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THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNPOPULAR COUNCIL HOUSING ESTATES

AND ATTEMPTED REMEDIES

1895 - 1984

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The thesis is divided into three parts. Part I traces the history of Council housing from the nineteenth century to the present day, showing the influences in building and management that have produced poor, run-down publicly owned housing estates. Octavia Hill, the ardent reformer, developed a system of intensive, localised management, coupling slow renovation of the worst slum housing with social support for the most disadvantaged households. Local authorities failed to copy her approach while wanting to combat slums. They built for secure, working families and built large, dense blocks of flats, often displacing the very poor. General housing subsidies were introduced in a big building spurt after World War I, and in 1930 these subsidies were targetted at slum clearance, relief of overcrowding and the construction of flats in inner cities. Local authorities were expanding rapidly and private landlords declined. After World War II the mass housing era began and about four million homes were built by Councils over 30 years. Half were industrially built or in the form of flats, both unpopular styles. Most were in cities on large estates. Management problems developed apace, with poor staff training and little political will to provide meticulous landlord services. Lettings policies concentrated the poorest families on the least popular estates. Homelessness increased in spite of evidence of a crude housing surplus. The gap between the Council sector and the owner-occupied sector grew in socio-economic terms.

Part II examines the detailed evidence of the Government and local authorities, illustrating the emergence of difficult to let estates as a major housing problem. Councils were already seriously concerned in the late 1960's. Difficult-to-let estates were first recognised officially in 1974 by the Government. The overwhelming evidence provoked the Government into a major new housing initiative in 1979, the Priority Estates Project.

Part III present the conditions on 20 unpopular estates around the country, and the efforts of the local authorities concerned to tackle the problems through local estate-based initiatives.

Overall, the conclusion is that major advances can be made through an integrated localised approach, although the future role of elected political bodies as major landlords of predominantly poor communities must be questioned. Autonomous local management organisations, better training and more socially mixed estate communities are found to be ways forward.

* * * *

NOTE ON THE AREA OF THE U.K. COVERED IN THE STUDY

The information in the study from DoE sources covers England, as does the Priority Estates Project survey. Some examples from Wales and Scotland are explicitly mentioned. The other major source, the Housing Policy Green Paper, covers England and Wales. The studies by David Donnison, Clare Ungerson and Patrick Dunleavy, which provide further general statistics, cover Britain as a whole.

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INTRODUCTION

"Public squalor" might be a more apt title for the story of unpopular, run-down council estates. Ubiquitous, sensational press coverage of the phenomenon has generated a climate of panic, yet very little is known or documented about the 300,000 council dwellings officially classified as difficult to let or the estimated one million dwellings on council estates housing some three million persons who would like to leave and on which housing staff are reluctant to work.

Council tenants move more often than owner-occupiers, primarily in an attempt to escape unpopular estates and upgrade their housing status. Most council tenants say that they would like to become owner-occupiers but less than a third want to buy their existing council dwelling, even with very favourable discounts.

Councils often choose to demolish unpopular, unlettable council homes rather than admit defeat of their past hopes by selling them to developers or to homesteaders, who would often bid for them.

Council repairs workers have estimated that two-thirds of their work time goes on travel and paper-pushing and only

one third on actually doing repairs. Ombudsmen say most housing complaints are connected with repairs.

Tower blocks have often been blamed for council housing's bad name. Yet far from being the main culprit, they are under-represented in every count of unpopular estates. They are also easier to improve and to let than "slab blocks", "deck access" and "walk-up flats".

Tenants are often assumed to be the cause of an estate's decline or decay. There is logic in expecting the people who live there to keep it clean and care for it. Yet few tenants believe they have the power or the right to exercise full control over their home and immediate environment. Legally, it is clearly the landlord's responsibility to maintain the fabric of all dwellings and also all communal areas of which the council is the sole owner. This legal duty would apply to all the estates in this study, a duty that has rarely been executed.

The book examines these problems and illustrates them from the development of slum housing areas within the landlord tradition, and particularly the public landlord tradition. It also examines current efforts at reversing those conditions.

It has been shown that the key to improvements and sometimes dramatic reversal lies in a few embarrassingly simple and well-known techniques.

The landlord must have a local estate base, with full-time, committed, local staff, open to tenants every day. The local staff must have direct responsibility and be able to get the key jobs done, such as letting an empty property or getting a repair seen to. The tenants must be involved in decision-making. Manual workers, such as caretakers and repairs workers, must be part of the local team. Money must be spent carefully, sparingly and incrementally, so that it is not wasted and confidence can be won back in the landlord. The process of dumping reluctant but desperate tenants on the estates of lowest demand must be reversed through a local recruitment drive to attract friends and relatives into the community. Should this smack of favouritism, a close look at the hierarchy of estates and the pecking order of applicants will disabuse any innocent observer of the fairness of existing systems of allocating public housing.

There is no sign that public-rented housing will go away. The Thatcher government, in spite of the popular image that it wants to get rid of council housing, has publicly asserted that for the foreseeable future, at least four million dwellings will remain in public ownership. About 70% of the occupants of these homes will be eligible for Housing Benefit to subsidise the rent and rates they cannot afford. Nearly half of the dwellings will be in the form of flats or maisonettes. A million will be industrially built, often structurally defective, expensive to maintain and heat, hard to insulate and unpopular with families.

Such is a large part of the council stock of the future, poorly designed and built, and occupied predominantly by low-income households, on large and uninviting estates that are hard to manage.

"The Development of Unpopular Council Housing Estates and Attempted Remedies" is an examination of how we reached this critical ebb in our long struggle to overcome slum housing conditions. Fortunately, the conclusions bear little relation to the bulk of the grisly story. For only in the last few years of renewed crisis, has a new strand of thinking emerged in the housing world. Many housing problems respond more swiftly and more positively to sensitive, localised housing management than they do to the blunt instrument of the bulldozer or the attempt to create yet another Mecca.

"The land over which the bulldozers may be poised is not the Garden of Eden; and there are already more than two persons living there."¹

A custodial approach to the publicly-owned built environment, ugly as much of it is, will augur well for our cities of tomorrow.

Reference

¹Speech by Archbishop Worlock of Liverpool at the Institute of Housing Annual Conference in Harrogate 1984.

CHAPTER I - NINETEENTH CENTURY ORIGINS OF THE LANDLORD TRADITION

"Transplant them tomorrow to healthy and commodious houses and they would pollute and destroy them."

- Octavia Hill

The Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries caused a huge movement of people from countryside to town. Large new cities sprang up around the new factories and humble shoddy dwellings were packed into the urban landscape in a way that had never happened before. People had to live near work, for there was no transport; factory and mining hours were long - 16 hours a day was quite common. "Back-to-backs" and "two-up-two-down" became the classic housing style of the masses.

The social and health problems caused by 19th century urban conditions were overwhelming. With no sanitation, no piped water, a damp climate, and families with an average of five children, epidemics of cholera, smallpox, typhoid and tuberculosis were common and the death rate rose in the crowded streets of industrial cities. Although overcrowding and dense urban development were not new, and although the industrial landscape affected only a small part of the country initially, it set a pattern of utilitarian squalor that by the end of the 19th century embraced the majority of the population.¹ Its marks have endured till now and in the major centres of population have only been displaced by a more modern and possibly as squalid utilitarianism.

Throughout the 19th century, private landlords provided the vast majority of housing for rich and poor alike. By 1914, only 800,000 dwellings were owner-occupied while over seven million were rented from private landlords. Councils, which had started building to replace insanitary dwellings in the 1880's, owned a mere 20,000 dwellings in 1914.² In the city areas where land was scarce and jobs plentiful, housing had long been expensive, crowded, and in bad condition for the mass of the poor. The housing needs of the bursting city populations were often in conflict with those of the factory owners and increasingly as the 19th century advanced, with those of the railway companies, road builders, model dwelling companies, housing trusts, and even school boards, which from 1871 were required to provide schools in districts where none had yet been built. These activities swallowed up city land and extenuated the problems of providing better housing for poor people. Even the initial attempts of local authorities to provide decent housing invariably displaced the poorest and most vulnerable households, making their problems worse. Most landlords did not want to cater for the very poor, who were seen at worst as feckless, disorderly or diseased, and at best as unprofitable.

Nineteenth century working conditions were probably as bad as living conditions. Lord Shaftesbury and others fought for Factory Acts to control such abuses as child labour, while, starting in 1864, Octavia Hill and a growing band of

lady helpers led a valiant housing reform movement that stressed the importance of running poor housing properly in order to make up for the inadequacy of the buildings.

"Building never was our main duty. It always was the right government of houses which I felt the greatest need."³

Octavia Hill argued forcibly that improvements like tapped water should be added and overcrowding reduced, rather than attempt to replace the slum houses with better dwellings at a cost that would put them out of reach of the poorest and most needy people, creating even more stress in the remaining slums.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE HOUSING CONDITIONS OF THE WORKING CLASSES 1884-1885

The clearest insight into conditions of overcrowding, ill health and exploitation in the homes of the very poor is given by the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, which published its findings in 1885, examining in detail why severe overcrowding continued up to the 1880's in spite of the substantial increase in the total number of dwellings, the general rise in living standards, and the improved sanitary and other health conditions. The great reformers, Lord Shaftesbury and Octavia Hill, both gave evidence to the Commission. Lord Shaftesbury asserted to the Commission that -

"The evils of overcrowding.....were still a public scandal and were becoming in certain localities more serious than they ever were,"⁴

Demolition, whether for sanitary reasons by local authorities or for developments such as railways, new dwellings and schools, was seen as the major cause of worsening conditions for the poorest -

"Demolitions have taken place for all these purposes and although the health and appearance of London have vastly improved in consequence of some of them, and though others have been a great boon to the better class of the poor, yet they have been accompanied with the severest hardship to the very poor, increasing overcrowding and the difficulty of obtaining accommodation, and sending up rents accordingly."⁵

The demolition of unfit housing and the construction of model dwellings were also found to be a growing cause of displacement -

"The houses so removed are generally in a hopelessly bad condition.....Nevertheless a good deal of hardship is caused by this class of displacement. The overcrowded state of Spitalfields is attributed in great measure to such clearances, and the rise in rent which has doubled.....is largely owing to demolitions.....When the new model dwellings are completed the very poor displaced do not generally find accommodation in them, and therefore the overcrowding continues notwithstanding the new erections."⁶

The continued influx of immigrants from the country, Ireland, Scotland and Europe added to the overcrowding. These workers, according to the Royal Commission,⁷ often enjoyed better health and were therefore more popular with employers. But their arrival intensified the problems of overcrowding in the poorest, most transient districts.

The Commission concluded that -

"the pulling down of buildings inhabited by the very poor, whether undertaken for philanthropic, sanitary or commercial purposes, does cause overcrowding into the neighbouring slums with the further consequence of keeping up the high rents."⁸

The Commission examined evidence of wage levels in relation to rents and found that dockers and costermongers earned between eight shillings and ten shillings a week, depending on employment and markets. Artisans earned about 25 shillings and the average for all labourers in Clerkenwell was about 16 shillings.

The average rent for one room across several London districts was 3s.10 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.; for two rooms 6s. In the provinces, the average was 2s.6d. Thus the average rent for one room in London would be a quarter of the average wage.⁹ But for the poorest families, rent would amount to nearly half their wages.

People without work or drifting in and out of the multitude of casual jobs would be constantly on the move, evicted from room to room.

The Royal Commission looked at conditions of overcrowding and rent levels among the poor, and found that -

"It was common practice in London for each family to have only a single room for the rent of which nearly half of them paid between 25% and 50% of their wages.....A contributory cause was the existence of the disreputable middle man."¹⁰

The middle man was in effect the housing manager, fixing and collecting rents, letting rooms and evicting tenants, doing repairs to a minimal standard or not at all. His basic job appeared to be packing in as many people as possible to maximise rents. The same rents were often charged by middle men to the very poor for part of a room as were charged by Octavia Hill and other more conscientious landlords for a simple flat.

It is worth quoting one or two examples of actual conditions:

St. Pancras - "an underground back kitchen 12 feet by 9 feet and 8 feet high inhabited by seven persons."

Bermondsey - "the washhouse at the back, 10 feet by 5, a father and mother, two children and two older sons."

Newcastle-upon-Tyne - "140 families in 34 houses, which each consist of four rooms and two cellars.....50 houses with 230 families.....62 houses with 310 families." 11

Usually in each house there was only one water supply and one closet for all the families. In some cases the closet was shared by several houses. In Clerkenwell a case was found of 16 houses using one closet.

"A large number have no washhouses, no backyards, and some no back ventilation," 11^a

having been built on what were the backs of older houses.

The conditions of the houses let under these conditions were often a cause of scandal. The street doors were not secured, so stairways and entrances were commonly

"crowded by persons who, presumably having no other place of shelter, come there to sleep."¹²

Although the Commission cites vestries and district boards as being responsible for hiring scavengers to remove "dirt, ashes, rubbish and filth", it is clear that this duty was rarely performed adequately.

"There is much room for improvement in the matter of ashpits and dustbins.....Vegetable substance..... is frequently thrown into open dustholes.....lying for weeks decomposing, and poisoning the atmosphere of the close courts."¹³

The question of repairs was most complex. According to the Commission the owner was responsible but he would usually lease the house to a middle-man with responsibility for repairs in exchange for profit in rent collection. This was considered a major cause of the break-up of single family houses into one-room tenements. A case was cited to the Commission of the landlord, Lord Northampton, renting a house to a middle-man for £20 a year, who in turn rented it out room by room for a total of £100 a year. The middle-man expected to make between 50% and 150% profit on the rent he paid over to the landlord.¹⁴ Repairs were minimal and gross overcrowding was the crude method of expanding the rent income. Lord Northampton claimed that he did not like to enforce repairs in case it led to even higher rents.

Absurdly, because of the low wages and high rents, rent arrears were often a serious problem. Octavia Hill gave evidence to the Commission of large rent debts accumulated in properties she acquired. This was inevitable, given the wage and rent levels quoted, and led to constant moves by poor families. The Commission claimed that -

"it is likely that more than one half the population¹⁵ of certain poor districts are constantly shifting."

The impact on family life of these conditions was devastating. Lord Shaftesbury described the human waste in moving terms -

"An intelligent active young man.....comes up to London; he must have lodgings near his work; he is obliged to take, he and his wife, the first house that he can find, perhaps even in an alley..... his health is broken down; he himself succumbs, and he either dies or becomes perfectly useless. The wife falls into despair; in vain she tries to keep her house clean; her children increase upon her and at last they become reckless.....Their hearts are broken and they have not the means of doing it. They do not know how soon they shall go; they are merely wanderers on the face of the earth."¹⁶

Many other witnesses to the Commission described this impoverished class in less sympathetic terms, attributing their atrocious conditions to their own fecklessness and addiction to drink. The Commissioners did not resolve the cause and effect -

"To return however to the question whether drink and evil habits are the cause or consequence of the condition in which the poor live, the answer is

probably, the unsatisfactory one that drink and poverty act and react upon one another.....the poor who live under the conditions described have the greatest difficulty in leading decent lives and of maintaining decent habitations."¹⁷

The Royal Commission sought evidence from Octavia Hill about work among the "rejects" of society, asking if her role was -

"to reform the tenants that nobody else will touch."

Her answer underlined the close interdependence of cause and effect:

"The tenants and the houses."¹⁸

Her overriding commitment to helping only the very poorest was a hallmark of her reforming zeal, lending a special quality to her intimate and personal involvement in the details of housing management. She, like all reformers, was convinced that there was a way out.

"The principle on which the whole work rests is that the inhabitants and their surroundings must be improved together. It has never yet failed to succeed."^{18a}

OCTAVIA HILL, THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVOCATE

Octavia Hill, the Victorian housing reformer who gave such vivid evidence to the Royal Commission, based on her hard-won experience of housing conditions among the poor, had begun to acquire responsibility for slum property 20 years before the Commission sat. She prevailed upon rich benefactors either to invest their own money in poor, tenanted property and allow her to restore it by sound management, or

she was actually given houses which she managed with alacrity and efficiency. The condition of the properties she acquired was often appalling -

"out of 192 panes, only 8 were unbroken."¹⁹

The levels of social disorder in the overcrowded lodgings were equally distressing -

"Such was the court in 1869; a truly wild, lawless and desolate little kingdom."²⁰

She summed up, in "Homes of the London Poor",²¹ both the conditions she set out to combat and the simple management techniques she used to such good effect. When she began her housing work, she found that -

"In Marylebone, where I began work, nearly every family rented but one room.....There were no cooking ranges in the rooms; water was hardly ever carried up higher than the parlours.... Wages were very decidedly lower, hours of work were longer....From these and many other causes a London court in 1864 was a far more degraded and desolate place than it can be now.....Moreover in the rough courts they were little meddled with and could pursue in ignorance their insanitary habits."

The very first court that she took over with money from John Ruskin was a decayed slum -

"The place swarmed with vermin; the papers black with dirt, hung in long strips from the walls; the drains were stopped, the water supply out of order."²²

Octavia Hill blamed negligent private landlords for the extortions of the system of management among the poor in

the most vividly scathing terms. She came across a private landlord who was an undertaker by profession and who told her of the large number of bad debts which he compensated for by the ready trade from his tenants in funerals -

"It's not the rents I look to but the deaths I get out of the houses."

She found middle-men, acting on behalf of the landlords, often a cause of serious mismanagement. In an area of ill-repute in Nottingdale she took over, she found -

"Our first duty was to remove the middle-men and to enter into direct relations with the tenants..... The dirty furniture was removed, and the people were encouraged to provide their own. In this way, the rent being lower for unfurnished rooms, families could take two rooms for the same rent as one, thus mitigating the crowding. The closets, washhouses and yards were supervised; the drunken and rowdy inmates were in a measure both influenced and restrained and the quiet poor were protected, encouraged and gradually raised to better conditions.....No large expenditure in building has been incurred."²³

Octavia Hill detailed the role of the middle-man landlord in exploiting and corrupting the vulnerable poor. She seemed to believe that there was an evil connivance between the chaotic lives of those who fell out from society and those prepared to make a living out of the desperation that was its consequence -

"The influence of the majority of the lower class people who sublet to the poor is almost wholly injurious. That tenants should be given up to the dominion of those whose word is given and broken almost as a matter of course, whose habits

and standards are very low, whose passions are violent.....is very sad. It seems to me that a greater power is in the hands of landlords and landladies than of schoolteachers, power of life and death.....There are dreadful instances in which sin is really tolerated and shared, where the lodger who will drink most with his landlord is most favoured and many a debt overlooked, to compensate for which the price of rooms is raised; and thus the steady and sober pay more rent to make up for losses caused by the unprincipled."24

She found the management of such houses often almost non-existent -

"The dustbins were utterly unapproachable, and cabbage leaves, stale fish and every sort of dirt were lying in the passages and on the stairs; in some the back kitchen had been used as a dustbin but had not been emptied for years.....in some the kitchen stairs were many inches thick with dirt which was so hardened that a shovel had to be used to get it off."25 In some there was hardly any water to be had...."

However, there was nothing inevitable in this mismanagement and exploitation.

Octavia Hill was committed to making the landlord-tenant relationship work with the existing tenants.

"Steady improvement of the people and the houses without selection of the former or sudden reconstruction of the latter was our first duty."26

To do this, she became a thoughtful business manager, making the housing system for the poor advance the economic and social interests of all parties -

"The distinctive feature of our work has been that of devoting our full strength to management,"27

which she defined as "just governing rather than helping".

In that sense she was far from being a philanthropist or a lady-bountiful. She was convinced that all must pay their way -

"Prompt payment of rent strikes a blow at the credit system that is the curse of the poor."²⁸

She felt that unless housing for the poor was made economically viable, landlords would never fulfil their duties properly nor would tenants ever get a reasonable deal.

She emphatically claimed that -

"I have never allowed a second week's rent to become due."²⁹

In this sense her rule seemed harsh -

"The main tone of action must be severe."³⁰

But she believed that unless tenants assumed responsibility for their part of the bargain, they would abuse the property and fail to establish their independence and self-respect. Therefore "those who would not pay.....were ejected". For -

"where a man persistently refuses to exert himself, external help is worse than useless."³¹

Yet her helping hand was extended wherever there was a spark of response and her decades of work convinced her that almost all were helpable. She devised a battery of

supports for the many tenants who regularly hit hard times. She organised savings clubs; she reduced overcrowding by giving families more rooms for virtually the same rent as they previously paid for only one room; she only gave extra rooms, however, as they became available by persuading tenants to move to new houses that she was acquiring at a steady rate. She explained the lengths to which she would go to persuade tenants to take an extra room when it became available, or to move to another house to obtain a better home for their family. Many people were as resistant then as now to moving. She did not believe in coercion.

She reserved maintenance work for residents who lost their jobs, believing that -

"It is far better to give work than money or goods."³²

One dictum was -

"Perfect strictness in our business relations; perfect respectfulness in our personal relations."³³

She rejected strongly the notion of patronage -

"refuse resolutely to give any help but such as rouses self-help."³⁴

She was adamant that physical improvements should only come after a basic businesslike order had been established -

"repairs promptly and efficiently attended to, references taken up, cleaning sedulously supervised, overcrowding put an end to, the blessing of ready money payments enforced, accounts strictly kept, and above all, tenants so sorted as to be helpful to one another."³⁵

Octavia Hill claimed not to reject any needy tenants unless their behaviour to fellow-tenants was outrageous or unless they actually refused to pay their rent. But she did move a noisy tenant away from a quiet one, and tried to protect frail or ill tenants from any kind of disturbance. Her aim in "sorting tenants" was to help curb the impact of disturbing tenants on neighbours and to protect those seeking a peaceful life from disturbance.

She applied herself diligently to every trivial detail of management and maintenance, believing that

"it is on such infinitesimally small actions that the success of the whole work rests."³⁶

While decay and neglect bred their own disarray, she felt that

"people are ashamed to abuse a place they find cared for."³⁷

Above all it was her constant personal intervention and application in all aspects of management that restored order and habitability to previously ungovernable loss-making slums.

"They will add dirt to dirt.....but the more they find done for [the property] the more they will respect it till at last order and cleanliness prevail."³⁸

She herself, and increasingly her band of trained helpers, were a constant presence in the houses they ran, enforcing their own standards on people previously trapped in enslaving, communal squalor -

"The surest way to have any place kept clean is to go through it constantly yourself."³⁹

She was able to make ends meet on modest rents but to respectable standards by organising improvements incrementally on the basis of trade-offs with the tenants -

"reconstructing the estate can be successfully accomplished only if they [the landlord] can ensure the goodwill and co-operation of the present tenants."⁴⁰

Better amenities were introduced slowly and only to the extent that they could be paid for out of rents collected, and to the extent that existing improvements were respected. She invited tenants to choose their favoured improvements themselves, thus ensuring a high investment in protecting them. She always aimed to retain the existing community and rehouse tenants back into the area where rebuilding or extensive renovation were taking place, although she always tried to avoid uprooting anyone in the first place. She held tenants' meetings regularly in her own home and later added common-rooms to the courts she managed in order to encourage tenants' associations. She believed firmly in resident supervisors, resident repairmen and so on; she used to employ girls from the tenants' families in cleaning the houses and yards and in supervising play areas; and she

ardently advocated that open space be attached to all dwellings, no matter how small. She or her assistants personally visited all her tenants at least weekly, collecting rents, organising repairs, sorting out disputes, enforcing standards and finally establishing personal friendship. She felt that these five elements of management were totally interrelated and had to be carried out by one manager only, through personal door-to-door contact. She saw no short-cuts to this approach and no specialisation. The manager managed everything. It was the door-to-door contact and the total responsibility of one manager for everything affecting the landlord/tenant relationship that were her unique management tools.

Octavia Hill took a very strong stand against flat-building, which was now being advanced as the new answer to the slums. Her two main arguments against flats were -

"the small scope they give to individual freedom",
and the fact that -

"people become brutal in large numbers."⁴¹

She objected to the segregation of rich and poor caused by large blocks, believing that small clusters of poor families and rich families together worked better. She disliked the public nature of flats, the many communal areas inviting disorder and abuse, and the complications of controlling family and social life in an anonymous block that generated so little intimacy. She did not accept that improved

amenities and better layout compensated for the loss of outdoor space by each dwelling which she believed was an essential ingredient of healthy family life. In her evidence to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, she was asked whether her experience bore out the common working class objection to "very large blocks". She replied,

"They feel the objection to them on the ground of the monotony and ugliness of them and that feeling seems to grow."⁴²

She also claimed that tenants much preferred the old terraced houses -

"The people always greatly preferred cottages, or houses accommodating a small number of families."

She made the further criticism that the high cost of constructing blocks of modern flats determined access only for the more affluent working classes, thereby extending overcrowding, high rents and poverty in the remaining slums. For example, she found that rents in Drury Lane rose by 6d. to 1s. a week in consequence of the Peabody development there. Octavia Hill's criticism of slum demolition and reconstruction because it worsened the conditions of the poorest was echoed by other witnesses to the Royal Commission.⁴³

Most of all she believed that blocks of flats could only work with authoritarian rule because of their density and

communal arrangement. She preferred smaller-scale, more personal management in lower buildings.⁴⁴ She believed in exercising tight management control, not through policing and the threat of eviction, but through a familiar and trusting relationship, with clear responsibilities on both sides.

Octavia Hill did not only oppose flat-building on design grounds. She also opposed the principle of municipal housing, believing that elected representatives should not control something as basic as the supply of homes to their electors. She abhorred the large-scale approach so readily adopted by public bodies. However, she increasingly recognised that the scale of the problem was beyond her scope and indeed praised the efforts made by Glasgow City Council to tackle their slums, 50 dwellings by 50 dwellings,⁴⁵ attempting to rehouse people within their own communities.

By the end of her life in 1912, private landlords under her system were finding it increasingly hard to make ends meet. She felt herself overwhelmed by the scale of the housing problems of the very poor, and appalled by the spectacle of unlet, publicly-owned tenements, too expensive for the most needy. She bequeathed her system of management but failed to make any significant impact at a critical stage on the public bodies that were to become the major providers of housing for the poor. The most likely explanation is that she genuinely did not expect

councils to expand their housing activities very far. In this, she could not have been more wrong.

Three other elements to Octavia Hill's work should be mentioned. She advocated strong action against anti-social behaviour -

"It is a most merciful thing to protect the poor from the pain of living next door to drunken, disorderly people,"⁴⁶

and she had no scruples about evicting tenants whose behaviour made life miserable for other residents. Noise, alcohol and violence were the abuses that she cited and that she regarded as "immoral", though by inference unstable relationships and prostitution were a major cause of disputes, brawls, general disturbance and scandal.

"Those who⁴⁷...lead clearly immoral lives were ejected."

She implied from her yearly letters to fellow workers that respectability and Victorian morality were important insofar as they affected the communal life of a house or affected relations between tenants. She only ever cited continuous disturbance to neighbours or an absolute refusal to pay rent without just cause as reasons for eviction.

Octavia Hill talked passionately of one solitary old lady who begged to be moved so that she could die in peace without being able to hear her drunken, disorderly

neighbour. But she did not evict without first giving the offending tenant the choice of a more socially acceptable way of life, since disorder was often bred of lax standards of management. She found that reform was very often possible, and cites no case where she actually gave up.

The second special element of Octavia Hill's approach was her love of nature and her desire to beautify the environment of crowded city courts, on however small a scale -

"The sweet luxuriance of spring flowers is more enjoyed in that court than would readily be believed."⁴⁸

As a crusading founder of the National Trust and a fighter for London's few open spaces, she felt that the poor would find life so much more bearable if they had access to sunlight and to growing green things. Therefore she sought always to provide access to open air in spite of working under the most desperate conditions. She and her fellow workers arranged many trips to the countryside with tenants and their children. On one occasion she was known to come back with bunches of wild flowers for all her tenants. She also acquired country property to which children of the tenants and sometimes whole families could go to recover from illness and to enjoy fresh air and nature.

The third element not so far mentioned was training.

Throughout her career she recruited like-minded women who

could act as visitors/rent-collectors/managers for the ever expanding stock of property she controlled.* She believed strongly that women rather than men should provide the personal, home-based service of housing management she had evolved because the woman was so much more in command of the home and family and the man was so often absent. She also believed women to be more sympathetic in distress and more knowledgeable in questions of budgeting, diet, hygiene, child development and so on. She was clearly not too happy about the growing problem of male estate superintendents in the blocks of flats then being built, as they played the tough role of authoritarian guards and could not establish the friendly personal trust that she so relied on. This was yet another argument against the blocks.

She did not establish formal training other than in book-keeping, about which she was almost fanatically rigorous, and she relied heavily on the individual

* By the time she died about 50 trained women managers worked with her directly or with landlords who adopted her method of management. This means that she must have controlled or directly influenced the management of about 15,000 properties. In her evidence to the Royal Commission she was asked how much property she owned or managed and she responded that because she constantly disaggregated her operations and encouraged each new development to be autonomous, she had no idea at all of the numbers of properties or tenants involved. Eight years before the Commission sat, she had valued her own property at the equivalent of about 1,000 one-room tenements.

"I know I balanced off the accounts of £70,000 and that was then decentralised; I have never touched it again. All I have now has grown up since."

When asked how much, she replied -

"I am not sure."

It is therefore hard to deduce how big a landlady she was herself.⁴⁹

initiative and responsibility of her workers. She devolved all responsibility for personal door-to-door management to each worker, who was given responsibility for about 300 properties. She wrote to them often; held meetings with them and reprimanded them for shortfalls in rent or any other lapse in standards. Octavia Hill wanted housing management recognised in the way that nursing and teaching were coming to be recognised.

"If there existed a body of ladies trained to more thorough work, qualified to supervise more minutely, likely to enter into such details as bear on the comfort of home life, they might be entrusted by owners with their houses. We all can remember how the training of nurses and of teachers has raised the standard of work required in both professions. The same change might be hoped for in the character of the management of dwellings let to the poor."⁵⁰

When the Royal Commission asked her about training for housing management, she explained -

"I think people with tact can do it.....capable, sensible, ordinary people. What we want is a combination of interest in the people with a certain amount of business training."

She felt she could train a capable person in six weeks.

CONCLUSION

Octavia Hill, for all her great love of nature and open spaces, accepted the built environment with all its horrors and sought to change it through running it properly rather than trusting to a new round of building enterprise to

replace the old.

Already far ahead of her time in thinking, she saw redevelopment as a terrible scourge on the poorest families, appalling as she found the existing conditions -

"The high cost of building, the rise of rates, the sometimes absurd requirements of local bodies, make it impossible to reaccommodate families at the same rents as in the old houses. This makes it to my mind a very great duty on the part of owners and local authorities to preserve so far as possible all old houses occupied by the poor, always supposing the drains and roofs are sound, and the rooms dry and light. The fashion of clearing away, which makes a grand show, has in my estimation, gone quite far enough.....so pause before you destroy an old house which is, or can be made healthy."51

Octavia Hill showed how, with meticulous management, and a businesslike but personal and trusting relationship with the tenants, she could transform the living conditions of the very poorest and break even financially or even show a slight profit on the money invested. Octavia Hill must be one of the few housing reformers who neither built houses nor argued for the replacement of slums with new and better homes, but relied entirely on how she ran or managed the existing houses.

However, her bold experiment compares well with the brave but almost futile struggle of her successors to have an impact on the major 20th century problems of slum clearance, mass public housing, and the emergence of vast bureaucratic systems. These are questions for the

following chapters.

Her whole ethos hinged on what she believed to be the constant gentle, understanding, unifying touch of women workers, and her reforming methods were kept alive by the women that she trained and their successors.

THE PHILANTHROPIC TRUSTS

The Peabody Trust was founded in 1862, two years before Octavia Hill acquired her first property. The Guinness, Sutton and Samuel Lewis Trusts were founded later in the Victorian era. Several rich Victorians, appalled by the urban squalor that increasing wealth had spawned, bequeathed fortunes for the purposes of building model dwellings to house the deserving poor. In dense city conditions, the Trustees wrestled with their bequest, packing as many homes as possible onto the scarce land.

These early trusts built thousands of model dwellings, usually in large blocks of tenement flats, to house the poor, but not the very poorest. They were more than ready to exercise disciplined and tightly controlled management over their expensive and much vaunted experiment.

Octavia Hill's methods of intensive, unified, on-the-ground management were widely adopted by the philanthropic trusts,

although she criticised Peabody for displacing the very poorest and disapproved of their dense, large-scale developments. It was spelled out in the Sutton Dwellings Trust* deeds that they would house the "respectable poor" with "proof of good character", and this certainly made their social tasks easier. They developed a system of resident estate management, with a resident superintendent in charge of each estate, controlling lettings, rents, repairs, communal cleaning, laundries and bath-houses, and ruling the blocks, often with a rod of iron. One resident worker, caretaker, porter, repairsman, manager or superintendent was employed for every 50 dwellings. The tradition has survived to this day. The Trusts throughout their 120 years history have been the envy of many local authorities, although they have often also been accused of paternalism, selective lettings, and harsh management. While it is said that they could not have succeeded with the "irrespectable" or disaffected, their intensive, coherent, local and resident management system has made physically unattractive blocks viable for low-income families for generations, which contrasts sharply with the early experience of local authorities.

It is a source of some puzzlement that the close, high, utilitarian blocks of the early Trusts have always been in high demand and popular with residents in spite of their oppressive style. The Trusts and the occupants would readily admit that these poky Victorian tenements were

* Later to become the Sutton Housing Trust.

physically far from the ideal homes they were built to provide. The key factor which made them work over their hundred years of history was the meticulous, if rather authoritarian style of management. The Trusts bequeathed a legacy of local resident management and maintenance, leading to close and interdependent relations between tenant and landlord that have inspired new thinking much later in the story of "Public Landlords".

The philanthropic Trusts up to the First World War had built more than three times the number of dwellings built by local authorities. They had the assets of private capital bequeathed for charity and the intense commitment to helping the poor of leading philanthropists. But the Trusts paid no heed to Octavia Hill's appeal to renovate the old terraced dwellings rather than build anew. The very poorest were often displaced by the redevelopment that followed their eviction. In any case they could not afford the new rents, exactly as Miss Hill had predicted.⁵²

A pattern of urban redevelopment was set by the philanthropic Trusts which actually intensified the problems of the very poorest in the late 19th century. In the 1880's local authorities were to be given powers to follow the path of model dwellings construction. In fact, local authorities had just begun to build their first blocks of model dwellings when the Royal Commission was called to examine the terrible housing conditions and

to propose solutions. One solution it did not endorse was the development of large tenement blocks of flats, whether by Trusts or councils, both because they displaced the poorest families, making their housing conditions worse and their rents higher, and because they were intrinsically unpopular and hard to manage. The early history of the London County Council proved them right.

THE BEGINNING OF LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING

The first Acts that gave local authorities the power to remove unhealthy dwellings and replace them with sound working class homes came between 1868 and 1879 and were called the Torrens and the Cross Acts. After the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes had pondered the stirring evidence of people like Lord Shattisbury, Octavia Hill, Bishops and other concerned people, local authorities, in addition to replacing demolished slums under the Artisan's and Labourer's Dwellings Act of 1875, were given even greater powers to build new working class houses. This propelled local authorities into a pathfinding role which they have only recently seen curtailed a hundred years later.

With the power to demolish bad housing and replace it with good, local authorities stepped into the housing market. They believed that public landlords could

provide better conditions, standards and services than private landlords, although they did not attempt to solve the problems of the poorest.

Renting, especially in cities, was simultaneously becoming less profitable for private landlords as standards and costs rose and as the stock of housing aged and land became scarce.

Average rents before the First World War were higher as a proportion of average income than they were in 1975 for council accommodation. Overall rents dropped from an estimated $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ of income in 1912 to 7.2% in 1975.⁵³

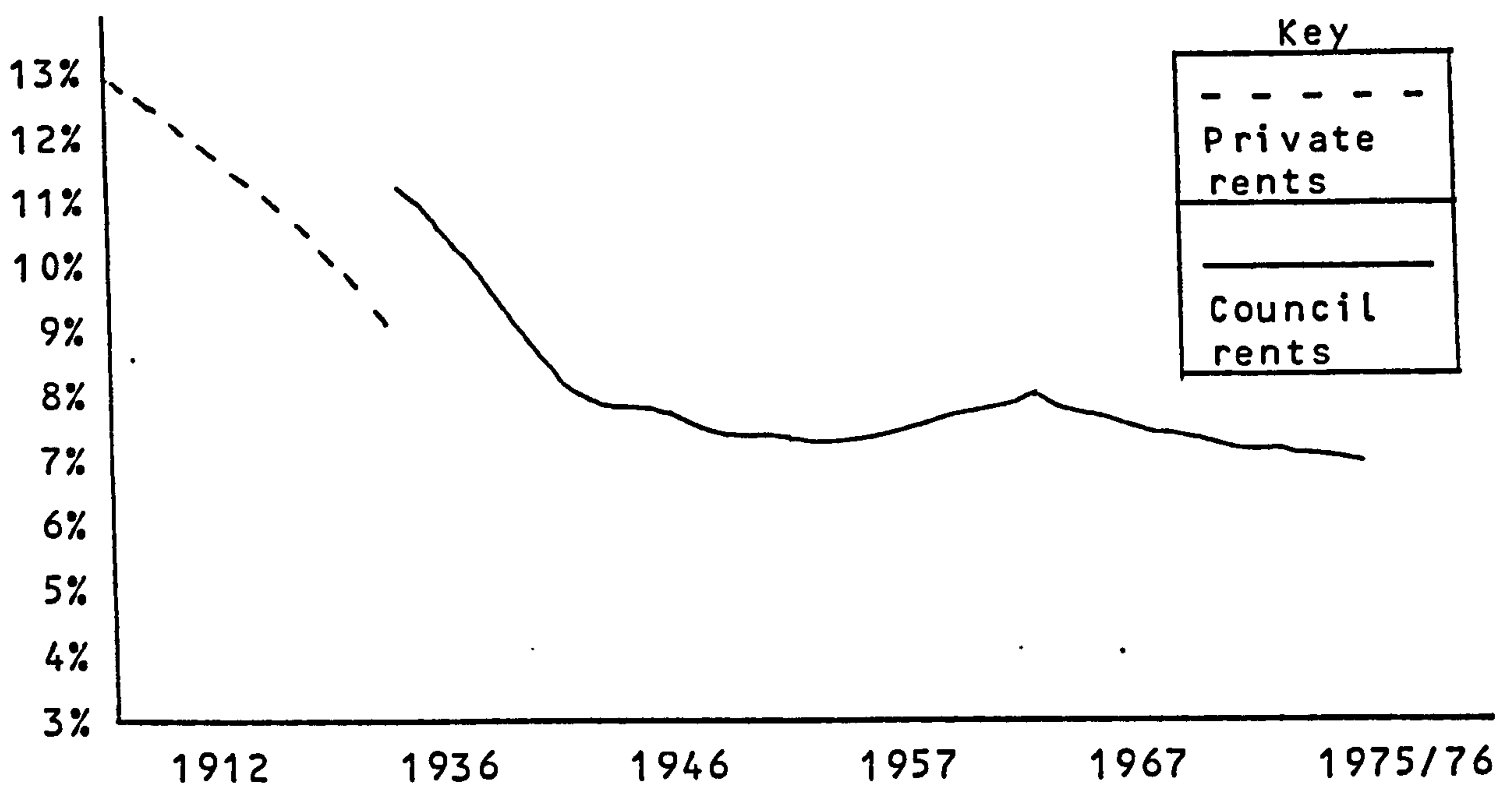
According to the 1977 Housing Policy Green Paper:⁵⁴

"average local authority rents in the late 1930's were lower in relation to average earnings than typical rents before 1914. But they were still high relative to income in comparison with the post-war years."

The following graph illustrates the rents paid as a proportion of income since the beginning of the century. There are no figures for council rents till 1936, so the only earlier comparisons are with private sector rents.*

* By calculating the difference between the rate of public investment in housing and the rate of public subsidies to housing between 1924 and 1975, it is possible to deduce that the rate of subsidy has increased more than twice as fast as the rate of investment. Therefore public sector rents in the early years of the century were bound to be much closer to the market rate than they are now and the rent levels for the private sector can be taken as a measure of the proportion of income spent on rents. These calculations are based on investment and subsidy figures in the Housing Policy Green Paper.

Average rent as % of average earnings 1912 - 1976



SOURCE: Housing Policy Green Paper, HMSO 1977, p.43

The graph illustrates the problems that families with below average incomes would have had in meeting rent payments.

From the start council housing was aimed at employed working families. The Housing Policy Green Paper of 1977 estimated that the average rent and rates for a new working class dwelling in 1906 would have been 25% of average earnings.⁵⁵ It follows therefore that anyone earning below average wages or in unstable employment would not be able to afford a new council dwelling for which rents and rates were not subsidised at this stage. Nor were there rebates. Only steady wage-earners were selected for the early council tenancies.

"Building costs were so high that only the better paid artisans and persons of similar economic status could afford to pay the rents which the local authorities were obliged to charge, and the local authorities for their part had perforce to secure a class of tenant which would be an asset and not a liability from a rent-paying standpoint."⁵⁶

Local authorities considered their new housing projects as models for others to follow, rather than a mass solution.

However, from its earliest days council housing was beset with two flaws. First, it was not geared to the market place, cushioned as it was by financing from the rates and by special powers under the various Acts. So the demand for council housing and the rents it could command were not carefully measured. Some flats were difficult to let from the very earliest days of council history. According to Octavia Hill's biographer, Moberley Bell,⁵⁷ London County Council flats were being advertised for letting at the turn of the century with 2-4 weeks rent free as an inducement -

"The difficulty was not to find tenements, but to find tenants."

Octavia Hill herself was alarmed by the obvious drop in demand for rented housing -

"All over London the same change has taken place, and the local papers are ringing with accounts of the thousands of tenements unlet.....there has been a depression in trade and an alarming extravagance on the part of local authorities which has increased the difficulty of the financial problem."⁵⁸

Some of the less popular L.C.C. estates had numbers of empty dwellings until the First World War created a shortage acute enough to generate demand for the unpopular blocks -

"In some of the less favourably situated block dwellings, there was for many years a high proportion of empties, and it was not until the pressure on housing due to the war was felt that some block dwellings were fully let."⁵⁹

London County Council opted for the "modern" idea of building flats rather than houses, considering amenities more important than design, and wanting to house as many families as possible on the scarce land. There was fierce argument in the Royal Commission over the advantages and drawbacks of flat-building. Octavia Hill reasoned forcibly that blocks of flats were not a response to housing demand but an imposed solution that would never be popular -

".....the day has quite gone by for the erection of block buildings. They were never satisfactory, and nothing but the great pressure on the people ever made them resort to them. Now that the facilities of transit enable so many to get to the suburbs, and thus the great pressure on the central houses is removed, blocks would not let well, at least so I believe."

Her arguments did not prevail and flats became the norm for council building in inner city areas, providing many more amenities than before and greater internal space to each family, but depriving it of privacy and outdoor space, however restricted -

"Even a third-rate house with a backyard of its own is better than the modern flats which the London County Council is now building because when the tenant can command his own front door and staircase, he can preserve the unity of his family."⁶⁰

There was a radical change in the housing scene over the final 20 years of the last century, with a rapid expansion of public intervention in the built environment, with major redevelopment in cities for roads, railways, schools and other public buildings, the spread of flat-building, the suburban explosion, and the gradual impact of health and labour laws.

Local authorities were only just finding their feet on the housing front, and some rushed into the breach without any careful evaluation of who needed help or how that help could best be provided. The result in the big cities where early council initiatives were most common, such as Birmingham, Glasgow and London, was the provision of relatively expensive, high-standard accommodation for the working classes, where shortages of very cheap accommodation were still acute but where access to good housing was not possible for the poorest and where the supply of land was strictly limited.

Under the new powers given to local authorities, change came on a relatively small scale at first. By the First World War, only 10% of the population owned their own homes and only 20,000 local authority dwellings had been built - one half of them were in London. The vast majority were still in the hands of private landlords and conditions for the masses of people were very poor.

OWNERSHIP OF HOUSING 1914 (in millions)

Tenure	Nos. of dwellings	% of dwellings
Owner-occupier	.8	10%
Local authorities	.002 (20,000 total)	.02%
Private and miscellaneous rented	7.1	90%
Total	7.9	100%

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

THE BIRTH OF HOUSING DEPARTMENTS

Local authorities had been pushed by the squalor and health problems of the slums into rearguard demolition and attempts at public landlordism for which there was no precedent or procedure.

Management was not regarded as a major issue because of the class of tenants housed, although there are early references to social abuses creeping into the public tenement blocks, due to the dense design, lack of privacy and lack of careful management supervision.

No study of housing offers any account of the birth and early growth of local authority housing departments, but a revealing insight into the rapid development of municipal housing management, which took a very different path from that propounded by Octavia Hill or the early Housing

Trusts, is gleaned from the Minutes of the London County Council proceedings from its birth in 1889.

The London County Council set up the Housing of the Working Classes Committee in 1889, the year in which the Council was formed. By 1893, it had been linked with the new Public Health Committee, and while rents were collected under the direction of the Controller of Finance at Headquarters, resident male superintendents for the large new estates were appointed by the Valuers' Department, who were responsible for day-to-day management. The estates housed securely employed working families and the L.C.C. was reputed to be highly selective.⁶¹

Tenants took great pride in being selected for council accommodation and the Council regarded its dwellings as standard-setters for the large private rented sector that still housed most of the working people in the country. Applicants were chosen for their reliability of character, their standard of cleanliness and their ability to pay the council rent on the dot.

Irene Barclay,⁶² in her history of the St. Pancras Housing Association, describes somewhat bitterly the way the London County Council selected respectable tenants for their dwellings early in the century, leaving the poorest and most needy households to fend for themselves, even where the Council was demolishing their homes -

"My serious criticism of the L.C.C. pre-war (1914) housing was that only a proportion of the population displaced from slums was rehoused - the families where the wage earner was in regular employment: postmen, policemen, foremen in established firms, a few white-collar workers; the rest went where they could to escalate slum conditions by overcrowding the neighbourhood."

Even so, densities on early council estates were extremely high, often over 300 persons per acre.⁶³

There was an average of five persons per dwelling on the large Boundary Street estate built in 1907, which is still standing north of Stepney, its dense blocks largely filled now with Bengali families. The estate has over 700 flats.

The L.C.C. had a system of resident caretakers, repairmen and porters. Door-to-door rent collection was carried out from County Hall. But sometimes on the bigger estates an office was opened where rent could be paid by tenants and repairs ordered. From the very beginning, estate-based staff were answerable to superiors at County Hall, often in different departments. There is early mention of the Finance, Controller's and Building Departments all having separate roles on a particular estate.

The L.C.C. came part of the way to providing a coherent management structure on some estates, with resident managers (called superintendents) and caretakers, but all important decisions, lettings and rent control were still passed up to separate departments in a remote County Hall.

By the turn of the century, the L.C.C. had one housing employee for every 60 dwellings, including manual repairmen, a total of 131. Because of the scale of the operation, in 1912 a Housing Manager was appointed under a Housing Committee, with nearly 300 employees administering 10,000 dwellings. As far as we know, this was the first housing department in the country. The Housing Manager was responsible for three sections, each responsible for separate aspects of housing management:

- repairs, with its own maintenance staff.
- lettings, rent collection and empty property.
- investigations and enquiries, general housing matters, lodging houses.

By the First World War, the ratio of staff was down to one employee for 30 dwellings, but many of these employees were based at County Hall. Management was co-ordinated at headquarters and most flatted estates did not have a resident superintendent because they were not thought to be big enough. Even Boundary Street with 700 dwellings was not considered large enough to justify a resident superintendent. Segmented, non-resident and functionally divided housing management had quickly grown up and taken root, while the dense, flatted estates of the L.C.C. posed problems from the very outset.

With 10,000 dwellings by the outbreak of World War I, the L.C.C. was probably the biggest and most developed

municipal landlord in the country. All the now familiar problems were present:

- a large, remote landlord.
- dense, large estates of several hundred dwellings.
- a number of council departments directly involved in housing, leading to the creation of a sectionally divided housing department.
- a high ratio of staff to properties but a poor showing on the ground.
- unlet flats.
- incipient problems of social abuse and vandalism.

Generally, in local authorities before the 1914-18 War, housing management was either farmed out to estate agents,⁶⁴ private companies or trusts,⁶⁵ or was handled piecemeal by a series of departments within the local authority, such as Surveyors, Valuers, Treasurers, Public Health, Engineers.⁶⁶ Local authorities were undertaking a task they had never set out to accomplish. Building decent homes and clearing slums had been an objective. Running them as good landlords had not.

None of the housing management skills built up by the Trusts or among the Victorian women housing managers was referred to in the records of the development of the Housing Department of London County Council, although

indirectly the resident superintendent and caretaking systems were a clear attempt to draw on that experience.

Yet by 1914, the L.C.C. was saddled with a system that was to cause more and more serious problems as time went on. Other cities were following the same muddled road.

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CHAPTER II - THE INTERWAR YEARS

"It is a gross error to equate problem families with the housing poor" B. Cullingworth 1979

The First World War created a housing crisis. Very little construction took place during the war. Strict rent control meant that private landlords could not make a profit, nor maintain their property in reasonable repair. The absence of large numbers of able-bodied men at war only served to make building and repairs problems worse. Even the benign landlords of the philanthropic housing movement, of which Octavia Hill had been such an important member, found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Conditions for the poorest families were very bad.

THE BEGINNING OF SUBSIDIES FOR BUILDING

Soon after the war in 1919, Parliament passed the Addison Act which subsidised house building for the first time. By 1924, the volume of public and private house-building, the level of subsidy and the general fall in prices led to cheaper building and cheaper rents, and councils began to build to modest standards to help low-income families.

The result was a building boom with local authorities building over half the new houses in the following five years. Councils became firmly established as major landlords. But even with subsidies, rents were still not -

"within the means of the lowest-paid workers
local authorities could still pick and
 choose."¹

Although blocks of flats continued to be built in big city areas in dense, poky tenements, most of the early post-war council housing was actually built outside the cities because land was already densely used and problems of displacement were very great. Many were built on green field sites on the edge of the cities, often to generous standards for the day. "Garden city" ideas had taken root whereby worker families were to be given space and individual homes in planned surroundings away from the city squalor. Cottage estates were favoured against city flats, wherever this was possible. But the location of some of the early council cottage estates away from the main areas of employment on the edges of big cities made them unpopular over the years and they became difficult to let. However, on the whole, the council housing of the inter-war years, especially the "cottage estates", stood the test of time and was built to higher standards of space and craftsmanship than the council homes built immediately after the Second World War up till the Parker Morris report of the early sixties. In the twenties, there were no cash incentives to clear slums or to help the most needy and on the whole, the emphasis was on the easy option of providing large numbers of homes for general needs.

Most L.C.C. building was on cottage estates, but in 1924 it began to build some "lower standard" dwellings so that it

could help poorer families. It afterwards found this policy a major cause of "sink estates" as low rents attracted poverty, which in turn lowered the reputation of an estate and its popularity. The council also at later stages had to carry out extensive remedial works such as building back extensions to move baths out of kitchens.

The L.C.C. was often a step ahead and its shift in emphasis in the mid-twenties towards helping more needy families was soon to be adopted by the Government. The L.C.C. stock quadrupled between 1929 and 1939 to 100,000 dwellings.

SUBSIDIES FOR SLUM CLEARANCE AND FOR FLATS

Because of land scarcity, the costs of redevelopment, and the social problems inherent in clearing slums, these were largely left to fester until 1930 when the bias was shifted towards slum clearance and flat-building, prompted by special government subsidies.

As the years passed and standards rose from 1919 onwards, more and more of the old terraced houses were designated as only fit for clearance. In response to the pressures of deteriorating slum conditions and the poverty caused by the great depression of 1929/30, Parliament passed the Greenwood Act in 1930, for the first time giving direct subsidies to councils for the demolition of slums. The Government gave councils £2.5s. per person per year for

each person they rehoused from a condemned slum. This gave councils a double incentive to demolish slums and to rehouse people from bad conditions. The role of local authorities as a landlord began to change. In addition to the existing subsidy for building costs, a special subsidy for expensive sites was introduced which was given only for buildings over three storeys high on sites above a certain price. Councils interpreted the additional subsidy for flats as a direct encouragement to build upwards. It was in fact the logical policy to adopt following the decision to clear slums in city centres on a large scale while attempting to put back the homes being torn down, to a higher standard.

The rationale for this subsidy was that flats, although more expensive to build, were necessary if housing conditions in crowded cities were to improve. Flats were seen as the only way of fitting more people in, while building modern homes and giving overcrowded families more space. The problems of communal supervision and housing management were underestimated or ignored and the virtues of terraced housing were unrecognised. No attempt was made to continue the familiar street patterns of the cities. Nor was the idea of renovation and installation of amenities accepted as a way of tackling the widespread slum conditions, in spite of Octavia Hill's experience half a century earlier.

Demolition had well and truly caught hold as the first

prong of attack on bad housing conditions, and flats seemed the obvious answer to the continuing inner city problem of overcrowding. By 1937, nearly 200,000 homes had been demolished and a further 200,000 were in demolition programmes. London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool had the biggest problems but other urban areas were caught up in the same process. The critical effect of the ambitious slum clearance programme was that tenants had no choice -

"Families are being removed, whether willing or not."²

The L.C.C., under the influence of the subsidies for flat-building, reduced its commitment to peripheral estates of houses and gardens and reverted to large-scale flat-building inside London. By the late thirties, it was building far more flats than houses, in spite of evidence that some of their inner estates were already hard to let. In the late thirties, the L.C.C. built nearly four flats for every house.

This new combination of subsidies, aimed at demolishing slums and encouraging local authorities to rehouse ex-slum-dwellers and overcrowded families in new council accommodation within the cities actually changed the emphasis of council housing policy from being a source of pride to both occupants and landlord alike, to being a provision for the poor and the needy which almost immediately became a source of shame to the landlord

and tenants. No one wanted the slum image attached to expensive new housing yet the occupants brought the reputation of the old areas with them. Some of today's most unpopular estates date from the thirties when they were first built to house slum populations. The slum image carried straight over and has never disappeared. The Government's 1939 report described the process -

"A number will adapt themselves quickly to their new surroundings; some will not react to the change in their condition quite so readily and will need initial guidance. Others without continuous supervision will produce a slum atmosphere wherever they are sent; and a few, a very few, will be beyond reclamation altogether."

There were several other important legislative changes in the 1930's that had a direct impact on the future of council housing. In 1935, the Overcrowding Act increased subsidies to flats on expensive sites and did away with subsidies for any housing that was not specifically designed to relieve overcrowding and slum conditions. Each person rehoused by the council to relieve overcrowding received a special subsidy. This tied the public provision of housing very tightly to the most needy, low-income households, and marked the onset of Welfare Housing, recognising that it was too expensive to provide direct Government subsidies for anything other than housing for the most badly housed people. The previous general subsidies were held to have caused sharp increases in house and building prices in the twenties.³ These new subsidies were carefully

targeted at the worst housing conditions.

A further Housing Act in 1938 clarified the type of household to be housed - either displaced by demolition of unfit areas or rehoused to abate overcrowding - and it set the minimum subsidy for flat-building at double the level for other dwellings, and payable for 40 years. It also laid down that local rates had to match the Government subsidy with an equal amount. These provisions established the tradition of public housing for the needy for long into the future.

TENURE CHANGE

Overall, the housing stock expanded in the inter-war years by 44% while the proportion of council dwellings rose from 0.2% at the onset of World War I to nearly 10% by 1938.

1. DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING STOCK BY TENURE (millions)

Year	Owner-occupied	Local authorities and new towns	Private landlord and others	Total
1914	.8	.002	7.1	7.9
1938	3.7	1.1	6.6	11.4

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

The figures show a major expansion in the stock across the board, but with owner-occupation expanding faster

than any other tenure. Council housing was fairly close behind. Private landlords still dominated the total stock but their share had dropped from 90% to 58%.

From 1938 onwards, private renting was to enter an inexorable decline and owner-occupation was to become the central strand of housing provision, which council housing, because of the very large subsidies it required, was only rarely to match. Nonetheless, councils were moving rapidly towards becoming major landlords.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALLOCATION POLICIES

Specific central government intervention in the question of allocations did not arise until 1936, when it first spelled out local authority responsibility for those in poor housing nearly half a century after the first council dwellings were constructed.

The 1936 Housing Act instructed local authorities to take account of need in allocating council housing, if couched in somewhat ambiguous terms:

"Local authorities are obliged to give reasonable preference to persons who are occupying insanitary or overcrowded houses, have large families, or are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions."

The phrase "reasonable preference" hardly made the local authorities' obligations crystal clear. But because of

the generous subsidies paid to councils by central government for each tenant rehoused from a slum or from overcrowded conditions, councils switched their rehousing policies to favour needy households, away from applicants who could convince housing officers of their worthiness.

Almost exclusively slum-clearance families were rehoused in the thirties. The shift in allocations from stable, affluent workers to poor, insecure slum dwellers was almost total. Such was the level of poverty that local authorities had on occasions to burn the tenants' belongings, as well as demolish their homes, because of infestations of vermin, lice and so on, when they were rehoused:⁴

"We noticed dire poverty.....They may begin [in a council house] with less than they had in their original homes because some of their effects have been destroyed to kill the vermin."

According to John Macey⁵ in his seminal work on housing management, in the period before the Second World War, up to 70% of rehoused tenants had infested belongings.

EARLY SLUM CLEARANCE CREATED FIRST PROBLEM ESTATES

Tenants were moved en bloc from crowded old neighbourhoods with very few amenities to new estates built to high standards for the day. The old slum neighbourhoods would

be demolished but the former residents carried the slum stigma with them and the new estates would sometimes acquire notoriety from the outset. In a recent survey of 20 local authority initiatives on unpopular estates,⁶ five of the seven pre-war estates were found to have been unpopular from when they were first occupied by virtue of the population that moved into them when they were first let. Surprisingly, most of these estates were cottage estates of houses and gardens. The current problems of the Walsall pre-war estate of Goscote were described in the following terms by the estate manager:

"It was first occupied in 1938 as an inner city slum clearance area. New tenants brought their trade of tat-collection with them. The evidence is still visible by the more than 300 skips of old tat so far collected in Goscote."

In some cases the emergence of unpopular estates was a long process of attrition whereby over the years an accumulation of problems and pressures pushed the estate into a downward spiral. In others, notorious streets from the old Victorian inner cities became notorious enclaves of council housing. Dispersal would have been seen as spreading bad apples around. Local authorities had readily taken on board the new housing responsibilities towards needy families, without considering the best ways of eradicating some of the social problems they aimed to resolve. It is possible that many authorities believed a physical solution to

housing was sufficient, or were simply unaware that housing management was vital to the creation of a viable public-rented sector. With displaced, forcibly uprooted, and often totally dispossessed families from crowded slum streets, the need for social support on a new estate was paramount, but often totally lacking. The rot set in from the very outset.

1939 "DISPERSING BAD TENANTS"

In a situation of severe housing stress, no one questioned the justice of allocating new publicly-owned and heavily subsidised housing to the most deprived. Nor did many question the assumptions behind the demolition of old slum areas nor the wisdom of transplanting communities en bloc to brand new estates. However, in 1939 the Government's Housing Advisory Subcommittee on Housing Management became concerned over the allocation of housing to more disadvantaged tenants and recommended the advisability of dispersing "bad tenants" among good, even if it meant breaking up old social networks. They were not convinced that semi-penal measures, such as the Dutch adopted towards difficult tenants, involving segregation and strict supervision and rehabilitation, were either "desirable or necessary in this country".⁸ They felt that putting vulnerable households together would exacerbate the problems and make estates unmanageable:

"We favour the principle of separating unsatisfactory families from one another, so far as this is possible, and interspersing them among families of a good type."9

The Committee recognised the danger of ghettoisation and the need to allocate sensitively to avoid concentrations of disturbed families, but their recommendation seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Dispersal did not take place.

As a result of the dramatic changes in housing policy and housing subsidy, and the major shifts under way in the pattern of tenure, over the inter-war period, a totally new set of problems faced local authority landlords by 1939.

The developments in housing management over the inter-war period illustrates just how unprepared most local authorities were for the task in hand.

THE WOMEN HOUSING MANAGERS AFTER OCTAVIA HILL

Following on Octavia Hill's death in 1912, the women managers, who had been trained by her and had worked with her, formed the Association of Women Housing

Workers* in 1916 with 50 members in order to advance the work of unified, intensive local housing management to a high standard. Early members, such as Irene Barclay, qualified as chartered surveyors, a most unusual departure for women -

"A good deal of foolish fuss was made of us as the first women surveyors."¹⁰

Later the Association organised special training for its prospective members, asking the Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors to set examinations for admission to their association. Trainees were very carefully selected and it was considered quite a challenge to be allowed to embark on the professional career of housing management. The women involved had a very strong sense of responsibility towards their work and were rigorous in the selection of suitable trainees. In addition, members did a three-year apprenticeship in door-to-door housing.

*The Association changed names a number of times before it finally merged with its rival, the Institute of Housing in 1965:

1916	"Association of Women Housing Workers"
Renamed	"Association of Women House Property Managers" a few years later.
1928	"Conference of Women Municipal Managers" formed.
1928	"Octavia Hill Club" founded by Miss Jeffrey, one of her followers.
1932	The three bodies united as: "Society of Women Housing Estate Officers".
1948	Admitted men and changed its name to: "Society of Housing Managers".
1965	Merged with the Institute of Housing.

management. Members gained the R.I.C.S. qualification on passing the series of professional examinations.

The hallmarks of the Society were a high standard of professional competence, and the total control under one manager of all aspects of landlord responsibility, from the organisation and supervision of repairs, to the enforcement of tenancy conditions, lettings and rents, as well as all aspects of welfare. The society hotly defended Octavia Hill's insistence that Society managers should be female. There were numerous serious debates on the question of male members in the housing world¹¹ and the women only gave way on this point in 1948. Some women housing managers today still think it was a mistake! The women managers, however, strongly rejected, and resented, the exclusively do-gooding, welfare role traditionally considered appropriate to females. They were determined that the business areas, rent collection, maintenance and repair should be their responsibility too.

Although local authorities began to acquire property in the last 20 years of the 19th century, in all but a few very exceptional cases, they did not attempt to establish a system of localised and unified estate management till nearly 50 years later when they controlled some million properties and their management problems were manifold.

The Society of Women Housing Managers throughout the early

decades of this century worked almost exclusively in the private sector, with the philanthropic trusts, the Church Commissioners, and the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Nonetheless, some of their work left its mark. During the First World War, women managers, in the absence of men, ran big housing estates for the Ministry of Munitions. Unfortunately, they resigned in favour of the male managers at the end of the war. They also built up and ran large estates for the Crown Estate Commissioners, under the control of the notable follower of Octavia Hill, Miss Jeffery. That management system has survived to this day and helped produce leading women members of the Institute of Housing, an organisation which first appeared in 1932.

The most important departures were in the twenties when nine local authorities appointed women housing managers, almost entirely to run difficult or unpopular estates. Chestertield, under the inspiration of their town clerk, Mr. Parker Morris (of Parker Morris standards fame), went to the Crown Estate Commissioners and, inspired by their intensive system of management, selected a woman housing manager, Miss Upcott, for their most difficult estate.

Miss Upcott later organised the Conference of Women Municipal Managers in 1928 to represent what was seen as a growing area of work. The Ministry of Health had

clearly stated as early as 1920 that -

"The success of working class property depends very largely on its management.....Proper management will require a person specially skilled and trained for the work. The manager must be given ample authority.....Little is done except by the Association of Women House Property Managers, who have rendered such admirable service in redeeming unfit property. There will have to be more facilities for training if needs are to be met."12

However, these early gains were not consolidated.

Liverpool Corporation appointed a woman manager in 1936, only to rescind the appointment because she would have been in charge of men, an unacceptable departure.

Only 46 women were employed by local authorities by the mid-thirties, with about 130 qualified members altogether.

The hallmark of the Society continued to be that -

"The women managers work in administrative control of the estate and at the same time in direct touch with the tenants.....including rent collection, court work, maintenance of properties including ordering and checking the work and accounts of direct labour staff, applications and tenancies, rehousing, social and educational work, committee work and relations with other departments."13

- light years away from the early fragmented housing management style of the L.C.C.

More was the pity that while local authorities entered a period of massive expansion with widespread adoption of a social role in housing, the women managers were shunted into a siding called "welfare".

The Society itself had an increasingly chequered history, fighting a rearguard action against the admission of men as members throughout the inter-war period when they had only 130-150 members. Some members began to accept with some gratitude a welfare role on the large new slum-clearance estates of the thirties, hoping that it would lead to a new departure in local authority housing management, but flying in the face of their dearly cherished management traditions. They were rarely given overall, co-ordinated responsibility for management; rather they were recruited to help impoverished new council tenants cope with the problems of a brand new, high-quality dwelling in a totally alien community.

When the women housing managers adopted the role of housing welfare workers for councils, they believed that welfare had finally fused with housing management and that they would play a critical role in solving the new social problems of council housing:

"By virtue of slum clearance and overcrowding, it [a local authority] has no option but to take all families whatever their income and character and trust that they will become satisfactory tenants. For this reason constant supervision and skill is always required.....The permanent social service which housing has now become can be far more economically and efficiently administered by one [housing] department."¹⁴

It seemed that the Octavia Hill tradition had survived long enough to come into its own again. But while the Society was hopeful that its ideas would take root in

local authority housing management, by the late thirties only 75 of its members were actually employed on council estates and between them they were covering 35,000 properties, just under 500 properties each, and less than 5% of the total council stock.

By the Second World War, only a small minority of councils had a housing department at all,¹⁵ or any concept of housing management as conceived by the Society. A much more typical pattern was the Birmingham model propounded at the National Housing Conference in 1938:

"The collection of rents is divorced from the welfare work and a section of women home visitors is wholly employed in investigating and assisting cases of the unenlightened type."¹⁶

The division of rents and repairs from allocations and welfare was fiercely if ineffectually opposed by the Society of Women Housing Estate Officers, in spite of their growing involvement in the welfare side of public housing. But the women were on the defensive and their views were largely discarded.

Mary Besley, employed as Housing Manager by Lincoln Council, addressed the National Housing Conference in 1938 on the problems of local authority management. She felt that the responsibility vested in the Public Health, Surveyors and Treasurers Departments for the management of local authority housing had led to the management

itself, as opposed to building, repairs and rent, appearing "insignificant and tiresome". She criticised this fragmented approach -

"They are employing several different officials to do separate parts of the work when they might employ people trained in the same work as a whole.....Continuity of contact is invariably sacrificed if several different people conduct business with the tenant. It is obviously easier too for even the most amenable tenant to co-operate with one well-known official rather than with several."17

She argued forcibly that the method of unitary management of the Society of Women Housing Managers was the only answer -

"Records are available to show they are a financial success."18

The viability of intensive management was based on -

"the absolute maximum number of houses for a collector of 330 if there is a large proportion of slum clearance among them, and 400 if there is no slum clearance."19

The Government-sponsored Central Housing Advisory Committee in 1939 strongly endorsed the employment of women and the Society's approach -

"The essential provision that the person responsible for ministering to the social needs of the tenants shall be given some business reason to gain periodical entry into the house."

".....we see no satisfactory alternative to the appointment of a qualified woman officer competent to undertake all management duties, if social service is to be carried out and economy secured."

However, notwithstanding Mary Besley's confident affirmations and the recommendations of the Government's appointed advisers, the Society and its tested methods continued to lose ground.

In spite of the "manifold problems of large-scale ownership",²⁰ and the questionable influence of the women housing managers on public housing management, the Society continued to propound its belief that -

"a good landlord can create good tenants,"²¹

and that Octavia Hill's approach was still valid -

"The soundness of Octavia Hill's approach is again demonstrated: respect for the individual, co-operation between the landlord and the tenants, the equal importance of human needs and technical efficiency."²²

But their statements came as belated reactions to a problem with which they had little real contact, and reflected a lack of realism about the scale of operations involved in public housing and their own failure to play any critical role in its earlier development.

By 1938, there were 1.1 million publicly owned homes, which would have required well over 3,000 trained managers in order to apply the methods of the Women's Association. Their numbers were less than 200, and their influence was insignificant in relation to the problem they were attempting to address. Their voice went almost unheard and was certainly unheeded.

THE BIRTH OF THE INSTITUTE OF HOUSING

Meanwhile, the normal council structure continued to comprise a variety of specialised technical departments handling different parts of housing management, with repairs, rents, lettings and welfare handled respectively by Engineers or Surveyors, Treasurers or Town Clerks, Valuers, and Public Health, Sanitation or Housing Officers.

The Municipal Yearbook of 1935 shows that only 13% of the 450 local authorities in Britain had appointed a housing manager -

"In many districts, town clerks, treasurers, medical officers of health, engineers and surveyors are either separately or in combination, in control of the management of municipal houses.....and excellent though each official may be in his own sphere, skilled management is not only outside his province but housing management as such must always be to him a secondary consideration.....Little has been done by way of social service..... Management is incorporated in the ordinary machinery of local government, different officers being responsible for such part of the work as falls within their specialised duties."²³

Construction was often the dominant interest of the "professionals" and there was a well-rooted belief that men making a career of public administration could more competently handle the technical problems of rents, repairs, and lettings than well-intentioned women housing visitors, whose main role was seen as improving the lot

of the poor.

In 1932, a body called the Institute of Housing was formed with a male-dominated membership drawn almost exclusively from local authority employees, and propounding a very different approach to housing management than the existing women managers' organisation, separating a social and welfare role completely from the more technical and professional questions of repairs and rents. The rival local authority-based organisation was born of different imperatives and propounded an opposite housing management tradition -

"their contentions are largely conflicting" affirmed the Ministerial Central Housing Advisory Committee in 1939.²⁴

The Institute of Housing dominated the local authority housing world with "ex-town clerks trying to cope."²⁵ It had its own examinations, set to a lower standard than the Society, arguing that there was neither time nor money to replicate Octavia Hill's approach nor the Society's training -

"The cost would not be justified by results."²⁶

The Institute held firmly to the belief that housing welfare should not be confused with the business and technical administration of housing which they regarded as "men's work".

The Society in turn refused to recognise the Institute, which in its early days provided no training, and would not allow joint membership, after some initial attempts at co-operation. But by 1938, the Institute of Housing had a membership of 261, including 78 members who were chief housing officers within their local authorities. This fact helps to explain why the Institute defended hotly the existing technical orientation of public housing management, and opposed the integrated, intensive and local approach advocated by the women. The majority of the Institute's members under such a reorganisation would have virtually lost their hold on a large part of their bailiwick and municipal housing, which had become an extensive and capital intensive activity, would have been handed over to the benign control of women welfare workers -

"The Institute of Housing are of the opinion that social service should be kept entirely apart from the other functions of housing, e.g. rent collecting and repairs, on the grounds that only a few tenants require supervision and that the majority can therefore be left entirely alone, thus avoiding unnecessary expenditure on management."²⁷

They rejected out of hand the Society of Women Housing Managers' advocacy of one manager for 300 properties on grounds of cost, overlooking the fact that under the sectional/technical system they advocated, local authorities usually employed (and still do) about one worker to every 40-65 dwellings.²⁸

THE CENTRAL HOUSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S FIRST REPORT

A landmark in the history of municipal housing was made in 1939 by the first report of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, appointed by the Government to consider the problems of municipal council estates. It took evidence from both the Institute of Housing and the Society of Women Housing Managers, as well as many local authorities. It also visited estates throughout the country.

The report brought into the open the central conflict between the two professional housing bodies, and on the whole favoured the Society's approach over that of the Institute. However, it failed to make clear-cut recommendations on many key issues -

"We are unable to recommend for general adoption in its entirety any of the systems which have been described to us."

It therefore failed to galvanise either support or opposition at a critical time in the evolution of housing management, when the overriding concern was how to cope with impoverished families and how to establish viable communities on the new estates.

Nonetheless, many vital issues were raised by the report, which fitted with the changing needs of public housing and the growing concern both for the welfare of tenants and the creation of a coherent housing service.

The report posed a series of critical management questions, revealing the members' own sense of fear and anxiety over the "slum problem" now transposed to municipal estates -

"How shall the undesirables be dealt with?"

"What steps can be taken to prevent the bed bug?"

"How can he be supplied with the bare necessities of comfort?"

"Who shall teach him to cultivate his garden?"²⁹

The Committee estimated that 80% of tenants were "of a good standard" and only about 5% required "continuous supervision". But slums were not as easy to eradicate as had been imagined -

"Others without continuous supervision will reproduce a slum atmosphere wherever they are sent and a few, a very few will be beyond reclamation."

The report recommended strongly the dispersal of this minority of problem-prone tenants in the hope that good neighbours would upgrade them. They felt that this approach stood some chance on a spacious cottage estate with a resident manager.

But in the dense, flatted blocks the opposite happened -

"The impact of one antagonistic person on another, the quarrels of children, the behaviour of a noisy tenant, may be magnified out of proportion to the importance of the actual event and cause a general feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction. Local authorities recognise the value of exercising a somewhat closer supervisory control over families living in flats than over tenants on cottage estates."³⁰

In the event, local authorities only partially adopted a supervisory role, and problems built up rapidly. At no stage was it suggested that the "antagonistic" tenants should not be rehoused in flats. This would have been the only possible solution, unless widespread and intensive policing was to be the management stance. However, flats were recognised as a permanent management problem because of their density, the proximity of neighbours and their unguarded common areas.

The report made a number of other useful points. It defended the door-to-door system of rent collection for all families, providing a vital point of contact. It stressed the need for good public transport to the outer estates and for social centres on all estates to rebuild a cohesive life for residents, especially since so many new residents from old slums were used to the vitality of city centres.

The report also stressed that the landlord should retain responsibility for all functions including minor repairs and redecorations, otherwise poorer, more vulnerable families would always be falling behind in their standards.

An interesting but largely overlooked piece of advice was that the manager of a large estate should hold a university degree, which in pre-war times was an exceptional demand. Two universities, London and Cambridge, at that stage offered degrees in estate management.

On the question of women housing managers, the Committee was unequivocal in its approval, endorsing the personal approach and the combination of business with social matters -

"The essential provision that the person responsible for ministering to the social needs of the tenants should be given some business reason for gaining periodical entry."

The Committee disagreed with the Institute's view that social service should be kept separate from housing management -

"The housewife is usually willing to talk more freely to another woman and to entrust her with a fuller degree of confidence. It is easier for a woman than for a man to be admitted to a house.....These are in our view strong arguments for employing women.....we see no satisfactory alternative to the appointment of a qualified woman officer competent to undertake all management duties if social service is to be carried out and economy secured."³¹

But the report failed to endorse unequivocally the central tenet of the Society of Women Housing Managers that one manager should handle -

"rent collection, ordering and supervision of repairs and costing, selection and allocation of tenants, keeping records and accounts, Court work in connection with notices to quit, and social service."

It described the normal system of local authority management -

"In the main, management is incorporated in the ordinary machinery of local government, different officers being responsible for such parts of the work as falls within their specialised duties. . . . The surveyor looks after the fabric of the houses, the treasurer sees to rent collecting and finance whilst the clerk exercises general supervisory functions,"³²

and lamented somewhat timidly the fact that only 17% of local authorities had appointed housing managers at all.

The report did maintain, however, that no one system was best and that it had visited very well-run, popular estates under various systems of management.

One of the impressions to come over from the 1939 report was that people were uprooted and rehoused in strange conditions that they did not readily take to and that they had to be helped to cope with. There was the blanket recommendation that all tenants should be assumed to be verminous and lice-infested -

"The cleansing process should be applied to all tenants as a routine."

Then there was the admonition that -

"Houses must be guarded against misuse and the interests of neighbours must be protected. . . . Firm handling introducing an element of compulsion, is occasionally necessary, for a family must not be allowed to break the conditions of tenancy."

There was the added worry over flats -

"where life is devoid of the spacious freedom of the cottage estate."

At no point was the construction of new municipal housing for poor families questioned, yet the C.H.A.C. report conveyed a strong sense of its inappropriateness, exposing the raw nerves of both the uprooted communities and the politicians and bureaucrats who had charge of the construction and management. No one thought or dared to question the rightness of building brand new estates to replace old slums. No one ever wondered whether social problems were intensified rather than alleviated by the vast transfer of populations that went on in the thirties. Yet the C.H.A.C. report implied that all was not well with municipal housing.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

Developments in the L.C.C. between the wars illustrate the lack of a clear sense of direction in local authority housing management. After the war, with its great burst of housing activity, the L.C.C. in 1919 appointed a Director of Housing on the very high salary of £2,000 p.a. Housing development became a major part of the job and the Housing Manager of pre-war times became the Housing Estates Manager under the Director. In the 1920's the L.C.C. was building peripheral estates on a large scale, having reduced its inner city flat-building to a very small share.

Of course the early post-war houses were subsidised and

built to a high standard and were therefore very attractive. All of these much more privileged developments had resident superintendents, a system that seemed to work well, but for some inexplicable reason focussed an integrated management service where it was least needed.*

At that time 10% of the Council's stock was let to L.C.C. employees, and several of the new outer post-war estates in such places as Bromley and Roehampton were considered very desirable residences for administrative staff. John Macey, later to become Controller of Housing at the G.L.C. with nearly a quarter of a million properties under his wing, was a favoured L.C.C. tenant under this scheme. The rest of the stock was let at this stage on a strict system of date orders - no favours, no judgement, other than ability to pay.

The resident superintendents were each responsible for 2,000 dwellings. The L.C.C. by its management system tied itself to the logic of large estates, arguing that one resident superintendent should manage 2,000 dwellings.

* As an interesting sidelight on management problems, in 1921, the L.C.C. Housing Committee decided to prohibit the keeping of cockerels on its estates, though hens were allowed, and it also decided in 1923 to purchase four bikes for staff to use on the largest estates. (At that stage a bike cost about six times the average weekly wage, whereas today it costs half the weekly wage!). These two items, recorded in Council proceedings, give some notion both of the involvement of politicians in detailed management decisions and the lack of devolution to a local scale.

Within London, the estates were usually of several hundred dwellings and often did not warrant their own superintendent according to the L.C.C.'s own standards. Here the rot set in, although there was always resident caretaking staff. Caretakers, however, were considered lowly employees and the records show that they were employed on roughly the same level as lavatory attendants. They had little responsibility except for small repairs and cleaning. Women were occasionally employed as caretakers too. There was no one actually in charge of most of the dense inner city blocks on the estate itself.

By 1925, the L.C.C. had 20,000 dwellings and it decided to allocate a quarter of new lettings to "meet cases of hardship". It also reduced the quota of all lettings allocated to staff to 5% and at that stage some of the better-paid L.C.C. officers were asked to leave the outer estates by the Council to make room for more needy tenants.

By the late twenties, a number of factors coincided which led to a radical redirection of housing policy, first within the L.C.C. and later at a national level.

First was the decision in 1925 to give some priority to needy families. Second, came a series of decisions between 1926 and 1928 leading to a renewed emphasis on

flat-building within the central areas, abandoning the early post-war policy of building cottage estates on the outskirts of London. Thirdly, came the lowering of building standards and conditions of tenancy to allow cheaper rents and to encourage poorer families to move in. Otherwise flat-building in inner areas would have failed to achieve the desired objective of attracting poor families, thereby improving slum conditions. A prime motivation in all this was the growing pressure in remaining slum areas, as the poorest families were constantly displaced by redevelopment and pushed into receding and rapidly deteriorating old areas.

The central management problem for the L.C.C. was that for most of the inner city blocks there was no coherent management system to cover rents, repairs, lettings and welfare problems. As a result, management problems grew while the populations rehoused became more needy.

In 1930, the L.C.C. recorded that -

"The present system of management is an intelligent one which secures cleanly living on the part of the great majority of tenantsNotwithstanding this there are undoubtedly some tenants who appear to be unable to appreciate to the full the accommodation afforded."

No sooner had the Council begun to rehouse genuinely needy tenants than the lack of coherent management became all too apparent. While the Council blamed inadequate

tenants for failing to make proper use of their new accommodation, it did also make a radical shift in its management organisation. The L.C.C. made the bold decision in 1930, ten years after the Ministry of Health had first recommended it, to employ women housing managers with responsibility for door-to-door rent collection, repairs, cleaning, tenancy matters and court action -

"Although it has not hitherto been the practice to employ women for the purpose.....a woman is specially fitted to be the helper and adviser of tenants."

This decision was ahead of most other local authorities, which continued to defend the prevailing system of assorted departments handling fragments of the housing service. However, the L.C.C. only sustained the intensive system for a few years and on a few estates.

CONCLUSION

The 1939 Government report lent official recognition for the first time to the problem of municipal estates, previously held as a solution per se; it recognised that large, uprooted communities containing only a small minority of impoverished or uncoping households posed special problems; it recognised after 40 years of intense building and nine years of special subsidies, the limitations of flats to house families and the special

demands they made on management; it brought into the open the critical division between Octavia Hill's method of management and current local authority practice, propounded and defended by its practitioners in the Institute of Housing; above all, it recognised the vast social problems unleashed by highlighting the contrast between expensive new estates and overcrowded inner city slums from which the poor families came.

The reaction among local authorities was to recognise the problems outlined, to move in jerky steps towards the creation of housing departments, but to reject unequivocally the central recommendation that one person, based on the estate for which he or she was responsible, should deal with any single tenant on all matters affecting his tenancy, including repairs. No local authority that we know of adopted across the board the decentralised integrated management system of the Society of Women Housing Managers.

