

Green Party

Dear Philip Glanville, Diane Abbott and Meg Hillier

We are writing to express our disappointment that the Labour Party has backtracked on commitments to support renters, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet after seeing their incomes reduced, or lost during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Hackney is one of the most expensive places to rent in the UK. The average rent for a room in a flatshare is £736 per month. Many private renters were already living precariously prior to the lockdown, with the average renter paying out 59% of their salary in rent. When finances are as tight as this, it's no surprise that many are finding themselves going into arrears with their landlord.

Under Labour policy, Hackney's renters would be liable to pay back any rent arrears accrued during the lockdown within two years, or face eviction. Banning evictions is not enough.

According to our calculations, a Hackney renter paying a median rent on an average salary, on the government's 80% furlough scheme, will accrue £238 rent arrears every month during the lockdown. Over the 4 month furlough scheme, this would total £952. Labour's Shadow Housing Minister Thangam Debbonaire and London Mayor Sadiq Khan propose that this would have to be paid back within 2 years.

Effectively, this meant that the new Labour leadership thinks it acceptable for Hackney renters to be saddled with an extra £40 in monthly rent arrears repayments until 2022.

This kind of burden, likely to be significantly more than £40 per month in some cases, will result in more people having to move out of our borough, losing their support networks, as well as pushing even more people into homelessness and increasing social inequalities.

The Hackney Mayor's request to the Conservative Government to increase housing benefit, provide assistance with rent shortfalls and time to make overdue payments still requires renters to carry the weight of this crisis. Instead of placing a burden on tenants, landlords are in a better situation to shoulder a loss of rental income and to access government support.

Along with the New Economics Foundation and the London Renters Union, Hackney Green Party is calling for an amnesty for all rent arrears built up during the lockdown period.

In this time of crisis, progressive parties should come together to support all members of our local community. Hackney Green Party asks you to stand up for Hackney's 34,000 private renters and join our call for a lockdown rent amnesty.

Best wishes,

Zoë Garbett
On behalf of Hackney Green Party

CC: Sem Moema, Rebecca Rennison, Clayeon McKenzie, Jennette Arnold, Heather Mendick, Maia Kirby