



LRU submission to the Renters Rights Bill committee

The London Renters Union has over 7,000 members across London. Each year we support more than 1,000 private renters to challenge illegal or unfair behaviour by landlords and the actions of often unresponsive councils.

Disrepair and enforcement

“When I called the council during an illegal eviction, I was told that the council couldn’t do anything. I wasn’t given another number or any other way to get in touch with my issue” – LRU member in East London

“I complained to my council about dangerous disrepair in my property. They told me all they could do was send me an application for homelessness to fill out” – LRU member in West London

A lack of enforcement activity

As of 2022, around 21% of PRS properties failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, with 12% classified as having Category 1 hazards. A 2021 [report](#) by the National Audit Office found that many local authorities do not fulfil their regulatory obligations well and that many do not have the resources to proactively inspect and carry out enforcement.

Freedom of information data [shows](#) both a low amount of overall enforcement activity compared to the number of unsafe houses and a wide range in the amount of enforcement activity carried out by different local authorities:

- In the period 2017-2020, Brent council issued 456 improvement notices while Hackney issued just 56.
- Over the same period, Liverpool council reported carrying out 22,481 inspections (one inspection per 2.15 renters), while Haringey carried out just 761 (one inspection per 42.17 renters).
- In the period 2018-2021, Newham issued fines totalling £318,700, while Haringey did not issue any fines at all.

A lack of deterrent

LRU branches often experience councils failing to uphold the rights of tenants. Too often, councils approach their role as mediators rather than regulators. Complaints are often ignored entirely. Where councils do communicate with a landlord, they are often reluctant to escalate from communication with a landlord towards enforcement action, such as issuing an improvement notice or a fine or prosecution. **It is therefore often cheaper for landlords to break the rules than follow them, giving landlords a green light to break the law.** Requests for support often go unanswered or, worse still, council staff lack basic information about their powers and responsibilities and make things worse.

Case studies

To give some examples:

- Requests by renters for the councils to inspect a property or otherwise intervene are often simply ignored. In summer 2023, staff at an East London council did not respond to urgent emails from a renter facing illegal eviction for nearly a month. The officers only responded once LRU got involved and contacted local councillors.
- In spring 2024, LRU alerted a south London council to a situation involving a landlord leaving a renter facing serious damp and mould and responding to requests for repairs by issuing a Section 21 notice. Council officers including the head of service did not believe LRU when we explained that if the council issued an improvement notice, this would mean that the Section 21 notice would be paused by a court. By the time the council issued a notice, it was too late. The landlord was granted a possession order.
- In Summer 2023, LRU alerted a council in east London to a situation where a renter was facing serious disrepair including damp and mould and also significant landlord harassment. Instead of threatening a fine or issuing an improvement notice, the council issued an informal email to the landlord that directly copy and pasted from our email to them. Because the council had not provided legal protection from eviction via an improvement notice or made clear that their ongoing violations of the law would have consequences, the landlord continued their behaviour. The landlord was angry with our member that the council had been notified and ramped up their harassment.
- In April 2022, a council in east London went along with a landlord's false claim that our member was a lodger despite clear evidence to the contrary, leading to our member's illegal and violent eviction.

A lack of resource and political will

Since 2021, the LRU has been working closely with a number of councils to pressure and support them to increase and improve their enforcement activities. In one borough in particular, enforcement action and responsiveness has improved. Several boroughs have started the process of introducing borough-wide selective licensing as a result of pressure from renters. However, in several other boroughs, promised additional resourcing has not been implemented and enforcement systems remain largely unresponsive. Some councils choose to focus only on the worst 'rogue' landlords, which ignores the scale of disrepair and illegal behaviour.

In conversations with council leaders and senior officers, it is clear that many councils lack the political will to properly enforce private rented sector standards. Some leaders and officers simply do not see it as a priority. Others say they are fearful because they rely on landlords to provide temporary accommodation. Renters should not be subjected to this kind of postcode lottery with regards to their ability to access their rights.

The government has promised new rights for renters such as the application of the Decent Homes Standard and of Awaab's Law to the private rented sector and new powers for councils. **However, new rights for renters are meaningless if the local authorities responsible for upholding them are unwilling or unable to do so.** Requiring councils to publish data regarding fines and inspections is something that LRU has called for and is welcome. However, the government's plans are not

sufficient to address the near collapse of local authority enforcement in many parts of the country and the lack of political will and resources that many councils have to carry out enforcement activity.

Recommendations

We urge the government to amend the Renters Rights Bill and its plans regarding enforcement:

- Renters should have the right to pause rent payments when they face serious disrepair. This would give tenants a new legal power to force landlords to address urgent safety issues that does not rely on them being lucky enough to be able to access legal representation or to live in a local authority that has the resources and political will to assist them.
- The government should issue clear guidance to councils regarding their responsibilities to enforce standards. Guidance should make clear to councils that there needs to be a large increase in the overall amount of enforcement and that their role is to routinely issue fines and take formal enforcement action when landlords break the rules so there is a clear deterrent to breaking the rules.
- Councils should receive ring-fenced funding for private rented sector enforcement. A portion of the registration fee for the new landlord database should be used to pay for local authority enforcement.
- Training of environmental health officers with a housing specialism should be well-funded and resourced.

