

National Renter Manifesto



Almost one in five people are private renters in the UK today. In England alone, private renters represent 4.5 million households, including one in four families with children and over a million people with a disability or long-term health condition.¹ Many of us will grow old in privately rented homes. Our housing system works well for the two million landlords in England – but it doesn't work for tenants. Too often renters spend half their income on rent, only to face poor conditions and no secure place to call home. Meanwhile landlords make billions in profit every year.² Private renters have few rights to fall back on, but are nevertheless fast becoming a political force. A national renters movement is building, with renters coming together to stand up for their rights, join renter unions and campaign for housing justice.

This National Renter Manifesto sets out the steps needed to ensure that everybody has a secure, affordable and decent home. The manifesto is based on joint work between Generation Rent, London Renters Union, ACORN, Tenants Union UK, Renters' Rights London and the New Economics Foundation. We are organisations that represent and support private renters, campaigning for radical reform of private renting and a transformation of our housing system. The manifesto covers six key themes: Security, Affordability, Justice, Conditions, Discrimination, and Housing for People Not Profit.

1. Open-ended tenancies and an end to section 21 evictions

Security of tenure in England is among the worst in Europe: Tenancies are as short as six months and the government has yet to make good on its pledge to end Section 21 “no fault” evictions. Eviction from the private rented sector is the leading cause of homelessness in England.³ To ensure that renters have the security to build a stable life, we need open-ended tenancies and an end to Section 21. Landlords should only be able to end a tenancy in very limited circumstances, and relocation payments should be made to tenants when this occurs. If the tenant wishes to stay in the property, landlords who wish to sell should sell with the tenant in situ.

2. Rent controls which bring down rents to 30% of local income

Rents in England eat up household income and push people into financial hardship. One in four private renters in England lives in poverty. Over half of the families with children living in private rented accommodation are below the poverty line. We need rent controls that bring rents down to 30% of median local income, following the accepted yardstick of affordability. Rent controls should be introduced incrementally, to prevent negative consequences for current tenants, and should be accompanied by a massive increase in public housebuilding.⁴

3. Public investment in a massive public housebuilding programme

Decades of undersupply of council and social housing stock, compounded by Right to Buy, has meant millions of people on low incomes have no choice but to rent privately or face homelessness. We need large-scale public investment in building high-quality council homes or community-led housing to ensure that everyone has access to a secure and affordable home. Right to Buy must be scrapped to protect access to housing for future generations.

4. Private rented homes brought into democratic public ownership

If landlords choose to sell their properties, the local authority or community-led housing projects should have first refusal. Any homes bought by the local authority through this channel should be converted into council homes, with the tenant remaining in situ if they wish to. This will prevent eviction of tenants and increase council housing stock.

5. A welfare system that supports access to safe, secure, affordable housing

Benefit shortfalls, delays and sanctions within the welfare system put private renters at risk of eviction and homelessness. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and other relevant public bodies must urgently address these issues to ensure that people claiming benefits can access housing and stay in their homes.

6. National database of landlords and rents

There is no comprehensive, publicly available data on landlords, properties or rents. This will be vital for implementing rent controls and for building the power of tenants. There should be mandatory national licensing and registration of private landlords and rented properties, including information on ownership and the amount of rent paid. The data should be freely and publicly available in an online database, giving local authorities the intelligence to enforce standards. Registration should work in conjunction with local licensing, and enforcement schemes and should be contingent on landlords maintaining good standards in their properties and meeting the conditions set out by local authorities.

7. Decent and safe private rented homes

Landlords should be required to demonstrate that their homes meet good standards, beyond the minimum requirement for Homes fit for Human Habitation. Homes should be subject to an annual “housing MOT”. The ability to operate as a landlord and collect rent should be contingent on properties being of good standard and landlords meeting conditions set out by local authorities. Enforcement processes and licensing schemes should put tenant needs at their heart.

8. Decent and safe temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation has become long term housing for hundreds of thousands of people. Too often, conditions are exceptionally poor or even dangerous. Temporary and emergency housing must be safe, secure and part of a quick, clear path to a permanent home, with standards monitored and enforced by local authorities. Landlords and management companies providing temporary accommodation must be made properly

accountable and their properties subject to the same standards, monitoring and enforcement as other private rented homes. Data on the use, extent and public cost of temporary accommodation should be collected and made publicly available. And temporary should mean temporary – public investment in high quality council homes is needed to reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

9. Private rented homes to address the climate emergency and help end fuel poverty

Energy efficiency in the private rented sector is poor in comparison to other tenures. Private rented homes should be made energy efficient to address the climate emergency and help end fuel poverty. Landlords should be required to bring private rented homes up to their maximum potential EPC rating. Financial support should be available to landlords to assist them in meeting this target, and sanctions should be applied to landlords who fail to make their homes energy efficient.