The L.C.C., which had tentatively branched out into the Octavia Hill approach in 1930 with the appointment of one woman manager and two female assistants, reacted defensively and narrowly. It is worth quoting in full from the report the Council produced in response to the Government -

"The question of adopting the Octavia Hill system has been considered on more than one occasion and many of those who advocated the system

apparently took the view that the Council's system merely consisted of rent collectionThe Council's system, however, extends far beyond this and recognises the desirability of making contact with families from slum clearance areas as early as possible and the need for after-care measures.....The chief difference between the Council's system and the Octavia Hill system are

- 1) the Council mainly employs trained men of practical experience, while in the latter system trained women managers are responsible for the management.
- 2) the pivot of the Octavia Hill system is the combination of all functions of management and the door to door collection of rents in one person, whereas in the Council's system all questions of principle or matters of a difficult technical nature are dealt with at the central office, and the bulk of the rents is collected at local offices.

"The Octavia Hill system is undoubtedly very successful when applied to working class dwellings previously subject to bad management and neglect, but it is doubtful whether it possesses any advantage over the Council's system.

"We cannot subscribe to the view that it is essential in every case for one officer to maintain contact with a tenant for all purposes.

"We do not accept the theory that women are, by reason of their sex, more suitable than men for this [housing management] work.

"We see no adequate reason, therefore, in the interests either of the Council or its tenants, to suggest a radical change in the existing system."

In defence of its own centrally organised system, the L.C.C. argued that door-to-door collection was more expensive than office collection; that social welfare combined with rent collection would slow down the rent collectors and involve a large increase in staff; and that in any case tenants were often visited by superintendents or surveyors from

the centre.

The L.C.C. had a very intensive staff ratio, higher than even the resident, estate-based housing trusts, and could certainly have organised integrated local management if it wanted. However, it would have had to break up its now vast central empire, employing over $2\frac{1}{2}$ thousand workers. The L.C.C. did not admit that estate management at estate level was necessary. It reinforced the strong trend towards sectional, centrally operated housing departments, of which it had been the pioneer.

The existing housing management structure offered little or no social support and had few devices for coping with the management problems of the very poor. Slum rehousing had begun before this question was addressed, and when it was finally raised in the late thirties, the Institute of Housing, with its powerful local authority following, took an entrenched and defensive position, rejecting out of hand the management approach that was tailor-made to solve these very problems - a local manager combining social, financial and organisational skills, working intensively and intimately in a small patch, so that all families no matter how poor or disarrayed could be reached and helped. The women advocates of this longstanding management tradition failed to make their mark and faded rapidly from the scene thereafter. Municipal housing management has yet to recover from these failures of the inter-war period.

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CHAPTER III - POST-WAR HOUSING - THE MASS COUNCIL BOOM

"We don't constrain ourselves with plans at the beginning when ignorance is highest"

- "In search of Excellence"

SECOND WORLD WAR - MAJOR SHORTAGE

The Second World War brought all building to a virtual halt and created another major housing shortage, this time principally through bomb damage. Three-quarters of a million homes were either demolished by bombing or seriously damaged - out of 11½ million. Rent controls continued on virtually all private rented dwellings, accelerating the decay of the old stock of city housing. Strict rent controls remained till the late fifties, thereby depriving landlords of funds for repairs.

Yet 66.7% of homes at the end of the war dated from before the First World War and were in constant need of renovation. Many private landlords gave up the rented market in the decades of tight rent control following the Second World War.

Because of scarcity and lack of repairs, the war gave a huge spurt to council housing programmes. The general

neglect of old city property fed into the massive slum clearance programmes of the late fifties and sixties. The crude post-war shortage forced Government to act and the war itself generated an ethos of state intervention that made it easy for the post-war Labour Government to take on the housing problem as a major plank of its social strategy.

LABOUR'S HOUSING FOR ALL

In 1945, the Labour Government was determined to make council housing a general service like health and education, available to anyone rather than a means-tested welfare provision for the poorest, as it had become in the thirties. The Government saw its role as inspiring and subsidising housing development with local authorities as the principal builders and landlords. The Green Belt was introduced as a major innovation in city planning, which very much encouraged dense council building within the cities, while attempting to protect more general environmental conditions.

New Towns were launched as a pathfinder to better social conditions, especially housing conditions, spearheaded by the State. The belief in Town Planning was never stronger. New towns enjoyed the unique feature of being built by public authorities both for renting and

owner-occupation, but they largely excluded the very poorest and most disadvantaged families by tying access to accommodation to jobs within new town industries. Nonetheless, new towns made a special contribution to the public sector housing stock by taking in a broader spectrum of social groups than had previously been heard of or than was usually contemplated in the cities.

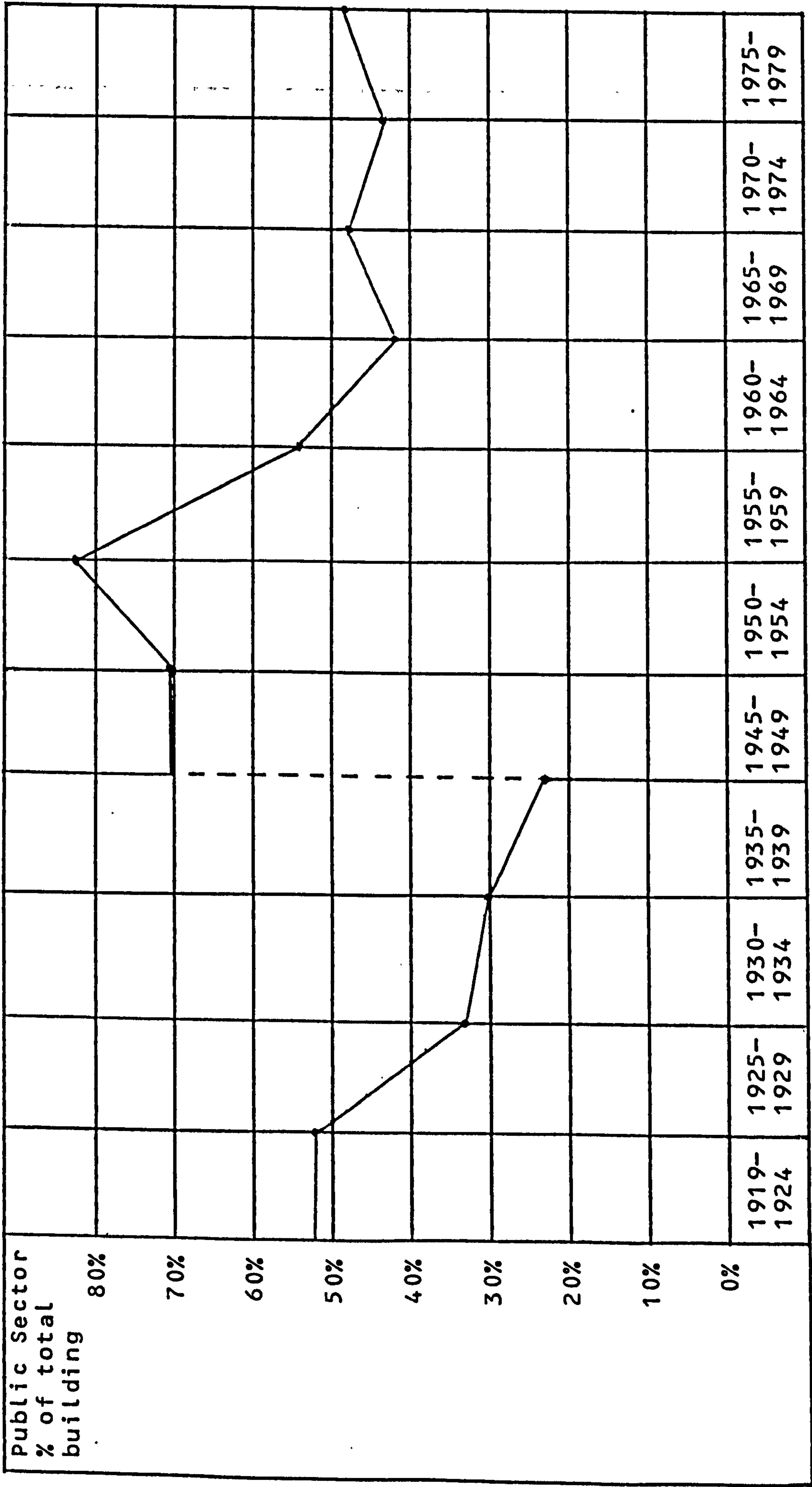
The poorest groups and the racial minorities on the whole remained locked within the cities in private-rented dwellings. The Labour Government was conscious of the problems of acquiring and building on expensive city sites and introduced a special additional subsidy in 1949 to encourage a mixture of houses and flats on such sites to diversify new city building away from flats alone. Improvement grants for older property were also introduced. Unfortunately, these imaginative new subsidies had little take-up at that point.

Unlike health and education, housing could not readily be provided universally by the State. There was such scarcity that demand was too great to be met by public effort only; in any case, the private sector still owned nearly 90% of homes after the war and there were strong political differences over the desirability of mass council housing.

Nonetheless, in the six years after the war, the bulk of housing was built by councils - about 80% of the total.

By 1951, Labour had built over three-quarters of a million council homes, nearly as many in six years as were built in the whole inter-war period, many of them flats in blocks over four storeys. But shortages continued with a further million homes still needed urgently. Mainly because of this sense of urgency, public house-building retained its dominant position as the major provider of new housing till the sixties.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR NEW-BUILDING AS A % OF TOTAL



Source - P. Levin

There was no slum clearance in this period since the housing shortage was so acute, and councils either built on bombed sites or went outside the cities. The urban land shortage reinforced the trend towards flat-building which seemed the only answer to city problems. In the cities with the biggest housing problems, very few houses were built in spite of the 1949 additional subsidy for mixed developments of flats and houses.

THE CONSERVATIVES' MASSIVE BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Conservative Government elected in 1951 expanded the housing drive even further, and within a short period of about two years, shifted the emphasis to owner-occupation as an ideal. Council housing was no longer for all, but for those who couldn't or wouldn't buy. Under the Conservative Minister of Housing, Harold MacMillan, a 300,000 homes a year target was pledged and met for most of the next 11 years. This was nearly double Labour's average rate. $3\frac{1}{2}$ million new houses were built, over half by local authorities in spite of the Conservative preference for private housing. By 1960, the stock of council dwellings had more than tripled from pre-war levels, although by the end of the fifties private building was beginning to overtake the rate of council building.

The following table illustrates the much faster rate of

expansion in the council sector than in any other.

While private renting shrank and owner-occupation almost doubled, council renting more than tripled.

3. OWNERSHIP OF HOUSING 1938 and 1960 (in millions)

Tenure	1938	1960	% of total in 1960
Owner-occupier	3.7	6.4	45.7%
New towns and local authorities	1.1	3.6	21.0%
Private rented and miscellaneous	6.6	4.6	32.8%
Total	11.4	14.6	100.0%

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

LOWER STANDARDS AND HIGHER SUBSIDIES FOR FLATS

In order to speed the production of homes, the Conservatives in 1951 drastically reduced space standards.¹ Densities were increased to enable more homes on scarce and expensive land.² Housing, especially public housing, became meaner. Extra subsidies became available for expensive land, mostly in inner city areas. These subsidies became an albatross. Designed to overcome the barriers to council building where it was believed to be most needed, it actually encouraged councils to build in locations, in a style, at a density and on a scale that later proved highly unpopular and undesirable. In a sense it was killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Because councils were encouraged through subsidy to buy

expensive land, it seemed more economical to build at higher densities, thereby rationalising the extra cost of the land.³ Also it seemed the only way to provide

adequate internal space for the growing population.

However, since high-density flats were more expensive to build than houses, this circular logic led to more subsidies which in turn encouraged more flats.

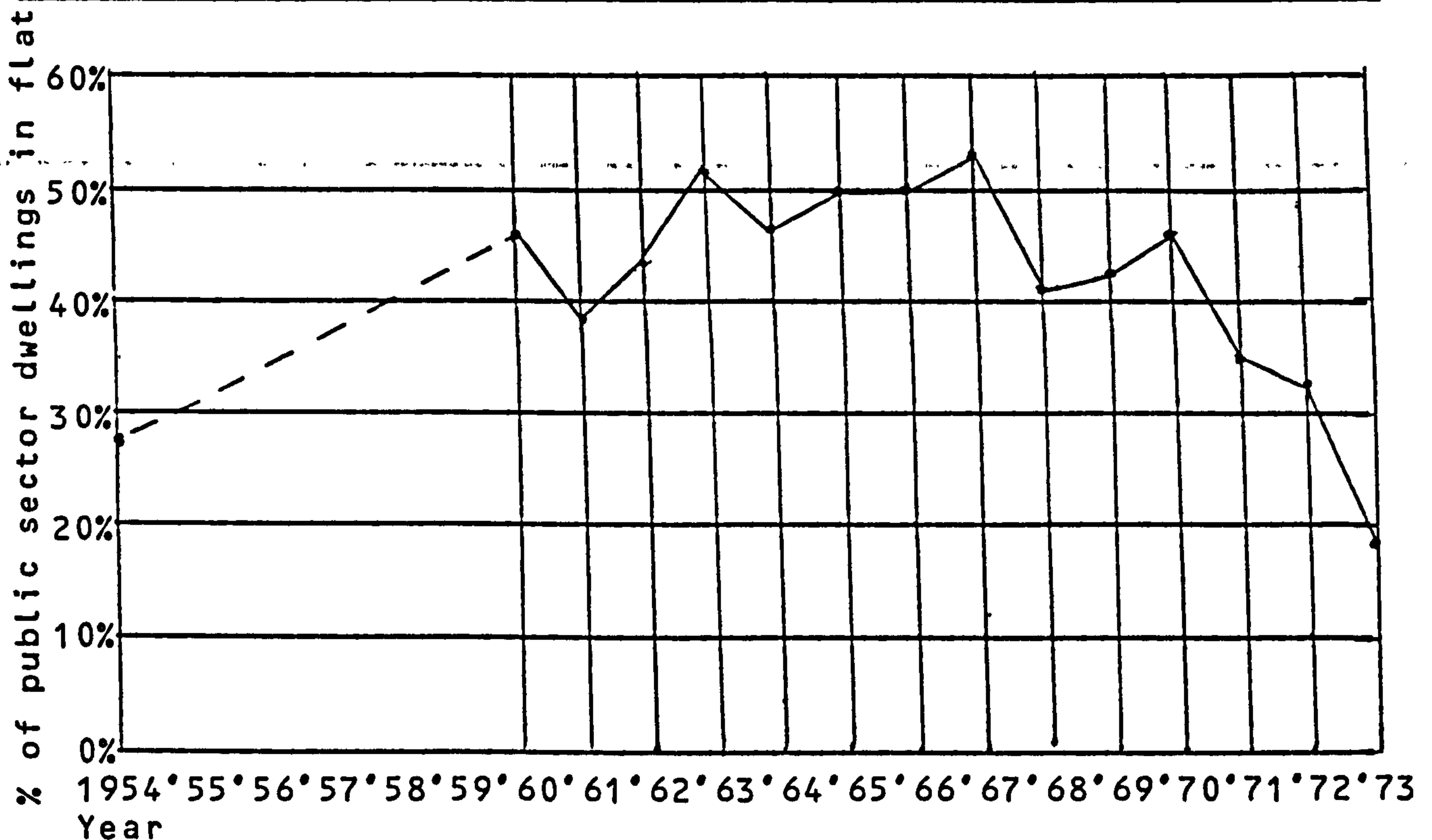
Ironically, within another 10 years the demand for family-sized dwellings within the public sector was to fall drastically and the space standards provided by flat-building were often too generous.⁴

THE SWING TO FLATTED ESTATES

The style of council housing under the impact of such a massive and fairly continuous upsurge in building was changing and becoming gigantesque.

At the beginning of Conservative rule in 1951, over 85% of council building was still in the form of houses, although the rate of council flat-building was already much higher than in the private sector. Government subsidies for flat-building inevitably led to an inexorable rise in the proportion of council dwellings in that form as the following diagram illustrates.

4. PERCENTAGE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY DWELLINGS BUILT AS FLATS 1960-73



Source: "Politics of Mass Housing", P. Dunleavy

Flats were on the ascendancy throughout the fifties, and by the mid-sixties comprised over half of the council dwellings being built.

Among owner-occupiers the proportion of flats and maisonettes remained at a fairly steady low figure of 7%.

The vast expansion in the proportion of flats, traditionally and continually unpopular in this country, was accounted for by ever-increasing subsidies for flats, with larger subsidies for more floors added.

The cost of building high-rise flats was 50% greater than building houses. Yet the subsidy for a high-rise flat in the years 1956-61 was three times higher than for a house. This gave councils an incentive to build high.

By 1965, it was reduced to double. When once the extra subsidy for high-rise was abolished in 1968, councils stopped building in that style. It was never economic to build that way, which makes the mass production in the hated style all the more absurd.

5. PROPORTIONAL COST OF BUILDING FLATS COMPARED WITH HOUSES, 1964, AND SUBSIDY LEVELS (1956-1965)

Style	Cost (base 100)	Subsidy (actual 1956-61)	Subsidy 1965
House	100	£22.1	£64
4-storey flats	114	£32	£89
10-storey flats	145	£57	£109
15-storey flats	150	£66	£107

Source: P. Dunleavy, "Politics of Mass Housing"

As an illustration of how subsidies favoured high building, the Housing Subsidies Act of 1967 laid down the following sliding scale:⁵

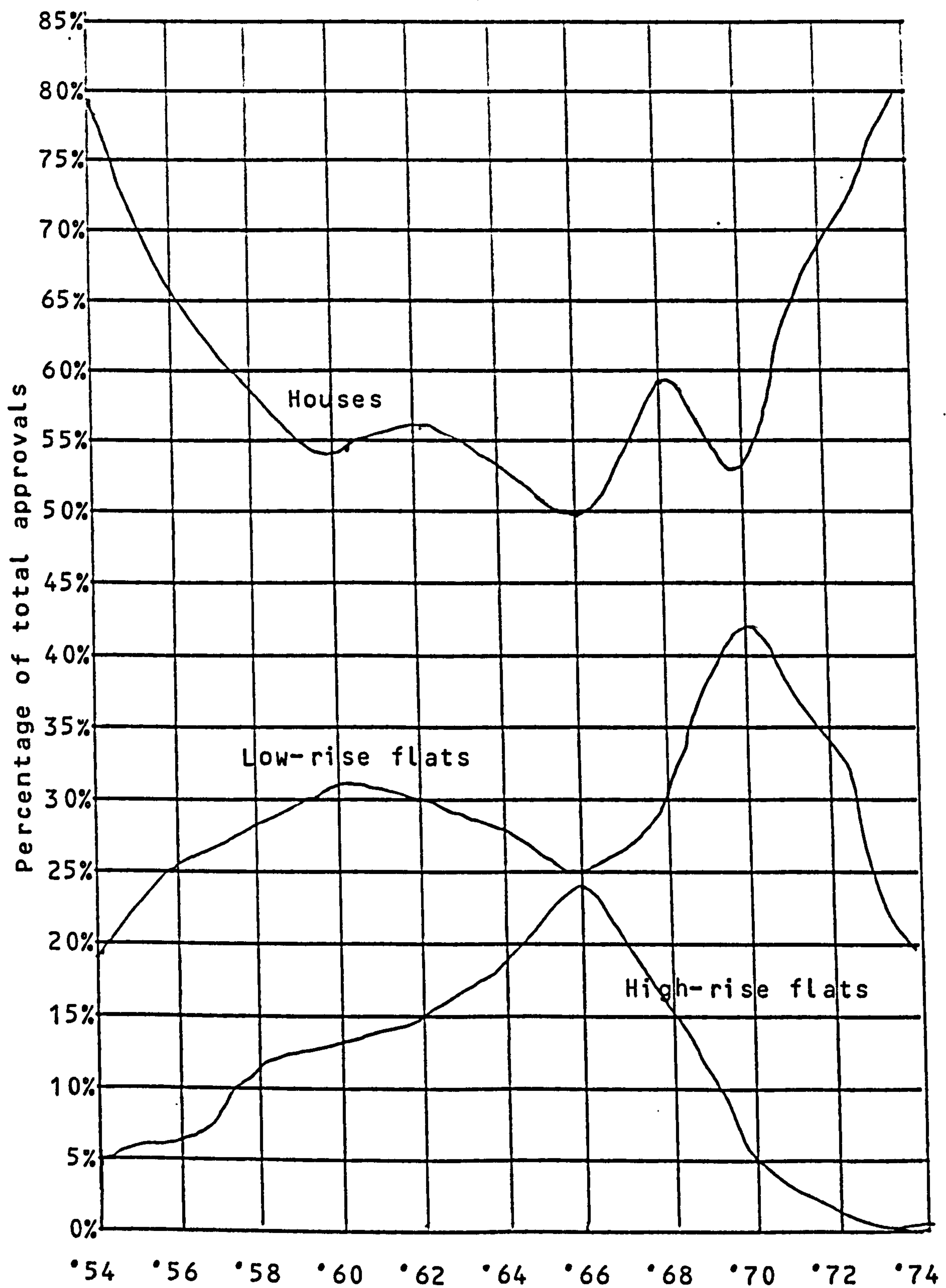
	Per dwelling
(a) Dwellings in 4-storey blocks.....	£8 a year
(b) Dwellings in 5-storey blocks.....	£14 a year
(c) Dwellings in blocks of over 5 storeys..	£26 a year

There were strong regional variations in the proportion of flats, relating directly to land costs and therefore eligibility for extra subsidy. In 1967, 91% of the homes built by the G.L.C. were in flats, 65% of which were in high-rise blocks. By 1971, two-thirds of the council stock in the London area was in the form of flats compared with 10% for rural areas.⁶ In the inner areas of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, proportions were approaching these. Flats became a hallmark of council housing in our large centres of population.

The following diagram illustrates the change in style of construction and the strong swing to flat-building from the early fifties onwards.

6.

TYPES OF LOCAL AUTHORITY DWELLINGS
1954-1974



Source: Patrick Dunleavy, "Politics of Mass Housing"

SIZE OF ESTATES

It is very difficult to know the numbers of dwellings being built per estate in the council sector compared with the private sector during the period, as no record can be traced of this information. The most informative examinations of housing policy, history and development appear to have overlooked this important element. However, the mass building of council estates on a large scale by one landlord was bound to lead to attempts at land consolidation in the hope that economies of scale would come into play. Large contractors who played a major part in council building programmes, because of their scale and because the single landlord favoured single, large contracts, also encouraged estate building on large sites. The L.C.C. records⁷ show that post-war estates tended to be larger than pre-war, and the Priority Estates Project reports⁸ show that more modern estates of the sixties and seventies were bigger than the thirties to fifties estates. The most direct evidence we have is collected by Patrick Dunleavy in his lengthy study of flat-building and the high-rise movement. He showed the contrast between the size of private and public house-building contracts. The gap indicated what experience would bear out, that council estates have been built with many more dwellings per estate than the private estates that appear so popular.

7. PROPORTIONS OF NEW CONSTRUCTION BY VALUE IN CONTRACT VALUE RANGES, 1969

Contracts valued at:	Public sector housing	Private sector housing
Under £100,000	15%	80%
£100,001 - 250,000	12%	12%
£250,001 - 500,000	19%	5%
£500,001 - 1,000,000	20%	2%
£1,000,001 - 2,000,000	14%	2%
Over £2,000,000	19%	0%

Source: P. Dunleavy

(See later chapter for more detail on size).

The table illustrates the heavy bias in the private sector towards small contracts, producing 20 houses or less in a single contract, compared with one-third of public sector contracts covering at least 200 dwellings.

Thus under the aggressive housing policies, first of the euphoric post-war Labour Government and then of the housing-conscious Conservative Administration of 1951-1964, the large, inhuman style of modern flatted council estates became accepted.

REDEVELOPMENT

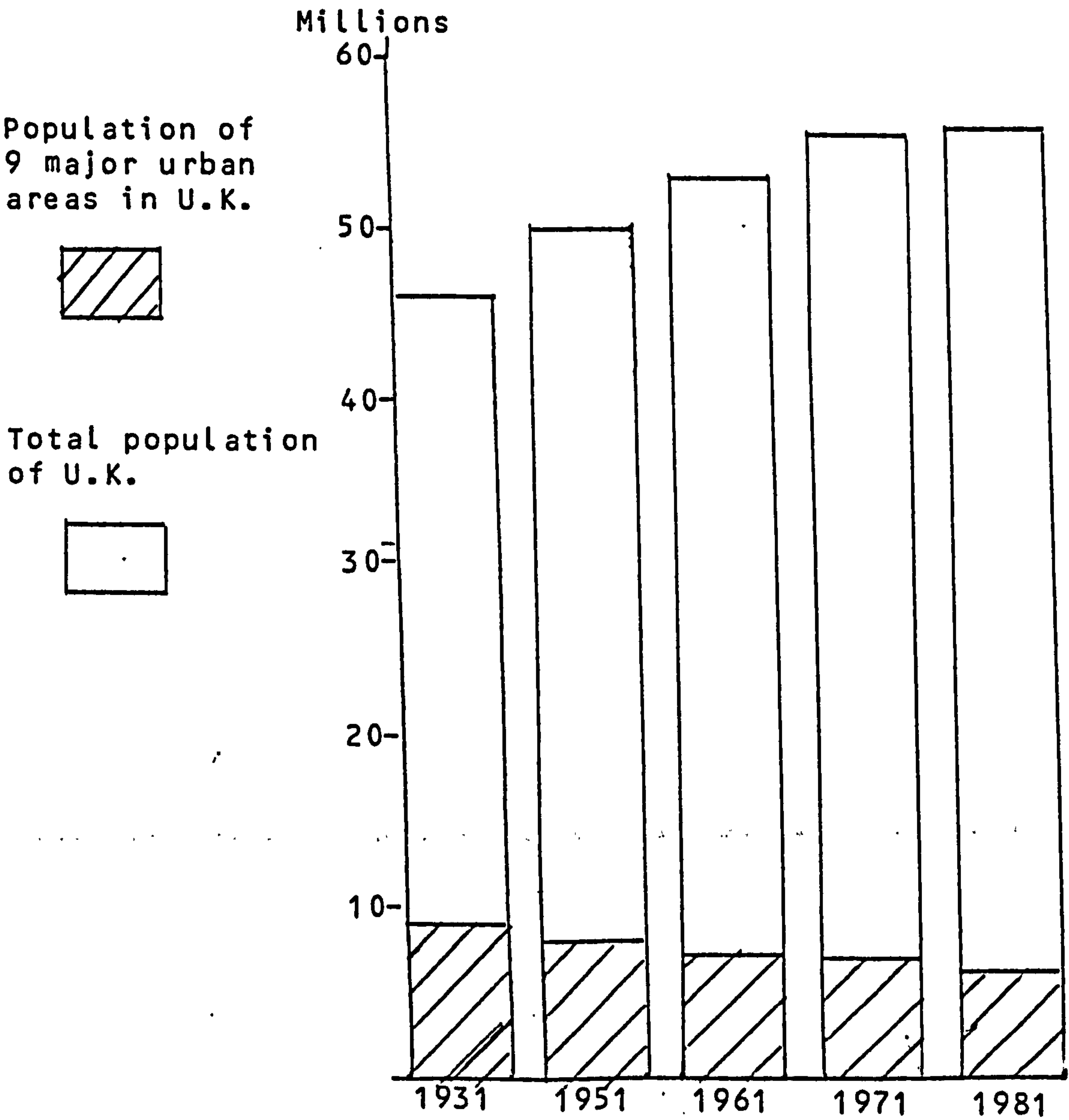
Councils and governments, while encouraging industry, offices and homes to move out of cities, had still not recognised the now relentless decline of city areas and

continued to build at a rate and density set by outdated population predictions.

8. DECLINE IN CITY POPULATION AND INCREASE IN NATIONAL POPULATION

POPULATION TRENDS IN 9 MAJOR URBAN AREAS* IN THE U.K. 1931-1981, COMPARED TO NATIONAL POPULATION TRENDS IN THE U.K. (with cumulative population increase/decrease shown as %)					
	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981
Population of 9 major urban areas in U.K.	8.9m.	7.9m. (-11%)	7.6m. (-15%)	7.5m. (-16%)	6.5m. (-27%)
Total population of U.K.	46.0m.	50.3m. (+9%)	52.8m. (+15%)	55.6m. (+21%)	56.3m. (+22%)

*Inner London, Birmingham, Kingston-upon-Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham, Sheffield.



Outer boroughs and county councils restricted council building, partly to preserve the Green Belt and partly to preserve land for more prosperous or more desirable private developments, also partly to retain a Conservative vote in the suburban and rural electorate. Council tenants were often considered Labour voting fodder. The consensus was also that they brought inner city social problems with them to new council estates. Therefore council efforts were further concentrated in Labour-controlled city authorities where land was scarce and expensive, and slums were worst. To some extent also, the Conservatives in the fifties and Labour in the sixties felt obliged to continue the expensive land and high flat subsidies as the only way of producing the volume of dwellings believed to be needed and of helping the needy inner cities to tackle their worst slums through major redevelopment programmes.

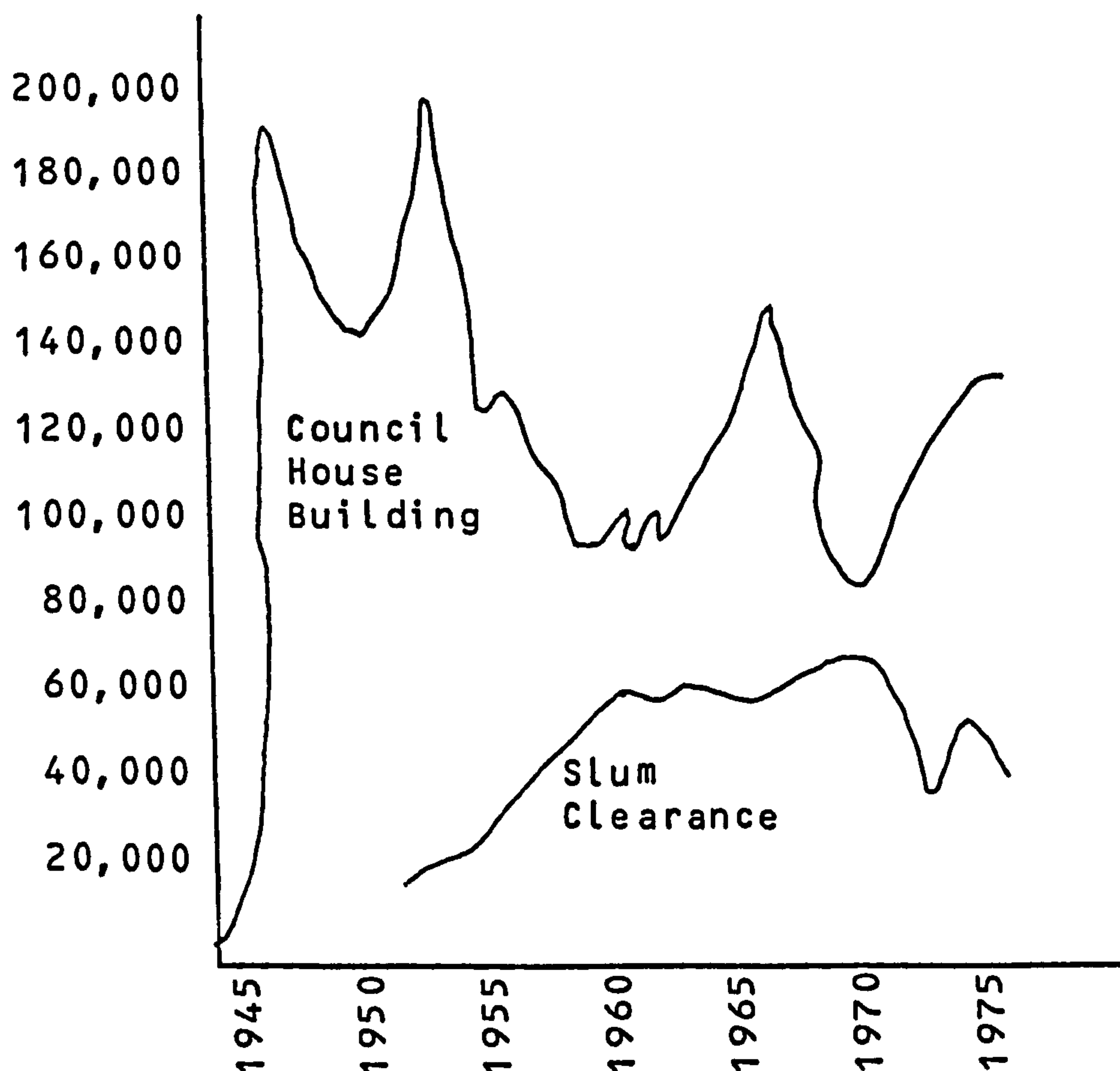
SLUM CLEARANCE

Because of the pressure during the fifties for large-scale, fast production of council housing and because the authorities willing to undertake big public housing programmes were on the whole the dense, Labour-controlled city authorities, shortage of building land became the absolute barrier to progress. The only way to get land on sufficient scale in the cities was to demolish existing housing.

Thus in the fifties demolition became again a main plank of the council housing programme, after a 20-year respite.

The policy of large-scale demolition was sustained through subsidies to the mid-seventies although the public mood swung against it progressively from the late sixties.

9. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING AND SLUM CLEARANCE
1945 - 1975



Source: Ministry of Housing and local government and Department of the Environment Housing and Construction Statistics.
New build: "Housing Policy" 1977.

The level of demolition was not hard to justify from the councils' or Government's point of view. Five million

homes lacked basic amenities. At the end of the war, 42% of households had no access to a bath at all. In 1951 69% of all households either shared a home or lacked basic amenities. Objectively, insanitary, overcrowded conditions seemed to justify demolition. However, a perceptive elderly tenant from the Byker district of central Newcastle, which was for years a blighted slum clearance area, observed that baths, sinks and hot water could have been installed in many of the popular but old and unplumbed terraces:

"It's wicked - these houses have been under demolition order for 20 odd years, and you know - they could've been saved, they could've just given us a bath and hot water."⁹

FLAWS IN SLUM CLEARANCE

The slum clearance policy set in train a series of new housing problems that were ill-considered at the time. The demolition programmes themselves were often based on misconceptions about housing need, housing policies and the social consequences of massive intervention.

First, it is cheaper and easier to instal amenities in existing buildings than to displace whole communities, demolish and start again. Octavia Hill had made this case in the 19th century. The L.C.C. did not agree. They argued in 1880 that only by building new could they provide adequate modern homes with proper amenities. Peter Wilmott and Michael Young, like Octavia Hill,

argued the case for saving East End Victorian terraced houses in 1957:

"The overwhelming majority [of East Enders] want a house, rather than a flat, inside, rather than outside the East End. Should the aim not be to provide as many new and reconditioned houses as possible while avoiding dispersal?"¹⁰

Not until the 1970's did subsidies substantially favour rehabilitation over slum clearance and even then the financial incentives were often too marginal for structurally sound but badly run-down houses. Although basic amenity installation grants had first become available before the war and were greatly increased in the sixties, these were not adequate to cover major repairs, such as damp-proofing, roof replacement, replastering, modern heating. Therefore, slum clearance continued to be the favoured economic option after it had outlived its usefulness. At the same time, the building industry was geared almost entirely to new building on "clean" sites and had been for nearly 200 years. The messy and unpredictable work of rehabilitation was more suited to a small repairs firm than to a large-scale building contractor. Most were very slow to adapt to the opportunities provided by rehabilitation.

"UNFIT"

Second, a large proportion of the houses declared unfit

during the slum clearance decades were not actually proved to be unfit. It was never required that councils should prove houses were slums. Until public opposition to demolition emerged in the seventies, it was sufficient simply to declare properties unfit. In fact the G.L.C. in a house condition survey in 1967 found that 69% of the properties it was demolishing in the late sixties had been assessed as structurally sound. London alone lost 54,000 structurally sound properties in the period of 1967-71. The last major redevelopment area to be demolished in Islington was the Westbourne Road area of Holloway. There at least 60% of the houses were found to be structurally sound when surveyed. In the end the four-storey terraces were demolished on social grounds based on the Medical Officer of Health's report on overcrowding, crime and prostitution. The area was demolished in the early seventies amid a fever of enthusiasm for renovation and opposition to demolition in adjacent areas.¹¹

Local authorities defined slums in a very arbitrary way. Welwyn Garden City in assessing its housing stock claimed to have the same proportion of slums as the mining towns of the Rhondda. Liverpool, Salford and Bolton, with similar Coronation Street-style back-to-backs, claimed respectively that 43%, 34% and 10% of their Victorian terraces were "slums". Far too little control was exercised over slum clearance, and no acceptable standard for subsidising or alternatively

preventing demolition was enforced. Councils' compulsory purchase powers were greatly increased between 1951-1971, making it ever easier for large areas to be swept away under the bulldozer. Councils were allowed to add areas of "fit" housing to clearance areas in order to produce large and neat packets of land. Some demolition areas, especially in London, were declared primarily because there were large gardens and councils could therefore gain land. The massive scale of slum clearance inevitably fed the "mass housing" ideas of modern architects and planners. Birmingham's first post-war clearance area covered no less than 50,000 properties, in one grand sweep through the central city, to be followed a few years later by a further 50,000 properties. No wonder it proceeded to build the largest concentration of tower-block flats of any city in Western Europe - over 400 blocks above six storeys. The whole approach to poor city communities was insensitive, inflexible and devastating in its impact, like its chief implement, the bulldozer.

TIME LAG IN CLEARANCE

Another element almost totally ignored by redevelopment advocates was the housing havoc created by the long time-lag, usually of 10 years or more, between deciding to demolish and completing a new housing scheme. One area of Newham took over 30 years to redevelop.¹² Some

areas of Islington were blighted by redevelopment plans for 15 years or more. Over the slum clearance bonanza period, areas were slowly emptied and demolished piecemeal causing a loss of housing space and thereby generating even more housing need in the short-term and running up vast costs in terms of idle land, lost rents and rates and social disturbance. It has been calculated that it will take the London Borough of Camden 100 years to make up for the loss of dwelling spaces through redevelopment. This is in spite of frequently very high densities within the rebuilt estate. The effect on the "slum" population was to disperse many of the people in advance of the demolition programme. This meant that by the time many city housing schemes came to fruition, the population designated to occupy them was no longer there, heralding large estates for which planned demand had partially evaporated.

The huge waiting lists for council homes were often artificially created at the height of the demolition era. But slum clearance in most city areas actually caused a substantial loss of population with up to half the previous population being "dishoused" out of the area in the process, as the long waiting lists forced desperate but able families to look elsewhere for a home, often choosing to buy in the suburbs or move to a new town. Even in the central Byker district of Newcastle, where there was an absolute commitment to rehouse the tight-knit old community back into the new

Byker, only one-fifth of the residents actually survived the long phases of redevelopment to move into the new

Byker estate. The other four-fifths were dispersed by the bulldozer.¹³

The depopulation figures for the cities in part illustrate the impact of slum clearance.

Over the 50 years from 1931 to 1981,¹⁴ the population in our cities shrank from 8.9 million to $6\frac{1}{2}$ million.

About 2 million of those who left were directly uprooted by slum clearance.

Thus the clearance plans generated big demand, leading to pressure for high density rebuilding schemes, while at the same time displacing large numbers of the residents for whom rebuilding was taking place.

IMPETUS TO DECLINE

The irony of modern housing policy lies in the accelerated decline of most inner city areas, actually fuelled by the redevelopment process. The very areas with the worst slums and greatest overcrowding were already suffering severe unemployment, industrial decay, and suburban flight by all who could escape. The post-war new towns policy was built on this desire to move out to greener pastures. Demolition on a large scale forced a flood of both population and small-scale industry that has not been attracted back. The slow slide became a helter-skelter under the impact of massive

redevelopment schemes.¹⁵

DISPERSING SLUMS

The most significant element in slum clearance was the dispersal of settled urban neighbourhoods that it caused. Without romanticising old slum streets, there can be little doubt that the people involved in the displacement suffered an acute sense of loss. 35% of women in Newcastle high-rise flats claimed to prefer their old, terraced slums. Today in Liverpool, tenants are voting with their feet. 10,000 households prefer to share accommodation in terraced housing rather than to live in self-contained council flats. In their seminal book, "Family and Kinship in East London", Wilmott and Young were told by the overwhelming majority of East Enders they interviewed that they wanted to stay put in terraced houses in the old streets. Not for nothing has the nostalgia of Coronation Street survived for 10 years on ITV as the most popular television programme among viewers. In Manchester, Liverpool, Salford, Oldham, Blackburn, the Victorian terraced house is the prize council offer, not the modern flat. The irony is that in the inner area of Salford, it is actually quite hard to locate the few surviving streets, so dominant are the ugly modern blocks that replaced them.

Planners were often quite clear about the aim and effect of slum clearance -

"The task is surely to break up such groupings [slum dwellers], even though the people seem to be satisfied with their miserable environment and seem to enjoy an extrovert social life within their own locality."

This statement was made in 1963 by the Chief Planner at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

Attempting to rid ourselves of the social stigma of slums was almost universally assumed to be a constructive attack on housing need until the consequences of the alternative became clear in the late sixties and seventies:

"One result is that a considerable movement of people takes place over long distances with devastating effect on the social groups built up over the years."

Unfortunately while the redevelopment phase was in full spate, this was often seen as a good thing. The consequences in terms of social malaise were often minimised, under a form of derision of low-income households' ability to adapt or be grateful, "the coals in the bath" syndrome.

In sum, a very cavalier attitude to the cost of slum clearance, in both social and financial terms, and to the newly-fashionable styles of post-war housing, determined the ease with which over 1½ million homes were demolished between 1945 and 1980. The replacement of

old slums with unpopular new estates was made inevitable by two other major elements: the design and scale of new council housing; and the relative neglect of housing management in the face of political enthusiasm for numbers of dwellings.

THE NEW ESTATES

Subsidies favoured flats over the 40 years from 1930 to 1970, multi-storey flats being more favoured than low-rise for a period of about 15 years up till 1967. The impact on the council stock, particularly in cities, was substantial and a high proportion (about two-thirds) of unpopular estates are large and flatted and located in city areas (see later chapter). At least half of these are estimated to be industrially built. The style of private housing was the opposite, built in small pockets, overwhelmingly in houses built of traditional materials.

10. PERCENTAGES OF HOUSES AND FLATS 1981

	Houses	Flats*	Total
Owner-occupied	93%	7%	100%
Local authority or new towns	66%	33%	100%

Source - General Household Survey

* Flats includes maisonettes built as dwellings on two floors but in a block comprising 3 or more storeys.

The fashion for including maisonettes on the new dense estates, an attempt at building high and dense blocks while providing a dwelling more like a house than a flat, and therefore hopefully more suitable for families, usually with two internal storeys or floors, crept in in the fifties. The style became more and more dominant in the late sixties as tower blocks fell from favour until management problems, generated by lack of privacy and supervision, noise disturbance, large numbers of children above ground and a general dislike of the often complex and unorthodox design, made it possibly the most unpopular type of council dwelling of all. Nonetheless, substantial numbers were built and by 1981,¹⁶ 33% of the total council stock comprised flats and maisonettes, with possibly nearly half a million in the form of maisonettes.

BIG SEEMED BETTER

Why did the Government invest so much extra money in an unpopular form of housing? The shortage of land and the ambition to provide more internal space made flat-building seem logical from the outset in the 1880's. The large scale of building required by governments because of the post-war housing crisis and the demand generated by slum clearance favoured dense, high building.

It was also easier in administrative and financial terms

to deal in large contracts, and big builders were prepared to eat out of the hands of willing local authorities. The greatest single factor, however, was the direct involvement of the architectural profession in government and in big building forms. Post-war architectural fashion was firmly wedded to large-scale, dense, high-rise housing. Architects were often hired direct by big construction firms to handle large council building contracts. According to P. Dunleavy, almost every leading British post-war architect was identified with the design and production of high-rise mass housing. By the 1960's deals between local authorities, major architects and large construction firms were commonplace. Only 32% of local authority dwellings were contracted through open tendering in 1964.¹⁷ (See P. Dunleavy for detailed documentation of this process).

The whole local and central government system came to favour large-scale, mass-produced housing as foreseen by the idle visionary of modern architecture, Le Corbusier:

"We must create the mass production spirit. The spirit of constructing mass production houses. The spirit of living in mass production houses."

(From "Towards a New Architecture", by Le Corbusier)

There was an almost fanciful desire to create extraordinary environments and to experiment with unheard-of building forms. Equally there was an obsession with ugliness over which the public exercised no control. Bare,

unadorned facades of grey concrete or sheet glass were the sophisticated design rage. Even guttering and window sills became obsolete for a time.¹⁸ Vain attempts in recent years by the Royal Institute of British Architects to refute such criticism coming from quarters as varied as tenants' federations and associations and the Royal family, have sounded remarkably hollow.

FASHION FOR HIGH-RISE

Behind the Government's post-war housing targets lay the new architectural mode - that of determining social contact through the physical structure of new housing, "the village in the sky". The arrogance of these architectural assumptions was obvious to the general populace and only public authorities had the capital and the power to experiment on a damagingly large scale. In Britain the private sector built on a miniscule scale in the style of Le Corbusier and his ilk. Not so public bodies - the desire for large-scale and high-density fed off the ambitions of young architects to replace slums with a new Mecca. Tom Wolfe in his scathing denunciation of modern architecture sums up the social disaster of mass high-rise council housing:

"On each floor there were covered walkways, in keeping with Corbusier's idea of 'streets in the air'. Since there was no other place in the project [estate] in which to sin in public,

whatever might ordinarily have taken place in bars, brothels, social clubs, pool halls, amusement arcades, general stores, corncribs, rutabaga patches, hayricks, barn stalls, now took place in the streets in the air. . . . Corbusier's boulevards made Hogarth's Gin Lane look like the oceanside street of dreams. Respectable folk pulled out, even if it meant living in cracks in the sidewalks."

(Extract from "Bauhaus to Our House", Tom Wolfe)

Planners and sociologists backed the architectural fashion almost unequivocally, although Peter Townsend, Peter Wilmott and a few others presented serious concern for the consequences of the expensive craze. People on the ground, housing managers, caretakers and tenants, were not asked on the whole, and did not find a voice against the new style of housing till very late in the day. The failure of high-rise and high-density, mass council housing was only recognised officially after the fashion had passed and after the costs had become prohibitive. But the failure also showed up in the low demand for the big new estates, many of which were difficult to let as early as the late sixties.¹⁹ Ordinary people did not like the style or the social consequences. One estate of tower blocks in Knowsley, Merseyside, was blown up as redundant in 1983, without it ever having been fully occupied in its 10-year life. Another estate in Glasgow was taken down when it was only built up to the second floor, because there was no demand for the type of dwellings it would offer. (See later chapters for more detail.)

LAND SCARCITY IN CITIES

The other element which favoured high-rise, high-density, large estates has been frequently referred to - land scarcity, and subsidies favouring the acquisition of expensive land. This policy aimed to help hard-pressed cities but in fact saddled them with too much housing in depopulating areas at an unacceptable density on land that was so valuable that high-rise/high-density building seemed inevitable, as a justification for the initial outlay.

Le Corbusier seized on the crowded nature of cities and argued for a nuclear view of city development with high densities in the centre, thinning out to leafy spacious suburbs on the outskirts. His view of spacious suburbs might be viable, but the nuclear city is not, packed as it is with low-income, ex-slum families forced to live at densities sometimes even higher than the previous crowded slum houses. Although there are large unused areas around flatted estates reducing overall densities, the blocks themselves often have absurdly high densities, creating a caged atmosphere which the surrounding dereliction, often planned as "leafy communal space", intensifies. Half the displaced slum dwellers of the post-war years have been rehoused back into flatted blocks in inner cities. About 80% of high-rise building is concentrated in inner areas - replicating previous slum conditions, but rationally planned on the grounds of

land shortage and a modern and sanitary answer to space-starved cities. As we have learnt to our cost, the rationalism of the modernist architectural movement created a kind of human folly with 100-foot-high buildings held together with only one in 20 of the requisite bolts, and unable to take a gas supply for fear of explosion.²⁰

INDUSTRIALISED SYSTEM BUILDING

Another element in the post-war style of flat-building was the favour which industrialised building found among public authorities. It was actively encouraged by Governments, both Conservative and Labour, since it was expected that industrialised building would be cheaper, quicker and larger in scale:

"The Minister proposes to launch a concentrated drive to increase and improve the use of industrialised methods in housebuilding for the public sector.....

The advantages for housing authorities.....

On numbers: this is the only way to build the number of houses we need.

On speed of erection: most industrialised techniques show worthwhile savings.

On price: for flats, industrialised techniques are already slightly cheaper.....but efficient organisation of supply and demand can bring down promotion costs.

On design: the use of carefully prepared standard designs will release scarce professional time to concentrate on raising

the quality of layouts.

On construction quality: industrialised methods facilitate quality control."

Ministry of Housing and Local Government 1965 (17)

20a

None of the claims proved true. It failed to become a cheaper option for a number of reasons - the materials were more expensive, and their bulk made them awkward and expensive to transport; the extra elaborate machinery needed to construct industrialised housing added to the costs; meanwhile labour costs were only marginally reduced.

Industrialised building was only rarely faster than more traditional methods, in spite of such claims being continually made for it. One reason was that the other elements in the time scale, such as clearing the site, planning and design work, were as long and so the actual building time was only one small element. Another problem was the unfamiliarity of the techniques and the lack of skill of the largely casual labour force. Another problem was the intense supervision required because of the complexities of engineering. In practice, this supervision was often inadequate.

Although it may have been the only building method capable of producing the volume of dwellings planned, with hindsight, supply was to outstrip demand in many areas and much demand was artificially generated through

demolition to make room for the new buildings, so volume of production was an invalid justification too.

Industrialised building has left a legacy of technical problems, some of which are unresolvable. About 3,000 Bison flats will probably have to be demolished less than 20 years after they were built. Several other standard industrial systems are now being questioned^{21, 21a} for their safety and the total bill for remedies is likely to be in the realm of many millions. Often panel-constructed flats have no insulation at all, with the concrete panels positively conducting cold air into the dwellings, causing extensive condensation and damp. Roof weights were reduced to a bare minimum, with inadequate allowances for the impact of wind. Flat roofs and open decks and corridors have leaked on many industrially built estates. The list is endless and sometimes frightening.

UNPOPULAR, UNGOVERNABLE STYLE

There are so many structural elements in the design of council housing over the last 35 years that have led to its increasing unpopularity that it is impossible to list them all. Unguarded common areas are known to cause insecurity and vandal damage, yet almost all council flats have such areas. Common entrances and balconies

shared by six or more households are subject to heavy vandalism and lack of privacy. A very high proportion of council flats are in this category. "Unused space is always abused", according to the insightful Octavia Hill. Almost all council estates, except the old tenement-style blocks built around small courtyards, have unused, open space. Bridges linking blocks, unguarded lifts, long open decks and balconies, noise-prone maisonettes, underground garages, all require constant supervision and maintenance. This factor was never built into the original plans or costings.

RESTRICTED DEMAND

The biggest problem of post-war council housing in Britain has been its vast scale. No other Western industrialised country has produced public housing on a comparable scale.²² Councils acted as though they were building for infinite demand. Yet the very rapid expansion of owner-occupation since the war constantly eroded demand. Councils restricted demand too by building almost exclusively for families until recently. As early as 1968, nearly half the households in the country had one or two persons only, while 88% of the council stock was built for families, a majority of dwellings having three bedrooms.

11. MISMATCH BETWEEN SIZE OF DWELLING AND
SIZE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN LOCAL AUTHORITY STOCK

	1 or 2 persons	More than 2 people
Proportion of units	12%	88%
Proportion of households	46%	54%

Source - Cullingworth 1968

In addition, the very areas where council housebuilding was concentrated were the depopulating, unpopular inner areas of declining housing demand. Demand was further reduced by building the wrong product. So while the vast majority wanted houses, councils were hell-bent on producing flats. The opposite was true of the private sector, which built almost exclusively houses for owner-occupation, thus fuelling the trend towards home ownership by providing what most people wanted. Many young households in the post-war years have migrated from inner city areas and have become owner-occupiers, seeking the more salubrious suburban environment and a house with a garden. The desire to owner-occupy has now seized the vast majority of our population according to Building Society surveys (see Chapter VI).

NATIONAL SURPLUS

By 1971, there was a crude surplus of dwellings over households of 200,000.* Of course there were many

* Households were carefully counted in the Housing Policy Green Paper and sharing and concealed households were estimated according to recognised formulae.

empty dwellings in the private sector, including second homes, as well as a certain level of empty property caused through household moves and improvement work. Nonetheless, the new crude surplus represented a real fall in demand, which inevitably manifested itself in low demand for badly built, unpopular council estates. The following table showing falling densities bears out this fact.

12.

DENSITIES - PERSONS PER ROOM						
1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1966	1981*
1.1	.91	.83	.74	.66	.57	.55

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper

The proportion of households living at above 1.5 persons per room has also dropped steadily, showing that the benefits of the greater stock of housing has been distributed throughout the population.

13. PERCENTAGE HOUSEHOLDS OVER 1.5 PERSONS

	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981
% households over 1.5 persons per room	11.5%	5.1%	1.8%	1.4%	0.6%

The smaller number of households living at high density is bound to be reflected in falling demand for rehousing through councils.

Similarly there has been a reduction in the numbers of

*1981 figures are taken from the Census.

shared dwellings:

14.

NO. OF SHARED DWELLINGS

Year	Shared Dwellings
1971	300,000
1976	250,000
1981	160,000

And this has been coupled with a drop in the total number of sharing households:

15.

NO. OF SHARING HOUSEHOLDS

1951	1,872,000
1961	886,000
1971	637,000

According to the 1981 Census, nearly 686,000 households did not have self-contained accommodation. Although the figures are clearly somewhat uncertain, the underlying trend has been towards lower demand for council housing in most areas.

Predictably, the proportion of vacant dwellings in the total stock has expanded:

16.

PERCENTAGE OF VACANT DWELLINGS

Year	% of vacant dwellings
1971	3.2%
1976	3.8%
1981 (predicted)	4.9%

A further crude measure of falling housing demand is the fall in the number of concealed households:

17.

CONCEALED HOUSEHOLDS

1951	935,000
1961	602,000
1971	426,000
1981*	266,500

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

The number of people without the use of a fixed bath has fallen dramatically too:

18.

NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT BATH

Year	No. of households without bath
1951	4.8 million households
1961	3.2 million households
1971	1.4 million households
1981*	500,000 households

Source: Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

With the great expansion of rehabilitation programmes and improvement grants in the seventies, this figure has dropped dramatically again, and less than half a million households are now without a bath. The smaller the number of households lacking basic amenities, the lower the demand for council rehousing.

The percentage of households unsatisfactorily housed on any count, sharing, overcrowding, or lack of basic

*1981 figures are taken from the Census.

amenities, declined sharply over the same period from 69% in 1951 to 24% in 1971. Of course slum clearance and massive housebuilding programmes played a major part in the reduction of housing need. The influential Parker Morris report of 1961, which recommended minimal space standards and amenities for all council housebuilding and improvement to older dwellings, also had a major impact in bringing about higher housing standards, although the aim of building to higher standards and converting old property into fully self-contained dwellings often conflicted both with financial "cost-yardstick" restrictions and with a rational internal layout of dwellings.

The combined effect has been to reduce housing need and therefore housing demand. Of course the figures given here are all national totals and in no way reflect the varying conditions of different parts of the country. London has for long experienced more acute housing need than other areas and in 1971, a full 27% of households were still living at densities above 1.5 persons per room.

On the whole, the richer areas of the Midlands and South-East England have better equipped housing and lower rates of unemployment, but higher levels of sharing and overcrowding. The seriously declining areas of the North, where densities are lower as populations move away, but unemployment rates are high, have the greater

poverty and more poorly equipped housing:

19.

HOUSING CONDITIONS

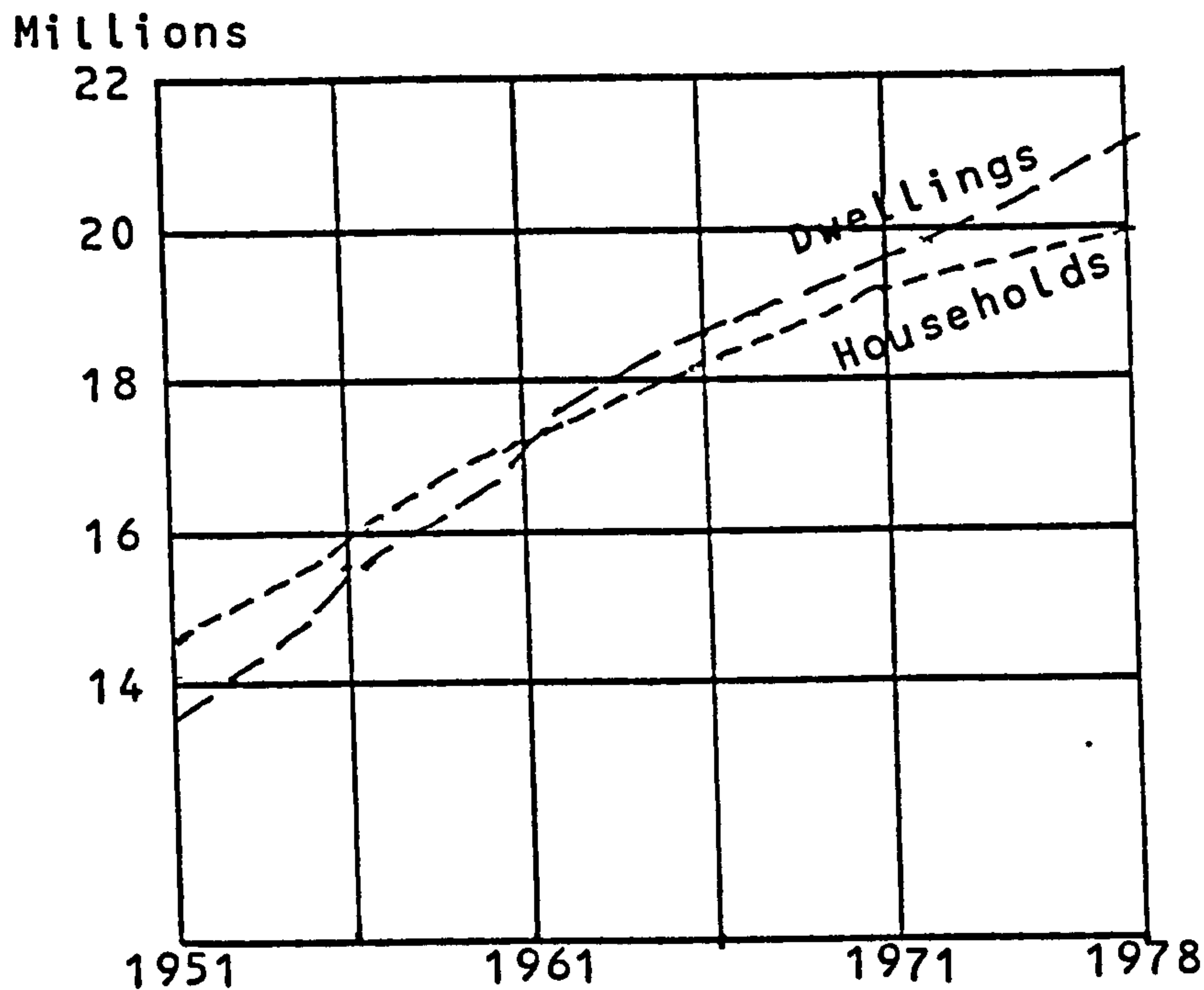
Area	Overcrowding	Sharing	Poorly equipped	Unemployed
North	1.8%	1%	7.7%	12.7%
North-West	1.5%	1.4%	6.8%	7.2%
Merseyside	2.8%	2.1%	10%	16.7%
W. Midlands	3.5%	1.5%	3.5%	2%
South-East	4.4%	11.7%	3.7%	1%
Inner London	12.9%	32.4%	12.6%	1.7%

Source: Census Indicators of Urban Deprivation, Working note, No. 6, Department of the Environment, 1975.

This table illustrates clearly not only sharp regional differences, but also the clear relationship between economic decline and fall in demand for housing. Note the consistent link between high unemployment and low sharing and overcrowding rates.

In overall numbers, dwellings exceeded households from 1961 onwards, and the gap widened steadily up till 1978, by which time there were about half a million more dwellings than households.

20.

DWELLINGS AND HOUSEHOLDS 1951-78

Source - "Housing Policy" by David Donnison

Council waiting lists have halved and in some cases quartered in size. The average wait for a council home for a family is down to weeks in many parts of Merseyside and the North-West. Even in London most families in housing need have some hope of a council home, although waiting time is now rising again and current cutbacks could, if continued, generate a new intensification of housing shortage.

The problem has shifted to the kind of home that will be offered. Increasingly it is the unpopular flats on high-density estates or the pre-war, cottage-style homes on run-down impoverished estates on the outskirts of towns that will be offered to incoming council applicants. Most frequent vacancies tend to arise on

these estates. And the applicants will be much more reluctant now than a generation ago to accept the offer of council accommodation if they don't like it.

The result is a new kind of mismatch between households and dwellings, with increasing numbers of council homes being categorised as unpopular or difficult to let.

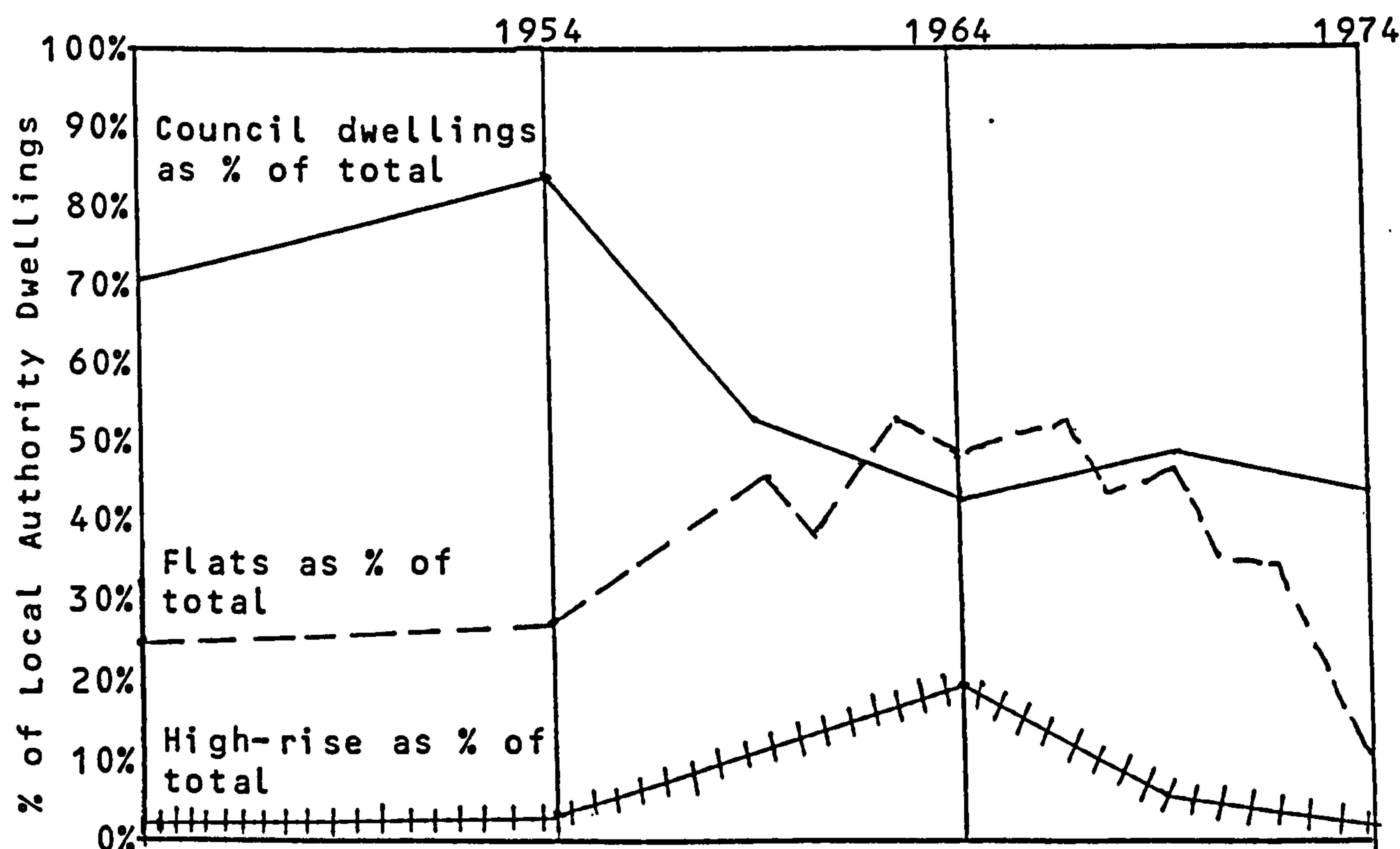
HOUSING MANAGEMENT

If housing management had enjoyed the status it deserves, as the critical function in the housing service, then government, architects, and local authorities would have quickly learnt that they were making an appalling mistake in pursuing the goals of mass housing, high-density flat-building, communal design and industrial technology. Then the production on a mass scale of homes that would become difficult to manage, if not difficult to let, would have been stopped in its expensive tracks, and replaced much earlier by smaller-scale housing renewal, coupling new building with widespread renovation of the old stock, thereby preventing the devastation of our cities that has led to such social distress.

AFTER THE MASS HOUSING BOOM

The peak years for the production of council dwellings, for the building of flats and for the production of high-rise blocks, were the mid-sixties.

21. DIAGRAM SHOWING PEAK OF COUNCIL ACTIVITY IN PUBLIC SECTOR BUILDING, FLAT-BUILDING AND HIGH-RISE BUILDING



Sources - Peter Levin and Patrick Dunleavy

However, slum clearance and large-scale building continued for many years after it was no longer considered the appropriate solution to our housing problem.* The G.L.C's Elthorne Estate was still being built in the late seventies, nearly 20 years after it was first conceived. The Byker Estate in Newcastle still had vacant cleared land to be built on in 1982 and had all the appearances of a building site 10 years after the slum-clearance residents were moved from the old

* Slum demolition only peaked in the seventies.

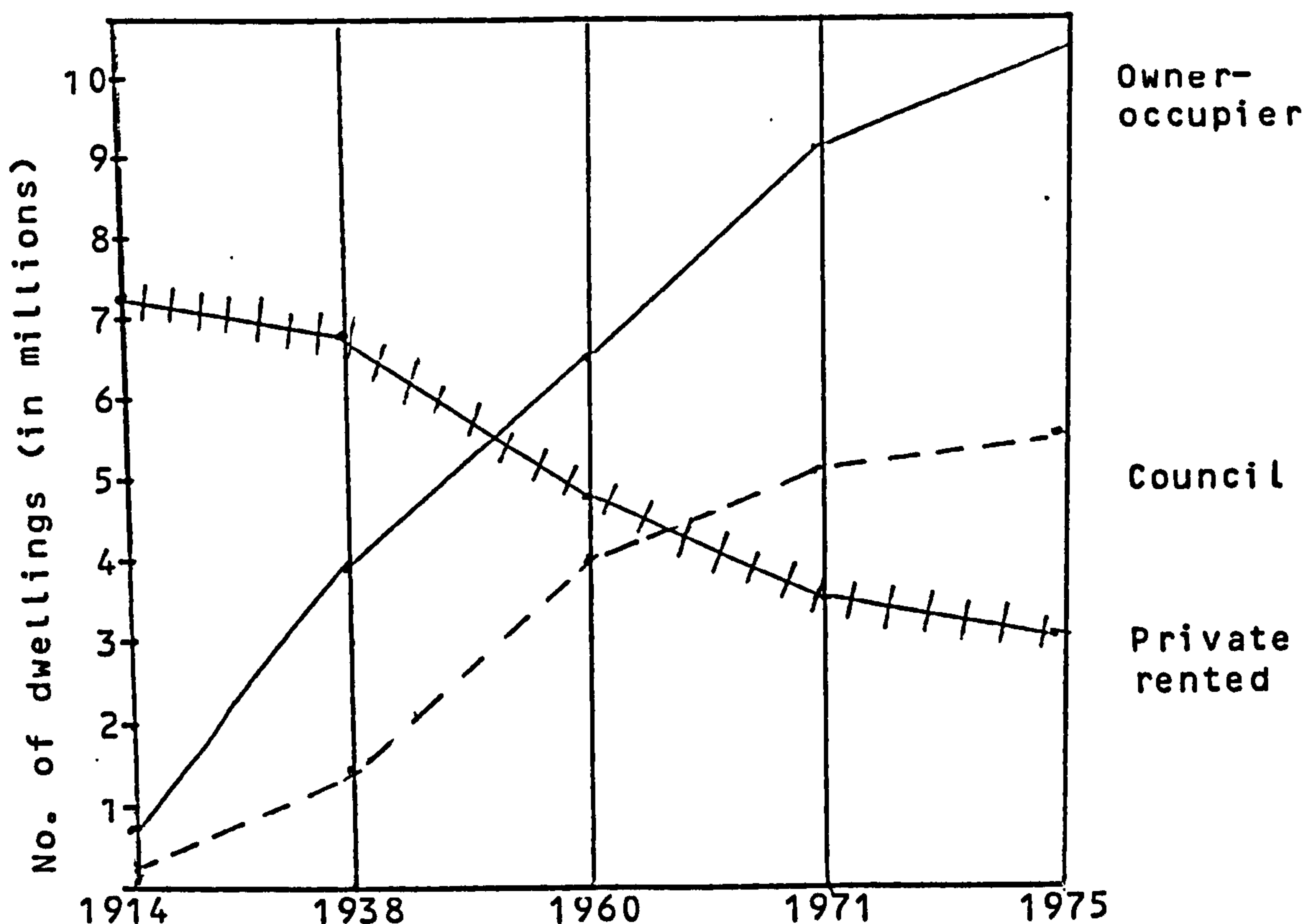
Byker into the new homes. Both these estates replaced areas that many residents did not want to leave. Both new estates were built on a vast, modern scale that many found threatening after the old streets they were used to. Both developments "dishoused" a majority of people from settled communities.

The kickback from the multitude of similar schemes, the scarred landscapes and long time-lags, produced a fever of new council activity in renovating the fast deteriorating old stock through Housing Action Areas, a new neighbourhood-based concept in slum-renewal, introduced in the new Housing Act of 1974. Many thousands of terraced properties were acquired by councils. In Islington alone, over 5,000 street properties were bought up and renovated in the seventies. Some slum clearance areas were converted to rehabilitation areas and several public enquiries into demolition plans had a stormy passage in the seventies, the latter ones sometimes overturning council demolition plans and preserving old housing areas. Nonetheless, over one and a half million new council dwellings were added to the total stock in the seventies, many of which, as we shall see later, were classed as difficult to let almost as soon as they were first occupied.

Council housebuilding had managed to produce well over 40% of the total new stock right up to the late seventies, partly because deceleration was harder than would have

been supposed. But by 1978 the production of council housing began to drop steeply, falling far behind the private sector, a position from which it has never recovered.

22. OWNERSHIP OF HOUSING (in millions)



The figures in the diagram show a dramatic change in the distribution of dwellings and tenures since the war. The stock overall has increased by a little more than one and a half times. Private landlords have halved in number; council dwellings have multiplied five times, the fastest increase of any sector; but owner-occupation now dominates the national housing scene, having expanded threefold since before the war.

23. THE STOCK OF DWELLINGS BY TENURE in 1971

TENURE	NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS
Owner-occupied	8,228,000
Rented from local authority or new town	4,628,000
Rented from private landlord	2,796,000
Rented with job or business	750,000
All tenures	16,402,000

Source - Housing Policy Green Paper 1977

The pattern of council housing over the last five years has changed dramatically. Traditional materials have come strongly back into favour. Very few flats are being built and those that are tend to be low-rise, two- or three-storey, often sheltered dwellings for the elderly and handicapped. Sites tend to be small infill areas, and the concept of an estate is weakening, and being avoided where possible, in favour of common or garden streets. It is unlikely that council housing will ever again enjoy the prestige, the subsidies and the planning acceptance that led to its heady mistakes of the post-war era. However, the legacy is massive with approximately five million council dwellings in England and Wales alone. While owner-occupation is now

the majority tenure, private landlords, in spite of all coaxing, continue to disappear and housing trusts and associations represent only a fractional contribution to the rented sector. Council landlords represent a very substantial part of the national scene, housing about 15 million people and controlling vast stocks in all our major cities. They provide the major source of rented accommodation. Our next chapter looks at the housing superstructures that emerged in Town Halls to cope with the relatively new empires.

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CHAPTER IV - THE EMERGENCE OF HOUSING DEPARTMENTS

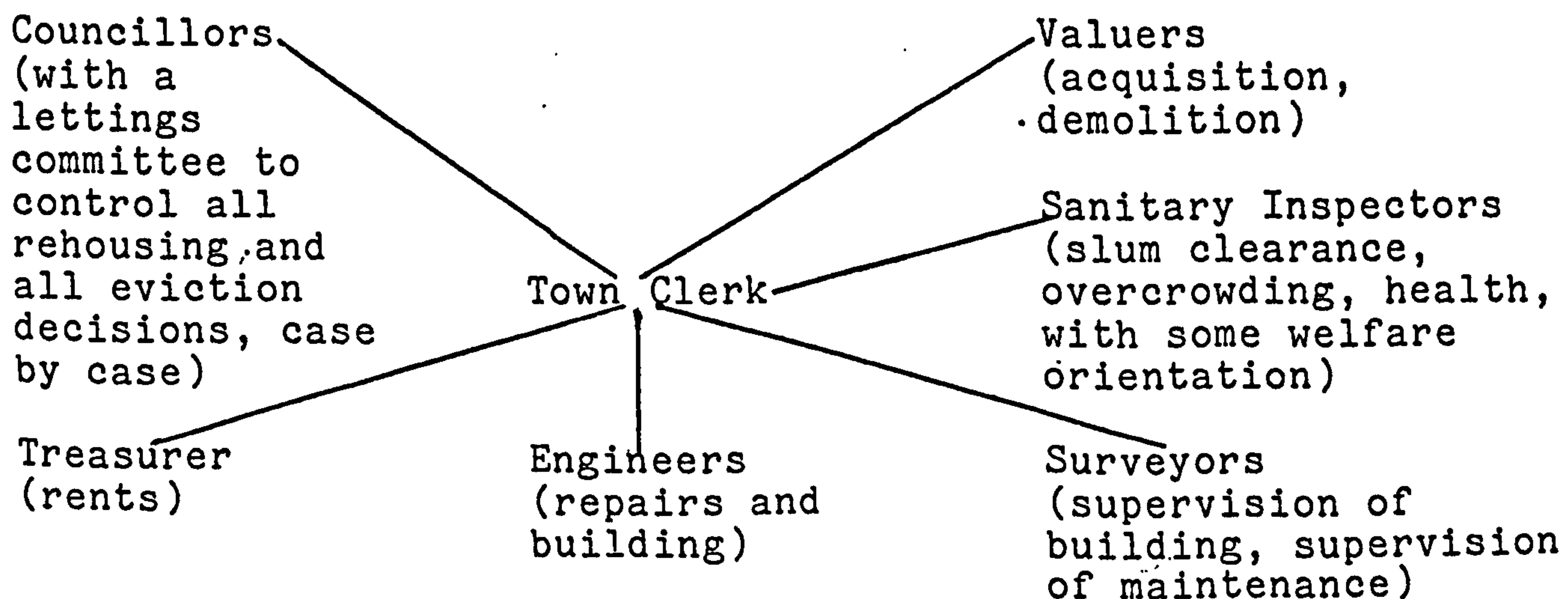
"A municipal tenant is a privileged person, living in accommodation it would be impossible to rent at the same figure elsewhere and which is in addition managed and maintained according to the most advanced ideals prevailing."

Article in Housing, October 1942, by
S. R. Butcher, Fellow of the Institute of Housing.

INTRODUCTION

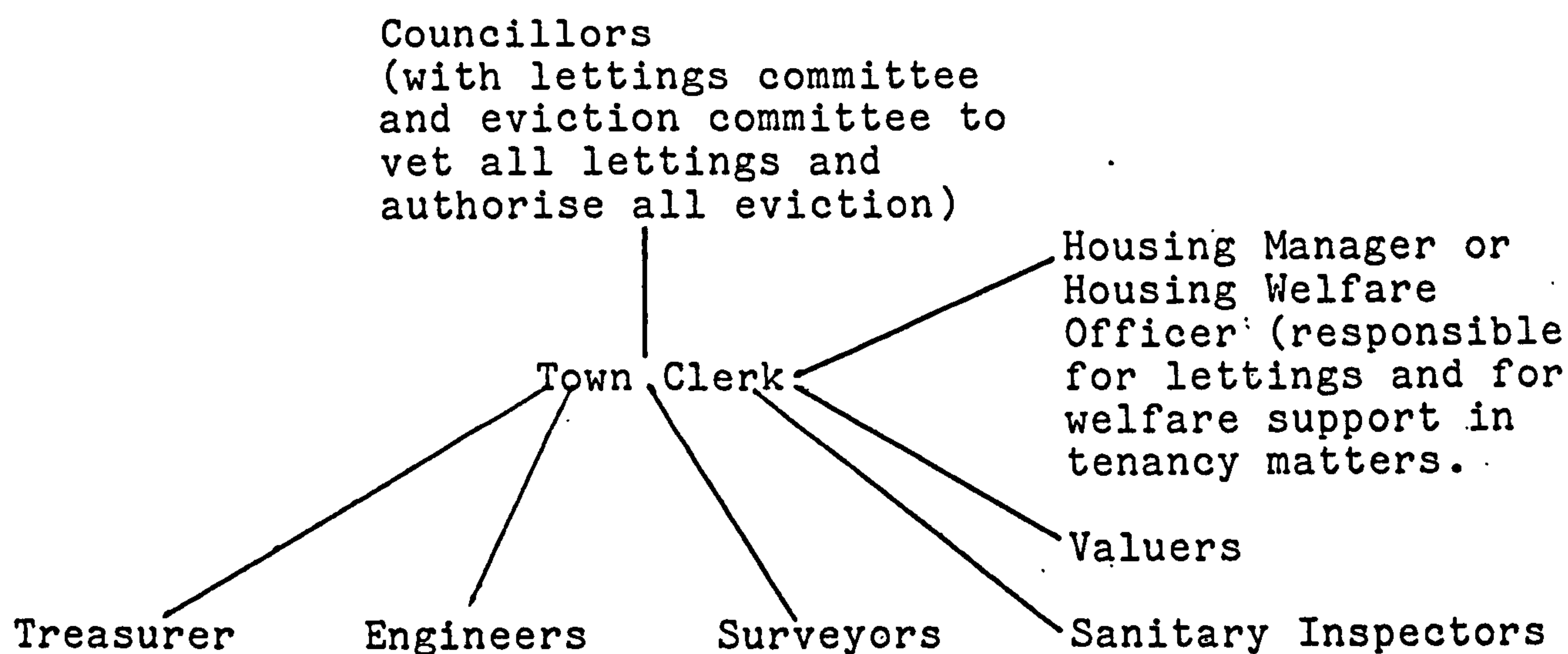
Councils became public landlords without commitment, plan or forethought. They intended only to provide housing and put almost no effort into how they would run it. The Government report of 1939, encouraging local authorities to put someone in charge of the stock is proof of how far they were from actually doing so. By the time war broke out, over four-fifths of all councils had no housing manager, or person in charge of running the council stock.

A typical council landlord looked like this:



Less than one fifth of local authorities had an employee with any specific housing management responsibilities.

An enlightened housing management structure in local authorities with slum clearance problems and large new estates looked something like this:



No local authority that we have discovered had a fully integrated, single housing management structure to cover all dealings with tenants. Nor could individual representatives of the landlord ever feel in control of any other part of the landlord service in their dealings with the tenants.

Housing management, as conceived by Octavia Hill and the Society of Women Housing Managers, was, according to available records, never practised within local authorities. At best a few threads of welfare work were woven into a complex town hall structure in the face of major problems with families from slums, or a

particular estate was singled out for special local treatment because of its social and management problems.

Very few local authorities, at least within the cities, would claim to have been on top of their landlord responsibilities at the time when council housing changed from being a minority to a mass provision, with direct Government responsibility for funding of demolition and rebuilding.

THE WAR AND AFTER

At the outbreak of the Second World War, a few housing departments existed, like the L.C.C. But the war led to severe cutbacks in the estate-based services like repairs and caretaking.

Under the impact of staff shortages, the L.C.C. itself handed over much of its rent collection to private agents, and amalgamated the management of several large estates under one non-resident superintendent.

This probably hastened the end of the resident management service to the large estates and increased the already remote scale of operation.

Meanwhile many London boroughs were establishing housing

departments and by 1946, one quarter had done so. Their primary task was letting vacant dwellings, coupled with welfare support to tenants in difficulties. The other two major areas, rents and repairs, were invariably handled by other departments of the Town Hall, even where a housing department was established. At that stage, Town Halls were responsible for compact geographical areas, something of a genuine parish, and each council, on average, owned 1,400 houses. Therefore the fragmented, compartmentalised and bureaucratic structure, inadequate as it was for good landlord-tenant relations, could still be held together by paper work. It was, however, to prove a very bad foundation for the problems to come with the housing spurt of the post-war era.

