

Motions received for 10 January Full Council

Golden Motion (Labour)

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

This council notes:

- Privately rented homes in Bristol make up around 30% of the total housing stock.
- The cost of privately renting a property in Bristol has increased by over 50% in ten years.
- 40% of council homes have been transferred to the private rented sector through right-to-buy. The UK Housing Review 2022 branding right-to-buy as a 'strategic failure.'
- **Increasingly unaffordable rents risks driving key workers further out of the city.**
- The current demand for rented properties at affordable prices has led to an increased power imbalance between tenants and landlords, resulting in tenants being warier to ask for repairs in fear of eviction, and the rising prevalence of 'bidding wars' - where letting agents encourage private renters to outbid one another for a property. This clearly has negative effect for renters, particularly low-income households.
- The Labour administration's work so far to support private renters, including the roll out of landlord licensing schemes, stamping out illegal 'no DSS' discrimination, the Renters' Summit, and the Living Rent Commission – which is exploring the options for rent controls within Bristol.

This council believes:

- **Housing should be regarded first and foremost as homes rather than investment assets.**
- Rent controls are needed in Bristol to stop homes in the private rented sector becoming increasingly unaffordable.
- **Effective rent controls should be equitable, proportionate, and data-driven.**
- Landlord Licensing schemes are an effective tool to improve conditions in the private rented sector. These schemes should be expanded city-wide.
- Further action is needed to protect private renters and ensure their homes are not in poor condition.
- Private renters are less likely to complain about problems with their homes if they face a threat of losing it as a result. Therefore, Government should bring forward the legislation it pledged to outlaw no fault evictions immediately.
- The Renters Reform White Paper should be strengthened. The Renters' Reform Coalition's 'Safe, secure and affordable homes for all: A renters' blueprint for reform' should be the basis for reforms to the Private Rented Sector.
- Right-to-buy should not be expanded to include housing associations, as was included in the 2022 Queen's Speech – which outlines a government's legislative agenda.

This council resolves to:

- Bring the findings of the Living Rent Commission to Full Council and commit to implementing its results. Should the Commission recommend a form of rent control, this council should use its resources to lobby the Government for permission to introduce rent controls in Bristol.
- Ask officers to consider serving improvement notices on homes with severe hazards to prevent landlords from serving Section 21 notices and enable Rent Repayment Orders if the landlord fails to comply. Council officers should also seek to serve more improvement notices for excess cold in homes that fail Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, and help private renters claim back rent through rent repayment orders when they are eligible to do so.

- Enforce the ban on letting agent fees by issuing fines to criminal letting agents.
- To condemn the practice of bidding wars and instruct officers to find ways that Bristol City Council can work to end the practice of 'bidding wars' in the private rented sector.
- Support the Renters' Reform Coalition proposals and use council resources to lobby the government to strengthen the Renters' Reform White Paper. This includes calls for a national landlord register and abolishing the 'Right to Rent' checks.
- Oppose any expansion of right-to-buy to include housing associations and instruct officers to submit a plan to government of possible ways to boost affordable home ownership rates without depleting social housing stock.
- Publish an annual "living rent index" of what affordable rents would be for Bristol.
- Following the conclusion of the Living Rent Commission, continue its work through a new, constituted forum in conjunction with the Homes and Communities Board.
- Review our Private Housing Enforcement policy to ensure it reflects any new national legislation and that formal action can be taken in a timely manner.
- Maintain a publicly accessible list of Enforcement Notices served on Private Housing in Bristol if no such national database materialises following the Renters Reform bill.
- Establish a regular Renters' Forum to engage with private rental tenants.

Motion proposed by: Councillor Tom Renhard (Labour)

Motion submitted: 22 December 2022