10. Private renters to have control of their homes

The vast majority of renters lack basic control over their home environment, yet being able to make decisions relating to one's home is vital for wider wellbeing. Private renters should have more control over their homes, including the right to install aids and adaptations to make their homes accessible, to redecorate, and to keep pets. Tenants should be able to carry out anything short of structural changes that will improve their quality of life and allow them to flourish in their homes.

11. Improve access to justice for private renters

Private renters in dispute with their landlord often face difficulties accessing legal support. Free housing advice services are in decline and lawyers are prohibitively expensive: most private renters have no savings and struggle to pay for legal support. Legal aid for housing cases should be restored and extended, and local support and advice on housing issues must be readily available.

12. End Right to Rent

Mandatory "Right to Rent" checks on immigration status by landlords have encouraged racial discrimination in housing and made the private rental sector a part of the hostile environment. Right to Rent checks push migrants

into renting from and being exploited by the very worst landlords. Discrimination against tenants based on their immigration status must end.

13. End discrimination against benefit claimants

Private rented properties continue to be advertised as "No DSS", a clear form of discrimination against private renters claiming benefits – often women, families, or people with long-term conditions or disabilities. DSS discrimination can be understood as a form of indirect discrimination covered by the provisions of the Equality Act. We must end benefit discrimination in the private rental market through publishing legally binding guidance on the Equality Act, or by other legal means.

14. Homes not assets

Housing is now valued as an asset more than as a place to live. Property has become an important form of speculation and income generation. Investors have flooded into the private rental market, pushing up the cost of housing and creating an affordability crisis for almost everyone else. We must end the financialisation of housing and disincentivise landlordism to ensure that our housing system meets the needs of people over the interests of private profit, investors or financial capital. Housing must be seen as a fundamental human right and not as an asset for the generation of profit.

15. Renters rights to organise

Renters' needs have been ignored for too long, with the interests of landlords prioritised over tenants. Politically independent renter unions should be recognised, including through legal provision for collective bargaining, the right to rent strike and laws against victimisation of renters involved in union organising. Renter unions should be actively supported in their work: public funding should be made available to renter unions and unions should be publicised to new tenants. Renter unions should be consulted on policy decisions which affect renters, and tenant representatives should sit on boards setting and monitoring standards and rent controls.

References

- 1.** 13m private renters in the UK, 11m in England; 5.2m households in the UK, 4.5m in England (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/ukprivaterentedsector/2018> , <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2017-to-2018-headline-report>)
One in four families with children In Britain are renting privately (<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2017/jun/12/one-in-four-households-in-britain-will-rent-privately-by-end-of-2021-says-report>).
One in seven private renters spend more than half their income on rent, compared to 2% of homeowners. (<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2017/jul/03/one-in-seven-private-tenants-pays-more-than-half-income-in-rent-study-finds>)
23% of private renters include someone with long term health condition or disability (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627686/Private_rented_sector_report_2015-16.pdf)
- 2.** 2 million landlords in England, while UK tenants paid £50bn in rents in 2017 and landlords made £177bn profit from rising house prices in five years to 2015. (<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2018/feb/12/uk-tenants-paid-record-50bn-in-rents-in-2017> and <https://www.ft.com/content/b94cd0d2-95a8-11e4-a390-00144feabdc0>)
- 3.** Eviction from the private rented sector is the leading cause of homelessness in England (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/18/no-fault-evictions-hundreds-of-families-homeless-each-week>)
- 4.** Between 2013 and 2016 in London alone, over 960,000 private renters were living in poverty, and 55% of children growing up in private rented housing are living in poverty (<https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/key-facts-london-poverty-and-inequality/>)
The private rented sector has the highest proportion of the most energy inefficient homes (<https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/about-us/news/minimum-energy-efficiency-standards-private-rented-sector>)
10% of landlords and letting agents have a policy not to rent to anyone on housing benefit (<https://www.inside-housing.co.uk/news/news/government-looks-to-ban-no-dss-letting-adverts-60424>)