



Prime Minister<sup>(1)</sup>

2 MARSHAM STREET  
LONDON SW1P 3EB  
01-212 3434

Contact with attached answer,  
which includes Barnet among the  
authorities with which DOE is in  
formal contact about the "right  
to buy".?

My ref:

Your ref:

23 January 1984

Dear David

DOB  
23/1

If it is  
a number (which I  
think) the name  
must  
go in  
MT

Following a supplementary answer given to him before Christmas David Knox MP has tabled a question for written answer (by 25 January) which specifically asks for the names of those authorities with which the Department is in contact on their right to buy performance. As we have published such a list before Ministers here see no alternative but to give the list in full although a large number of the authorities on it are under Conservative control. My Secretary of State believes that the list of authorities in the form of the draft answer attached should be drawn to the Prime Minister's attention before it appears in Hansard.

The Prime Minister will recall that when the Minister for Housing and Construction spoke at Blackpool he made clear the Government's determination that every tenant who wished to exercise the right to buy should be able to do so speedily and freely. To this end the Department has been pursuing current progress on the right to buy with a large number of local authorities across the country. In some cases, especially in the South East, this is the first time that their performance in implementing the Government's objective in delivering the right to buy has been questioned.

The majority of authorities concerned have responded positively and greatly improved results are already beginning to show through. In a few instances, however, members and officers have reacted to the Department's pressure with resentment and hostility. The publication of a list of monitored authorities might therefore prompt some adverse comment from Conservative circles in local government. On the other hand it would demonstrate our resolve to honour our commitment to deliver the right to buy throughout the country.

The Prime Minister should note in particular that Barnet is included on the list. The Department has been in frequent correspondence with the Council in the past about tenants' complaints of delays in dealing with their right to buy applications and about particular problems on the Grahame Park Estate. More recently the Council has been pressed to improve its general progress in dealing with the right to

buy. Councillor Perry spoke to officials here in September to express his concern as Chairman of the Housing Committee that Barnet should be included on the list of monitored authorities. Positive action is now being taken by the Council, as a result of the Department's correspondence to speed up right to buy sales and there has been a marked decline in the number of complaints made by right to buy purchasers in recent months about delays by the Council. However there is still some way to go particularly on cases awaiting completion.

I would be grateful to know if the Prime Minister is content to our giving a Parliamentary Answer which includes the list of monitored authorities as shown on the attachment to this letter.

*Yours ever*  
*Alan*

A H DAVIS  
Private Secretary



Mr David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, whether pursuant to his Answer to the honourable Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands on 21 December, Official Report, column 428, he will list the local authorities with which his Department is in contact about aspects of their performance in implementing the right to buy council houses; and whether he will indicate the aspects of the performance of those councils which is giving cause for concern.

- A. Those authorities with which my Department is in formal contact about right to buy progress are as follows:

(Please see attached list A1)

The following authorities have also been requested to provide information on current right to buy progress.

(Please see attached list A2)

My Department is now in contact with a total of 156 councils on their performance on the right to buy. This figure reflects progress since the answer which I gave to my hon Friend on 21 December. Those aspects of right to buy performance which have been taken up by my Department concern mainly the ability of tenants to complete the purchase of their homes expeditiously and on reasonable terms. My rt hon Friend is determined that the right to buy should be delivered freely and speedily to every secure tenant wishing to buy his home. He has informed all local authorities that he expects sales to be completed normally within 3-4 months of admission of the right to buy when the tenant proceeds expeditiously.