The Institute of Housing's journal in 1942 produced a thoughtful analysis of the way forward in the light of the growing scale of council housing and the problems of often confused, uprooted slum-dwellers in the face of an unidentifiable landlord. It argued that maintenance should be firmly in the control of the housing manager; that mixed housing should be built in small groups of dwellings; that selection and training of good staff was vital; and that -

"The ordinary tenant.....likes to have a quick and easy contact with some person in authority, capable of giving a quick and clear-cut decision, and is moreover not at ease if contact can only be made after a journey to a somewhat grandiose building. For this reason some enlightened authorities have decentralised management into

local groups in charge of officers with delegated powers to deal with all matters of a difficult or technical nature to whom the tenants have easy and local access."¹

This demand for a localised service was instigated primarily by the needs on the one hand of disorientated, new occupants of council housing, and on the other of housing managers facing a complex battery of problems on large estates. However, it was very much the exception to the rule.

THE GOVERNMENT'S 1945 REPORT

In 1945, the Central Housing Advisory Committee produced for the Government a second report on the management of municipal estates, giving the clearest insight available into the problems of local authority landlords.²

Many municipal organisations contributed advice to the 1945 Committee. The L.C.C. and most urban authorities with more than 1,000 dwellings, supported by the Institute of Housing, advocated the appointment of a Housing Manager to each local authority. The rural districts, with far less stress, felt less need to organise management into a single department. The Municipal Treasurers and Accountants inevitably thought that rent collection should be kept separate from other aspects of management firmly under their own wing and that "business or work" time should not

be uneconomically used on integrating welfare with management. The Sanitary Inspectors' Association argued that their members were well placed to become effective housing managers. And Municipal Engineers argued with regret that rent collection had taken precedence over other aspects of housing management, such as maintenance. To the reader 40 years on, the evidence of the municipal experts gave ample testimony to the piecemeal and even chaotic approach to estate management through the conflicting roles of different "professional" departments and specialisms. Most local authorities claimed in their evidence that housing management problems could be solved by more comprehensive and more rigidly enforced procedures in each department. Why local authorities thought that foolproof systems could be established to cover the multitude of eventualities, building styles, climate and family circumstances, is hard to imagine. Because operations were increasingly tied up at the centre in an attempt to solidify and clarify procedures, the ground-level jobs of caretakers, rent collectors, welfare visitors, and repairmen, became more and more remote from decision-making and therefore more ineffective. The gap was not just between landlord and tenant, but between estate-based menial workers with little responsibility or supervision, and the operational and "professional" base firmly lodged in the Town Hall. The 1945 report concluded that -

"the varying needs of many thousands of individuals cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula."

The Government's advisers could on balance see the need for radical developments in housing management, but they failed to give shape to this general sense of things going down the wrong path.

The report concluded that tenants were to blame for many problems because of a "deterioration in tenants' care." This was associated with the war and the encouragement of animals in backyards for food, coupled with the removal of metal fencing for munitions. Anxiety was expressed that pigs and fowl should be banned as soon as food supplies increased. They did not dream that the disappearance of animals would do nothing to reinstate a sense of control, purpose or order among individual householders, in the face of absentee landlords.

Over the early post-war period, the L.C.C. underwent a series of management changes. It finally responded to the C.H.A.C. recommendations to make housing management more personal, by spreading door-to-door rent collection in the place of resident superintendents. This method reduced arrears and improved contact with tenants, but it became very mechanical with each collector covering about 800 dwellings a week. It also led to the closure of several estate offices. Over the same period, some housing functions were handed over totally to other departments in response to the demands of the scale of operation. A separate Works Division was established;

so was an Acquisition Division, Rating and Statistical Division, Administration and Establishment Division. Housing architectural work was handed back to the central Architects' Department. In addition, Valuers, Engineers, the Chief Officer of Supplies, the Comptroller of the Council and the Medical Officer of Health were variously involved in parts of the housing service. The Housing Department itself had reduced its functions to allocations, welfare, caretaking, arrears pursuit, and repairs ordering. Eleven different departments at County Hall were thus directly responsible for fragments of estate management.

VANDALISM IN 1948

Social problems continued to mount on the poorer estates. The war could be blamed as a major cause. At a big housing conference in Scotland in 1948; vandalism was highlighted as a major problem, echoing the C.H.A.C. reports' anxiety over lack of "tenants' care".

"There is still an evident lack of social conscience on the part of the general community towards communal property. Trees and shrubs, flowerbeds and playing field apparatus are still being destroyed to an alarming extent."

In addition, gardens were reported neglected and packs of dogs roamed uncontrolled, in spite of food shortages, rationing and the drive to vegetable growing. Fences were not reinstated after they had been collected for war purposes or in some cases were replaced with easily broken,

damaged or burnt wooden fences. Little did we realise that in the 1980's many of those vital garden fences, establishing dominion and control, would still be missing, and back wastelands would still be the preserve of packs of stray dogs.

THE INSTITUTE OF HOUSING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT

The demand for housing personnel in local authorities was accelerating and systems were constantly modified to keep pace with the demands of expanding rehousing programmes.

There was a severe labour shortage and major difficulties in recruiting qualified staff into local government. Many recruits were untrained and had a minimal educational background. Job structures were consequently routinised and narrowed, and areas of discretion as far as possible eliminated. The L.C.C. was forced to reduce its entrance requirements from the equivalent of two 'A' levels to two 'O' levels over this period, a far cry from the pre-war recommendation that only graduates should be recruited for the job of estate manager.

Throughout this period, the most serious misconception of both Government and local authorities was the belief that slum demolition and rehousing was solving most social

problems, thereby removing many social needs in one "simple" operation.

The Institute of Housing was continuing to recruit members and to engage in the ongoing housing debate. Although full membership of the Institute was still in the region of 262, associate members and student members boosted the total by 1949 to 1,612.

The Society of Women Housing Estate Managers, with 250 members, was finding it hard to recruit suitable candidates for its rigorous training. They played an accommodating role in local authorities, trying to make the system bend to the requirements of housing management. On this, almost everywhere, they fought a losing battle.

The Institute of Housing had much lower recruitment and training standards than the Society of Women Housing Managers. The Institute still held that welfare and the "women's side" of housing management should not be confused with the main council job of keeping the technical side operating smoothly. The Institute also argued that in more affluent post-war conditions, intensive management was no longer normally necessary. The Society continued to argue that high-density, communal housing presented special management problems and that "group management", where each manager was responsible initially for all aspects of the landlord/tenant contact, was more

effective than the prevailing "sectional management" where functions, such as rents, lettings, repairs, were separately run within the Town Hall and often not controlled by a housing manager at all. 4

But there was little sense of urgency and a serious under-estimation of the developing social and management problems of council housing with no major reorganisation of public housing proposed.

THE GOVERNMENT REPORTS ON FLATS 1952

A special sub-committee of C.H.A.C. in 1952 considered the problems of flat-living, because special management needs were generated by this peculiarly communal form of housing. While making many clear recommendations in favour of resident caretaking, supervision of common facilities, such as laundries, liaison with tenants' representatives, and rehousing families with children in houses rather than flats, the report did not challenge the basic assumption that flat-building was necessary. Nor did it propose a radical reorganisation of management to encourage local, estate-based offices to develop, as already operated so effectively in the flatted estates of Peabody, Guinness, Samuel Lewis or Sutton Trusts. It argued consistently that local authorities should avoid "an ongoing maintenance commitment" and yet flats by

C.H.A.C's own definition required long-term, continual management and maintenance. At the time of the Government's report, councils were building about 100,000 flats a year. Yet the members of the Committee barely addressed the major problem of long-term, coherent management and maintenance of an increasingly difficult stock, while recommending that pets, such as rabbits and pigeons, should be encouraged and creepers planted up the bare walls in order to help tenants keep in touch with nature. There was a strong sense that the Government and its advisers were running behind a scale of problem they barely perceived.⁵

The whole issue of flat-building, and the subsidies to encourage it, was not raised by the membership of the Committee; nor was the question of funding the additional management costs of flatted estates. According to the L.C.C., it cost more than twice as much to manage and maintain flats than cottages.* Many ideas, such as "consultation with responsible representatives of the tenants through their own organisation" or proper rubbish disposal, were caring but ill-thought-out. Others were simply idealistic, such as collective tenants' gardens

*

UNIT COST OF SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT ⁶			
	All dwellings	Cottages	Flats
1950-51	£4,911	£3,409	£7,919
1951-52	5,422	3,706	8,853
1952-53	5,710	3,939	9,271
1953-54	6,300	3,985	10,839

making use of the surplus open space, or unrealistic, such as the introduction of cleaning rotas. There was nothing wrong with these ideas in themselves if they could be organised and supported by a local management structure. The committee did not come to grips with either the scale and cost of the problem or the impossibility of applying local tenant-oriented solutions without intensive local management. Resident caretaking was the only vital link, but caretakers had no management authority and no control over the main services such as lettings, repairs or refuse disposal. The failure of local authorities to raise the basic problems with the Committee is ample proof of their ignorance of the problems they were generating. By implication, none of these issues were being addressed by local authorities. The report reveals a singular blindness to the Government's headlong propulsion into large-scale flat-building without a concept of the public landlord's role or structure.

THE GOVERNMENT REPORTS ON "UNSATISFACTORY TENANTS" 1955

The post-war boom, relative affluence and full employment, did not do away with the problem of "unsatisfactory tenants" and in 1955 the C.H.A.C. was publishing again on this taxing subject, in a report entitled "Unsatisfactory Tenants".

The scale of the problem was estimated to be very small - only 0.1% of tenants being considered "problem families" and 5% requiring fairly constant supervision. The advice was sound - tackle arrears early and firmly; do not cluster anti-social families together; give practical help rather than "mere advice and verbal encouragement". The vital realisation was that "mere provision of a house is usually not enough". However, this admonition was never taken sufficiently seriously and many social workers still believe that physical housing conditions are the main cause of a family problem. In fact, it is possible to argue that the uprooting and rehousing of disturbed families within poor communities through slum clearance, coupled with the greatly increased material commitments of a new council house and the total change in housing environment in some cases, pushed a precarious family over the brink.⁷ The fact that the landlord structure was remote, unclearly organised and uninvolved in the wider social dimensions of rehousing, catapulted social disarray affecting a small number of "problem" families into centre stage. The C.H.A.C. report on the problems of disruptive tenants, like the previous Government interventions, failed to take seriously enough the scale of the emerging problems, or recommend a substantial change in direction. In 1984, the common cry of the city council landlords was that "Council housing would be alright if it wasn't for the bad tenants". Their impact is magnified out of all proportion

by the failure to inject strong social support within the housing service.

HOUSING MANAGEMENT SHIFTS GEAR AGAIN DOWNWARDS

By the mid-fifties, waiting lists were growing everywhere, in the wake of the post-war marriage and baby boom, slum clearance programmes were starting up, and the proportion of flats to houses being built was rising. Average densities were lower than pre-war levels and more communal spaces were provided, requiring additional care and cleaning. But the blocks themselves were as dense or denser, as high flats became more fashionable. In 1955, the L.C.C. alone received half a million enquiries about the waiting list and the expected wait for a dwelling was seven years. In the following year, the waiting list was frozen. Under this pressure, beleaguered housing officials scrambled to make the system fit new and expanding demands. Allocations became the critical area of housing management. Ingenuity was taxed, corners were cut, and applied management at estate level was rarely the primary concern or even a topic of debate. The only direct contact between landlord and tenant had for many years been the rent collector. Yet because of the rapidly expanding stock, the rent collector was increasingly seen as a person of limited ability and application, hired to cover as many doors as possible, as

fast as possible, and his function was constantly being narrowed.⁸ Partly because of this and partly because management problems within the central bureaucracy were growing, further attempts were made at streamlining by reducing rent collection to fortnightly rounds.⁹ The limited contact was becoming widespread and with it, came higher arrears and general neglect of detailed "chasing", whether of arrears, or cleaning, or repairs. Without it, also came a further disparagement of the rent collector's role and of the vital connection between landlord and tenant.

Simultaneously, because of the political importance of rehousing on the vast scale that was now under way, housing departments as such were becoming more fashionable. Single-point "management" was openly advocated, but the entire debate focussed on the creation of a unified housing department within the Town Hall, as opposed to fragmented, multi-department management, as previously practised.

However, the emerging housing department rarely incorporated repairs and often did not take over rent collection.

Therefore, there was a large gap between a "single-point" housing department, with functions divided and delivered separately, and the "single-point", estate-based manager responsible for a small group of dwellings and the wellbeing of their occupants. Because of this gap, enlightened housing managers¹⁰ argued that decentralisation

to districts, which was just beginning, was only workable in an integrated housing department capable of delegating total housing responsibility to a district. A decentralised office, within which decisions constantly gravitated back to the centre, would not resolve the basic management problems. Unfortunately, most efforts at coherence were concentrated in the overgrown centre.

THE 1959 REPORT ON HOUSING DEPARTMENTS

In 1959, the C.H.A.C. attempted to address these central problems. C.H.A.C. conducted a unique enquiry into the organisation of housing departments in 57 local authorities and found that less than half, only 27, had a separate housing department, responsible for most elements of housing management. The other 30 authorities varied from 11 with no housing manager at all to 19 with a housing manager usually responsible for a limited part of housing management, such as lettings and welfare, based in another department.¹¹ Just under a third of the authorities gave housing managers responsibility for repairs. Only just over a half collected the rent. More than half the local authorities listed the Treasurer, Surveyor or Chief Public Health Inspector as in charge of housing. The following table indicates the way housing functions were divided.

24. TABLE SHOWING THE NO. OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES OUT OF 57 WHERE THE HOUSING MANAGER PERFORMED EACH FUNCTION

Applica- tions	Alloca- tions	Rent Collection	Ordering Repairs	Executing Repairs	Supervision of Estates	Housing Welfare
45	43	30	36	18	45	42

The inquiry found that almost all rent collectors also took repairs orders, thereby underlining the point that the personal contact between tenant and rent-man brought its own positive management benefits, however limited the rent collectors' role was now considered. This was in spite of the fact that rent collectors were often controlled by another department such as the Borough Treasurer's.

As a result of the survey, C.H.A.C. at last argued strongly and clearly for detailed, unitary, localised management, including door-to-door rent collection, local management control of repairs, close co-operation between landlords and tenants, and the need for training, as well as recommending input from tenants and managers into design. However, the new report stressed the virtual autonomy of local authorities and offered no coherent strategy for dealing with the new scale of public housing provision.

"Local authorities have complete freedom to manage their estates as they think best."

This point was reaffirmed by the veteran housing management expert, John Macey, in 1984.¹² It is a very odd quirk of housing management history that it is the only public service

over which central government exercises virtually no control.

Maybe because of the weak central government role in public housing management, no consideration was given to recruitment of staff, training programmes, budgeting, repairs, apprenticeships or any of the other critical issues facing local authorities. The approach of the 1959 Housing Advisory Committee contrasted sharply with the Government's approach to training, recruitment, inspection, budgeting and management within the health, education and social services. The Ministry, throughout this period, employed only one civil servant to advise nationally on housing management, yet the stock by the late fifties represented nearly four million dwellings and an investment of approximately £12,000,000,000.

The 1959 report, while raising these key issues, misfired in several directions. For example, it endorsed the spreading practice of fortnightly rather than weekly rent collection, while arguing that payment of rent was the primary link between landlord and tenant; it did not challenge flat-building nor address the serious problem of supervision on large flatted estates; it made a big play of management costs, arguing that tenants should take over internal redecoration, which was bound to increase difficulties in re-letting and have greater impact on poorer tenants. It did not question the general philosophy of large-scale mass housing, based on drastic redevelopment

policies.

There was a vital point in the 1959 report that was seriously debated for the first time, the general appearance or environment of estates. The report found instances where -

"the general level of maintenance of open spaces and verges falls considerably below the quality of the houses and the efforts of the tenants themselves."

C.H.A.C. recognised that this lamentable decay lay not at the tenants' door, but at the landlord's, underlining the drastic splits within local authority management -

"The local authority should have an agreed policy"

with arrangements for -

"co-ordinating the work of general maintenance and the supervision of the estate as a whole."

It was clear that such common-sense liaison and on-the-ground organisation did not normally take place.

The Committee, with singular lack of wisdom on the multiplying social problems, found a hidden advantage in the proliferation of flats, as -

"it becomes easier to offer to tenants who either cannot or will not cultivate a garden, transfers to more suitable accommodation." (i.e. flats)

The painful fact that flatted estates were far harder for the local authority to maintain by virtue of the communal

space that they, the landlord, and not tenants, were directly responsible for, was ignored. The reality that tenants with an untidy garden were likely to cause more nuisance if their untidiness spilled over to communal balconies, staircases and courtyards, was also overlooked. The Government openly endorsed pushing less ambitious, less coping families into flats on the grounds that they'd cope better without the added burden of a garden. This view was only a short step from the widespread view of local authority politicians that "bad" tenants should be rehoused on "bad" estates, thereby fuelling another whole strand to the development of unpopular estates.

The Government was equally shortsighted in its attack on the other glaring environmental problem, car-parking. Because so many pre-war and flatted estates had little or no parking facilities, grass verges and front gardens were often converted to that use. The report therefore recommended universal car-parking provision -

"It is better to make over-provision than under-provision,"

advice which planners, architects and developers roundly adopted, leading to the gross over-provision of garages on flatted estates and the current spate of demolition of unused multi-storey car parks and plans to concrete in many virtually abandoned underground garages. The crystal ball-gazing was too complex to hit the target.

Advice on welfare was equally misdirected, separating out

housing functions from social support. Local authorities -

"should not give the impression that they are running a 'secondary welfare service' for council tenants."

In any case -

"the need for specialised welfare work as part of the landlord's function has decreased."

The report concluded with a proposed pact between landlord and tenant -

"There must be a real understanding of human needs by the landlord and a willingness on the tenant's side to take his share as a responsible tenant and neighbour."

The underlying ingredient to this pact was in almost every case still missing - a local management organisation through which access between landlord and tenant was possible, and without which, no trade-off of responsibilities could be established.

The report advocated local management where possible or suitable, particularly in large authorities -

"that such offices, and in particular the presence of a resident officers, are welcomed by tenants was made clear in evidence we received from tenants' organisations."

However, the changed social conditions of the post-war era were assumed to dictate a generally reduced need for housing management. The C.H.A.C. was therefore speaking with forked tongue, making it easy for the prevailing

wisdom to continue.

The report was generally complacent and unchallenging, assuming that all was reasonably well in municipal housing -

"These changes have.....resulted in the community now accepting increased responsibilities. In addition there have been great advances in design, both of individual dwellings and estates due to increased interest in and study of all aspects of housing; there have also been modifications and improvements resulting from technological advances, in the construction, fitting out and servicing of dwellings."13

New housing developments were believed to be moving the populace as a whole inexorably towards a "final housing solution".

CULLINGWORTH ON HOUSING DEPARTMENTS

Barry Cullingworth, following on the 1959 report of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, gave a brief history of the growth of housing departments, bearing out the story we have so far told.

Cullingworth's analysis revealed that housing departments employed one staff for less than every 50 properties, including all repairs and maintenance workers and all other manual staff employed on estates. This was a higher ratio than the philanthropic Housing Trusts and should have allowed a local authority to manage all its stock intensively along the unitary lines developed by Octavia Hill. However, a

further detailing of the jobs covered in Bristol's technical services department illustrated the structural problems of local authority staffing.

"The Technical Section is not formally subdivided as is the Administrative Section, but its responsibilities are equally as extensive and varied. The staff includes 19 Technical Assistants, 7 Bonus Surveyors, 4 Housing Inspectors, 3 Administrative Assistants, 25 Clerical Assistants, 8 Maintenance Superintendents, 10 Foremen, 9 Depot Assistants, 9 Storekeepers and 623 Building Trade Operatives."¹⁴

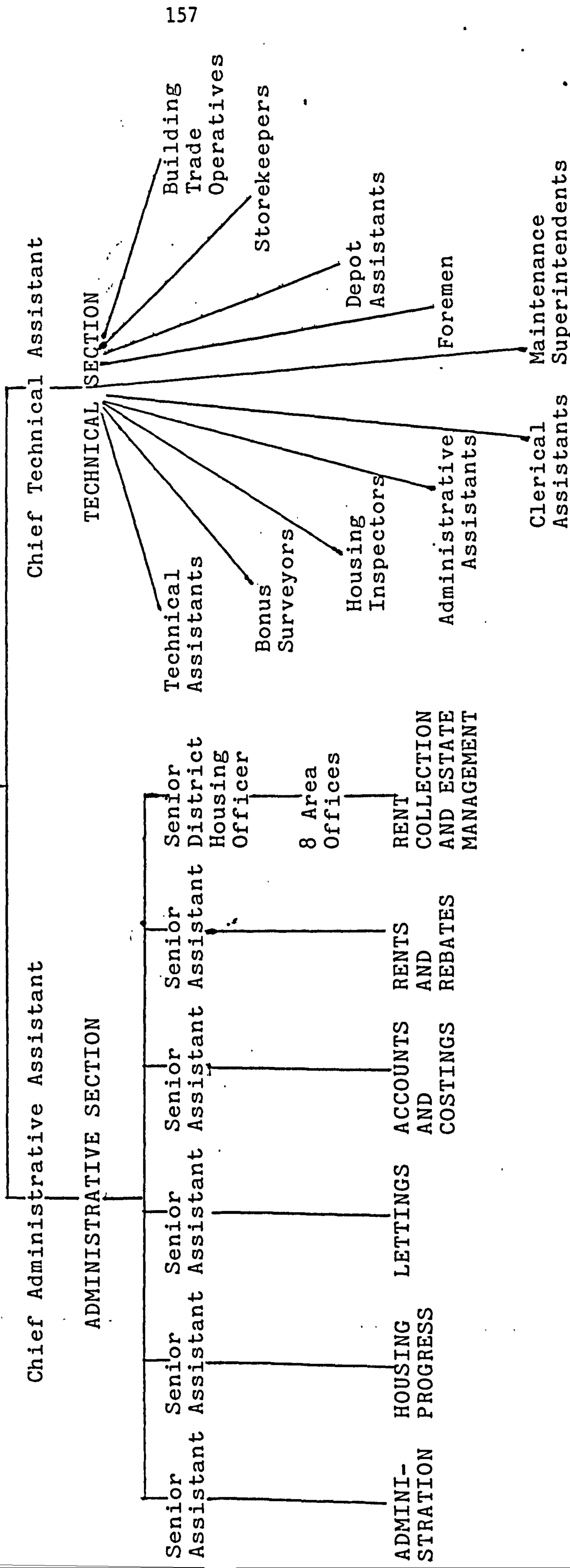
Bristol Housing Department was responsible for no less than 66 estates, each with an average of 560 dwellings. The case for decentralisation and estate-based management couldn't have been stronger, and yet it was not even considered by Cullingworth or Bristol.

The outline structure of Bristol Housing Department in the sixties, a relatively clear and integrated service compared with the other examples given by Cullingworth, Leeds and the G.L.C., illustrated a large, modern, sectional housing department, comprehensively organised, a model for the great leap forward of the seventies, when most housing departments burst their seams.

CITY OF BRISTOL HOUSING DEPARTMENT

Housing Manager and Secretary

Deputy



DEVELOPMENTS IN THE L.C.C.

By the early sixties, the L.C.C. was operating on a massive scale, owning 110,000 dwellings, processing and completing 21,000 allocations in 1964 alone, and employing one estate officer (i.e. manager) to every 310 dwellings. The overall staff ratio in the housing department, including repairs workers, was by now well under one to 30 dwellings. In 1964, the L.C.C. was reorganised into the Greater London Council with a strategic housing role, expanding its activities even further and serving to intensify the difference between outer and inner estates, as well as enhancing the complexity of the internal organisation. The L.C.C. was double the size of Bristol and several times more complicated.

At the same time, the London boroughs were reorganised into much larger and more dispersed areas, against serious staff resistance, creating housing management problems on a scale not previously experienced.

In 1967, there was a special investigation into hooliganism, within the G.L.C., which was on the increase, especially on large, flatted estates which dominated the G.L.C. stock.*

There was no recognition of the fact that the constant population upheavals of the previous 20 years, and the virtual withdrawal by housing management into the centre,

* The G.L.C. had 360 flatted estates and 44 cottage estates. The latter were all located on the periphery of London.

were in any way related to the accumulating social problem. The report expressed a sense of defeatism - sanctions were felt to be limited. The police could not help in prevention because at that stage the police only patrolled so-called public areas, thereby excluding most council estates, which were considered private housing areas. Public housing authorities, including the G.L.C., widely acquiesced in this policing anomaly, causing up to the late seventies a major breakdown in contact between the police and the large urban communities that were being transposed into ever bigger and more alien estates. Many of the problems of ultimate social breakdown on the worst estates in the seventies and eighties must have hearkened back to the failure of the police to police estates.

The next year, following a report on the cost of management, staff numbers at the G.L.C. were severely restricted, rent collection was reduced to a monthly cycle and giro payments were introduced even though they were found "not wholly satisfactory". The G.L.C. housing management was under constant attack from politicians and community activists, leading to a proposal to -

"bring forward schemes in which tenants are directly associated with the management of their own estates."

By this time John Macey had come from Birmingham, the second largest housing authority in the country, to the G.L.C. He had argued in the Institute of Housing's journal, "Housing", in 1961 that repairs must be fully integrated into the

management service and quoted evidence from the philanthropic trusts of the Victorian era -

"Experience very soon showed that tenants readily responded and improved their own attitude to rent-paying and to the care of the landlord's asset if the latter himself showed a proper interest in the care of the property and dealt with the tenants' reasonable complaints or requests for repair."

This was, of course, a profound statement about the landlord's role but a far cry from current practice where management and maintenance were usually running behind the problem and never catching up. Public landlords either did not accept or failed to deliver on the notion of meticulous management.

However, in 1965, in the first edition of his landmark book on housing management, Macey argued that while the intensive and unitary system of management was clearly the most effective, it was no longer necessary, except in special circumstances, in terms of the declining social problems -

"In pre-war days when there were far more problem families.....it was a popular system.....such an intensive system of supervision, which is necessarily expensive, would now be justified only very exceptionally."¹⁵

He acknowledged that with resident staff, including repairs

"the relationship between landlord and tenant is much better than under any other system,"¹⁶

and that

"The comprehensive door-to-door system of collection and management is probably the best

combination for economy and efficiency for
authorities with large numbers of houses."¹⁷

Macey believed that with 2,500 dwellings or less, a local authority could run an economically viable, unitary service on the ground, including repairs. What he did not address fully either in the Institute of Housing, his book or his tenure at County Hall, was how to disaggregate the housing service in practice. His sense of fairness and desire to co-ordinate housing activities at the top would not allow him to relinquish central control of a broad-fronted housing service. Therefore, his powerful advocacy of local management entities, including repairs, was not developed into a practical system, and the new G.L.C. continued to withdraw and centralise its services, finally even removing resident caretakers and local repairmen in the early seventies.

Macey rejected his own preferred method as too labour-intensive and socially outdated. In all the detailed management procedures he evolved himself as a Director of Housing of the largest authority in the country (the L.C.C.) and advocated in his book, he assumed that housing departments would be strongly organised at the centre and would operate central or district systems based on a division of responsibility between functions. Nowhere did Macey set out procedures for a local estate management system covering all functions. While weak Government reports appeared to fall on deaf ears, John Macey's Housing Management blueprint missed a critical moment in the history of housing and his

tenure at the G.L.C. intensified the trend towards a highly functional and central "professionalism".*

By the time John Macey retired from the G.L.C. in 1971, there were 10,000 employees in the housing department, and not on the tail of the establishment of the London-wide authority, the dismemberment of its housing department with the transfer of estates to the London boroughs was set in train, only to burden the already large London borough landlords with often vast acquisitions of difficult-to-manage, G.L.C. flatted estates. The problem was being transposed yet again.

MANAGEMENT CUTS

Meanwhile other pressures were at work within the arena of public housing management, mainly the desire to minimise the cost and staff commitment of a rapidly exploding service.

The influential Metropolitan Boroughs' Committee produced in 1963 a series of recommendations on how to cut the costs of management in line with the local authorities' general feeling that housing management could work perfectly well for the majority of "normal" tenants remote from tenants themselves and with a minimum of contact. It advised on how housing departments should save money on basic services.

* John Macey continued to be active in housing management long after retiring from the G.L.C. and he has been an ardent activist in the Housing Trusts, defending and extending their intense involvement on the estates in local, tenant-oriented management. He retired as Chairman of the Samuel Lewis Trust in Spring 1985.

Some of the recommendations were as follows:

- Rents should be collected fortnightly or less frequently.
- Door-to-door collection should be linked with other work or discontinued.
- Visits should not be made for less than three weeks' arrears.
- Certain work should be made the responsibility of the tenants.
- Responsibility for the elderly should be placed on caretakers, rather than managers.
- Daily supervision of caretakers should be discontinued.
- Some cleaning should be carried out by tenants and the use of mechanical equipment should be extended.
- Visiting cleaning gangs should replace residents.
- Motorised transport should be provided for patrols (cf. Panda policing).
- Typing pools and mechanised dictation should replace personal clerical support.

Each of these recommendations represented a retrograde step into the centre and a withdrawal where it hurt most. The Metropolitan Boroughs' Committee was very much swimming with the tide, but these measures, often appearing perfectly logical as a paper exercise, led to the widespread

disappearance of the vital personal contact and supervision that made rented housing viable. Maybe the crucial error was to imagine that the landlord could withdraw as long as tenants were coping and well housed, on the grounds that they would act like owner-occupiers and actually take charge of their property. It was possibly forgotten that the legal relationship between landlord and tenant would not be so readily abdicated on the tenants' side, without the actual security of ownership. Local authorities did broadly follow the recommended cuts in service.

Management problems continued to grow and in 1968, the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee noted that local authorities -

"have generally failed to accord to management the importance and priority it requires if a satisfactory service is to be provided."

It was found that, in Scotland, housing managers were only responsible for about half the key functions of management. Local management was not even mentioned.

A NEW TURN FOR THE INSTITUTE OF HOUSING

The Institute of Housing had undergone fairly radical changes in the 20 years since the war, partly under the impact of the merger in 1965 with its rival, the Society of Housing Managers. The Society, in the post-war conditions of mass public housing, first decided to admit male members in 1948,

then lowered its recruitment and admission standards to cope with the demand for housing personnel and the shortage of applicants. Finally, it amalgamated its examinations with the Institute's in 1962 at a lower level than the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, through which it had previously passed its members. In 1965, the two organisations merged completely, under the new title of Institute of Housing, all reference to management disappearing and symbolising a new sense of the profession. Management, in the women's sense, had never been acceptable to the men, and this was enshrined in the new organisation's examinations, with their emphasis on building, planning, the law, housing finance, local and central government history and structures, and a reduced role for the applied duties of rent collection, repairs, and the integration of social support into business management.

However, the Institute's membership was more alive than ever to the debate on housing management organisation, probably influenced in part by the active women members who were now more centrally engaged as a result of the merger.

In 1968 in the Institute's yearbook, a radical new line was taken:

"All aspects of housing management should be in the hands of one person.....[who] should be responsible for the collection of rents.....This link [with tenants] is becoming more difficult to maintain in those areas where rents are no longer collected door to door."

The loss of the door-to-door rent service highlighted the

vital role it had played as the only tenuous link between landlord and tenant.

The most critical point made by the Institute was that -

"This contact with the tenants has a very considerable influence on the standard of an estate,"

not because it was a means of upgrading tenants, although some pressure could be brought to bear on individual, disarrayed households, but because it was the vital channel for delivery of prompt and effective landlord services. It was the sign of a responsible landlord, determined to take care of his property and look to the welfare of his tenants. For a good estate was always primarily a function of a good landlord, the tenants feeling collectively unable to enforce good communal standards in the face of landlord neglect. A final point made by the Institute was that -

"The housing manager should order all repairs and approve completed work."

For the Institute this statement in their yearbook of 1968 was a standard-bearer to which members are still trying to put flesh and blood. It actually totally shifted the emphasis from professional departments at the Town Hall to housing managers on an estate, and from separate technical departments to integrated repairs services. It also shifted from bad tenants causing decay in otherwise "good" areas to the landlord directly carrying the can for whether an estate was good or bad. However, no realistic method of applying the obvious solutions was any longer to hand.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION, 1974

Local government history was about to take another sharp twist which was to have a devastating impact on the already weak and complex structures of housing management. In 1974, the Government reorganised all local authorities into new, amalgamated and much larger units. The number of local authorities was chopped from about 2,000 to 400 in England and Wales, in the name of streamlining and simplification. Many mergers did not make sense geographically, and local government in many places is still grappling with the organisational nonsense that was created in 1974, with Town Hall functions now often split between different historic administrative centres. Worst of all, housing departments often tripled in size overnight, in a few cases rationalising a small and scattered stock, but in most urban areas, removing the landlord a large step further away from the tenants. Council housing stock jumped from an average of 1,400 after the war to 14,000 in 1975 in each local authority. The city authorities were often double this size or more.

Many housing departments ended up with subsidiary Town Halls, often located several miles from each other with different functions based in each. Therefore, there was no longer just the historic confusion and the rapid expansion of a difficult-to-manage stock, housing almost exclusively low-income households from demolition areas, but the unwieldy structures and scale of amalgamation with

the consequent intensification of all previous problems.

These shifts and waves of change gave some sense of urgency to the housing situation. As the public stock expanded and as the complexity of building styles increased and populations on the less popular estates became more universally poor, so did councils move towards a unified housing service. Unfortunately the "right" system was no longer applicable because of the scale of public housing and the complexity of local authority administration.

The Comprehensive Housing Service, as the new thrust of the public landlords came to be known, was a sure case of closing the stable door after the horse had bolted.

THE COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING SERVICE

The Housing Services Advisory Group - a government-sponsored committee, which took the place of C.H.A.C., set up to make recommendations about the organisation of the housing service - in 1978 produced its housing blueprint for the Government and local authorities, called "Organising A Comprehensive Housing Service". This was welcomed by progressive housing managers within local authorities as a major step in giving some coherence to fragmented housing management. The scale of operation, however, made coherence very difficult in practice. What was commonly called the Comprehensive Housing Service comprised a central

housing directorate covering housing policy, development, housing management, private sector matters and advisory issues. It was responsible for an average of 14,000 properties, rising to 38,000 in the metropolitan authorities.

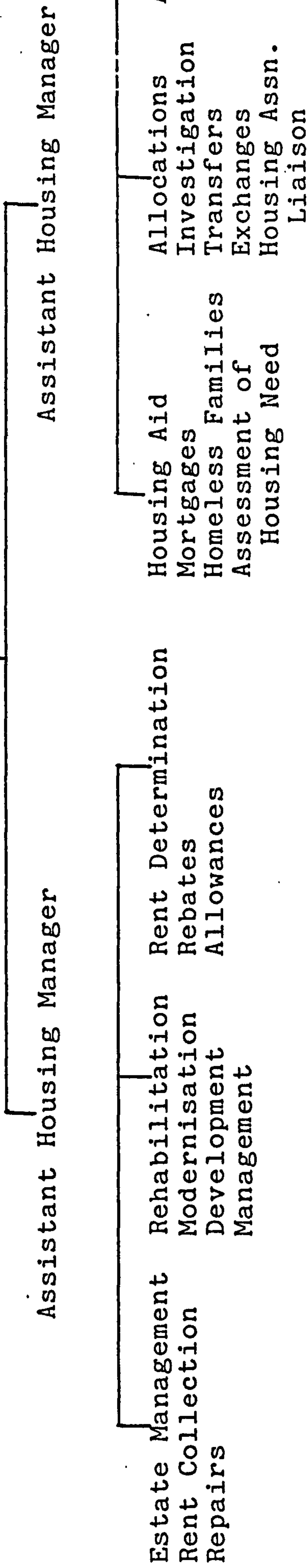
The Comprehensive Housing Service often served to reinforce centralised and functional organisation at the expense of what few remnants existed of local management.

The Housing Services Advisory Group recommended a structure for the Comprehensive Housing Service which belied the unified approach altogether by putting each area of housing management under a different section leader, while putting a single "Director" in charge of the overall service. The following diagram illustrates the typical unification and division of responsibilities.

DISTRICT COUNCIL

(Under 5,000 dwellings)

Chief Housing Officer



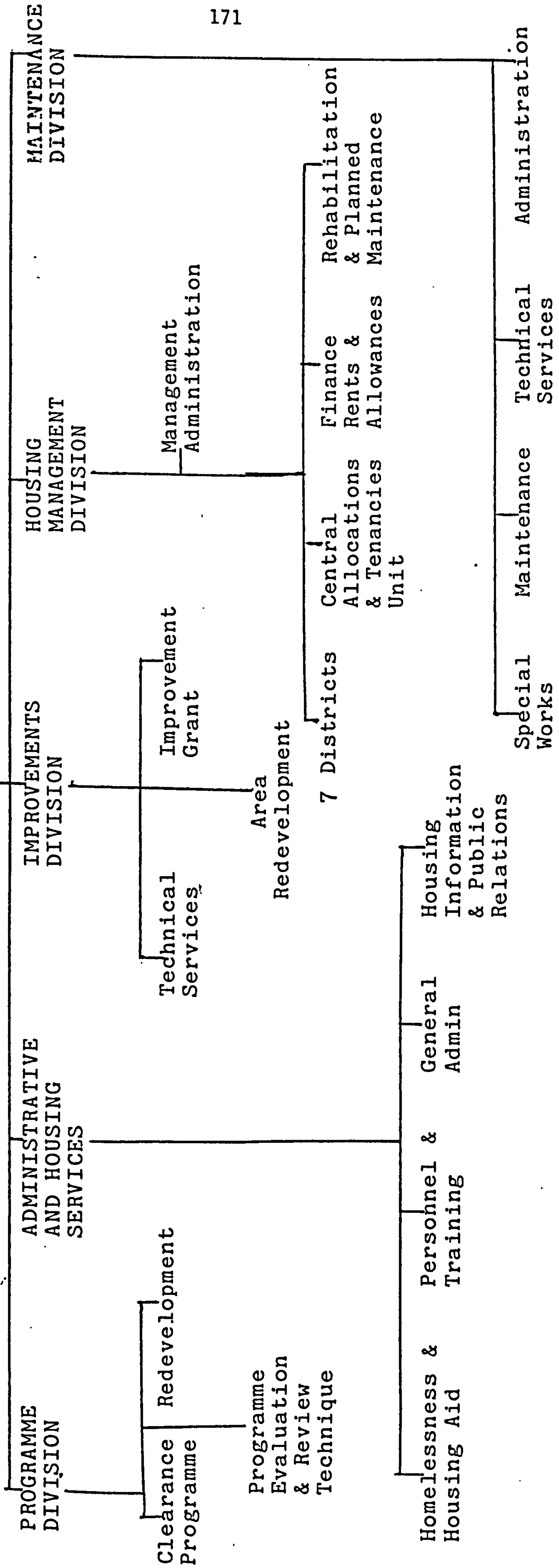
From "Towards a Comprehensive Housing Service" based on a model drawn up by Housing Services Advisory Group.

METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

(75,000+ dwellings)

N.B: High degree of area decentralisation

DIRECTOR OF HOUSING



From "Towards a Comprehensive Housing Service" based on a model drawn up by Housing Services Advisory Group.

REPAIRS AND OTHER PARTS OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT

The execution of repairs was not normally included within a comprehensive housing department and was almost always handled by a separate directorate or division for whose services the housing department became the so-called client. There was no leverage in the market sense because the repairs organisation enjoyed a monopoly within the local authority.

Nor was there leverage in a hierarchical sense internally, since repairs were usually run by a department as powerful as or more powerful than housing. More importantly, technical services, including repairs, commanded the lion's share of housing budgets. Therefore, housing directors often seemed like featherless birds.

As a result of the failure of the "client role", there has been a growing trend to put repairs under the housing directorate, but this has often been a nominal arrangement with few teeth in terms of sanctions or incentives. Even the new legislation of 1982, forcing Direct Labour Organisations to go out to tender for 60% of their work, seems merely to have generated a new set of evasions and more centralised corner-cutting than ever. Repairs have increasingly been ordered by telephone or at district and central offices, as contact at estate level has shrunk even further. Lettings too almost invariably continued to be run centrally on a tight rationing system in spite of

evident changes in demand and the decline of slum clearance. Arrears continued to be followed up locally, but rent accounts went on being handled centrally, often in finance departments. So estate managers have usually been left with almost no role at all in the most sensitive and locally responsive management areas of all.

A modern housing department put a typical London housing director in charge of 20/40,000 properties, with some 500-1,000 jobs involved and at least £400,000,000 of public investment in the stock itself. Many ladders of responsibility were involved in holding such an operation together and at the bottom of it, there was a collection of poor, badly-designed or located estates, which the Director could not readily deal with and in many cases, had not even had time to visit. Therefore to regard the Director of Housing as the person who could ensure the unified delivery of all services to a particular tenant on a particular estate through a single operation, called "The Comprehensive Housing Service", was to whistle in the wind.

The Housing Service Advisory Group was so concerned to advance the unification of housing functions in a single department that it paid no regard at all, not even a passing reference, to the urgent need to address the size and scale of the public housing stock, and the economic and management viability of an operational unit of the size it was proposing. It ignored the question of estate-based management altogether. It even stated quite categorically that repairs could not be

considered a "core service" of housing management, while every previous Government report had stated it to be one of the pivotal services.

CONCLUSION

The notion of a Comprehensive Housing Service, which seemed like a major advance in the late seventies has bedevilled progress in tackling estate management by upgrading the Town Hall status of housing departments at the expense of the basic jobs on the ground.

Housing is historically in an anomalous position in local government. The Secretary of State and the Department of the Environment (previously Ministry of Housing) have virtually -

"no jurisdiction in regard to the management of the local authority's housing stock"¹⁸

except for very limited responsibility under the Acts of 1957 and 1980. There are no enforceable standards and the Government plays a purely advisory role in the running of the housing stock. Yet the stock is worth nationally a nominal £50 thousand million.

Nor are local authorities directed by statute to set up a housing committee with the specific task of running the housing stock owned by the local authority. There is no

requirement to appoint a housing manager. So not only is the Government not responsible, it has apparently not laid down a framework for local government to carry out its duties as a landlord either. In fact, not until the Housing Act 1980 did local authority tenants enjoy such basic rights as security of tenure and some local authorities only set up housing departments at all in the last two or three years.* This compares sharply with the law concerning almost all other aspects of local government, and with private sector housing, which is infringed with numerous Rent Acts and public health laws.

It is unclear why the Institute of Housing in its early years failed to advocate the establishment of a unified housing department within the Town Halls. At a stage when local authorities were relatively small landlords before the war, it would have made sense and would have given some direction to developments. Only after management problems assumed overwhelming proportions and the preoccupation with building declined, did serious attention focus on management. By then, it was too late to resolve the problem within the central framework.

Housing management of the public stock began to meet major difficulties when large numbers of the poorest families began to be rehoused in the 1930's. The lack of a local system, the lack of a proper budget or standards for management and maintenance, the weak political structures both in central and local government for the control of the

* Tower Hamlets established its housing department and appointed its first Director in 1982. In the Rhondda Borough Council, the Borough Treasurer is still responsible for housing management.

publicly-owned housing stock, all meant that the new demands generated by rehousing from slums could not be adequately met. With a weak management and maintenance organisation, the other problems of poverty and social uprooting, unfavourable design and large-scale estate development, all fed each other at the least popular end of the housing scale, just as they had done in the old, privately-rented housing market.

Octavia Hill's Victorian predictions are no longer as outmoded as they seemed -

"These [new estates] will rapidly become as forlorn and rowdy as their old haunts, unless something of thoughtful rule be established in them. And the huge blocks of flats will equally need the presence of trustworthy leaders and human government."

More recently, through the Department of the Environment's Inner Area Study in Lambeth, Jean Cox¹⁹ observed -

"In general the quality of the environment seems to depend more on the way the estate is maintained and cared for than on the standard of design."

The most recent observation came from the Audit Commission's Report on local authority rent arrears, asserting that arrears were largely accounted for, not by the incidence of deprivation but by the style of management.

"The importance of management performance..... far outweighs the impact of external factorsGood management can affect the local situation, even in the most difficult circumstances. More successful authorities.....often have arrears 50% or more below the levels of authorities facing similar socio-economic conditions.²⁰

The current crisis among large, remote local authority landlords has grown from this chequered history. The results are:

- vastly expanding rent arrears in line with the withdrawal of the door-to-door service.²¹
- centralised and expensive repairs services that are often slow and unresponsive to tenants and very inefficient in terms of productivity, completion times, prevention, etc.
- housing managers, usually untrained, with an assortment of parts of jobs and no overall control.²³
- distant, if not hostile relations between tenants and the landlord and a common desire among tenants to keep moving (more than among owner-occupiers).²⁴

Only in the philanthropic housing trusts and associations, has intensive, local and unitary housing management been retained. In cost and staffing terms, Trusts, such as Peabody, Sutton, Samuel Lewis and Guinness, invest about the same as city local authorities. Housing Associations and Trusts are allowed by the Government to spend approximately £8 per week per unit on management and maintenance (1984). For this they receive a direct subsidy. Local authorities are expected to pay for housing management and maintenance out of rents and rates. By law they must set up a Housing Revenue Account and they spend between £5.04 and £12.92 per unit per week.²⁵ The

average is about £5.77. The difference between housing associations and local authorities is that local authorities do not receive a direct management and maintenance subsidy. It is always at their own discretion how much they actually spend on ground-level services, whereas smaller landlord bodies, whose only function is to be a benign landlord, tend to spend almost all on direct on-the-ground services.

In terms of staff ratios, both local authorities and housing associations employ about one worker to between 40-50 dwellings, including manual workers.²⁶ But local authorities tend to tie up staff in central functions and very top-heavy repairs organisations. It is true that local authorities have direct responsibility for homelessness and carry out wide housing functions not assumed by housing associations. The public housing estates are on such a large scale as to defy many straightforward management solutions. Therefore the comparison is limited. However, in terms of direct management and maintenance responsibilities, their roles as landlords are very similar, but are executed in a very different way, due largely to the historic development of housing management in the two strands - housing associations being strongly influenced by the Octavia Hill tradition and more recently by local voluntary initiative and input from tenants, local authorities being more influenced by male-dominated professionals in surveying, accounting, architecture and so on, and directly

controlled by politicians. With low-income populations and very dense buildings to manage, the results could not be more strikingly different.

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CHAPTER V - POST-WAR ALLOCATIONS POLICIES

POST-WAR ALLOCATION POLICIES: LABOUR HOUSING FOR ALL; CONSERVATIVE HOUSING OF LAST RESORT

"In reality a large part of the council stock displays that type of neglect which suggests lack of pride rather than lack of money."

Reade, "Policy and Politics", January 1982

Having traced the development of housing management from its early hey-day in the second half of the nineteenth century to its heavy-handed, overweight bureaucracy in the second half of the twentieth, we came to see the emergence of unpopular council estates as inevitable. However, the way public housing has been allocated must still be scrutinised, as it has had an overriding influence on the final shape of the problem. The decision as to who deserved what was always the most difficult and sensitive area.

Octavia Hill was openly committed to helping only the very poorest and to rescuing social rejects. She was also totally committed to preserving existing tenancies in the houses she acquired. Therefore selection did not arise.

By contrast, early public housing tenants were carefully

screened for their ability to pay, their regular income and for their respectability. In 1930, the sharp change towards slum clearance and helping the needy, pushed public housing into a conflicting role - how to stop slums from recreating themselves in the new public housing estates to which slum-dwellers moved en masse. With little sense of history, few declared policies, and little awareness of the long-term consequences, local authorities tried to cope with social problems through a policy of social segregation, rather than intense management support.

By the 1950's, the institutionalised sifting of applicants was firmly entrenched and most local authorities were judging applicants twice over - were they eligible for a council home? What kind of council home did they deserve or best suited their style of life? A whole battery of assessments, points, home visits, gradings, quality offers, rights of refusal, picking and choosing, grew up, that not only eventually snarled up the lettings process into a laborious and lethargic maze, but also categorised tenants in a way that no self-respecting welfare or private system should, solidifying far more intensely than the old slums ever had, sub-class divisions, creating communities at the bottom of everyone's aspirations, which inspired only a desire to escape.

The following analysis is based on long involvement in the lettings processes of Islington and the GLC, and on the fragmented and partial accounts available officially. Few

local authorities have been open, even about such basic matters as how they operated their points system. So the account is derived from first-hand experience rather than second-hand sources. However, the Priority Estates Project and the Department of the Environment Difficult-to-Let Investigation involved contact with about 100 local authorities. The pattern of sifting, grading, and segregating applicants was almost universal.¹

In earlier chapters, we have outlined changes and developments in who should be entitled to a council home. The actual policies governing selection for particular dwellings do not appear to have been documented. Right up to the Second World War, access to any kind of council housing was considered a huge step up the ladder, and although stigmatised estates were emerging, the incipient lettings problems were not recognised till well into the sixties. We take up the account at the end of the war in 1945, when lettings policies and procedures became more central to housing management as public housing came to be regarded as a broad-based provision, rather than simply a slum clearance mechanism.

Between 1938 and 1960, 650,000 dwellings had been demolished² (including 200,000 in the war) and 2,300,000 new council dwellings had been built. The surplus of new dwellings over demolished dwellings was used to move people out from slum areas to peripheral cottage estates, thereby reducing city populations. It was a desperate attempt to

bring households into balance with dwellings. It generated a whole new emphasis in housing management, namely mass rehousing, and a set of policies for deciding who deserved what.

The post-war Labour Government of 1945 was committed to council housing for all, as a universal service, and the 1949 Housing Act removed the obligation on local authorities to house only the "working class". This should have shifted allocation policies back towards mixed rehousing. However, six years later, when councils were still trying to cope with the housing crisis created by the war, a Conservative Government adopted a very different policy: owner-occupation was favoured and council housing was reduced to a provision primarily for those who could not afford to buy. Need became paramount again as it seemed the only fair criterion for allocating a scarce welfare resource designated to help those who could not help themselves.

The 1957 Housing Act stressed that:

"Local authorities must give reasonable preference to persons occupying insanitary or overcrowded houses, have large families, or are living under unsatisfactory conditions."

Because of the massive slum clearance programme that was by then gathering steam, in practice councils had very little choice in who they rehoused. Between 1960 and 1975, 1,100,000 further homes were demolished and 1,600,000 new dwellings were built by councils. Many of the demolished

dwellings contained more than one household. It is therefore easy to see that most new dwellings in that period were required to redress the balance of demolition. Some new dwellings, however, were used to rehouse existing council tenants wanting rehousing from older council property in order to make room for "poorer and less deserving" families in inferior dwellings. This was generally considered a realistic way of allocating very different qualities of property to families with often very different standards of behaviour and housekeeping. However, many of the new estates were built to high density in the form of unpopular flats, and residents of old, decayed areas often proved reluctant to move. A pecking order of rehousing was developed, with the more skilled getting a better deal from the council, which still had complete autonomy to allocate more popular dwellings within the stock to whom it chose. Lettings priorities had become a central housing issue as the scale of building continued at a high level.

NEED AND MERIT IN THE ALLOCATION OF COUNCIL HOUSING

Councils accepted responsibility for the needy while attempting to maximise the use and value of a very varied and complex stock. Applicants were assessed usually through a points system that gave priority for overcrowding, lack of amenities and sharing a dwelling. But points were also given, often disproportionately, for length of

residence, which often positively militated against need. Large numbers of tenants were not eligible for points at all, either because they had not lived within the local authority area for five years, or because they occupied furnished rooms and were therefore categorised as transient, regardless of how long they had lived there. For decades, both these restrictions disqualified all immigrants and all new city dwellers from rehousing. Points only began after you were deemed eligible by the particular local authority. These restrictions also usually applied to slum-clearance and demolition areas; thereby ensuring that the most vulnerable families often could not be helped but were shunted on from one redevelopment area to the next, as the supply of rented housing in more salubrious areas declined in the face of rapidly expanding owner-occupation.

Once accepted as eligible, tenants were graded according to suitability or merit, usually by a home visitor who assessed tenants' housekeeping standards, quality of child-care, rent-paying ability and general competence. Ironically, the home visit to assess need in a very personal way was the tool whereby poorer, more needy households were often designated unsuitable for better housing, resulting in the social grading of tenants and the development of strong social segregation according to the popularity of estates, and the merit of the applicants. The most vulnerable households were often thereby rehoused into the least suitable property.

The Oldham Community Development Project³ did a comparative study of allocations in several northern cities dating back to 1950 which demonstrated that grading of tenants and social segregation in rehousing were widely accepted practices. There were in fact objective reasons why the sifting and ranking went on in spite of a commitment to rehousing according to need. Each applicant faced a conflict between timing and quality in the offer he was prepared to accept.⁴ Time pressure induced the most desperate families to take what they could, quickly, according to availability. Quality aims led waiting list applicants and more determined, less vulnerable households to wait for good offers.

In the case of rehousing from council clearance areas and rehabilitation programmes, timing and quality pressures combined to give that group first claim. Studies conducted in the G.L.C.⁵ and in Birmingham⁶ both found that "good" rehousing cases from demolition areas had the pick of the property on the shortest time-scale. Usually rehousing cases were allocated the best property quickly unless they were a "poor quality tenant" or a "low-grade" applicant. The councils' need to empty condemned property ensured favoured treatment for residents of demolition areas. Vulnerable, needy households were offered the worst, quickly. Their access was determined by their need, but their need enabled councils to put them in the worst property. Those that could wait, but were eligible for rehousing, could pick and choose and ended up in property they liked, often after a considerable wait. Furnished tenants were normally simply

evicted in advance of the council taking over.

John Lambert⁷ described vividly the complex structure of rules to regulate need through merit, allowing for pressure, favours and special pleading, underlining "the personalised and individualistic nature of the wait in the queue". As many as five different departments would be involved in the lettings process in Birmingham, the biggest housing department in the country, and different demand groups would "bid" for dwellings, the homeless, the poor and the non-white faring invariably worse than others.

Thus need and merit acted as the shaky and conflicting criteria of fairness in the allocation of council housing even though need became widely accepted as the main criterion of access and merit the principle criterion of allocation.

MERIT AND GRADING OF TENANTS

The merit system, which developed alongside need, worked largely through the grading of applicants. At various times, Islington, Lambeth, and other councils tried to dispense with grading and gave the most disadvantaged families equal access to good council accommodation, abandoning any form of grading altogether. These policies were usually applied temporarily. Due to pressures from ward councillors, housing managers on good estates and sometimes residents, these attempts were quietly shunted

aside as objections to the breaches in the social hierarchy poured in.

The standard approach was to grade tenants according to their suitability for different types of accommodation. In many authorities this involved a simple approval, on the basis of a home visit, for an ordinary letting. Then other elements in the scramble for good offers would come into play, such as family size, or ability to wait. It was taken for granted by housing experts and practitioners that home visits were essential and that the majority of tenants would be classed as suitable for good accommodation.

The G.L.C. lettings survey in 1976 described the grading process as it had grown up over the years of priority lettings, dating from about a century before.

"The first stage of the lettings process involves the applicant being visited by a welfare assistant, who assesses the prospective tenant's suitability for different types of property by looking at their rent record and judging their domestic standards."

This was inevitably a subjective process. Income and economic security played a large part in a family's reliability, standards of housekeeping and general ability to cope. Race also played a part in grading according to the G.L.C. survey. Black tenants were on average less often assessed at the highest grade than white. This was partly due to much greater overcrowding and poverty among immigrants and larger numbers of children. It was also a result of

cultural differences and possibly prejudice. Even so, 75% of non-white applicants compared with 87% of white were assessed at the highest grade, thereby guaranteeing a matching problem between a majority of suitable tenants and a majority of unpopular estates.

The G.L.C.'s complex system of matching tenants and property illustrates the highly bureaucratic and judgemental nature of grading by merit, as well as the severe lettings problems posed by a largely unpopular stock:

Whereas most applicants were assessed at the most favoured grade, most dwellings were assessed as below the most favoured grade. Therefore the grading of tenants and property was only the first step in an attempt to match the two.

Each property and applicant was given a "lettability range" of 1 to 19, which determined the quality of property offered.

The G.L.C. developed a measurement of popularity for the full range of its dwelling-types, taking account of age and type, that may indicate the popularity of the council stock nationally. The main categories in order of popularity were:

- 1) Post-1964 house.
- 2) 1955-64 house.
- 3) 1945-54 house.

- 4) Inter-war house, post-1964 flat, pre-1919 modernised house.
- 5) Pre-1919 house, 1955-64 flat.
- 6) 1945-54 flat and inter-war modernised flat.
- 7) Inter-war unmodernised flat and pre-1919 modernised flat.
- 8) Pre-1919 unmodernised flat.⁹

This ranking order of popularity is based only on physical type and does not allow for social or management factors that can distort the scale.

Flats are now widely recognised as less popular than houses. Unfortunately since 1964, more flats have been built in the council sector nationally than houses.¹⁰ Tenants' dissatisfaction was intensified because most applicants lived in houses prior to becoming council tenants, thereby linking dissatisfaction with the new flat with loss of the old home.

John Lambert, in his study of Birmingham's housing department in 1978,¹¹ found that council employees, responsible for letting the large number of flats available, had to exert considerable pressure on applicants not to hold out for the rare but popular offer of a house.

"There was understandable pressure on housing visitors to find prospective tenants for the many flats which the Council possessed."¹²

Similarly, a survey conducted in 1975 of slum clearance

residents in Hull¹³ came up with the staggering figure that only 2% of the applicants said they would accept offers of accommodation in flats or maisonettes. Over 96% would hold out for a house. However, in practice many applicants would end up in flats through a process of pressure from lettings officers, by virtue of the number of flats available for letting during the slum clearance period.

Flats have been demolished in Liverpool, Knowsley, Merseyside, Birkenhead, Glasgow, Tyneside and London because of the difficulty of persuading tenants to live in them. In very few cases were the flats demolished because they were structurally unsound. Two-thirds of the unpopular estates in the recent Department of the Environment study of estate-based management¹⁴ comprised flats, even though they form only one third of the total council stock.

The council sector, which was not regulated by what people wanted but by what Governments and local authorities decided, built far more flats than were wanted and in some cases, more than were needed.

Obviously, if over 80% of applicants were given the highest grading initially and only about 10% of the stock was in the most popular category, then the lettability range was determined by more subjective and discriminatory factors. The G.L.C. report¹⁵ uncovered clearly that the most

economically and socially disadvantaged were concentrated on the old flatted estates, the least popular lettings offer, based on the home visit which determined the type of offer made.

The numbers of households from disadvantaged groups in the G.L.C. sample allocated to older flats were as follows:

<u>Head of household</u>	<u>Allocated an older flat</u>
Homeless	43%
Non-white	45%
Unemployed	12.5%
Unskilled	21%
Under 30	42%

The proportion of all other applicants allocated to older flats was 15%.

With such a complex set of allocation procedures, it was hoped to reduce areas of discretion to a minimum. Yet the report admitted that -

"owing to the flexibility of the system, it was quite possible for identical applicants to be given different lettability ranges."

The object of grading and matching was to ensure that unpopular property was let and the value of good property was maximised. Yet in spite of grading and matching,

"desirable properties let quickly: whereas unattractive, old flats can be unlet for months."¹⁶

So in the area of highest housing demand in the country, some property became virtually unlettable and the complex system of grading failed to solve the problem of allocations. Tenants low down the grading scale resisted the allocations system even where they had little hope of finding their way to a better offer. The G.L.C.'s experience seemed to indicate that the very complexity of grading, lettability ranges, and matching, so downgraded the poorer estates and refined and slowed down the system as to make it unworkable. Any tenant who could resist, did so.

Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow, as well as other local authorities, operated similar grading systems to the G.L.C., both for property and for tenants. In Birmingham, condemned property was used systematically until the late seventies, when the last redevelopment areas were demolished, for adversely graded families. The lettings files of these families were labelled "recommended for older property only".¹⁷ In Glasgow, very large areas of city council housing have become unlettable and thousands of unpopular council dwellings, some relatively new, proposed for demolition. Adverse grading enhanced the unpopularity of certain estates. Similar tales could be told in Manchester and Liverpool. In Newcastle and Islington, the worst blocks of flats were earmarked for "unsuitable" tenants. Eventually these blocks were fit only for demolition too.

GRADING INEFFICIENCY

The object of grading was to classify estates on a scale from most to least popular and to do likewise with tenants. Grading did not work as a means of ensuring proper use of the council stock. On the contrary, it so stigmatised estates at the bottom end of the grading process that their decay was hastened.

"Unnecessarily rapid decay of the housing stock is proportional to the degree of social segregation.....Decay is attributable to the perceived social undesirability of the buildings in question."¹⁸

The policy of grading and then allocating, not according to need, but according to perceived social disadvantage, including homelessness, colour, unskilled work or no work, created low demand, empty dwellings, and consequent social disarray on the least popular estates.

HOUSING MANAGERS GRAPPLE WITH ALLOCATION PROBLEMS

John Macey and Charles V. Baker¹⁹ in 1965 wrote an authoritative book on council house management, rightly convinced that this Cinderella of local authority empires deserved more considered attention. They grappled thoughtfully with the problem of how to allocate the council stock to applicants, recognising that some estates were much more in demand than others and that tenants,

given the choice, would always opt for the most popular estates, thereby creating a lettings bottleneck. They therefore weighed up who "deserved" good housing and how less popular homes should be best used. The approach advocated by Macey and Baker was based on widely accepted current local authority practice and long experience. Their formula has been regarded as a blueprint by housing professionals for 20 years and their careful analysis of the most difficult issues in housing management was like a litmus paper for all the areas of conflict and confusion. They epitomised the most serious and considered balancing act of the city housing departments.

MARKET RENTS TO DETERMINE WHO GETS WHAT

Macey and Baker did not enjoy sitting in judgement over tenants struggling to improve their housing situation. But they were intensely conscious of the conflicting claims of different households and wanted to establish a method that would eliminate accusations of favour and privilege. They concluded that rent levels should dictate broadly which tenants chose the better or worse housing. This idea has commonly been rejected on the grounds that it would intensify socio-economic segregation. It also failed to address the problem that many council tenants could not pay anything approaching a realistic rent, made worse by the recent phenomenon of very high levels of unemployment with over 70% of council tenants nationally

being eligible for Housing Benefit.²⁰

Their market-oriented approach to rents was not widely adopted. Rents have been fixed by a combination of non-market calculations, leading to sometimes absurd anomalies. For example, in the city of Liverpool, rents for flats in some highly stigmatised blocks were higher than in the adjacent houses with gardens that could be let many times over. The actual construction and debt repayment costs, as well as perceived standards of amenity for modern flats as opposed to old houses, were so much higher that this influenced rent levels. Although the very low cost of pre-war cottage estates has been used to offset the cost of modern flats through a system of rent-pooling, tenants still usually pay more for the less popular modern estates. Therefore, council rent structures have not related to the popularity of or demand for particular dwellings. Instead of low rents attracting poor tenants to lower quality housing, relatively high rents for unpopular flats compared with relatively low rents for much more popular cottage property have driven away many potential applicants, making unpopular housing even more difficult to let. The exception has been low priority applicants on supplementary benefit who have not had to take account of rent levels anyway. The socio-economic segregation that Macey and Baker's "market" approach would have encouraged has happened in places through the reverse process, with undifferentiated council rents tending to

drive away from the least popular estates wage-earning tenants and encouraging a concentration of welfare recipients for whom rent levels are not a deterrent. Unified Housing Benefit introduced in 1982 has finally succeeded in making rent levels irrelevant to the allocation of housing, although unless Housing Benefit is used to enable poor tenants to gain access to more popular dwellings, it is not clear that it will help lettings on stigmatised estates. Meanwhile rent levels have not been used as an objective, if economically discriminating method of determining access to better or worse council housing. Macey and Baker did not in any case believe that ability to pay alone should determine allocations.

FAIRNESS IN ALLOCATIONS

Macey and Baker argued that good, reliable tenants should be offered the best property and "unreliable" tenants the worst on grounds of justice and prudent management.

".....Apart from the avoidance of trouble to the management, it will usually accord more nearly with the popular idea of fairness that good behaviour should receive some reward."

Although this dictum might ring true, the G.L.C.²¹ found that over 90% of applicants had no history of rent arrears and 80% were deemed suitable for the best property. Even if Macey and Baker's notion of just allocation were accepted and applied, council applicants, the vast majority of whom were "good and respectable", would be competing for

the small proportion of council property that was most desirable, at least in the major cities where unpopular flats formed so much of the council stock. Therefore the reward of the best offer became highly subjective and personalised, with lettings officers selecting from the 80-90% of "respectable" tenants, who should actually get the 20-30% of "good" offers.

Macey went on to recommend that homeless families should be allocated according to their circumstances. If homelessness was seemingly the families' own fault, such as wilful rent arrears leading to eviction, they should be offered inferior property.

"In cases, e.g. those where eviction is the result of wilfully running up arrears without reason, it would be folly to provide the family with a better home than the one they have lost.

"There needs to be a carefully considered and firm policy for allocations to the homeless. While it is very undesirable to use the long-known deterrent of splitting up families, it may be necessary to acquire some older, less popular housing, for those whose claims on the resources of the authority are weakest.....housing can only be given to one group at the expense of other, often more deserving families."

Macey and Baker recognised at the bottom of the housing ladder a group of households whose seeming fecklessness and incompetence made them suitable only for low grade council property. In this way social stratification became institutionalised in council housing departments.

HOME VISITS TO ASSESS APPLICANTS

As mentioned earlier, applicants were visited in their home to assess their needs and to try and gauge the type of property they were most suited for. The original idea of home visits, strongly advocated in the thirties to help slum-clearance families make the rehousing transition with the personal support of a lettings/welfare officer, became distorted into the crucial chance to assess the suitability of a family for various types of rehousing.

The decision to place people on the worst estates was not taken lightly. Macey and Baker attached a lot of importance to home visiting in assessing the suitability of an applicant for particular types of property:

"The applicant's suitability from this standpoint is usually judged by a visit to his present accommodation.....Trained housing assistants can distinguish between untidiness and dirt due to adverse conditions, and that which is due to poor standards of home care. There is rarely any real excuse for lack of personal cleanliness. The current rent book will indicate the applicant's attitude in the matter of meeting his financial obligations, due consideration being given to the validity or otherwise of any explanations put forward as the reason for any arrears shown.....

".....It is desirable, but not always possible, for assistants engaged on the 'office' side of lettings work to have had a good deal of experience of seeing people in their own homes, and learning to judge both their good and their bad qualities.....

"It will be appreciated that the personal suitability of the applicant and his wife are a guide in the type of dwelling to be offered."

Home visits were standard practice in the G.L.C.,

Birmingham and many other local authorities. Councils could not think of a better way of "assessing" applicants.

USE OF OLD AND POOR QUALITY PROPERTY - TRANSFERS

To back up these allocation methods, Macey and Baker outlined two very important uses of the diverse housing stock. Both had disastrous social consequences. First, they proposed that old property should be kept available for the very poor on the grounds that they could not afford better. Secondly, they advocated maintaining as many pre-war council properties as possible available for "low priority" applicants by rehousing existing tenants and higher priority applicants to better dwellings. The use of transfers as a social ladder had the great advantage of giving dissatisfied and aspiring council tenants a leg-up into the bottom of the council sector. However, it failed to allow for the fact that the very process of sifting and shifting was constantly undermining the stability of estates which had only existed for a generation by advertising the fact that the "better" families moved off. It generated a disproportionate desire to leave old for new, and inspired a sense of failure and captivity in those who did not succeed in gaining a transfer.

The bitterness generated by the failure was in turn often meted out on new incoming tenants who were blamed for

"dragging the estate down". Indeed they often were poorer and more disadvantaged than the successful "leavers". In that sense a liberal transfer system within the council sector bedevilled the chances of older and less popular estates maintaining their own sense of identity and backbone. The result was an ugly decaying spiral.

It is ironical that transfers generated such mobility among council tenants that they moved more often than owner-occupiers. This was particularly true of tenants on unpopular estates.²²

In sum, Macey and Baker endorsed the prevailing wisdom that good housing should go to respectable and deserving tenants and that the least desirable, poorest housing should go to corresponding households. As long as someone had to sit in judgement over who got what, it was hard to come up with a fairer notion.

The book "Housing Management" validated judgement over poor people's access to "welfare housing". Long before it was ever recognised as such, council housing had become a gateway. For some it was a way up, for others, a further step down. It mainly depended on how your fate was sealed by the all-important lettings officer.

CULLINGWORTH'S REPORT ON ALLOCATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

While problems were accumulating within the council sector

as a result of discriminatory allocation procedures and grading of tenants, government and enlightened housing experts were still focusing their energy on the issue of access to public housing as such.

In 1969, the Cullingworth Report of the Housing Management Sub-Committee²³ made a number of important recommendations on the management and allocation of council housing.

ACCESS FOR THE MOST DISADVANTAGED

Cullingworth argued very strongly for the most vulnerable and sometimes problematic families to be given absolute priority for a council dwelling, but with the important proviso of built-in social services support. He later countered the accusation that he had been advocating the ghettoisation of council housing. The size of the council sector was such that much more responsibility could be taken for the most needy without the whole public sector becoming stigmatised.

Cullingworth did not, however, allow for the fact that many councils would create social ghettos by organising allocations in such a way that the least able tenants he was trying to persuade councils to help would end up on the least popular estates. Social ghettos were created within the council sector by virtue of the poor gaining access

according to the prescription of the Cullingworth report, but on the whole only to less popular estates.

Nor did he consider satisfactorily the implications of rehousing families whose behaviour was such that they could not cope with community life on high-density estates. Most council dwellings were on communally-designed estates which stripped a family of privacy and drew attention to and accentuated the nuisance caused by certain types of behaviour. Cullingworth overlooked the nature of many public housing estates in his advocacy of access for families who could not cope with normal life.

DISPERSAL OF RACIAL MINORITIES

Unlike the 1939 Housing Management report²⁴, Cullingworth did not recommend the dispersal of disadvantaged families across the range of stock. But he did recommend with great force the dispersal of Commonwealth immigrants to avoid racial ghettos. His recommendations on this were no more adhered to than the 1939 recommendations for dispersal of "problem" tenants. Colour became enmeshed with other elements of discretion and discrimination in the allocation of council housing and Cullingworth's report will stand out as a farsighted failure to influence practice.

DATE-ORDER ACCESS

Cullingworth attacked the accepted system of grading tenants according to their suitability for better or worse property. He argued that it was unnecessary for the allocation process. Instead, he advocated date order for access. But by 1969 much of the council stock was already highly unpopular and difficult to run. Unless tenants lost all rights to choose where they lived, date-order lettings would enable applicants under least stress to hold out for the best property, since they could wait the longest. However, his stand against merit or a points system was more radical than was obvious at the time. And no one has since come up with a fairer allocation system.

OPEN WAITING LISTS

His other important and contentious recommendation was that waiting lists should be open to all-comers and that residential qualifications should not be a bar to a council tenancy any more than they were a bar to owner-occupation. This should be coupled with a publicly declared system of allocation.

It is possible that had these recommendations been widely followed, council housing would have become an open door to the whole community, as were other social provisions such as schools. Social polarisation through allocation might then

have been less severe because open allocation on a straight date-order and the critical exposure to public examination would have shown up the problem much earlier.

By raising the vital areas affecting access to council housing, the Cullingworth report was representing the Government's concern on the one hand with councils excluding needy groups and households, and on the other creating social or racial ghettos. But the report did not tackle satisfactorily the issue that was already at the forefront of housing managers' agendas - how to avoid unpopular estates being matched with impoverished populations, once access itself had been assured.

BUSINESSLIKE APPROACH

Cullingworth did point to the approach that was long overdue if council estates were to be saved from the same fate as the slums they were built to replace:

"Local authority houses and flats represent a considerable part of the nation's wealth and it is the responsibility of local authorities to treat their management as an important business enterprise."

If local authorities had followed this sensible if obvious recommendation, the allocation process would not have been left to feed the decline and decay it was generating at the time of Cullingworth's report. Cullingworth moved the debate a long way forward from the conventional wisdom

of Macey and Baker. His recommendations were not backed by housing legislation, and council housing is still largely bedevilled with assessments and judgements of fairness, following the same historic system that the Cullingworth Committee aimed to dismantle in 1969.

HOMELESSNESS AND EMPTY COUNCIL DWELLINGS

In spite of increasing vacancies and the emergence of difficult-to-let estates, access to council housing was not made easier in time to avert the growing problem of homelessness.

Cullingworth, in his essays on housing policy in 1979,²⁵ pointed out that:

"It is possible to have a general surplus of housing accompanied by acute need which market forces and public policies do not meet."

Thus there can be high vacancy rates in dwellings and high numbers of homeless. The explanation is clear:

"The homeless do not have easy access to available accommodation.....its very existence by definition points to a particular housing shortage."

It has not paid private landlords in cash terms to let to potentially homeless families and it has not been an obligation on local authorities to give vulnerable households sufficient priority to prevent the problem of

homelessness arising. Yet generally there are more than enough empty council dwellings to match the numbers of families received into local authority accommodation as homeless, especially within the city areas where most homelessness occurs. (The Audit Commission has shown that in London in 1983, there were 5,500 homeless families being accommodated in temporary accommodation, at a cost of £18 million, while there were 30,000 unlet council homes within the same local authority areas.)²⁶

"Homeless" families are rarely homeless as such however. They are either under threat of homelessness or they are in temporary accommodation arranged by the council. Therefore in some senses "homelessness" is a misnomer, applied to the most desperate families forced to throw themselves on the mercies of the council sector for want of any sound alternative.

The concept of homelessness covers two housing allocation problems. First, there is the problem of access by the young and the vulnerable. Because of restricted access, these groups are disproportionately squeezed into the homeless category, which is their only avenue to a council home. Since the 1977 Act, homelessness has provided obligatory access to temporary accommodation at least.

Second, there is the problem of moving homeless families from temporary to permanent council accommodation, the issue being what housing they should be entitled to. On

the whole, homeless families are allocated as a policy to the least desirable accommodation. Even where this is not the case, the pressure to rehouse a homeless family into permanent accommodation leads the council to offer them the most readily available and therefore least desirable stock for which there is little competition from other groups. As long as the homeless are rehoused on an emergency basis, they will continue to be treated differently from less pressured households, and they will be expected to accept whatever is offered.

The twin problems of access and quality of offer could be dealt with by simplifying and opening up the allocations process. Boroughs like Lambeth, Islington and Tower Hamlets, have been in the anomalous position of having large numbers of so-called homeless families in temporary accommodation, while having several thousand empty council dwellings in each borough. The councils' main line of defence has been that homeless families would not accept offers of inferior accommodation, preferring to hold out in bed and breakfast hostels for a better offer. The tight lettings process and the constant grading has generated this bottleneck.

STIGMA OF HOMELESSNESS

The most obvious problem is that the existence of homeless families alongside empty dwellings somehow implies

inadequacy on the part of the homeless. Why couldn't they get a home like everyone else? Councils, through eviction of troublesome tenants and tenants with large rent arrears, actually cause some homelessness and exacerbate the identification of homelessness with problem families. Conditions in temporary accommodation, to which homeless families are usually admitted, are often quite appalling. In 1980 Islington was rehousing families in an old seamen's hostel in Stepney, which had been closed down, while it had 4,000 empty council dwellings within the borough. Conditions in the hostel made family privacy and stability extremely difficult. The same applies to the very expensive solution of bed and breakfast accommodation, commonly used by many London boroughs. The cost causes intense bitterness among properly housed rate-payers. Families in this plight are accelerated down a social spiral, validating discriminatory lettings as they go.

There is abundant evidence that homeless families are disproportionately concentrated on the least popular estates. In Lambeth, 40% of lettings are to homeless families but only 20% of new dwellings go to the homeless. In the G.L.C., homeless families were three times as likely to be offered old flats as ordinary applicants. On the least popular estates in Brent, up to 80% of offers are made to homeless families. In a hated tower block in Haringey, almost all lettings in one-bedroom flats at one stage were to one-parent, black, homeless families.

The five Home Office Community Development Projects revealed very big concentrations of homeless families on the least popular estates.²⁷ Unless more popular accommodation was actually reserved for the homeless, this would be inevitable, because of the pressure they were under to take anything.

The concentration of homeless families in particular estates could itself cause social problems. A new brick-built, low-rise, high-density estate in Brixton became a socially disturbed ghetto within two years of first being occupied because most of the one-bedroom flats were let to one-parent, often teenage, "homeless" families in a concerted drive to reduce the numbers in bed and breakfast accommodation. What could have been a pleasant and well-run estate became a social nightmare, as single young girls, desperately in need of support and direct financial help as well as a home, were thrust together as strangers in a futuristic, lavish, but unstructured environment with no adults to help or hinder.

Homelessness became a funnel down which the most needy were pushed in order to gain access to council housing without "spoiling good estates".

The G.L.C's exhaustive and thoroughly self-critical survey²⁸ of their allocation process conducted in 1976 demonstrated clearly that the problem of discriminatory lettings to homeless families was at least in London well

established before the Labour Government in 1977 introduced legislation to force councils to give priority to homeless families. They concluded that:

"The most significant social variables associated with variations in the quality of accommodation are homelessness and colour."

Within the G.L.C.'s four main priority groups for rehousing (decant, homeless, special groups, general needs), homeless families consistently fared worst, although they enjoyed high priority for access. About 45% of them were allocated to pre-war flats (the least popular housing type) compared with 8% of rehoused (decanted) households. The G.L.C. also found that homeless families were offered old flats 2.8 times more frequently than they were offered a more popular home.

The G.L.C.²⁹ was able to show that homeless families were younger, more often with a female head, more often non-white, and twice as likely to be unemployed as the rest of the population.

HOMELESS PERSONS ACT 1977

The 1977 Housing Act broke new ground in lettings policies. It imposed on local authority housing departments the duty to rehouse homeless families and families threatened with homelessness, homeless pregnant women, and other "vulnerable" persons threatened with

homelessness.

Many local authorities argue that the 1977 Act opened the floodgates to "problem" families and made certain that more needy households would be increasingly concentrated on the least popular estates, where the largest number of empty properties were found. In fact, local authorities were already supposed to give priority to such applicants. However, the rapid shrinkage of the private rented sector, and the expansion in the overall number of households,* made an increase in threatened homelessness inevitable. By the same token, the vast and rapid expansion of public housing made councils the obvious providers of shelter for those without a secure roof.

The first mistake most councils made was to adhere to unnecessary allocation restrictions long after the acute shortage had disappeared; the second was implicitly to regard homeless families as inferior to other tenants, and therefore unworthy of good housing. The ghettoisation of homeless families, given their obvious vulnerability by virtue of their need, rebounded against the councils and the homeless.

Certain estates and housing areas became so stigmatised and socially explosive because of the high concentrations of homeless families that demolition sometimes came to be regarded as the only solution. One estate in Islington,

* The population increased by one-tenth in the 30 years after the war, but households by one-quarter.³⁰

Blythe Mansions, used primarily for homeless families as a deliberate policy, was demolished in 1978 because the stigma attaching to the estate became so intense. The estate was structurally sound. The stigma derived from homelessness and the associated poverty, numbers of children, reduced supervision through the incidence of one-parent families, and the concentration of racial minorities among homeless families.³¹ Because vacancies were becoming hard to fill on the worst estates, the homeless category grew to take up the slack.

The Homeless Persons Act of 1977 should have been a pathfinder in opening up socially-owned housing to those who really needed it. Because of the tight allocation system and its inevitable sifting, the Act was turned into a management albatross forcing councils to expand greatly their provision for vulnerable groups while doing nothing to ensure the equitable distribution of poor tenants among good and bad council homes. The business of sitting in judgement over who got what became even more entrenched.

The Act was not the cause of the problem. It heightened it because councils were still not prepared to follow a policy of dispersal or to abandon their more general approach of sifting allocations in favour of a less judgemental and more straightforward system.

For families who had been homeless, vulnerability, deprivation and poor housing conditions continued to be

linked within the council sector and the 1977 Act did nothing to ensure equal access to good accommodation in the light of the now statutory obligation on local authorities to rehouse them. Therefore segregation, if anything, became more intense since 1977 and homeless families have been increasingly blamed for the continuing decline in conditions on many of the poorest estates. In no local authority we have visited have homeless families enjoyed automatic access to the best estates. In most, they are rigidly designated as eligible only for the worst.

SEGREGATION IN THE COUNCIL SECTOR

Other forms of social segregation continued to operate along with homelessness. These included the treatment of racial minorities and the role councils have played in rehousing so-called "problem families" (families whose anti-social behaviour makes them difficult or impossible to live next door to).

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Racial discrimination is more insidious in its long-term effects than other forms of discrimination in council housing, because it marks people by virtue of their skin colour only. No effort on the part of the person can

change the fact of colour.

The G.L.C.³² analysed in great detail the relation between colour and allocation. Their findings coincided with other less comprehensive studies of discrimination.³³ All other factors causing low-grade allocations, such as homelessness, low income, poor previous housing conditions, female head of household and family size, were allowed for and the writers still concluded:

"Differential allocation cannot be completely explained by the measurable aspects of the lettings process."

Racial discrimination was the only element that explained the constant over-representation of racial minorities in the least popular dwellings.

The findings of the G.L.C. were clear and disturbing. Non-white applicants compared unfavourably with white on all aspects of housing type.

	<u>Non-white</u>	<u>White</u>
In flats rather than houses	92%	73%
In pre-1945 property	45%	25%
Above 10th floor	6%	3%
Inner London (rather than Outer)	91%	63%
On cottage estate	4%	25%

The unskilled and the unemployed fared worse than other socio-economic groups, but within them non-white applicants

were much the worst.

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Unskilled		
average quality* of housing	5.3	6.4
% in older flats	28%	57%
Unemployed		
average quality of housing	5.8	6.2
% in older flats	48%	56%
All applicants		
average quality of housing	4.6	5.8

*Quality is measured on a scale of 1 to 8.

