



How Metro Mayors can support renters

A Renters' Manifesto for City Regions

February 2024

Introduction

On Thursday 2nd May, voters in ten city regions will elect Metro Mayors. These are:

- East Midlands
- Greater Manchester
- Liverpool City Region
- London
- North East
- South Yorkshire
- Tees Valley
- West Midlands
- West Yorkshire
- York and North Yorkshire

There are six things candidates can do to improve life for the private renters they will represent

1

Create a landlord and letting agent fines and prosecutions database.

2

Work with the local police force to end illegal evictions through better police training and proper recording of incidents.

3

Host a fighting fund to tackle the worst landlords and seize their properties.

4

Ask national Government for powers to regulate rents, fast-track developments and approve licensing schemes in your region.

5

Buy previously privately rented homes and provide them for social tenants, reversing the flow of social housing into the hands of private landlords.

6

Create a renters' forum to involve private renters in decisions that affect housing and your wider work.

**Everyone deserves
a safe and secure
home at a price
they can afford.**

But many private renters in our cities face high rents, substandard and even dangerous conditions, all in the knowledge that they can be evicted by their landlord at just two months' notice.

Lack of affordable homes in the private rented sector is fuelling a rise in homelessness. This manifesto sets out a plan for Mayors elected on 2nd May to

ensure their city region's renters have access to secure, quality and genuinely affordable homes.

Metro Mayors have powers to improve their city region's rental markets directly, but they also have a powerful voice on the national stage which they must use to demand reforms from the government in Westminster.

1



Fines and prosecutions database

One in eight privately rented homes is unsafe, with more homes classed as 'non decent' than any other tenure.¹ These conditions directly affect renters' health: hazards in the home are estimated to cost the NHS £1.1bn a year, and a 2023 study by the University of Essex found that being a private renter is linked to more rapid biological ageing.² A city region-wide rogue landlord database, as exists in London, would allow us to see if our landlord had broken the law, and help keep tenants safe. Local authorities would individually upload the details of landlords who have been prosecuted or fined in the last 5 years.



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2



Illegal evictions

In the four years 2019-2022, 4,360 households sought homelessness support from their local authority after an illegal eviction. Because not everyone will be eligible for homelessness support the true number of illegal evictions is likely to be much higher. In the same period, just 91 landlords were prosecuted under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977.³

Illegal eviction is a crime – landlords cannot change the locks, harass or otherwise force a tenant to leave their home. But many police officers lack the training required to recognise illegal eviction and act appropriately, as incidents are often mistaken for civil matters. Too often, tenants report calling the police for support, only to have the police refuse to help them.

Every mayor should work with the local police to introduce training to identify and respond to criminal activity, such as illegal evictions. Mayors of Greater London, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire have additional powers as commissioners presiding over their respective police forces. Generation Rent is calling on them to improve training in the Protection from Eviction Act for their officers and call handlers, record all incidents involving landlords and renters, and work directly with local authorities to prevent illegal evictions and prosecute criminals. The Mayor of London and Metropolitan Police updated guidance on this in 2023 and other mayors should take a similar approach.⁴

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-headline-report>
 2. <https://bregroup.com/press-releases/tackling-cold-homes-would-save-the-nhs-540mn-per-year-new-bre-research-reveals/>
<https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/news/2023/10/09/renting-rather-than-owning-a-private-sector-home-linked-to-faster-biological-ageing>
 3. Generation Rent analysis of Home Office and Statutory Homelessness statistics
 4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/27/met-officers-to-be-told-to-arrest-landlords-illegal-evictions>

3

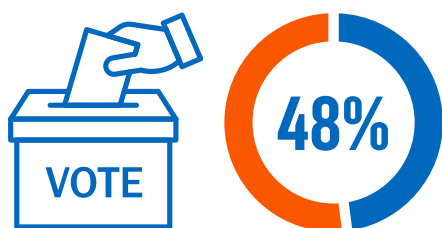


A fighting fund and seizing property

Private renters rely on our local authorities to take action if our home is unsafe and landlords are failing to take action to meet minimum standards. Unfortunately, even when environmental health officers find hazardous conditions they don't always take sufficient action to hold landlords to account. This is partly due to limited budgets at local authority level which reduce their appetite to fine or prosecute landlords who flout the law, or take over their properties when they have been found unfit to provide housing.

The lack of legal action against criminal landlords emboldens them to continue to exploit and mistreat tenants. Very often these landlords have portfolios that straddle local boundaries, so no single local authority can drive them out of business alone.

Metro Mayors should play a greater role in supporting local authorities, through coordination of enforcement policies, facilitating the sharing of intelligence, and providing institutional support for local authorities considering legal action against criminal landlords. This could include a fund to enable more prosecutions, and the infrastructure to manage homes seized through interim management orders – both of which local authorities lack on their own.



