseholders in danger and suicidal, three years on from Grenfell. Only £134 of the £600 million government money allocated has been spent on remediating AC-clad tower blocks, and the new Building Safety Fund offers only £1 billion for an estimated £3.5 billion worth of work.

For leaseholders, the picture is complicated by the overnight loss of 100% of the value of their flats, and an expectation that they will end up paying for remediation.

For tenants whose homes have been refurbished under PFI schemes, the buck-passing has been lethal. Pendleton social housing estate in Salford, with nine buildings virtually identical to Grenfell, was denied a share of the (drastically underspent) £400 million allocated for social housing remediation, on the grounds that state money should not subsidise a dividend-paying private scheme. When Pendleton Together and the council -- after nearly three years -- came up with money to get the cladding off, HMCLG refused permission. A further proposal has now been submitted but not before residents endured three months of lockdown in buildings that could go up in flames. The public/private impasse has led to a huge mental health crisis on the estate. Although work has now started on removing cladding, Pendleton Together now tell FPA that remediation is expected to be completed "over the next two years".

A return to widespread council housing, with residents' control, is urgent for these and many other reasons. So is direct public management of the maintenance and other work now undertaken by many layers of unaccountable contractors. In many cases the work of remediating cladding has been passed to the same corporations that put on flammable cladding in the first place, along with faulty fire doors, and more. The work of refurbishing the UK's housing stock to meet health needs and the demands of the changing climate must be allocated to builders who are accountable to the community, rather than to shareholders and finance.

Equally, the privatisation of gas and electricity has been a disaster. Energy is far too important to our lives, and far too critical for the climate, to allow decisions to be governed by the need to maximise profit. And the patchwork of heat networks -- which cry out for effective planning across wide areas -- has compounded the perverse incentives of this industry, which receives huge state support but is largely privately owned. Brilliant operators, well-run small businesses and technical innovators who can and do make heat systems work much better are out-financed by others who don't seem to care if they work or not.

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[4] There is also a back story -- the blatant refusal of successive governments of all hues to respond to pleas from fire authorities and others for updated building regulations to ban flammable materials; plastics industry lobbyists were in positions of power and did not allow this (see section 2 here)

In each case, the solution is reappropriation of public wealth, at national and local and community-cooperative level, while rewarding and broadening the influence of the people who are making the breakthroughs (our many submissions on District Heating to the GLA, BEIS and CMA say more about the ownership question).

In the meantime questions arise about state intervention to support profit-making landlords and corporations, always in the name of protecting residents and customers. The Labour Party must press clearly and consistently for residents and customers -- and the climate and environment -- to actually be effectively protected, as outlined in Q3, while challenging bail-outs that undermine that purpose.

Q9. What are the key institutions including business, local government, trade unions who should play a role in delivering a green recovery? Are there particular lessons that should be learnt about effective delivery? Local people know their communities better than Westminster. What steps do we need to introduce to empower local communities to be able to tailor the provision to suit their needs?

Safe affordable housing is a right which has too long been undermined by building homes for purposes of speculation rather than to live in. Private developers, and private contractors, and their sub, and sub, sub, sub contractors have created a morass of expensive, unaccountable housing provision that also leaves many thousands homeless.
For social housing construction, and for all retrofitting, local authority direct works and supervision, natural and safe, healthy materials, and accountability to residents who must live in the properties are essential principles. There must be procedures to ensure that complaints are acted on. Both public and private sector tenants must be empowered to ensure that their housing is brought up to standard, including by restoring rights and resources to **tenants and residents associations.** These rights and resources are currently being removed, with residents denied access to their own community rooms, and associations with elected representatives are being closed down or sidelined in favour of hand-picked teams. Locally and nationally, Labour could win much credit for reversing this process and facilitating democracy on an estate and borough-wide level.

Tenancies, both social and private, must be secure, and rents must be controlled.
The current leasehold system leaves 4.3 million so-called “homeowners” at the mercy of freeholders, many facing ever-growing ground rents and service charges, poor service, and often unsafe cladding and/or dysfunctional heating systems, for which they must also raise huge capital sums on demand. As far as we know no other country has his oppressive ownership system, and it should be abolished. In the meantime leaseholders, like tenants (often neighbours on the same estates) must be empowered to effectively control their housing.

Transparent structures must be put in place for prompt and accountable resolution of complaints, making information publicly available on the web. There must be meaningful processes for informed consultation on new developments and changes -- both those put forward by landlords and government, and those proposed by residents themselves.

Accountability to residents is hugely important when it comes to retrofitting of renewable energy options, including for instance, installation of solar panels, heat pumps,or heat

networks. This means making available full and *independent* information, with pros and cons, and being responsive both to people's worries or complaints, and to people's ideas, hopes and initiatives. Adequate compensation, paid to the end user, is a key driver for accountability.

Q10. What other issues/points do you think are important? What are the Covid-19 challenges of delivering such a programme and how might they be overcome?

For the programme we are describing, Covid-19 creates far fewer challenges than opportunities, and a spreading realisation that such changes are needed very urgently. Lack of funding can be overcome by a sea-change in priorities; lack of skills can be overcome by training and international cooperation. Opposition and vested interests can be overcome by helping to encourage and mobilise the rapidly growing mass of the UK population that wants to move in this direction, by being honest about the climate and bold in what you promote, and by ensuring that Labour local authorities respond to their residents' demands.