



**FURIOUS:** A demonstration outside 55 North Street as prospective buyers are shown around a reclaimed property from shortlifers

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# Evicted. Now that home is on sale for £260,000

LAMBETH council is selling up the last of its shortlife housing stock and evicting long-standing residents – to a rising chorus of criticism.

The town hall acquired 1,200 properties through compulsory purchase orders in the 1970s for a project that never got off the ground.

The properties, many without boilers, with holes in the roofs and broken windows, were rented out to housing co-operatives, which then maintained them.

It became known as “shortlife” because tenants expected to stay for a short, fixed-term, the trade-off being cheap rent.

But successive policy changes through the 1980s and 1990s saw the shortlifers remain.

That all changed in July 2011 when Lambeth council began the latest tranche of recalls.

It was also agreed to keep 20 per cent for affordable rents.

Those evicted are given notice and are encouraged to bid on other council properties via the Choice Based Lettings [CBL] system.

But the hard line approach means those who turn down unsuitable properties from the CBL are left to fend for themselves in the private rental market – where rents are higher.

Fiona Duff was evicted from her home of 20 years in Rosendale Road, West Dulwich, on February 19 this year.

Her property was managed by a housing cooperative who replaced windows, fixed the roof and helped install a central heating system.

“I was trying to find somewhere on

**DOZENS of families are being evicted from their homes as Lambeth council pushes forward with plans to reclaim its shortlife houses.**

**BEN MORGAN speaks to those involved . . .**

the CBL but was not successful with my bid.

“I wanted somewhere close to my daughter’s school but I was offered the Loughborough Estate [in Brixton].

“Then they offered me a flat on an estate in Vauxhall but as I work from home, that would take three and a half hours to travel to school and back, twice a day. I’d have to give up work.”

Instead, Fiona and her daughter have been staying with friends since her eviction.

“The council knew I didn’t want to move my daughter from her school.

“There were properties available near her school but they chose not to offer them to me.

“Despite what the council have said, they have not worked with the shortlife residents to find suitable alternative accommodation.”

Her former home is due to be sold at auction later this month. The guide price is £260,000.

Councillor Pete Robbins, who inherited the housing portfolio from

council leader Cllr Lib Peck, has defended the policy.

He said that the money from sales would be reinvested in its Lambeth Housing Standard – a five-year, £450million refurbishment programme.

He said: “There are 15,000 homes that are not at decent home standard and it will cost £500million to do that – with 20 per cent coming from Government.

“We only have £450million. There is a £50million gap which we are unable to fill.

“The way we can fill that is from generating money from disposals. The money from shortlife can go towards that.”

Previously, the council has said the cash would also be used to improve roads and schools.

Cllr Robbins defended the council’s policy.

He said every household has been offered the chance to be rehoused and more than half of the remaining former shortlife tenants are not contesting evictions.



**DEFIANT:** Cllr Pete Robbins



**PROTESTERS:** People against against shortlife policy

He added: “The last thing we want to do is go to court because both parties run up expensive legal bills and the lawyers win.”

However, that has not stopped legal action going ahead.

Andy Carstairs, a resident for two decades of North Street, Clapham, lost his battle over his eviction.

Within 20 minutes of leaving court bailiffs were at his back door.

Those who lose in court are liable to pay thousands in costs – to both their own counsel and that of the town hall.

A solution has been put forward by Lambeth United Housing Cooperative (LUHC) that would retain the properties, refurbish and recycle them and retain them as social housing.

LUHC member Julian Hall said: “The plan would retain social housing units in areas where there are very few.

“It would also have a tangible

effect on bringing empty homes back into use.

“Instead, we are looking at a situation where the council is adding to its oversubscribed housing waiting list and taking away social housing at the same time.

“Our plan is a self-funding.”

But the LUHC plan has not been embraced by the council.

Cllr Robbins said: “To retain that stock would cost the council millions. The estimation is £10- to 15million. The money’s just not there.”

In the meantime, politicians are working on a Councillor Call for Action that would force a special council meeting to discuss the shortlife issue.

Lambeth Liberal Democrats, Tories and a smattering of Labour councillors hold out hope that such a move could force shortlife to the top of the agenda once more.

But for those with evictions looming, it could be too little, too late.