

# TENANTS' MANIFESTO 2020/21

LIVING  
RENT



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## **1** Fighting the growth of buy to let landlordism in our communities:-

*Increasingly former public housing is becoming a vehicle for buy to let landlords, negatively impacting on housing schemes and their residents. We propose that before any house privately acquired under right to buy legislation is resold on the open property market, that the local RSL is given the first right of refusal over whether it wishes to make an offer to buy the property.*

## **2** Restorative justice for vacant land in all new public housing, to maximise public housing:-

*Dealing with the long term impact of mass demolitions of public housing, which in the past twenty years saw 66,000<sup>1</sup> homes demolished, largely unnecessarily, with great environmental impact, we propose that "vacant land", particularly where these demolitions took place, should be a focus for the redevelopment of public housing. We believe that sectoral demands for 53,000 new affordable homes do not fully address the shortfall, but furthermore that it is particularly important in terms of restorative social and environmental justice that the site of former public homes is the location for new public housing developments. Given the enormous environmental impact of public housing demolitions it is paramount that new housing is constructed to last, built to the highest environmental standards, fit for purpose, incorporating district heating and rated for maximum energy efficiency, with technologies such Passivhaus or similar approaches (e.g. those proposed in Our Common Home Plan).*

## **3** Tackle the accountability gap in stock transfer landlords:-

*Housing stock transfer has not met the intended goal of community led housing, but has instead seen large landlords like the GHA transform into nationwide landlords, imposing rents and policies across huge tracts of the country. It is vital that the role of tenants and public authorities is strengthened in the governance of such landlords. Tenant and Municipal board members must not be bound by confidentiality clauses and must be allowed to freely criticise decisions. Such representation should be expanded.*

*We propose that annual rent consultations mandated for RSLs are given a statutory basis. Should a simple majority of tenants participating in consultations oppose or favour rent rises then this should be legally binding. All rent consultations must include an option to reject rent rises at the current time.*



## 4 Introduce rent controls to improve the quality of our housing stock:-

The current measures in place to limit sky-high rents across all tenures have failed. Stipulations in the legislation mean that three years since Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) were introduced, no council has been able to implement them. Even if they were to be introduced, there is no evidence they would be sufficient in tackling the hardship faced by tenants; they could also have an inflationary impact on rents between tenancies and do not have the scope to monitor housing quality. We advocate a points-based system which is tied to the property, rather than the lease. This would stop landlords being able to hike rents between tenancies and continue to push up market rates.

The most recent Scottish Housing Conditions survey found that 1 in 2 privately rented dwellings had 'some disrepair to critical elements'<sup>2</sup>. In social housing, run by both the council and housing associations, our members have mobilised around poor standards of repair and hygiene during the pandemic and prior. We propose a points-based system of rent controls linked to the quality and amenities of a property, rather than just market rates. Here, a points-based system would incentivise housing providers to maintain and improve their property, ensure that landlords are unable to hike rents between tenancies whilst still keeping an overall cap on rents. We believe this should be mediated by an independent body, a Scottish Living Rent Commission, as a centre for expertise and regulation for renters.

1. Scottish Government: Housing statistics: Conversions and demolitions: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-conversions-and-demolitions/>

2. Scottish Government: The Scottish House Condition Survey 2016: key findings: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/12/5401/348230>

3. Scottish Government: Private sector rent statistics: 2010-2017: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-scotland-2010-2017/> STV: Private renters living in poverty up 75% in a decade: <https://stv.tv/news/politics/1427402-private-renters-living-in-poverty-up-75-in-a-decade/>

## 5 Bring rents down—not just limit its increase:-

Rents are simply unaffordable for most tenants, increasing far beyond the rate of inflation and have completely flown free from our wages. Since 2010 average rents for a 2-bed property in the Lothians has increased by 33.7% to 2017 yet in the same period, wages have decreased in real terms. This has contributed to the number of tenant's living in poverty increased by 75% between 2007 and 2017<sup>3</sup>.

Since the deregulation of social housing in the 1980s and the stock transfer to housing associations, rents have been able to spiral out of control. Housing associations are more expensive to run than council housing and therefore typically have higher rents. In social housing, this has been in large part due to a decrease in housing stock with 66,000 demolitions. Approximately a third of properties purchased during Right to Buy is now rented by private landlords, stock transfer of remaining council stock has seen cheaper council housing stocks vanish. —The growth of rentier capitalists who are buying up owner-occupied houses has made it impossible for people who want to buy their own home to do so. The government's efforts to encourage first-time buyers, in reality, has just been a subsidy for buy to let landlords to acquire new cheap housing.

Rent needs to be reduced. A new Scottish Rent Affordability Index to peg maximum rents at affordable levels for tenants would ensure that rent is affordable for all. This should not be limited to conventional private lets. Otherwise, we risk developers instead focusing on building student properties or letting out their homes through short term lets to avoid the legislation. And should not exclude social tenants from these measures to protect renters. This doesn't mean we should have less regulation, we need more.

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