Ashford  
Ashfield  
Barking and Dagenham  
Barnet  
Barnsley  
Barrow  
Basildon  
Birmingham  
Blackpool  
Bolsover  
Breckland  
Brent  
Brentwood  
Bridgnorth  
Camden  
Cherwell  
Chesterfield  
Chester-Le-Street  
Chichester  
Chiltern  
Copeland  
Crawley  
Dacorum  
Durham  
Ellesmere Port and Neston  
Enfield  
Epping Forest  
Forest of Dean  
Fylde  
Gateshead  
Greater London Council  
Greenwich  
Hackney  
Hammersmith and Fulham  
Haringey  
Harlow  
High Peak  
Hillingdon  
Hounslow  
Ipswich  
Islington  
Kensington and Chelsea  
Kingston Upon Hull  
Kirklees  
Lambeth  
Leeds  
Leicester  
Leominster  
Lewisham  
Lichfield  
Liverpool  
Luton  
Maldon  
Manchester  
Mid-Bedfordshire  
Mid-Devon  
Mid-Suffolk  
Mole-Valley  
Newbury  
Newham  
North Dorset  
North Devon  
North Hertfordshire  
North West Leicestershire  
Norwich  
Oldham  
Oxford  
Preston  
Poole  
Reading  
Richmondshire  
Richmond-upon-Thames  
Rochdale  
Rother  
Sedgemoor  
Scarborough  
Surrey Heath  
Slough  
St Albans  
St Helens  
Sandwell  
Scunthorpe  
Sheffield  
Southampton  
South Bedfordshire  
South Derbyshire  
South Northamptonshire  
South Tyneside  
Southwark  
Stafford  
Stroud  
Sunderland  
Sutton  
Three Rivers  
Thurrock  
Torridge  
Tower Hamlets  
Trafford  
Wakefield  
Wansbeck  
Wandsworth  
Watford  
West Dorset  
Westminster  
Woking  
Wolverhampton  
Worcester  
Wychavon  
Wyre Forest

Aylesbury Vale  
Basingstoke and Deane  
Bath  
Broadland  
Bromsgrove  
Broxbourne  
Boston  
Bournemouth  
Canterbury  
Caradon  
Craven  
Dartford  
Eastbourne  
East Devon  
Elmbridge  
Gillingham  
Guildford  
Hart  
Hastings  
Havant  
Hereford  
Hertsmere  
Maidstone  
Melton  
Mid Sussex  
Newark  
North Kesteven  
Redditch  
Restormel  
Rushcliffe  
Salisbury  
Solihull  
South Oxfordshire  
Swale  
Tendring  
Test Valley  
Vale of White Horse  
Warwick  
Waverley  
West Oxfordshire  
Wimborne  
Winchester  
Windsor and Maidenhead  
Wokingham  
Worthing  
Wycombe



File

be Jay.

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

24 January 1984

Thank you for your letter of 23 January with which you enclosed a draft statement by your Secretary of State listing the local authorities with which he is in contact about the right to buy. The Prime Minister accepts that Barnet must be included in the list if this accurately reflects the facts.

MR. D. BARCLAY

A.H. Davis, Esq.,  
Department of the Environment.

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unemployed, as he implied on the Jimmy Young show this morning, when he contrasted the position of such people with business men who allegedly do not have a vote?

**Mr. Gow:** The allegation against my right hon. Friend is absurd and wholly without foundation.

**Mr. Straw:** Is the Minister aware that, as part of the Secretary of State's campaign grossly to distort and exaggerate the impact of rates upon businesses, he has briefed his Cabinet colleagues to the effect that business rates form half of industry's trading profits, although the Minister has just informed me that they form one quarter of that figure—that is, one eighth? When the Minister meets the local authority associations will he say whether the CBI or the Minister is correct?

Will the Minister also take the opportunity to explain to the local authority associations that what the Secretary of State has told the House today about businesses paying a larger amount of rates, and the implications of what he said on the Jimmy Young show, suggest that he is seeking to re-impose a property qualification upon the right to vote, which was fought for on behalf of all working people for over a century?

**Mr. Gow:** Any information and any papers circulated by my right hon. Friend to his Cabinet colleagues—*[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) let me answer? He asked me a question and I am answering it. Any information and any papers circulated by my right hon. Friend to his Cabinet colleagues or others will have contained accurate information. In so far as there may have been any discrepancy between the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred it is because one set of figures was adjusted for inflation and the other was not.

#### Unused Public Land

15. **Mr. Martin Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the 24,000 acres of unused public land owned by nationalised industries and statutory undertakers at 1 July 1982 has been sold since then.

**Mr. Macfarlane:** Between 1 July 1982 and 1 July 1983, the last date for which figures are available, 1,100 acres of land owned by the nationalised industries and statutory undertakings have been removed from the land registers following disposal, and a further 138 acres have been removed because the land has been brought into use.

