



A conference held on 10.10.12 was convened by a group of Christians concerned by the increasing shortage of affordable housing in London.

Go to <http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/news.php>



If your congregation is involved or wishes to get involved please contact Peter Stevenson, Convenor, Synod Church and Society

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The Government is in the process of introducing changes designed to reduce the national deficit by limiting the cost to the Exchequer of both housing benefit and the supply of new social housing. There has been little consideration of possible alternatives such as capping rents or taxing land values. These changes will hit the poor hardest, forcing people into debt or privation as their benefit payment no longer covers the cost of keeping a roof over their head and, ultimately, causing internal migration, as families move from high-rent neighbourhoods to cheaper areas.

Homelessness applications to Local Authorities are already up to as much as 30% from last year, as the impact of the crash of 2008 works its way through redundancy, unemployment and arrears to eviction and the street. As the caps on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) introduced in April are implemented, yet more homelessness is bound to result.

There is a proposal that from January 2013 people under 35 without dependents will no longer be entitled to LHA for a separate property; they will have to claim the Shared

Room Rate (the imputed cost of a room in a shared house).

The upper age limit for this rate is currently 25 and raising it to 35 will affect many people who have been living independently for years, as well as people moving into independent living after a time of homelessness. There is particular concern about parents living apart from their children, who will have to move into properties that are not suitable for their children to stay with or visit them. This is likely to put even more strain on those children and families that are already struggling to maintain relationships.

Via the Blue Print for Local Action website there is a guide to help those who wish to take a proactive role in light of these changes. Follow the link:

http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/data/_resources/554/Blueprint-for-Local-Action.pdf



Welfare Reform

Reforming the benefit system aims to make it fairer, more affordable and better able to tackle poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency. We are committed to overhaul the benefit system to promote work and personal responsibility.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/>



Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income.

It is said that Universal Credit will help claimants and their families to become more independent and will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment. The new Universal Credit system will be launched in 2013 and will replace:

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits

- Working Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit.

On the one hand some would consider it right to encourage the long-term unemployed to seek work and live independent of State support. By limiting families to a maximum of £500 per week it could remove the disincentive of seeking to find work.

There is a helpful BBC article that explores the history and development of the welfare state in UK written by Frank Field MP http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/field_01.shtml

He explores the origins of the help given to those in need characterised by voluntary provision, with mutual and friendly societies delivering a whole range of benefits.

At the local level many churches are approached by individuals seeking help and few would hand over cash.

Often the person's story is heard and then the appropriate response is given in the form of food, transport or support to name a few.

As the effect of welfare reform impacts on communities, the church will come under increasing pressure to respond.

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How would you share the welfare budget fairly to those who need it most?



Trident Submarine replacement

Can we really afford the cost of this?

The government has put the bill at between £15bn and £20bn, but campaign group Greenpeace claims it will run to at least £34bn once extra costs like VAT are factored in. Officials have also warned that any decision to reduce the number of Trident submarines from four to three would not result in a 25% cut in costs.

But its not just the financial cost. At the URC Peace Fellowship Annual Conference held in Birmingham on Sat 3 Nov. 2012 Revd Peter MacDonald, the leader of the Iona Community explained the Scottish dimension to the debate.

The fleet is currently based at Faslane on the Clyde. If the referendum on Scottish independence went in favour of separation from the Union, the

fleet would have to be relocated, as the SNP has said that Scotland would be nuclear free.

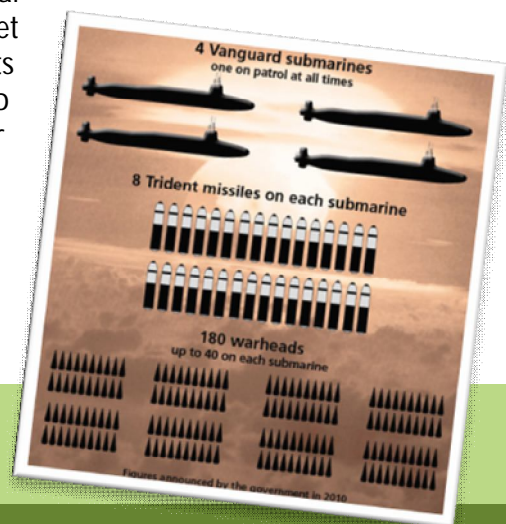
The added cost of such a move would be beyond any of the estimations so far given. The natural site would be in the Thames Estuary around Chatham and the public opposition is likely to divide community and disrupt that part of the country.

The main reason why people are against replacing Trident is that the old Cold War threat from the Soviet Union no longer exists and therefore the UK no longer needs nuclear weapons, or does not need a submarine-based system designed for the Cold War era. It is also said that nuclear

weapons are useless in that they could never be used and would not combat the new threats from international terrorism.

One argument for is that without a Trident replacement the UK's nuclear industry could be severely damaged. Some estimates say that up to 15,000 jobs may be lost - as well as considerable expertise - if a new batch of submarines is not commissioned.

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All we are saying is give peace a chance

URC Southern Synod

Church and Society:



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Droning on ...

Speaking in November 2012, the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) of the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union of Great Britain has voiced support for a parliamentary inquiry into the use of drones. It has been reported that members of the Commons Defence Select Committee are to investigate the deployment of armed unmanned aerial vehicles in Afghanistan as part of a two-year inquiry into the military's use of lethal force.

The use of remote weaponry to seek out and kill alleged enemies of the state may be politically acceptable but is morally indefensible.

The United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church discussed the use of drones to carry out targeted killing at their General Assembly/conference last summer.

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All we are saying is give peace a chance