Economic evictions by the back door

“When some new expensive luxury flats were put on the market in my neighbourhood, my landlord told me that he was increasing the rent by £645 per month to match the price of the new flats even though our flat wasn’t anywhere as nice as those luxury ones. This was a 55% increase. Me and my partner had no choice but to move out and it caused months of stress and anxiety and had a big impact on our mental health.” - Liam, North London, quoted in the Renters Reform Coalition [report](#).

The government’s proposed changes to the housing tribunal system for challenging rent rises will not prevent landlords from carrying out unfair rent increases, leading to significant insecurity and rent rises serving to discourage tenants from reporting disrepair.

The Renters’ Rights Bill should prevent landlords retaining the power to carry out no-fault evictions via unaffordable rent hikes, by limiting rent increases within tenancies to the lowest of either inflation (CPI), or median income growth, averaged over the last 3 years.

LRU has recorded information about 398 rent rises faced by our members since September 2022:

- The **average rent increase was 28.89%** or £310 per month.
- The biggest absolute rent rises reported was from £1,300 to £2,600, **an increase of £1,300.**
- The biggest percentage terms rent rise reported was a couple sharing a flat who received a **79% rent increase to £1,700.**

For many renters, a rent increase of this size is effectively the same as a Section 21 eviction notice. **Fear of such rent increases discourage renters from raising disrepair and safety issues**

Under new plans, when certain conditions are met, renters will be able challenge rent increases through the housing tribunal. However, the tribunal system will not provide sufficient protection from unfair eviction because:

- Renters can only challenge rent increases which are to levels substantially above market rent levels in the area. As long as the rent hike is within the range of the market for the area, the rent hike would be legitimate, and the tenant could be evicted in response to complaints or requests for improvements made.
- The onus will be on tenants to provide evidence about the rent of similar properties in their area, making it likely that tribunals will default to using new rents as the measure for market rent in a way that does not distinguish on the basis of property quality.
- A tribunal puts the emphasis on tenants knowing about and knowing how to navigate a complicated tribunal system, and relies on the capacity of the tribunal system. It is likely to only be used by a small fraction of tenants.

Government must look beyond the tribunal system to close a loophole that undermines the ability of the Renters Rights Bill to end unfair no-fault evictions. It should introduce rent stabilisation measures as proposed by Shelter and the Renters Rights Coalition so that a landlord cannot raise the rent above the lower of inflation or wage growth.

Affordability

Rents have been too high for too long. Over the past few decades, successive governments have handed the responsibility for housing over to unaccountable private landlords who have driven up the cost of housing for personal gain. Now, renters are at a breaking point, with millions unable to meet basic living costs, or forced out of the communities they've lived in for years.

Government should establish a National Rental Affordability Commission to investigate effective methods to make renting more affordable. This should include investigation of rent control measures aimed at bringing rents down relative to incomes.

The scale of the problem

The average asking rent outside of London has risen 61.22% since the start of 2020. Renting in London is [now totally impossible](#) for a range of key workers, with average rents in inner London equivalent to 106% of a teaching assistant's salary

With the exception of two countries (Luxembourg and Norway), renters in the UK hand over the highest proportion of their incomes to their landlords anywhere in Europe.

The financial burden on taxpayers is substantial, with government projections estimating £70 billion spent on housing benefit between 2021 and 2025, alongside an additional annual expenditure of £1.74 billion on temporary housing.

The cause of the problem

Rent controls are common across Europe. The UK is unusual in having no limit on the amount that landlords can raise the rent.

A major cause of rising rents is landlord profiteering: [around 2 in 5 landlords](#) do not have a mortgage. [Two thirds](#) of these mortgage-free landlords increased the price of new rental agreements during

2023, even though they were unaffected by rising interest rates.

The solutions

Generation Rent estimates that an extra 20 homes per 1000 people would only improve affordability by 2.8% of average incomes. The government's ambitious house-building plans will not meet the urgency or scale of the rental affordability crisis.

Across Europe, rent controls are commonly used to ensure renters have security of tenure and to stop people being evicted by a rent rise.

In April 2024, the Social Market Foundation published a detailed review of the available evidence of the use of rent controls across Europe. It [found](#) that rent controls do not lead to a reduction in the supply of private rented sector housing:

“A broad analysis of controls in Europe indicates that controls do not hold back the growth of the sector..Countries with rent controls also have had a faster growing private rental sector in the decade to 2022, than countries without controls.”

Wide support for rent controls

On 10 October, a letter in support of rent controls was sent to Angela Rayner from tenant unions, housing campaigns, charities and 12 trade unions including Unison, NEU, CWU, RMT, Equity, PCS and UCU.

“The government has the power and the responsibility to control high rents and stop millions of households being pushed into poverty and homelessness...More affordable rents would take pressure off councils and the public purse, freeing up funds that could be invested in much-needed social and council housing” the letter argued.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, [told](#) the Guardian: “After years of austerity, the rising cost of rent is pushing communities to the brink. Teachers and school support staff are unable to keep up with skyrocketing rents. Children cannot learn when they are growing up in insecure homes or living in cramped temporary accommodation. Schools in London are closing because families cannot afford to live in the area and education funding is inadequate.”