The G.L.C. found that as many as 48% of all new lettings in older flatted estates were to households with a non-white head, causing incipient racial ghettos to emerge on some estates.

Not surprisingly, non-whites were much more dissatisfied with their housing than whites as a much smaller proportion were rehoused in the area of their choice or the type of property they wanted. A particularly striking finding was that 84% of non-white households had no friends or relatives in the area they were rehoused in, compared with 64% for whites. Councils have often countered allegations of racial discrimination with the argument that "they like to live together". This view was not borne out by the G.L.C. survey. The G.L.C. survey did conclude, however, that "non-white households were more resigned to

dissatisfaction."

The London Borough of Islington³⁴ conducted a lettings survey to assess the quality of rehousing for white and non-white residents. They found very similar patterns to the G.L.C. The Runnymede Trust³⁵ in 1975 came up with similar findings. The recent C.R.E. report on Hackney³⁶ showed unexplainable concentrations of minorities on the worst estates.

The survey of estate-based management offices conducted in 1982³⁷ by the Department of the Environment showed that in all areas in the survey with an ethnic minority population of 10% or more, the most unpopular estates in those areas had a disproportionate concentration of households from ethnic minorities.

A series of factors in many allocation systems offer opportunities for racial discrimination:³⁸

- residential qualifications for the waiting list.
- poor communication between the Town Hall and members of racial minorities.
- assessment of housekeeping standards.
- shortage of larger dwellings which are more in demand among racial minorities.
- greater housing need among minorities creating much more pressure to be rehoused in areas of less choice.

Cullingworth, in 1969, foresaw the possibility of racial concentrations developing within the council sector.

The G.L.C. survey bore out his fears. Prior to council rehousing, non-white applicants to the G.L.C. were spread fairly evenly through eight inner London boroughs. After rehousing by the G.L.C., they were largely concentrated within the four boroughs with the greatest proportion of pre-war council flats. In Lambeth, the non-white population rose from 12% to 19% as a result of G.L.C. lettings.³⁹

Racial concentrations on the worst estates have enhanced their problems by advertising their unpopularity, by heightening white prejudice and by increasing lettings problems, thereby ensuring ever greater concentrations of less favoured applicants.

OPENING UP THE SYSTEM OF ALLOCATION

The Department of the Environment in 1977, during the Housing Policy Review,⁴⁰ published a consultation paper on allocation and access to council housing, advocating a much looser approach to allocation. The abolition of residential qualifications and publication of allocation methods were recommended anew as a way of opening up the system. There was a refreshing recognition of the need to widen the social make-up of the public sector as it increasingly became the only alternative to owner-occupation,

and in the face of reduced demand from slum clearance and redevelopment areas. It is true that Cullingworth some years previously had asked councils to provide housing

~~for local professionals as well as less affluent, more~~ needy households. But whereas Cullingworth, with the same basic recommendations, had stressed need, the Government was now stressing broad social mix. There was growing awareness of the need for communities to have a cross-section of interests, ages and classes. Councils like the G.L.C. began to introduce open-access, first-come, first-served policies, though these only ever applied to difficult-to-let estates.

The Scottish Housing Advisory Committee in 1980 went even further in attempting to broaden the public view of allocations:

"Insensitive allocations and transfers contribute to the creation of difficult-to-let estates and have an important role in improving conditions too."⁴¹

The Committee recommended that date-order allocations should be adopted as the method of distributing the most popular dwellings, thereby abolishing grading and merit as the determinants for the best property. It did not address the problems of urgent cases still being concentrated where demand was slacker. It maybe simply recognised the inevitability of this.

However, the Committee envisaged compensatory allocation measures on difficult-to-let estates. It proposed that

unpopular dwellings should be taken outside the normal lettings system and special lettings devices should be adopted. This included reducing the number of socially disadvantaged people on these estates, reducing high child densities, finding tenants for vacancies who did not add problems. A reversal of the standard lettings and transfers procedures would be involved, and an aggressive approach to recruitment of more socially able households was implied. Unfortunately, good ideas voiced in advisory reports simply marked progress in thinking among those not hewing at the coal face. Lettings procedures barely changed.

HOUSING ACT 1980 AND THE RIGHT TO BUY

The 1980 Act was intended to tackle the thorny problem of allocation procedures by legislation, but fell short of the conventional wisdom by failing to abolish residential qualifications for council housing. It did, however, make it legally binding on councils to publish their allocation systems. The Government hoped that a general leaven of ownership on large estates would combat some of the social problems resulting from the sifting of allocations. So far, however, it appears that the right to buy is achieving the exact opposite. The more attractive and popular council houses, primarily in suburban and rural authorities and on smaller estates, are selling well. But many tenants, on the unpopular estates

with such large concentrations of poverty and unemployment, could not afford to buy, even on the very favourable terms of the Act. The large flatted estates in the predominantly Labour-run big cities were not only unpopular, but were also made inaccessible for owner-occupation to low-income occupants by virtue of service charges, high rates charges and social breakdown.

Therefore the social polarisation, that was caused by the councils' own allocation systems has been exacerbated by the right to buy.

TRANSFERS HAVE SEIZED UP THE SYSTEM

Transfers have worked very much in the same way as the right to buy. In fact they have enhanced the right among more ambitious and better housed council tenants. The scale of transfers in the last fifteen years has accentuated the contrast between old and new estates, flats and houses, reputable and disreputable estates, by constantly generating the aim to move on. It has also undermined among residents the commitment to improve conditions. It has left a constant vacuum at the bottom of the scale since families only ever want to transfer upwards.

In the late sixties, while the supply of new council accommodation was still very plentiful, a decline in the number of new redevelopment or demolition areas set in.

Because of the drop in rehousing cases from demolition areas, new property became available for other categories of applicants and there was an acceleration in the transfer of existing council tenants into new council property, accentuating all the problems at the less popular end of the stock. Already by the end of the sixties, nearly half of all lettings were to transfer cases.

A close investigation of local authority policy and practice in the seventies showed that:

"The decision common to all authorities studied to give priority to transfer applicants in the allocation of houses has tremendous effect. This decision apparently influences the type of waiting list applicant who will be housed by determining the type of property available for letting to new tenants."⁴³

Inevitably, the less popular property made available to first-time applicants through transfers attracted less ambitious, more needy applicants. Councils had broad discretion and a minimum of legal obligations over transfers. Because transfers counted for so many moves in the council sector and tended to be moves to better property, the sifting process was intensified. The fact that according to census information, council tenants moved more often than owner-occupiers but moved closer to their previous address, suggested that they were simply climbing the housing ladder through transfers, rather than moving for employment reasons.⁴⁴ This was simply a reflection of the dissatisfaction of many tenants with their existing accommodation.

By the same token, if a large part of the property let to first-time tenants is of poor quality, then council occupancy is constantly getting off to a bad start. It becomes hard to generate a sense of pride or purpose and the general objective of a council tenant becomes to get out or move up. The degree of social grading in the council sector thus becomes more and more intense with transfers both a cause and a result.

There are now serious practical limitations on transfers that are working in favour of a more integrated and businesslike approach to poorer estates. A large-scale transfer system is only possible if there is a constant supply of vacant and popular property. Because very little new council housing is now being built, transfers are declining and are made available only to the most eligible and "deserving" tenants. This has intensified the pecking order at the top end but the population stability it is generating on the less popular estates could enable other improvements to get under way.

In addition, the right to buy, introduced in 1980, has reduced the supply of better property needed for a flexible transfer system, as the half million dwellings sold so far are concentrated largely on more popular estates and involve very few flats, only one out of a hundred. The result is a drop in transfers, a decline in the average quality of the council stock and a sense of bitterness among those who feel forced to stay within it with less opportunities for

transferring up the ladder. This dissatisfaction is generating pressure to improve the more run-down estates.

Meanwhile, the private owner-occupied sector continues to expand, at the expense of the public sector, as a result of which some slack continues to occur in the council sector.

The tenants most likely to move out of council accommodation and buy in the private sector, rather than buy their existing council dwelling, are those living in undesirable council property that they do not wish to buy. Therefore as a result of spreading owner-occupation, vacancies will be even further concentrated in the least popular estates rather than in the more popular dwellings suitable for ambitious transfer applicants. If the unwanted dwellings are to be let, some improvements are required.

In sum, transfers can no longer be used as a central plank of allocation policy and as a safety valve for unpopular estates. This change might work to the advantage of the entire council sector.

CONCLUSION

Need seemed a sensible criterion of access to council housing in the face of housing shortages and slum conditions, and yet it has been much harder to translate

into fair allocation practice than it should be.

The City University Housing Research team⁴⁵ suggested that the very size and complexity of housing department systems led to a many-faceted, interlocking hierarchy of decisions where events and individuals were totally lost in computers and paper work. It has proved hard to open up, as Cullingworth and others have proposed, a system that was so big.

Allocation systems are still largely the invisible arm of housing management and local political structures. Having examined the inequities of present allocation systems and their serious consequences for the poorest members of our society and the worst estates, it becomes tempting to embrace Octavia Hill's impassioned plea 100 years ago, not to allow local political masters to control the allocation of homes for their electors. The room for trade-offs and pressure is too great. The poor under such a system would be always vulnerable and the more dynamic members of the electorate able to manoeuvre political power to their own housing advantage.

In the areas of the country where there is now a surplus of council housing, local authorities are advertising property, diversifying their intake of tenants and relaxing all criteria of access. In areas of shortage and need, this is harder to do, and some overriding priority must be given to the homeless. Even so, more open access, faster

re-letting of empty property on more relaxed criteria should reduce the incidence of homelessness and broaden the social base of many estates. However, later chapters will show that only compensatory intensive management can make a residual unpopular estate attractive to residents and applicants. The fact that its occupants are poor should not so completely determine the quality and therefore the popularity of estate life.

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CHAPTER VI - THE THREADS OF DEPRIVATION IN THE COUNCIL SECTOR

"A clean person gets a clean house and a dirty person gets a dirty house."

E. Burney, "Housing on Trial"

COUNCIL RENTING IS LESS POPULAR THAN OWNING

It has become common currency that owner-occupation is financially and socially the most advantageous form of tenure, and that a council dwelling, while often providing a welcome way out of insecurity, overcrowding, lack of basic amenities, or even homelessness, is a poor second best. Just how serious the cleft is between ownership and council renting gives us a further and possibly decisive clue to the emergence of unpopular and difficult-to-manage estates. At a basic level, we know that 93% of owner-occupied homes are houses and only 7% are purpose-built flats, compared with 66% houses and 34% flats and maisonettes among council dwellings. Density of occupation is lower and space standards are higher in owner-occupied dwellings than in council dwellings with 66% of dwellings having one or more bedrooms spare, compared with 47% in the council sector. The most important hallmark of a council-owned dwelling might be that people can almost invariably, except in renovated,

old inner city areas, recognise it as "publicly owned".

What people aspire to and what they are forced to accept by circumstances strongly colours their view of their home and their neighbours, and how they use it.

In 1973¹ the Department of the Environment National Movers Survey showed that local authority tenants moving into a council home on the whole did not feel they were choosing what they wanted or liked. Only 13% said they were moving because they wanted to. Among people becoming owner-occupiers, 54% said they were buying because they wanted to. At that time, demolition and slum clearance were still a major element in pushing people into the council sector causing 34% of moves into council accommodation. We have already shown how much reluctance and compulsion accompanied that process. The need for a better home and personal reasons for moving, such as family break-up, were the other major causes (provoking a further 35% of moves). Therefore, at least 69% of council tenancies were created by push factors, whereas only 25% of new owner-occupiers felt pushed by poor conditions: a majority of owners were pulled by the attraction of becoming owners.

In 1978 the General Household Survey² asked people which form of tenure they preferred and 72% chose owner-occupation, while only 19% preferred local authority renting. At that stage nearly 30% of the population

occupied a council dwelling. Among council tenants themselves, almost half (49%) stated that they would rather be owner-occupiers.

In 1983 the Building Societies Association sponsored a survey to measure the aspiration to owner-occupy in greater detail. They found that younger age groups were extremely keen to buy a home, with 89% of 25-34 year olds saying they preferred to own. Even among 35-54 year olds, 84% wanted to own, and among 55-64 year olds, 71% did. Among adults under 35, 93% expected to become owners within 10 years.

Council tenants were also asked whether they wanted to buy their existing home. The responses were broken down according to ages. Only 30% of 25-34 year olds were very interested, 28% of 35-54 year olds, 14% of 55-64 year olds and 5% of retired council tenants. The enthusiasm for buying their existing council home declined sharply with age but even in the youngest age group, less than a third wanted to. The vast majority of council tenants would not want to buy their own home in spite of the very substantial cash incentives to do so and the strong desire to become an owner-occupier. In a rough fashion, this response confirms an overall sense that a majority of people prefer to own rather than rent; but that many council tenants are not where they want to be; and that a majority of those wanting to buy would not want to become owners of their existing

council home.

People's choice of tenure between renting from the council and buying their own home has diverged more starkly with the passing of time. The following table, puts together the findings of various surveys over the last 17 years and illustrates the growing divergence clearly:

28. Trend in attitudes to renting and owner-occupying, shown through four opinion surveys

		Prefer owner-occupation	Prefer local authority renting
1967	Opinion Research Survey	66	23
1975	Building Societies Association	69	21
1978	General Household Survey	72	19
1983	Building Societies Association	77	16

There are several threads to this tenure preference and to the general disinterest in buying one's existing council dwelling. Firstly, as we have outlined in Chapter I, the design and scale of council housing makes much of it very unpopular and undesirable for home-ownership or for renting. Secondly, the allocation of council housing has led to large concentrations of disadvantaged households within the council sector and in exaggerated form within certain estates. This gives people a strong incentive to leave those areas rather than regard them as a permanent

home. Thirdly, local authorities have run their housing stock on the whole in a singularly careless fashion, without the intensive, small-scale, personal effort that might have compensated for the problems of design, scale and social need.

There is underlying these grave deterrents to council renting an inherent desire for each household to exercise the control over the home that only ownership can bring. It is clear that for most social groups, owning a house will be more attractive than renting. It was partly with this in mind that the Tories introduced the right to buy for all council tenants. However, as we have seen, council dwellings are often not the occupants' idea of a "home", the place where you choose to stay, to invest your care, money and pride. On the more unpopular flatted estates, the case is more extreme. Even supposing a tenant was keen to buy, the problems of repair would be considerable, communal areas would be beyond his control and individual ownership hard to envisage. Tenants have been reluctant to take on the risks and responsibilities of ownership where the council retains control of so many elements in the home environment.

Therefore, while sales might help change the pattern of council tenure at the better end of the stock with the better-off tenants, its impact at the less desirable, poorer end is insignificant.

POLITICAL SWINGS

There has been a longstanding divergence between the two main political parties over the role of council housing and the question of owner-occupation. The Labour Party has traditionally pursued the viewpoint that council housing should be for all and should not be segregated on a class basis, while also encouraging owner-occupation. It was responsible for a number of attempts to build mixed communities of owner-occupiers and tenants under the public housing umbrella.³

Conservative policy has consistently advanced and favoured owner-occupation more wholeheartedly than Labour, and regarded the council sector as a necessary second-best for those unable to buy.⁴ One would have expected these somewhat diverse policies to result in some kind of contrast in results between the actions of Labour and Conservative Governments since the war.

In practice, however, Labour Governments, traditionally on the side of the underdog, have encouraged rehousing according to need, concentrating on the "housing poor", and have dragged their feet on the sale of council housing, feeling that it would intensify segregation between home-owners as "haves" and tenants as "have-nots" by enabling better-off council tenants to buy their council homes. As a result, many would-be owners were driven permanently out of the council sector, and the council

sector, particularly in the largely Labour-controlled cities, became progressively more and more oriented towards the most needy and those least able to buy. Points systems for rehousing have increasingly focussed on allocation according to need, and Labour Councils have prided themselves on rehousing large numbers of the "housing poor", who inevitably suffered disproportionately from multiple disadvantages. The result has been an inevitable bias towards social polarisation, with the most socially egalitarian of purposes - that is to lift the "housing poor" out of private slums into "decent" council-provided homes. Labour's opposition to or ambiguity about the Conservative Right-to-Buy legislation that gave all council tenants the right to buy the council dwelling they occupied, at a significant discount, has intensified still further social polarisation their policies towards the needy have helped to create. It has certainly intensified the problems of dense, inner city, flatted estates where often the sense of being left behind has become overwhelming.

The Tories, on the other hand, have encouraged sales and have experimented in alternative initiatives for unpopular blocks, such as sales to developers. These initiatives have been singularly successful in rescuing such blocks from demolition but have invariably brought in a much more economically secure and ambitious range of households. The very poor have invariably been displaced into other council estates. The hope of the Conservatives was to break up

the monolithic class nature of much council housing. In this they have failed.

THE DESIRE TO OWN AND THE RIGHT TO BUY

It is worth examining the Right-to-Buy provisions of the 1980 Housing Act and their impact on tenure in a little more detail since they are a milestone in housing policy and enshrine the Conservative philosophy of "a property-owning democracy", while casting serious doubt on the ability of the Labour Party to respond with anything more than churlish confusion to this popular housing bonanza.

Under the Right-to-Buy, tenants could buy their home with discounts of 30-60% depending on how long they had lived there. They also acquired a legal right to a mortgage so long as they could meet repayments. Because of the social composition of council housing residents, many groups in council housing were excluded from the right to buy by economic circumstance. According to the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants, less than half of existing council tenants would qualify for mortgages and discounts under the right to buy. In spite of the popularity of this measure and tenants' declared ambitions to become owner-occupiers, by 1983 only 9% of council tenants had applied to buy their own home, and the number of new applicants had begun to decline.

According to Ray Forrest and A. Murie in their study of the application of the Right to Buy,⁵ the poorer social groups already concentrated in public sector housing would be largely excluded.

They produced evidence of the concentration of sales in houses rather than flats, and in lower-density, more attractive areas. For example, Bristol had sold 2,000 dwellings by 1982. But while one third of its stock comprises flats, only 1.5% of sales were of flats. In London, 16 houses have been sold for every flat, thereby skewing even further the balance of the stock towards unpopular, flatted estates. They found the typical dwelling sold to be a 3-bedroomed, semi-detached house, and sales to be most popular in the New Forest. In Greater London, with the lowest rate of sales in the country, only .7% of the stock had been sold. Murie and Forrest linked low sales not only with poverty, but with dissatisfaction with existing dwellings. Although this inevitably links far more strongly with flats than houses, it would apply to the poorer cottage estates⁶.

The most important defect in the Right-to-Buy legislation was that two major costs had to be added to the mortgage if the buyer lived in a flat in an inner area. Rates are often as high or even higher for a purpose-built flat and in inner London are often now £10 a week or more. In addition, councils spend approximately £10⁷ a week on

management and maintenance of a dwelling on a flatted estate (the G.L.C. currently spends £20⁸). Councils argue that many of these expenses apply to Right-to-Buy flats. In addition, owner-occupiers on flatted estates demand the full level of services, thereby forcing up council costs.⁹ As a result, service charges on flatted estates are often very high as well, in the region of £10 per week.

Because of high costs, coupled with an often poor environment and social and management problems, even those normally eligible to buy are far less likely to want to on a flatted estate, and in fact may not be able to afford a discounted flat with a very low market value, but high rates and service charges.

The foregoing evidence bears out the fears of many housing experts that the right to buy, while offering a unique advantage to many previously excluded households, does nothing to eliminate the problems of poverty and cumulative disadvantage in the remaining council sector.

Opposition to the Right-to-Buy in itself offers no way out of the inherent problems, while frustrating an obvious desire to own among many tenants.

Therefore, in the long run, both approaches to public housing policy - privatisation under various guises, and a commitment to help the needy - are intensifying the

process, already far advanced, of leaving the poorest, least skilled, most economically dependent, in the council rented sector, while the more ambitious, more skilled and more successful, move out or buy up the more desirable council homes. The large, impoverished cottage or flatted estates have become steadily more decayed, virtually untouched by the right to buy or by socialist dreams of a classless society.

The result of spreading owner-occupation has been an increasing concentration on council estates of those who had least choice and who for economic or social reasons, could not buy their own home. This trend is overlaid on the very substantial bias of council housing since 1930 to give priority to those in housing need and to those without other choice. Therefore the present quite extreme social polarisation between council renting and owner-occupation is an extension and intensification of a longstanding bias in the council sector towards the needy and the "housing poor". We now examine in more detail the extent of that poverty.

POVERTY

Peter Townsend, in his mammoth study of poverty¹⁰ based on a survey conducted in 1969, found that in spite of substantial subsidies in the council sector and relatively low rents at the time of his study, the richest 10% of the

population spent only 7% of their income on housing whereas the poorest 31% spent 25%. The decline in private renting and the expansion of owner-occupation among the better-off means that a majority of the poorest now live in council housing. Peter Townsend's finding 15 years ago might, if anything, be less extreme than current realities because sharp rises in council rents and fuel costs have possibly increased the proportion of income that the poorest now spend on housing.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

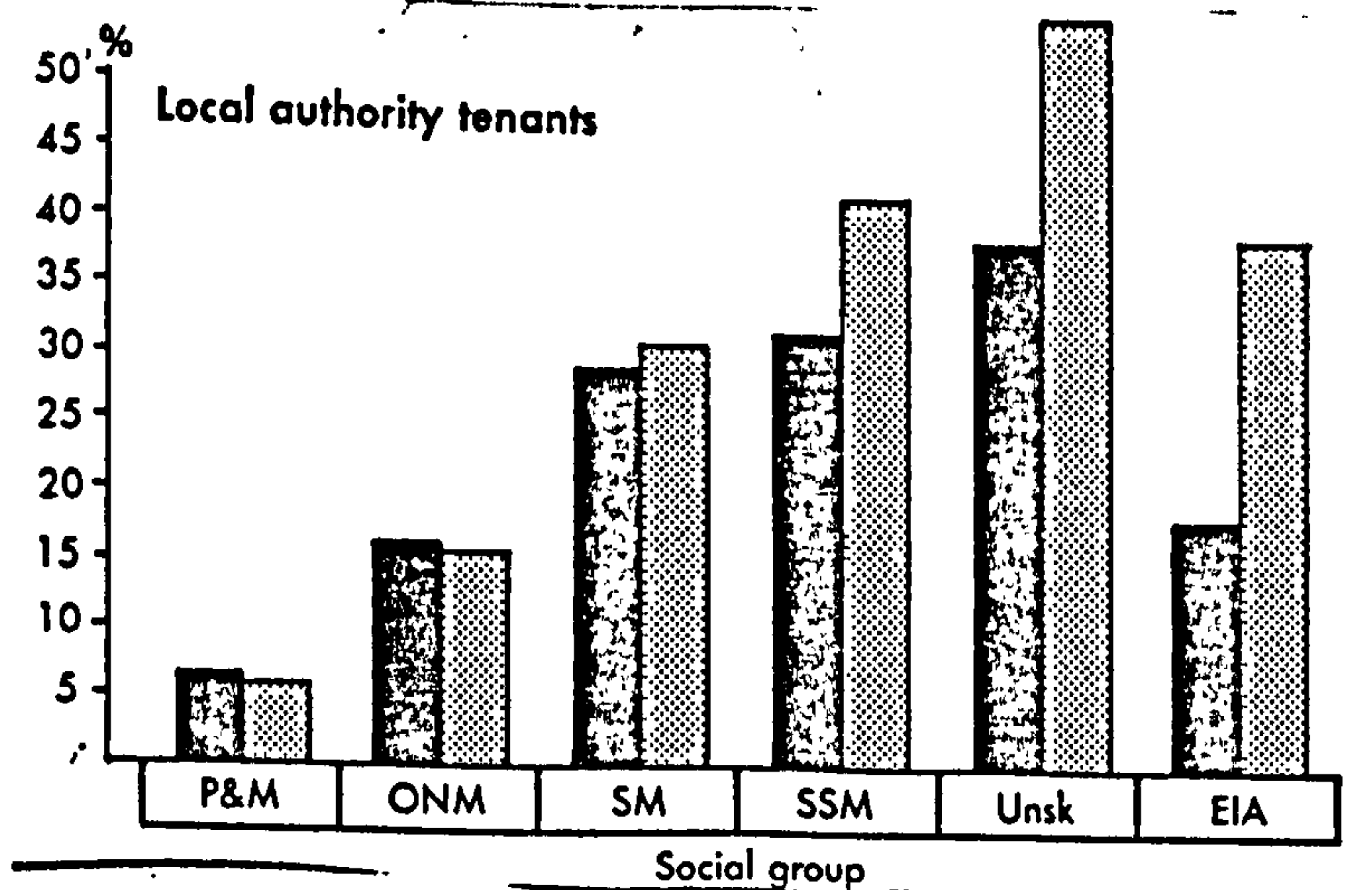
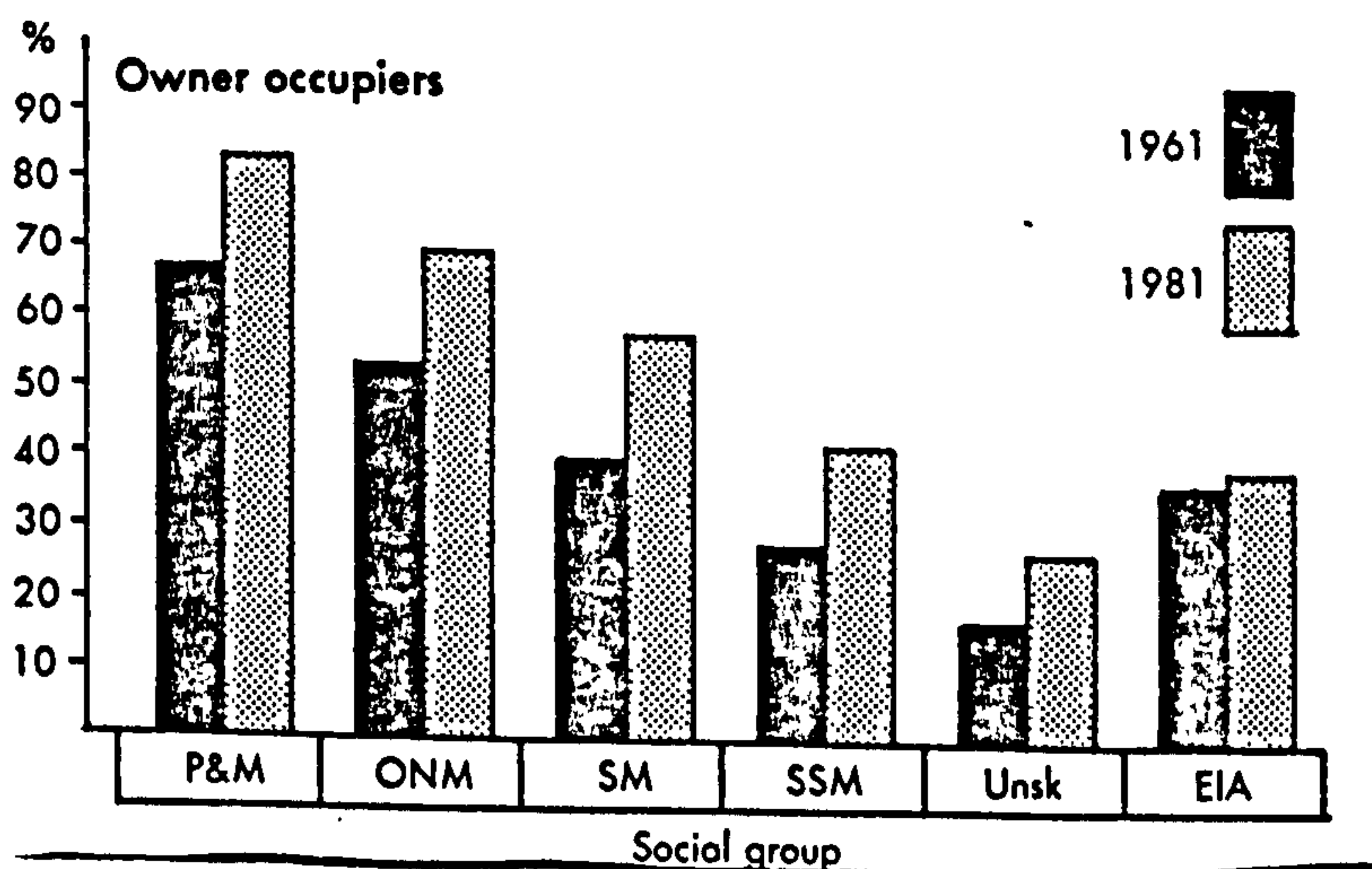
The Housing Policy Green Paper of 1977 examined the socio-economic make-up of households in different tenures. According to the 1971 Census, nearly half of owner-occupiers (46%) but 80% of local authority tenants were manual workers. By contrast, over a quarter of owner-occupiers were in the top professional and managerial social grouping compared with only 1 in 20 of council tenants. By 1975, only one fifth of unskilled, manual workers were owners, while nearly two-thirds were council tenants.

Roof¹¹ analysed the 1981 Census figures and produced the following diagram to show the tendency for lower socio-economic groups to be increasingly concentrated in local authority housing. The overall proportions of

both owners and council tenants in the total population is rising in the face of a steep decline in private renting.

The owner-occupier diagram shows high and growing proportions at the more elevated end of the social scale. The council tenant diagram shows the very opposite, but with much bigger jumps over the last 20 years in the proportions of the two poorest groups, the unskilled and unemployed.

29. : Changes in tenure by socio-economic group, England & Wales 1961-981



P&M = Professional/Managers, ONM = Other non-manual, SM = Skilled manual, SSM = Semi-skilled manual, Unsk = Unskilled, EIA = Economically inactive

Source: Roof, July/August 1983, article by Chris Hamnett, "Split City".

INCOME GAP

Average earnings in the two sectors were compared in 1975.¹² At the time, national average earnings were £3,000 a year.

30. INCOME GAP BETWEEN COUNCIL TENANTS AND OWNER-OCCUPIERS

TENURE	% in each group			
	Income under £1,500		Income over £1,500	
	Economically Active	Economically Inactive.	Active	Inactive
Owner-occupiers	8%	80%	92%	20%
Local authority tenants	16%	96%	84%	4%

Source: Family Expenditure Survey, 1975, HMSO.

The figures show a clear division in average levels of income between owner-occupiers and council tenants.

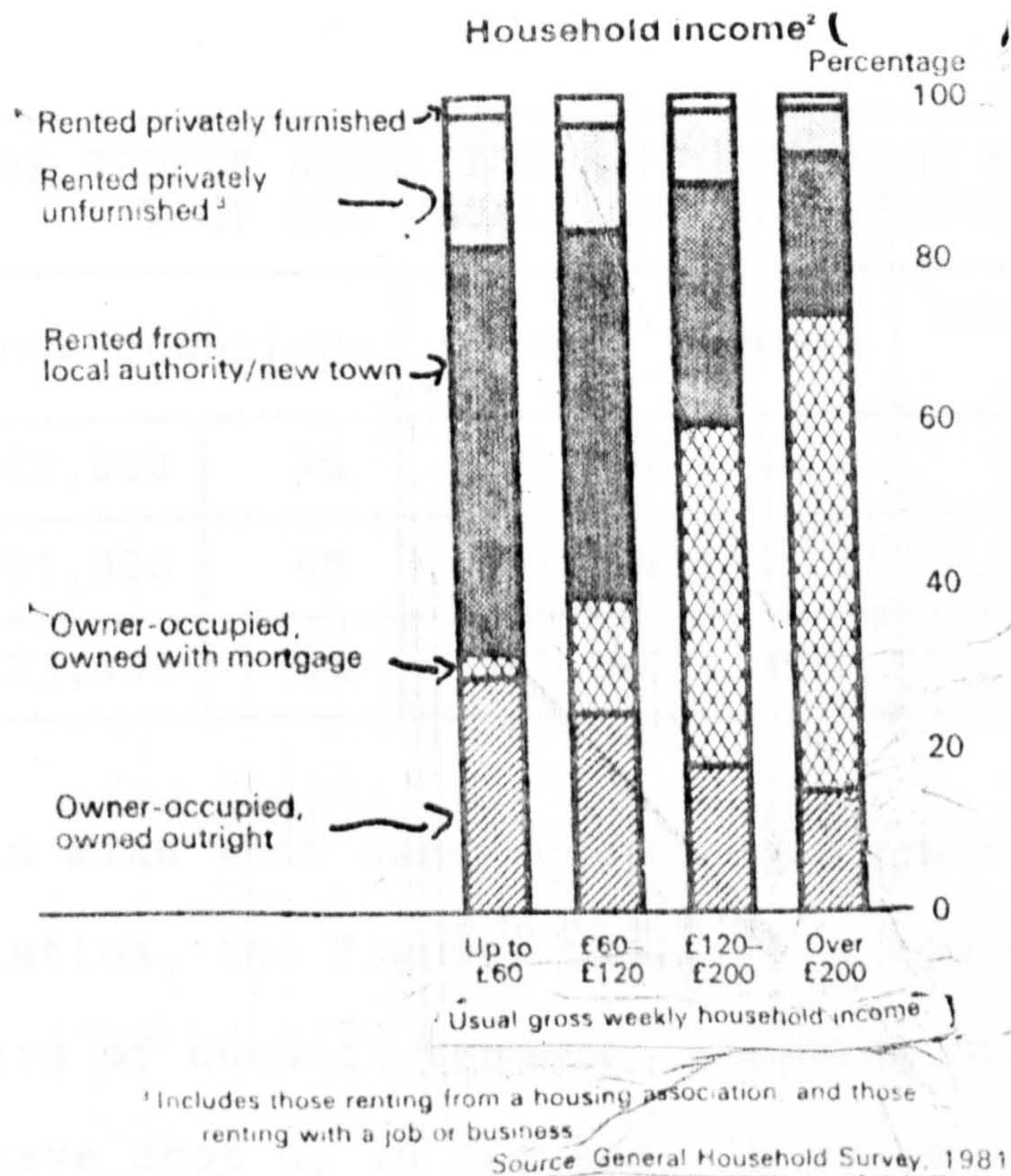
More up-to-date figures in the 1982 Family Expenditure Survey¹³ show that normal weekly disposable income per household was £102.13 among local authority tenants and £176.90 among owner-occupiers. Among households in the process of purchase, it was £201.62.

Nearly half of local authority tenants in jobs earn less than the national average whereas only a quarter of working owner-occupiers earn less than average.¹⁴

The General Household Survey of 1981 illustrates further the income differences between owner-occupiers and council tenants. The following graph shows clearly the

preponderance of lower incomes among tenants, and higher incomes among owners, though a large number of retired owner-occupiers are on relatively low incomes.

31.



The General Household Survey showed that in 1982, the income of all owner-occupiers was £171 per week, and of council tenants was £94 per week.

WELFARE RECIPIENTS

The number of households who received supplementary benefit, probably the most absolute measure of poverty,¹⁵ has been found to be much greater in the council sector than among owner-occupiers. The proportion is increasing, especially among women with dependent children and among

the unemployed. While local authority tenants comprised roughly one third of all households in 1982, the council sector housed nearly two-thirds of all Supplementary Benefit recipients.

32. NUMBERS OF PEOPLE RECEIVING SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT AND AS % OF ALL PEOPLE IN THAT TENURE

	Owner-occupiers		Private tenants		Local Authority Tenants	
1967 ¹⁶	362,000	4%	814,000	25%	978,000	20%
1975 ¹⁶	391,000	4%	573,000	20%	1,297,000	25%
1982 ¹⁷	623,000	6%	591,000	25%	1,980,000	40%

Bearing in mind that owner-occupiers form the majority of the population, the figures below show how dramatically the numbers of council tenants receiving Supplementary Benefit have shot up in the last 15 years. The large increase in dependent council tenants is explained almost entirely by the very steep rise in unemployment, although the ageing population also has some impact. They also show that numerically the private sector houses less dependent households now than it did 15 years ago. There are over three times more council tenants than there are owner-occupiers who are supplementary benefit recipients. Among women living alone with dependent children, two-thirds of those on supplementary benefit were council tenants in 1975. There were seven women with dependent children receiving supplementary benefit in council housing for every one in the owner-occupied sector. There were three and a half times the number of unemployed among

council tenants as among owners. It is obviously virtually impossible to become an owner when once a person is unemployed or on supplementary benefit. If owner-occupation continues to expand, then the drift into council housing of the poorest households will inevitably continue.

FAMILY BREAKDOWN

The contrast in family structure between owner-occupiers and council tenants bears out the evidence that family break-up places a disproportionate burden on council housing. In 1971, 37% of widowed, divorced or separated household heads owned their home, while 40% rented from a local authority. Conversely, 55% of married household heads owned their home while only 26% rented from a local authority.¹⁸ The 1977 Housing Policy Green Paper deduced that there was a steady drift, with the general increase in family break-up and divorce, of separated families into council housing, with the often accompanying poverty and other social implications. It is particularly true, as we have seen, where there is an unemployed woman head of household.

The General Household Survey of 1981 showed that nearly two-thirds of one-parent families had become local authority tenants, while only one-third of other families rented from a local authority. There are other indicators of the housing disadvantages of one-parent families, such

as the fact that while 90% of other families lived in a house as opposed to a flat, only 73% of one-parent families did. And while just over half of one-parent families had central heating, over two-thirds of other families did. These qualitative aspects of housing overlap with the issue of owner-occupation, as well as diverse conditions within the council sector.

EDUCATIONAL GAP

Another major measure of economic and social opportunities highlighted in the 1982 General Household Survey was educational attainment. Here the contrast was very stark between the two tenures. Over a quarter of owner-occupiers had passed G.C.E. Advanced level or higher exams, while only 5% of local authority tenants had. Conversely while 38% of owner-occupiers had no qualification, 74% of council tenants had none. Lack of qualifications overlaps with unskilled work, which in turn links strongly with unemployment. Unskilled workers are very heavily concentrated in council accommodation (over 61% of them live there). Economically inactive adults are also over-represented (44%)¹⁹ both in the council sector and among households with poor educational attainment.

RACIAL DISADVANTAGE

Racial disadvantage also has some impact on council housing.

For a long time it was the case that racial minorities were more likely to be owner-occupiers than the native population. This in turn led to many furnished tenancies being created in owner-occupied houses. In part it was a ghetto response to problems of access to council housing and other parts of the rented housing market.²⁰ As access opened up to minorities in the late sixties and as the shift to renovation through Housing Action areas forced landlords to improve their properties or sell to the council, an increasing number of furnished tenants became homeless and gained access to council accommodation. A very disproportionate number of these were from racial minorities.²¹ By 1981, 46% of households of Caribbean origin lived in council accommodation. The proportion among white households was 32%.²² Families of Asian origin were still very under-represented (only 14%),²³ partly because of their more recent arrival, partly because they tended to live in wider areas of the country where terraced private housing was still very cheap and plentiful, but where demolition and council rehabilitation programmes have slowed down dramatically. Nonetheless there is evidence that Asians are gaining increasing access, most commonly to the least popular estates.

COUNCIL HOUSING, THE CITIES AND FLATS

Council dwellings house disproportionately disadvantaged groups, while council housing is itself concentrated

in city areas where the greatest deprivation occurs.

Nationally, the local authority stock has grown by 46% in the last 20 years, but by 75% in the inner areas of cities.²⁴

50% of the total is in metropolitan areas, including London. The proportion of inner London's population living in council accommodation has risen from 31% in 1971 to 43% in 1981. This is against a backcloth of substantial population loss throughout inner London.

The concentration of flats in metropolitan and city areas is even more intense than the concentration of council dwellings as a whole. This, of course, is closely related to land shortages and high density building already illustrated in the history of council house building.

Since the war about 1½ million council flats have been built, mainly in city areas. About 75% of all dwellings built by the Greater London Council are flats; in Islington, 69% of the council stock is in flats and maisonettes; 62% of all council dwellings in Greater London are in flats. 34% of council dwellings in metropolitan areas are in flats and 25% in non-metropolitan areas. The heavy bias towards flat-building in the council sector is heavily concentrated in the major urban areas where most of the poorest households live.

Because flats have long been considered inferior to houses as family dwellings, households with less choice, greater need, lower priority and less skill in handling the system

have ended up disproportionately concentrated in flats. The G.L.C. lettings survey²⁵ found that all disadvantaged groups (homeless, unemployed, unskilled, one-parent, coloured) were two to three times as likely to end up on older flatted estates. For example, 45% of non-white applicants, compared with only 15% of white applicants, were rehoused in older, unpopular flats.

In Europe, flats have not suffered the same stigma as in Britain, partly because a house is not a real alternative in many European cities, and partly because caretaking, cleaning and guarding of communal entrances and courtyards have helped maintain a level of supervision and control that has made them acceptable.

FLATS AND CRIME AND VANDALISM

Without a doubt, flats have proved harder to manage than houses. Oscar Newman,²⁶ in his celebrated examination of crime in New York public housing blocks, demonstrated a clear and strong correlation between increases in crime and the reduced opportunity for the exercise of social control through the design and layout of buildings.

Street properties were the least crime-prone. High-rise enclosed flats in large blocks with internal corridor access and unguarded, unobserved entrances were the worst because social controls were weakest. Anti-social behaviour often went unchecked on a communal estate.

Alice Coleman applied Newman's concept of defensible space to council blocks in London.²⁷ She found that anti-social behaviour was magnified on flatted estates where minimal social controls operated because of the large number of communal spaces and other "design disadvantages" such as long corridors or interlinking blocks. The impact of anti-social behaviour is minimised in street properties. Anti-social families can most readily be absorbed in individual houses, preferably on noisy, busy roads with lots of opportunities for surveillance, or on cut-off back streets where the impact on others is reduced.

The Home Office-sponsored Community Development Project²⁸ maintained that a majority of unpopular council estates, by virtue of their often highly public and communal layout, so accentuated and made public the annoying behaviour of neighbours that social problems, barely noticed in the old back-street slums, were accentuated and exacerbated. This very fact has weakened the normal social controls, which were in any case hard to exercise in a new environment with an uprooted community. All these problems are incomparably greater on large flatted estates.

The concentration of undesirable flats in big cities encourages many more economically viable households to drift away.

CITY DEPRIVATION

On a combination of measures of deprivation, the 1981 Census revealed London, Manchester and Merseyside as the most deprived areas, with 28 metropolitan authorities having serious problems of deprivation.²⁹

The incidence of homelessness was heavily concentrated in the biggest cities with the highest incidence of deprivation.

The 23 authorities having more than 1,000 households claiming homelessness in a year comprised 13 in London and 10 metropolitan authorities.³⁰ Again London's problems were more intense than anywhere else in the country.

The density at which people live in large cities is another factor in social stress, pressure on services and a general sense of environmental strain. There are very large variations within different city areas, with London suffering far greater pressure than anywhere else in the country. The following selection shows the wide variation even between different major cities. Stark contrasts between city areas and the countryside on housing densities are obvious.

33.

DENSITY ³¹	
Urban Area	Nos. of people per hectare
Islington, Inner London	108
Liverpool	45
Manchester	39
Sheffield	15
Doncaster	5
National - England & Wales	3.3

CONCLUSION

It is hard to imagine the cumulative impact on the most unpopular council estates of such diverse elements as location in dense inner city neighbourhoods or on the edge of industrial belts, poverty and other disadvantages of race, family make-up and education; the size of the estate, often a thousand or

more dwellings, and the size of the landlord, often controlling tens of thousands of homes; the design of the estate, at best communal and public, at worst dangerous, dirty and unguarded.³²

The council sector itself is shrinking in absolute numbers but is expected to remain at over 4 million homes for a long way into the future and comprises 25%³³ of the stock, a very sizeable chunk of the housing market. Therefore its increasing undesirability and poverty pose bigger problems than ever before, coupled as they are with the demoralisation that these trends are causing both among occupants and housing staff within local authorities.

There is no way of knowing whether council policies have directly created the social stigma that accompanies the least popular estates, housing the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people, or whether the fact that some estates have proved intrinsically unpopular has led to policies which accommodate the social reality of a hierarchy of applicants. We do know that some otherwise attractive and well-situated estates have been stigmatised exclusively by their occupants, and that adjacent and similar estates or blocks sometimes differ dramatically from each other in standards and general popularity, seemingly because of their social make-up.

There is no overriding determinism, and so many elements come into play that we will never be able fully to answer why or how the present situation emerged. However, the estates, which were conceived of as the solution to established slums, have too often themselves inherited the same title.

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CHAPTER VII - ANALYSING DIFFICULT-TO-LET ESTATES

- THE GOVERNMENT'S FIGURES

In the first six chapters we have looked in some detail at how, from the late nineteenth century, the building of the council stock, both in scale and style, generated problems that led to the growing unpopularity of many council estates.

We have also examined how council dwellings were allocated over the years and showed the development of systems of both allocation and transfer which were destined to cause serious concentrations of poor and socially disadvantaged households in the least popular estates.

We have described the management and maintenance systems within local authorities which have had a particularly harsh effect on the poorest, high-density estates of unsympathetic physical design, where only a very intensive and integrated form of local management could be expected to work.

Finally, we saw that the growing division between owner-occupation and council tenure in terms of economic and social disadvantage enhanced the trend towards the development of unpopular council estates, particularly in

the large city authorities with multiple social and economic problems.

The problems of design, scale, discriminatory allocations and transfers, inefficient and insensitive management, combined with the overall heavy concentration of the less skilled and less economically self-sufficient within the council sector, have led to the emergence of difficult-to-let council estates at the least attractive end of the council stock.

Newspapers, both local and national, frequently report the horrors of living on particularly infamous estates, helping to extend the blight and stigma, deterring would-be residents and generating fear among existing residents. However, accurate information on the actual estates on a national basis, their number and their condition, is almost non-existent. Only the Department of the Environment's Investigation of Difficult-to-let Housing, published in 1979,¹ and the reports of the Priority Estates Project in 1981, 1982², and 1984³, have produced published accounts which attempt to analyse the situation of difficult-to-let council housing in any detail. However, there are two valuable sources of information gleaned from every housing department in the country that trace the broad outlines of the problem of difficult-to-let estates for the first time.

In 1974, the Department of the Environment conducted a postal survey of all local authorities in the country, asking

for information on up to three post-war estates that were considered unpopular and difficult to let. This information is analysed in detail here for the first time, although the 1974 survey led directly to the 1976 investigation of difficult-to-let estates whose findings were published in 1981. Secondly, since 1978, the Department of the Environment has asked all local authorities in their annual Housing Investment Programme submissions to state the number of their difficult-to-let properties. This information does not give any indication of size of estate, type of dwelling or building style, date of construction, or any other details. However, despite being based on officers' judgements not uninfluenced by political considerations, it is the clearest indication that exists of the concentration and extent of the problem in particular local authorities. The information has not previously been examined.

The Government's investigation of difficult-to-let estates conducted in 1976, but only published in 1981,⁴ is ~~briefly summarised~~ briefly summarised since it is much more selective and focusses heavily on 30 estates and their detailed problems.

This chapter examines the evidence from the 1974 postal survey⁵ and the Housing Investment Programme submissions from all local authorities for 1978, 1981 and 1983.

THE FIRST NATIONAL SURVEY OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET ESTATES

The recognition that there were difficult-to-let council dwellings emerged in the early 1970's after reports that councils were having to advertise tower blocks in local newspapers in order to find willing takers. This state of affairs was partly caused by the Ronan Point disaster, where part of a tower block in East London collapsed following a gas explosion. The collapse highlighted a growing consciousness that many of the new council estates were felt to be an eye-sore and difficult to let, and in some cases were actually unacceptable to live in at all.

The fact that council dwellings had to be advertised was such a shock to officials, who for decades had advocated large-scale building to cope with the seemingly insatiable demand for council housing, that the Department of the Environment decided in 1974 to conduct a national postal survey to establish the scale of the problem.

The definition of a difficult-to-let estate used in the survey was as follows:

"Not only those schemes with a high vacancy, but also those which, while fully occupied, had other indications of unpopularity, such as a high rate of requests to transfer out of the property or a concentration of problem families."⁶

All local authorities in England and Wales were asked to name up to three difficult-to-let post-war estates within their area. The restriction to three estates per authority

was to limit the "amount of work"⁷ in processing the survey, in order to produce an initial over-view only. This biased the results of the survey substantially away from the authorities with major problems. In that sense the survey is extremely limited. Nonetheless, it gave clues that were to be borne out by later evidence.

87% of local authorities replied, but only 79% of metropolitan authorities, compared with 89% of non-metropolitan authorities. Therefore, the results even further under-represented the problem in cities where the larger proportion of difficult-to-let dwellings were expected to be found.

Altogether the nearly 62,000 difficult-to-let properties, described in the survey returns, comprised 307 estates or groups of similarly designed dwellings. The large number of estates represented makes the 1974 survey by far the most comprehensive picture of the problem to date, although many questions were not asked and the scale of the problem could not yet be gauged with complete accuracy because of the serious undercounting.*

*It is somewhat puzzling that the average number of dwellings per estate was only 201 in the examples reported in the survey, much smaller than in the estates in the later difficult-to-let investigation or in the Priority Estates Project reports. The survey broke up estates into smaller examples where groups of dwellings had been built to a different design or at a different period. This to some extent accounts for the size being smaller than expected. Another possible explanation is that local authorities only reported on particular problem blocks or areas within bigger estates. It is quite common to have intense concentrations of problems in the least favoured or most communal or dense part of the estate, often the middle area, or the part of the estate that was occupied last (see later report on Ashfield Valley, and previous chapter).

UNDERCOUNT

The results were assumed by the Department of the Environment to underestimate the problem because of the restriction to three estates and exclusively to post-war dwellings, and because of the lack of information on one fifth of the big city authorities who did not reply to the survey.

One of the most serious limitations on the information collected in the postal survey was that at the time of the survey report -

"No reliable overall picture exists[ed] of the form in which the post-war housing stock has been built."⁸

Therefore comparisons between the difficult-to-let stock and the total stock were often impossible. Even now we still do not know the average size of estates, one of the key factors in unpopularity. Nor do we know the full extent of industrially-built units. Nor do we know the precise division between flats, maisonettes and houses, nor their exact geographical spread. However, through the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (C.I.P.F.A.) and H.I.P. returns, we do now have a general picture of some aspects of the stock, and we do know the total size of the stock.

At the time of the 1974 survey, it was not known how many properties some 40% of local authorities actually owned.

It is ironical but hardly surprising that, at the time when the Government finally became alarmed at some of the housing problems it was itself generating by building council housing "half blind", it also discovered that the overall size and nature of the public stock was not even known. With such a large and unexpected gap in information, it was impossible to estimate the proportion of the stock of houses, flats or maisonettes that were unpopular in 40% of local authorities. Nonetheless, the information available on the difficult-to-let dwellings themselves, their location, design and age, was very revealing. The survey gave much new information on difficult-to-let dwellings (although the survey provided no way of relating problem dwellings to the council stock in general).

DIFFICULT-TO-LET ESTATES CONCENTRATED IN CITIES

The difficult-to-let estates were found in the survey to be heavily concentrated in the metropolitan authorities and the true concentration was likely to be even more intense. Of the local authorities that replied, 38% had at least one unpopular estate and 12% had at least three. Over half the total of 62,000 properties were in metropolitan areas, even though metropolitan areas had only approximately 25% of the total stock. Based on the survey returns, 40% of the metropolitan districts for which there was information had at least three difficult-to-let estates,

and 32% claimed to have one. It was considered likely that a large number of the metropolitan authorities returning the maximum of three examples had other difficult-to-let estates.

The regions of the country with the highest proportion of difficult-to-let estates were London and the North-West (the lowest was the South-West). This finding could have been predicted because the North-West had experienced serious population loss, a high rate of slum clearance, a high rate of council building and a high concentration of flats (see below). It is also the area of the country where a crude housing surplus is most in evidence. The inner London area has had by far the highest-density developments and the largest proportion of flats in the country. It has also suffered serious population decline and has much the highest concentration of council-owned property in England and Wales.

THE MOST RECENT ESTATES WERE MOST UNPOPULAR

Possibly the most significant and unexpected finding of the 1974 postal survey was that 58% of the difficult-to-let stock was built in the most recent decade immediately preceding the survey, 1965-1974. This contrasted sharply with the fact that only 36% of post-war construction took place in that decade.⁹ Obviously the most recent dwellings were posing the most serious problems.

In the two earlier post-war decades of 1945-64, 64% of construction took place, but only 42% of difficult-to-let dwellings dated from that period. The finding is puzzling on the face of it because the post-war shortage of building materials often led to lower standards such as metal frame windows, lack of lifts and so on in the earlier building period. Space standards were also reduced under the Conservatives during the 1950's and early 1960's, and high densities were encouraged because of the overall shortage of housing. In spite of these factors and the greater age and therefore dilapidation of the stock, it apparently posed fewer problems than the newer estates. There were several possible explanations for the more recent and more severe problems: one was the increase in the proportion of flats being built and the other was the spread of industrialised building methods,¹⁰ both of which, as we shall see from the later Difficult-to-Let Investigation,¹¹ enhanced the unpopularity of many new estates. It was also found that modern (post-1964), industrially-built, flatted estates were on the whole larger and therefore more difficult to let and manage. In the postal survey, the most modern blocks of flats and maisonettes were two and a half times bigger than the earlier walk-up blocks. Later studies have borne out this early association between size and unpopularity. The sheer size of many developments in the more recent period often led to a sudden rush of lettings, often 1,000 or more, over a very short period. This inevitably taxed the highly centralised and rigidly administered lettings systems and took a great and sudden

bite into the often outdated queues of applicants. As soon as flats began to stand empty because of these difficulties, other problems began to emerge - vandalism, a "bad name", "low grade" lettings and so on.

An added reason for the greater problems of the more recent estates was the decline in demand for council housing dating from the mid-sixties due to the reduction in slum clearance, just at a time when supply was reaching its peak. In addition, lettings systems, rigidly geared almost entirely to slum clearance rehousing, failed to adapt quickly either to the changing demand or to the need for a more flexible approach posed by the large new estates.

Each successive decade since the war produced greater numbers of difficult-to-let dwellings and smaller, overall numbers of homes. It is possible to deduce that the increased size, predominance of flats and industrialised building style and decline in housing demand all made the more recent estates the most unpopular.

On the question of the age of the difficult-to-let property, there is a difference between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts. The non-metropolitan districts found that almost two-thirds of their difficult-to-let property had been built in the previous decade, while in the metropolitan authorities there was a lower proportion, just over 50%. In other words, the disproportionate concentration of more recent estates was greater for the less

urban areas. The latter finding was possibly explained by the scale of slum clearance in the urban areas in the fifties which produced many dense, flatted estates by the early sixties. Non-metropolitan districts were less involved in slum clearance, but were urged by the enthusiastic Labour Governments of the sixties to build new-style prestigious council housing. Councils were often reluctant to do this because of uncertain demand. Therefore it is possible that the non-metropolitan districts ended up with difficult-to-let estates in the late sixties and early seventies through Government determination to persuade them to build, while metropolitan districts created difficult-to-let estates out of seeming necessity. The Penrhys estate in the Rhondda Valley and the Killingworth Towers estate in North Tyneside are two examples of industrially-built estates with large numbers of flats constructed since 1964 in non-metropolitan districts with low housing demand, on a scale and in a design that was guaranteed to make them unpopular. In the rapidly depopulating Rhondda, direct Government intervention was the reason for the 1,000-dwelling, "no fines", concrete estate being built. Overall the bulk of difficult-to-let dwellings belongs to the most recent decade.

34.

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1974*	
Date of construction	No. of dwellings
1945-1954	9,600
1955-1964	16,500
1965-1974	35,500
Total	61,600

*1974 Department of the Environment Survey

UNPOPULAR STYLES

In the survey local authorities specified whether the unpopular estate comprised houses, walk-up flats and maisonettes or lift-access flats and maisonettes. On the question of unpopular design, in the whole of England and Wales the houses posed the smallest numerical problem, closely followed by lift-access blocks and then walk-up flats. Again we have no accurate way of testing to what extent this was a reflection of their proportion in the total stock, due to the incomplete overall information. Houses were in any case under-represented since we know that they comprised about two-thirds of the total public stock, but only about one fifth of unpopular dwellings.*

The most interesting fact about the non-metropolitan authorities was that houses formed the single largest category of difficult-to-let dwellings in non-metropolitan

*There were strong regional variations between the numbers of difficult-to-let dwellings in the three main categories of styles: houses, walk-up blocks and lift-access blocks. In the North-West and London metropolitan districts, lift-access blocks were at least twice as often cited as problems compared with walk-up flats; in Yorkshire it was evenly balanced; and in the North and Midlands and South-East, the numbers were reversed, with walk-up blocks occurring twice as frequently as lift-access flats. In all the non-metropolitan districts, the walk-up blocks were a bigger problem than the lift-access blocks. These regional differences could most likely be explained by the overall numbers of that type of dwelling in that particular region. But because of the 40% gap in the available information on the housing stock, the attempts to identify the reasons for the regional variations in the unpopularity of different styles are somewhat meaningless.

districts. This not only reflected the predominance of houses over flats in these districts, but also revealed that industrialised building methods, unpopular architectural styles and large-scale developments of houses proved as unacceptable in areas where houses were the norm as industrially-built, weirdly-designed, large-scale, flatted estates in the cities.

35.

NO. OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS IN METROPOLITAN AND NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS BY BUILDING TYPE (NEW TOWNS WERE EXCLUDED FROM THIS TABLE)			
	Metropolitan Authorities	Non-Metropolitan Authorities	Total
Walk-up	13,689	9,132	22,821
Lift-access	15,226	3,445	18,671
Houses	3,788	9,697	13,485
Other	102	3,316	3,418
TOTAL	32,805	25,590	58,395

The different types of difficult-to-let dwellings tended to belong to distinct building periods. 79% of walk-up flats belonged to the pre-1964 period, and almost all (85%) lift-access blocks to the post-1964 period. Houses were more likely to belong to the fifties in the metropolitan areas (62%), but in non-metropolitan areas even very modern houses (1970-74) were proving unpopular in thousands. These tended to be industrially built, poorly insulated, expensively heated houses, often designed against traditional commonsense without eaves or window-sills, and with flat roofs, mono-pitch roofs or other

variations that lost their tiles, leaked or had faultily constructed rainwater gulleys. St. Helen's, Merseyside, boasts one estate of houses built in the last decade with almost all those characteristics and with most houses unable to keep out the rain.

It is possible to show from the information collected by the Department of the Environment in 1974 that as each new building style peaked in fashion and was encouraged by subsidies and government circulars, so too did they peak in unpopularity. As each new architectural and design idea was tried in the public sector, so it moved into disrepute as it posed difficulties in letting, management and maintenance.

The most unpopular period of all was 1965 to 1969, which was the peak period for tower block construction, industrialised building and flat-building. As a result of the prevailing stress on industrialised building, the largest number of difficult-to-let houses were also built in this period, using concrete, non-traditional and system building methods.

TOWER BLOCKS

Unexpectedly, tower blocks as such were relatively insignificant among the unpopular styles. Only 4,170 out of a total of nearly 62,000 dwellings were in tower blocks,

only one in 12 of the unpopular dwellings in metropolitan districts, and only one in 23 of the dwellings in non-metropolitan districts. Tower blocks have generally performed above expectation, in spite of their highly stigmatised image.¹² Part of the reason might be that their poor reputation and massive media coverage has led to more drastic remedial measures being more thoroughly applied, such as special lettings policies, entry phones, resident caretakers, and door porters. The other reason might be that tower blocks have little internal communal space apart from lifts and are therefore easier to manage than balcony or deck blocks.

The predominance of smaller dwellings in high-rise blocks was another dominant reason why tower blocks nationally were easier to let and manage in spite of their greater apparent unpopularity. There was high demand for the size of unit they commonly provided and, more importantly, they housed relatively fewer children because of their bedroom size. A high child density was a major cause of unpopularity, according to the difficult-to-let investigation, and it has also been closely linked with high levels of vandalism.¹³ Tower blocks with fewer bedrooms and therefore a lower ratio of children suffered less vandalism. Wherever tower blocks did house large numbers of children, however, the results were disastrous.

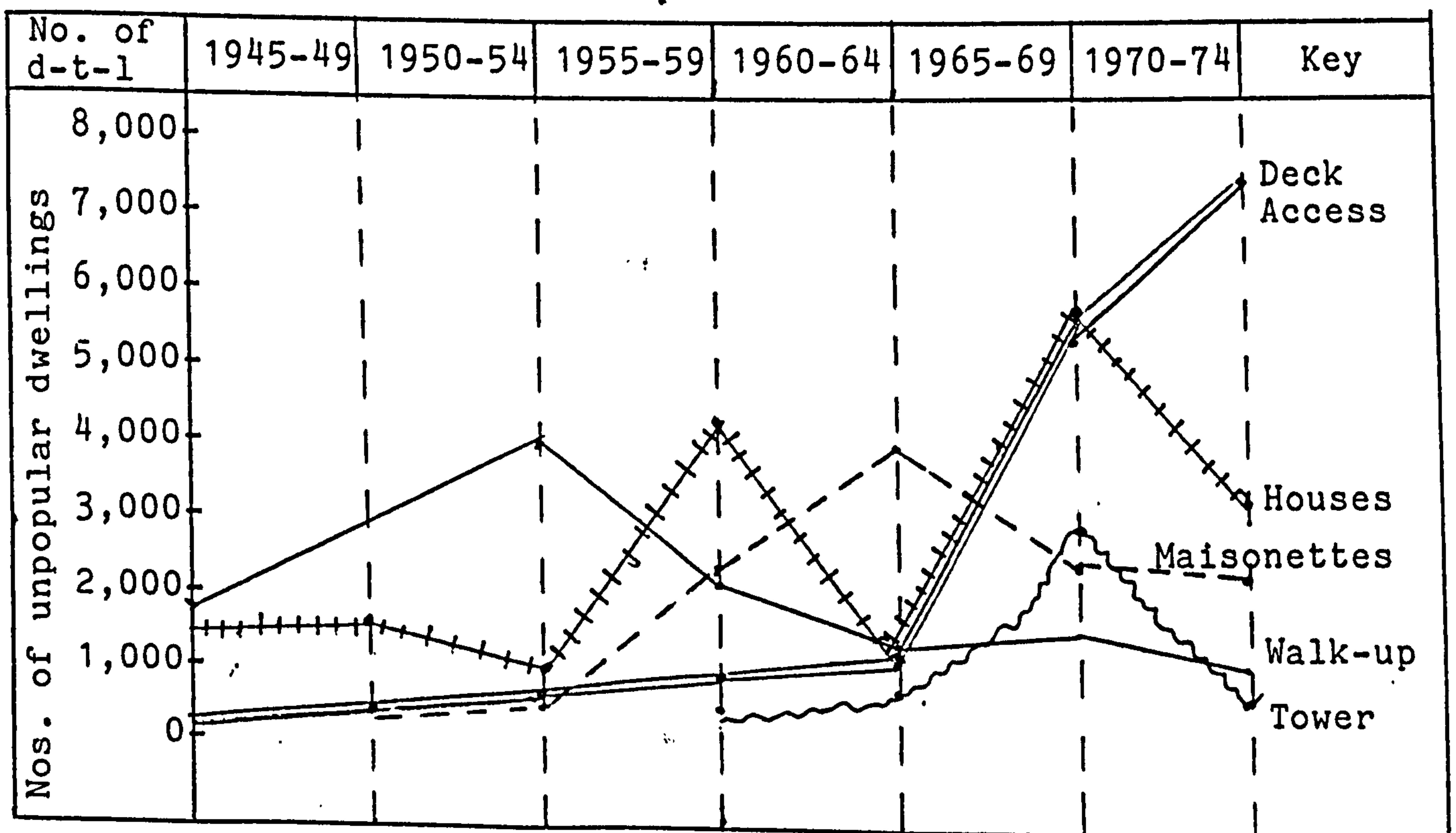
Although in numerical terms tower blocks formed only a small proportion of all council dwellings built (about 4%) and

about 14% of dwellings considered unpopular, nonetheless they were the symbols of a whole new departure in style and scale that took domestic building into realms of fantasy that the general public (and the Royal Family) have baulked against to this day.

36. TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS BY DATE OF CONSTRUCTION AND STYLE OF CONSTRUCTION

	1945-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74	Key
Walk-up	1,891	3,949	2,001	1,245	1,452	1,049	——
Maisonette	-	184	2,104	3,820	2,323	2,259	-----
Tower	-	-	128	391	2,995	656	~~~~~
Deck	387	411	637	874	5,217	7,181	=====
Houses	1,604	874	4,068	1,013	5,413	3,014	———
Total	3,882	5,418	8,938	7,343	17,400	14,159	

Source: Department of the Environment Survey 1974.



It can be seen from the diagram that houses peaked twice in unpopularity. All other building styles except houses peaked once before being shown to fail. Houses were in continuing demand and generally popular but were foisted with new-fangled designs or materials in the '50's and '60's. The non-metropolitan authorities were the main house-builders, but started late and ended late with the new styles and building methods.

DENSITY

The postal survey collected information on the density of difficult-to-let estates and predictably the largest number of problem dwellings was found at the highest density. However, the number of unpopular dwellings at high, medium and low density, was more evenly distributed than would have been expected. One possible explanation of the spread of dwellings across the range of densities could be that many of the flatted estates that appear to have a high density have very large areas of communal open space around the blocks. In fact, a latter-day justification for building flats rather than houses was that for a comparable density you could produce much more communal green space. Le Corbusier himself used this argument.¹⁴ We do know, however, that compared with the ideal densities proposed by Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement at the turn of the century in response to inner city pressures, the density of nearly half of the difficult-to-let estates was too high.

37. TOTAL OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS AT DIFFERENT DENSITIES

	Low 1-59 bed spaces per acre	Medium 60-119 bed spaces per acre	High 120+ bed spaces per acre
Nos. of difficult-to-let	14,206	16,333	17,355

For a large number, nearly 14,000, the density was not known, which typifies the ignorance about council house-building in general.

3-BEDROOMS MOST DIFFICULT TO LET

Another interesting question in the survey was the number of bedrooms. The most problematic size numerically was a 3-bedroom dwelling, yet since the turn of the century this was considered the standard family requirement.¹⁵ In the private sector, three bedrooms are still the norm, although smaller dwellings are becoming more common. The only possible explanation for the concentration of 3-bedroom dwellings in the difficult-to-let category is the allocation procedures followed so rigidly 10 years ago when the survey was conducted. A family with two children was normally only allowed a 3-bedroom dwelling if the children were of the opposite sex and aged over 10. Otherwise they were only eligible for a 2-bedroom dwelling. "Preventive" allocations to bigger units were very rare because of the still prevailing view that vast queues of eager and needy applicants existed for all council dwellings. Underletting

was frowned on as a waste of valuable housing space. Yet those with experience of allocations know how much easier it was throughout the '70's to achieve rehousing for a household eligible for a 3-bedroom category than for a 2-bedroom category. Need operated as the determinant for rehousing but only within each bedroom category. The situation became so absurd in Islington that in 1975 you needed double the points to get a two-bedroom house than a three-bedroom. Of course, demand for smaller units had escalated dramatically, partly through the larger proportion of elderly, the increase in newly-formed families seeking first homes, and partly as young, single people left home prior to getting married. Cullingworth showed in 1969¹⁶ that over half the applicants for council housing wanted one-bedroom units, while the supply was something like 57% of all dwellings had 3+ bedrooms and only 12% had one-bedroom. In unpopular, high-rise blocks in the survey, only 400 units had three bedrooms and 3,600 had one or two bedrooms, underlining a major reason why they had let more easily. The largest number of unpopular 3-bedroom units was in houses.

Allocation restrictions were a major cause of the problem in letting unpopular 3-bedroom units. It has been found in several places that 3-bedroom houses that were hard to let were easy to sell on the open market, indicating that where no bedroom restrictions existed, there was take-up for the 3-bedroom houses. Sales of 3-bedroom council houses were successful in Skelmersdale, Knowsley and Newcastle. The

vast majority of houses on any estate would have been built with three bedrooms since this has been the recommended norm for a house since before the First World War.¹⁷ Therefore an estate of unpopular houses would almost certainly have mainly 3-bedroom dwellings. The impact of low income on allocation procedures is nowhere more visible than in the problem of letting 3-bedroom houses. Better-off, smaller households are often willing to buy a 3-bedroom house. But low-income tenants, who need a 2-bedroom dwelling, are often reluctant to accept three bedrooms because of the extra cost of heating or furnishing. Even where councils have tried to liberalise their lettings procedures and "underlet", they have had difficulty in persuading tenants to under-occupy. It is ironical that many old terraced properties were demolished because they were too small to convert to "decent-sized" modern units. Flats were often justified because they afforded more bedrooms on the same land. Yet now, with shrinking household size and growing concentrations of poverty in council housing, the extra space is often a liability.

In spite of unexpectedly serious problems with 3-bedroom houses, flats overall were still the dominant problem, comprising nearly three-quarters of all unpopular dwellings, and a majority of those (nearly two-thirds) had only one or two bedrooms.

38. DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS BY BUILDING TYPES AND BEDROOM SIZE

	1- and 2-bedroom	3-bedroom	Total
Tower	3,727	443	4,170
Lift/deck	9,623	5,074	14,697
Walk-up	14,012	9,487	23,499
Houses	3,743	12,243	15,986
Other	-	-	3,418
TOTAL			61,770

CAUSES OF UNPOPULARITY

The postal survey asked local authorities to list the reasons which their housing managers considered "very important" in causing the unpopularity of estates.

Unfortunately, the replies to this vital part of the survey were not broken down between metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts, but only by region. Nonetheless the reasons given were very revealing. The most frequently cited reason nationally for unpopularity was design, followed closely by vandalism with which it was associated. The third major cause was social stigma. Social stigma was often generated by the operation of the lettings system, which in turn was often connected with design, vandalism and wider social problems. Design, vandalism and social stigma were so far ahead of all other reasons as to be considered the major causes of unpopularity. In fact many of the subsidiary reasons, such as external appearance and

unsuitable environment, the next most common causes, were strongly linked to the three central reasons.

The reason given least frequently for unpopularity was the internal appearance of the dwelling. This would be partly because so many of the dwellings were fairly modern with good amenities. It would also bear out the general impression that applicants and residents care more about the overall "feel" of an estate and its social and physical aspect than the particular amenities of a home. It certainly proves that a "modern and satisfactory" home does not necessarily satisfy the needs of the occupier, and is in line with Octavia Hill's view that amenities matter less than good management and maintenance and a cared-for environment. High-rise blocks as a major factor in unpopularity ranked fairly low. So did the inconvenience or general lack of facilities of an estate, although there were estates where this was considered the overriding problem.

39.	REASONS HELD BY HOUSING MANAGERS TO BE VERY IMPORTANT IN UNPOPULARITY	
	Reasons	No. of times cited
	Design of dwellings	109
	Vandalism	104
	Social stigma attaching to estate	94
	External appearance	68
	Unsuitable environment	66
	High-rise dwellings*	49
	Lack of local facilities	35
	Too far from the main centre	32
	Inadequacy of public transport	26
	Internal appearance	21

*The definition of high-rise, according to CIPFA, is 5 storeys or more.

When the reasons for unpopularity are scrutinised according to period of construction, then previous trends are confirmed. The period 1965-1969, when the greatest number of unpopular dwellings were constructed, is also the period most strongly connected with the three dominant reasons for unpopularity - design, vandalism and stigma. The period with the next greatest number of problems was from 1970 onwards, again confirming the pattern of more recent estates posing most problems. The immediate post-war decade had fewer problems.

40. TABLE SHOWING THE BREAKDOWN BY PERIOD FOR REASONS FOR UNPOPULARITY

	1945-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74
Total no. of times all reasons for unpopularity were cited by period	78	48	89	84	192	113

41. TABLE SHOWING MAIN REASONS FOR AN ESTATE'S UNPOPULARITY BY PERIOD OF CONSTRUCTION

3 MAIN REASONS FOR UNPOPULARITY	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION					
	1945-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74
Design	14	7	14	16	36	22
Vandalism	12	5	20	15	34	18
Stigma attached to property	12	7	17	14	27	17
TOTAL	38	19	51	45	97	57

The main reasons for unpopularity were clustered in the construction period of 1965 to 1974 rather than in the previous decades.

One noticeable omission from the list of reasons for unpopularity was any reference by housing managers to housing management and maintenance as such. In the later investigation, poor housing management was recognised as a major cause of unpopularity. But in 1974, neither the Department of the Environment, nor the local authorities that replied, so much as hinted at it. Housing management had not yet been recognised as the vital ingredient in the landlord function, without which any estate would be difficult to run.

THE GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION OF DIFFICULT TO LET HOUSING

The Government was sufficiently concerned by the findings of the 1974 postal survey to undertake a more detailed investigation, conducted in 1976 in 30 local authorities claiming to have difficult-to-let estates.¹⁸ In the estates examined, the problems often seemed overwhelming and in every case the level of distress was a shock to the investigators. Several of the estates have since been demolished or sold.

According to the Government investigators, the most significant problems causing the decline of the 30 estates in the eyes of the local authority employees and residents were in order of times mentioned:

- Social factors, including concentrations of families with problems, high child density and divided community or lack of community spirit.
- Management and maintenance problems, including vandalism, insufficient management, repairs or caretaking, and physical neglect due to insufficient maintenance funds.
- Estate surroundings, including lack of play facilities, impersonal public spaces, and lack of community facilities.
- Dwellings shortcomings, primarily condensation or water penetration, and outdated fittings.

- The final point was the vast size; physical separateness; and labelling of the estates.

The Difficult-to-Let Investigation concluded that to cope with the major repairs problems of the estates,

"Maintenance should be a personal and responsive service."

Housing management was recognised as the missing link:

"The frequent failure to recognise the full extent of the role [of housing management] has probably played a large part in precipitating or accelerating the downward spiral in status and acceptability of many estates."

A direct result of the combination of communal design and inadequate management was the decayed and dirty environment of most survey estates -

"At first glance what most of the case study estates needed was a thorough clean-up, not as a once and for all exercise, but as a prelude to continuous care and attention."

It is hard to imagine an official investigation of any other public service that would be forced either to specify "dirt" as a key finding, or to recommend continuous cleaning as a critical solution. Florence Nightingale's criticism of conditions in the Crimean hospitals was possibly the last comparable indictment of a Government-sponsored and funded service.

Design was a primary issue -

"[The] preoccupation with slum clearance and fast production of alternative housing led to unsuitable designs for families and well-publicised defects of some industrialised building systems."

Sixteen of the original 23 post-war estates in the survey were industrially built with -

"massive concrete facades of overwhelming severity."

All the estates bar three were dense blocks of flats. The intense communality -

"made heavy demands on people's ability to live amicably at close quarters with neighbours."

The Investigation found that many estates suffered from damp and water penetration, lift failure, and defective heating systems.

It was finally admitted by the Government in the face of overwhelming problems on the worst estates, that the administration, political structure and policies governing local authority housing caused general problems in the public stock that backed up into the worst estates, where the system finally failed altogether to hold things together within the bounds of the law.

The report concluded that demolition, perhaps the most obvious solution to the most undesirable dwellings, should not be considered before other options had been tried, although the investigators were so depressed by some of the more modernistic estates as to consider that they had only a limited life -

"The long-term future.....seems bleak."¹⁹

The Difficult-to-Let Investigation was the first published report by the Government concerning the specific problem of socially and physically undesirable estates. Its evidence was damning, cautiously worded as it was, and it highlighted beyond doubt both the magnitude of the design failure of modern estates and the total inadequacy of housing management and maintenance organisations. Most importantly, it stressed the social disarray and ghetto-like communities that were generated through a lettings system that pushed the most desperate households to the worst estates, and it exposed officially for the first time a crude over-supply of council dwellings in some areas of the country. The Difficult-to-Let Investigation forged a partnership between a worried central Government and desperate local authority housing departments that led directly to the birth of the Priority Estates Project and the advent of local management on many unpopular council estates.

THE HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME SUBMISSIONS ON DIFFICULT-TO-LET ESTATES

Chapter VI outlined how the council sector as a whole had increasingly housed poorer and more needy households, leading to heavy concentrations of deprivation on the least popular estates.

The original Government survey and the Difficult To Let Investigation were very early feelers into the problem of difficult-to-let estates. We now have much more detailed information on the scale and concentration of the problem, based on the Housing Investment Programme Submissions for 1978, 1981 and 1983,* the most up-to-date evidence there is on the extent of difficult-to-let estates.

At the time of the original Difficult-to-Let Survey in 1974, there had been no attempt to formulate an overall picture of the housing stock and its problems. But since 1978 the Government has asked local authorities in their annual Housing Investment Programme submissions to the Department of the Environment to specify how many difficult-to-let dwellings they have, as well as their total stock, the number of empty dwellings, and the condition of the stock.

The major qualification to the present figures is the looseness of the official definition of difficult-to-let dwellings and the lack of a detailed breakdown of the age, style and size of the estates. Difficult-to-let dwellings are defined as -

"Those properties which are frequently rejected or are accepted very reluctantly even by applicants in urgent housing need."

Some authorities used their own definition of difficult-to-let dwellings, varying widely from the Government's. A few examples used in 1978 will illustrate the range. Hackney included all "unimproved pre-war estates and, generally, high-rise dwellings

* All figures except where otherwise stated are for 1983.

above the 10th floor". Southwark used the G.L.C. definition to include all inter-war unmodernised flats and all dwellings above the fifth floor. Lewisham defined as difficult to let all estates offered to people who had been on the waiting list for less than three months. Wigan had by far the broadest definition. It included -

"pre-war unimproved council dwellings; maisonettes and flats above the first floor; 3-bedroom houses where there [were] too many such houses and a trend towards smaller families."

[Author's underlining]

Wigan obviously had a severe problem of demand. Lewisham, in pinpointing the issue of unpopularity, was probably the most accurate.

In all cases, the local authorities concerned were attempting to spell out objective criteria for designating a dwelling difficult to let. The use of "high-rise" and "pre-war", commonly adopted by the local authorities as their criteria for defining the problems, were far from being necessarily the clearest indicators. The Government and local authorities had already found that the later post-war blocks, more often low-rise, were the most unpopular.

The problem of definition and counting was accentuated by the difficulty some local authorities had in deciding what was actually difficult to let and what was the result of inefficient, inflexible lettings systems. Hence the G.L.C., the largest landlord in the country, in 1977 recorded 148,900 difficult-to-let dwellings, but by 1978 had reduced the figure drastically to 29,432. This was probably because of the radical change in lettings policy at County Hall, leading to widespread advertising and queuing on a first-come, first-served basis for flats that had remained vacant for more than a limited period or had been turned

down by more than a certain number of applicants. The result was that many previously unlettable flats became occupied. However, the basic characteristics of a difficult-to-let estate remained unchanged, a high-turnover of tenants, and general unpopularity with tenants who could afford to pick and choose, plus a high demand for transfers. In fact, ready-access lettings in some cases increased the transience of an estate because of the mobility of young, single people. Although advertising generated demand and reduced the number of empty dwellings, it was not usually enough to restore a difficult-to-let estate to popularity. Therefore the larger G.L.C. estimate may have been more accurate. The G.L.C. and many London boroughs preferred the term "hard to manage" because they maintained that with high housing demand in London, virtually nothing was hard to let if a landlord would take all-comers, but most of the estates that became easy to let under the new, relaxed free-for-all were still very hard to manage and required a continual intensive input.

The latest Department of the Environment figures for 1983 revealed a heavy concentration of difficult-to-let dwellings within the metropolitan areas and particularly London, as already indicated in the incomplete 1974 survey. The authorities with the largest difficult-to-let stock tended to be the big landlords with very big stocks of publicly-owned dwellings, and the local authorities experiencing severe social deprivation. The difficult-to-let dwellings in the HIP submissions were not described in any way, so there was

no indication of the type and age of dwelling, or size of estate. Nor were the figures necessarily accurate, given the very loose definition used by the Department and the wide variations in local definitions. However, they did give a notion of the scale and concentration of the problem.

In 1983 6.6% of council dwellings in England were classed as difficult to let. They were unevenly distributed, as the table below shows, with the largest concentrations in Greater London, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, the West Midlands and Birmingham.

42.

DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS IN ENGLAND Figures from H.I.P. submissions for 1978, 1981 and 1983					
REGION	Local authority stock '78	Difficult-to-let 1983	1983 Difficult-to-let as % of total stock in region	Increase/decrease 1978-83	Number of local authorities with over 5% of stock difficult-to-let
Greater London	632,000	108,672	13%	+43%	21
North-West	663,000	69,239	10%	+19%	19
West Midlands	579,000	48,352	9%	+130%	6
Yorkshire/Humberside	578,000	27,478	5%	+62%	4
Northern	453,000	19,502	5%	-18%	8
East Midlands	395,000	14,983	4%	+67%	3
South-East	487,000	6,811	1.5%	-24%	8
Eastern	485,000	6,754	1.5%	-29%	6
South-West	348,000	2,747	0.8%	-8%	3
ENGLAND	4,620,000	304,538	6.6%	+33%	78

Source: Department of the Environment, 1978, 1981, 1983.

