

Living Rent

Annual Report 2018



Contents

- **Introduction** 3
- **Living Rent Objectives** 4
- **Achievements** 5
 - Strengthening our organisational capacity 5
 - Demonstrating the Power of a Tenant's Union 5
 - Engaging With a Wide Audience and Diverse Partners 6
- **Ensuring Tenant Voices are Heard** 7
 - Social Media 7
- **Policy** 8
- **Long Term Strategy** 8
- **Annual Accounts** 9, 10

Introduction by the Chair

Since the last AGM in October 2016, Living Rent has doubled its membership, demonstrated the relevance and value of a tenants' union through numerous tenants' victories, secured additional funding and ensured that tenants' voices are heard throughout Scotland.

Last year, at our second constitutive AGM since we formed as a membership organisation, we outlined the need to hire staff members to support our organisation and actions. Through crowdfunding and our collected dues, we were able to hire Living Rent's first community organiser, Sean Baillie. Trained and managed by ACORN England, throughout the year Sean supported the Glasgow Branch to organise stalls, resist evictions, ask for repairs, win rent decreases, challenge illegal fees, and engage with the Glasgow City Council to examine how rent controls can be introduced throughout the city.

As a result, the Glasgow branch now has tripled its membership, from both the private and the social housing sector and features active, trained and engaged members who have set up various working teams – defence, door-knocking, campaign, and events teams.

In Edinburgh, we continued to organise tenants, support individual tenants and in November 2017 hired another community organiser Maddie Barink. This was thanks to the support of the People's Health Trust, to whom we successfully applied to involve low-income tenants to improve the quality of their home such as fighting against damp and securing repairs.

Throughout the year, we also continued to engage with the legislative process. We submitted responses to various public consultations to ensure that tenants' voices were considered at the level of Parliament, examined the effectiveness of rent controls as suggested by the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016, and launched our own campaign for a Winter Break from evictions.

I hope the year 2018 will feature as many successes. The situation for tenants across Scotland remains difficult – rents across the central belt have risen by 25% over the last 6 years, whilst some letting agencies and landlords continue to disregard our rights and the quality of homes can still be shocking. We hope to work with our members primarily and in collation with unions, community groups and charities to change this situation.

Onwards,
Emma Saunders

Living Rent objectives

Living Rent is Scotland's tenants' union.

We are a democratic organisation run by and for tenants. We formed as a union to ensure that tenants' rights are respected and upheld. We want homes for people, not for profit; to redress the power imbalance between landlords and tenants; and ensure that everyone has decent and affordable housing.

We believe in the collective power of tenants to come together to fight for their rights, and use diverse tactics – including direct action when necessary – to achieve this. We are not affiliated to any political party, but recognise the importance of influencing parties and politicians and holding them to account. We work with a variety of stakeholders, campaigning groups and charities when needed to promote tenants' interests.

In 2017, our main objective was to develop the union and showcase its relevance for helping individual tenants whilst also raising wider issues around housing in Scotland: its price, its quality and its accessibility.

Achievements

Strengthening Our Organisational Capacity

In 2017, we underwent our first recruitment process. Helped by key advice from several charity directors, we set up the administrative, human resource and accounting framework to hire our first community organiser. We organised advertise this position in December 2016, sorted through 25 applications, interviewed 4 people and hired Sean Baillie in February 2017 to support tenants in the Glasgow Branch. We developed a stronger relationship with ACORN England and drafted with them a new working policy, which all ACORN and Living Rent organisers follow.

Following a successful grant application to the People's Health Trust in June 2017, we hired in November 2017 another community organiser Maddie Barink.

Our National Board elected members and co-opted members ensured that we had a coherent media and communication strategy, as well as training for our members. National Board members attended legal and accounting workshops to ensure they were up-to-date with latest regulations and account reporting procedures. The board adopted modern accounting software.

We shifted our platform to from CiviCRM to NationBuilder, to ensure we are complying with new data protection legislation, and that we have an agile Constituent Relations Management database with which to run our campaigns, and engage with our members.

Demonstrating the Power of a Tenants Union

Throughout the year, we have won several individual and collective cases for tenants. By winning such cases, we demonstrate the power of organised tenants and thus confront one of the main issues we have identifies holds back tenants: powerlessness. Stopping an eviction, winning rent decreases, securing repairs, reclaiming illegal fees challenge the impunity and matter-of-factness of housing injustices experienced by tenants.

Over the last year, we have:

- Stopped illegal evictions and ensured that tenants were instead provided with adequate or better accomodation
- Secured repairs for tenants, with help from the Govan Law Center in Glasgow where needed
- Organised legal trainings for tenants, as well as special trainings for migrants arriving in Scotland
- Confronted housing associations' anti-social pressures on tenants
- Challenged disproportionate rent increases
- Helped tenants reclaim illegal fees and withheld deposits
- Organised across tenure, tenants and homeowners to find a solution to the mice infestation they suffer from

As a result, we have supported over 100 households, whether with advice, practical support or information and we have more than doubled our membership, having now 202 dues paying members, whilst the number of our supporters has also increased and reaches now 5600 people.