**Mr. Stevens:** I thank my hon. Friend for that welcome news. What steps are he and his departmental colleagues taking to speed up the process still further?

**Mr. Macfarlane:** Neither I nor my right hon. Friend are satisfied with the rate of disposal of land from the registers. I would not pick out the nationalised industries and the statutory undertakings for special criticism. It is dangerous to generalise, but we are stepping up the pressure on owners—local authorities as well as nationalised industries—to explain what they are doing with such developable sites. I am anxious that we should proceed with this urgently throughout 1984.

**Mr. Eastham:** Can the Minister assure us that, despite the Government's anxious pursuit of their intention to get their hands on this land, they will use every endeavour to make sure that the land is not sold off to cowboys who will not do a proper reclamation job when they have got control of it?

**Mr. Macfarlane:** I take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

**Mr. Steen:** Bearing in mind that there are still 104,000 acres on the land registers, will my hon. Friend consider persuading the nationalised industries to get rid of 10 per cent. of all their vacant land every year by putting it up for auction, without reserve, on the open market? Would not that be a quicker way of getting rid of the vacant land?

**Mr. Macfarlane:** I take note of my hon. Friend's proposal and will consider it. We must certainly race on with our programme and keep up the pressures on all who own vacant land.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** As there is little unused public land available for housing development within the national parks, and now that the Government have reviewed the position with regard to section 52 agreements, preventing the Lake District planning board from introducing them, what measures will the Government introduce to ensure that there is no further spread of second homes within the national park?

**Mr. Macfarlane:** The hon. Gentleman should table a question on that subject, because that question does not relate to the one I have just answered.

#### Council House Sales

16. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made with the sale of council houses to sitting tenants.

**Sir George Young:** Approximately 630,000 houses and flats were sold between April 1979 and September 1983 by local authorities and new towns in Great Britain, some 400,000 of them under the right to buy. The vast majority were to sitting tenants. In addition, housing associations sold about 40,000 dwellings of which 28,000 were to sitting tenants. Continuing progress is therefore being made. My Department keeps under review the performance of local authorities in implementing the right to buy, and we continue to take appropriate measures to ensure that the rights of tenants are secured.

**Mr. David Knox:** How many local authorities are still dragging their feet over the sale of council houses, and how many of those authorities are Labour-controlled?

**Sir George Young:** My Department is in contact with about 200 local authorities, most of which are Labour-controlled, about aspects of their performance in implementing the right to buy. Problems are taken up by my hon. Friend and myself, and we shall do all that we can to ensure that tenants get the rights conferred on them by Parliament.

**Mr. Pavitt:** In deciding policy on these matters, and in acting on them, will the Minister give consideration to areas such as Brent, which adjoins his own constituency, where there is a housing emergency? There is a waiting list of 15,000 and we pay £35,000 a week for bed and breakfast for the homeless. Any reduction of housing stocks has disastrous effects upon the rehousing of those in urgent need.

**Sir George Young:** Selling one's council house does not reduce the nation's housing stock. In addition, the right-to-buy policy has generated some £2 billion, which

has enabled the local authorities to make faster progress in tackling the problems to which the hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn our attention.

**Mr. Hill:** Will my hon. Friend re-examine the protection given to some large estate managers, such as Grosvenor and Cadogan, and consider whether the scheme for the sale of houses to tenants could be enlarged in a Housing Bill that he might introduce in the not too distant future?

**Sir George Young:** The Government have no plans to extend the right to buy to the private sector.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Will the Minister acknowledge that for the 1.5 million families who are homeless or in desperate need of housing but are still on waiting lists there

is, in traditional terms, no room at the inn this Christmas? Will he also acknowledge that about one half of all housing capital expenditure is now being financed by the sale of council houses and that those sales are falling off? Where will the money for any form of capital housing building programme come from when the boom of house sales, or rather the initial flush, has ended?

**Sir George Young:** There are 130,000 applications in the pipeline at the moment and the Bill that the House will discuss shortly gives the right to buy to a further range of tenants. I do not accept that there will be a diminution in the volume of receipts to the extent that the hon. Gentleman suggests. For the future, we shall continue to do all that we can to maintain the HIP allocations at an appropriate level.



23 JAN 1984