The proportion of difficult-to-let dwellings in each area of the country parallels almost exactly the size of the local authority total stock. The bigger the number of council-owned dwellings, the greater the proportion of unpopular dwellings. This does tie the scale of unpopular council housing to the size of landlord and indicates a management cause of the problem.²⁰

By comparing the figures for 1978 with 1981 and 1983, it is possible to see a steady progression in most regions. In the industrial areas, with the notable exception of Tyneside (Northern Region), the numbers of difficult-to-let dwellings increased. In the less urban regions the numbers tended to decline. This was partly because the slow-down in new building tended to reduce the surplus stock in the country as a whole. But the continued severe population loss from the big cities and the long-term unpopularity of a very large segment of the metropolitan council stock, coupled with severe restraint on public spending on improvements, led to intensified problems in the cities. It is hard not to conclude that local authorities saw it in their interest to increase the number of difficult-to-let dwellings reported to the Government as justifying additional help, although in fact the argument cut both ways since central government took the difficult-to-let phenomenon in part as a proof of a surplus of housing in the public sector and in part as an indicator of inefficient management. There appeared to be only one logical explanation for the decline in difficult-to-let dwellings in the North: the development of a number of

intensive management initiatives on large, unpopular estates in Newcastle, Gateshead and South Shields. These authorities were among the first to move on the management front and made a substantial impact by 1982²¹ on at least 4,000 difficult-to-let properties (see later chapter for more detailed examination of initiatives).

The table below shows the trends by region:

43. TABLE SHOWING CHANGES IN THE PROPORTION OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET DWELLINGS BY REGION BETWEEN 1978 AND 1983

REGION	Actual nos. of difficult- to-let stock in 1978	1978 - base 100	1981	1983
Greater London	76,000	100	121	143
North-West	58,000	100	117	119
West Midlands	21,000	100	223	230
Yorkshire/Humberside	17,000	100	158	162
Northern	27,000	100	83	72
East Midlands	9,000	100	138	165
South-East	9,000	100	78	76
Eastern	9,500	100	78	71
South-West	3,000	100	117	92
ENGLAND	229,000	100	125	133

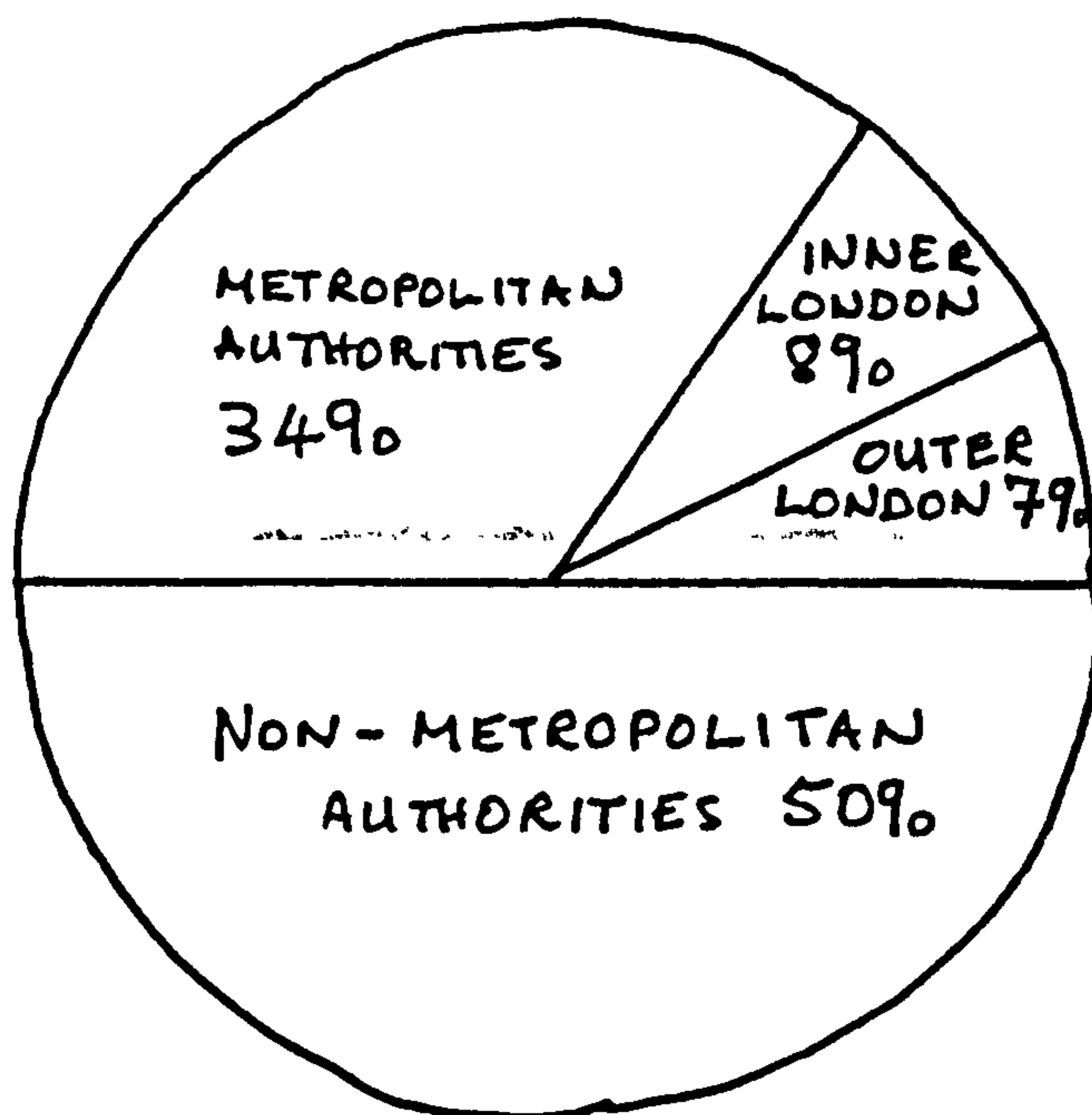
Note: The figure for the West Midlands rose dramatically between 1978 and 1982. Originally Midlands cities claimed to have very few difficult-to-let dwellings in the strict sense of the word. As oil prices and other troubles hit the car industry and the general recession hit engineering firms, the Midlands developed the fastest growing rate of unemployment in the country, causing a rapid decline in general prosperity and possibly affecting crude demand for housing in the region. The cities of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton were also slower than others in recognising the problems of difficult-to-let estates. The West Midlands is now the region with the third highest proportion of difficult-to-let dwellings. Most other increases were numerically small. 42 local

authorities stated that their number of difficult-to-let dwellings had increased between 1981 and 1982. Of these 5 were in London, 11 in metropolitan authorities and 26 in non-metropolitan areas. The overall percentage rose nationally in the five years of record-keeping from 5% to 6.6%.

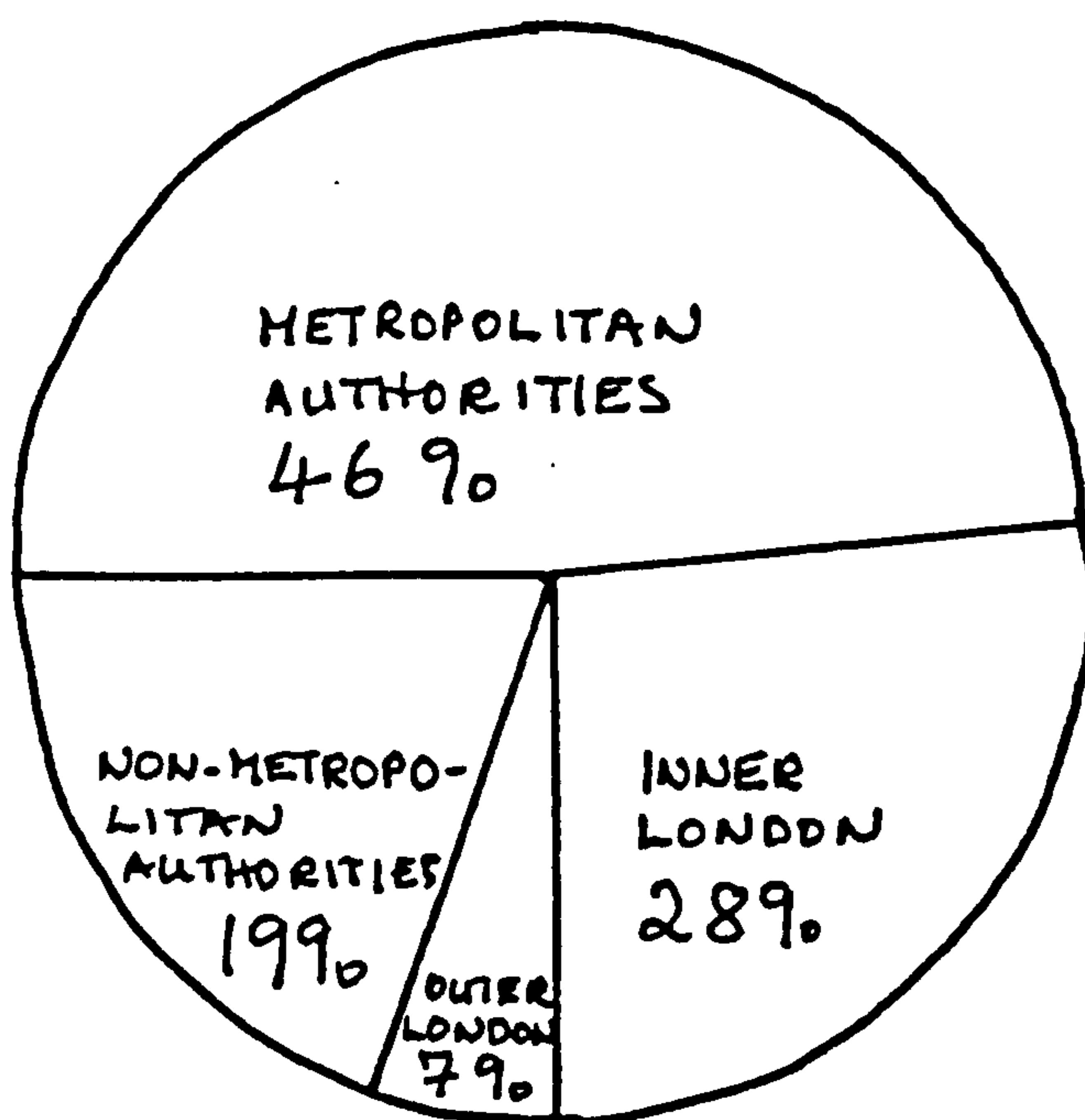
Inner London had by far the biggest concentration of problem estates. It had 11% of the national council stock but 28% of the national stock of difficult-to-let dwellings. Nearly one in five inner London council dwellings was considered difficult to let - over three times the national average. The total figure for inner London came to 86,000 but the hand-over of the G.L.C. estates to the boroughs will have led to a substantial increase in that figure in 1984, because of the major problems the G.L.C. estates have posed for the already overstretched inner London boroughs. The inner London difficult-to-let stock was, as far as is known, exclusively in the form of high-density flats. It was therefore the most problematic, the hardest to manage, and the most costly to put right.

The metropolitan districts contained just over a quarter of the national council stock but nearly half the difficult-to-let housing. Only three in every hundred council dwellings in non-metropolitan districts were hard to let. It is easy to see from the diagram below the disproportionate concentrations of unpopular estates in the city areas, especially inner London.

44. DISTRIBUTION OF COUNCIL STOCK AND DIFFICULT-TO-LET STOCK BY AREA



DISTRIBUTION OF
COUNCIL DWELLINGS



DISTRIBUTION OF
DIFFICULT-TO-LET
DWELLINGS

Source: HIP Returns

The vast majority of difficult-to-let estates were in the cities, with 247,000, out of the total of over 305,000, in London and the metropolitan authorities. It follows that all the other disadvantages of inner cities that we have already examined must impinge directly on the condition of these estates.

Inner London and Liverpool are the only major cities with more than half their stock in the form of flats. In inner

London, about 72% of the council stock consists of flats and maisonettes, and in Liverpool, 51%. We have already seen that one in five dwellings in London is hard to let; in Liverpool, the proportion rises to one in four. The proportion in Liverpool is even higher than in London because of massive over-building, very poor management and serious depopulation. London and Liverpool together have about one tenth of the national council stock but one third of the unpopular estates.

In other parts of the country, the overall proportion of flats may have less influence than the size and style of particular flatted estates which may compare unfavourably with the more typical houses and gardens.

The size of the local authority landlord was a major factor in the scale of difficult-to-let problems. 35 local authorities in England owned over 30,000 dwellings each. 33 of the 35 large landlords were in London or metropolitan districts. Only two were in non-metropolitan districts. The large landlords contained less than one third of all local authority housing, but over two-thirds of difficult-to-let housing. Over half the large council landlords had double the national average of difficult-to-let dwellings. They also tended to have the highest proportion of flats.

The table below shows how concentrated and interlocked the key elements have become and how disproportionately London and the North-West suffer from a cross-fertilisation of problems, more than other areas of the country. All of the

cities listed have over 40% of the housing stock publicly owned, over 40% of council dwellings in flats, and a disproportionate concentration of unpopular dwellings. On average, one in five local authority dwellings in these cities was difficult to let.

45.

TABLE SHOWING THE % OF COUNCIL-OWNED PROPERTY, OF FLATS AND MAISONETTES AND OF DIFFICULT-TO-LET, IN THE CITIES WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATIONS OF ALL THREE (OVER 40% OF STOCK COUNCIL-OWNED; OVER 40% IN FLATS; ; OVER 6.6% DIFFICULT-TO-LET)

Local Authority	No. of council dwellings	% of total housing stock owned by the council	% flats	% difficult-to-let
Hackney*	45,000	57%	83%	20%
Islington*	41,000	57%	69%	18%
Lambeth*	47,000	43%	70%	33%
Lewisham	44,000	44%	75%	14%
Greenwich	37,000	47%	60%	20%
Southwark	62,000	65%	76%	22%
Manchester*	100,000	47%	39%	7%**
Liverpool*	69,000	40%	51%	26%
Salford	43,000	47%	45%	16%
Newcastle	47,000	46%	35%	7%
Birmingham	124,000	35%	39%	18%

Source: 1983 H.I.P. Submissions

*Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Manchester were among the 12 most deprived areas in the country. Liverpool was in the top 18. See below for definition of deprived area.

**This figure is almost certainly a serious undercount.

There is now clear evidence that the most deprived areas also have the most difficult-to-let dwellings. The Inner

Cities Directorate at the Department of the Environment studied the 1981 Census in great detail in an attempt to draw up a list of the main characteristics of a deprived area. They were: numbers of ethnic minority households; population loss; numbers of one-parent families; homes lacking basic amenities. London had much the highest levels of deprivation, except for unemployment. Unemployment was heavily concentrated in the north with the exception of Corby. There were $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more difficult-to-let dwellings in the 18 most deprived boroughs than the average.

When we look at the five most deprived local authorities that were the biggest landlords, had the highest proportion of flats, and rehoused large numbers of homeless families each year, we find that they had nearly four times the national average of difficult-to-let dwellings. ²²

46. TABLE SHOWING THE 5 LOCAL AUTHORITIES OWNING OVER 30,000 COUNCIL DWELLINGS, HAVING OVER 50% OF THEIR STOCK IN FLATS AND MAISONNETTES, FEATURING AMONG THE MOST DEPRIVED 18 LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND REHOUSING OVER 1,000 HOMELESS FAMILIES A YEAR

Local Authority	Size of local authority stock	% difficult-to-let	% of flats and maisonnettes	Among 18 most deprived local authorities	Rehousing 1000 + homeless p.a.
Camden	35,000	15%	N/A but over 50%	✓	✓
Hackney	45,000	20%	83%	✓	✓
Islington	41,000	18%	69%	✓	✓
Lambeth	47,000	33%	70%	✓	✓
Liverpool	69,000	26%	51%	✓	✓

On average over half the housing stock in London is publicly owned, over 70% is in the form of flats, over 20% of council

dwellings are difficult to let, and London has much the highest incidence of homelessness. Six of the 12 Inner London boroughs appear three or more times in the various categories of the 10 most deprived boroughs in the country.

These findings bear out the evidence of the previous chapters that council housing has built up severe problems over a long period.

The 1974 survey showed that three-quarters of the difficult-to-let dwellings were flats and maisonettes. The walk-up, balcony block style of estate was the most common unpopular type, with modern, concrete, deck-access and tower block estates a close second. Well over half the difficult-to-let estates were less than 10 years old (built since 1965) and a quarter were less than five years old. Difficult-to-let estates were also more likely to be built at high density and within a metropolitan area. The main causes of unpopularity were design, vandalism and social stigma. Some of the more surprising findings were that tower blocks formed only a small part of the problem, and very modern houses in non-metropolitan areas were quite heavily represented.

The difficult-to-let returns now show layer upon layer of overlap between the fairly consistent numbers we have annually recorded of difficult-to-let dwellings and the other problems associated with them - location in cities, size of the council landlord, predominance of large, high-density, flatted estates, and incidence of poverty.

EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Councils themselves have been collecting and examining detailed

evidence about their unpopular estates. Their findings are only mentioned here briefly to illustrate the extent and depth of their crisis.

Islington housing department officials, early in 1982,²³ categorised every estate of more than 50 dwellings in the borough as either easy to manage or hard to manage. Because of great housing need and the consequent demand for almost any council accommodation in Islington, it seemed more realistic to look at problem estates from the point of view of management. It covered about 31,550 dwellings out of a total stock of almost 41,000 dwellings in January 1982, and it did not include 6,500 units in pre-1914 street properties. It covered almost the whole purpose-built council stock, including ex-G.L.C. estates which had only recently been transferred to the Borough.

Islington's evidence confirmed the findings of the original 1974 Department of the Environment survey. The largest volume of unpopular council dwellings was built in the seventies; the size of individual estates tended to get larger as the decades passed; the number of unpopular dwellings increased; and they were heavily concentrated on the larger estates. In Islington they were exclusively flats or maisonettes. 200 dwellings seemed to be the size above which flatted estates became hard to manage. The Islington evidence would suggest, therefore, that design and size were the two dominant determinants of unpopularity and that management problems were intensified under the impact of both.

Lambeth housing department analysed the 1981 Census information in great detail, based on enumeration districts,²⁴ and was able to draw up a profile of the housing conditions and socio-economic

CONCENTRATION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS ON UNPOPULAR ESTATES

Source: Lambeth Council Report, op. cit. (All national averages are from 1981 Census)
 N.B.: Figures rounded up to nearest whole number

	Proportion of children 0-15 years	Proportion of old-age pensioners	Proportion of 1-parent families	Proportion of households with 5 or more persons	Proportion living at more than 1 person per room	Proportion of economically active seeking work	Proportion without a car	Persons resident in households with head of household born in New Commonwealth or Pakistan
National average	22%	18% (G.B.)	4%	11%	4% (England & Wales)	10% (G.B.)	39%	5% (England & Wales)
Average for all Lambeth residents	20%	17%	10%	11%	7%	12%	59%	23%
Average for all Lambeth council tenants	24%	17%	unknown	13%	10%	unknown	70%	unknown
Average for estates with major concentrations	33%	29%	24%	23%	17%	21%	81%	40%
Proportion on most disadvantaged estate	40%	50%	28%	29%	19%	26%	83%	50%

make-up of the households on all Lambeth estates of more than 200 dwellings. This covered more than 75% of all Lambeth's council tenants living on estates of 25 dwellings or more and included virtually all of their unpopular estates. The 53 estates, containing 28,000 dwellings, had an average of 528 dwellings each. The vast majority of council dwellings were part of overwhelmingly large estates. Based on the Islington evidence, purely by virtue of their size, the 53 estates would be hard to run and difficult to live on.

The main purpose of the Census analysis was to establish whether there was a disproportionate concentration of social stress on some estates and whether a process of polarisation was at work because of the unpopularity of certain estates. There was a sharp contrast in the proportions of the following groups between estates: heads of household born in the New Commonwealth; one-parent families; unemployed; children under 16; large households; households owning a car (see table 47).

The findings of the "Lambeth Estate Profiles", presented for Housing Management attention in 1984, provided a unique insight into the concentration of disadvantage and the cul-de-sac that inner city housing departments often find themselves in.

The Cleveland County Research and Intelligence Unit²⁵ did an exhaustive survey in 1980 of the social conditions in Stockton and Cleveland, compared with the Ragworth estate, a highly stigmatised and run-down cottage estate of 393 dwellings in Stockton. The findings were startling, especially since the estate and the houses were potentially very attractive. The main findings of the survey are summarised in the following table:

48.

CONTRASTING LEVELS OF DEPRIVATION AND DISSATISFACTION IN CLEVELAND COUNTY AND IN THE RAGWORTH ESTATE		
	RAGWORTH	STOCKTON
One-parent families	1 in 5	1 in 30
Unemployment	33%	19% (Teesside)
No. of children under 16	45%	28%
Manual workers	88%	67%
Dissatisfied with the houses and facilities	30%	4%
Dissatisfied with the level of vandalism*	82%	N/A
Dissatisfied with the appearance of the estate	72%	12%
Dissatisfied with noise	52%	18%
Dissatisfied with the level of privacy	28%	10%
Far from relatives and friends (few or none near)	70%	40%

*37% of households had had windows of their home broken by others.

The basic socio-economic findings were alarmingly predictable except that the number of children under 16 is higher than any other estate so far examined. The gap between the Ragworth estate and the wider community was more striking than anywhere we've examined.

The Tyneside Partnership²⁶ has similarly documented the stark contrast between general conditions in Newcastle and Gateshead, inner city conditions, and social and economic problems on the five estates chosen for intensive management assistance.²⁷

A follow-up study was also done by the Building Research Establishment to show the contrast between the estates included in the Difficult to Let Investigation and the rest of the council stock in those areas. The pattern of sharp deterioration from the average to the worst estates was replicated with alarming consistency.²⁸

There is strikingly uniform evidence from the five surveys of extreme social deprivation on unpopular estates compared with other parts of the community illustrating forcibly the Government's growing evidence about the emergence of difficult to let estates.

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- 18b. ibid, p. 14.
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CHAPTER VIII THE WORST ESTATES

"Suitable, hygienic dwellings for the poorer classes at a substantially lower rent than that charged for accommodation of the normal type"

- from "Tenement Town" by L. White

BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

In 1979, in reaction to the Department of the Environment Difficult-to-Let Investigation of 1976, the Government decided to establish the Priority Estates Project in an attempt to demonstrate and record possible remedies for unpopular estates in association with willing local authorities.

Because of the pre-eminence of poor management and maintenance, it was decided from the outset that a radical - change of direction in the management and maintenance of problem estates was called for. The full-time estate office and the involvement of residents in their own destiny had become accepted within the Department of the Environment as the base-line for making any serious inroads into the problem of difficult-to-let estates. The local office was also the only avenue of direct contact with tenants on management issues and the only way of organising an effective day-to-day landlord service within local authorities with a large stock of council dwellings. Most other attempted

solutions, including re-design, major improvements and social and community initiatives, had failed to reverse the fortunes of badly stigmatised estates with the existing community. Attempts at management reorganisation, whether streamlining a centrally based, comprehensive housing service or attempting to provide a coherent local service to cover a number of estates in a limited area or district, had also proved inadequate in the face of the severe decline of the worst estates.

Over a period of five years the Priority Estates Project, sponsored by the Department of the Environment, visited about 100 local authorities in England and Wales, which had sought advice on problem estates or were taking the initiative in doing something about them. It ran three pilot projects in Hackney, Bolton and Lambeth. As a result, the Project came into contact with every local authority in the country that it could uncover concerned about its unpopular housing. The writer was responsible for visiting most of the local authorities and for helping local authorities to organise local management offices on priority estates in several parts of the country.

SURVEY METHOD

In 1982 the Priority Estates Project conducted a national survey of all local authorities that had established a full-time estate management office on a stigmatised estate. The aim of the survey was to find out how many local offices

were organised and what, if any, success they were having.

When the survey was initiated, it was not known that the entire first crop of estate offices in the country would be located exclusively on difficult-to-let estates.*

This turned out to be the case. Later, the more ambitious local authorities, which had already marked up some success with a local office on their worst estates, became keen to decentralise their housing management further and set up offices on a wider scale to serve many or all of their estates, including more popular areas. Walsall, Lambeth, Islington and Newcastle were at the forefront of this effort to spread local management beyond problem estates.

For the purposes of the survey, we restricted our enquiry where possible to the first local office opened by each local authority. In every case, this was on one of their worst estates. There were 19 local authorities** that

* Lewisham Borough Council had two estate-based projects on run-down estates and decided to set up a third on a pleasant new estate as a preventative measure.

** The G.L.C. was included because it was involved in estate-based projects in two boroughs, Lambeth and Lewisham, although it has now transferred the ownership of all its stock, with the exception of Tower Hamlets, to the boroughs in which they are located. Although we selected only one estate in each local authority, Lambeth and Lewisham had two projects or estate-based offices, one on an ex-G.L.C. estate and one on a borough estate.

had set up 45 full-time* local management offices, staffed with full-time workers, on unpopular estates and opened by January 1982, the cut-off date for inclusion in the survey. Only one office was selected from each local authority, with the exception of the G.L.C. We included two of their local initiatives because they were based in different boroughs and used very different approaches as a result. The total number of estates included in the survey was therefore 20.

The following three chapters are a detailed examination of the problems leading to the local initiative. The main sources of information were the council reports that formed the basis of the political decision to make such a major departure from previous housing management practice and the staff who initiated the projects.

The findings of the 1982 survey** provide the most detailed examination to date of the decline of a representative*** cross-section of the most problematic council housing. Here we present an overview of the problems, covering the four key areas so far discussed in this book: design, lettings, social deprivation and management. The account that follows

* Three offices only operated three days a week but were included because they provided an estate-based housing management entity. For a full examination of the method of selection and collection of data, see A. Power, "Local Housing Management: A Priority Estates Project Survey", Department of the Environment, February 1984.

** The survey was written up in brief and simplified form by the Priority Estates Project in order to convince councillors, housing department staff and estate workers that local management was effective.

*** Based on findings presented in Chapters VII and VIII, the estates included in the 1982 local management survey appeared to be broadly representative of the range of problems.

is based largely on the survey for which the writer was responsible, but it also draws heavily on her personal experience in visiting all the local authorities involved, and in working directly with staff and residents in approximately 30 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. That experience coloured the commentary which is here recorded for the first time.

THE TWENTY ESTATES

The often shameful conditions described in the following pages prevailed before the projects began, and bear no relation to current conditions in the local authorities concerned or on the project estates.

According to the 1983 difficult-to-let returns to the Department of the Environment, the 19 local authorities included in the survey of 20 estates contained 13% of all English council housing, but 37% of all difficult-to-let dwellings. This meant that on the whole, special projects were set up in areas where the problem of unpopular estates existed on a large scale and not just on the particular estates in the survey. One in six dwellings in these local authorities was difficult to let, compared with the national average of one in twenty.

Two-thirds of the estates comprised flats and the remainder were pre-war, unmodernised cottage estates on the edge of urban areas. The average size of estate was over 1,000

dwellings. The estates were spread across the country in Greater London, the Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Tyneside, and the North-East. Of the 19 local authorities in the survey, 11 were in Greater London and seven in metropolitan areas. The survey covered the major areas of the country with concentrations of difficult-to-let estates; it focussed predominantly but not exclusively on flats; and it found that almost all the estates were very large.

The actual problems faced by all the estate communities were oppressively varied and all-encompassing. The following diagram summarises the nature and extent of the main problems.

CHARACTERISTICS WHICH LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ESTATE-BASED MANAGEMENT

	Number of estates out of 20
Neglected, rubbish-strewn environment	20
Poor repairs and maintenance	19
High levels of crime and vandalism	19
Higher than local authority average of unemployed and tenants on welfare benefits	16
Higher than local authority average of one-parent families	16
Higher than local authority average tenancy turnover	16
Higher than local authority average rent arrears	16
Higher than local authority average child density	15
Hard to let	15
Little previous community involvement	14
Higher than local authority average of lettings to homeless	14
Higher than local authority average level of empty property	14
Unmodernised dwellings	11
Isolated position with few shopping/social facilities	11
Structural repair problems	10
Ethnic minorities disproportionately allocated to unpopular estates	9
Particularly unsuitable design ¹	7
Continuing stigma of first allocations from slum clearance area	5

¹ Unsuitable design: — walkways with bridges linking blocks, underground garages, etc.

SNAPSHOTS OF ESTATES IN THE SURVEY

Snapshot descriptions of a cross-section of the estates in the survey will give some idea of the range and extent of the problems, and the causes of residents' despair.

The Cowgate estate, Newcastle, was built on the edge of the city before the war. The estate is isolated, with poor shopping facilities. The 900 dwellings are terraced cottages, with 110 flats added since the war. At the time of the survey, the male unemployment rate was 60%. Decline accelerated from 1974, when transfers were made easier, because of the large supply of newer dwellings elsewhere. As the number of empty dwellings rose, so did vandalism. By 1978, there were about 100 vandalised empty homes, one in nine dwellings. Many gardens had been abandoned as fencing had decayed or "disappeared". The backlog of repairs awaiting action ran into thousands.

Ashfield Valley in Rochdale was built outside the city, next to the abandoned Manchester Ship Canal. The 26 slab blocks, comprising 1,014 units, named from A to Z, Appleby to Zennor, are linked with open decks and bridges. The early blocks at the top of the alphabet let fairly easily. But by the time the housing department reached Zennor at the tail of the alphabet, willing applicants had dried up. Half of the offers were turned down. It is held that single male migrants from Donegal docked in Liverpool and headed straight for the Valley, having heard about the empty new flats.

The estate has unlettable one-bedroom flats on staircase landings of every block. These have now all been bricked in. The Council has spent £1 million repairing the exposed and leaking decks, but the water is still coming in in places. There have been constant lift breakdowns and the entry phones that were later installed in the least popular blocks to try and curb crime and fear of crime have not worked from the outset because they were wrongly wired. There were in 1982 270 empty dwellings on the Valley, and the council was reluctantly considering selling it. Many people argued that it should be demolished.

The Stockwell Park estate in Lambeth, comprising 1,000 dwellings, was one of the early low-rise, high-density estates, a hoped-for answer to the "tower-block blues" and to the desire of inner city dwellers to stay put. Practically the entire ground area is a vast cavernous, unused car park, and the estate is on stilts above. The overground walkways link all dwellings, providing several miles of bleak, concrete corridors. Mugging and break-ins were very common in 1982 when the survey was carried out. The level of squatting, following on the large number of empty dwellings (63 in 1979) caused such social disarray that the tenants' association began to let flats direct, by-passing completely the council housing department. During the Brixton riots in 1981, the estate became a no-go area as youths used the underground garages and walkways as "safe" areas and police were temporarily stopped from coming onto the estate. The estate was used as the

location for the film "Black Joy", a mixed celebration of reggae, crime, dope and urban rebellion. When the Brixton police set up a special beat-policing experiment there, reported crime went up by 185%.

Lewisham's Honor Oak estate was built by the L.C.C. on spare railway and allotment land in the early 1930's to rehouse dockland families from slum clearance areas.

Because it was designated to help the most needy, the new population was selected on the basis of poverty, illness and handicap from the existing slums. The flats, 1,100 of them in 27 barrack-like blocks, were built to a minimal standard, so that rents would be low enough for the poor families they were being built for. The result was an ill-suited location, high density, a total lack of communal facilities, strife-prone communal bathrooms, tiny bedrooms and so on. The other result was an almost uniformly impoverished population, which was to be the despair of estate officers, social workers, community workers and teachers. There wasn't even a Church. From the very outset people had an overriding desire to leave the estate.

Before the Second World War, a pacifist support unit set up a special project to try and help the new and unsettled community.² The task was constantly undermined by the people's hatred of the estate -

"Because life in Tenement Town is so unsatisfactory, the families with higher standards of living instead of playing their part in raising the general level, only lived for the day when they could escape to more congenial surroundings."³

As early as 1937, about one third of the tenants left each year.

Over the years many attempts were made to upgrade Honor Oak, some with, some without the tenants. In 1976, when the Difficult-to-Let survey was conducted, the G.L.C. was undertaking an ill-thought-out, piece-meal improvement programme with some blocks being emptied of tenants to the envy of remaining residents, while other blocks received a limited set of improvements with the residents remaining in occupation, and yet others were left for later programmes. Eight years later, some courtyards had been improved but others were as barren and bleak as ever.

In 1981, a survey of three blocks revealed that nearly half the households there had children under the age of 16; 42% belonged to ethnic minorities; a quarter had only one parent; 70% were in rent arrears.

The estate, without local management or repairs, without major reinvestment, security, resident caretaking and a general leavening of the demoralised community, could not rise above its original designation - "a slum rehousing estate", carrying all the scornful and pitying type-casting that went with a somewhat meanly executed good intention. The environmental works have softened the contours of the estate somewhat, but the long bleak blocks still look more like a prison than home.

The estates in the survey were all difficult places to run

and on the whole unpleasant places to live in. Many of the awful results of management incompetence and social decline were undreamt of.

The local authorities, towards the end of the seventies, finally accepted that the wrong system of management was being applied. We will now examine how they saw their problems, how they set up alternative structures and the results.

THE BASIC PROBLEM - DESIGN

First we will consider the physical aspects of the 20 estates, the way they were built and the extent to which their physical design contributed to their unpopularity. It is hard to separate out physical from social and organisational factors, since each element interlocks with the other. However, in order to trace some kind of evolution in the decline of the 20 estates, we examine what was put in place as people's homes to start with.

ENVIRONMENT

The design problems of the 20 estates could be summarised under several items. The size and scale of most of the estates, the isolation from the surrounding community, the omnipresent communal areas, the abandoned, unguarded territory such as allotments, gardens and garages, made the estates look and feel neglected, decayed and poor. On the 13 flatted

estates, oppressive, ugly blocks and communal internal areas created a sense of anonymity and fear that depressed and repelled residents. In the case of the modern estates especially, which shared all the disadvantages of older flatted estates, problems were compounded by industrial design of gigantesque proportions. The diagram that follows shows the severity of design problems, particularly on flatted estates, and more especially on modern ones.

50.

TABLE SHOWING DESIGN PROBLEMS ON 20 ESTATES, LEADING TO THEIR UNPOPULARITY AND DECLINE

Problem	7 Cottage	6 Balcony	7 Modern	Total
Over 200 dwellings	7	6	7	20
Abandoned land	7	6	7	20
Unmaintained, communal areas	7	6	7	20
Dark, un-overlooked areas	2	6	7	15
Damaged communal entrances	0	6	7	13
Open balconies and decks	0	6	7	13
Unprotected stairwells and entrances	0	6	7	13
Unpopular location	7	2	4	13
Noise problems caused or enhanced by design	2	4	4	10
Unused garages	0	3	6	9
Vulnerable lifts	0	3	6	9
Industrial Building methods	1	1	6	8
Few or no community facilities	4	2	1	7
Damp and condensation	1	1	4	6
Poorly guarded or abused community facilities	3	2	1	6
Failed improvements:				
- entry phones	0	1	4	5
- house modernisation	1	2	0	3
- environmental improvements	1	1	1	3
TOTAL DESIGN PROBLEMS	43	64	86	193

Source: Background information from Department of the Survey of Local Management Offices.

It can be seen from the table that the modern flatted estates suffered from twice as many design problems as cottage estates.

Many design problems on flatted estates were quite intractable, capable of some modification only if backed by intensive management.

On cottage estates, size, communality and neglect took their toll too, but it was much easier to see how these problems could be rectified through well-organised management, sensitive modernisation and proper supervision of all communal areas.

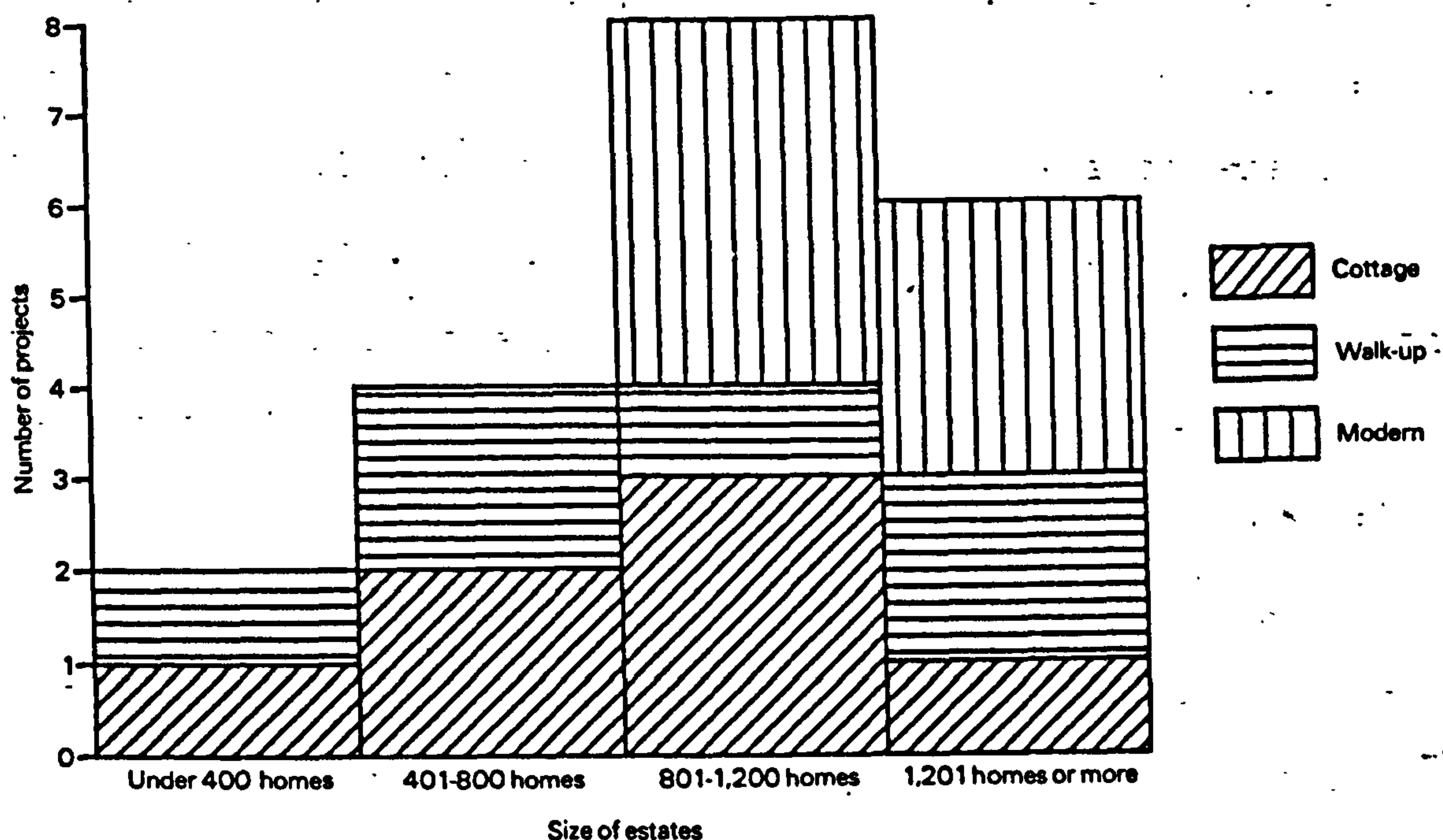
SIZE OF ESTATES

Scale has already been discussed in some detail concerning problem estates in general and we have shown that when once an estate has more than 200 dwellings,* it requires local management, particularly in the case of flats. The estates in the survey averaged 1,000 dwellings, which is way above the size with which a majority of people can readily identify as a community.

Below is a diagram showing the size of the estates in the survey. The smallest estate had 272 dwellings, the largest 1,898.

* For the sake of simplicity, based on the Islington survey discussed in the previous chapter, we will assume from here on that 200 dwellings is the cut-off point for a manageable estate without special input.

51. . Number of Projects on Different-sized Estates



The problems created on the survey estates by virtue of their size seemed to be: anonymity; a lack of identification of tenants with their estate; a sense of isolation; loss of social controls; increased vandalism and crime through difficulties of detection; loss of management control; a desire to leave; a general dislike of the scale of the environment. It was hard for workers or residents to articulate the reasons for size creating such a sense of dismay. However, it was such a constantly recurring theme, echoing many other writings⁴ on the subject, that it became very apparent how much it dominated people's sense of dissatisfaction. The average size of the estates in the survey lent weight to our initial assumption that the scale of an estate has a direct impact on its problems.

We concluded that size was one of the major causes of social and management decline on unpopular estates, based on the overwhelming size of the estates in this survey and the strong sense among residents and workers that the large scale of the estates greatly enhanced their unpopularity.

Although we know that the large estates posed management difficulties and tended to be unpopular with tenants, we do not know how big problem estates are on the whole. The estates in the Difficult-to-Let Investigation averaged over 600 dwellings. The fact that the average for this survey was 1,000 dwellings might illustrate, not the typical size of problem estates, but the extreme end of the problem, which councils had a strong incentive to tackle. Also large estates tended to provide a greater incentive to opening a local management office because they were a convenient size patch for a team - unlike smaller problem estates. There are, however, many unpopular estates substantially bigger than 1,000, including three in this survey of over 1,800.

Until clearer evidence is collected of the size of problem estates, it seems fair to assume that they rarely number less than 200 dwellings and more usually, have over 500.

THE ESTATE CONCEPT

On the survey estates it was very difficult for residents to identify with their community. It was also difficult

for council staff to identify with the estate because of the sense of uniformity, anonymity and alienation that the number of dwellings and occupants bred. The visual character of the estates was such that they were separate from the surrounding area and identifiable as a separate unit or a community. An unnatural boundary, separating off the estates from the rest of the area, was created, both by the estates' physical definition, by their size and by the stigma attached to them. The larger the estate, the more stark this definition was likely to be. Not only was the estate physically separate and identifiable, there was also an unusually strong community of interest within each estate, above all because of the common landlord. Everyone had in common the fact that they were tenants on an estate, at the bottom of the housing hierarchy. There was also often an apparent general economic and social homogeneity among residents (though this was far from always being the case).⁵

It might well be, however, that the poorer a community and the more disadvantaged, the less homogeneous it felt to those who lived there in that a majority of the people ended up there after falling through the net of slightly more viable communities above them in the social and economic strata. So poor estates often seemed to residents more like a collection of failures from somewhere else than a community of interest. Their size and separation helped set in train a circular decline, as their unpopularity invited low-income residents who disliked the estate for these very reasons and who found it hard to identify with

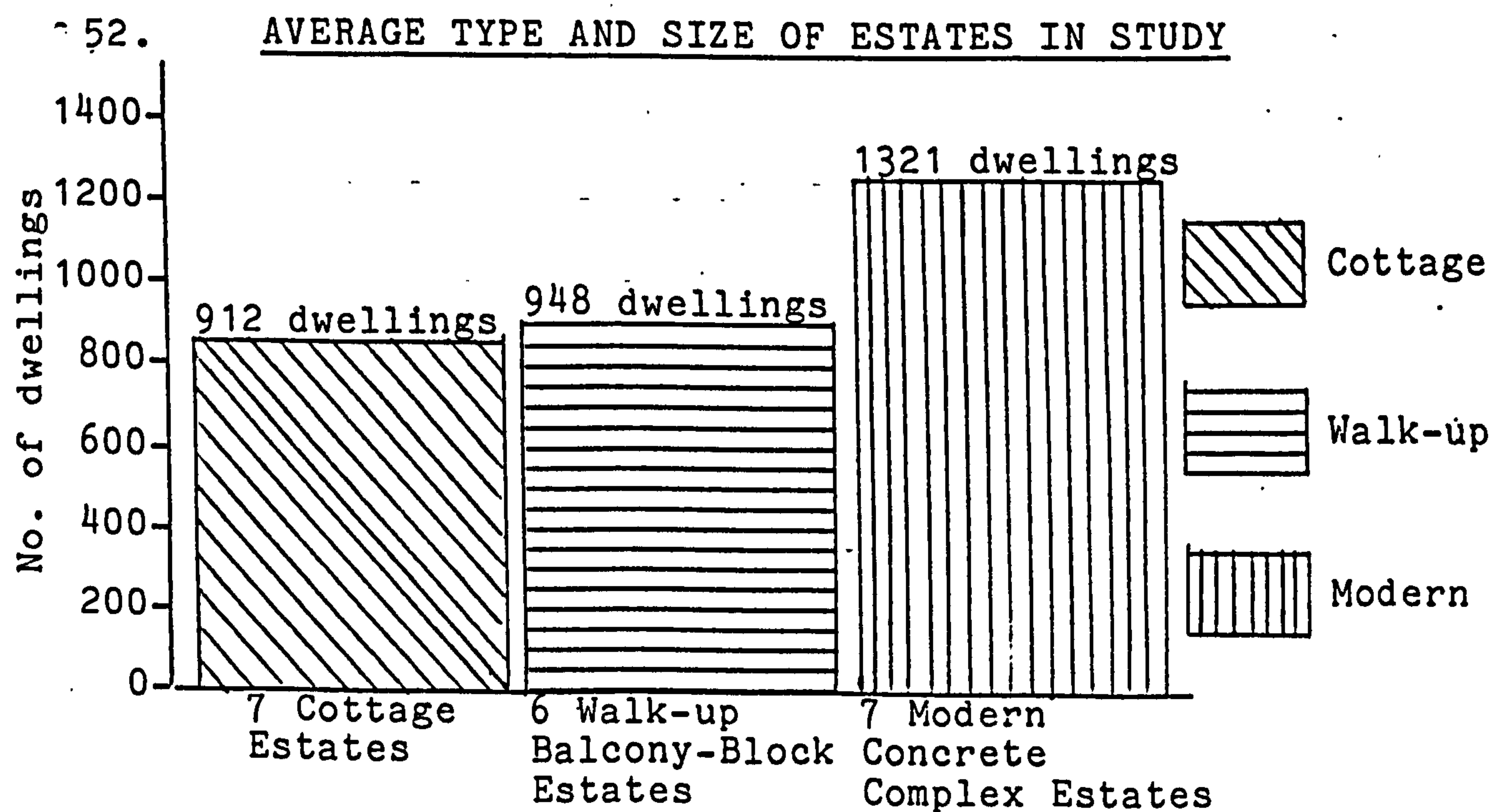
their neighbours because of the overpowering anonymity.

Their failure to identify with their community in turn enhanced the estate's problems. People with intense social and economic problems often simply do not want to identify with others in the same uncomfortable boat.

The estates therefore housed an increasingly reluctant population, who often did not identify with their surroundings or like their estate. So there was a double problem of separateness and inner discord. For this reason unpopular estates have often been likened to prisons⁶ or ghettos.

DESIGN TYPES

The 20 estates in our survey represented an almost exact spread between the main three design types of council estate, with seven cottage estates, six balcony-block, walk-up estates, and seven modern concrete complex estates.



COTTAGE ESTATES

It was surprising to find that one-third of the estates comprised houses and gardens. For Londoners and residents of flats, this seems unthinkable. However, the cottage estates were located exclusively outside the major cities of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, in areas where flatted estates are much rarer and the cottage style predominates. In fact, the "cottage" stock was seriously under-represented among the problem estates since over two-thirds of the national stock has been built as houses and gardens, and the proportion outside London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool would be over 75%.* This bears out the overall impression that flats are overwhelmingly more unpopular than houses. Nonetheless, age, size, and social stigmatisation resulting mainly through lettings policies and poor management, caused some cottage estates to be unpopular, and set in train the familiar cycle of decay, neglect and finally abandonment of dwellings and facilities that would signal the social extremes to which poor cottage estates could sink. Low general demand in many areas of the country and antiquated amenities in kitchens, bathrooms and heating appliances, would also have an impact on the lettability of a cottage estate, as would location and the original image of the estate.

Cottage estates were unpopular, not just because they were old and unmodernised, but because they were built with a

* Only in London would it be unheard of that a cottage estate should be unpopular. All the other cities have poor, run-down cottage estates, but these do usually pose less severe management problems than their flatted estates.

communal uniformity, a mean stamp on them, an "estate atmosphere" that residents rejected.

All the cottage estates in the survey were built away from the town centres, and residents disliked feeling cut off from relatives, friends and services. Life seemed to be happening somewhere else. Three of the cottage estates in the survey had always been stigmatised because they rehoused en bloc residents of a notorious pre-war slum clearance area. Six of the seven cottage estates were completely unmodernised at the outset of the local management initiative, yet all were at least 40 years old and in serious need of major renovation. This fact dominated tenants' dissatisfaction and the difficulties in letting empty dwellings, which in turn led to rehousing of last recourse or "dumping". The subsequent stigma gathered its own momentum and unless radical management and community initiatives were undertaken, modernisation of itself could fail to reverse the declining fortunes of these estates. This happened on one of the seven, the Goscote estate in Walsall, where earlier improvements were simply stripped out by thieves making an illegal living from selling council central heating systems on the black market.⁷ Other cottage estates not in the survey, such as Abbeyhills, Oldham, and Cloverhall, Rochdale, had experienced the failure of modernisation in the mid-seventies through lack of management back-up and inability to move a family in faster than the vandals could get to it. Therefore modernisation, while a prerequisite for restoring run-down

property to lettability, was not of itself the answer to an estate's problems.

The interior design of the houses on cottage estates was often problematic, especially because of very small kitchens. However, as basic dwellings, they offered a workable and generally acceptable, if cramped, home that in most cases simply needed repair and updating.

The other design problem of cottage estates was that on the one hand they were built in the pre-war period when there was little acknowledgement of the need for community facilities, such as a community hall, a children's playground or a football pitch; on the other hand, they were built with verges and stretches of grass which required constant maintenance and litter-picking, back alleys (or runnels) that were badly lit and unkempt; and odd corners of land that had simply not been built on. No one any longer knew why these abandoned areas had been left there. Often they were simply at the end of a row of houses, not big enough to build on, but too big for someone's garden. On one estate, they were owned by another landlord and had not been acquired with the rest of the site. On another, a workshop had been demolished and nothing put in its place; on another, the housing money had run out and building had been peremptorily stopped.

Estate roads, by contrast, were usually narrow, designed for an era when no ordinary people owned cars. Grass verges on all the estates were used for car-parking since the roads

were too narrow, either by residents who wanted their car within sight of their windows but had no garage, or by outsiders, such as lorry and van drivers, looking for somewhere to park. The result in winter was deeply rutted, muddy verges that the council pointed to as proof that they could do little to improve the estates in the face of such irresponsible tenants' action. On at least one estate, residents had knocked down their front walls in order to park their cars outside their living rooms. Fear of theft was a real element in this.

In no case had the construction of an estate office or a repairs base taken place while the estate was being built or in the 40 years that had since elapsed. On one of the estates, shops were built, but because they were purpose-built with relatively pristine conditions, rents and rates were high and shops had difficulty getting established. Because shopkeepers were on the whole not willing to live as tenants on the premises on a poor estate, shops were often unguarded and frequently broken into and heavily vandalised. Many shops were boarded up or abandoned.

On no cottage estate had a community centre been built with the estate, though community facilities were added in later years. These were often inadequate, such as a wooden hut for a community centre in Leicester. Belatedly, playgrounds of sorts had been added in several cases.

Overall, on the cottage estates, the public landlord was over-generous, if not positively casual, in the use of the

land, while giving very little coherent thought either to its future use or maintenance, or looking at all carefully at the social needs of the uprooted slum-dwellers it was to rehouse en masse on the brand new site.

It must be said that many of the cottage estates were not architect-designed, and very little planning skill was brought to bear either. Most local authorities did not employ architects at the time when these estates were built.⁸ It was considered sufficient to put up rows of adequate houses of standard design and leave spaces between, very much as the nineteenth century industrialists had built the inner city terraces, only with more generous space.

The cottage estates, with their houses and gardens, were far more enclosed and controlled than the flatted estates. But on the seven cottage estates in our survey, many front gardens had become abandoned rubbish heaps. In fact on two estates, the council had communalised front gardens, turning them into open-plan grass verges because private gardens were such an eyesore. Needless to say, communalised front gardens were not properly maintained. However, the fact must be faced that "defensible space" does not automatically operate in a very poor, demoralised community, residents can simply give up all attempts at guarding or caring for their own property.

Back gardens were an even bigger problem and on most estates, over the 40 years of the estates' life, fences simply

disappeared and many back gardens became communal tips and shortcuts.*

The overall effect on a cottage estate of the widespread abandonment, neglect, and rubbish dumping on public open space and in private gardens, was to generate an atmosphere of depression and abandon that deterred self-respecting people from considering moving there and forced more ambitious tenants to leave. They simply couldn't accept the low standing of such a neglected estate.

In spite of this, many gardens were enclosed and well cared for, albeit often with ad hoc home-made fencing, and many tenants made endless use of the areas attached to their houses, whether or not the fencing was still standing. Flat dwellers did not have outdoor space to make use of, only space that was abused.

Intrinsically, all the cottage estates in the survey were adequately if unimaginatively built and laid out and it was relatively easy to conceive of making them perfectly acceptable. The same could not be said of the 13 flatted estates. Unsightly and wasteful as the derelict areas were on the cottage estates, they could not be compared with the ubiquitous squalor of almost every square foot of territory on the flatted estates.

THE FLATTED ESTATES

While building design, unlike size, was not a pre-condition

for problems, as the cottage estates showed, it was easier to see why the flatted estates in the other two categories of balcony or modern style were unpopular compared with the seven cottage estates. The 13 flatted estates were all oppressively built at high density, with a mean finish.

The flatted estates were larger on the whole than the cottage estates and this increased the dense atmosphere. Ten of the 13 had more than 800 dwellings and the modern estates were largest of all, with an average of well over 1,000 dwellings. The greatest impact was created by the denseness of the blocks.* Many of the flatted estates were built at over 200 bed-spaces to the acre. All the survey estates were in this sense extremely oppressive, whereas the cottage estates with about 60 bed-spaces to the acre seemed open and airy by comparison.

COMMUNAL SPACE, DOGS AND CHILDREN

It was the intense communality of the flatted estates, where your children, your dog, your rubbish and your milk were shared because you couldn't keep them to yourselves, that people seemed to hate most of all.

Dogs illustrated the problem well. They were a menace on all the estates and were somehow associated with communal space. Many people with dogs tended to treat the open areas

* Alice Coleman argues that density is not a factor in problem estates, citing the much greater density of old city streets as evidence. However, density of design, coupled with size of blocks and scale of estates, seemed to have a serious impact on the environment of the flatted estates we visited.⁹

as a private house resident treats his garden. They would open the door and simply put the dog out. It is hard to appreciate how great a loss of control the dog problem represented on the estates we visited. The one feature that seemed to explain it, other than a cursed fecklessness among dog-owning residents, was the lack of private space and the extensive communal areas. However, it was also a function of weak, negligent management and illustrated the need to enforce communal rules rigidly. Dogs had been explicitly forbidden in most tenancy agreements but the rule was simply ignored. Dogs were ubiquitous. On one tower block in Liverpool, that was one third empty, stray dogs lived inside the building and wandered in and out of the lifts with the legal occupants, moving between floors and waiting for lifts just as the two-legged occupants did.

It is not possible to link dogs directly with design, but they did somehow epitomise the problem. Dogs were acquired primarily for security and companionship, as a result of the fears generated by flat-living; but secondarily, as a compensation for cramped estate-living where a dog represented freedom and outdoor space. Unfortunately, only brutally rigid management enforcement could contain the dog problem and this was missing from all of the survey estates.

Many children became equally communal, put outside the front doors to play. Again, this often appeared to be simple fecklessness on the part of tenants, but it was more an acknowledgement of the fact that children through the ages have spent most of their time out of doors, when not in

school or eating or at work. In a minimally designed flat, the imperative to escape to the outdoors is stronger than ever, and can only be repressed at serious cost to the children's development and the mother's nerves. But the communal design of flatted estates militated against the kind of play that was compatible with adult needs, the safety of the children and the survival of communal facilities.

Children and dogs, therefore, came to be viewed as uncontrollable threats, proof of the slum character of the estates, and also a source of much direct damage. Our impression was that this resulted more from the design of the estates and the living patterns they generated than from the nature of the people, although as always the one fed the other. Both problems seemed substantially more severe on the flatted estates than on the cottage estates, though it is almost impossible to quantify.*

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMUNAL AREAS OF FLATTED ESTATES

All three types of estate had large areas of rarely cleaned communal space with no one effectively in charge of them, but the problem was more especially difficult and prevalent with the flats.

The major distinguishing feature of the flatted estates,

* Alice Coleman has spent three years quantifying among other things excreta (human and dog) on flatted estates compared with terraced streets and has shown that the former are significantly more abused than the latter.¹⁰

apart from the block structure and their height, was the ubiquitous no-man's land of common parts. A house is private, even if rented and owned by an absentee landlord. The street onto which a house abuts is public, and in that sense is seen to belong to the community. Houses and streets on council estates share the public/private definitions. A flat opens out onto a string of common areas that are neither clearly public, nor clearly private¹¹ and therefore belong neither to an individual tenant nor to the community of tenants as a body. They actually belong to the landlord, and therefore must be cared for by the landlord, as the philanthropic trusts have accepted over the last century or so. Local authorities have not taken this blanket responsibility seriously and in almost every case have assumed that at least some of the responsibility belongs to tenants as individuals or as some kind of undefined collective body.¹² This has not happened. Tenants' collective responsibility for common areas that they do not own, but that are part of their estate, has not been defined in law and could not be enforced if it was, unless tenants collectively became the legal landlord, as happens in the rare cases where they form a co-operative. In all other cases, the landlord is entirely, solely and exclusively responsible for communal areas, a responsibility that was not executed with any diligence on the 20 estates.

On the flatted estates in the survey, the problem was inherent and therefore much more intractable. Firstly, there were more communal areas than were easily manageable. Planners, with some kind of conscience for the living style foisted

on low-income families by virtue of the block concept, ensured on the whole maximum space around the blocks to compensate for the enclosed flat-living, especially on the modern estates, where planning ideals were at their zenith. The result was absurdly high densities within blocks and too much unused or abused open space. Secondly, the design of flats dictated communal entrances, stairwells, rubbish collection areas and so on within each block. Thirdly, design fantasies created frightening dark areas. The general lack of security and the major problems of policing caused by such design features as underground car parks, multi-storey car parks remote from dwellings, overhead pedestrian walkways, linking bridges, long open decks and enclosed corridors, under-used, sometimes abandoned shopping precincts, unguarded communal drying rooms and rubbish stores within blocks, all helped generate crime and fear of crime and invited noise and vandalism and graffiti that often turned a communalistic design fantasy into an ugly and abused eyesore.

COMMUNAL PARTS OF BLOCKS

The basic communal parts to the actual buildings posed the most difficult problem - the doors and entrances, stairwells, balconies, decks, rubbish collection points and garages. These areas were constantly damaged, dirty, or simply badly designed and unable to stand up to the wear and tear of so many users. They required constant maintenance and supervision, not just because of greater use and abuse, but

because they relied more on vulnerable externals such as lighting and working doors, without which they became dangerous and even unusable. For example, on Tulse Hill rubbish stores and collecting points became unusable because doors were broken off and not replaced. As a result, the rubbish store would be severely abused and men would refuse to collect from it. Drying rooms, garages and store sheds, were widely abandoned because doors were ripped off and not replaced. Balconies and stairwells were sometimes unlit for weeks because light fittings were broken and bulbs constantly stolen.*

In many local authorities we visited, attempts at keeping doors on their hinges and lights working had quite simply been abandoned. On several estates no stairwell window had glass in it and no door, either to rubbish areas or to entrances, was in working order.

UNGUARDED LIFTS AND COMMUNAL ENTRANCES

There were lifts on at least some blocks of all the more modern flatted estates. Lifts were a constant attraction to abuse, provided a challenge to ingenuity and daring. Boys would ride on the roofs of lifts, try to open doors between floors and even try to trap unsuspecting people in them. Lifts would often be vandalised and in tower blocks on at least three of the project estates in the survey,

* Alice Coleman's research shows that the more dwellings share a communal entrance, stairs, corridors, the greater the level of dirt, vandalism and other abuse.¹³

broke down continually. On two of the estates, in tower blocks over 15 storeys high, lifts were sometimes out of commission more often than they were working. In one case, new lifts had to be installed. On both estates, elderly people and very young children lived in the tower blocks and were dependent on lifts to reach the ground. The blocks were 17 storeys and 23 storeys high.

Lift breakdown was associated with cheap installation, ineffective maintenance and the lack of door controls or resident porter/caretakers; but it was also a function of the numbers of children using and abusing them and the challenge they represented to youth as a communal collecting point and a technological adventure. Because of their anonymous, unguarded nature, lifts never represented among the young a vital service they needed to protect, rather a source of fun or an object of their scorn - a way of getting even with an environment with which they did not identify.

Lifts themselves were a frequent source of fear; people were afraid to travel alone in lifts for fear of attack; and even more commonly, people were ashamed of their visitors using the lifts because of the smell from people using them as a lavatory. It is unclear whether lifts were abused in this way through the need for a toilet, or as a symbol of the total lack of esteem in which the community, the estate, and especially its common parts were held. People do not deface what they respect as belonging to others or what they know is guarded or overlooked. An unguarded lift, because it is enclosed, partly private and partly public,

a source of fear and a symbol of precarious dependence on others, appeared to bring out the very worst of the aggressive desire to abuse. It was extremely rare to enter a clean-smelling lift.

It was obvious that all lift entrances required guarding, both in terms of cost of installation and maintenance, cost of vandal damage, and of the large number of people using each lift, quite apart from the need to keep them clean and working for the sake of all residents. Yet no local authority we visited guarded lifts from when they were first installed. On six of the 13 estates, attempts were made, after initial damage, at installing entry phones in lift access blocks. But without local management, all these attempts failed and became themselves the targets of even greater vandalism.

In fact, entry phones in lift access blocks were the only changes to communal areas attempted prior to local management, apart from one cottage estate in the north, where environmental improvements costing £1 million were carried out without any local management or tenant involvement and were destroyed completely over the following two years. Few as the attempts were, it is interesting that they all failed through lack of tenant consultation and management back-up. Many other estates not in the survey made similar attempts either at environmental improvements, communalising abandoned private gardens, reinstating tumbledown garden fences, planting out courtyards, enclosing entrances, providing garages, removing drying areas. They

all failed where they were not coupled with tenant involvement and intensive management, unless the existing population was moved out and the estate or block effectively rebuilt.*

Communal entrances and lifts were probably more menacing than the other areas because they were the residents' only means of access to their home or from their home to the outside world. The ease with which they could be damaged made residents feel vulnerable and therefore incited bully-style behaviour from tough youths, muggers and vandals, because the weak spots always do. For this reason, without very tight control, the failure to improve security to entrances was to be expected.

DECKS AND BRIDGES

The other communal areas that were integral to the blocks, and therefore provided a direct link to people's homes, were the decks and bridges. Decks and bridges were a special feature of the modern estates, along with the underground or freestanding, multi-storey car parks. All but one of the modern concrete complex estates in the survey had linking bridges between already large blocks. The idea, as we know, was to provide "streets in the air". In fact, their effect was to break down even further any sense of neighbourliness or identity within a block, each of which could contain over a hundred dwellings. In purely

* This has been done on several Islington estates.

physical terms they were extremely ugly, combining the worst features of main-road subways and overhead bridges. Instead of providing an arterial link within a community, they seemed to provide a strangulating line of access and escape for strangers. The police argued forcibly that they created a muggers' paradise, giving constant cover and escape routes. One estate was described by the housing manager as a "giant climbing frame". Crime was alleged to be a bigger problem on these estates than anywhere else, although the lack of accurate figures made it hard to establish the exact truth of this claim. The police in any event found them the hardest to police; caretakers the hardest to maintain; and residents, the most frightening. By the very anonymity and inter-connectedness that they created between 3,000 or more residents, no stranger could be challenged, no outsider detected. Everywhere was made to belong to everyone. And yet unlike streets, they were not public and therefore guarded by everyone's eyes. They were often partially hidden and infrequently used. There was therefore a total contradiction between their exposed and public character and their unnerving atmosphere of abandon and secrecy.

The open decks along the blocks in front of people's flat entrances created another major problem, with the noise they generated. They were almost always directly above someone else's bedroom. There was the noise of constant coming and going; but much more importantly they were ideal for skateboarding, roller-skating and even cycling. They were the first play area beyond the front door and

they were fun because they were long and flat and were linked to the next deck and the next. There was no easy way that a tenant on the second floor could detect the children on the third deck making a noise. There was no social connection between one deck and the next, even though they were all linked.

Decks were in many cases a wind trap, with driving rain in bad weather causing surface puddling. Decks were not originally built as roofs or as roads, and yet they needed to function as both. In practice they neither kept out the weather in many cases, nor bore the continual traffic successfully. Some decks were so exposed to the weather as to provide a major deterrent to prospective tenants and a constant deterrent to ordinary human intercourse.

GARAGES

There has been a disastrous multiplication of free-standing rows of unguarded garages, with demand for very few of them because of their vulnerability, providing ready rubbish dumps, refuges for tramps and other social outcasts, cover for glue-sniffing, drug abuse, and more innocent teenage pranks.¹⁴ On older estates in the survey, abandoned garages have been demolished by the council, having been half destroyed by vandals, even though there was some demand for them, simply because they could not be protected. Even worse were the communal underground garages that formed dungeon-like cellars under vast blocks on four estates in

the survey. At Stockwell Park there were about 1,000 virtually unused, dark underground garages. On one estate, because of bitter experience elsewhere, the underground garages were blocked up and made unusable before the estate was ever let. Multi-storey car parks, separate from the blocks, were actually scheduled for demolition in one case. The question of unusable garages exposes the planning madness that dictated expensive and useless provision of garages without ever considering how they would be guarded or how their proper use could be ensured.

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Seven of the 13 flatted estates and part of one cottage estate were industrially built with concrete slabs. All of the modern estates and all the tower blocks were industrially built. As a design method, it was not only ugly and unpopular with residents; it carried with it the liability of size, since it was not worth using the machinery and the large-scale building operation involved unless it came in a big contract. But its main drawback turned out to be its failure to weatherproof, the most basic requirement of a dwelling. In some cases, flat roofs, external rooms and exposed decks actually leaked, flooding rainwater into dwellings. More commonly, the concrete slab components of the blocks and houses formed cold bridges into the dwellings causing intense damp, condensation and mould formation. This was common to all the industrially-built estates. The irony was that the condensation was blamed on the tenants'

lifestyle. Tenants were told that cooking, washing, running hot baths, drying clothes, in their homes were the cause of damp problems. Of course, domestic activities generated moisture but they were not the cause of damp problems. The building failure was not faced up to except in the most extreme cases.

The problems of cold bridges were intensified on several of the estates by projecting, overhanging bedrooms, sometimes exposed to the wind and weather on five out of six sides of the room. Only architectural folly and massive spare cash could have induced local authorities and construction firms to hang a bedroom out of the building it was supposed to be part of. On one estate, the problem of cold and damp due to outhanging bedrooms was so severe that the projecting bedrooms were simply bricked up. It was becoming common to instal ventilators along the top and sides of new windows in an attempt to prevent condensation. So sealed windows to keep out draughts were ventilated through draught-creators to combat damp.

The lack of insulation was made worse on all the modern estates by the exposed nature of all the sites and by the creation of wind tunnels and the even greater cooling effect that resulted. It is not by chance that the estates were located on exposed sites. Their scale and their late arrival on the housing scene determined that on the whole only the most unfavoured sites were still available. Several estates, including two in Sheffield and one in the

Rhondda, not in the survey, were so exposed and windy that elderly people found it hard to walk upright through the estate in bad weather. The design of the estates actually enhanced the force and the impact of the wind, particularly on the deck access estates in Sheffield where able-bodied adults sometimes had difficulty rounding corners on the exposed decks.

Various attempts had been made at rectifying the design disaster of cold and damp and exposure, from sticking polystyrene tiles on inside walls, to re-lining decks and in one case, glassing in parts of the overhead walkways. The solutions were almost as costly and as risky as the original industrial building system. The only real solution to have emerged appeared to be to build a "skin" round the dwelling to provide normal protection from the elements. On the concrete complex estates, enclosing all exposed decks with glass and brick appeared to be the best hope, along with internal insulation. With industrially-built houses, it seemed the ultimate irony to propose building a completely new outer skin to an uninsulated, damp, cold, "modern" house. It was being seriously considered on one estate not in the survey.

TOWER BLOCKS

Five of the industrially built estates included some tower blocks, two on walk-up estates and three on modern estates. All the tower blocks were industrially built. However, they were on the whole less problematic than the lower blocks

with balconies, corridors and decks. An enclosed building with only one or two entrances and generally only four flats accessible on each floor posed fewer problems than the open balcony-style or the interlinking, open walkway and corridor-style blocks. The tower blocks rarely had flats with more than two bedrooms, whereas the vast majority of other council dwellings comprised family accommodation with three bedrooms or more. As a result, child densities in tower blocks were usually lower than other parts of the estates, although three London authorities with severe lettings difficulties had rehoused many homeless, one-parent families in tower blocks in the survey estates and had severe problems as a consequence. Tower blocks were far from problem-free but they posed less of a threat than their reputation would have suggested.

ABANDONED, UNUSED AREAS

There were areas on the flatted estates that were dark and unfrequented, such as the huge underground garage areas, communal rubbish rooms, multi-storey car parks, abandoned shop-premises. Bulky rubbish that would not fit in normal containers or chutes provided, often including old fridges, abandoned beds and settees and burnt-out vehicles, as well as illegally parked vehicles, would all be deposited on open spaces.

All these half-hidden, unguarded and often totally unseen areas invited theft, dismantling and rebuilding of cars,

recycling of council heating radiators, light fittings, and more random scrap. More menacingly, they also sometimes harboured drug-abuse and glue-sniffing. A large deck access estate in Greater Manchester was the subject of a recent T.V. documentary about heroin addiction (July 1984).^{*} Filming took place secretly from a flat rented from the council by the police, and drug-trafficking and youth drug abuse were recorded on camera.

Sometimes the derelict areas were totally deserted and invited nothing other than the fear that abandoned, dark and unclaimed territory can inspire. But the occasional violent crime or mysterious disaster generated a general sense of horror towards the abandoned areas. On Tulse Hill, a large area of abandoned allotments along the edge of the estate was widely hated and feared by residents and staff because a dead baby had been found hidden in the undergrowth in the late seventies. The identity of the baby was never discovered. The very desolation and lack of users, legal or illegal, put a jinx on these areas.

DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT-BACK-UP

The design of flatted estates actually required a resident caretaker/porter/janitor/concierge. Many communally built estates of houses and gardens required an estate warden or caretaker too. Without a resident caretaker, it was impossible to maintain in functioning order such areas.

In some of the local authorities where the projects were

^{*} Ashfield Valley, Rochdale

located, resident caretakers were no longer employed prior to the local management initiative, and in some they never had been. On some estates resident caretakers had been withdrawn after vicious attacks on them personally or vandal damage to their flats and attacks on their families.¹⁵ Isolated incidents, which changes in working practices could maybe have overcome, were allowed to generate a level of fear among staff that caused the collapse of a vital ingredient in the management of communal blocks of flats. On some estates like Tulse Hill in Brixton, only the most defeated of caretakers would agree to stay. Even then they would only work in pairs, and only three of the eight posts were filled.

It is important to grasp the intrinsic connection between the communal areas of blocks of flats and the requirement that they be serviced daily by an employee of the landlord. It is as intrinsic a connection in the functioning of a flatted estate as the link between a bus and its driver if the bus is to move.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES ON ESTATES

Prior to a full-time management office, community facilities, wherever they existed, tended to be beset with major difficulties, and yet it has been a criticism of estate design, that in so many cases, large communities were rehoused into dwellings without the proper provision of community facilities. On the Honor Oak estate in Lewisham,

the lack of community halls or play areas in the dense blocks was blamed for the failure of the community.¹⁶

On Tulse Hill, the opposite was true, with a number of community facilities being built in an attempt to restore the estate, some of which generated intense and continuing problems, and none of which of themselves restored the popularity of the estate.

Laundry facilities and drying rooms epitomised the contradiction between needed communal provision and communal abuse. Their provision was considered a must for many years on flatted estates. On the most modern estates, this practice had become uncommon because of abuse, but on the pre-war estates and estates built up to the sixties, it was a standard practice, recommended by government reports.¹⁷ Most laundries and drying rooms had been closed because of vandalism, theft and tenants' protests. On every balcony on Tulse Hill in 1979, there was an abandoned, smashed, glass-strewn, windowless, doorless drying room. In Merthyr, the council agreed to brick up drying areas at the end of corridors as a concession to tenants' desires to improve their cramped but appallingly misused environment. Yet on modern estates without laundries such as Ashfield Valley, it was a major plank of tenant protest that there were no communal drying facilities. There simply was not room in the small flats.

The result was quite typical of communal provision. If it was not there, it was often considered a major cause of estate problems. If it was there, it became a major focus

of estate destruction.

It may be asked why large estates should not work like a village, separated as they are, and large enough to support their own facilities in most cases. Indeed many a modern planner conceived of estates in exactly that light, encompassing schools, launderettes and hairdressers, shops, community centre and even a pub and a church. Of course, many estates had none of these things and that was a major source of complaint, making it very difficult for tenants to get together. Fourteen of the survey estates had few facilities; a few had some facilities that worked reasonably. However, it was common on the problem estates in the survey with reasonable facilities to find the shops boarded up and the community centre or play areas a source of friction and factionalism, if not violence; and most facilities were expensive, dirty and vulnerable to break-ins.

Both shops and community centres often resembled fortresses. Desperately needed play areas were often ransacked and abandoned. Where well used, they were often too near dwellings for comfort and a constant source of nuisance between youngsters and elderly people with a need for quiet. On one estate, there was a totally derelict play area on the edge of dense, ugly, deck-access blocks. The local authority could not restore it, badly needed as it was, because of the volume of complaints it had generated from residents. But neither could it summon the courage to remove it because of the rampant youthful vandalism that it

believed would be grossly exacerbated by such an act.

The one obvious point was that communal facilities and communal areas did not run themselves. Unfortunately, because of the design of estates, and the social alienation, they needed to be run and guarded by the landlord or by the community association acting on the landlord's behalf. This happened on only one of the estates in the survey prior to local management.

MISUSE OF ESTATES BY YOUTH CONGREGATION

Communal facilities and communal areas posed special problems in relation to youth. It was maybe logical to provide public space that households were deprived of within their own domain. However, in practice these areas attracted vandal damage and youthful congregation. Youth always found out the unguarded corner to hang around. A bench, a lamp-post, a fire-gate or an entrance way, a bridge or a shop-front, all on different estates, provided a physical focus for the social instincts of youth. It was then only a matter of time before the bench was dismantled, the gate off its hinge, the entrance chipped with gang names or sprayed with verbal abuse, or the light fitting torn out. The energy of youth attacked the unguarded areas with surprising venom. In winter, on modern estates with communal heating systems, boys would collect around the heating vents from the main boiler because of the heat they provided. These youthful collecting points not only

generated physical damage to the particular area of congregation. They also generated genuine fear among smaller children and older people. The fear was born of isolated incidents of unusual horror, which somehow spread a threatening reputation to any so-called gang of young people, who in most cases caused little damage, but simply identified themselves through their numbers and noise and physical dominance as a target of fear.

The most horrifying example of youthful abuse of unguarded communal facilities was on a large, old balcony estate in central London. There a group of about 10 youths hid themselves in the toilets of the community centre till the 30 or so old-age-pensioners of the estate had come in for their lunch club. They then locked the exit doors, guarded them, and held all the old people up with knives while two of the youth took all their purses. The youth escaped with their paltry haul, leaving a terrorised group of elderly residents, a defeated staff, and a paralysed community centre. A more trivial and more common example was on a northern estate where benches, newly installed on the steep hills to help elderly residents on their way home from shopping, were used nightly by gangs of youths as a collecting point. Older residents, after several hysterical meetings, got the new benches removed. In fact on many estates, benches were removed as part of tenant-led "improvements", to prevent youth from congregating, and it was the strangest proof of an estate's disintegration that social facilities needed by everyone had to be withdrawn to pacify irate tenants and contain the explosive energy of

youth.

It is the style of the first violent incident, coupled with the universality of the second, added to the landlord's unwillingness or inability either to guard or re-define common areas, that has led to the shrill polarisation between the "uncontrollable" youth on the one hand, and the angry, alienated adult residents on the other. The design of the estates merely provided many vulnerable targets for the youth gangs that have always existed in poor areas. The remote council landlord highlighted the general inability to hold behaviour within bounds.

One of the noticeable areas of failure on the survey estates was the lack of more imaginative provision for youth. Local schools were often opened as youth centres in the evenings. Club halls were also often made over to estate youth clubs. Adventure playgrounds existed on several estates, though only one was well-run with leaders who could control the older youth. The leaders were residents and recently "ex-youth" themselves.

Yet on every estate threatening gangs appeared and reappeared. They were often much tamer than their appearance or reputation. But in a crowd they were certainly capable of menacing, if not actually harming others. It was rare to hear of attempts to reach these gangs, and police were frequently called in by residents to disperse them. Confrontation always seemed part of the

sport, but an estate could rarely take the strain. Unemployment was inevitably exacerbating the youth problem. There literally was no outlet for the most energetic and creative spate of life.

CONCLUSION

The design of the 20 estates in every case posed problems of communal maintenance and social control. The 13 flatted estates had many additional features that invited abuse and fear.

The problems of youthful congregation and vandalism highlighted the vulnerability of estate infrastructure and the lack of supervision at any level.

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CHAPTER IX - THE MANAGEMENT OF PROBLEM ESTATES - EMPTY PROPERTY AND LETTINGS PROBLEMS

THE PROBLEM SEEPS INTO THE COMMUNITY -

There are a number of important management issues that follow on from the design of the estates, their inherent unpopularity and seeming unmanageability. Lettings problems and empty dwellings were the most basic indicator of unpopularity. The maintenance of communal areas was another. The support for and survival of communal facilities was another. The level of neglect, damage and even total destruction to these areas spoke volumes about the scale of the management tasks of the public landlord. All the examples in this chapter are drawn from the 20 estates in the P.E.P. survey.

LETTINGS CONTROL

Although lettings are one of the key elements in housing management, the allocation of council housing has always been such a politically sensitive activity that extremely tight control of it has been retained at the centre. In fact, in many local authorities, elected members still intervene personally in favour of individual constituents and also create a great deal of pressure against such

changes as relaxing the residence requirements for access to council housing or a wider range of offers to homeless families, or monitoring lettings to racial minorities in an attempt to identify discrimination.

In several local authorities in the survey, only one housing officer or one tightly organised and secretive section of the housing department, actually called a "lettings cell" in one local authority, knew the workings of the whole lettings system, in order to "ensure fairness" and to prevent housing managers, supposedly vulnerable to pushy tenants or hard-luck stories, from being able to influence decisions.

This close and centralised approach to lettings created enormous delays in the system. On every estate in the survey it was difficult to get a dwelling signed up with a given tenant, even if it had been empty for some time. On no estate before local management was there a swift, locally-run re-let system, the only known approach that would keep empty property down and curb vandalism. Even the G.L.C's so-called "instant lettings" took up to three months to clear the queue of applicants each time it formed in response to advertisements.

Thus, for primarily political reasons, one of the key ingredients of day-to-day housing management had been kept out of the hands of local housing managers. Before estate-based offices opened, none of the estate officers in our 20 estates did more than handle some of the mechanics of the lettings procedure, such as showing applicants a property or

signing them up as tenants after an offer had been accepted. In no case, before local management offices were established, did they have any responsibility for finding suitable and willing tenants, ensuring that there was a waiting list to fill any dwelling the moment it came empty, or controlling transfers. This separation of the lettings function from the rest of housing management made housing management itself a "toothless animal".

It made estate managers feel that they were not in control of the property they were supposed to manage and took away their sense of responsibility for how the property was governed. Because they had no say in lettings, it became much easier for housing officers to blame the tenants for the estate not working well, especially in the case of social problems. Government of the estate was clearly and firmly out of their hands and in the hands of the central bureaucracy and political machine, often anxious to be fair but unable to deliver.

LETTINGS PROBLEMS AND EMPTY PROPERTY

It is hard to establish to what extent the 20 estates became hard to let through the way they were designed and run, and to what extent it was the result of lettings policies as such. Very few local authorities were prepared to admit that they had a "dumping" policy. But in practice, they all used their problem estates to rehouse the most economically and socially vulnerable households.

We did not get exact figures for all the 20 estates and we relied heavily on the evidence of council staff for our overall conclusions, but it was clear that 15 of the 20 were hard to let within the normal council allocations system. As a direct result, these estates housed disproportionate numbers of one-parent and homeless families, unemployed people, households headed by a member of an ethnic minority, and disproportionate numbers of children. Further evidence of lettings problems and unpopularity lay in the high turnover of tenants on the estates and the high incidence of rent arrears (see below).

The following table shows the incidence of lettings problems on the 20 estates.

53.

LETTINGS PROBLEMS PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ESTATE-BASED MANAGEMENT		
	Number of estates out of 20	
Higher than local authority average of one-parent families	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	16
Higher than local authority average tenancy turnover	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	16
Higher than local authority average of unemployed and tenants on welfare benefits	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	16
Higher than local authority average child density	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	15
Hard to let	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	15
Higher than local authority average of lettings to homeless	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	14
Ethnic minorities disproportionately allocated to unpopular estates	XXXXXXXXXX	9
Continuing stigma of first allocations from slum clearance area	XXXXXX	5

ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

The numbers of one-parent families were known for 11 of the 20 estates. On average, 17% of households were one-parent families, compared with 4% nationally. On some estates, one half of all the families with children had only one parent. Residents themselves were conscious of the social stress this caused, often mentioning the numbers of one-parent-families as proof of how unstable the community was and how much of a dumping ground for social problems it had become.

They were less likely to have economic choice, and were more prone to allied problems such as homelessness. They were also more vulnerable to sickness and family crisis. One-parent families were far more likely to be in financial difficulties, especially over rent payments,¹ than 2-parent households. Therefore, the tenants' common diagnosis of their community as a "dump" and "full of riff-raff" had its own crude grounding in reality.