Engaging With a Wide Audience and Diverse Partners

We believe in the importance of working with others to achieve change. We have worked with WestGAP who have provided us with office space, with Govan Law Centre around difficult legal cases, and with Shelter to run a survey on housing affordability according to our members.

Our members attended conferences and networking events such as a meeting of European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City, a coalition of housing movements across Europe. One of the members of our National Committee attended the meeting of this coalition in Cyprus, building connections with other housing organisations, sharing skills and experience, feeding into the strategy of the Coalition, and taking part in the launch of their international campaign against the financialisation of housing.

Our members organised several events, open to all, throughout the year. These included events legal experts, academics, poets and musicians to ensure that tenants are trained, have the opportunity to debate together key issues relating to housing and also develop a sense of community through sharing informal events, as well as formal ones.

Our meetings were open and accessible to all; we provided childcare when needed and using as much as possible wheelchair accessible venues. We also worked with so-called vulnerable communities such as migrants, translating our training material for it to be understandable to newcomers.

We have also finished the collective editing process of a chapter in the collection of essay organised by Dr Neil Gray, *The Glasgow Rent Strikes: 100 Years On*.

Ensuring Tenant Voices Are Heard

This year, our campaigns and actions have been featured in many prominent print and online publications including the Evening Times, The Guardian, CommonSpace, The Herald and Vice.

Our members have made radio appearances on Radio Clyde and BBC Good Morning Scotland. We have also worked with producers from BBC Panorama and BBC Three to contribute to documentary programmes on housing.

In 2018, we aim to achieve more television exposure, to raise the profile of the organisation and to reach more potential members. We also aim to maintain and build upon our relationships with news outlets to ensure regular coverage of our work.

Social media

We have approximately 5,000 Facebook followers and 2,000 Twitter followers. We have found our branch-specific Facebook groups the best way to engage with our followers and update our members in an informal setting. Our national page has been useful in disseminating information on housing issues, publicising our events and sharing our media coverage.

In 2018, we are looking to create more original educational multimedia content, in particular a series of 'know your rights' videos around the new private tenancy legislation. We would also like to work with members to produce video exposing poor quality rented accommodation.

Policy

Our policy team drafted responses to a consultation around short-term lets, launched an affordability survey to identify the issues tenants experience in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and produced a report around the concept of a 'Winter Break' (the suspension of evictions during the winter months).

We won pledges from elected representatives in Glasgow that they would launch a study of how to implement rent pressure zones throughout Glasgow.

Long-term strategy

In the coming years, Living Rent seeks to continue to challenge the uneven distribution of power between tenants and landlords, in both social or private rented sectors. We will continue to campaign in order that real rent controls are implemented in order to ensure that people across tenure have access to decent, affordable and secure housing.

In the short term, we will continue our campaign for a Winter Break of evictions and working with existing charities, church groups and homeless support services to examine how this can be made into policy.

We have had a number of people approaching us from Dundee, Stirling and Aberdeen with the intention of starting up new branches. We will support them as we can without further funding and seek to secure additional funding to support them. We will also be approaching a number of trusts and applying for grants to secure our organisers' posts. We envision that by the end of the year 2018, dues will cover 1.5 organiser roles and will rely on funding to secure 2 full time organisers throughout this year.

Annual Accounts

Living Rent

For the year ended 31 March 2017

Account	2017
Turnover	
Crowdfunding	870.00
Grants	5,100.00
Members Subscriptions	3,171.15
One Off Donations	53.00
Other Revenue	0.01
Total Turnover	9,194.16
Gross Profit	
	9,194.16
Administrative Costs	
Advertising & Marketing	230.00
Audit & Accountancy fees	370.80
Hiring Costs	98.98
Insurance	501.75
IT Software and Consumables	95.58
Printing & Stationery	36.98
Rent	430.00
Room & Hall Hire	863.50
Salaries	512.64
Staff Training	150.00
Telephone & Internet	20.00
Travel - Staff	100.00
Volunteer Expenses	44.70
Total Administrative Costs	3,454.93
Operating Profit	
	5,739.23
Profit on Ordinary Activities	
Before Taxation	5,739.23
Profit after Taxation	
	5,739.23

Annual Accounts

Living Rent

For the period 1 April 2017 to 20 January 2018

Account	1 Apr 2017-20 Jan 2018
Turnover	
Grants	18,282.00
Members Subscriptions	7,087.29
Org Donations - speaking, workshops	325.00
Total Turnover	25,694.29
Gross Profit	
	25,694.29
Administrative Costs	
Advertising & Marketing	107.36
Bank Fees	7.54
Employers National Insurance	216.74
Hiring Costs	390.38
IT Software and Consumables	1,648.43
Payroll Service Costs	368.70
Printing & Stationery	186.22
Rent	1,850.00
Room & Hall Hire	260.00
Salaries	9,977.26
Staff Expenses	901.24
Staff Training	125.00
Telephone & Internet	127.78
Travel - Volunteers	195.08
Volunteer Expenses	96.55
Total Administrative Costs	16,458.28
Operating Profit	
	9,236.01
Profit on Ordinary Activities Before Taxation	
	9,236.01
Profit after Taxation	
	9,236.01