2.3m private renter households are electing a metro mayor in May – 48% of households who live in the private rented sector

4



Devolved powers for regulation, development and licensing

Metro Mayors currently have limited powers over housing, despite being well-placed to respond to the particular challenges of their city regions. Candidates should commit to campaigning, alongside their counterparts around the country, for greater devolved powers to regulate the rental market and bring down the cost of renting a home.

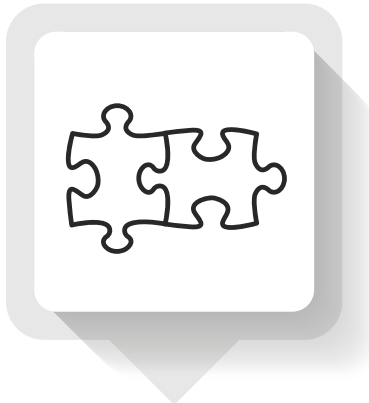
Currently local authorities must seek the approval of the Housing Secretary in order to introduce selective licensing schemes to more than 20% of the local rental market. These schemes allow local authorities to target enforcement on areas that are particularly vulnerable to bad landlords, but without local autonomy their impact remains muted. Metro Mayors have the ability to act strategically so should have the power to approve licensing schemes and thereby coordinate local authorities' efforts to regulate their private rental markets.

Rents have risen rapidly since the end of pandemic restrictions and anyone trying to move home is facing costs that have risen by more than wages have. We know that building more homes is the only sustainable way to bring down rents, with every 40 new homes per 1000 people reducing the rent-to-income ratio by approximately 2.5 percentage points.⁵ We also know that a high proportion of these homes must be social homes to directly help those of us most vulnerable to homelessness.

But building more will take years and renters on low and middle incomes need relief now. Metro Mayors should demand powers both to regulate rents in their city regions and to set planning rules that speed up delivery of new homes as long as they provide sufficient amenities and infrastructure, and meet affordability, climate and biodiversity criteria. French cities have similar powers and enjoy a much healthier housing market than England's.

5. Generation Rent analysis of ONS local rent indices, income, population and housing stock data

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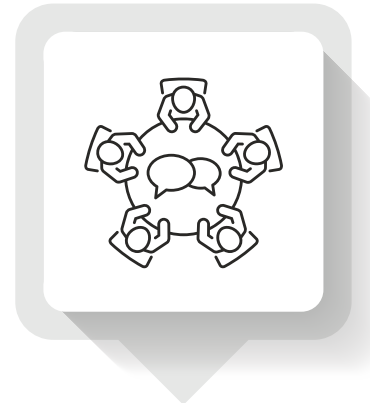
From private renting to social housing

The decline of social housing is making it more expensive for local authorities to meet their statutory homelessness obligations. Just 25% of homeless households get a social tenancy – 63% are put in nightly private sector accommodation, bed and breakfasts or private rented homes leased by the local authority, which are eight times more expensive per household than social housing. Total spending on temporary accommodation has increased by 47% since 2018-19.⁶

The privatisation of housing over the past generation has produced a situation where homes that would once have provided affordable, long term tenancies for families are now housing those same families but on precarious, extortionate arrangements. With some landlords now struggling to remain profitable as a result of higher interest rates, there is an opportunity for local authorities to bring homes back into the social sector to provide a more sustainable option, both for households facing homelessness and the public finances.

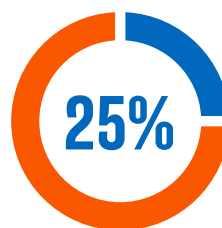
Mayors should consider creating a fund on the principles set out by the Affordable Housing Commission to acquire existing homes and let them out to tenants in greatest housing need.⁷ This would be in addition to the building of new homes for social rent. The acquisition would be an opportunity to retrofit homes and bring city regions closer to meeting climate goals.

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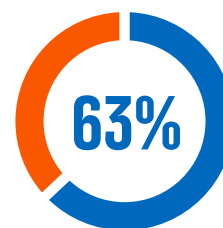


A renters' forum

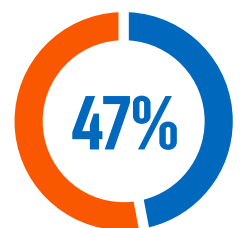
Too often, the needs of renters in the local community are overlooked in favour of landlords or large developers. All private renters should be given a vote on decisions that will directly affect their housing, such as estate regeneration. In London, social tenants enjoy this right already but the institutional indifference to the views and experiences of private renters is a significant factor in the much worse outcomes we face. The mayor should establish and consult with a renters' forum on the city region's housing strategy, to ensure the mayor and their team are aware of the issues private renters face. This forum should reflect the diversity of renters in the city-region.



Just 25% of homeless households get a social tenancy



63% are put in nightly private sector accommodation, bed and breakfasts or private rented homes



Total spending on temporary accommodation increased by 47% since 2018-19

6. Generation Rent analysis of statutory homelessness statistics and local government spending.

7. <https://nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Affordable-Housing-Commission-report-on-A-National-Housing-Conversion-Fund-23-sept-2020.pdf>

**WE
WANT
TO HEAR
FROM
YOU**



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