The disproportionate numbers of one-parent families on estates where people on the whole did not want to live, was as much a reflection of their own housing need and lack of choice, as the relative ease with which the council could fit them into estates with a high turnover. It could be argued that existing tenants pressing for transfers off the unpopular estates should not be given that right, thereby ensuring a supply of empty dwellings for more desperate households on the better estates. In many ways this would

make sense as it would bottle up the more ambitious tenants on the estates that needed drastic improvements and a lot of drive to bring them about; it would help prevent ghettoisation and it would ensure a better chance for poorer households. In practice, however, though all the local authorities we visited paid lip service to helping the needy and opposed grading of tenants and "dumping", they took the line of least resistance, adopted progressive transfer policies for "good" tenants, i.e. tenants with no arrears and tenants whose house was in a good state of redecoration for re-letting, and let the vacated dwellings on the 20 survey estates to the most vulnerable families, who had very little resilience or choice. The Cowgate estate, Newcastle, which was in the survey, traced its latest decline to the period in the mid-seventies when transfers became much easier and many of the established tenants left for a "better" area, while the vacated unmodernised dwellings could not attract more ambitious and choosy tenants.

One indicator of the extent of upwardly mobile transfers was that the turnover of tenants on 16 of the 20 estates was higher than the local authority average. It would not have been possible in almost all cases to transfer to a worse estate within the local authority since these were the very bottom of the pile. Therefore it must be assumed that the vast majority of transfers were to better

estates.*

CHILD DENSITY

Fifteen of the estates had higher than the local authority average of child densities. The major cause of this was the predominance of 3-bedroom dwellings on most estates. Although exact figures were only available for nine estates,** on these 33% of the population was found to be under 16. This was 50% higher than the national average. Large families have often been concentrated on the poorer estates. Therefore the high child densities were to be expected.

* But not all moves off estates were transfers -
e.g. Tulse Hill: March 1980 - February 1981

Tenants leaving estate

Transfers off estate	41	(41%)
No forwarding address	36	(36%)*
Deaths	10	(10%)
Evicted	9	(9%)
Flats abandoned	3	(3%)
Other	2	(2%)
	<u>101</u>	

e.g. Wenlock Barn: Voids May 1984

Reasons for void

Transfers	25	(76%)
Deaths	6	(18%)
Abandoned	2	(6%)
Found own accommodation	1	(3%)
	<u>34</u>	

<u>** Under 16's</u>	<u>Mainly 1981 Census</u>
Springwell	31%
Braunstone N.	38%
Cowgate	31%
Ragwater	45%
Chalkhill	40%
Broadwater Farm	27%
Stockwell Park	34%
Tulse Hill	23%
Edward Wood	30%
Average =	33%

*** Many of these were likely to be transfers.

Although it has been demonstrated that a high density of children causes problems such as noise and vandalism, this should not of itself cause an estate's unpopularity since many suburban owner-occupied estates must have similar child ratios. It is a function of the lack of social controls and the large amounts of unfilled time through truancy and unemployment among youth, coupled with unsuitable design, high-density building and the intense communality but poor community spirit of most estates that children cause so much trouble.²

Children inevitably created noise, instinctively congregated in groups and had an irrepressible exuberance that displayed itself in daring and damage, depending on how much they could get away with. The behaviour of children was not only determined in large measure by what adults allowed them to do. It was also very much a function of estate living as such, for both adults and children. The estate, as a separated but unintegrated community, as a vast uncontrolled but boring no-man's-land, the estate as an environment hostile to family living and to children's love of the outdoors and thirst for adventure, caused the loss of confidence by adults in their own community of children. Children became both the cause and the victims. Nothing could represent more vividly the failure of public housing than the overwhelming verdict by housing officers and Government experts³ that children are an actual measure in themselves of unpopularity. One wonders whether it isn't also a symptom of our ageing society, the foundering nature of our economy and the loss of a sense of the future that makes us

connect children so glibly to a more general social malaise, and blame them directly for problems on unpopular estates.

Ironically, on the most unpopular estates in areas of very low demand, such as Merseyside and Greater Manchester, very few families were moving onto the problem estates in the survey, and existing families were as far as possible being moved off the flatted estates in these areas. They were largely replaced by young single people and the absence of family life was felt to generate even more instability and transience. This would indicate that the root problem was not the children of the young, single people but the overall management structure, which was totally inadequate to cope with the problems of running a large, poorly designed estate.

HOMELESSNESS

Fourteen of the estates housed disproportionate numbers of homeless families. On several estates, especially in London, the bulk of all lettings, up to 90% in one case, were to previously homeless families. Homeless families were not only disproportionately made up of one-parent families. They were very often black. In the cases of Lambeth, Haringey, Brent and Wandsworth, the majority of homeless families rehoused on the estates in the survey were black. There is substantial evidence that this was because of racial discrimination rather than because of homelessness, and has actually been demonstrated for some of the estates in our survey by Lambeth, Islington and Greater

London Councils. Almost certainly, it would also be true of Brent and Haringey.⁴ The exact overlap between race, homelessness, and lone parenthood was not known for the survey estates but there was a funnel effect as the three categories of housing disadvantage overlapped and were sifted to the bottom of the lettings pile.

The poorest estates, such as we visited, became a lettings net to catch those rejected by the system for better offers. Various attempts were made in authorities as far apart as Gateshead, Rochdale and London, to reduce lettings to homeless families on the estates in the survey. The effect of these efforts is examined in the next chapter. But the point of critical importance is that the homelessness funnel could be stopped or at least modified because it was partly a product of the filter system of lettings operations.

By establishing strict criteria of need, of which homelessness is the most acute and the most irrefutable, and by running a dual system where good estates are for those in less acute need who can wait, or those who "deserve" better as a result of their tenancy record, and where bad estates are difficult to let and can therefore be used readily for those whose need forces them to accept whatever's offered, certain estates become earmarked as suitable for the poor and the homeless. As a result, families who are desperate and can find no other way into the council market, inevitably uncover ways of becoming homeless, now the only sure avenue to rehousing. This does not mean that homeless families are liars and frauds, as is sometimes suggested. It

means that they are prepared to go through the fight and pain and stigma of homelessness because they cannot hold their family home together without abdicating self-reliance and declaring themselves homeless. They cannot find their own home through normal channels and are forced into declared homelessness by severely restrictive allocation policies.

Homelessness on the priority estates was a kind of slavery, a way of breaking a family's will to independence. One of the major effects was a kind of truculent resentment of the local authority, "the master", and angry resignation to the stigma and the dependence that went with it. It was quite impossible to detect in many of the supposedly desperate homeless families being rehoused by the G.L.C. on their worst estates any sense of gratitude or relief. In fact, this was one of the biggest factors in demoralising and even angering estate staff. Not only did homeless families resent their landlord, but in almost every case, the landlord's representatives on the ground, the estate officers or housing managers, often resented homeless families for either grudgingly accepting or refusing offers on their estate. Newly recruited local management staff were more likely to accept a family's right to pick and choose. But certainly in London, where homelessness was a dominant avenue for lettings, it was considered the main problem and was constantly thrown up by housing officials and local politicians as a major reason for the failure to keep up standards of management on problematic estates. As an explanation it was patently absurd. Ironically, the stigma that was attached

to homelessness was the very reason that councils at various times were unable to treat homeless applicants like any others, but restricted offers to them either specifically to unpopular estates or to "one offer only" or both. Councillors and housing officers alike were reluctant to tar all their estates with the brush of homelessness. The excuse was that only the unpopular estates had vacancies. In Lambeth, certain estates, such as the two in our survey, were designated hard to let and were reserved at certain crisis periods for the homeless families on the grounds that their needs were so great that they must be given priority over all other lettings. At various times they were allowed one offer only. In other words, lettings policies ensured that homelessness became the hallmark of problem estates. Dumping was barely disguised.

The fact that homeless families were often relegated to the worst council properties created the impression that homelessness in itself was some kind of social offence. Such a suggestion would be nonsensical. It was simply a rationing system to force the poor and the vulnerable into the dwellings no one else would choose to live in. The large estates were built with a dream of mass housing but they became minority housing. They would work for the rich but they rehoused almost exclusively the poor. They were meant to end slums, but they became in less than a generation tighter and more closed social ghettos than ever the back-to-backs were.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Ghetto is a dangerously loaded word. None of the estates in the survey were total ghettos, though most of them housed almost entirely households from the lowest-income backgrounds or increasingly unsupported, dependent households. This was much more true out of London than in London however. Racially none of the estates were true ghettos such as exist in the United States Public Housing projects.⁵ However, in the nine estates of the survey located in areas with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, the estates housed even more disproportionate numbers of minority households. On the seven estates for which there were specific figures, the average number of households headed by a member of an ethnic minority was over 40%. Yet the average for surrounding areas was 27%. Therefore the gap between a representative concentration and the actual proportions was considerable. On some estates half or more of the population belonged to racial minorities. It was never the case that an estate was popular among non-white tenants while being unpopular with white tenants.* Therefore this rehousing bias did not represent the housing choice of ethnic minorities, but a further mark of its unpopularity and decline. In fact, very often minority households exercised no housing choice at all since they were coming across the rehousing system for the first time, were often in very great need and more vulnerable outsiders to the council housing market.

* This may no longer be true of the Asian-dominated estates of Spitalfields.

The incidence of homelessness and single parenthood was higher among non-white families seeking access to council accommodation than among white families,⁶ and access to the least popular estates was most often linked with these factors. For example, on the Henry Prince Estate in Wandsworth, before 1982, about 90% of lettings were to homeless families, of whom 60% were black. However, the relationship between homelessness and race did not account for all of the concentration of ethnic minorities on unpopular estates that occurs.⁷ What seemed to happen was that through homelessness, non-white families would get the most disfavoured and restricted offers. Within that narrow range, they would be concentrated on the very worst estates or the estates where there were already many non-white families.

The concentration of minority households was often taken as a further proof of stigma, referred to frequently by estate staff as both a cause and a clear sign of the estate's decline. However, it must be said that among residents, racial issues were rarely raised as evidence of decline. It is therefore possible that housing staff were more prejudiced than residents. Given the ambitions of housing staff to work on better estates and often to graduate away from estate-level work altogether, this would be quite plausible.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Specific unemployment rates were known for 10 of the 20 estates. The average number of males over 16 of working age seeking employment but unemployed on these estates was 57%. Estates in Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and Tyneside were found where over 70% of households had no breadwinner. Even on the London estates, where rates were much lower, unemployment was a rapidly growing problem, especially among the young, and was more than double the national average. ~~For example, on Tulse Hill, Brixton, it was 40% of all working adults.~~

These unemployment figures showed a most serious trend. It is hard to define exactly at what point a community becomes economically and socially unviable. But our impression was that if more than half the population was not economically self-supporting, the consequent poverty and marginality of that community made it unviable. The consequences of that state of affairs have been experienced in the United States in communal violence, rioting and looting, a pale shadow of which was seen in this country in 1981. Many of the riots in the United States began in public housing estate ghettos.⁸ The youth problems which were commonplace on estates, coupled with the unemployment levels here described, made a Molotov cocktail which local authorities were seriously alarmed by.

Lettings policies at the centre, as exercised in relation to the 20 estates we examined, produced socially isolated communities at the bottom of the public housing ladder.

It would probably be more accurate to suggest that the social disadvantages of the worst estates were a result of lettings policies towards more popular estates where a system of queuing and selection worked to the advantage of better-off tenants. The complete lack of lettings policies other than "dumping" on the least favoured estates was primarily the result of selecting on merit for the more favoured estates.

EMPTY PROPERTY

The corollary of lettings problems was empty property.

The number of empty properties on the estates was the clearest and crudest indicator both of the unpopularity of the estates and the cumbersome lettings policies. Only three of the 20 estates had a comparable tenancy turnover and number of empty dwellings with the rest of the local authority stock. But even these three estates had lettings problems in that they were unpopular with higher priority applicants and were difficult to let except to the most desperate households. A high turnover of tenants was common to 17 of the estates and not only undermined the social fabric; it also left behind the larger, poorer families, since they were the ones most likely to fall into

arrears,⁹ a direct barrier to eligibility for transfers in most cases.¹⁰ On the majority of priority estates, the high tenancy turnover and high arrears went hand in glove by virtue of the lettings and transfer policies favouring the better estates and the better-off tenants.

We knew the number of empty dwellings at the outset of the special projects on 18 of the 20 estates. There was a total of over 900 empty dwellings (5% of total) with an average of 50 on each estate. However, there were wide fluctuations between estates that seemed as much a reflection of lettings incompetence or management diligence as housing demand. Thus several London estates in areas of serious homelessness had more than 100 empty dwellings. Conversely, several northern estates in areas of very low demand had relatively few empty dwellings. According to the 1981 Census, the voids level in inner London was double the rate for outer London or for England as a whole. Voids on the survey estates in London ranged from less than 1% to 18%.

The following diagram shows the number of empty properties on the 20 estates before a local management office was established.

54.

VOID PROPERTIES ON 20 ESTATES

VOIDS - excluding voids in capital programmes			
Type of estate	Project starting date	Number of voids at start of project	Voids as % of total dwellings on estate
Cottage - N.W. England	1979	7	1.5%
Cottage - North of England	Feb. 80	19	1.9%
Cottage - Midlands	Feb. 79	50	2.5%
Cottage - North of England	1979	41	4.1%
Cottage - North of England	July 81	21	5.3%
Cottage - Midlands	Jan. 82	100	35.0%
Cottage - N.W. England	Jan. 81	9	2.9%
Balcony - London	Apr. 80	15	2.2%
Balcony - London	1978	c.100	18.0%
Balcony - London	Mar. 80	68	7.7%
Balcony - London		Unknown	
Mainly balcony - N. West	Feb. 80	79	4.1%
Balcony - London	July 81	43	16.0%
Modern - London		8	0.5%
Modern - London		Unknown	
Modern - London	1980	Average 10	1.2%
Modern - London	Aug. 81	34	3.2%
Modern - London	Aug. 79	62	6.2%
Modern - London	July 78	123	11.0%
Modern - N.W. England	Feb. 81	140	13.8%
Cottage Average - 34 Balcony Average - 61 Modern Average - 61			

Lettings sections were run quite separately from other parts of the housing service, such as repair and control of empty

property or rent collection, all of which were integrally connected with the function of lettings. Therefore lettings departments took responsibility only for selecting tenants. They did not take responsibility for any of its consequences.

Empty dwellings spun a whole chain of problems that fed into the main arteries of estate life.

LOSS OF RENT

The first result was the direct loss of rent and rates income to the council. This was barely mentioned by the 19 local authorities and was certainly not considered a major reason for setting up local management. The remote management structures and the global accounting systems put little stress on maximising income as a way of paying for management and maintenance, on the strength of which dwellings would be kept occupied as a very high priority.

It took a long time for the link to be made between rent income and management and maintenance costs and the virtue of keeping dwellings let. A strong incentive now lies in the substantial rent and rates income each occupied dwelling generates since the big rent rises of the last five years.

We calculated that 10 occupied dwellings paid for the salary of one estate worker.¹¹ On that basis, on average each of the 20 estates could in theory have had five additional estate

workers if they were fully occupied. Several of the local authorities we visited, which had not established local management, claimed that they had no way of paying for local management and maintenance. Income from rent and rates was often earmarked to repay debt charges and to provide general council services, such as housing advice, homelessness admissions, members' inquiries and complaints. The idea had not taken root that management and maintenance were directly linked to rent incomes, albeit such a high proportion of rent income now comes from housing benefit. Therefore the loss of income from empty properties took a long time to percolate the local authority consciousness. Even then it was more the vandalism they invited and the cost of continually re-repairing damaged empty property than loss of rent that forced remedial action upon the local authorities. Tenants by contrast were often very upset by the obvious waste from empty property and would frequently say -

"If they kept all our flats occupied, maybe they wouldn't put our rents up so high."

EMPTY DWELLINGS BREED MORE EMPTIES

The second direct effect of empty properties was the poor advertisement it made for the estate. The very fact that there were problems keeping it fully let advertised those very problems to existing residents, applicants and council workers, especially caretakers and estate officers. It became hard to recruit caretakers to the estates with empty

dwellings and applicants would be more likely to refuse an offer on a balcony or street with several other boarded-up properties.

On the Tulse Hill estate in Brixton, the estate officers and caretakers were beaten to despair by 19 out of 20 applicants refusing to take up offers. Some of these were referred as homeless families but such was the physical aspect of the estate, with rows of boarded-up windows and glassless stairwells, that even desperate households could not bear to move in. On some estates the local authority had all but abandoned attempts at letting property. In Liverpool, there were a number of flats on estates that were simply not offered by lettings staff to applicants. -On the Goscote estate in Walsall, after modernisation in the seventies, nearly half the dwellings were still empty and such was the notoriety of the remaining community and the bleakness of the ransacked, abandoned dwellings that it was still unlettable when the special project began.¹²

VANDALISM

Private property is normally guarded. Not so public housing, on the strength of which the impression was widely created on the run-down estates that empty property was not wanted any more. Empty, unguarded property appeared to belong to no one.

Closely linked to the fact that empty property was unguarded

and that there was a lot of it, was the extensive vandalism. Empty dwellings on all but one of the estates in the survey were invariably heavily vandalised, usually within a few days of them becoming empty. Where the dwelling was modernised or was being modernised, everything of value would be stripped out. Most local authorities were convinced that it was the work of experienced thieves, although it was still commonly classed as vandalism. In one case, it was suggested that the building contractor actually being paid to do the repair work was also responsible for stealing the heating systems and other fittings. On only one estate was any kind of effective guarding instituted, and it was an ongoing battle on all the others to outwit the vandals. On one estate, impregnable steel shuttering at the windows inspired vandalism, youth to climb on the roof, take the tiles off and force a way in. Only a human guard proved really effective and in 18 out of 20 this was not contemplated because of the cost. Yet each vandalised property cost anything between £500 and £8,000 to restore. The cost of a full-time night-guard plus relief would be in the region of £12,000 a year, so any estate with about 20 empty dwellings a year would have spent less on a guard than on repair to vandal-damage. The estates in the survey with an average of 50 empty properties each, could have paid for approximately two property guards each.

On the 20 estates, neighbours did not see fit to guard the empty property next door, in spite of their direct interest in seeing it occupied rather than destroyed. There were a

number of reasons for this. If the police were called, it was claimed they often took two hours to come. In some cases, it was held they never came. There was a genuine fear almost everywhere of reprisals, so a resident was reluctant to stick his neck out over something that wasn't his own, whether it was against thieves or youthful vandals. The process of alienation had bitten so deep that people often felt there was nothing to be gained by trying anyway. It was a lost cause. This latter view was based on long experience of nothing working, and no familiarity with the landlord's presence or commitment to his property. There was no sense of ownership or control on the part of landlord or tenant.

The landlord in turn genuinely did not believe it was his responsibility to guard his own property. Councils in every case blamed residents for failing to stop vandalism to empty property that did not even belong to them. Councils, by some strange misinterpretation of the meaning of being a socially responsible landlord, assumed that the estate as a collective entity belonged to the collective residents who happened to live there, rather than to the council. Councils on the whole did not in this sense take seriously the ownership of property.

The logic, induced by the anonymous and seemingly negligent council landlord, that -

What's no one's and no one can see is mine"
produced the thief who stripped out the dwelling. It then

became anyone's illegal business to recycle whatever could be stolen. On the Tulse Hill estate, G.L.C. officers claimed that one empty flat had had a central heating system installed eight times over in an attempt to get it occupied. But each time the vandals/thieves got there first. On the Cowgate estate in Newcastle, it became cheaper to strip out all the fittings, including the central heating system, when a house became empty and reinstate them later when an occupant was ready to move in, because otherwise about £2,000 was lost each time a house became vacant through theft and vandalism. Similar experiences could be cited for most of the 20 estates.

AIMLESS VANDALISM

So much for the theft-oriented or purposeful vandalism. The aimless vandalism was different. Breaking things has always given a curious satisfaction, like crunching a Coca-Cola can underfoot. And if someone tries to stop you, it becomes a challenge and an adventure. Either way, the target of vandalism is there for the taking because it doesn't belong to anyone directly and is not being used or protected by anyone. The council is not a body almost anyone, except the elected politicians themselves, identified with very closely. So vandalism on the whole is either purposeful and profitable, or it is purposeless and unstoppable. A notion of its main cause is indicated by the fact that occupied property was very rarely vandalised on any of the estates. In fact, it was almost unheard of except for

broken windows. Even vandalism to occupied garages was much less common than to unoccupied garages. Most of the vandalism to empty properties on the poor estates should therefore have been stoppable, if the above analysis is correct, by simply occupying or guarding all property, in whatever way necessary. The same logic should apply to open spaces and all other communal or unoccupied areas, as well as to dwellings. Guarding is part of the process of ownership. Occupation and use have proved the most vandal-proof preventives.

SQUATTING

Squatting is the fourth consequence of empty property. It has one element in common with vandalism - it is a cause and effect of lawlessness on the poorer estates. There is an almost irrefutable logic to the argument that needy people have a right to occupy empty property, that would otherwise be vandalised. Squatting took place at some point on 10 of the 20 estates, but only five estates, all in London, housed squatters on any scale. The fact that the problem was concentrated in London was mainly a result of the loss of private-rented accommodation and the demolition of most old, decayed areas where people on the edge of the law and the economy previously tucked themselves away. There was real housing need among some squatting groups, and this was cheek by jowl with empty council property, on a very large scale in some boroughs. The empty property represented lack of management rather than lack of need. The boroughs

that were tough with squatters tended to keep their property occupied and avoid the problem. The "progressive" boroughs, like Lambeth, Camden and Islington, with serious management problems, tended to attract squatters into their many empty council dwellings. Ironically these were often areas of great social need and a high incidence of homelessness. The inefficient lettings system with large numbers of empty dwellings seemed to be coupled with widespread homelessness and squatting. It was tempting to conclude that the archaic lettings system to some extent generated both.

It was the experience of the Priority Estates Project and of residents and housing managers up and down the country that squatting often brought with it many forms of social abuse including drugs, noise, all-night parties, large numbers of extra occupants, disregard of neighbourhood conventions and so on. Conflict with bona fide tenants has been common in squatting groups in the inner London boroughs, and the complete lack of sympathy meted out to squatters by estate residents was not necessarily, as is often suggested by liberal outside observers, a sign of bigotry and intolerance on the part of more traditional residents. Rather it was a function of the extreme difficulties of estate-living, where one group, whose members were in any case prepared to run the gauntlet of the law and were not afraid of the police or the courts, did not accept that noise and other anti-social behaviour was the business of those directly affected by it. Associated as squatting has often become with an anarchistic and individualistic view of society, it is obvious, leaving

aside the more extreme forms of social abuse, that squatters will not accommodate easily to a densely built-up and often dissatisfied community where individual behaviour is magnified and impact on others maximised.

TRANSIENT OCCUPIERS

It is also true that on some estates unused buildings encouraged unsettled, transient occupiers, the fall-outs from society's safety net. It seems fair that they should fit in where they could and it is perhaps inevitable that they would find a niche in the least desirable estates. However, their presence threatened even further the many tentative balances within the community, particularly where the indigent passers-through were the young unemployed.

Increasingly, travelling gypsies were moving in and out of the worst peripheral estates as camp sites were drying up around the Northern parts of the country and even, in one case, in inner London and another in central Birmingham. Illegal gypsy occupants caused a staggering amount of grief and dismay on three estates we visited, partly because of the noise of numerous dogs and children, but mainly because of their trade in refuse, their lorries and caravans and their asphaltting equipment (now part of many travellers' trade), parked on the open areas of the estate. At Tulse Hill a large group of gypsies squatted in a block for about four months and caused serious disruption during their stay

on all the above grounds.

Squatting seemed inevitable where empty property on a wide scale existed alongside housing need. It also appeared to be coupled with failure to generate or back up strong social controls aimed at harnessing behaviour to acceptable levels of noise and nuisance. Squatting was not the only source of social abuse, but it was on several estates a major element in a general environment of disarray.

Empty property, therefore, led to loss of rent, vandalism, enhanced lettings problems and squatting.

CONCLUSION

The combined impact of centralised, segregating letting policies and large numbers of empty and vandalised dwellings was so depressing to residents and estate workers that it generated its own momentum and in some cases seemed irreversible. Before going on to examine successes, we will look at other areas of management and social failure.

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CHAPTER X - REPAIRS, RENTS, CLEANSING AND CARETAKING

REPAIRS CONTROL

Lettings officers were hand-picked and trained to have as little sense of identity with individual applicants as possible in order to detach them from the highly pressured and stressful situations of both the customers for council housing and the receiving communities. Estate workers therefore exercised very little control or influence over lettings.

Repairs were more central to the estate officers' direct relations with tenants, but almost always even further removed from his influence or jurisdiction.

The feeling of helplessness, generated in the first instance by lack of any control over or say in lettings, was enhanced by the lack of any responsibility for or control over repairs. In all cases bar one in the survey, repairs were handled by a separate department. Therefore even the chief housing officer was unable to exact the necessary repairs service since its delivery was not under his control. In recent times, some directors of housing have been placed theoretically in charge of the director of technical services, while both departments retained their separate identity.

Without direct control over or responsibility for day-to-day repairs, an estate manager cannot satisfy tenants' needs,¹ since at least 60% of tenants' requests relate to repairs, and the proportion is usually higher.² The more remote and inefficient the repairs service, the higher that proportion is likely to be. In addition, the basic fabric of a house must be kept in good working order if it is not to become a slum. Yet the repairs departments are not directly responsible in most local authorities for keeping houses in good order. The housing department is normally the landlord department, responsible for actually maintaining a good standard of repair to the housing stock. The repairs departments are expected to respond as best they can to housing officers' requests for work. The endless inter-departmental squabbles that arise from that relationship, the so-called "client role" - lost job tickets, incorrectly ordered jobs, access problems, incomplete work, trade demarcations and other bureaucratic confusions - serve only to eat up resources and alienate tenants. In the end neither department carried the can for the repairs. In the local authorities we visited, complaints from senior officers in the repairs departments about the incompetence and inefficiency of housing management and the irresponsibility and destructiveness of tenants were endless. Similarly, housing officers' tales of badly done work, long delays, and lost job tickets were almost continuous. Estate officers barely figured in this charade - "Sorry, I can't help with repairs" or "I can only tell them for you" or "It's not my fault" or "There's nothing I can do" were the standard management responses to the most frequent tenants' complaints.

On all the estates in the survey bar one, prior to local management, the repairs service was inefficient, and in some cases, delinquent, with patently dishonest practices at work. Three of the local authorities in the survey, during the life of the Priority Estates Project, have had senior officers in the direct labour organisation investigated by the C.I.D. or by the Chief Executive. In one case they were all arrested, and the entire repairs department was without senior management while new chief officers were recruited.

In Hackney, the manual unions calculated that only 33% of their time was spent on actual repairs;³ the rest went on travel, paper work, waiting for materials and so on.

Men were often tied to bonus systems that allowed almost no flexibility. In one direct labour organisation, job times were calculated down to tenths of a second. In most local authorities, job times, on which bonuses were based, encouraged shoddy work, made some jobs much more desirable than others. Maximum bonus for the week could sometimes be earned by Tuesday. In one case the men earned a better bonus if they sat doing nothing than if they worked. In the latter case, they simply ensured that jobs were left undone through "no access". In another local authority where there were bonus penalties for no access, the records for genuine abortive job calls through no access were simply destroyed. All record of the job ever having been reported was thereby lost.

Trade demarcations also attempted to lay down to the last nail and splinter of wood, whose job was what, so a carpenter or plumber, if both were needed for a job, could both get their bonuses. Often one tradesman would finish his part of the job and collect his bonus, but the rest of the job would be left undone, either because the complicated system of a job being complete for one trade but requiring re-ordering for another broke down, or because the bonus for finishing off a job might not be good enough. The division of labour and economies of scale appeared totally nonsensical under all the repairs systems we came across in the 20 projects.

On flatted estates, men would fight over who got ground floor jobs; materials would be hurled over balconies instead of the more laborious method of carrying them down stairs. Where glass panes were being replaced, it was normal practice to hammer out the glass and leave it lying on the tarmac or grass below. Many a grass-cutting machine was damaged this way. Spare materials were left lying around, as this was easier than carrying them back to the van or the depot. When once materials had been issued, there was often no check on what was left over. When a tenant on a G.L.C. estate complained about a cast-iron drainpipe that had been left outside her door by the repairmen for weeks, the foreman said -

"That's very odd, it should have been pinched by now. We never take left-overs away."

Tenants' views of this type of service ranged from scorn to

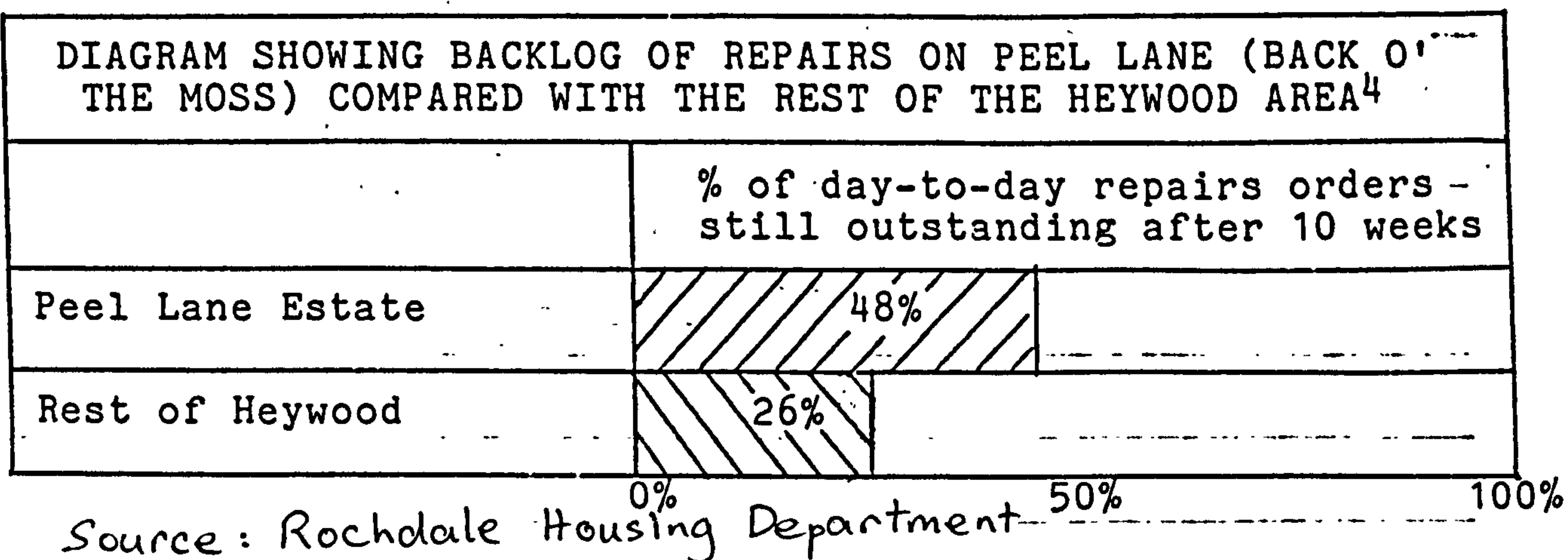
anger. Estate officers, unaware that it should be a normal part of their job to run a repairs service, simply accepted with cynicism or despair the hopelessness of trying to get things done better.

In our survey, no repairs service worked to the satisfaction of housing managers prior to local management.

We have in the course of our work come across three housing departments that received an efficient repairs service. Only one of these was in the survey, however, possibly because carefully repaired estates had not reached the point of decline that was common to the 20 examples we visited. The poor repairs service was one of three dominant complaints from tenants we consulted on priority estates. It was the major cause of the physical decline of property, the ultimate test of a slum.

What we had no way of judging was whether the repairs service to better estates was better, but it is very probable that this would be the case. There would be more political impetus, more pressure from the community, and a better housing stock to work with. Repairsmen also preferred to work on better estates, like everyone else. The only unmeasured indicator that we found came from Rochdale where one of the more recent priority estates, Back o' the Moss (not in the original survey), was shown to receive a much worse service than the rest of the estates in the area, as the following diagram shows.

55.



Because there was no commitment within the local authorities either to base repairs locally or to integrate them firmly with estate management, the estates in the survey ranged from dilapidated and decayed to positively dangerous. The long-term prognosis for many of the estates was as a consequence fatal, and in many people's minds, poor council housing was like poor quality furniture. It wore out quickly, wasn't worth repairing and should be junked rather than restored. In the case of modern post-war estates, it sometimes wasn't built to last more than two generations anyway and its time was already up.

RENTS, ARREARS AND LEGAL SANCTIONS

With little or no say in lettings and little or no control over repairs, local estate officers often seemed like the emperor with no clothes, parading authority but commanding very little. The one area they were invariably held responsible for was rent collection and arrears which took up a major chunk of a housing officer's time,⁵ although

there were numerous other partial tasks that accrued to the local housing officer, from checking empty property, to inspecting the dwelling of a tenant wanting a transfer.*

However, on most estates, the estate officer's control over actual rent collection was minimal since office, giro or bank collection had become the norm. Only three of the local authorities in our survey still used door-to-door collection. All three projects were on cottage estates outside or on the edge of the big cities, and in two of the three, door-to-door collection was only carried out on the better and "safer" parts of the estate. These collections provided an umbilical link between the households and the landlord and served to pick up repairs orders and complaints, as well as endless other queries and problems. Arrears were lower on the three estates, but were still much higher than for the rest of the local authority stock on two of the three estates. Only where door-to-door collection applied to all tenants did it really work since bad payers often opted out of the door-to-door system in favour of other methods, given the choice.**

On the remaining 17 estates, tenants either paid at a rent office, a rent van or the district office, or they paid by giro. Giro is supposed to be the most arrears-prone system.

* City University counted up over 30 designated jobs for housing managers in one of the survey authorities.⁶

** In Keith Kirby and Sue Duncan's comprehensive analysis of arrears patterns, they show that arrears are much higher among tenants who opt out of door-to-door collection than tenants who opt to go on paying that way. Some local authorities operating door-to-door collections give tenants that choice.

56.

METHODS OF RENT PAYMENT (Some estates had more than one method of rent payment, therefore total exceeds 20)	
	Number of estates
Rent collected door to door	3
At estate office	6
Fortnightly rent van	1
At district office or area rent office	12
Giro	9

In fact, arrears were approximately the same for giro as for office collection in our survey, arrears being extremely high on all the estates.

RENTS, ARREARS AND LEGAL SANCTIONS

Rent arrears on the 20 problem estates were held to be much higher than the rest of the local authority with only one exception. On 13 of the 14 estates where arrears information was complete, the unpopular project estates had on average double the arrears of their local authority as a whole.⁷ But arrears were escalating rapidly across the board, and in total the difference was one of degree.

Arrears in the survey were heavily concentrated in London or Liverpool. There seemed to be a direct relationship between difficult-to-let estates and rent arrears. The focus of arrears problems in London and Liverpool coincided

with the earlier findings of the difficult-to-let statistics (Chapters 7 and 8) and almost certainly related directly to the nature of the stock, the proportion of flats, the social deprivation, the size of landlord, and the housing management structures.

In addition to the greatly increased arrears that appeared to result from mechanised, centralised or less personal rent collection, the actual cost of operating the rent accounts under the mechanical system was high and, under the giro system, usually higher than the labour-intensive door-to-door system.⁸ Of course, added to the actual cost was the cost in greatly increased arrears. Staff jobs had been cut on the ground, but banking services, giro charges, computer systems within the local authority and the multiplication of paper procedures that went with the increasing remoteness, had all added to costs while reducing efficiency. Directors wrung their hands at the faulty computer print-outs, or alternatively, the accurate print-outs showing accelerating arrears. Their mechanical "brain" did not do the job for them.

Our impressions of arrears procedures prior to the establishment of a local office tallied with the City University research⁹ showing that even after the abolition of door-to-door rent collection and the computerisation of rent accounting, over 50% of housing managers' and estate officers' time was spent on checking and chasing arrears (mainly checking). Because of the dramatic increases in arrears, inevitably this has been an expanding and

increasingly burdensome part of the estate officer's role.

57. TABLE SHOWING RENT COLLECTION METHOD AND ARREARS

Estate	Method of rent collection	Average gross rent 1982/83	Average debt per household for all households
Cottage - N.W.	door to door + rent office	£14-50	£14-49
Cottage - North	giro	£19	£63
Cottage - Midlands	estate office+district office	£22	£95
Cottage - North	rent office	£22	£160
Cottage - North	estate office + door to door	£19	£76
Cottage - N.W.	district office	£20	£81
Cottage - Midlands	estate office + door to door	£22	£170
Walk-up - London	giro + rent office	£25	£98
Walk-up - London	fortnightly rent van + district office	£25	£54
Walk-up - London	giro	£25	£186
Walk-up - London	estate office	£25	£218
Walk-up - N.W.	giro + district office	£30 ^a	£230
Walk-up - London	giro + district rent offices	£21	NA
Modern - London	estate office+district office	£39 ^a	£50
Modern - London	giro	£30	£128
Modern - London	giro	£33 ^a	£188
Modern - London	giro + district rent office	£39 ^a	£253
Modern - London	district office	£26	£235
Modern - N.W.	estate office+district office	£22	£114
Modern - London	district office + giro	£40 ^a	£368

^aincludes district heating charge

There was a very wide range in levels of arrears between the

highest and lowest local authorities.

The next diagram shows the number of weeks in arrears owed on average by each household according to different types and location of estates in the survey. Weeks in arrears are the clearest measure because it takes account of differences in rent levels in different boroughs. And while averaging the total debt across the total number of households concealed the real levels of individual debts, and the numbers of households free of debts, it seemed to give the clearest indication of the problem and the variations on an estate by estate basis.

58. TABLE SHOWING PATTERN OF ARREARS

		Average arrears in weeks
LOCATION	Out of London	5
	In London	7
TYPE OF ESTATE	Cottage	4.4
	Flatted	6
COLLECTION METHOD	Door-to-door	4
	Office	6
	Giro	6

Flatted estates, location in London, and impersonal rent collection were shown to be related to higher arrears than cottage estates outside London with door-to-door collection.

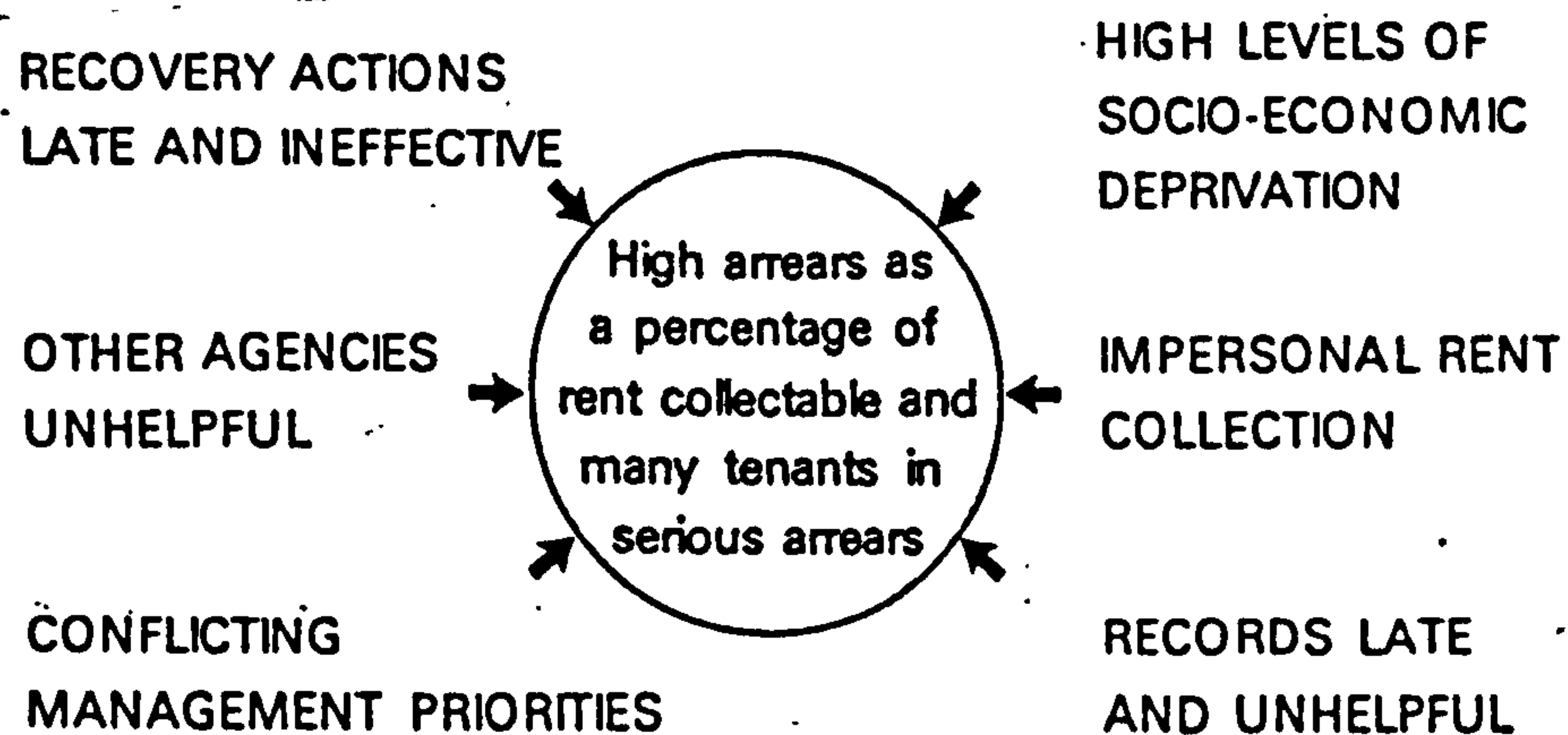
About five times more tenants on an unpopular estate than on an average estate might be in serious arrears. For

example, on one of the survey estates throughout 1983, between 44% and 58% of all tenants owed over £90 each.

The exhaustive Department of the Environment rent arrears survey¹⁰ found that management, as well as social factors, were closely related to arrears. (See following diagram).

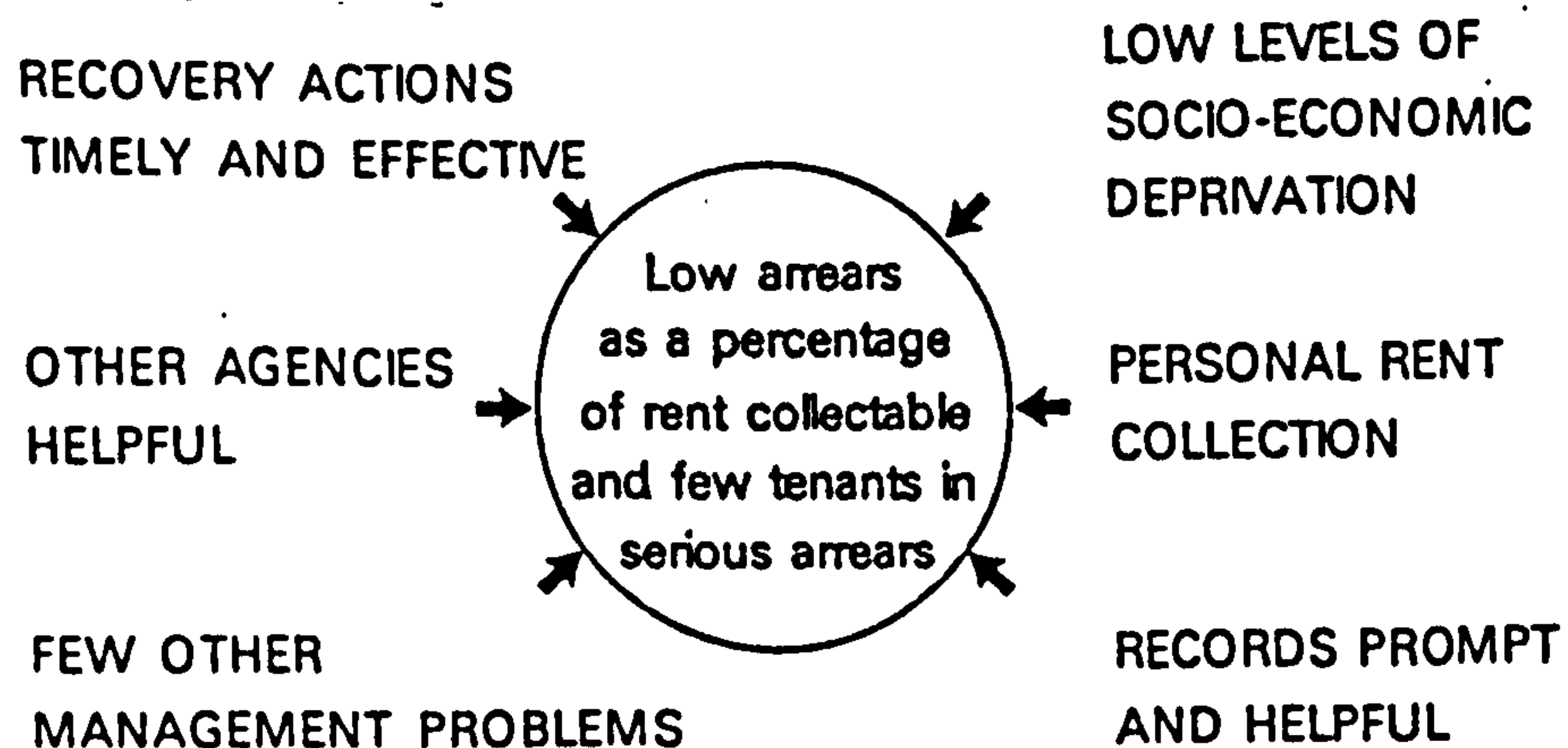
59.

THE PATTERN OF VERY HIGH ARREARS



60.

THE PATTERN OF LOW ARREARS



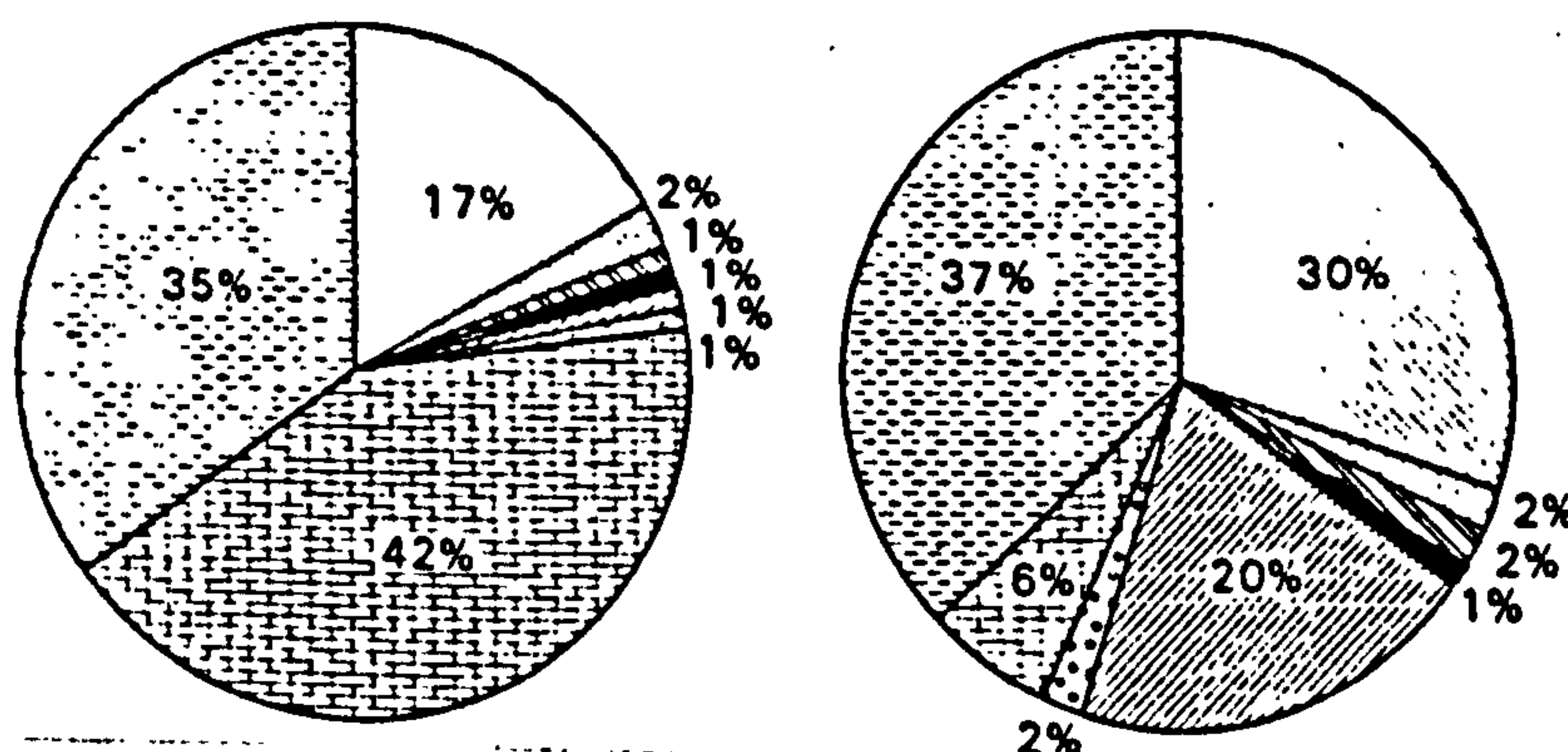
The Department of the Environment Arrears Survey found that door-to-door collection overcame most of the hurdles to rent payment, including in many cases, poverty. This was partly because of the personal contact and the pressure and sense of responsibility it created. It was primarily because it gave shape and identity to the landlord and it placed the

initiative for achieving the goal of rent payment firmly in the hands of the local officer.

The following diagram¹¹ illustrates clearly the relationship between method of collection and serious arrears. Only 6% of serious arrears cases were part of the door-to-door system, while 42% of all tenants paid their rent that way.

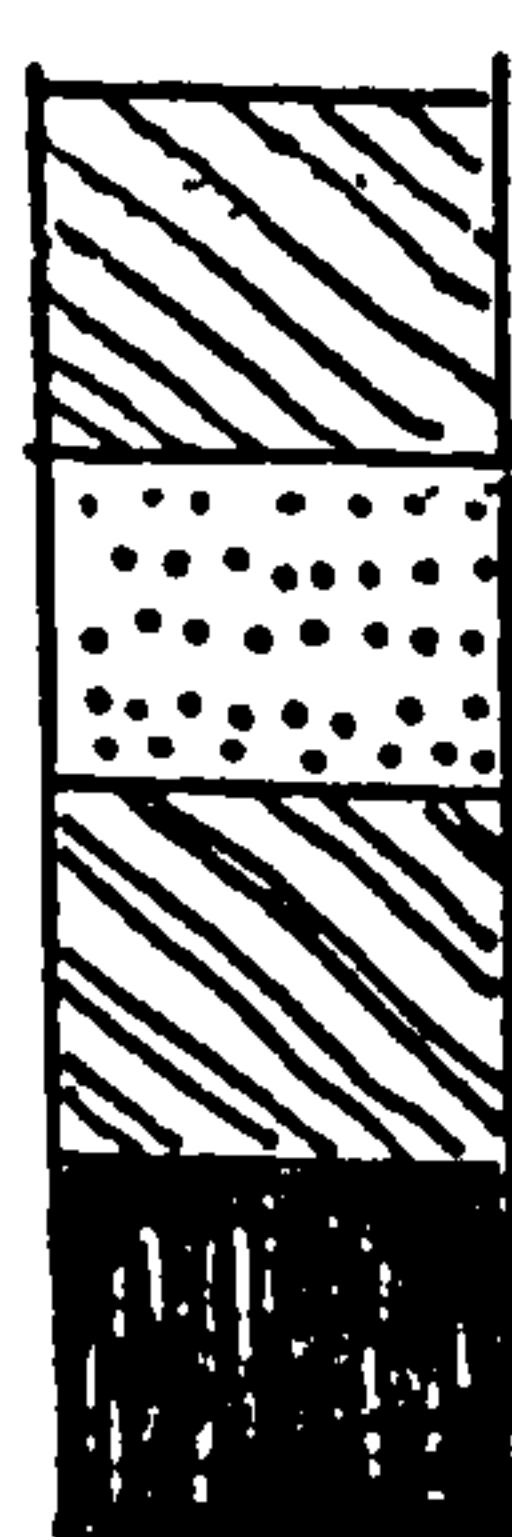
61.

USUAL RENT PAYMENT METHOD



Random sample of all tenants

Tenants in serious arrears



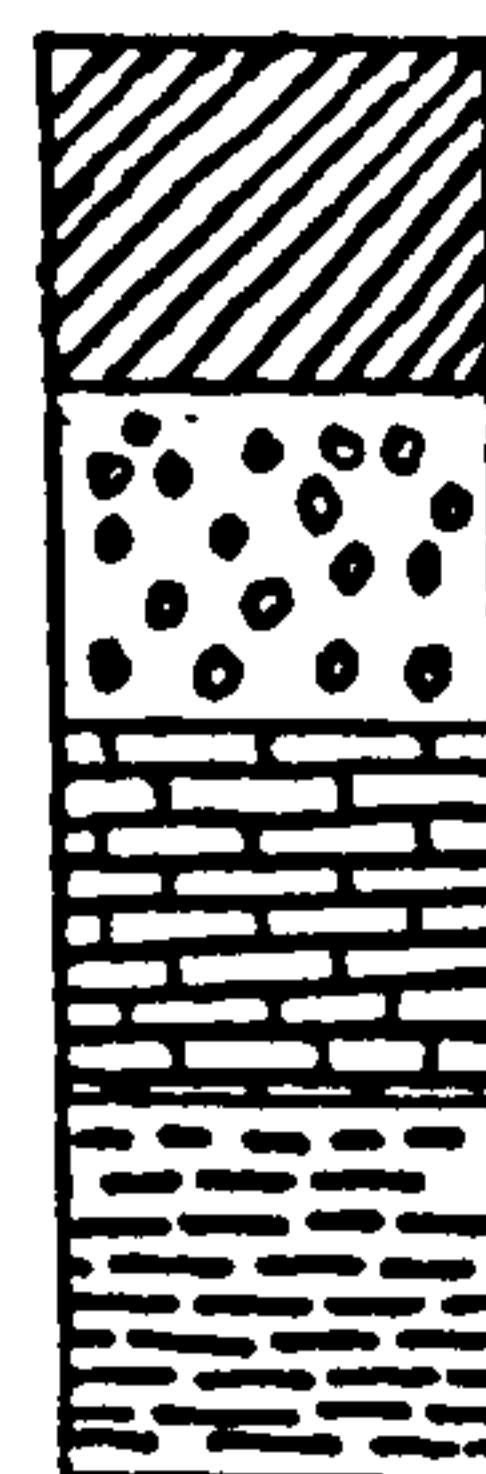
Method

By Post Office Giro

By bankers order

By cheque through the post

By deduction from wages



Rent paid direct by DHSS

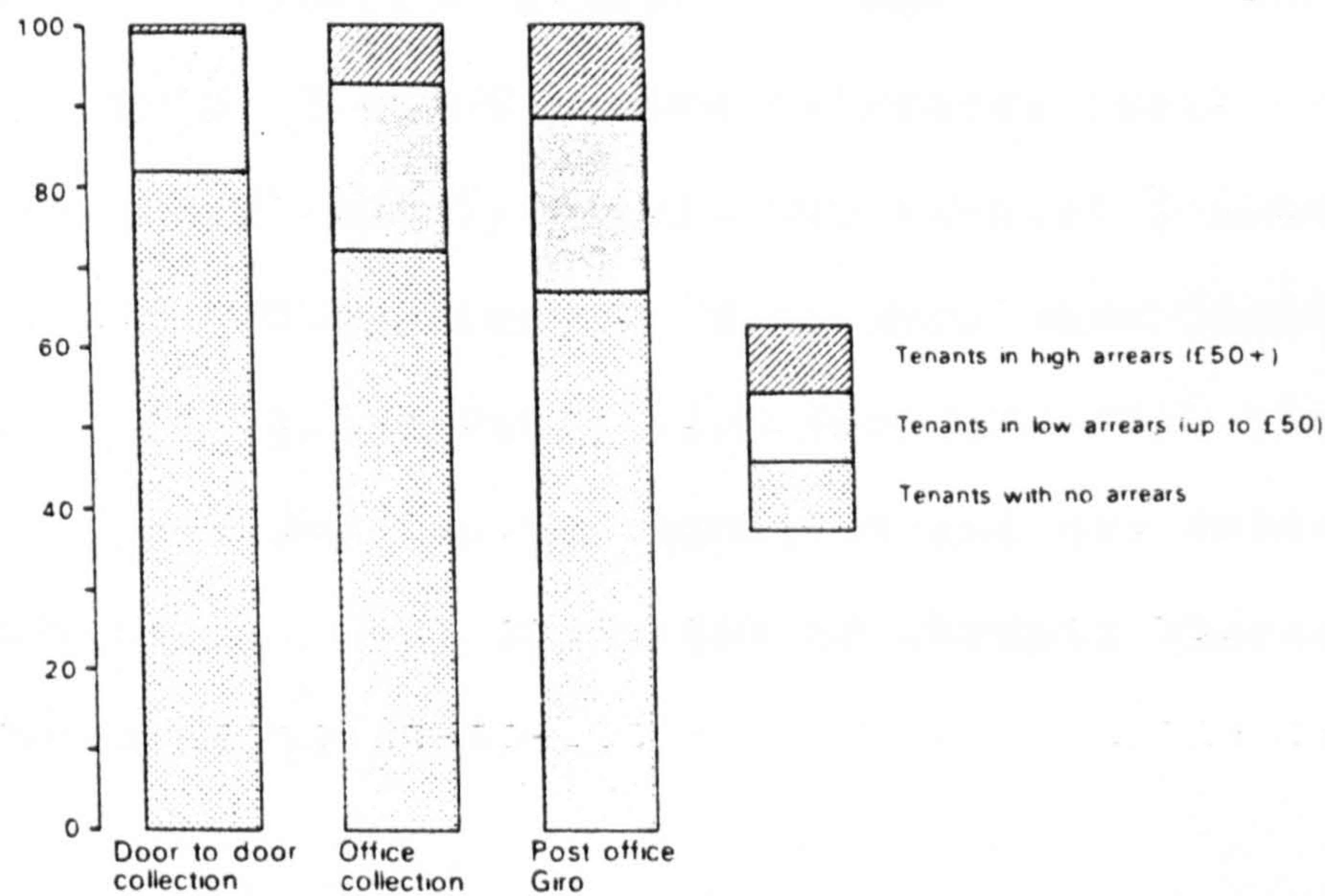
Other methods

To a rent collector

At a council office

Over 80% of tenants with door-to-door collection had no arrears at all, compared with just over 60% under the giro system:

62. PERCENTAGE OF TENANTS IN ARREARS FOR EACH MAJOR PAYMENT METHOD



By contrast 94% of tenants with serious arrears paid either at an office or through some purely impersonal method.

The Audit Commission report on local authorities' rent arrears in 1984 drew similar conclusions from its very close look at the London Boroughs. While it found that poverty, poor quality estates and big rent increases within large local authorities were major factors, the management structure and rent collection systems had a significant effect on the level of arrears in similar authorities. Impersonal rent collection, central systems, poor management control and overall management performance were key elements in making arrears up to 50% higher in poorly managed areas with similar social and economic problems. Rent arrears were a symptom of poverty and family stress. But more significantly they were often a symptom of an unworkable management system.

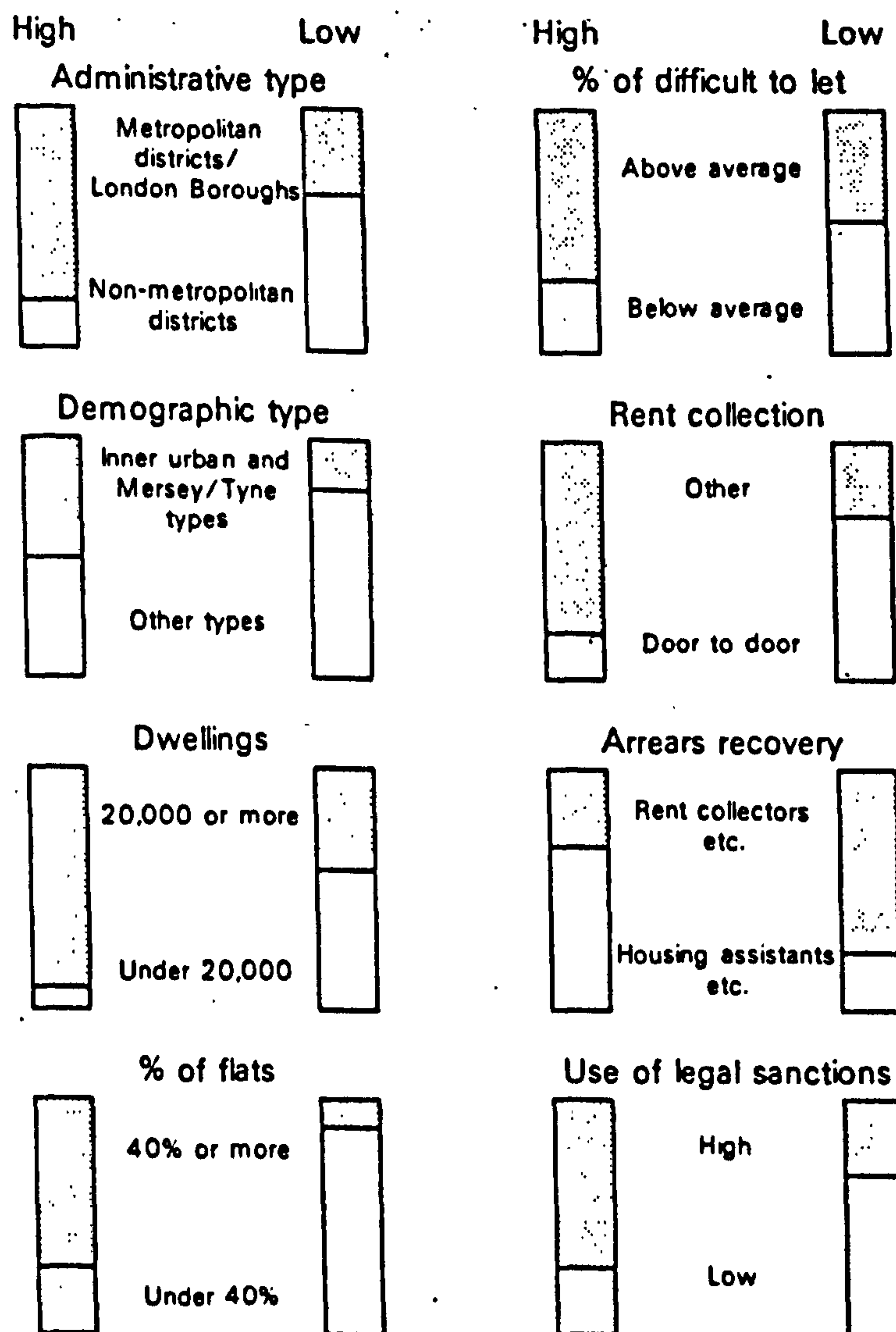
In general, arrears were found to relate to all forms of poverty and deprivation except old age. The numbers of elderly tenants in arrears were extremely small everywhere.¹² It was felt that elderly people had reached a settled point in their life and had become, with hard experience, better managers. It is, however, also possible that older people were more "grateful" to the landlord and had better rent-paying habits, born in the years of chronic shortage and more ruthless evictions.

According to the Department of the Environment study, the most significant group of households in serious arrears was one-parent families, fully one quarter of whom were seriously behind with their rent (over £50). On the estates in the survey, and on problem estates in general, the proportion of one-parent families was extremely high. This would help account for very high arrears in the survey estates.

However, taking average figures, the levels of arrears fluctuated more widely between authorities and regions than did the levels of poverty and deprivation. Five of the London estates had arrears that averaged more than £200 owing per household, whereas eight estates (seven of which were outside London) carried an average debt per household of less than £100. The range from £14 average debt on the lowest estate to £368 on the highest clearly related to management methods as well as family circumstances, given the overall poverty of the estates and the much lower unemployment rates on the London estates than in the North. This bears out the finding of the Department of the

Environment survey¹³ that arrears varied between authorities by a factor of 100, even when social and environmental conditions were comparable. The variable factor was the style of the local authority landlord. The following diagram from the Department of the Environment study illustrates the range of interlocking problems in arrears levels, coinciding almost exactly with our own findings in earlier chapters in relation to more general problems on difficult-to-let estates and on the estates in the survey.

63. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH AND LOW ARREARS AUTHORITIES



For the estate officer, as with virtually all other aspects of his job, rents had become a thankless, remote, seemingly endless task of harassment and paper chasing. He no longer actually did the job himself in most cases but had to try to make the Post Office or the computer do it properly for him. He had lost all sense of control or purpose in the frustration of operating a complex, cumbersome and unworkable rent system. In one of the local authorities in the survey, we counted 43 possible stages in the rent arrears procedure,¹⁴ only a handful of which would be personally performed by the estate officer.

It was ironic that local authorities with high arrears more frequently resorted to legal sanctions, primarily eviction. In many cases, this was ineffective in recovering arrears because the process was slow, it was rarely backed up with personal contact, and the action was often initiated after the rent debt had already reached a very high, almost irretrievable level.

LEGAL SANCTIONS

The central problem with the removal of door-to-door collection was that the threat of eviction became the only real sanction. Previously, personal contact exercised a strong pull on the tenant, avoiding a direct threat. Because eviction is a complex legal procedure, long drawn-out steps must be taken. Because tenants on the whole are aware of the length of the process, many preliminary,

time-consuming steps are ignored or ineffectual. Therefore an elaborate game is set in train whereby effectively, estate officers waste much of their time and tenants build up arrears while the legal process of attrition grinds through its 43 stages.

Under the office and giro collection systems, the only successful method of reducing arrears was frequent visiting as soon as a family came into arrears. With high rent levels, visits would be necessary within a maximum of two weeks in arrears in order to be effective. Otherwise the debt was beyond the powers of the family to clear and a pile-up of arrears was begun which led inevitably to the commencement of court proceedings. Court proceedings were not only extremely costly and time-consuming (no local authority had actually worked out the costs as far as we know, or took account of them); they were intensely alienating to the tenant and in many cases were simply ignored. In Lambeth, only a minority of tenants even showed up in court for the final eviction proceedings. Knowing that they were living on the council's very worst estates, they were often not alarmed at the prospect of being evicted by the council and taken in again as homeless. From the point of view of the estate officer, the initiation of court proceedings was purely a mechanical operation. Senior officers rather than estate officers actually went to court and in most cases, an actual eviction had to be authorised by the housing committee itself. Therefore the estate officer had very little involvement in the harsh court proceedings or any sense of the ultimate consequences

for the family. As in all such procedures, failure to carry responsibility for what you're doing or to carry through the task to the end, undermined any sense of purpose or responsibility. Another problem was frequent conflict between politicians and managers over the use of eviction as a central tool of rent collection.

Eviction, as an integral part of rent collection, was generating a growing pool of disaffected, indebted households who were almost past being afraid of it.

Most directors of housing we spoke to cited the difficulty in obtaining an eviction, and the statutory obligation to rehouse homeless families after they had been evicted, as major causes of arrears. They felt they had no sanctions that worked.

It is true that being forced to move because of arrears and court action was not such a terrible threat though in most cases, it did bring about some payments. One of the characteristics of very poor households that pre-dates the Industrial Revolution, with temporary squatting on the edge of common land, is the ease with which they move from shelter to shelter. It was a major finding of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes and has carried right over into the worst estates today.

Homelessness, while carrying a stigma in the society at large, is no longer such a threat to families who hate their current living conditions and who are very poor, and who are used to living on the fringe of society. There are enough

empty council properties for them to feel they will end up somewhere.

In our view, the fact that eviction and rehousing after eviction removed the harshest edge from the sanctions against arrears, was not a cause of arrears. Rather the constant resort to ineffectual legal sanctions was a result of ineffectual rent retrieval methods. The remote collection method and the bureaucratic, de-personalised follow-up, including the threat of eviction, were the causes. The problems of eviction and homelessness, with the disaffection and transience they bred, simply highlighted the need for a very different approach - with speedy, personal follow-up in order to arrest the spawning of transient, brutalised households who could no longer feel responsible for their debts because the system was beyond their ken.

The examination of arrears showed two things. People's alienation from their surroundings, and their awareness that they were receiving a bad service, made them much less willing to pay their rent. It was one of the few weapons tenants felt they had. On the dense, flatted estates, with more acute dissatisfaction, arrears tended to be higher than on the cottage estates.¹⁵

We have mentioned the social and management reasons for arrears being higher on problem estates. The important link is the chain-effect between housing a poor population, with many one-parent families, adopting arrears-prone

methods of collection and debt recovery, preventing transfers of arrears cases but facilitating transfers of other households, enhancing thereby the incidence of disadvantaged households, frequently one-parent families, and arrears cases. The impact on the rest of the population and on estate staff was both to accelerate flight and encourage greater delinquency among those remaining. It was alarmingly common to be told by tenants "They don't pay their rent, so why should I?" The fact that arrears in the end made the link back to homelessness, even poorer (if possible) rehousing offers and subsequent reduced motivation to pay rent, completed the cycle that led directly to sink estates. For where else could "bad tenants" be evicted to?

It can be seen from the foregoing analysis that the trends in rent systems were exacerbating other problems and were being superimposed on an ineffective and poorly structured housing system that simply could not cope.

CLEANSING AND CARETAKING

PARKS DEPARTMENTS AND CARE OF OPEN SPACES

The repairs department was not the only separate department responsible for part of the housing service.

On a majority of estates in the survey, the parks

department, quite separately from housing, repairs and maintenance, or cleansing, was responsible for maintaining communal gardens, grass verges, lawns and flower beds. Most estates had open planted areas. An absurd situation commonly arose whereby the parks department was not responsible for removing litter from grass and flower beds though it was responsible for cutting, hoeing and weeding. Lawn mowers commonly shredded litter while they cut the grass. And decorative shrubberies and rose-beds, where they survived, were often packed with litter between the bushes. Only on the Victorian housing trust estates, among all those we visited, was this problem resolved by uniting within one job, under the estate manager, the warden/cleaner/porter who was also responsible for any planted areas.

It was an administrative nonsense that housing departments were actually paying out from their meagre management budgets substantial amounts to parks departments for an unskilled job that could more easily be done by resident staff within the housing department. It was also ironical that the generous planning of open space to provide often large green areas on some of the most depressing and deprived estates should be so poorly maintained. Parks departments were prepared to mow up the litter along with the grass because they were working on housing territory and not a park or a "public" grass verge; therefore they did not feel responsible for the quality of job they did. For the fact is that most parks departments do an excellent job except on estates; it is extremely rare even in the most

depressed cities to see a dirty, unkempt park. But parks and recreation departments in most cases failed to do their job properly for the housing department on the survey estates.

REFUSE AND CLEANSING SERVICE

On all estates, street cleaning and refuse disposal were dealt with by other departments. It would have been quite possible to deduce on some estates that no rates were being paid and residents were not entitled to a refuse service. On one estate, where there were large numbers of families with over three children, the very large families were entitled to a second dustbin. The dustmen simply threw the additional bins into the automated dustcarts after they were issued to the families and the housing department felt powerless to do anything. They said that if they took any action, all the men would be out on strike and there would be no refuse service at all. It turned out on investigation that no one had discussed with the men the extra dustbin emptying involved. Industrial relations within the local authority were notoriously bad. On another estate, owners of a row of shops that backed onto a very large estate simply put out and piled up their refuse all week at the back of the shops, on the tarmac courtyard of the estate, onto which the front doors of the blocks of flats opened. The Chinese Take-away put out piles of chewed spare ribs. From there it was spread by dogs around the flats. The rates and valuers' department was in charge of shop rentals;

the housing department seemed powerless. It took 18 months for the three departments, housing, rates and cleansing, to agree on the siting and structure of a refuse store for the shops. There had never been one before. On another estate the paladins were too small to take all the refuse from the chutes. Previous daily collections were reduced to twice weekly. The dustmen were paid a spillage bonus because of the overflow of rubbish, on which basis caretakers would not sweep up on refuse days. The dustmen meanwhile did not clear up either, since no one checked on them. In addition they refused to empty overfull paladins because it was extremely difficult and dirty work to pull them out of the normally blocked rubbish chutes. So for the following week, tenants had to put rubbish in plastic bags outside the overflowing refuse area. Dogs tore open the bags and scattered the rubbish. The men the following week had even stronger grounds for refusing to remove the rubbish or empty the bins since the whole area around the chute was blocked. The ensuing tussle cost the local authority additional payments, industrial action and disputes with caretakers. Meanwhile tenants in small, crowded flats with no open fires, and usually no transport, had no alternative but to get rid of their rubbish at the mouth or the base of the chutes. It sometimes went over the balcony as a gesture of defiant alienation and aggression.

A farcical refuse problem arose on an estate where no dustbins were provided and where there were large concrete litter bins dotted around the estate. Tenants put their

black plastic rubbish bags in these bins in an attempt to dispose of refuse, so the bins were constantly overflowing. The response of the cleansing department was to remove the litter bins altogether. They pointed to the resulting filth on the estate as proof that tenants were the cause of the problem.

In a certain sense, of course, tenants were the cause of the problem since the litter originated with them. But on large, dense and communal estates, without domestic fireplaces, littering was inevitable if there was not an adequate refuse service. Ironically, blocking up coal fireplaces in the course of modernisation has been the direct cause of greatly increased litter, as well as causing condensation and greatly increased fuel bills which many tenants had difficulty in paying.

The kind of extreme cowboy refuse service described here was prevalent in various fragments on 14 of the estates in the survey and all 20 estates were dirty, although the cleansing department was not responsible for keeping estate areas clean, only for organised refuse collection and some of the estate roads. We found only one housing department in the country (not among the 19 local authorities in the survey) where an adequate cleansing service operated on large, poor estates. Only where there was strong housing management and a well organised manual caretaking service to supplement refuse collection did the refuse system work at all adequately. It was useless to leave the whole responsibility to a separate department.

The way the estates were built greatly enhanced the refuse problems. House by house, in streets, it has been possible to expand refuse capacity. But in blocks of flats, refuse storage areas and rubbish chutes, if they were big enough 30-50 years ago, often no longer are. It is costly and difficult to expand them and their inherent problems remain - easy to block with bulky rubbish, accessible to dogs if protective doors are not maintained, subject to fires and other vandalism because they are unguarded targets.

Refuse stores in basements of blocks were equally disastrous. Bags would burst as refuse men tried to clear them. They would then refuse to move the spilt rubbish and the area would degenerate. Dogs would get in, communal keys would get lost, doors would finally get broken. Caretakers would give up on a losing battle to keep them clean.

Unused garages were often converted into surplus rubbish stores to await removal. But that was a contradiction in terms. There was a continuous flow of surplus rubbish on all the estates, but especially on the dense, flatted estates and no effective system for staying ahead of it. Without more capacity than volume of rubbish, the estates could not be kept clean, and they were not.

CARETAKING

It was overridingly important to have resident caretaking

in the management of flatted estates. Cleaning of communal areas, maintenance of balcony and staircase lighting, emergencies in lifts, a contact point for calls to the police, evening patrols, are all vital roles for a resident caretaker. Without a resident caretaker, it becomes extremely difficult to deal with emergencies such as flooding, which can affect flats several doors below.

There were 13 flatted estates in our survey. Eleven of these had resident caretakers prior to local management, but on several there were only resident caretakers in the tower blocks, and on two less than half the designated caretaking posts were filled. It was stated by the housing directors that it was no longer possible to recruit resident caretakers to such estates, in spite of offering rent-free accommodation and secure long-term employment.

Parts of most estates comprising maisonettes and flats in large blocks from four to eight storeys were without resident caretakers. One estate had the unpopular mobile caretaking service where gangs of men would move in and out of large numbers of estates, somewhat similar to Panda-car policing. No one knew who they were, when they were to come, or how long they might stay. Caretakers' unions sometimes pressed hard for a conversion to the mobile system as a way out of the growing unpopularity of the resident posts and the fear of attack.* Union leaders argued fiercely that with proper organisation it would work as well as, or even better than the

* There were several estates where caretakers had been violently attacked and on Tulse Hill, caretakers were only prepared to work in pairs after nasty incidents.

resident system. But tenants felt that it threw the baby out with the bathwater, making the caretaking role unpopular and ineffectual.

That in fact is exactly what happened on one estate in the survey, where resident jobs were converted to mobile jobs and were finally withdrawn altogether.

On no estate were caretakers answerable to estate-officers, or even integrated with them in a team approach to the estate as the only other estate-based housing employees. On two of the estates, dedicated caretakers were holding together the basic housing management against almost impossible odds. On the rest, caretakers felt unsupported and unsupervised, vulnerable to physical abuse and attack, unappreciated by tenants, and carrying out hopeless and undignified tasks that were no sooner done than they would be undone. The trend was definitely away from caretaking as a resident, manual job. And yet without it, it was impossible to see how the flatted estates could be managed at all. There were so many points of possible breakdown and such a dire need for vigilance and oversight. A most essential job had been undervalued. Resident caretaking was the last line to the landlord and it had almost seized up.

SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSIBILITY

One major department that should have been closely involved on the 20 estates was the social services department. In

practice, however, although many or the majority of social work clients live on council estates, it was rare to encounter a social worker in the course of housing management work. There is a historic adversary relationship between housing workers and social workers. This is because housing workers have to try and keep the lid on social problems and so-called "problem" families for the sake of good management and the majority population of an estate. They are frequently forced to argue either for the removal of a household causing nuisance on an estate or for the transfer of a "good" tenant away from a bad one. They are also expected to take proceedings against tenants for rent arrears and eventually go to court "against" the family for possession of their home. Social workers on the other hand, have a duty to support the families causing housing problems and also to argue for the housing rights of the most needy families. An ex-social services director, who became housing director in a Greater Manchester authority, summed up the conflict of roles by saying -

"Why should I worry about rent arrears? It's more important for the kids to have shoes for school."

He resigned as housing director three years later. A good housing officer is supposed to run a tight ship in tune with the vast majority of respectable, rent-paying, quiet, clean and orderly households.¹⁶ A good social worker is supposed to understand the multiple problems of people who cannot cope and to help them without judging or pressuring them. Therefore the housing officer is

bound to see the social worker as soft, starry-eyed and even a do-gooder, while the social worker will often see the housing officer as hard-bitten, judgmental, bigoted, unjust and superior, or simply tough.

In practice on the 20 estates, prior to local management offices being opened, the paths of housing officers and social workers rarely crossed except in the adversary roles outlined above. Yet the social needs of the estates in question were almost endless and social services departments were often pouring in disproportionate resources to an unco-ordinated and seemingly fruitless effort. As an illustration, on the Oldham estate of Abbey Hills that we discussed in Chapter VIII, at one time there were eight social workers and community workers and not a single full-time housing worker. The social problem of that estate continued to mount out of all proportion to its size or physical characteristics, and the very enlightened and constructive social services department appeared powerless to change it. This estate was not included in our survey because there was still no local housing management and it was still in a relentless state of decline.

Given the incidence of homelessness, single-parenthood, unemployment and the lack of skilled wage-earners, it was not surprising that unpopular estates had disproportionate recourse to the social services. The number of social services referrals on Broadwater Farm, Haringey, were six times higher than for the surrounding areas. Alice

Coleman, in her exhaustive study of flatted estates in Tower Hamlets and Southwark, has shown that the numbers of children taken into care is much higher in large, dense flatted estates than in the surrounding streets.¹⁷ The social needs of unpopular estates were out of all proportion to the size of the population they housed.

The alarming finding of the Priority Estates Project survey was that in no case had there been any formal liaison between housing and the social services departments in operation, prior to local housing management and very little after its establishment, except in three local authorities, in spite of general recognition of the overriding dominance of social problems. This does not mean that in most cases relations were bad. This was the exception. But generally, as with cleansing, repairs and parks, each department held the other responsible for the shortcomings of divided responsibility. In the case of social services, it was hard to see a way of combining the best interests of both departments within the present framework, and the best hope lay in the housing department adopting a far more welfare-oriented stance and social workers becoming integrated into the housing team.

SOCIALLY DISTURBED HOUSEHOLDS

What has not been commonly recognised either by housing or social services departments is that anti-social, unneighbourly households cannot be adequately rehoused on large, unpopular

estates, particularly of flats. These households are in a tiny minority^{18*} and while their access to council housing is important, special social and housing provision must be made to support and constrain them. Otherwise, there is no community within which such households can be contained and various institutions, prisons, children's homes, mental hospitals, take over. Sadly, on many poor estates, both housing management and social services support are so weak that such families may drive out more normal, coping families and end up in a ransacked, crazed slum, which tenants can only think of demolishing as the way out. Blocks in Salford, Islington and Liverpool reached this pass.** None of these communities survived. This could happen on a much bigger scale unless the resources of social services departments are somehow brought to bear on local housing management.

"HOUSING WELFARE"

Social problems were generally left to social workers. Only on two estates were there housing welfare workers, whose job it was to help sort out social problems that related directly to housing issues, such as transfers, arrears, fuel disconnections, emergency furniture provision and so on. In practice, these workers were primarily responsible for helping with immediate issues rather than long-term social work support. Yet the need

**Estimated numbers: less than a fraction of 1%.

Ordsall Flats, Salford; Myrtle Gardens, Liverpool; Blythe Mansions, Islington; none of which were in our survey because no attempt was made to tackle the problem through housing management. Ordsall Flats and Myrtle Gardens were emptied of tenants and sold to private developers. Blythe Mansions was demolished.

for housing officers and caretakers to respond to social needs was becoming constantly more pressing. Elderly people and small children were particularly vulnerable and easy to keep an eye on, yet this was rarely done. One London housing director put it thus -

"We're here to run estates, not look after people."

