Partick/Scotstoun Living Rent – The Story So Far

Who are we?

Living Rent is Scotland’s largest tenants’ union. We are a democratic organisation, made up of social and private renters. Our union is structured with local organising committees and branches, so that members can organise quickly and effectively around housing issues in their neighbourhood. We fight for affordable, safe and secure housing. By building collective power among tenants, Living Rent is mobilising a force that holds landlords to account for their shortcomings, and puts people before profit.

In June 2020, some of our members who are tenants in Partick and Scotstoun came together and assembled as a committee. Since then, we have been organising around various campaigns and demanding better living conditions for tenants in the area.

Here’s what we’ve been up to so far...

Pandemic Hygiene Standards

On 14th April 2020, the Scottish government published guidance for social landlords on how to keep their properties up to a reasonable standard of hygiene, given the safety threat posed by the spread of Covid-19. This stated the need for ‘frequent daily cleaning’ of high contact areas, ensuring cleaning staff had been issued with the appropriate PPE, and providing tenants with regular updates on how cleaning protocols were being reviewed.

Living Rent members who are
Partick Housing Association tenants highlighted some experiences which contradicted the expected standards detailed in this government guidance. Cleaning staff with no PPE; a singular (and rushed!) ‘deep clean’ of the close at the beginning of the pandemic, not to be repeated regularly as it should have been; a single hygiene protocol update for tenants (dated in March). A picture altogether inconsistent with the Scottish government guidelines.

What did we do?

Union representatives went down to Mansfield Park and spoke to local residents about hygiene standards in closes during the pandemic. We gathered testimonies from our members and wrote to Partick Housing Association, demanding that they adapt their protocols to meet the standard deemed reasonable by the Scottish government. PHA denied that they were even in breach of these standards – despite cleaning services being suspended! Nonetheless, the closes were cleaned again soon after…

Rodent Issues

Did you read the Evening Times articles about Gillian, a Partick Housing Association tenant with a young family living in a flat infested with rats?

Gillian, a Living Rent member, spoke with the union about longstanding problems with rats in her flat, and PHA’s failure to get this issue resolved. As part of our response, we stuck up photos on PHA’s offices which showed the rats and damage caused by rats in the flat. This action was covered by the Evening Times and caused quite a stir in the community – we learnt that Gillian’s issues with rats were not uncommon.

In October, we put on a stall in Mansfield Park in order to speak with local tenants about their problems with Partick Housing Association, especially around the rodent issue. Complete with home-made rats crafted out of felt and leaflets with contact info for one of our organisers, the stall not only gave tenants a chance to be listened to as they spoke about how the vermin problem has affected them, but also a way of getting in touch with the organising committee as a first step towards tackling the problem in a collective, organised way. Through the discussions our members heard about rats and mice hanging out in peoples’ bins, clawing around in the walls and even running from flat to flat along windowsills!

Another theme that came up in conversations were the concerns of locals with the recent redevelopment projects like those of Glasgow University’s huge campus expansion, which have seen old buildings knocked down and their resident mice and rats fleeing into Partick to take up new homes on Chancellor street and the surrounding blocks. In this can be seen yet another negative effect of private construction projects that consider neither the concerns nor the health of the local community.

Overall, the takeaway was that there has been broad and consistent negligence on the part of Partick Housing Association in dealing with the rodent issues that their tenants bring to them. One person we spoke to even directed us to a newsletter issued by the housing association which places responsibility for dealing with vermin on tenants themselves, instead of committing to comprehensively fix the issue across their housing stock.

Alongside this community outreach, the union was working hard with Gillian to find a resolve for her particular case. Union reps accompanied Gillian to a meeting with Partick Housing Association, where we negotiated terms for her relocation. 4 days later, Gillian was offered a new flat.

Tenant’s Surgery

Ahead of our tenants’ surgery in Mansfield Park on the 14th of November, on a couple of evenings our branch members went out putting posters up in closes along Mansfield Park and Chancellor Street to get the word out about the tenants’ surgery the following Saturday.

Our surgery aimed to speak with local tenants – primarily social housing tenants – about their experiences in the area with vermin, hygiene, landlord-tenant communication, and general living standards.
We learned that many tenants had experienced problems with their housing, and had reported these to the Housing Association, only to be told that their issues were their own; not shared by other tenants, and not to be dealt with by anyone other than the tenant complaining. This individualised response was consistent with previous positions taken by Partick Housing Association that put the onus on tenants to solve their own issues.

There is a behavioural pattern here, that goes something like this: When tenants complain, suggest that the tenant fix the problem themselves, and make the tenant feel like they are the only one with this problem.

The impact of such an approach is that landlords manage to absolve themselves of their responsibilities, whilst minimising the significance of collective experiences, therefore reducing the likelihood of collective responses.

Living Rent aims to change this. By fighting battles together, we are tipping the power scales back in favour of the community. We are stronger as a group. Our victories as a union prove this.

Opposing the Beith Street Development

The union caught wind of developers’ plans to build 424 Buy To Rent flats on Beith Street, along the ‘river corridor’, aimed at single tenants. In an area with inadequate and insufficient social housing stock, it seems baffling that a development like this could be given the green light. Not only would these flats do nothing to address existing housing shortages and inequality for local families, they would have a knock-on effect on private rental prices in the area and exacerbate these problems.

On this basis, Living Rent members contacted Glasgow City Council and made formal objections to the development plans. We hope that city planners reconsider, and engage local councillors, unions, and tenants in a dialogue about the housing needs of Partick. Living Rent Partick-Scotstoun stands in unequivocal opposition to the development of even more profit-driven, landlord owned properties in the area. Social housing projects should be given right of first refusal on these vacant pieces of land.

Where next for Living Rent Partick-Scotstoun?

Its been a busy six months for our organising committee. We’ve fought hard campaigns, made our presence known within the community, and recorded some important victories for our members. With these successes in mind, and with the pace at which we are gaining momentum as an organisation, we have decided to launch as an official branch of Living Rent.

On 8th of December, we will be meeting on Zoom for an official launch. This will involve electing official branch representatives, discussing key campaigns for 2021, and building plans around the issues put forward by our membership.
We are run by and for our members. Our organisation can only deliver change with the involvement and participation of our members.

Poor housing? Problems with your exploitative landlord? Housing Association not listening to you? Are you threatened with eviction? Do you feel that your neighbourhood would benefit from the presence of community-led organisations which challenge existing power structures?

If you are a tenant – private or social – in the Partick and Scotstoun area and these issues resonate with you, then join Living Rent.

Come along to our branch launch. Help choose our next campaigns. Take action.

Click the link and take back power!

Join your local branch of Living Rent!

We will also hear too about what our community could look like, what we could achieve together if we work together to achieve Partick power.

What we will do at the launch
Due to the pandemic we will be meeting online, using Zoom. If you’d like to come and you’ve never used Zoom before don’t worry, just click the link available at:-

www.livingrent.org/partick_launch

we will be electing our committee, and as such we’d like to invite as many people as possible to take part as members or to come along as observers; you can join the union on the day and take part, or why not join us today online at:-

www.livingrent.org/join

Alongside electing our committee we will also be putting to our members what campaigns we take on in 2021, whether that be fighting unjust local developments, campaigning to raise the standards of local housing, or eradicating vermin issues in the area.

Partick residents have been fighting overdevelopment on Beith street for some time: locals here seen protesting an earlier development of 48 flats on local greenspace.

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