ENFORCEMENT OF TENANCY CONDITIONS

Each tenant makes a legally binding agreement with the landlord, giving him the right to enjoy the peace and security of his home, and the duty to help his neighbours enjoy the same, as well as to protect the landlord's property and use it only as a home.

Estate officers and caretakers universally felt that they had lost their previous authority and status, and that it was pointless even attempting to enforce rules to control noise, dog abuse, rubbish nuisance, disputes, or even, on some estates, illegal occupancy. These abuses disrupted the lives of many or most residents to varying degrees on all the estates.

The only management tools invoked were transfers away from the problem for the discontented tenant who appeared to be the injured party, commonly known as a "management transfer", or eviction for those in arrears. Eviction was almost never used on other management grounds although some legal

measure was necessary in curbing social excesses.

The result was virtual anarchy on some estates and very little respect for tenancy conditions among some tenants on all the estates. Council employees often despised and disregarded the communities they were employed to serve on the strength of the social disarray that resulted. The communities themselves were quite unable to enforce standards of behaviour on their neighbours. There was fear of victimisation, a feeling that you should mind your own business and a sense of not belonging. It was hard to collaborate with neighbours who were often seen as part of the problem. Prior to opening the estate office on Tulse Hill in 1980, the commonest complaint was the abuse of neighbours.* With careful investigation and questioning, the extreme transgressors were narrowed down to eight households on an estate of over 900 flats. Yet mayhem appeared to prevail and many tenants lived in fear of burglary, mugging, squatting, dogs and drugs. There had indeed been several violent and vicious attacks.

Under the existing remote management, enforcement of tenancy conditions seemed laughable.

CONCLUSION

With repairs, cleansing, open space maintenance and social service support removed from the jurisdiction of the housing department; with housing departments running lettings

* Summary of findings from tenant consultation, Tulse Hill, June-September 1980 - Anne Power, Priority Estates Project, 1980.

almost exclusively from the town hall; and with estate officers increasingly losing control over any part of the housing management job, including rent collection, it is not surprising that staff were extremely demoralised and almost universally ineffective. Tenants on the whole had given up all hope of a decent service. In the words of the district manager for Tulse Hill, the single biggest problem on the estates was -

"the total apathy of the tenants, their inability to conceive of anything better"

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CHAPTER XI - LOCAL OFFICES ON UNPOPULAR ESTATES

"Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration."

- Thomas A. Edison 1896.

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the Priority Estates Project, it was clear that a full-time local housing office was a prerequisite for running a large and often neglected estate properly. Our survey of 20 projects produced powerful evidence that this approach worked.

Other attempts had been made on many of the estates, primarily costly physical improvements or adaptations, but also sometimes initiatives involving social services, community provision and changes in lettings policies. The fortunes of problem estates were not to be reversed by these piecemeal attacks on a multi-sided problem that constantly reappeared in a new shape.

A few authorities had operated part-time surgeries without allocating full-time staff with responsibility for day-to-day management to the estate. These provided some kind of link but did not change the central management structure or tackle the problems where they arose. They were most

often a simple reporting service. They too failed to reverse the overall conditions of run-down estates.

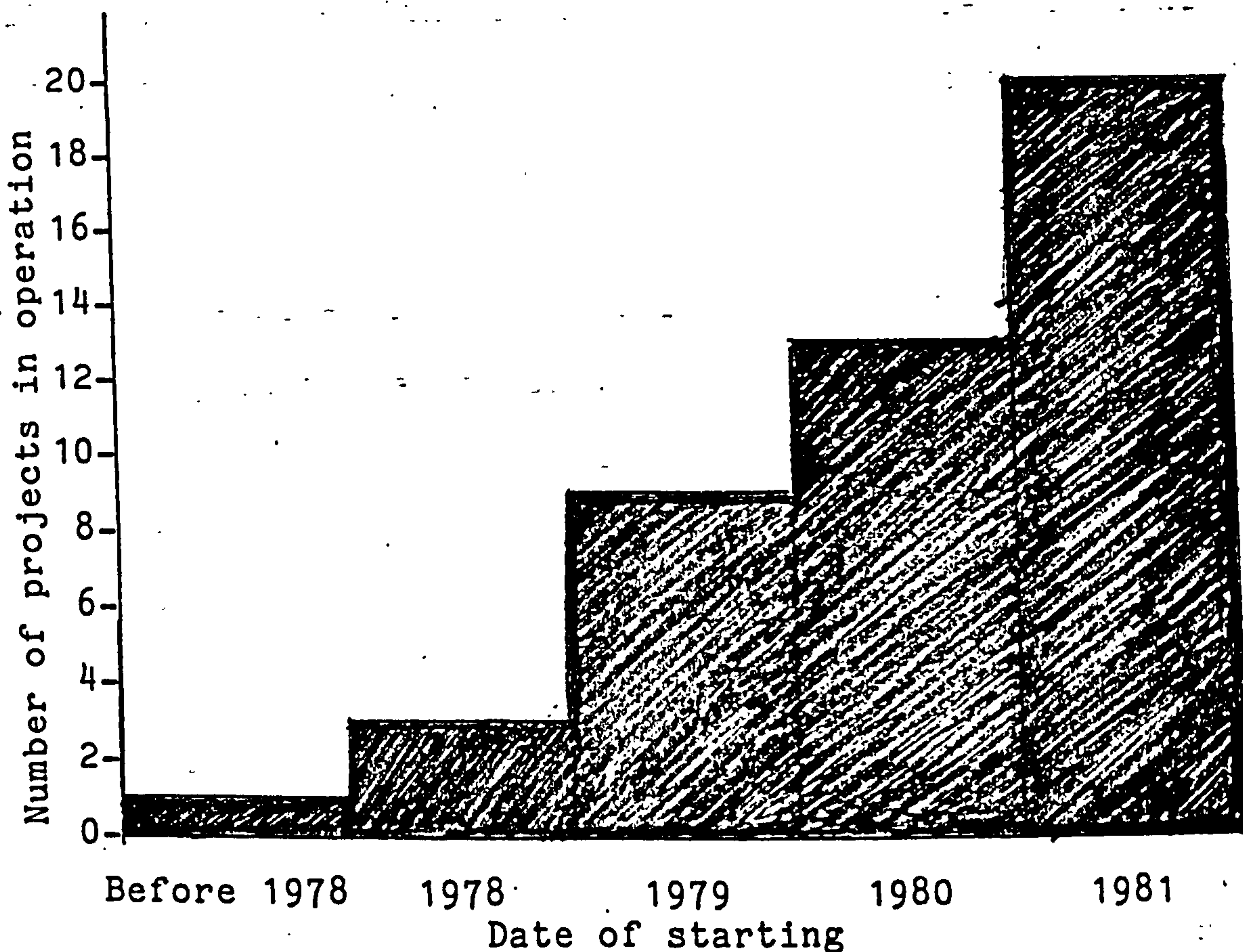
We were convinced by every visit we made that only a meticulous, detailed, day-by-day approach to all aspects of running an estate - rents, repairs, lettings, caretaking and cleaning, welfare and communal law enforcement - would win back the confidence and self-respect of the residents, thereby providing a basis for rebuilding a sound housing investment and a workable housing community.

Having analysed in detail the poor services and major physical and social handicaps of these communities in the last three chapters, we now analyse the more intimate management approach developed by the 20 projects and its impact on the problem.

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION - GOING LOCAL

When the Priority Estates Project began in March 1979, only three councils throughout the whole of England had full-time, estate-based management offices.¹ In the following three years, the idea gained ground and by January 1982, 19 councils operated 45 projects. We included 20 projects in the survey, selected from the 19 local authorities.

64. NUMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES OPERATING
ESTATE-BASED MANAGEMENT OFFICES FROM 1978²
STARTING DATES OF ESTATE OFFICES



The 19 local authorities represented only a tiny minority of the 403 local authorities in England and Wales. By June 1984, the number actually running full-time estate offices had risen to nearer 30 local authorities, but it was still a trifling effort compared with the scale of the problem, although the 30 local authorities involved covered more than a dozen critical London authorities and several other major cities.

LOCAL OFFICES

Because of the urgency of the situation on many estates, it was important to establish how effective local management was. We first examined the direct impact of local offices.

The effect of all the local offices on the life of the estates in the survey was immediate and extensive. Once tenancy records were moved from the town hall or district to the local office, all contact between the landlord and tenant was filtered through the local office. This did away with the dual system, based on tenants having to go to a district or central office for what they wanted and separately, an estate officer having to visit tenants for what the landlord wanted, both sides frequently bypassing the other, and the information and action being constantly disjointed. The "by-pass" system resulted in neither side pursuing all the matters that required action.³ Many things had been left unreported or unattended by virtue of previous experience of fruitless journeys and abortive efforts.

The most immediate impact of the local office was to open the floodgates to tenants' requests and complaints. All full-time offices reported extensive and continuous use.⁴ Some did not record carefully how many users came to the office. However, we estimated that one fifth of residents called at a local office each week. On Tulse Hill, about 200 callers a week was the sustained rate over five years, in spite of the office being open only two hours a day. In the Rhondda (not in the survey), about 70 callers a day was the average on an estate of 1,000 dwellings.

Over a three-week period, most of the households on an estate

were expected to have contact with the office for one reason or another, although there were obviously many uneven patterns to the use of local offices. It still did not compare with old-fashioned, door-to-door weekly contact but it was a great opening up. To the estate officers it was like an unstoppable floodgate.

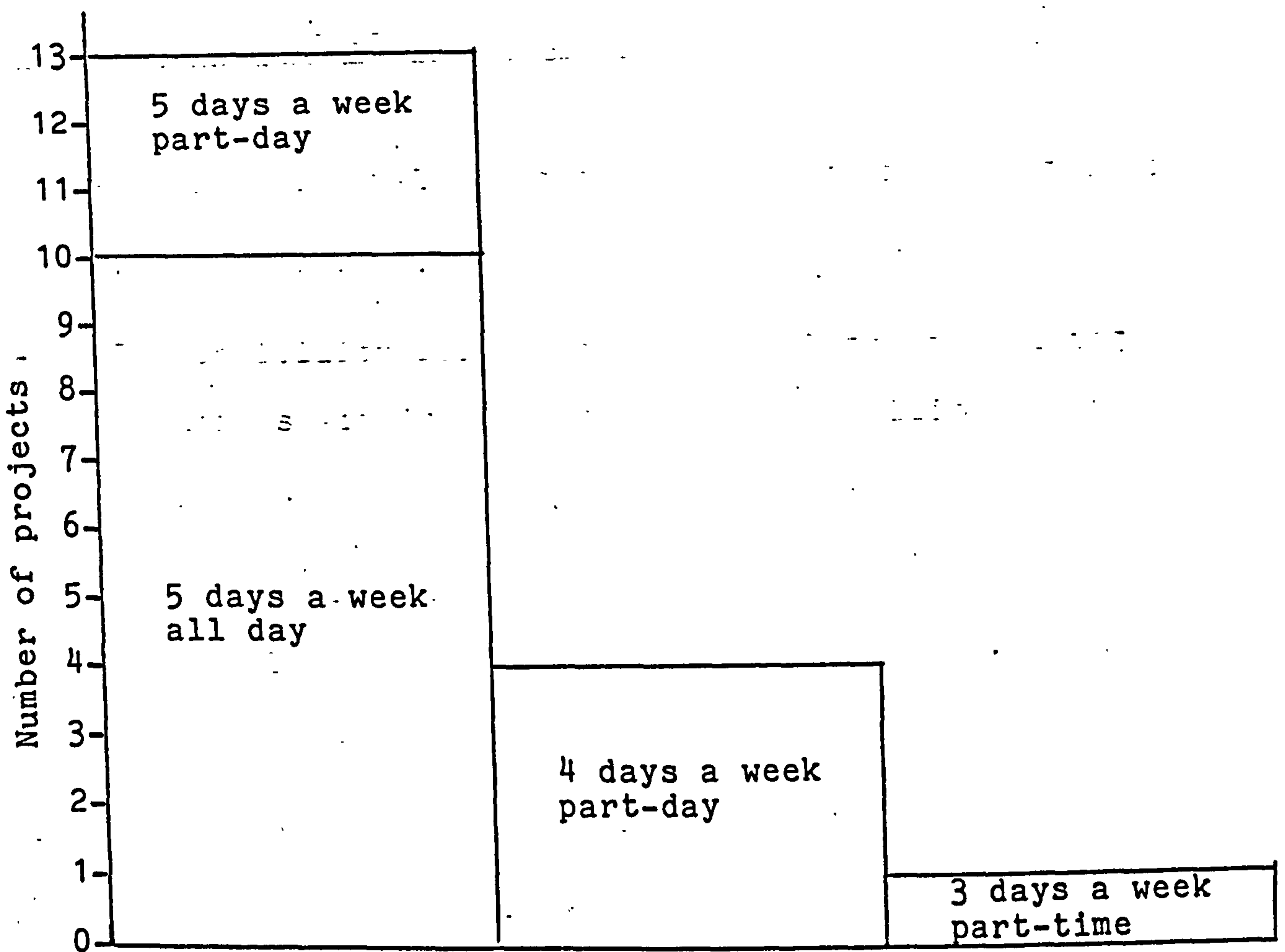
There were wide fluctuations in the number of callers, depending on three factors: hours of opening; amount of local responsibility; willingness to give advice and support on welfare and financial matters as well as on housing. The most used office was in Walsall, with 360 callers a week, where all functions were devolved to the neighbourhood management office, and where the office was open all day. But all offices were reported to be in continuous demand throughout their opening hours. We never went to an estate office open to tenants where there was no tenant in the office over some matter. In only one office did we encounter the strained, beleaguered attitude to tenants so common in centralised housing departments. This was typically the office with the least local power. The other 19 offices seemed business-like, friendly and purposeful.

Half the offices were open all day every day and these were the offices that did best in controlling empty dwellings. As a result, vandalism was reduced and the general management of the estate was raised more quickly. Only one project was opened less than four days a week and we concluded that three days opening was the minimum for the

project to work.

65.

OPENING HOURS OF ESTATE OFFICES



The longer opening hours were usually coupled with a greater degree of local responsibility and a greater degree of contact between tenants and staff. This in turn generated confidence, kept information up-to-date, helped speedy re-letting, helped prevent damage to empty property, encouraged people to stay on the estate and to bring others to live there. Many local authorities and estate teams argued against opening all day every day on the grounds that it did not allow enough time for "the work to be done". However, as long as problems could be dealt with locally as they arose, the constant contact with tenants over all management problems actually ensured that the work was done.

Most of it could be done on the spot while the tenant waited.

The purpose of a local office in the eyes of most local authorities was to provide a point of contact for tenants. This in itself was the most useful function. On the one hand, it gave tenants immediate access to the landlord, even if they couldn't get immediate satisfaction. On the other hand, it gave workers a direct incentive to build up a good relationship with tenants and win their confidence by getting an answer to real problems.

The local projects were widely regarded as exceptions to the rule, able to cut through red tape and get things done. Devolution of responsibility to the local offices was far from automatic and in fact apart from chasing rent arrears, ordering repairs, and tenants' advice and liaison, there was no area of management responsibility that was totally passed down to the local office. This was wasteful of time and effort, frustrating to tenants and staff, and illogical in organisational terms. It did not, however, do away with the value of direct contact through the local office. This was wasteful of time and effort, frustrating to tenants and staff, and illogical in organisational terms. It did not, however, do away with the value of direct contact through the local office, and it did encourage better performance on almost all fronts. This was achieved by endless chasing and pressure. Much of the effort would have become unnecessary with a fully autonomous local organisation. Nonetheless the office provided effective

pressure on the system.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

There were nine vital areas of day-to-day management that needed to be covered on any estate:

- Responsibility for letting empty flats, organising transfers within the estate and controlling empty property:
- Responsibility for arrears prevention and recovery, and rent collection where feasible, with rent information being provided weekly to enable immediate action.
- A locally-based repairs team to cover small-scale, day-to-day repairs.
- Local supervision of all estate workers including caretakers, cleaners and gardeners.
- A co-ordinated local team approach to include all employees, manual and office-based.
- Local input from staff and residents into any physical improvements, major repairs, etc.
- Regular monitoring of performance in management and maintenance.
- Close liaison with residents on all issues affecting the running of the estate.

- Local responsibility for a day-to-day budget.

In addition, local input into major repairs, improvements, environmental works and modernisation was essential.

The following diagram shows the number of projects exercising local control over each of the nine key management areas.

66.

AREAS OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PROJECTS	
Responsibility for:	Out of 20 projects
Reasonably adequate project control of rent arrears recovery	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 16
Formal liaison with residents on issues affecting the running of the estate	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 15
Input by management staff into improvement programme/s	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 13
Local lettings	XXXXXXXXXX 9
Estate-based repairs	XXXXXXXX 8
Co-ordinated team approach	XXXXXXX 7
Regular monitoring	XXXXXXX 7
Local supervision of caretakers	XXX 3
Local responsibility for a day-to-day budget	0

No projects covered more than six of the nine areas of responsibility. Most in fact had responsibility for fewer than half the vital elements. No local authority at the time of our survey had established a management and maintenance budget for an estate or an area. The projects

on cottage estates had control over more functions and had on the whole been more successful in improving conditions. It is of course an easier task than on an estate with dense blocks of flats. Modern concrete complex estates had the fewest locally-based responsibilities and correspondingly the least success in improving conditions.

67.

LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR EIGHT MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS		
Number of functions controlled locally	Number of projects	Type of project
7 to 8	0	
4 to 6	9	4 cottage 4 walk-up blocks 1 modern complex
1 to 3	11	3 cottage 3 walk-up blocks 5 modern complex

LOCAL BASE, CENTRAL SYSTEMS

In spite of lack of control over some functions, the project estates were improving management by dint of endless pressure from the estate through the office and back to the town hall, often reaching up to the chief housing officer, chief executive or senior politicians. Because they did not have direct control in many cases, project staff spent large amounts of time chasing, manipulating and even defying the system in order to make things work. This approach might not be so successful on a broader front. It would be essential to establish very clear decentralisation of management functions if a local authority wanted to develop

estate-based offices on a wider scale. Otherwise a number of decentralised offices could create tremendous confusion through constantly having to refer back to the centre and chase basic services.

The obvious way forward seemed to be the vogueish borough-wide decentralisation of services. Yet many authorities felt they did not have sufficiently trained and motivated staff to implement intensive management across the board with local responsibility for all key management areas. Many certainly did not have a system that readily lent itself to local autonomy. And the complexities of extricating services, staff and budgets from functional entities at the centre were often overwhelming.

Most of the local authorities were concerned about the confusion between local project systems and the centre, but were unable to unscramble the layered, amorphous organisation for one-off projects. To base the estate managers in a local office was the first easy step that all had taken. To break up all aspects of estate management into locally-run, multi-skill units was much more difficult. Apart from Walsall, no local authority had attempted such an idea across the board, and Walsall did not include estate-based repairs teams. Hackney, Islington and Lambeth Councils were in the process of establishing local management offices across the board, but it was unclear whether any of these would relinquish central control over key areas, such as budgeting, staff performance and so on. In Walsall, Lambeth and Hackney,

neighbourhood offices were planned to cover about 1,500-2,500 homes. The units often fitted awkwardly with estate boundaries and were too large if they were geographically spread or covered several large estates. The problems of decentralisation for all these authorities were immense.

No authority the Priority Estates Project was in touch with, apart from Stockton-on-Tees, was contemplating across-the-board, estate-level management although Rochdale said it intended to introduce comprehensive estate-level budgeting in due course.

Only tenant management co-operatives had succeeded in extricating from the town hall system a management entity with its own staff, funds and organisation, and with local tenants' control.⁵ But most tenants were reluctant to assume such wide responsibility, especially on estates with multiple problems as in the Priority Estates Project survey. On none of the 20 estates had tenants established a management organisation under their own control. Most estate offices were set up with unclear boundaries and a lack of designated authority. Nonetheless, their local presence and the fact that central services were usually bogged down in their own complexities, meant that they had a relatively free hand whenever they could get hold of the right bit of the system.

The limited local management responsibility meant that in

a number of key areas there were still major problems and threats to the longer term viability of local management. Success was limited, but the survey showed substantial gains in standards of estate management and in tenant and worker satisfaction.

GAINS ON THE ESTATES

Because of the direct contact between estate staff and tenants and the impetus this gave to improving the operation of the existing system, all projects were having some impact on the estate conditions.

The project staff were the main source of information on the extent to which projects were bring about improvements, though we checked what they said against our own impressions and against housing department information.

The improvements that seemed most important were:

- Better general environment, usually remarkably cleaner.
- Improved repairs service.
- Greater security and less vandalism.
- Rent arrears reducing or rising more slowly than local authority average.
- No longer hard to let.
- Fewer empty dwellings.

- Increased tenant involvement.
- Successful physical improvements.
- Co-operative local efforts in management and maintenance.
- Improved caretaking.

No project was improving in all areas but all were improving in some.

The following diagram lists the principal improvements brought about in the 20 projects in order of spread of success.

68

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PROJECTS LEADING TO INCREASED POPULARITY OF ESTATES	
	Number of estates out of 20 bringing about improvement
Environment improving	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 19
Increased tenant involvement	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 18
Major repairs/environmental improvements	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 18
Improved repairs service	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 15
Less vandalism and insecurity	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 15
Co-ordinated approach	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX- 14
Fewer empty dwellings	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX - 13
Improved caretaking	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 12
No longer hard to let	XXXXXXXXXXXXX 11
Lower tenancy turnover	XXXXXXXXXXXXX 10
Lower child densities	XXXXXXXXXXXXX 10
Fewer one-parent family allocations	XXXXXXXXXXX 9
Fewer homeless allocations	XXXXXXXXXXX 9
Improvements to homes	XXXXXXXXXXX 9
Rent arrears reducing, or rising more slowly than local authority average	XXXXXXXXXX 8

Almost all projects had a better repairs service, a better environment, greater security, more involvement with residents and successful physical improvements, although it must be remembered that to improve on the previous situation was actually quite easy, once a local team was given the go-ahead, since we were starting from a very low base. The difficulty was in making improvements stick and integrating the various parts of the operation at the local end so that a viable local management unit could become accepted as part of the local authority structure. This has only happened in the half-dozen authorities that we have extended local management beyond the initial experiment.

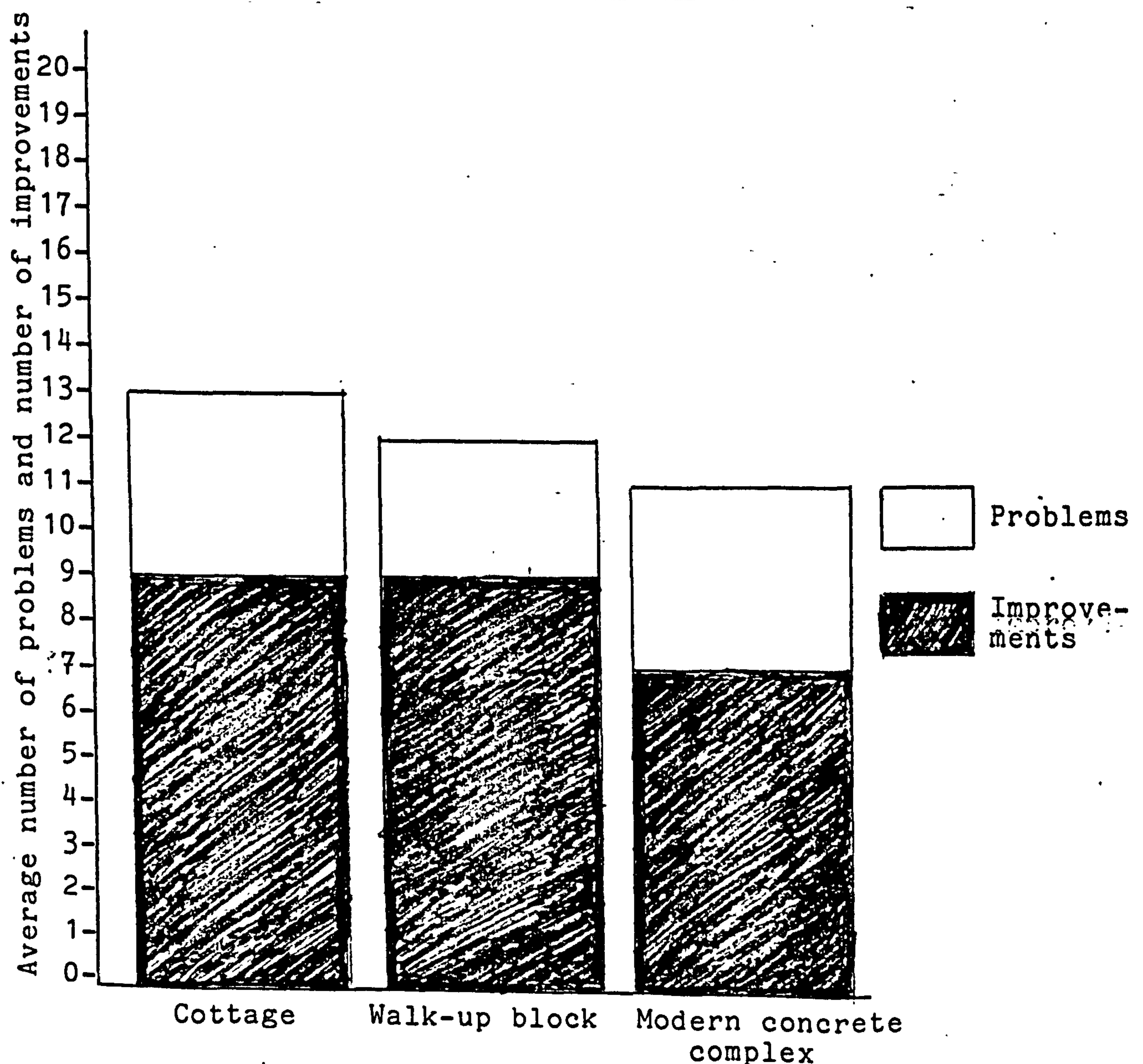
The two most difficult areas to reverse were rent arrears and social deprivation among incoming tenants. Without generating the full rent income, long-term management and maintenance could not be funded. Without reversing the intense social deprivation, too many of the better-off tenants would go on wanting to leave. Some way of making a more mixed, economically and socially viable community still had to be found. Improvements were real, but not sufficient to secure the future of the worst estates. In addition, all projects were still so dependent on the central system working in their favour and so circumscribed in their local powers, that it was often difficult to make the next major leap from the initial improvements to sound, long-term management.

We had found a range of 18 dominant problems in the projects; the cottage estates average 13, the walk-up blocks 12, and

the modern concrete estates 11. The projects on cottage and walk-up block estates were more successful than modern concrete complex estates in bringing about improvements, in spite of the fact that cottage and walk-up projects began with a broader spread of problems than modern concrete complex estates.

We found 15 main improvements under way in the projects. The cottage and walk-up block estates were improving on average in nine of the 15 areas. The modern concrete complex estates were improving in only six.

69. DIAGRAM SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PROBLEMS AND IMPROVEMENTS ON DIFFERENT STYLE ESTATES



The more serious difficulties of the projects on modern concrete complex estates in bringing about improvement were quite predictable. The physical and security problems of large, interlocking communal blocks were immense. The very large scale of rehousing, often over a short time-span, bringing in a new and unsettled community of several thousand people, was a factor which could not quickly be resolved. The smaller-scale, more old-fashioned estates were often more run-down but easier to improve.

CONCLUSION

All estates were improving significantly on a number of counts, but the job was far from complete. The following chapters describe the most important of these improvements and some of the outstanding difficulties.

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 3. Charles Legg, "Could Local Authorities be Better Land-Lords?" City University, 1981, pp. 67, 72.
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CHAPTER XI.I - IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ESTATE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT
WITH THE HELP OF RESIDENTS

IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

The most popular, and one of the most successful, area of attack in the 20 projects was the general environment of the project estates. The built environment, described in detail in Chapter X, was, on the 13 flatted estates at least, rather horrifying with its dark, high walls, its denseness, its great, smoke-streaked, grimy contours, its over-provision of tarmac, garages and sheds. On the cottage estates, it was oppressively uniform and drab.

Everywhere it was dirty. Rubbish chutes on balconies usually showed signs of fire, as did refuse stores. Tarmac was often pot-holed, clothes-drying lines abandoned, and on most estates there was the omnipresent boarding on unoccupied dwellings - sometimes torn off or sprayed over - always ugly and abandoned-looking.

Fencing was broken down; graffiti abused all-comers; windows were out in most entrances.

Lots of windows had half-drawn or closed curtains. Poverty was often plain to see. The most depressing sight of all was the barred and shuttered shops, dark because the shopkeepers felt safer with the boarding left up.

The place looked a mess and this mattered as much, or more, to residents as the dwellings.

All the survey estates shared these problems to a greater or lesser extent at the outset of the projects. But, in between the mess, there would always be attempts at caring, a "Georgian" front door, a hanging basket with flowers, a tenant's effort at enclosing and making private a no-man's land, roses, sunflowers, and the occasional vegetable patch. These things seemed buried because of the ubiquitous debris. But a closer look gave the lie - over half the residents on any estate we visited showed an amazing willingness to go on trying. The new estate office was almost like Pandora's box in uncovering the latent ambitions of people everywhere to make their environment habitable.

The opening of local offices and the involvement of tenants had an electric effect on environmental problems. The attack was many-sided and each estate had its own ideas.

Skips were commonly used and so successful in attracting rubbish that they were sometimes abandoned again because the council couldn't cope with the volume. The estates were literally an alternative dump. Hundreds of tons of every kind of refuse had accumulated over years and on most estates no end was in sight. It was a continual and seemingly endless task. Hundreds of tons of refuse were removed from some estates.*

* Goscote, Springwell, Northwood (not in survey)

Litter-picking and grass-cutting were attacked with frustrated zeal via alien departments such as parks and cleansing, which usually responded to unheard-of pressure from areas where previously nothing had been expected. The previous lack of standards was no longer acceptable.

Miraculous graffiti removal and anti-graffiti paint were creeping in to coincide with the advent of local enthusiasm. Children and local artists undertook murals with little encouragement.

Many different planting schemes were initiated - wild flower patches, nature gardens, balcony box competitions, allotments, shrub cover, creeper-planting up bare walls, seedlings in estate offices, daffodils and snowdrops on open ground, a tree nursery. These worked to the extent that children were involved, but always required a community leader of some kind. Over decades the trees will have their impact.

Children were often enlisted to clear abandoned gardens, to paint murals, to plant shrubs and trees. In these ways, they were involved against vandalism, littering and abuse. Adult residents often did not like getting involved visibly, but would normally help the children's or teenagers' efforts and were generous in their praise of caretakers and community workers when things went well. They readily supplied tea to work parties and youth clean-up campaigns.

Litter bins with vandal-proof insides were coming into their own. Extra dustbins and bigger paladins were also "allowed" in the face of volumes of "overspill" rubbish.

The key to it all was the estate office and the pride and prestige that went with cleaning up the estate. It was definitely the easiest and most dramatic winner, but estates did revert to squalor within a few days or weeks if effort was withdrawn.

The role of caretakers and cleaners was absolutely critical. All else flowed from the elementary need to ensure cleanliness through a paid workforce.

The dustmen were very important too. On most estates with local offices, relations with these men and with their often criticised union representatives improved dramatically by virtue of direct communication and a straight desire to be fair. Under central regimes, dialogue was difficult and everyone was out for their pound of flesh, because dialogue was hidebound by union protectionism, by political weakness and by management secretiveness and ineptitude. In the town hall, shared decision-making was almost unheard of below director's level. But with an estate office, it was possible to sort out sensible procedures and to win co-operation round the tea-kettle.

Cleaners for communal staircases and landings were increasingly introduced in flatted project estates. It seemed impossible to leave any communal area to the goodwill

of the tenants as transgressors were hard to curb or to punish, and communal areas too numerous. The residents could not do it on their own, partly because of the size and complexity of the task, but principally because of its communal nature.

For that reason above all else, the basic improvements to the environment hinged on the local office. . . Nothing could be kept clean or cared for by remote control. There was always a dirty person to combat the clean one. Someone had to decide which way it would be, then enforce it, and then build up momentum for improvements behind enforcing it. The decision was always in favour of keeping the place clean.

Cleaning up the estates was the most critical turnaround and it had succeeded on 19 of the 20 projects to a greater or lesser degree.

The trouble with all the environmental efforts was that they needed constant checking, recognition and reprimand. Project staff were eager to get involved and did create a lot of positive pressure, as did leading residents.

RESIDENT CARETAKING

All the flatted estates except one (12 projects) had resident caretakers. One estate had non-resident caretakers. We have already argued how vital the caretaker's role was on flatted estates, especially those which were large, dense, and run-down. No other part of the service was more critical or could have greater impact. Resident caretakers operated on a highly intensive and localised basis; this was the essential ingredient. As residents, they were extremely vulnerable to fellow-tenants' criticisms if their efforts were diluted. Caretakers were fairly thick on the ground in most projects.

70.

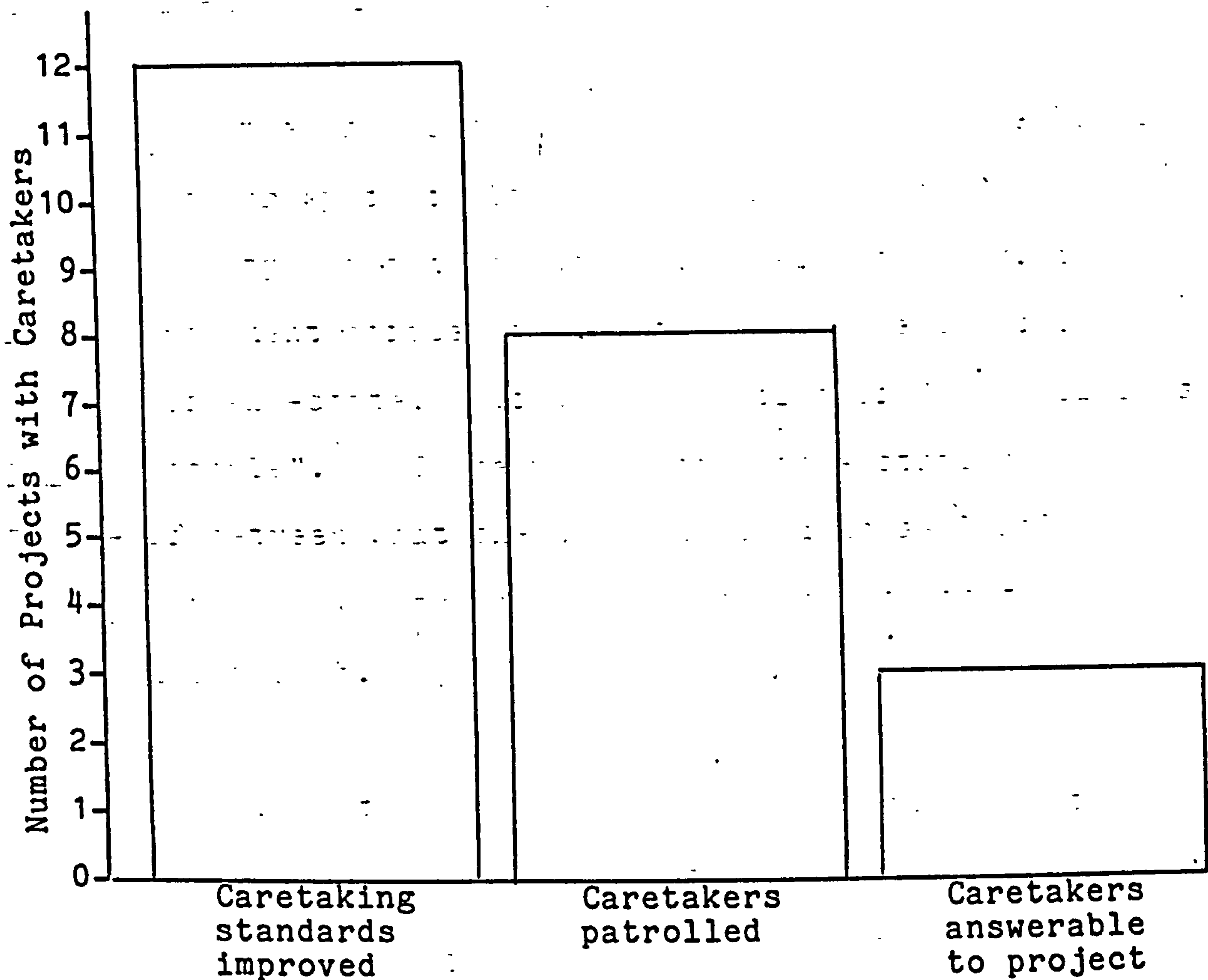
RATIO OF CARETAKERS TO PROPERTIES	
	No. of Projects
1 Caretaker for up to 150 properties	7
1 Caretaker for 151-250 properties	3
1 Caretaker for 350 properties	2
Total	12

Only three of the local management projects had direct control over the standard of caretaking, with caretakers fully absorbed into the local teams. Most caretakers were answerable to supervisors outside the project in the town hall. This often made for difficulties of co-ordination over jobs to be done, relations with tenants and team effort. In all projects, it would have made sense for caretakers to be an integral part of the local

team under the local manager. However, most of the 12 projects had good informal liaison with caretakers.

On eight estates, caretakers patrolled the communal areas. This was an essential part of keeping a finger on the pulse. Patrolling was often misunderstood as endangering caretakers in case of trouble. However, caretakers who patrolled successfully did not intervene where they spotted trouble. They called for help. Their role was very much a deterrent and also a reassurance to residents. When patrolling took place on Tulse Hill and Ragworth estates, it had an instant effect on vandalism, break-ins and the general sense of security. Where there was a serious threat of intimidation in large cities, caretakers patrolled in pairs.

Caretaking standards had improved on all 12 project estates with a resident service. This was usually achieved with existing staff. The caretakers felt they were part of a team effort centred on the local office, and the better relations between tenants and council made the caretakers' job much more worthwhile.

71. CARETAKING (based on 12 Projects)

The caretaker's role was highly visible. Therefore, caretakers often enjoyed recognition and praise on project estates, especially for cleaning, an otherwise thankless task that was noticed by visitors and residents alike. On some estates caretakers did minor repairs, helped in cases of flooding or other disasters, and also got involved in community activities. This broader and more flexible role very much enhanced their status.

There were only two non-resident caretakers out of a total of 83 caretakers in the 12 projects. The consensus was that caretakers should be resident on the estate they served. Otherwise, a vital link for emergencies was lost, and the

coherence of the management presence was jeopardised.

Lift breakdown, communal light failure, blocked chutes, trouble with youth gangs, an accident to an elderly person, fire and flood, were all problems that could arise day or night. The impact of an emergency on an estate was far-reaching, often involving a whole block. —Therefore chaos— and panic could spread if there was no clear point of contact. Resident caretakers provided that vital link.

The other critical element of resident caretaking was its manual character. Cleaning common areas, tackling emergency floods and light failure were three examples of the caretakers' manual role. Some authorities and union representatives seemed to think manual work was only good for someone else, and that caretakers would gain status by becoming office-based. This is patently absurd and undermines the value of the critical manual jobs on which our whole society depends. Caretakers without cleaning responsibility tended to lose their sense of direction and were no longer any use for the constant emergencies of a large estate. Cleaning duties gave caretakers a constant daily routine that tenants recognised and that committed them to holding the line on all sorts of abuse. Caretaking is a complex job, based on a manual function with a major human component. In other words, it's one of the few truly traditional jobs to survive and be indispensable and irreplaceable. Its value was greatly enhanced on the project estates. Without caretakers, the flatted estates were not viable.

FORMAL LIAISON WITH RESIDENTS

We found in the Priority Estates Project and in the local management survey that without a clear sharing of responsibility between tenants and local authority, a local management office could not reverse the serious decline of an estate. It was a question of "the buildings and the people".¹ There was a need for a straightforward trade-off between what the council would do as landlord and what the residents would protect and back in their own communal interest.

The open door that operated on all 20 estates was not enough to ensure success, and most projects went much further, with close liaison between tenants and staff on many issues.

In 16 of the 20 estate-based management projects, there were strong and active tenants' groups. Fifteen of these 16 had the support of a paid community worker or organiser and had regular formal meetings with the council in order to discuss the running of the estate. Six had joint organisations between tenants' bodies and local staff.

Of the four estates that had rather inactive tenants' groups or no tenants' groups, two had a community worker.

72.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT			
Degree of tenant involvement	Number of projects	Number of projects with community work support	Number of projects with regular consultation and liaison between tenants and local authority staff
Strong, active tenant group/s	16	15	15
Less active/no permanent tenant group/s	4	2	0
Total	20	17	15

The involvement of tenants in management tasks was limited on most estates. On only four estates did residents have direct jurisdiction over any areas of management responsibility such as monitoring repairs, helping with lettings, selecting priorities for improvements.

One of the residents' groups was aiming to form a tenant management co-operative but was foundering in its negotiations with the council. Four projects,* including the would-be co-operative, had elected bodies which were recognised by the council as having a formal say in the management of the estate. However, none of these organisations had yet taken on a permanent life of its own, and they depended very much on the goodwill of the council officers and the local leadership that emerged.

Some estates had very varied communities and tenants' representation was not always straightforward. Several

* Brent, Lambeth, Hackney and Bolton; the latter three were the three pilot Priority Estate Projects. Hackney and Bolton Tenant Boards both registered as Friendly Societies.

of the estates went to great lengths to ensure that representatives from minorities were directly involved in decision-making. On two or three estates, co-options from minority organisations to the Neighbourhood Management Committee were agreed since the sizeable ethnic minorities might not be elected under a majority ballot system. Ensuring that a wide cross-section of the community on a large and diverse estate participated in decision-making was a tight-rope that all estate officers walked.

LIMITED ROLE FOR TENANTS

Tenants' priorities in improvements were accepted in principle on most estates through the established liaison channels. In practice, constraints of finance, confusion of responsibility between departments and a desire to "treat everyone alike" throughout the council, led to disappointment and bitterness when tenants' often common-sense opinions were overridden. Ironically, this often arose out of over-ambitious spending plans by councils which distorted residents' choices and generated consultation exercises that couldn't be followed through.

Without a transfer of responsibility through a formally constituted management agreement between the council and the residents' organisation, it was difficult to overcome this problem. Only by registering as a Friendly Society could a residents' group consider taking such control.

Although registration does not of itself give control, it gives the tenants' group the legal status to negotiate a management agreement. Two projects' tenant groups had registered in this way.

In practice, while a co-operative relationship between residents and local authorities was developed on most of the project estates, the role of residents was strictly limited, both by their own reluctance and the councils' nervousness. On only one estate in the country, Cloverhall, Rochdale (not in the survey), did the tenants take over full management and maintenance responsibility from the council. This was a highly complex and drawn-out process, taking over three years to negotiate.

It must be said that, while we talked to residents wherever we could, no systematic survey of residents' opinions was conducted on most of the estates, and it remains to be uncovered what a broad cross-section of tenants would say about local management. However, on two of the project estates, tenants were surveyed and their views were very positive.²

Meanwhile, it is true to say that the degree of local involvement and contact between staff and residents was much greater following the opening of local offices than on the average estate, and that, without exception, local staff were deeply committed to working with residents. Local residents everywhere argued for local offices.

COMMUNITY WORKERS AND TENANTS

It was surprising to find what an important role community workers played on unpopular estates. Within the local authorities, it was very common to hear officers and councillors belittle their role as "lefties", "do-gooders", or "agitators". Yet in practice, their desire to identify with the needs of tenants and their ability to find their way through the town hall system meant that they often greatly enhanced the tenants' chances of being heard. It was true in at least three cases that community workers played an adversary role in relation to the council which was inappropriate to the new management approach of a local office. It involved a confrontational style that militated against an open door to tenants' problems and a co-operative relationship between locally-based council staff and tenants. On some estates, the hostile relations between tenants and staff took several years to overcome. This was particularly true where there was a well-organised, aggressively-led, but minority tenants' association backed by a politically-motivated community worker. In that situation, the political rewards of efficient day-to-day management were not immediately apparent and therefore initially had no stronger appeal to politically-motivated community workers than they had to personally ambitious tenants' leaders or local and national politicians. This was changing in boroughs like Islington, Lambeth and Liverpool, as estate management was seen to "pay off" politically. In every case in the survey, common-sense

and good management eventually led to better relations with the council, with the community worker still backing the tenants, but in a collaborative rather than adversary role.

As environmental issues have risen in people's consciousness and as money for instant physical solutions has disappeared, more and more councillors, community workers and residents have accepted the logic of local management and the importance of having a say in it. Therefore the "them" and "us" atmosphere of the classic public encounter between tenants and council has been supplanted .

FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY WORK

The community workers were funded in a variety of ways: ten were paid for directly by the local authority; four by Urban Aid or Inner City Partnership funds; three by voluntary organisations. Thirteen of the 37 community workers were on the local authority payroll. It was surprising to find local political commitment to this work, though it should be pointed out that community work jobs were constantly being reviewed and were very vulnerable to cuts in spending.

TENANT TRAINING

One of the innovations of the Priority Estates Project on

a number of the survey estates was tenant training in basic housing management issues. The first course was in January 1982 and organised at the behest of the Cloverhall Tenants' Association, Rochdale, where tenants wanted to take over from the council the management of their estate. Bolton, Hackney, Lambeth and Islington tenants joined in. Training programmes have been organised around the key issues of rent income and arrears; organising and allocating a local budget to pay for a local workforce; allocating dwellings and choosing between conflicting needs of applicants; ordering and sorting out priorities for repairs; dealing with social problems; and running a democratic and efficient local body.

The training sessions have been rich in inspiring local leadership and in generating a sensible dialogue between the council and residents. The central ideas of local housing management have proved well within the grasp of the average layman and woman. The tenants who came forward from a run-down estate, with their disillusioning experiences of community breakdown and council ineptitude, usually warmed to the problems to hand because only exceptionally caring and committed residents were still willing to try after so much failure. The depth of their feeling for the problems always gave them a long start and the human content of the housing issues enabled them to seize on solutions very quickly. Tenants received certificates at the end of each course to verify that they had completed the work.

The value of input into the training, support and development of local residents' organisations tended to be questioned by councils, even though it was happening in most of the projects. The evidence from the survey and from the training sessions suggested that it paid dividends.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

It is perhaps surprising that fewer than half the projects were improving community facilities generally, given the level of social problems and of tenant involvement. However, on many run-down estates with a notorious local reputation, social services, health and education services were already heavily involved, sometimes over many years. Nine project estates already had community provisions, such as a community centre, under-fives activities or adventure playground, before the projects were established. We found that the impact of these community provisions was largely dependent on an efficient housing management service, bringing some kind of coherence and order to the landlord services, requiring a local office to provide a focus for residents, management staff and other community services. Six local authorities we visited, that were not included in our study, had mounted estate-based, community projects with fairly elaborate provision of community facilities* but without involving directly the housing department. In no case had these community projects

* One estate had been provided with an under-fives playgroup, mothers' and babies' centre, youth club, community centre, and playground, as well as a full-time advice centre.

succeeded in reversing poor conditions.³ Housing management must be in the front line in order to tackle basic running problems, as a prerequisite for wider community development. However, as the management projects became established, the demands for better community facilities grew. In most cases, these were popular and diverse. Football pitches, BMX tracks, play areas, quiet garden areas, workshops, mothers' clubs, church groups, Sunday schools, all sprang into existence and sought house-room.

Community halls, while badly wanted on many of the estates, were extremely difficult to run and often hit financial difficulties, especially where there was a licensed bar. The scope for dishonesty in that case was endless and what was supposed to give the tenants' association financial independence became a debt-spinner. On one estate, members running a community centre with a licensed bar amassed debts totalling £9,000 owed to the breweries and resigned. As a result, the hall was closed for several months and the new tenants' association had to invest much of its energy in paying off debts. A second estate raised money to build a community centre, ran it successfully for two years, then closed it down and boarded it up in the wake of factional strife only three years after it was first built. Tenants' organisations and community workers were often weak on the business side of community enterprises.

Community facilities only worked in the end if they were

properly supervised, maintained and cleaned regularly, and organised in tandem with an efficient landlord service. On a majority of the project estates, this was gradually happening, though housing staff were often taking the initiative outside the immediate jurisdiction of their job and working closely with particular groups of residents.

Many of the project estates were too large and too disparate for estate-wide community-run facilities to succeed. Small committed interest groups seemed to work better. For example, on the Broadwater Farm estate in Haringey, their Youth Association, representing primarily the interests of youth, a majority of whom were from racial minorities, worked tirelessly for their youth club, job creation, community facilities, and help with the elderly, most of whom were white. This organisation, based within one section of the community, managed to target itself on issues that would not only help the youth but the estate as a whole. On other estates, similar small interest groups formed and had an impact far beyond their immediate objectives. Under-fives activities, language groups for foreign women, training workshops, pensioners' lunch clubs, advice centres, are all examples that have sprung up. Organising around particular groups or goals can often generate local leaders and spread to much wider community benefits.

MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS

Modernisation of outdated interiors to dwellings and environmental works to surroundings were going on on 18 of the 20 estates. On 13 of the estates, local staff and residents had some influence over what happened.

The following table shows a breakdown of areas of work and how the work was funded.

73.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS		
Type of improvement	Number of estates	Source of funding (% of total cost of work)
Exterior of blocks and dwellings and work to the environment	18	67% HIP 33% Urban Aid/Inner City Partnership
Inside homes	11	100% HIP
Entry phones	9	100% HIP
Community facilities	8	67% HIP 33% Urban Aid/Inner City Partnership
No improvements	2	

The most extensive improvement was to the estate environment. Almost all estates were being upgraded by landscaping, repainting, planting, and provision of playgrounds.

Environmental improvements tended to work better than house modernisation because they caused less disruption. There was a growing tendency for tenants' priorities, such as

lighting and door security, to take precedence over architects' dreams for weeping willows and flowering cherries. This was not to say that tenants did not appreciate greenery. On many estates they were actively involved in planting. But they set the highest premium on security and other basic items and wanted them first. Tenants at Tulse Hill and White City⁴ persuaded the G.L.C. to postpone landscaping in favour of improved lighting.

Entry phones or secure doors were essential for communal blocks and were being installed on 10 of the 13 flatted estates, but were a dismal failure on half the estates, even after the local office was involved. This was for a variety of reasons. Often they were installed prior to resident consultation and in several cases prior to the opening of a local office. In one case, they were wrongly wired up and had never worked over a 3-year period. In some cases, poor, vandal-prone doors and breakable glass were used*. And in some very disarrayed areas where social pressures were too severe, entry phones could only be made to work with full-time door-porters, acting as security guards. After numerous failures, this was tried successfully in Liverpool. Entry phones only worked where other areas of management, particularly tenant involvement, lettings and maintenance, were operating properly. Long-term maintenance contracts were essential with specialist firms.

The enclosure of public open space to provide private front

* In one case the glass was never put in.

and back gardens or patios, whether for flats or houses, was probably the easiest, most radical and most successful of the small-scale environmental innovations, totally transforming the physical aspect and social dynamic of many blocks and more than one cottage estate.

Dwellings on five out of the seven cottage estates and four walk-up estates were being modernised; one cottage estate and one walk-up estate had been modernised in the 1970's - 11 of the 13 estates that were 30 years old or more were thus being brought up to date.

There were two innovative and exciting experiments in modernisation. One was the tenants' grants scheme whereby tenants themselves became responsible for hiring a builder to modernise their kitchen, bathroom and heating system, with professional advice from the council and a range of choices open to the tenant. The results were encouraging in saving money, accelerating the programme, involving the tenants directly and attaining a higher standard of workmanship, although this experiment had its special problems too.

The other was the G.L.C.'s ambitious rolling programme of package conversions on its pre-war flatted estates, which included the two G.L.C. estates in our survey. The G.L.C. hired contractors to rip out and replace complete kitchens and bathrooms and instal full central heating over a five-day period. The work was carried out only if the tenant agreed. Special arrangements were made with neighbours

for emergency water supply and cooking and no one was without services overnight. The modernisation, basic as it was, cost half to a third of the normal internal modernisations and caused minimal disruption. The G.L.C. package scheme was the only example we found of a large-scale capital operation broken down so effectively into each dwelling component that it was actually cheaper and faster and more efficient than any other modernisation scheme we encountered.

Modernisation of homes was popular, even though the process caused quite incredible disruption to family life, often over months. Most councils were no longer rehousing families, but were carrying out modernisation around the family or, at most, temporarily rehousing them for the worst few weeks.* The biggest frustrations were the unkept promises of council staff and the unrealistic timetables of builders. All capital improvement programmes, including modernisation, were decided at the centre and carried through by centrally-based staff. This often meant that valuable local expertise and on-the-ground supervision were lost, even though there was some local input. In only five cases were project staff directly responsible for co-ordinating improvements on the ground, though not for taking key decisions. Even then, they were usually attempting to achieve a co-ordinated programme with the involvement of council architects, surveyors and

* Seven projects did conversions with tenants in situ. One rehoused tenants temporarily; three rehoused permanently. The in situ conversions were very popular.

engineers, building contractors and sub-contractors (often several firms), private consultant architects, the tenants affected by the work, the central lettings department where rehousing was required, finance department for payment of contracts, legal department for checking contracts and pursuing any breaches, and sometimes the direct labour organisation for ongoing repairs while the major works got under way. Up to 11 separate organisations or departments, other than the local housing office, were therefore involved in one way or another.

By no standards could such a structure be regarded as logical or workable and it is not surprising that, among tenants,⁵ capital works earned more derision, if not anger, than any other aspect of estate management. It was not that tenants did not want improvements. They were crying out for them. But the nonsensical organisation and the waste grieved them in their need.

The most radical major innovation was "lopping off" the top one or two storeys of 4- and 5-storey blocks of maisonettes and flats. While costing at least £8,000 per dwelling, it produced an attractive row of houses from an unlettable block of flats in areas where there was a crude housing surplus (such as Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Tyneside). It had the major advantage over demolition of asserting some value in the community and in council housing, but it was not a solution which enjoyed widespread application and was too radical for many local authorities

to contemplate. It was becoming too expensive for the Government to encourage. However, in the areas of surplus flats, it was a most enlightened and imaginative way forward.

Often relatively minor improvements which were not very expensive made an important difference to the overall conditions. Cavity wall insulation on a cottage estate (Leicester), gas fires in the living room that also heated the water (Stockton), anti-graffiti paint in hallways and on staircases (Rochdale), laminated glass in windows in vulnerable public areas, and vandal-proof light covers on exposed balconies (G.L.C.), strong, solid front doors on thief-prone balconies (Haringey and Brent) had an immeasurable effect on the quality of life. Each improvement might cost £50 to £250 per dwelling, the type of investment that could be replicated many times over. The shopping list given here was a direct result of tenants' pleadings. Their needs and requirements were often far more immediate and basic than the council would normally allow. The obsession with capital programmes and the involvement of architects, surveyors and building contractors at the wrong level and on the wrong scale, had often distorted the progress of maintenance and continual renovation into a kind of new-build approach to old dwellings. The innovations in local management greatly enhanced the tenants' ability to ask for and oversee sensible and modest improvements, which were so much more likely to fulfil the object of the exercise. The same could not always be said of more ambitious and less locally focussed

spending.

All the estates in the survey needed substantial sums spent on them on an ongoing basis, either by virtue of their age or their design or both. However, we concluded that large-scale building contracts on dense, fully-occupied estates were cumbersome, costly and wasteful. It seemed more logical to disaggregate the work needed, organise small-block or area-based contracts and generally do small sections of the work on an incremental basis. Then it became easier to pick up mistakes. The amounts of money, the penalties and the faulty plans became more manageable and rectifiable. This incremental approach, with resident involvement in decision-making, was increasingly being adopted as funds became more scarce and previous blunders more apparent.

Improvements on Tulse Hill were radically modified in the light of tenants' preferences. Balcony lights were renewed instead of extensive landscaping, and improved rubbish chutes were given priority over better car parking. Sleeping policemen were introduced to stop speeding traffic instead of waiting for planning permission to close some roads and open others. The latter plan had bounced between departments for five years and would have cost £2 million - the 10 sleeping policemen cost £100 each and took six weeks to get agreed and put in place.

A major problem in all the projects was the way capital budgets were drawn up. Capital spending was the puppet

of central and local government financial problems and there was no ongoing commitment to planned maintenance, nor any regular, clear local budgets.

The real need in the projects was for a competent repairs team able to take on bigger and more regular maintenance, such as roof overhaul, plumbing replacements, cyclical repainting and suchlike, thereby reducing the need for disruptive, unwieldy and often wasteful crash programmes when an estate had already reached a catastrophic point of decay. There was no reason why the maintenance programme should not include continual upgrading of the inside of dwellings and of communal areas. This approach was being tried on one estate. In the long run, the ongoing long-term maintenance approach would be cheaper and more intelligible to residents.

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CHAPTER XIII - THE HARD CORE OF MANAGEMENT

- REPAIRS
- RENTS
- LETTINGS

LOCAL LETTINGS

The letting of empty properties was the most complex and sensitive issue. It was very difficult in the larger authorities and on the less popular estates to achieve quick and effective letting of empty property except on a decentralised basis. The lettings chain involving an offer being made, viewing arranged, possible refusal, new offer, caused a time lag that in turn invited vandalism. The alternative to this damaging cycle was letting to desperate households who were more likely to accept an unpopular offer quickly but who might compound their family problems and the unpopularity of an estate by accepting an unsuitable offer. This form of social "dumping" was the common practice on all the estates prior to local management.

On 16 of the estates, there were changes in lettings policy in an attempt to reverse the decline. In one or two cases, homeless families were no longer offered that estate for a time; in others all applicants were carefully screened to prevent households with severe social problems ending up on the estate. On the flatted estates, there was an effort to reduce child densities, either by under-letting large

dwellings or by restricting access for families to lower floors. In all tower blocks there was a declared policy to move families out, though this was proving increasingly difficult to implement in London because of the worsening housing situation.

All restrictions on lettings policies carried their own liabilities. Under-letting larger dwellings to smaller families and childless households, unless rents were reduced, imposed a big rent and rates burden on a low-income household. More importantly, heating and furnishing a dwelling that was larger than necessary was a serious problem. Under-letting in many areas was no longer considered a very sensible solution unless a tenant particularly wanted it and was able to cover the extra cost. Excluding families from tower blocks was very successful, both for the families who moved out and for childless households who moved in, but to extend that policy to upper floors of 4-storey flats or maisonettes, as has been done in Liverpool and Rochdale, so narrowed the demand from suitable applicants that there was a surplus in many areas of 3-bedroom upper floor dwellings for which the only demand was from single people.

Most of the single applicants in places like Rochdale and Liverpool were unskilled, unemployed, transient youngsters who had just left home and who could not cope with furnishing a large flat, connecting gas and electricity and paying for rent and rates. The turnover was very high under such lettings and moonlighting was common,

leaving hire purchase and fuel bills as well as rent arrears very often. The trail of debts enhanced the poor reputation of an estate, leading to the common refusal of shops and delivery services to deal with bona fide tenants. Local authorities were reluctant to ask for deposits or guarantors, yet such precautions were the only ways of protecting the stock and the lives of other tenants, which were often made miserable by freewheeling youngsters not yet used to the fragile independence they had found. The blocks and dwellings themselves were often totally unsuitable for young single people.

Excluding the homeless and other low-income groups from the poor estates proved socially divisive and politically sensitive. It was hard to justify, given the existence of empty dwellings and the patent housing need of some households. A policy that overtly limited the rehousing of homeless families on bad estates made the immediate connection between homelessness and unpopular estates, often seeming to blame homeless families for poor conditions. Making a wider range of offers to homeless families in areas of high demand was the only alternative but was not a policy that was widely adopted. The only other solution was to open up demand through better management and local lettings.

Eleven of the projects still had centrally run lettings systems but seven of these enjoyed special policies in an attempt to prevent social ghettos. In only four of the project estates was there no change in lettings policies and virtually no flexibility. There, the management staff

had a serious uphill battle to make anything work. Where there was some flexibility, local managers were able to intervene and affect lettings practices if not carry them out themselves. This greatly enhanced the sense of purpose and satisfaction of the local staff and often involved residents in lettings matters too. It also produced more applicants.

On the 11 estates without local lettings, the number of empty homes had increased fractionally from 496 at the outset, to 522 in 1982/83. On one highly unpopular modern concrete complex estate, empty flats increased by 150 to 29% of all dwellings. The increase happened in spite of special lettings policies and some flexibility, but no local waiting list or local lettings. By trying to reduce the number of lettings to families with children and to disadvantaged groups in an area of low housing demand, there were greater difficulties at the town hall in finding applicants at all. Even on the estates where the number of empty dwellings was falling, the reduction was much smaller and slower without local lettings, as these figures show.

A LOCAL WAITING LIST

The system that worked most successfully was where lettings were handled entirely by the local office. This happened on nine estates. All but one of the nine were able to generate some local demand. Under local lettings, anyone

wanting a home could queue at the local office for any dwelling available. The overriding priority was to get the dwellings occupied. This random method of letting worked best in that it was fast, it enhanced tenants' choice and commitment, and it was even-handed. No one sat in judgement over anyone else.

Local lettings reduced the number of empty properties* in every case. The main advantages of the local list were speed of letting, a guarantee that people who applied locally actually wanted to live there, and a chance to strengthen local ties. Relatives, friends and local people were often willing to move onto a local estate that was unpopular with outsiders, because of their roots in the neighbourhood. The local list included applicants referred from the town hall and people applying direct to the local office. Under local lettings in some authorities, only households registered on the central waiting list were eligible. Rehousing was in these cases according to the same priorities as the town hall with the same points system and with homeless families and other urgent cases taking automatic precedence.

But in some areas, the dearth of council applicants was such that lettings took place on a first-come, first-served basis at the local office. Dwellings were let literally over the counter. In general, the local waiting list

* We eliminated from our estimates in all project areas. properties that were empty for major improvements, but included vandalised empty property that would otherwise have been fit for letting. On one estate, there had always been very few empty dwellings.

generated a steady stream of applicants if it was open to all-comers.

A large pool of willing applicants was essential if local lettings were to work. Even in areas where through the central or district system, there appeared to be few applicants, such as Liverpool, Newcastle and Gateshead, a local office, letting empty dwellings direct, was likely to recruit in people who otherwise would not consider living on the worst estates. This change of psychology was born partly of the impact of local management. More importantly, it overcame the absurd pecking order that commonly passed as tenants' choice whereby, through the central lettings system, applicants were asked to rank on paper their top choices of estates. On that basis, of course, applicants had never asked for the estates in our survey.,

74.

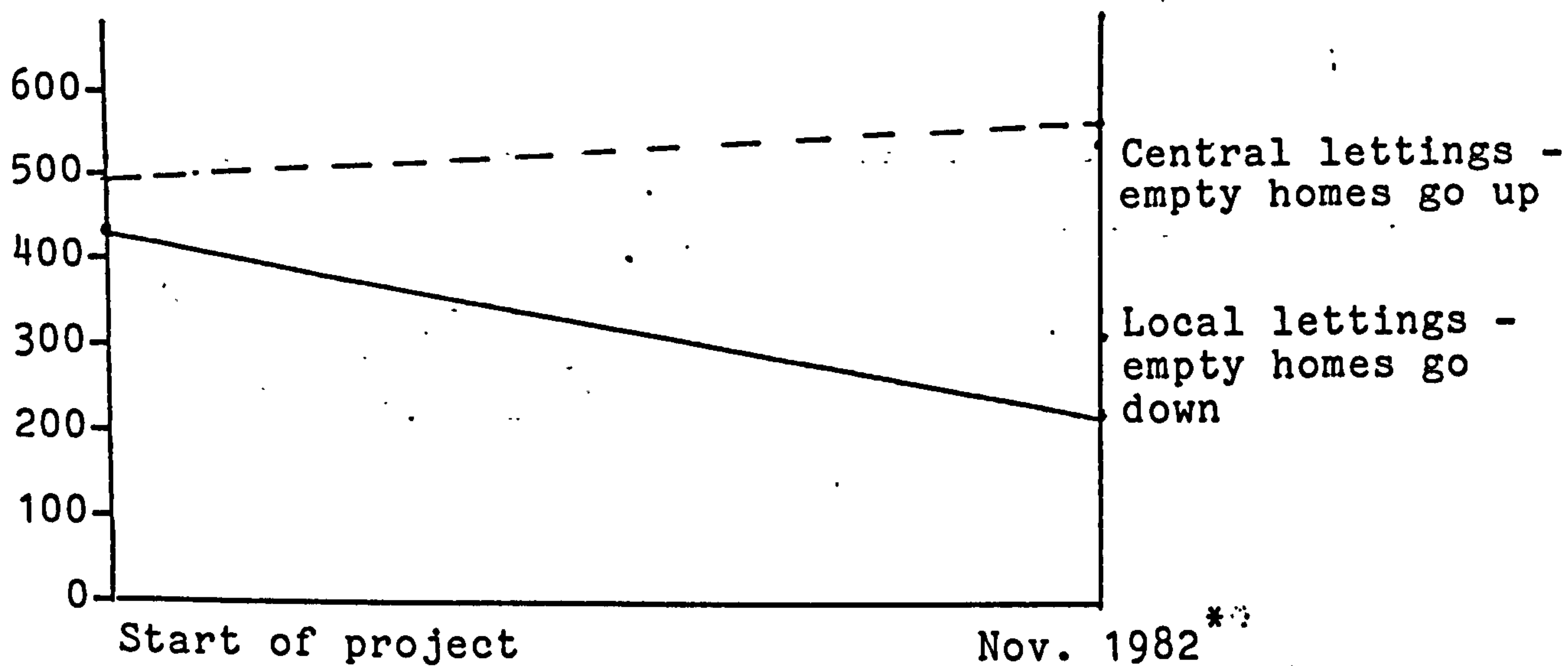
LETTINGS					
Type of letting	No. of projects	Voids down	Voids same	Voids up	No information
Central	11	5	1	3	2
Lettings from estate office	9	8	1	0	

IMPACT OF THE LOCAL OFFICE ON LETTINGS

The number of empty homes in the nine projects with local lettings had dropped from a total of 435 at the outset of

the projects to 225 in 1982/83 when we conducted our survey. The following table shows the changes that were brought about in the number of empty dwellings where the local offices handled lettings.

75. CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF EMPTY PROPERTIES UNDER LOCAL AND CENTRAL LETTINGS IN ALL PROJECTS FROM THE OUTSET OF THE PROJECTS TO THE TIME OF THE SURVEY



The following table shows that the number of empty dwellings rose on three estates, none of which had local lettings. Empty dwellings were reduced, often substantially, on the other 17 estates.

* The projects started at varying times. We used the figures recorded for each project when it began, regardless of actual dates.

76.

NUMBERS OF EMPTY PROPERTIES AND CHANGE IN THE RATE OF VOIDS SINCE THE LOCAL OFFICE OPENED				
Type of estate	Recent voids		Empties as % of total	% change from start of project
	Date	Total		
Cottage - N.W. England	Nov. 82	7	1.5%	same*
Cottage - North of England	1982	15	1.5%	-21%*
Cottage - Midlands	Sept. 82	30	1.5%	-40%*
Cottage - North of England	1982	10	1%	-76%*
Cottage - North of England	June 82	23	6%	+10%
Cottage - Midland	Mar. 83	44	15%	-44%*
Cottage - N.W. England	Jan. 83	5	1.6%	-44%*
Balcony - London	Dec. 82	22	3.2%	+45%
Balcony - London	Nov. 82	26	4.7%	-74%
Balcony - London	Nov. 82	43	4.9%	-36%*
Balcony - London	Nov. 82	22	2%	N/A
Mainly balcony - N.West	Jan. 83	37	1.9%	-53%*
Balcony - London	Nov. 82	17	6.2%	-60%
Modern - London			0.5%	some
Modern - London	1982 av.	30	1.6%	N/A
Modern - London	1982	Average 6/7	0.8%	-33%
Modern - London	June 82	27	2.5%	-21%
Modern - London	Oct. 82	34	3.4%	-45%
Modern - London	1982	Average 55	4.9%	-55%
Modern - N.W. England	Jan. 83	293	29%	+109%

*Starred numbers represent estates with local lettings.

Local lettings did not work in isolation from other management initiatives. They had to be coupled with a

local office, a general clean-up of the environment, swift repair of empty property, good security, employment of night guards, control of vandalism, and special recruitment drives for new residents, including advertising in the paper. All these involved the close co-operation of residents who had to be persuaded that there was some point in trying.

Empty, boarded up homes were a visible announcement of trouble and told residents and outsiders that the dwelling on offer was basically unacceptable before the applicant even saw inside it. Extraordinary steps had to be taken at the outset of a local management project to reverse this situation. Conventional lettings did not prove sufficient.

Conversely, a full estate, the direct and personal achievement of the local workers who were dealing with applicants, generated demand, built up a local queue and created an atmosphere where local workers were personally committed to getting homes occupied. They were "marketing" the homes in a positive way rather than just coping with a hopeless cycle of offers, refusals, boarding up, more offers, vandal damage, further refusals, squatting.

The problems and the solutions were shown to be closely interrelated and as many elements as possible had to be tackled together. Local lettings on their own did not fill the estate's empty properties.

Local lettings in the eight projects saved the councils

thousands of pounds by bringing in extra rent and rates and by stopping vandal damage to now occupied property. In all, approximately £210,000* a year was being recouped through rent and rates from the previously unoccupied homes. Even allowing for very high arrears, a lot of cash was at stake: the equivalent of a salary for at least two workers in each of the eight projects. Additional savings on repairs to empty property and reduced vandal damage were between £500-£2,000 per property. Local control of lettings was an essential economy for hard-pressed local authorities with difficult-to-let estates.

POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO LOCAL LETTINGS

In spite of the obvious advantages of devolving lettings to the local offices, chief housing officers and senior politicians on the whole took unkindly to the idea. So ingrained was the notion that council housing was strictly rationed and that you had to queue for it, prove your overriding need for it, and fit the dwelling and estate you wanted according to council-determined criteria, that any freer, more localised and more autonomous lettings system seemed synonymous with "queue-jumping" and parochial bigotry. The genuine fears that local lettings might discriminate against minorities and might lead to unfair

* To arrive at this figure, we averaged rent and rates for 2-bedroom properties in all the projects (£20 per week), multiplied by 50 (rent-paying weeks) and by 210, the reduced number of empty properties.

lettings were bedded deep within the psyche of centralised administration. Local lettings were rarely initiated from the centre. Almost always they followed logically upon the local office struggling with the problem of failing to fill empty dwellings while the centre failed to supply sufficient willing applicants. Some local officers took the initiative in going to the centre, taking names from the central waiting list and contacting applicants direct. In that way, de facto, local lettings developed. By the same token, when once the office was there on the estate, tenants would bring in sons and daughters, friends and relatives, needing a home of their own. The idea proved itself through informal initiatives.

In the hard-pressed London boroughs, the constant pressure of homelessness caused central allocations departments to resist local lettings, often bitterly. They wanted (and needed) to commandeer all vacant dwellings for the endless demands of homelessness. However, many families opted to remain in "bed and breakfast" until a "good offer" came up, rather than be dumped on the worst estates through central lettings. This happened constantly at Tulse Hill and Stockwell Park in Lambeth where homeless families often failed to materialise at the local office when sent from the town hall. Through the local lettings scheme, however, tenants came and registered at the local office in large numbers. There were always willing takers and anyone who was homeless or under threat of homelessness took automatic priority. The council could refer any needy case and

determine their priority. It then depended on the family to show up.

In that way, the local lettings worked for everyone. It only remained to monitor closely for any sign of discrimination or unfairness. The estates concerned so overwhelmingly attracted and housed disadvantaged groups that this was very unlikely to be the case. There was no suggestion that the eight projects with local lettings discriminated in any way against vulnerable households. If anything, they helped the very poorest communities regain self-respect by enabling fast lettings and encouraging a full estate, the surest indicator of communal wellbeing.

TRANSFERS

Transfers continued to be facilitated as a way of overcoming tenant dissatisfaction and on all estates there were still substantial problems with the volume of re-lets, although this was declining as the estates improved. One of the most destructive and common types of transfers was a "management transfer" where a "good" tenant was moved off a "bad" estate because he was being harassed by a "bad" neighbour and had come to blows in some way. There were numerous cases of this happening for a range of reasons from attacks by dogs, to noise nuisance and racial abuse. Whatever the cause, it was the most damaging way out, breaking the resolve of those who remained, including staff,

to curb the nuisance. The main argument against the alternative approach of moving the offending family was that they were bound to move to somewhere better since they were usually already on the council's worst estate. The whole notion of transfers as an avenue of escape had yet to be lost on most of the 20 estates. Jeremy Seabrook's snapshot notes about Walsall¹ summed up the problem of management transfers:

"It is the policy of the authority to move old people out if they are harassed by the young..... part of the nature of things that the young will so torment the old that they have to be moved."

Given slack housing demand in many areas, the turnover of tenants continued to be very high and it did not seem reasonable to deny people transfers. Yet only when vacancy and transfer rates began to fall did an estate community usually begin to galvanise. A lot of management effort was focussed on reducing the demand for transfers.

INTERNAL TRANSFERS

One way of satisfying changing housing needs, while retaining the community, was to organise internal transfers locally. Six of the projects without local lettings were allowed to give priority to internal transfers on the estate. Allowing tenants to transfer to another home within the estate through the estate office was a tremendous boost to the morale of tenants and workers and had the opposite effect of normal off-estate transfers. It helped prevent more

ambitious households from moving off to other estates altogether. Transfers were often needed because of changing family size and circumstances, because of major repairs and also because of neighbour problems. Ready internal transfers, as an alternative to transferring off the estate, helped to keep down the number of empty homes on the unpopular estates and held together the tenuous community links which were so vital for a healthy future. Tenants were often willing to stay on the estate if their other housing problems could be solved.²

Local housing officers took many initiatives with internal estate-based "swops" and transfers, thereby pleasing otherwise frustrated transfer applicants. It also gave a sense of control and responsibility to the local office which they were keen to exercise. It did mean that the "better" dwellings would be snapped up by existing residents if they came vacant, leaving the less popular dwellings for newcomers. But it was less destabilising than a complete exodus.

LOCAL REPAIRS

Repairs were the most difficult and costly problem to sort out. Because they were not normally run by the housing department, they were rarely integrated into the local management structure. However, with one exception,^{*} all repairs ordering in the 20 projects was done through the estate office. This had the great advantage that tenants could at least pin down the person they had reported their repairs to, and estate officers could make instant reference to repairs records and could chase them by phone with the tenant in attendance.

^{*}Leicester.

In 15 of the 20 estates the repairs service was reported to be improving. Because proper monitoring of repairs was almost non-existent, it was extremely difficult to extract more than impressionistic information in most authorities, either about the central repairs system or the impact of the local office. However, we managed to glean uniform evidence to show that only where there was a local repairs team based on the estate, working in concert with the local office, were staff and residents satisfied with the service provided.

There was a vast difference between the repairs service offered by an estate-based team on eight estates and that offered by a district or centrally-based system on the remaining 12.

A majority of the district-based repairs services had improved somewhat in the project estates as a result of on-the-spot staff, quick reporting, better liaison with tenants through the estate office, better relations between local housing staff and repairs workers and fewer access problems. However, the district service was still cumbersome, inflexible, slow and difficult to control. No one was wholly satisfied with it and there were many complaints.

The backlog of jobs, the level of complaints, the problems of access to homes were higher in district and central systems. Overheads took up more than half the repairs

budget and workers spent on average less than half their working hours actually doing the repair jobs required. Employees were as dissatisfied with this state of affairs as residents.³

Most of the projects relied on the central organisation for work on heating or drains or other specialist services. This invariably posed major problems of delays, inefficiency, crossed wires, wrong parts, lack of parts, etc. etc. But there was often no alternative for highly specialised repairs, such as lift maintenance or central heating.

PROBLEMS WITH DIRECT LABOUR ORGANISATIONS

The direct labour organisations were geared to paper and mechanical operations that fitted badly with the sensitive and personal local approach that the run-down estates cried out for.

In several of the project authorities without local teams, the unbending rigidity of the central direct labour organisation, the acrimonious industrial relations, the extreme defensiveness of the unions, and the emphasis of directors on computerised records, specialist teams, economies of scale, job control and systems analysis, prevented the reasoned consideration of local teams. The new legislation forcing direct labour organisations to tender for most local authority repairs work added a

further layer of confusion to an existing minefield. The result was that repairs remained an expensive and unsatisfactory area on a majority of project estates and the failure to resolve it could lead to the demoralisation of project staff and the extended cynicism of tenants, as well as the continuing decay of the stock. Only where the local project could bend and adapt the system on a local basis and integrate repairs into local management, did repairs give satisfaction. This was happening on eight of the 20 estates.

ESTATE-BASED REPAIRS TEAMS

With repairs more than any other aspect of housing, the scale and remoteness and specialisms of the local authority structure impeded progress. Yet it was easy to achieve almost overnight success with a local, well-supervised repairs team.

The eight projects which had an estate-based repairs service had all brought about an improved * service. The backlog of jobs had been cleared in four projects. The number of jobs completed by each worker had increased significantly in four projects.⁴ Travelling time and paperwork had been reduced by virtue of on-the-spot liaison.

* "Improved" in the opinion of the staff and residents. Their general popularity was based on very close proximity to residents and local staff, which ensured constant feedback on actual experience. Therefore we took satisfaction to be a valid measure of success. In four projects with accurate and accessible records, we checked the productivity of local teams.

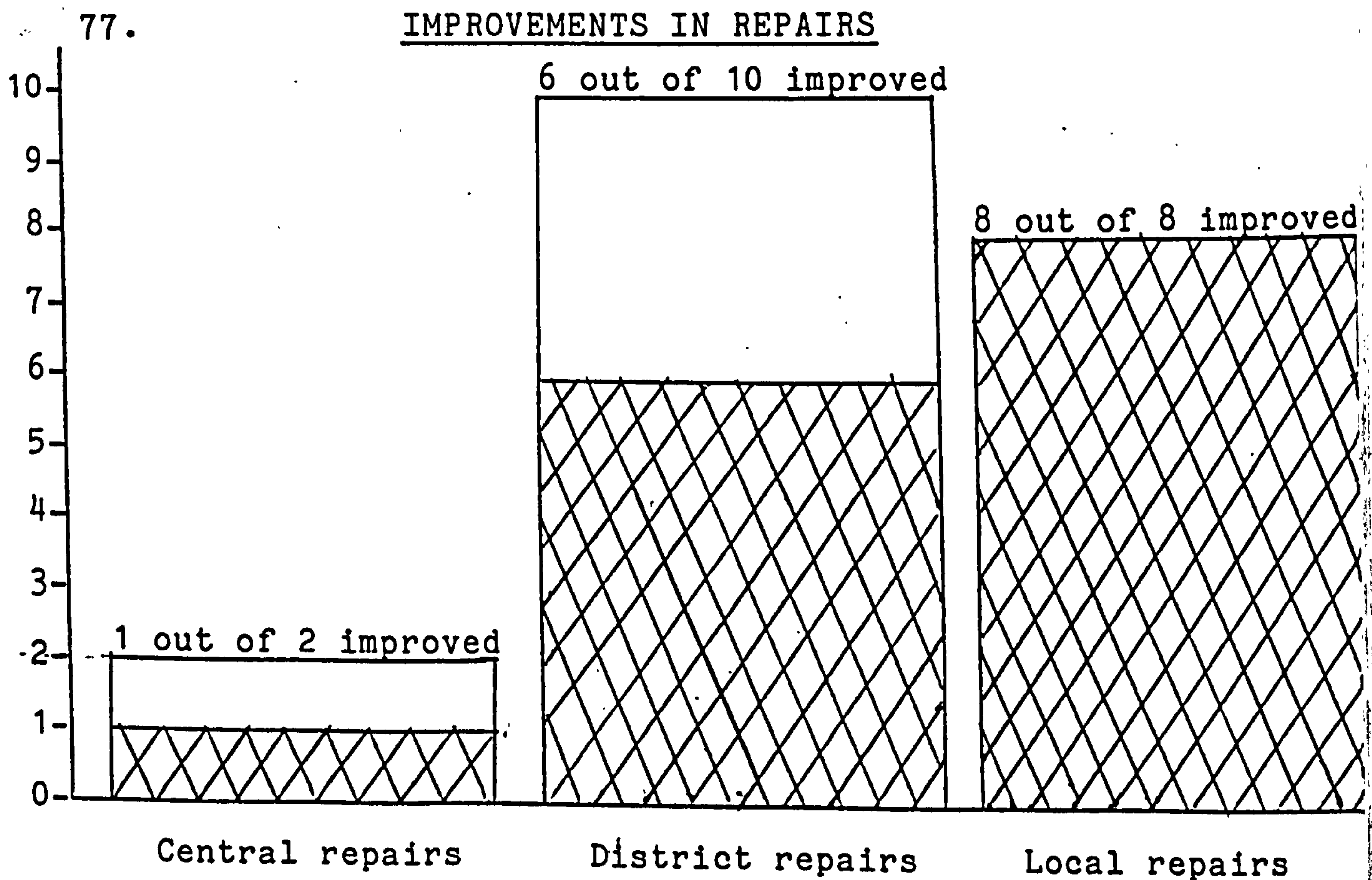
The local repairs teams employed approximately one worker for every 100 properties. Once the backlog of outstanding repairs had been cleared, each worker could normally handle about 150 properties, or do more preventive or planned maintenance work. On two projects the workforce was reduced as the backlog was cleared.

One element that was clearly vital in a good repairs team was high-quality, on-the-spot, full-time supervision and co-ordination. One local repairs team collapsed temporarily because of inadequate supervision, but all the other teams seemed to attract able and hardworking foremen or team-leaders.

Tenants and estate staff were delighted with the results. Repairs workers were no longer the scapegoats for everyone's frustrations. Liaison was usually friendly, informal and effective. Many unexpected benefits accrued. For example, on one estate where entry phones had been continually out of order, the local repairs team leader did a daily round with a screwdriver and oilcan, finding that he could keep them all functioning. It was not vandalism or electronic hitches, as previously suspected, but very minor yet important shifts and pressures in door frames, locks and hinges, that caused slight but critical blocks to the door-closers.

The commitment of locally-based repairs workers to the estate was often a major element in their agreeing to work outside the tight, defensive and often absurd demarcations

that so beset the average council repairs system. Some jobs did not even get as far as a job ticket. Where a repairs worker fixed a tap or a lock while replacing a pane of glass, he was simply doing a favour. He did not earn a bonus on the basis of which his wages were made up, but he did re-define his job. The men in the local teams were reported to be unwilling to be moved back to a central system when once they'd experienced the satisfaction of doing the job locally and flexibly. The praise they received from residents was unstinting. It would have been hard to refute the eye-witness evidence of the people who experienced the system at first hand.



PRODUCTIVITY OF LOCAL TEAMS

Of the eight projects with estate-based repairs teams, four

had information on the performance of the teams. It was not possible to collect data on performances in other local authorities because of complex paper systems and wide variations in the way jobs were defined and information recorded. We give below a summary of our findings from examples in the survey.

An analysis of repairs done by Newcastle's entire direct labour organisation in 1980/81 showed that the average ratio of repairs tradesmen to properties was 1 employee to 58 properties. The average number of repairs completed each month in Newcastle was $4\frac{1}{2}$ jobs per worker per week. The local Cowgate repairs team, with the same ratio of staff to properties, completed on average $7\frac{1}{2}$ jobs per worker per week. Its productivity was 79% higher than the rest of Newcastle.

An estate-based repairs team of 6 tradesmen and 1 foreman was set up on the Tulse Hill estate in November 1982. It covered 882 Tulse Hill flats plus another 600 properties, 1,500 in all, with one workman to 250 properties. Its performance was closely monitored by the Priority Estates Project. The team completed on average 10.4 jobs per worker per week. The estimated average for the borough was 6.2 jobs per worker.

A local repairs team has been established on Ashfield Valley since it was built. It comprised 5 tradesmen, giving 1 worker to 200 dwellings. A check on productivity revealed that the team averaged 30 jobs per worker per

week. The team was extremely well thought of. When 1,000 tenants were canvassed across the whole estate for their complaints, only five people mentioned repairs, a most extraordinary come-back.

In the Chatsworth Intensive Management Project, Liverpool, nearly 2,000 properties were serviced by the local repairs team of 20 operatives, including three foremen, one yardman and one wagon man, giving one employee to 100 properties. Its performance was closely monitored by the Intensive Management Project since it was set up in 1980. In the year 30/11/81 to 28/11/82, the team completed an average of 7.4 jobs per worker per week. It was estimated that productivity in the intensive management repairs team was 57% higher than for the City of Liverpool as a whole.

Islington started setting up local repairs teams borough-wide in July 1983. Within nine months, the first experimental teams had increased productivity and reduced the backlog from 7-11 weeks outstanding to 1-2 weeks.

Although the number of jobs completed per worker per week is a somewhat crude measure (a particular estate might demand many small jobs that can be done in a short time, and there are many different definitions of a job), there was a broad consistency among the few comparisons that were available.

78.

TABLE SHOWING PRODUCTIVITY OF LOCAL TEAM			
Name of estate with local team	Ratio of men to property in team	Job rate of local team	Job rate of local authority
Cowgate	1 : 50	7½ jobs a week	4½ jobs a week
Tulse Hill	1 : 200	10½ jobs a week	6 jobs a week
Ashfield Valley	1 : 200	30 jobs a week	
Islington local repairs team	1 : 320	7-12 jobs a week	Local backlog 1-2 weeks; borough backlog 4-11 weeks

In spite of the success of local teams, no local repairs team was regarded as safe from the axe and several were under constant threat. Directors of Technical Services were almost unanimous in their resistance to local teams and their reluctance to set them up. Sensing that direct labour organisations were in for an increasingly thin time, they were jealous of what power they had and guarded it zealously. They were also far more centralist in their organisational approach than most housing directors, believing firmly in economies of scale, investment in expensive hardware, large, centralised stores and so on. But the criticisms by tradesmen, councillors and tenants alike were overwhelming. Existing organisations were quite unsuited to the small-scale, labour-intensive, messy nature of most day-to-day repairs, yet the power and prestige of direct labour organisations were often closely tied to the BIG SYSTEM. Local repairs teams either were anathema to the majority of local authorities in the survey or had to

fight hard for survival in the eight where they were established. Ironically, the only hope of survival for most direct labour organisations was the delivery of a sensitive and finely tuned intensive repairs service.

COST-EFFECTIVE REPAIRS

All local authorities feared that local repairs teams were administratively too expensive to be replicated. We had direct cost calculations for only one of the local repairs teams. In Lambeth, the local team cost £159* per dwelling per year including all the repairs that could not be covered by the local team, such as central heating or roofing. The costs included labour, materials, office-based costs, and the direct labour organisation overheads of the Directorate. The average cost for Lambeth as a whole under the central system was £330⁵. Productivity was 68% higher locally than the borough average and 87% of all jobs were completed within seven days. There was virtually no outstanding backlog of jobs. This team was clearly cost effective, as well as cheaper than the more traditional system.

The evidence from our survey and from the Priority Estates Projects showed that local teams were viable over fairly small areas for basic day-to-day jobs as long as specialist services were provided from the centre. Management co-operatives, which usually covered about 100-150 dwellings,

* Based on Lambeth direct labour organisation's own figures.

set great store by having their own repairs service, often with an odd-job handyman, backed up by a local contractor. A small estate of 200 dwellings might employ a carpenter/plasterer who could also glaze and do other small jobs. Other skills might have to be covered by paying the central repairs service out of a local budget or by contract with a local builder. In two estate projects, small building firms ran a highly effective local repairs service, both on estates of 200-400 dwellings. But most local authority direct labour organisations would not hear of such flexible local working arrangements. In many places a local team was unviable except over a large area because tradesmen would only agree to be supervised by a foreman from their own trade. This would have meant doubling the size of the team and was obviously unworkable on a smaller scale. In Liverpool, the local repairs team was large because of trade by trade supervision.

Generally, it seems likely that with higher productivity, saving on travel and central administration, a reduction in paper operations, and a major improvement in access to tenants, a high level of tenant satisfaction and a high standard of maintenance by virtue of eliminating the backlog of local repairs, local teams should be cost effective and possibly more economical than the centrally-run services.*

* Many local authorities spent more than £200 a year for each property on repairs and maintenance. The average spending in the survey was £187. This would allow them to employ one worker per 150** properties including local supervisors, allocating approximately £100 per property per year for central costs and contract work. This would mean that in a totally decentralised system the repairs team would be financially viable within present average spending rates. An unusually frank Borough Treasurer asserted that it would be impossible not to save on a local team, given the costs

**and inefficiency of the centre.
This ratio should be adequate on average. The estates we visited were in much worse condition than the average.

RENT ARREARS

Arrears control was the area of management that was most frequently handled locally, although rents on 17 of the 20 estates were no longer collected door to door. In looking at the problems that led to the establishment of the offices in the survey, we examined in some detail the method of rent collection and the problem of arrears. Here we examine what impact the local offices have had in reducing arrears.

14 projects had no responsibility at all for rent collection and therefore had no personal involvement with the tenants' payment of rent. This was probably a critical weakness in the local management system.

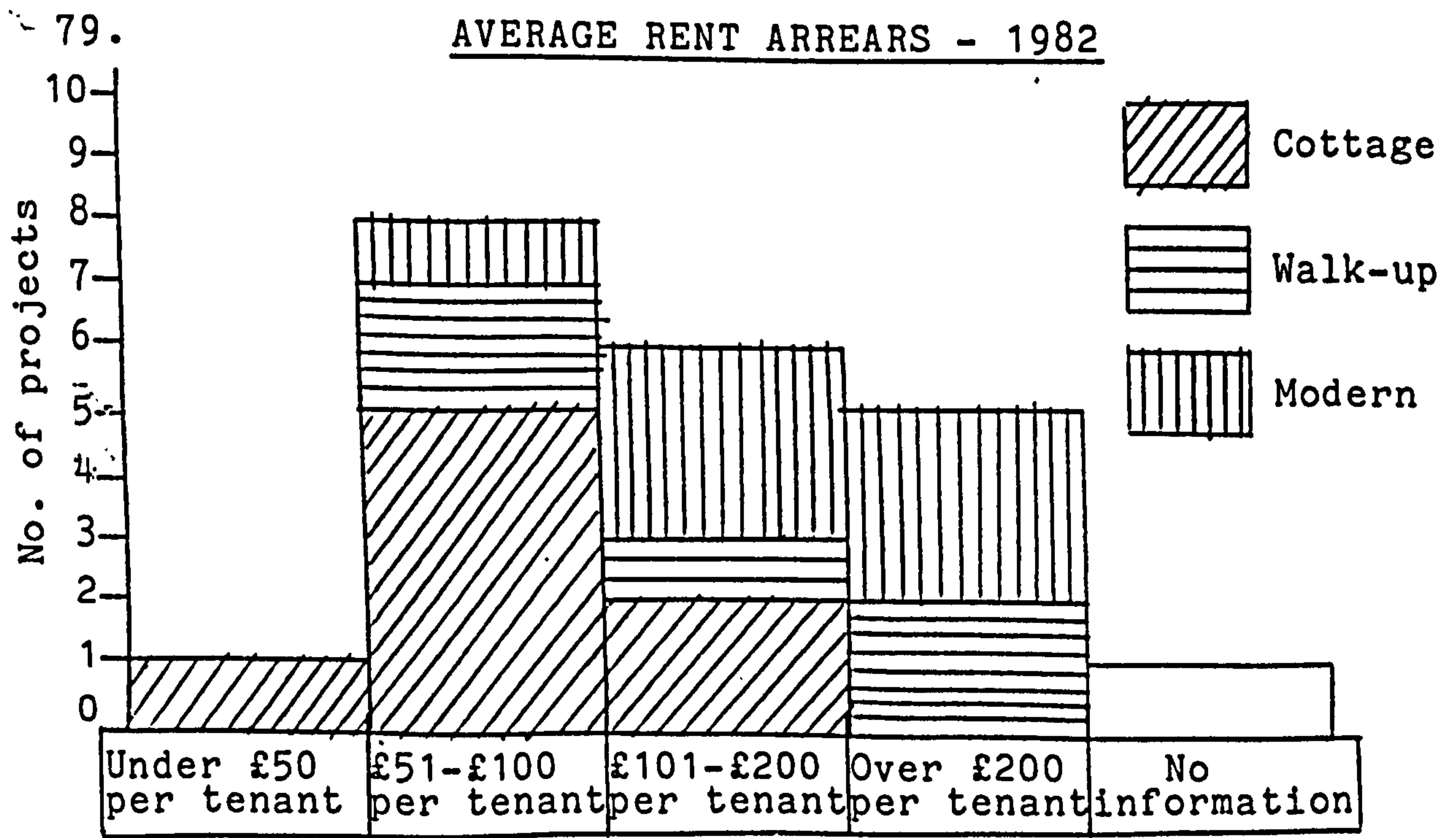
All the projects dealt with rent arrears but on four estates there was insufficient control over arrears procedures to allow the local management office to operate efficiently. Arrears information in general was often incomplete, or slow in arriving at the local office. Six estates did not have proper information.

When the projects began, 13 of the 14 estates for which we had exact information had on average double the level of arrears of the local authority as a whole. Therefore, it was not surprising that of all the responsibilities tackled locally, arrears was the most time-absorbing duty of estate officers, and it therefore made every sense to localise it. It was a source of great indignation both to the councils

and to rent-paying tenants that so many households "got away with" not paying. It was fairly clear, however, that the higher arrears related directly to the greater poverty, the poorer conditions and the generally lower expectations that prevailed on the worst estates, as well as the weaker management control. Unfortunately, chasing arrears without a localised rent system was prone to mistakes and was difficult to sustain.

The existence of the local office and local control did not radically alter the approach to arrears and it was a continuing major issue in most projects, although there was more emphasis on debt counselling and advice, and relative to the rest of the local authority, most of the project estates were holding their own or improving somewhat.

The following table shows the high level of arrears owed on most of the project estates, particularly the flatted estates. As was found in the Department of the Environment rent arrears survey, tenants on the most modern estates were often the most dissatisfied, paid the highest rents, and had the highest arrears.



There was the additional problem that on five estates, tenants were paying often uneconomic heating charges, based on the sixties' fashion for district heating systems, which had looked like a good buy when they were part of a massive building contract but which proved very expensive to run in the post-oil crisis of the seventies and eighties. (They often also broke down.) This greatly increased the debt burden on poor households that simply could not afford high weekly heating charges they could not control. This too, applied most often to the modern estates.

Since the projects began, four projects had reduced their total arrears figure. This was very much the opposite of the national trend,⁶ or the trend within the survey authorities. A further four had more slowly rising arrears than the rest of the local authority. That still left a majority of projects with double the average arrears. Nonetheless, only two were doing worse than the local authorities as a whole, in spite of the immense problems of poverty on all of the projects.

80. IMPACT OF ESTATE-BASED MANAGEMENT ON ARREARS

IMPACT OF ESTATE-BASED MANAGEMENT ON RENT ARREARS	
Arrears reducing	4
Arrears increasing more slowly than local authority rate of increase	4
Arrears increasing as much as local authority rate of increase	4
Arrears increasing faster than local authority rate of increase	2
Information not available	6

Detailed figures for nine local authorities and the local projects within them, enabled us to make a clear comparison.* The following table details the percentage changes in arrears where they were known between one year and the next.

81. RENT ARREARS UNDER LOCAL MANAGEMENT

ESTATE	% CHANGE OF ARREARS AS % OF ANNUAL RENT ROLL OVER APPROX. ONE YEAR	
	Project arrears	Local authority arrears
Cottage - N.W.	-	-
Cottage - North	+8%	+39%
Cottage - Midlands	+18%	+32%
Cottage - North	-5%	+13%
Cottage - North	-23%	+9%
Cottage - N.W.	+8%	+14%
Cottage - Midlands	-	+66%
Walk-up - London	+18%	+79%
Walk-up - London	-	+34%
Walk-up - London	-	-
Walk-up - London	-	+55%
Walk-up - N.W.	-15%	-17%
Walk-up - London	-	+21%
Modern - London	-	-
Modern - London	-	+40%
Modern - London	+16%	+17%
Modern - London	-	+2%
Modern - London	+42%	-
Modern - N.W.	-7%	+55%
Modern - London	-	+52%

* The incomplete arrears information was symptomatic of the current malfunctioning rent collection and accounting systems.

It can be seen clearly from this table that in the nine local authorities where proper information was available, all projects were doing better than the local authority.

REDUCING ARREARS

The projects had found that there was no effective method for preventing worsening arrears other than speedy personal intervention or, as a last resort, concerted legal action. The withdrawal of door-to-door collection meant that any approach to tenants over rents automatically implied arrears and debts. The projects, which worked so hard to establish goodwill with tenants, were extremely reluctant to pressurise people who were financially hard-pressed already. Estate staff backed off more often than they should. There was a lack of awareness on the part of often soft-hearted estate staff that debt could be a crushing burden on a poor household. This meant that arrears were sometimes pursued rather gingerly.

No project had uncovered an innovative breakthrough in tackling high levels of arrears. But the projects which had reduced rent arrears had achieved this through swift personal visits after not more than two weeks of arrears. The overall ethos in those projects was that arrears were unacceptable and must be cleared at all cost. Residents accepted this ethos. Bad debts and threats of eviction were followed through with Court action; but with a good personal system, this was almost never necessary. Tight

financial management was usually associated with the efficient organisation of housing services in general.

Ironically, it was the more "sloppy", less rigorous approach to arrears that in the end led to more legal action and more evictions. Notices seeking possession were issued to about 25% of all the tenants on one estate with exceptionally high arrears. They were as ineffectual as other measures in tackling the massive arrears problem.

Housing Benefit caused considerable confusion and an even higher level of arrears in many of the authorities. In theory, Housing Benefit should make arrears a thing of the past and any form of rent collection largely irrelevant to poorer estates, where incomes are low and where a majority depend on supplementary benefit, unemployment or sickness pay. However, most local authorities were neither ready for its introduction nor seemed to have a good system for calculating a tenant's entitlement readily, nor changing its level with the constantly changing circumstances of individual families. One of the problems Housing Benefit was meant to solve was the previous complications of so many different sources of financial support to low-income households. However, levels of Housing Benefit and rent owing were re-calculated with every change in family income. For families at the bottom of the housing market, often in short-term jobs, or with family members changing, Housing Benefit was often out of date. This made a mockery of the simplification it was supposed to introduce. It also meant that where arrears had been caused by mistakes in the

system, it was very hard ever to recover them or allay tenants' fears.

For example, in Lambeth at the outset of Housing Benefit, the rents owed by about one third of the Tulse Hill tenants were wrongly calculated, showing many tenants wrongly in arrears. Many people stopped paying rent altogether or paid less than they should only to discover later that they had been building up arrears. Because the debts were accrued on the wrong calculation, the tenants fought hard not to repay them. This made arrears chasing from the estate office even more unpopular than it already was.

Although many housing departments came to grips with Housing Benefit over a period of months, it introduced another element into the general morass of arrears in authorities that were not coping. It also made the rent control system more remote than ever.

No local authority handled Housing Benefit at the local level, and it seemed very difficult to inject a sense of personal involvement or responsibility either among staff or tenants on a poor estate, entirely organised and locked up as it was in main frame computers.

The major advantage of Housing Benefit on all the estates was that "fully passported" tenants were freed almost totally from the arrears debt syndrome. This applied to well over half the tenants on most estates.

The experience of the local management projects in tackling rents and arrears was very close to the national experience, showing that:

- door-to-door collection was no longer the main form of rent payment in metropolitan and London boroughs, but authorities still using it had the lowest level of arrears;
- big city authorities with serious security problems in connection with rent collection were increasingly changing to office, bank or giro systems. Arrears under remote systems were five times higher or more than with door-to-door collection;
- visits and personal rent collection could still be used for arrears cases and could contain the problem, even where the general method of collection was no longer door to door;
- immediate personal and determined follow-up (within two weeks maximum) helped prevent large arrears developing in most cases.

The relative, if limited success of the local management projects in reducing arrears was the result of on-the-spot pressure, personal contact and financial advice. Its limited efficacy, however, pointed to the problem being out of control in some areas and very serious in most areas.

There was a need for a system of visiting to be reintroduced to replace the now largely defunct door-to-door collection

system, and to supplement and modify the cumbersome and often inaccurate computerised, centralised and mechanical systems.

CONCLUSION

No project had an integrated local management service covering lettings, rents and repairs, the core areas of estate management. So much capital, prestige and job promotion was tied up with their organisation that local authorities found it impossible to disaggregate them completely.

The local offices served as pressure points and organisational bases. But the staff did not feel they had enough control. Their responsibilities to residents and for delivery of estate management services were sometimes in direct conflict with their responsibility to central directorates and political overlords. The desire to help needy people, whether already living on estates, or waiting to be housed, led to two divergent views of the best way forward - partial localisation with central control or total local autonomy. To date, estate-based management has been a partial division of responsibilities and functions between local and central organisation. The jockeying will probably continue well into the next decade and the landlord-tenant relationship, sitting so awkwardly in the late twentieth century, will continue to jostle against its inherent contradictions.

References

1. Jeremy Seabrook, "The Making of a Neighbourhood - Walsall", Photo Press, 1984, p. 52.
2. Department of the Environment, "An Investigation of Difficult to Let Housing", HMSO, 1980, p. 13.
3. "Hackney Building Workers and Tenants' Repairs Report", p. 10.
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CHAPTER XIV - THE LOCAL AUTHORITY INVESTMENT IN LOCAL MANAGEMENT

STAFF ORGANISATION

Having looked at the impact of the estate offices on the very worst conditions in public housing that we could find, we must consider the staff input, the cost, the way the projects were funded, the possible savings from management changes, and how local management could be paid for on a more permanent basis.

Firstly, the staff input should be examined.

STAFF RATIOS

We checked the number of properties per estate officer borough-wide in comparison with the staff ratios in the local management projects.* In only two local authorities did the staff ratio remain the same locally as under the central system. In all others, the number of management staff to properties increased with the local management office - in many cases substantially. The following table illustrates what happened on the ground.

* We knew the staff ratios in all the local offices, but failed to discover the central staff ratios in two of the local authorities. Therefore the averages were based on the 17 known local authorities.

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STAFF INPUT INCREASES WITH LOCAL MANAGEMENT

Estate	Estate managers to properties across local authority	Estate managers to properties within local office
Cottage	1 manager per 915 properties	1 manager per 454 properties
Walk-up	1 manager per 855 properties	1 manager per 586 properties
Deck/modern	1 manager per 646 properties	1 manager per 429 properties

In the cottage estate projects, the ratio of estate managers to properties was halved and the results on the whole were very positive.

In the local authorities with modern, unpopular estates, staff ratios across the board were more favourable, and fewer extra staff were recruited for the special projects. As we have seen, the results were not so significant.

The local authorities with walk-up estates had the lowest staff input. However, this was partly compensated by resident caretaking.

Overall in 18 of the 20 projects, management input was more intensive than the local authority as a whole. This showed clearly in the major improvements being brought about.

However, only six local authority projects had one estate manager for 350 properties or less. The other property ratios varied from one manager for 375 dwellings to one to 800.

The management staff figures of course only applied to the

employees in the project, who were considered directly responsible for estate management - a whole battery of functions, and lots of partial duties.

Many other workers formed part of the local teams.

Clerical and administrative staff found in 10 projects, repairs workers, cleaners, caretakers and wardens, added up to a sizeable workforce, usually about 20 to a thousand dwellings, or one employee to 50 dwellings. This was about the same ratio as housing associations and the Victorian trusts employed and, on the whole, it was adequate. It was interesting that in the 19 local authorities, the average staffing levels across the borough were also one employee to every 50 dwellings, including maintenance and caretaking staff, the difference being that many jobs were based in the town hall or district office with layers of vertical supervision and paper-chasing operations. The ground-level staff was often minimal. Therefore although in the local management offices, usually one or two additional estate officers were recruited, the staff input within the local team had gone up significantly. The output changed noticeably too because jobs were closer to the ground where paper operations could be cut and where results were quick to show.

The project local authorities, with the exception of Walsall, found it hard to grasp that they could re-deploy most staff to local teams and reduce the central workload, without more than a relatively small expansion in overall

staff ratios and a lot of job re-definition. Estate management itself, as the history of housing development revealed, was always a meagre department.

TEAM LEADERS

All the projects had leaders or co-ordinators or senior officers in charge. Twelve project leaders were on senior grades within the local authority structure and eight were on assistant grades.

On cottage and walk-up block estates, the majority of the project team leaders were on a senior grade. On modern concrete complex estates, the majority were on lower grades. The lower average grading on modern concrete complex estates must partly be a result of the fact that in these projects there was less local responsibility for management, e.g. lettings. It must have also helped produce the result that the projects on modern concrete complex estates were less successful in improving conditions.

83.

SENIORITY OF PROJECT LEADERS

Grade	No. of project leaders on grade	Type of estate
P01	2	1 walk-up block
		1 modern concrete complex
S01/2	10	4 cottage
		4 walk-up block
		2 modern concrete complex
AP4/5	8	3 cottage
		1 walk-up block
		4 modern concrete complex

Local management offered a very different career structure, whereby ambitious young employees or capable and experienced housing managers were choosing to leave the mainstream hierarchy of the housing department for a job with direct responsibility, some seniority and no buck-passing.

THE COST OF LOCAL MANAGEMENT

Thirteen projects were funded entirely from local authority Housing Revenue Accounts, the statutory local purse which all local authorities must set up to pay in rents and subsidies, and to pay out debt charges and management and maintenance costs. The remaining seven projects were funded by a combination of Government and local authority support. Three of the 20 projects in our survey were set up by the Priority Estates Project with some Government help. In every other case, the local authority had taken the initiative in organising estate-based management, although in the case of Liverpool, the three Intensive Management Projects were very much the product of the inner area studies sponsored by the Department of the Environment and were funded by inner area Partnership. The two Tyneside projects were also funded by Partnership, but were firmly rooted within the local authorities. Ragworth, Stockton-on-Tees, was Urban Aid-funded.

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SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR LOCAL MANAGEMENT PROJECTS	
Source of Funds	No. of Projects
Local Authority Housing Revenue Account	13
Inner City Partnership	3
Priority Estates Project	3
Urban Aid	1

Local authorities had reached a critical point on some of their estates where only local management offered a reasonable hope of success. While most local authorities would argue that they simply could not afford local management, the authorities in the survey argued that they could not afford not to have it.

It is true that drastic Government cuts over the previous five years had seriously reduced the amount of money available for major improvements to estates and modernisation of older council property. Government support to local rate funds had also been cut more and more. However, rent incomes rose steeply and most local authorities are now in a rent surplus for the first time in decades. That is, they collect more in rent than they pay out in debt charges, management and maintenance. This unfortunately does not apply to most of the beleaguered inner London boroughs or most of the Metropolitan authorities, though even they are in a better position to pay for local management than they were before rent rises. Rate-capping could mean that in the high-spending city

authorities, management and maintenance must be paid for entirely out of rent income. The precedents for this are not good. Even Octavia Hill and the 5% philanthropists found it very hard to make business ends meet with low-income wage-earners in rented housing at the turn of the century. On the other hand, Housing Benefit has become a major rent subsidy and as rents have risen, so more and more tenants have become eligible for it. It should, if it continues, replace rate subsidies to the Housing Revenue Accounts as the main Government subsidy to management and maintenance budgets. If Housing Benefit were cut, then the financial artery to housing management would be severed.

The actual cost of providing a local full-time office with permanent staff was much lower than most critics would suppose, lower in fact than the typical management costs of the same local authorities under a central system. The average central management and maintenance costs for all 19 local authorities were estimated as £7.38 per week per dwelling in 1983-84 throughout the stock,¹ with about £4.87 on average being spent on repairs. This would leave £2.51 per dwelling per week for management at all levels, but mainly central and district. The average local management cost for the 20 full-time estate offices, including caretakers and all local staff, was £1.41 per dwelling per week, substantially less than the average central management cost. The cost for the flatted estates, including caretaking, was £1.70, and for the cottage estates £1.11.

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TABLE SHOWING MANAGEMENT COSTS	
Average management and maintenance costs in 19 local authorities	£7.38 [*]
Average expected spending on management in 19 local authorities	£2.51
Average actual local management costs with local office on 13 flatted estates	£1.70 ^{**}
Average actual local management costs with local office on 7 cottage estates	£1.11 ^{**}

Of course, some central costs would need to be added to this, but local offices, as has been shown, were capable of shouldering the main management functions more effectively than was common at the centre. Therefore there was no need to duplicate many central and local costs. Walsall had cut middle management ruthlessly in order to do this. But most local authorities duplicated roles and responsibilities, causing considerable confusion, increased costs and poorer delivery.

Almost all local authorities argued that central services, such as housing advice and homelessness services, and also for central overheads and charges to other departments such as legal, parks, etc., ate into the Housing Revenue Account, leaving too little for estate-based management across the board. However, many central costs should diminish as local offices take on genuine responsibility. In Walsall, both homelessness and housing advice, as well as all lettings, were handled at the local offices. In Walsall,

^{*} The national average for all local authorities was £5.54.

^{**} These figures do not include ongoing district or central costs nor the cost of centralised rent or lettings systems, etc.

the council showed off its totally empty, furniture-less town hall housing department after all staff bar the Director and three assistants had moved out to neighbourhood offices.²

The main problem was a reluctance in most local authorities to give up central control, coupled with a desire to keep all the senior tiers of officers in jobs at the centre. This would not be possible with full decentralisation to local estate-based management. It was vital that functions should not be duplicated at local, district and central levels as happened in high-spending boroughs, nor retained at the centre, as happened in highly centralised boroughs. Such double structures were not only very costly but also rendered decentralisation inoperable. Local management could only work, in the long run, in the place of central management.

Most of the local authorities in the survey had not accepted the logic of full local autonomy, even though they appreciated the gains made by the projects and their cost effectiveness.

Most of the local authorities in the survey were spending above the national average on management and maintenance of their housing stock. The following table shows the wide variation in average overall spending, particularly between the London authorities and the Northern ones within our survey. Costs often reflected wider management problems rather than more intensive input at estate level.

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TABLE SHOWING AVERAGE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE COSTS IN 19 LOCAL AUTHORITIES PER DWELLING PER WEEK AND LOCAL MANAGEMENT COSTS PER DWELLING PER WEEK (WHERE KNOWN)

Local authority	Management and maintenance costs per dwelling per week - local authority average Actuals 1982/83*	Estimated local authority costs for management only 1982/83	Estimated local management costs per dwelling per week for 12 local housing projects 1982/3
Greenwich	£7-99	£2-66	
Hackney	N/A		
Hammersmith & Fulham	£11-89	£3-96	£1-80
Islington	N/A		77p.
Lambeth	£9-39	£3-13	£2-57
Lewisham	£6-51	£2-17	£1-85
Wandsworth	£9-42	£3-14	
Brent	£8-96	£2-99	
Haringey	£8-56	£2-85	
Bolton	£3-95	£1-32	£1-15**
Rochdale	£5-87	£1-96	£1-58
Tameside	£4-73	£1-58	62p
Liverpool	£5-04	£1-68	
Gateshead	£5-16	£1-72	£1-40**
Newcastle	£5-62	£1-87	£1-62**
Walsall	£6-09	£2-03	£1-46
Stockton-on-Tees	£4-47	£1-49	40p**
Leicester	£6-06	£2-02	
G.L.C.	£12-31	£4-10	£1-62
All local authorities	£5-77***	£1-92	£1-41

* C.I.P.F.A. Housing Revenue Account Statistics.

** Represents actual budgets.

*** C.I.P.F.A. estimated average for 1983/84.

Thirteen hard-pressed local authorities established local management offices without recourse to special funds, representations to Government, or any special pleadings. They found it cheaper than had commonly been believed, although the now widespread and hard-hitting financial constraints on local authorities might have a severely restraining influence on innovative approaches to housing management problems. Nonetheless, many of the more committed local authorities are still extending neighbourhood management and local offices to other estates.

SAVINGS

It is important to give some idea of the possible cost benefits of local management. The number of empty dwellings at the outset of the projects was over 900. By 1982 this total had dropped by about 20%, making a total gain in rent and rates income of nearly quarter of a million pounds a year. The saving on vandal damage to these now occupied properties would have been a minimum of £90,000 and savings on boarding up and other security measures, in the region of £36,000. Reduced rent arrears had only brought savings in four projects. There the savings were in the region of £100,000. The scope for further savings on arrears was very great. The savings through local repairs can only be judged by Lambeth's experience, where the cost of a greatly improved service was half the previous cost, a saving on one estate of about £150,000. Other savings included reduced vandalism to garages and lifts. In Liverpool, on

one estate in one tower block, the saving was £50,000 in the first year of employing door guards. The savings through the use of vandal-resistant light shades (to protect bulbs) on one estate was £14,400. These partial estimates made an average saving in each project of approximately £39,500, well above the salary costs of additional staff. Assuming that improved performance in management and maintenance continued, the savings would also continue. Certainly the converse was true, that any relaxation in standards or input led to a swift decline in performance and reversal in conditions. This occurred temporarily on at least three estates.

The list of possible and actual savings could be extended. But the main cost benefit on a majority of the estates resulted from the fact that a combination of social physical and management ills had caused these estates to consume large amounts of money, sometimes over many years, to very little effect. Under local management, they were costing somewhat less than expected, and the decline and damage was being arrested. The balance of judgement lay in the continuation of the projects. To our knowledge, all of the local offices have survived the severe cut-backs of the last few years. In 16 of the 19 authorities, further local offices have been opened, and paid for out of the Housing Revenue Account. The Audit Commission recently found that there were few savings to be made from economies of scale in estate management. Conversely, they found that the greater the number of dwellings per local authority, the higher the unit costs tended to be. Local management

appeared to be paying its way and at least in the worst estates actually saving money.

A BUDGET

No project in the survey had a working budget. Two local authorities tried to establish costs for particular estates from their central accounts, but these generated mountainous computer print-outs and meaningless lists of figures attached to miniscule items.

The Priority Estates Project has shown that a viable local budget can be calculated, based either on the average management and maintenance costs of that local authority or based on the Housing Association allowance, which is Government-determined and more generous than many local authorities. A figure of £8* per dwelling per week will provide any estate of 200 dwellings or more with a full-time office and one employee to 50 dwellings, with a local repairs service and a full complement of resident caretakers and cleaners. There will invariably be some money left over for locally determined improvements. The following outline budget gives some idea of how a local budget, tied to each estate, might work, based on experience in the Welsh Priority Estates Projects. A simplified model estate budget is calculated by multiplying the local authority's average management and maintenance spending after debt charges have been deducted by the number of dwellings and 50 weeks for an annual budget. The current Housing Association allowance is almost £9 a week³. This budget is based on the council's average management and

* 1984 figures, e.g. Cloverhall Estate, Rochdale, which has now been taken over by the Cloverhall Tenant Management Co-operative.

maintenance per dwelling of £8.50.

87.

SIMPLIFIED MODEL ESTATE BUDGET

INCOME:

£8.50 x 1000 x 50 =	<u>£425,000</u>
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EXPENSES:

Estate office	£12,000	
3 Estate officers	£30,000	
1 Clerical worker	£ 7,000	
8 Repairs workers	£80,000	
Materials	£50,000	
Specialist work	£110,000	
10 Caretakers	£70,000	
Employers' overheads (23% of £187,000) =	<u>£43,010</u>	<u>£402,010</u>

Here we have 22 employees to cover 1,000 dwellings. There is no allowance for central overheads in the budget. There is a strong argument that the central service costs should be met almost entirely from the rates. This would have the salutary effect of making local authorities more cost-conscious at the centre rather than always resorting to stringency at the periphery where it hurts the public most, but senior officers least.

A major problem with extending local housing management is that although local authorities have always put money into a Housing Revenue Account, they have never budgeted, as housing associations have, to provide the day-to-day services on the ground. Even the newer Priority Estates Projects with clear

and specifically allocated budgets are under threat while finance departments manipulate the housing revenue accounts for their global budgetary purposes, and other departments, such as parks and direct labour organisations, can charge unrealistic prices for services they deliver - often to a very poor standard. We concluded that unless a local estate office became an autonomous management entity, with its own completely separate budget, deducted from rents collected and from housing benefit, local management was unlikely to work on a wider front, because it would always seem a luxury in periods of financial stringency or when other initiatives gained favour. An allowance per dwelling per year, comparable to housing associations and deducted from rents and housing benefit, seemed to make financial and organisational sense, and to give some permanence to the local management organisations that were emerging on the large unpopular estates. This simple and obvious idea would require a major reform of local and central Government finances.

References

- ¹ C.I.P.F.A. Housing Revenue Account Statistics, 1980/81 Actuals plus 10% for inflation to 1983.
Anne Power, "Local Housing Management", op. cit., p. 79.
- ² "The Guardian", article on Walsall, 16-3-1982.
- ³ Figures from Samuel Lewis Housing Trust, Spring 1985.
- ⁴ Audit Commission, "Bringing Council Tenants Arrears under Control", HMSO, 1984, p. 29.

CHAPTER XV - CHANGING THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS

"Hawkers, traders and others are prohibited from calling, shouting or using a bell around these premises."

- L.C.C. Mersey House

The sign, still displayed today outside an old block of flats, suggesting that bell-ringing causes more nuisance than is acceptable and that salesmen bringing their wares round the blocks somehow lowers its level of control, gives some idea of how far council housing has travelled from its original status and concept.

In the last few chapters we have shown the impact that local offices had on landlord-tenant relations, on environmental conditions on the estates, on staff morale and general management performance.

The most significant and most difficult turning point on the estates was the restoration of confidence and the establishment of peaceful living conditions, so that fear no longer prevailed over confidence, and shame over pride. Having lost a sense of control or even purpose, social abuse was a most sensitive and explosive touchstone for the future of the estates.

On estates where abuse had become rampant, only long-term patterns of control would re-establish more guarded behaviour.

At the outset of all the Priority Estate Projects, we talked to tenants in small groups throughout the estates and recorded what they felt were the main problems of their community.

All groups on all estates listed the same three dominant issues,

albeit in different orders: poor repairs; rubbish and a neglected environment; and crime, vandalism, insecurity and social disarray. There were different words and nuances to each main theme, but the underlying feelings were the same.

Better repairs and environmental upgrading fitted fairly easily with management procedures within the local offices. The control of social abuse and the reversal of social disarray were much more daunting tasks. It was a daily struggle and only implacable determination brought an end to severe vandalism and loss of control.

BEAT POLICING

Crime and the prevention of crime were major preoccupations of the residents. All projects except one suffered previously from an atmosphere of tension and fear of crime.

Beat policing played an integral role on 19 of the 20 project estates. Because good policing was impossible without community resolve and because tenants everywhere felt vulnerable and dependent on good policing, the success of beat policing was of paramount importance. The establishment of a local management office almost inevitably led to a change in policing from reactive response to a preventive beat approach to crime.

Brixton police had said in 1979 that without a housing management office, policing a dense, flatted estate properly was impossible. At first this seemed like a lame excuse for police failure. But on reflection and after tenant consultations, it became very clear what the police were

driving at.¹ Criminal activity, theft, vandalism and personal attacks were all flourishing under the cover of communal disarray. Because there was no "handle on the community", there was no confidence between the police and the public or between the police and the council. Therefore policing was going badly wrong and tenants appeared to be to blame. They were the criminals, so it seemed, or at least the cover for crime. When once the local office was open, and tenants became involved block by block in planning the future of their estate, it became possible for the police to be brought in on a continual preventive basis.

On 13 estates, beat policing had a major impact in improving police/community relations and was considered a success by residents and local staff on all 13. All beat policemen called in regularly at the estate office and patrolled the estate on foot, but only five worked exclusively in the project area. The five locally-based police projects were undoubtedly the most successful. The policemen liaised very closely with residents and project staff. They spent a lot of time with children and by virtue of their sociable personalities were able to do preventive work especially with the youth. Where the police covered a wider area than the estate, the results were on the whole less satisfactory because they were more diluted.

The 13 projects reported that beat policing had helped inspire confidence and a sense of security in the community and had reassured workers and residents that complaints or ongoing problems over policing, such as a slow response time or frequent changes of personnel.

There was only one clear failure, based on the police's inability

to provide low-key, friendly bobbies in such a hostile environment, and the total rejection by the youth of the estate of the kind of heavy-handed "search and arrest" swoops that were the common response to repeated muggings. The estate was racially mixed and policing was strongly labelled as being anti-black. It took the black tenants themselves to sort out the policing problem and the police were the first to admit it. We discussed the tenants' dominant role in coming to grips with crime, policing and social control later.

Actual crime records were available only for two projects.* Therefore the evidence of "success" in beat policing was based on project staff assessments and on feed-back to them from residents. It was also based on the police's own assessments of the value of beat policing. Residents and project staff universally argued in favour of local beat policing as opposed to more remote Panda car patrols and emergency responses.

88.

BEAT POLICING			
		Beat covered project area only	Beat covered wider area
Very successful	3	2	1
Satisfactory	10	3	7
Unsatisfactory	5	0	5
Failed	1	0	1

We felt that local opinion was a valid way to assess policing on an estate since the way people felt about security was a fairly clear measure of the actual impact of crime and vandalism and police activity. It was important that tenants felt safe

* The Springwell estate, Gateshead, showed a decrease in reported crime and vandal damage of 30% in the 12 months March 1981-1982. Three beat policemen were based full-time on the estate during that period.

in their homes, safe to walk around the estate, and confident enough to challenge vandals and report criminal activities, as this in turn brought policing into a more preventive role with strong community backing. At the end of the day only this worked.²

It is not quite clear what actually happened to bring the project estates into some kind of social order from disorder. But a transition did take place. The reduction in crime and vandalism and the increased feeling of security among tenants reported on 15 of the estates often resulted from a combination of factors, of which beat policing may have been only one element.

Many improvements in security related to the existence of the estate office, the introduction of door security, a reduction in the number of empty dwellings, the role of resident caretakers in patrolling the estate grounds, the employment of guards, wardens, door porters and so on, the closure of walkways, the demolition or securing of garages. The reduction in vandalism in 13 of the project areas was probably a result of several changes, including stronger doors, better lighting, break-resistant glass, evening patrols, door guards and more responsive policing.

Tenants themselves had a vital part to play in increasing security. As estates improved and tenants' feelings about their surroundings became more positive, they were more likely to feel able to protect their homes and environment. Tenants felt able to challenge vandalism and report crime if there was sufficient back-up for intervention from the estate office and the police, and if they felt confident that neighbours would

support them in resisting reprisals and intimidation. The fact that tenants were calling on police and caretakers for help was a sure sign of a community upturn. The fact that beat policing and other security measures were sticking meant that some confidence was flowing back into the estate communities.

DISTURBED RESIDENTS

The families who were outside normal social controls, who simply could not be curbed, posed almost insuperable problems. Many people, residents, managers, councillors, said they were the real problem.

The evidence we gathered would suggest that they formed a small minority, though their impact was often out of all proportion to their numbers.³ Estate offices reported a maximum of 30 disruptive households - roughly 3% of each estate. That of course is a much, much higher proportion than in the population at large,^{*} and shows the effect of "dumping" policies.

However, if 97% of the population were determined, they could normally cope with 3% of households who broke accepted norms. One problem was that many other families were involved around the edges, whether out of fear of reprisals, childhood friendships, street or balcony social patterns, or simply felt in the same boat but not quite to the same degree. After all, someone must go to the noisy all-night party besides the host! The main problem in curbing abuse was that the vast majority of tenants who caused no nuisance and who simply wanted to live their own lives in peace, did not want to stay on the estate, did not like its environment, did not identify with their

^{*} Cullingworth in 1969 suggested it was about 0.5%⁴

neighbours and did not know how to curb the aggressive, anti-social behaviour meted out by the few. There had been a sense of total defeat in the social atmosphere of all the estates that was reflected in the tenants' own verdict that -

"Neighbours were more to blame than the council for the estate being bad."⁵

Council officers and caretakers frequently echoed this view.

It needed an outside catalyst, a new initiative, a determined stand by someone with authority and back-up to reverse this sense of social defeat.

On Tulse Hill, through block by block meetings, we traced eight households out of a total of 900 responsible for generating a siege atmosphere and creating the impression in block after block that most residents were involved in the social abuses that were so bitterly complained about.

In six of the eight cases we found that management pressure curtailed the main problems - dogs and noise. Two families, who should never have lived on a crowded communal balcony anyway, were moved off Tulse Hill. The estate subsided to relative normality in the course of three months, helped immeasurably by beat policing and by the local lettings that were introduced at the same time, resulting in the immediate occupation of about 70 empty flats through a local queue. The only condition for getting a flat was being accessible by telephone and being prepared to move in the day it was

offered. Squatting was thereby overcome, too, with all the sense of lawlessness and anarchy it brought with it in Brixton.

After a series of noisy, overcrowded parties in West London, an injunction was secured to prevent an all-night "rent party" on a balcony flat. The action was successful and the abuse was curtailed.

In Kirklees on their Priority Estate (not in the survey), housing officers were putting substantial pressure on tenants with noisy or uncontrolled dogs, with rubbish causing a health hazard, or where elderly or frail tenants were harassed or upset by neighbours. The Tenants' Association backed this strong stand with police protection and evidence in court if necessary. Kirklees was one of the few authorities that had taken action in court to make social pressure stick.

In one case, a tenant was evicted on grounds of nuisance.

In other cases, the nuisance stopped in advance of court action.

It was not always so straightforward to curb disarray. On the Broadwater Farm estate, a remarkable tenant, mother of six, called Dolly Kiffin, took the bull by the horns, deciding that mugging was as bad for the youth who were associated with most of the crime as it was disastrous for the victims. She organised, with her own teenagers, the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, with the declared aim of winning over the youth of the estate to constructive activities and away from crime. She was as concerned for the elderly

white population as she was for the black youth and almost exploded when the council offered the police a base on the estate before the Youth Association. On the strength of taking over the police base, her standing with the youth rose sky-high. They began to take a pride in leaving money and goods around in their club. It was a challenge to anyone to dare offend Dolly or the name of the Youth Association by "nicking". The Youth Association has organised a food shop, a nursery, a lunch club and also runs meals on wheels for the estate. The Youth Association recently won two football matches against the police and the question remains whether the police will be skilled enough to build on the confidence of the racially-conscious, highly motivated and jealously communitarian tenants.

Broadwater Farm was one of the few estates where almost everything was in train - a local repairs team, locally supervised resident caretaking and cleaning, tenants on the management panel, local recruiting for estate jobs, and a multi-racial local staff team, 50% of whom were residents on the estate. There the social disarray had provoked almost total despair, which in turn galvanised the tenants into their own remarkable turnaround. The council has been more than anxious to respond.

Other estates were tackling social disarray, usually with strong backing from vociferous tenants and usually with some success. The estates where it was very difficult to make headway were those where the level of demand for

council-rented accommodation was so low that dwellings could not be let except on a give-away basis: there, the social abuse and disarray were often most severe. Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Tyneside, all suffered from this overwhelming problem and the projects, to the extent that they were successful, were "poaching" tenants from other waiting lists. Neither was there any point, as happened in two northern deck-access style estates in the local office orchestrating the emptying of the estate. In both cases about a quarter of the dwellings were empty. In Killingworth the increase in empty dwellings related directly to the local project office's success in reducing arrears, thereby helping tenants to gain a transfer to better accommodation. Sales, "lopping off" upper storeys to halve blocks of flats into terraced houses, and furnished bed-sitter experiments had to be tried in these cases.

It had to be recognised, and increasingly was in the 19 local authorities, that "dumping" disproportionate numbers of socially disturbed households on already disarrayed estates simply multiplied the problems of the families concerned and accelerated the decline of the estates. The local offices were ensuring that this longstanding practice was no longer tenable.

In addition, it was being recognised that disruptive, unresponsive, and unneighbourly behaviour could not be tolerated on dense communal estates. Where the gauntlet was thrown down and the household could not respond, there

was no alternative but to move that disruptive household. Only by a combination of tough-minded and consistent measures could the estate community be protected and survive.

THE CHILDREN

There were many children on most of the project estates and they were often blamed for the damage, crime and disruption that was so common. Some of the older children and teenagers were certainly capable of substantial damage and were hard to reach. This cycle had to be broken down.

The children and young people were a key to protecting the environment and the general security of the estate. Their direct involvement often diverted their energies away from more destructive activities and made them want to protect improvements they had helped create.

Children had to be seen as an asset to community life. Their joie-de-vivre, their ability to survive, their ingenious defiance of their too harsh childhood, made them the most special members of the community. No sentimental, soft-hearted, free-for-all playschemes had any long-term appeal to them. Competitive sport, heavy activity, material rewards (crisps, a coke, a free swim) and access to the outside world were the prizes they coveted and the things that won them over to helping. They never wanted to help for long but it helped them stop destroying. Like the children in "Lord of the Flies" and Graham Greene's "Destructors", they were often horrified at their bullying power and wanted to find the limit. The feeling of things giving way under their pressure made them feel deeply

disturbed and even more destructive. The closer the limit could be drawn with the toughest of the youngsters, the more likely the estate was to curb its social disarray. But it was not a discipline that could be imposed easily. Almost everyone wanted lines to be drawn and it was a matter of making the first move very carefully and then the second, with enough of the key actors helping both draw and hold the line. Adults were needed to back the involvement, the restraint and the encouragement of youngsters.⁶

However, wanton destruction, curbed through the initial efforts, did not stay at bay for long and new gangs had a nasty habit of forming immediately in the wake of the reformed gang that had just converted to gardening. So like rubbish, vandalism was not something that was overcome once and for all. It had to be fought day in, day out. Some estates were more resilient than others.

There was something about the environment of some estates that invited damage, no matter what was done, and only a much greater degree of social control and tighter guarding seemed likely to overcome it. In the end, only extremely tough-minded residents could do it. The projects were doing a holding operation with the help of the residents.

Tenants, estate staff, caretakers, police, all needed to know that the other adult groups were prepared to set limits. They needed to advance in concert. Otherwise estate workers held on to outmoded views of tenants' lack of care and destructiveness, while tenants continued to feel that the council was a useless landlord because it couldn't keep things in order and stop the estate from being "a bad place".

That was why in the end, tenant consultations and the local workforce based in a local office were vital. Through that network of contact, the council landlord discovered, often with surprise, that the disarrayed community had a total identity of interest with the housing authority - to make the estate liveable in and to pay its way for a decent service; to protect the capital and social investment; to enhance the chances of the next generation of "problem" children; to call the bluff of the bullies; and to call out the courage of the silent mainstream, the ordinary people who had never been asked before and who did not want to speak out of turn, but who in the end wanted to feel satisfied with their home, and exercise some control over it. A retired caretaker put it best -

"I'm seventy this week, and in all my life so far no one's ever asked me for my thoughts about anything.....I've often thought it might be a good idea if the GLC sent people round say once every year or so, asking people on the estate what their feelings were. But of course they never did, which is why it's such a sad place now.

".....When they first built it twenty years ago or more it was going to be paradise, wasn't it?.....They'd all been living in very bad conditions, in slums and places like that, and here was this marvellous modern new housing estate.....in those early days there was a great sense of community among the people who came to live on Providence. They all knew that they had all come here to have a new start in life.

".....it just strikes me as a funny thing that's all, that all the years I was working on the estate no one ever asked me my views about it.

"Oh yes, it is a sad place now."⁷

References

¹ "The Brixton Disorders. Report of an Inquiry by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Scarman", Cmnd. 8427, HMSO, 1984. See Appendices on visits to Tulse Hill and Stockwell Park. p.144-145

² Ibid.

³ B. Cullingworth, "Council Housing, Purposes, Procedures and Priorities", op. cit., p. 31, para. 90.

⁴ Ibid, p. 33, para. 98, p. 31, para. 90.

⁵ M. Burbidge (ed.) "Improving Problem Council Estates", Department of the Environment, 1981, p. 6.

⁶ D. Donnison, "Observer" article re riots, 14-3-1982.

⁷ Tony Parker, op. cit., p. 255.

CHAPTER XVI - CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

We have described the development of council housing from its inception to the present day with the aim of explaining the emergence of the most unpopular estates. As the history has unfolded, this perspective has inevitably led us to look at the poorest communities and try and identify the causes of social disarray and even communal breakdown.

All is far from well with large numbers of council estates. But there is growing experience of attempts to rectify the most severe problems, adopting if only in part the tried and tested methods that set in train the social housing revolution of late Victorian times. Octavia Hill had pioneered an intimate, custodial, and locally based housing management organisation that depended as much on the goodwill and support of the tenants as it did on the dedication and care of the landlord. It was this organisation that the new public landlords failed to reproduce as they steadily emerged to be the largest landlords in the country.

VICTORIAN HOUSING TROUBLES AND REFORM 1862-1914

The rapid development of towns and the spread of factory employment led to dense urban housing in back-to-back

terraces that quickly became slums under crowded and impoverished conditions.

Octavia Hill, inspired by the awful conditions in central London, persuaded rich benefactors to buy up slum houses, and hand them over to her. She developed a system of intensive management among the most destitute slum inhabitants that relied on constant personal contact, careful business management, essential but modest repairs and improvements, and retention of the existing community in existing but improved dwellings. Octavia Hill trained many women in this new style of landlordism and inspired a powerful movement among leading philanthropists like Lord Shaftesbury. Octavia Hill bitterly opposed the building of large blocks of flats. She argued that women were naturally better housing managers than men. She did not think elected councils should become direct landlords; and she pleaded for each family to have its own patch of outdoor space, no matter how small.

The Victorian Housing Trusts began at about the same time as Octavia Hill, but developed a new style of model dwellings built in dense blocks of tenement flats, housing only the "poor of good character" and charging rents beyond the means of the most needy. However, the Trusts did establish intensive, local resident management based on close relations with the tenants. They have managed to run seemingly unpopular, densely-built blocks effectively to this day.

Local authorities began building model dwellings in the last 20 years of the 19th century, copying the new style of flat-building of the Housing Trusts but incorporating very little of their management technique. The early council blocks in London were sometimes hard to let and were run from the beginning from County Hall where housing functions were acquired by different departments. The landlord service was remote and fragmented from the outset. Rents generally were high; the most desperate families were pushed into a diminishing supply of private accommodation. Early council housing was expensive and housed a privileged population of artisans and securely employed workers. By 1914, they and the Trusts together provided only a tiny fragment of housing; 90% of households still rented from private landlords in poor conditions.

THE FIRST ATTEMPTS AT MASS SLUM CLEARANCE AND REHOUSING 1918-1939

The acute housing shortage and accelerating decay, which were highlighted by the First World War, led to innovative general subsidies for new buildings. Councils produced many new high-quality estates on the edge of cities. But from 1930 onwards a radical shift took place. Subsidies became tied to slum clearance, and rehousing of slum dwellers and to relief of overcrowding. Higher subsidies were made available for flats on expensive city land, and the modern pattern of welfare housing in dense inner city flatted estates was established. The Governments of the

day were determined to tackle slums. Over a million council dwellings were built under these subsidies before World War II.

Social problems quickly emerged and while the lady housing managers were increasingly influential on the welfare aspects of slum demolition and rehousing, they were ignored on matters of overall housing management by the rapidly expanding local authorities.

The public landlords carried out their duties to tenants through assorted departments - Finance, Engineers, Surveyors, Sanitary Departments and Town Clerks. They threw up their own municipally-oriented housing body, founded in 1932 as the Institute of Housing, which openly opposed the integrated and localised emphasis of the rival, and better qualified, Society of Women Housing Managers, founded in 1916 to carry on Octavia Hill's tradition.

By 1939 there were over a million publicly owned dwellings. Many estates were difficult to run, and tarnished with the same reputation as the slums they were built to replace. A coherent housing management structure had not evolved within local authorities, though some attempts were made by a small minority of housing departments to graft a social and welfare role onto the more "professional" aspects of housing.

The landlord service was delivered in a fragmented way,

attracting less attention and interest than building, and argued over in acrimonious and jealous terms by the various professional protagonists. The Government collected evidence of this great confusion for its 1939 report, which admirably summed up the problem but failed to give any sense of direction on the way forward for public landlords. Local authority housing departments, like the L.C.C., were complacent about this service, blaming failings on the minority of bad tenants who could not adapt to the better conditions now offered.

THE POST-WAR HOUSING BOOM 1945 TO PRESENT DAY

By the end of the Second World War, with extensive bombing of cities, further rent freezes and disinvestment in old slum areas, the housing situation was chronic.

For 25 years a massive public housing boom was generated by Labour and Conservative Governments, with generous subsidies for slum clearance, demolition and flat-building. The higher the block, the greater the proportion of subsidies. Councils were the major providers throughout the period and flats became the dominant form of new construction.

Because of the vastly ambitious scale of public building, four million council homes in 35 years, the desire to produce large, dense flatted estates in a monotonous, almost mindless style was unsurprising. Industrial

building and high-rise seemed obvious answers to the numbers game. Massive clearance of seemingly obsolete houses, usually condemned for lack of amenity and overcrowding rather than structural flaws, was a glib response.

But the cities emptied partly as a result of clearance, and new estates housed only a small proportion of existing residents. The exodus to suburban owner-occupation was fuelled by slum demolition and council building. Small job centres were often demolished too.

The result was a largely unpopular style and scale of new housing, reduced demand, and major problems of damp, structural defects and communal layout, that led to vandalism, fear of crime and increased difficulties in letting. By the time councils stopped building unpopular monoliths, much demand for public housing had effectively evaporated. The result was a decline for the largest and often most modern estates.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES, 1945 TO PRESENT

The massive building boom of the post-war era, producing large, costly and difficult-to-run estates, generated an unprecedented scale of management problems.

The typical housing department comprised a lettings and

welfare section, with repairs, rent collection and building, dealt with by separate departments of the local authority.

The recruitment of staff for the rapidly expanding housing departments proved difficult and standards were lowered drastically and training was minimal.

"Rationalisation and streamlining" were the order of the day, with severe cut-backs in the already poor estate-based services.

At the same time, the bureaucratisation of procedures narrowed and tightened functions, limiting room for manoeuvre and enhancing the sectional division of responsibilities. Power was increasingly concentrated in fast expanding town halls and estate-based staff became more and more divorced from decision-making and control, as well as increasingly ineffectual in relation to tenants. They were expected to cover more and more ground with less and less power to deliver. Contact was reduced to a bare minimum and often done away with altogether with the withdrawal of rent collection, the centralisation of repairs, and the reduction in cleaning and caretaking services. Staff ratios remained high, but were actually cut at estate level in the period of rapid expansion from 1950-1975.

Because slum clearance generated such huge demand, and because the imperative to build large and high seemed so overriding, housing departments operated under a seige of

applications, waiting lists, "decanting" and demolition. Little or no thought or effort went into the long-term management implications. Even weighty Government reports on living in flats, rehousing disturbed families and organising a "comprehensive housing service" failed to address the fundamental issues of flat-building, localised services, dis-economies of scale, landlord-tenant relations, repairs as an integral part of management, and the more basic welfare or service role of housing. Housing departments grew in importance and sophistication, but also in complexity and size. Rarely did they control all aspects of estate management and up to 12 entirely separate departments might be involved in any one estate. The housing department itself might comprise half a dozen separate hierarchies of functions. By the seventies, housing departments often employed hundreds of staff, controlling thousands of properties - 38,000 in the average metropolitan area - worth hundreds of millions of pounds.

Yet by the time public housing started to fall seriously from favour in the mid-seventies, the public landlord had virtually lost control of estate management. Unpopular dwellings were coupled with a remote service that tenants could not identify with or locate. Meanwhile, housing staff found it increasingly difficult to deliver on anything but the narrowest part of the total service.

The attempt to organise a comprehensive housing service seemed to be shutting the door after the horse had bolted.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC HOUSING - NEED OR MERIT

Throughout the last 50 years, the allocation of council housing was the most strife-torn and confused area of housing management. Having started out with carefully selected, economically secure tenants, local authorities shifted in the thirties almost totally to poor, overcrowded slum dwellers, whose conditions were overwhelmingly bad. After the Second World War, public housing was declared "for all", but the massive shortage made rehousing more like a mad scramble than a priority system. When slum clearance began again, rehousing from demolition areas took overriding precedence, but although access according to need was now widely accepted, the major issue of distributing an uneven stock between conflicting groups remained to be resolved. A system of points was developed, which included the grading of a family's standards, their merit based on behaviour and rent-paying records. This system required lettings officers to sit in judgement over who "deserved" the most popular or least popular homes. A complicated "system" of matching quality of applicant with quality of rehousing was developed and applied in most local authorities.

Vulnerable categories, such as the homeless, racial minorities, welfare recipients and unemployed, tended to receive the lowest grade offers and became disproportionately concentrated in the least popular estates.

There was such a large area of discretion within a highly

complex and therefore largely invisible central lettings system that sifting inevitably took place.

Large-scale transfers made matters worse by offering more ambitious and respectable existing tenants the chance to upgrade their housing. The instability and substantial vacancies created by transfers off the worst estates reinforced their unpopularity, resulting in widespread lettings on these estates to the most desperate households. Lettings therefore became the tool of segregation and discrimination in the public sector, resulting in a polarisation between good and bad estates, forcing residents of the bad estates to seek a constant way out, and trapping the "lowest category" applicants in the areas with the worst reputation.

THE GAP BETWEEN COUNCIL HOUSING AND OWNER-OCCUPATION

A wider process was at work simultaneously, creating a growing disparity between owner-occupiers and tenants. Most council tenants would prefer to be owner-occupiers, but less than a third would want to buy their existing council home. Most council tenants did not choose to be council tenants but felt pushed into it by bad housing conditions, demolition or lack of other alternatives.

Not only does this sense of lack of choice determine the unpopularity of much council housing; it also disguises major differences in the economic and social wellbeing

of residents in the two sectors. Council tenants are substantially poorer on average, are more often unskilled, with poorer educational qualifications than owner-occupiers. A much higher proportion are claimants of supplementary benefit or unemployed. A high proportion of separated families dependent on means-tested benefits are housed within the public sector. Racial minorities are also increasingly, and in the case of Caribbean minorities, disproportionately concentrated there.

The council sector enjoys other significant disadvantages. It is disproportionately located in cities where deprivation is highest. It is built in unpopular forms with a high proportion of flats and large, anonymous estates.

Its design makes it harder to police or to supervise. Social stress and lettings policies determine that the poorest and most disadvantaged households are crowded onto the most undesirable estates at the bottom of an intense pecking order.

The consequent disarray leads to some council housing being difficult to let to anyone at all.

THE GOVERNMENT'S RECOGNITION OF DIFFICULT TO LET ESTATES - 1974-1978

For the first time, in 1974, the Government recognised the

problem of unpopular post-war council housing. In a survey of all local authorities, it established that over half of problem estates were in metropolitan areas; three-quarters were flats; and over half the difficult-to-let estates were less than 10 years old. The main causes of unpopularity were given as design, vandalism and social stigma. Tower blocks comprised a small proportion of the problem.

The Government has since 1978 asked all local authorities to inform it annually of the number of dwellings that are difficult to let. The figures collected bear out the earlier findings that difficult-to-let estates are overwhelmingly located in cities. The overlap with homelessness and poverty, the proportion of flats and the size of the local authority landlord have also been demonstrated through the national figures to be associated with lettings difficulties.

Council housing has not overcome the problem of slums. The crude shortage has declined but "difficult-to-let estates" have emerged as a major housing disaster.

The Department of the Environment's Investigation of 30 difficult-to-let estates provided the first published account of the problem. It spelt out the design failure of large modern estates and underlined the need for compensatory management if flatted estates were to work. Coupled with design aberrations, the decline of localised

housing management and the concentration of desperate households within unpopular estates were both direct causes of disintegration. The case studies revealed an over-supply of council housing in some areas.

The report suggested that only by introducing a wide range of remedies, including more personal and sensitive management and maintenance, physical remedies and a reversal of the lettings spiral, could the problem be tackled.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT SURVEY

In response to the Difficult to Let Investigation and evidence from local authorities, the Department of the Environment launched the Priority Estates Project in 1979 to develop with local authorities experiments in reversing conditions on very unpopular estates through a local management office with the full involvement and backing of tenants. A survey was conducted in 1982 of 20 special housing projects on the most run-down estates in 19 local authorities, giving valuable details about the nature of the problems and possible ways of tackling them.

The 20 estates were spread across the country and ranged from cottage-style, pre-war estates, through balcony-style flatted estates, to the modern concrete complex estates of the sixties onwards. The average size of the estates was 1,000 dwellings. The main design problems related to the communal nature of all the estates, the poorly maintained environment, and on the flatted estates, the oppressive, dense style and the constantly damaged and poorly protected lifts, stairs, rubbish chambers,

garages, drying rooms and so on.

Every communal part was abused. All the estates suffered from youthful vandalism. The modern concrete estates suffered from leaks, damp, condensation, and noise in more intense forms than the others. Cottage estates could be just as decayed and unpopular as the flatted estates, but it was easier to see how they could be restored. The 13 flatted estates in the survey were depressingly large, anonymous and even frightening.

SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT DECAY ON 20 ESTATES

The design of the 20 estates led to major social and management problems. Allocation of housing was probably the single most dominant question and the survey showed that there were above average concentrations of many disadvantaged groups on the 20 estates. Thus, homeless families, one-parent families, numbers of children, racial minorities, unemployed adults, were all over-represented.

At the same time, there was a higher rate of turnover of tenants, causing instability and unrest, with many tenants aiming to upgrade their housing by leaving. A corollary of the lettings and turnover problems was a disproportionately high proportion of empty dwellings. This applied to almost all the estates too. Some estates had as many as a hundred empty dwellings and one estate was almost a quarter empty. Empty dwellings created a chain reaction. More people refused to come and live there because of the atmosphere of dereliction. Squatters moved in. Vandalism and theft to empty property were commonplace. The cost of all this damage was substantial

and, coupled with the loss of rent income, generated serious concern.

Communal facilities, where they existed, were often ill-used. Where they didn't exist, the estate seemed barren and spiritless.

Rent arrears were exceptionally high on almost all the estates, but there were enormous variations and some management systems seemed unable to cope with them. The disappearance of door-to-door collection was a major setback. The alternative of legal sanctions was ineffective, costly and extremely damaging to landlord-tenant relations.

Repairs presented serious problems and were invariably run independently of housing management under a remote system. Homes were generally poorly maintained. Cleansing, Parks and Social Services Departments, all ran their separate operations, unconnected with each other, or with the housing department. Generally, performance was poor and the estate received a service commensurate with its generally low reputation. No estate had a local management office prior to the projects, and no estate caretakers worked in a team with estate officers or repairmen or social workers.

Tenants were often isolated, frightened and desperate to escape. The council was often at its wits' end.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT OFFERS HOPE OF SUCCESS

We examined the local offices which were opened on the 20 estates in an attempt to stem overwhelming decline. When

they were set up, their impact on the local community was immediate, opening up extensive and frequent contact between landlord and tenants and providing an on-the-spot service, cutting through red tape and acting as a pressure point and arbiter with the council.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF 20 LOCAL MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

The cumulative experience of the first 20 local management projects has been an invaluable source for many further initiatives. The most important lessons could be summarised as follows:

- Local estate offices open all day to tenants, with full-time staff and all housing records brought about an impressive improvement in landlord-tenant relations.
- Almost all estates were undergoing physical modernisation and adaptation, often incurring major expense. On the whole this reinvestment was successful in rebuilding the popularity of the estates, but it relied heavily on local management to ensure long-term maintenance.
- Local management of repairs, rents and lettings was only partially delegated. Where local repairs teams were introduced they were highly popular, efficient and cost-effective. Local lettings brought about a significant reduction in the number of empty dwellings and also substantial savings in vandal damage and loss of rent income. However, local lettings and local repairs were introduced on only eight of the 20 estates.

Rent arrears were on the whole being contained but

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were less expensive than is commonly imagined, were usually funded from the Housing Revenue Account direct, and brought about substantial cash savings. No local authority questioned the value of the investment in local management.

THE FUTURE

There are many unanswered questions which impinge directly on unpopular estates and the future of housing management. If housing benefit is reduced for large numbers of low-income households, rent arrears will rise and income for management and maintenance will be reduced.

If rate-capping is extended, the hardest-pressed authorities with the most formidable problems will be obliged to reduce their rate subsidy for housing without being able to reduce their debt charges. Again spending on management and maintenance will suffer.

If the right to buy continues to favour the better-off and the better property, the council sector will be increasingly polarised.

There are other unresolved issues. The number of manual jobs in local authorities is decreasing and white-collar jobs increasing. The white-collar unions often exercise a stranglehold on essential services. The white-collar council-wide strike in the Rhondda Valley, causing massive refuse and flooding problems, and the children's home strike in Islington are two examples.

Official homelessness is on the increase, yet families are reported to refuse accommodation on the worst estates in many London authorities, and the number of families in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation is high, sometimes in the very boroughs with the most empty council dwellings. The cost to councils per family is much higher than alternative solutions to the problem.

Some housing departments are attempting to decentralise services, but finding it costly because they are not willing or able to accept a corresponding reduction in their central departments. The areas covered by decentralised "local" offices usually involve several estates which rarely have a common sense of identity. Thus they fail to resolve the core problems of the worst estates.

Major economic and social issues also impinge heavily on council housing. Large areas of the country have a crude lack of demand for conventional family council housing, of which there is an over-supply. Waiting lists are often overweighted with single teenagers wanting to leave home, hoping to get access to property that more highly pointed applicants reject.

Large institutions, mental hospitals, children's homes and hostels discharge vulnerable people "into the community". As there is a chronic shortage of supported, sheltered accommodation, such households often end up on the largest and most disarrayed estates.

Poor estates contain a concentration of the unemployed and

with the rise in unemployment, this tendency has increased. The poorest housing communities outside the south-east have generally more than 50% of the adult male population out of work. In the north, as few as 10% may have jobs on the worst estates.

The imponderables spell a bleak long-term future for council landlords and tenants, unless more creative use is found for the physical capital and human energy which has in the past been so undervalued.

HOUSING MANAGEMENT OF THE FUTURE

The central problems of run-down council estates are endemic. A majority of the estates we studied are very large with over 500 dwellings. A majority are built in dense blocks of flats and all are built with many communal, unguarded and unusable areas. At least a third of problem dwellings are built with industrialised and non-traditional designs and materials which are unpopular and often expensive to maintain.

There is severe poverty and the estate communities are often isolated, uprooted and transient. Disturbed households are most frequently rehoused on the least popular communal estates where their problems and those of their neighbours are intensified.

The loss of shops, social facilities and centres of employment through slum demolition has by no means been

made good in the rebuilt estates and there is often a sense of desolate inactivity.

Councils, especially city councils, are too big and too complex to co-ordinate or execute effectively the meticulous delivery of landlord responsibilities and thus suffer from distant and often acrimonious relations with tenants.

Inadequate households are often blamed for the problems of estate management, and physical reconstruction is the most commonly proposed solution. However, neither changing the population of council estates nor embarking on a major new demolition programme is a realistic or humane way forward in the immediate future.

There are seven major changes in organisation which could make a significant difference to the operation of housing services on the worst estates.

The first is a new system of housing finance, allocating a management and maintenance allowance for all council dwellings, taking account of the type of dwelling (houses/flats), special maintenance needs (lifts/decks/flat roofs), the age of the property (renewal of services) and location (extra costs for London), with a different rate for metropolitan and non-metropolitan authorities.

A compulsory deduction from rent income, with adjustments in the wider subsidy system for the varied financial obligations of different authorities, would provide such

an allowance. This would facilitate the provision of budgets for each estate and allow local management organisations to flourish.

The second is to reorganise the traditional council housing management hierarchy into locally-based entities along the lines of schools, hospitals, health centres, banks and other services. All basic housing management, rents, repairs and lettings, would be part of the local organisation. As there is no known economy of scale in housing services, such a reorganisation, while reaching the customer more effectively, would not add significantly to costs.

The third change would be to tailor capital investment and major repair and improvement programmes to the priorities of residents and to scale down all building contracts to locally manageable proportions. Work should be done incrementally and within very strict financial limits to allow practical solutions and intelligible plans to flourish. Waste has created an immense well of bitterness on the worst estates. Careful reinvestment is urgently needed.

The fourth development would be to enhance the formal role of residents in the running of their estates. Only where they are at the forefront of changes, do improvements seem to succeed in inspiring the support of the community.

There are several formulas for the residents' role. A locally constituted management body, comprising elected residents and council nominees, could preside over the

running of all day-to-day estate affairs, in conjunction with staff.

The fifth point is that manual jobs are vital to the healthy operation of landlord services. Caretaking, local repairs and cleaning make the critical difference between a habitable estate and a veritable slum. These jobs can only be sacrificed at the risk of hastening demolition programmes already under way in some councils, often for social and custodial rather than structural reasons. As many as possible of the jobs must go to residents and the actual number of locally-based jobs should increase. Other forms of economic activity can be stimulated by the generation of a local workforce.

The sixth element would attack the size, scale and anomie of council housing in the least popular areas from as many angles as possible, by physically breaking it down into small, manageable units; by enclosing as much public space as possible and making it private; by guarding all necessary communal services and access points; by personalising details such as colour schemes, door designs and gardens; by encouraging individual initiative, enterprise, and vitality, including diverse service provision through shops and so on; by enhancing the enforcement of basic social norms through the close working liaison between landlord and tenants.

The last and most difficult change would be to broaden the socio-economic base of the most unpopular areas by

introducing a variety of tenures and by having a much more open lettings system throughout the council sector, without residential qualifications, points assessment or grading for the mass of applicants, using the simple concept of queuing, but with a fall-back priority system for households who cannot find their own way into the local housing market. By opening up areas of low demand to a more flexible, open-door buying, selling and lettings system, any latent housing demand will be uncovered and difficulties in letting decline. A new look should be taken at the need for furnished lettings too. At the same time in unpopular areas, the local waiting list should encourage people with ties in the area to apply, thereby strengthening the community.

The right to buy and sales of unwanted blocks of flats should be balanced by local authorities' ability to acquire street properties so that the disequilibrium between council flats and houses in inner areas can be gradually redressed.

There are serious limitations to local authority landlords operating on such a vast and monolithic scale as they have in the last few decades. Leaving aside the politically charged debate about public and private ownership, there are many arguments for scaling down and diversifying the social landlords within the publicly built housing market. Churches, social and community organisations, trade unions, businesses, social services, health authorities, as well as the large reserves of individual occupiers, have all at

different times shown an interest in housing provision and organisation. There is scope for a variety of smaller trusts and associations, such as exist in Scandinavia and Germany, to help manage publicly-built estates.

Local management organisations, developed in many varied forms in all parts of the country on the very worst estates over the last six years, offer a way forward. Indeed, had local management been in place from the very beginning of council housing, the situation today might have been very different. Octavia Hill's intimate, businesslike and incremental system, designed over a century ago, but adapted to the requirements of a more democratic age, is still the only working solution to succeed in the poorest areas. Local management does not resolve the long-term dilemmas of public housing but it offers one remedy - so far the only proven remedy - to many of the problems of large estates. The future of one and a half million council dwellings - of nearly five million people - is in jeopardy.



1. Abandoned back gardens were common on cottage estates where fencing had disappeared.



2. Where fencing was reinstated, pride was restored.



3. Derelict, empty houses had front walls removed and roofs in serious disrepair. Some houses had been restored for letting and ransacked more than once.



4. Houses and front walls were restored and dwellings re-let after the opening of a full-time management office.



5. A cottage estate in the north-west had poorly designed and unmaintained communal play areas that fell into decay within a few years of being built. There was no



6. A near-empty block of pre-war tenement flats in Liverpool that the council planned to demolish until a builder bought them, renovated them and sold them to individual owner-occupiers.



7. The Rhondda valleys have continuous terraced housing along the valley bottoms.



8. In sharp contrast with the valleys, a 1,000-dwelling, concrete estate was built in the late sixties on the ridge between two valleys. A reclaimed slag heap is in the distance.



9. "Italianite" architecture offers mono-pitch roofs that occasionally lift off in high winds. There are over 400 areas of communal land wedged between tiny gardens on this estate.



10. A large but decayed northern cottage estate suffers from wall-tie failure and is under threat of demolition.



11. The same city boasts the largest industrially-built estate in Europe. Wind tunnels are so powerful that it is sometimes impossible to round the corners of upper floor decks.



12. A thousand flats and maisonettes were built on stilts and linked above ground with decks and "podiums".



13. These "gigantesque" tower blocks have dark internal corridors. Frequent lift failure in one of these blocks meant that old people were sometimes marooned. One old lady took two hours to reach the sixteenth floor on foot. Luckily the local estate officer carried her shopping. Fortunately this style of tower block was very uncommon.



14. These blocks on a large estate with long decks and linking bridges were blighted, then emptied and demolished.



15. An L.C.C. balcony block estate that was stigmatised by shared bathrooms and low rents. First World War stretchers were used to make the fencing.



16. This northern estate, straddling a dual carriageway, was never fully occupied. It is now managed through a local office. This estate has a high proportion of children because of its large dwellings.



17. This estate is a quarter empty and has bricked-up, bed-sitter flats and protruding bedrooms. The entry phones were wrongly installed and have never worked.



18. Garages were abandoned and vandalised on an ex-G.L.C. balcony block estate.



19. Windows were smashed to communal drying rooms on every floor of the same estate.



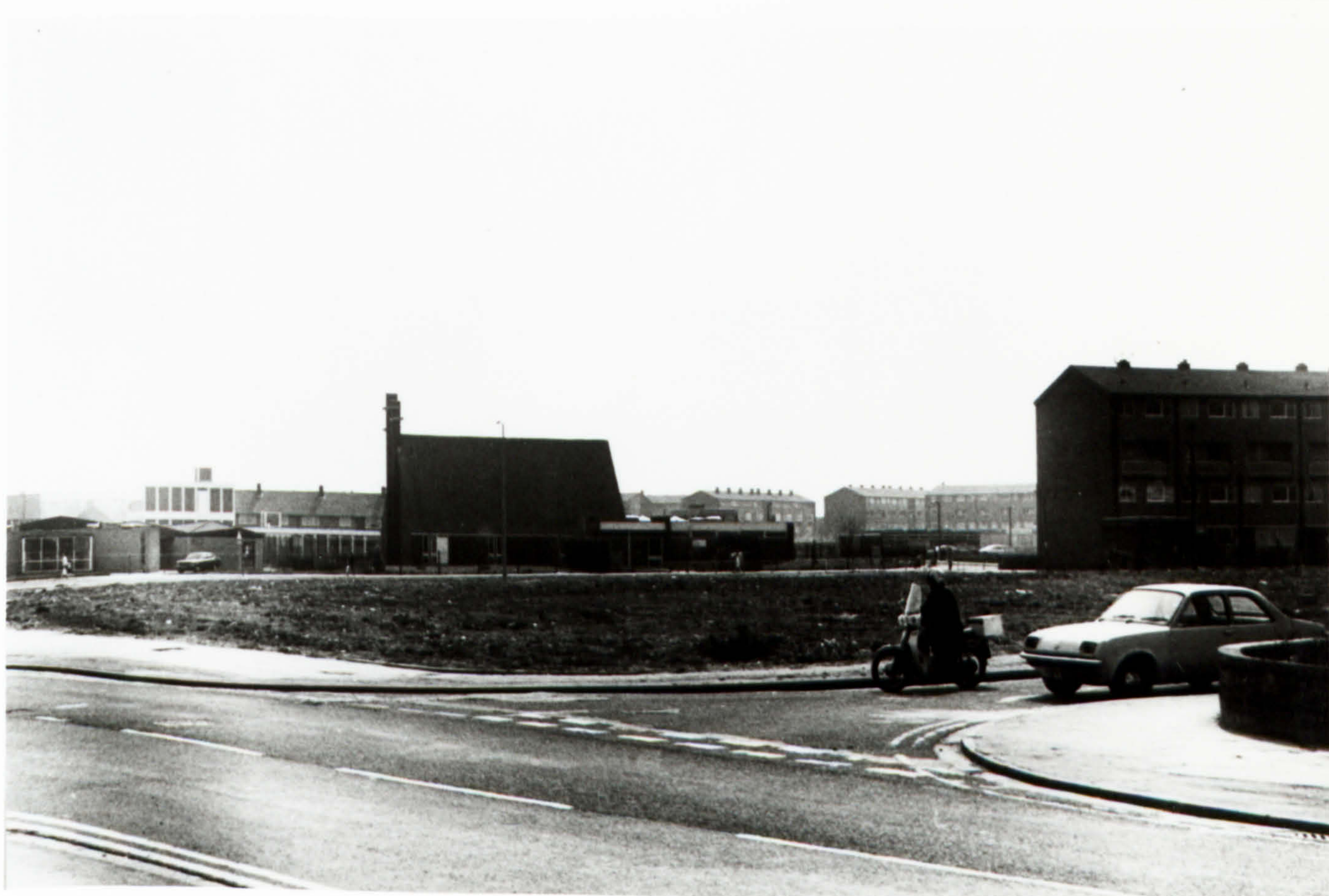
20. A tenant exerts control over his balcony.



21. Front entrances to a 1950's estate in Hackney.



22. Private gardens in front of the blocks transform the communal areas.



23. An unwanted site scars the landscape after the demolition of surplus 4-storey maisonettes in Merseyside.



24. A close-up of some surplus maisonettes.



25. A number of councils are "lopping off" upper floors of blocks, and putting on pitched roofs, making the lower floors into attractive and popular houses. This expensive solution avoids some of the scars of total demolition and is cheaper than new terraced



26. These entrances to private dwellings are frightening on decks in Lambeth.



27. Cavernous underground garages are virtually unused on this estate in South London. It is proposed to fill the whole area in with concrete and landscape above.



28. All 50 communal entrances on this estate in South Wales have fallen into disrepair. Stray dogs compound the ubiquitous litter problems of unguarded communal areas.



29. A porter's lodge inside the entrance to a tower block, manned for 18 hours a day, has more than paid for itself by eliminating vandalism and bringing about full lettings.



30. Many blocks were joined by overhead bridges on this difficult-to-manage estate in Brent.



31. Walkways were blocked off in an attempt to control crime. Walkway closure groups were organised among residents and enclosed groups of flats and corridors were upgraded.



32. The contours of a large tower block estate were softened by tree planting and providing individual front gardens. Residents were directly involved and protected the trees.



33. The Broadwater Farm Neighbourhood Office with the resident superintendent of caretakers and one of the housing managers. A team of over 20 mans the 1,000 flats and maisonettes.



34. Mrs. Dolly Kiffin, the tenants' leader and founder of the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, was instrumental in turning the tide on one of the most difficult estates in London.



35. Tenants on a training visit to London learn about the Tenant Board on the Wenlock Barn Estate in Hackney.



36. Tenants work hard to learn the ropes of local estate management.



37. Cloverhall Tenant Management Co-operative visits the Holbrook Co-op, Islington, for a training session.

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