

LIVING RENT MANIFESTO 2026

A society by and for the people



Foreword

Our communities are beyond crisis. Look around your town, scheme, or city and you will see obvious failings: unaffordable housing, closed community centres, expensive transport, and empty high streets.

Austerity, COVID and the cost of living crisis has pushed many into poverty and led to a dramatic decline in living standards. Meanwhile, our country's wealth continues to be funnelled into the pockets of the super rich. We cannot be forced to settle for this system of managed decline as the planet is burning, people go hungry, and far right actors turn neighbour against neighbour.

This manifesto has been created by members of Living Rent, with a single core tenet: life for the average person should be free from the suffering and poverty that so many of us face.

We believe that the essential components of a decent life should work for us, not for landlords, bosses, and the super-rich. Our public services, transport, taxation system, land, and planning systems should bring us comfort, safety, stability, and collective wealth - not be treated as assets to be extracted for profit by the few.

Although by no means exhaustive of our union's vision, this document outlines our key priorities for the next Scottish parliament.



We call on the Scottish Government to commit to:

1 Universal public housing

Universal public housing, available to all, and owned by the people as a public asset.

2 A just transition for our homes

A national retrofitting programme to improve our homes, cut energy bills, and future-proof houses against the climate crisis.

3 No more second homes

Reduce and cap the number of holiday lets and second homes.

4 Tax the rich, fund public services

A tax system which redistributes wealth by properly taxing the richest to fund public services.

5 Free public transport for all

A free, sustainable, and truly national public transport system.

6 A people's planning system

An accessible planning system that listens to community priorities.

1 Universal public housing for everyone

Housing is a human right that must be met for us to live with dignity, comfort and safety. Under the current for-profit system, our right to a safe and warm home is not being met. Council housing was created as a mass alternative to the exploitative private rental market and slum housing. Following privatisation, social and council homes have become an after-thought for the government and stigmatised as a 'last resort' for tenants, when public housing was previously viewed as providing a service for the public good. What's more, we have witnessed a dramatic decline in the quality and condition of social homes. We demand universal public housing, available to all, owned by the people as a public asset, and built to a liveable standard with the needs of tenants in mind. Currently both social and council housing fail to meet this standard. In the short term we support the expansion of council and social housing, but we organise towards abolishing the private rented sector and win universal public housing.

Private housing:

- **Rent controls that bring rent down.** We need a comprehensive system of rent controls which systematically reduces rents over time, inline with that of social rent. Rent controls must initially cover all tenures, including Build-to-Rent, Mid-Market and Purpose-Built Student Accommodation and be linked to the housing quality.
- **An increase in the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs),** to empower local authorities and housing associations to purchase private property from landlords.
- **A government commitment in the next housing strategy to reduce the size of the Private Renter Sector (PRS)** over the next parliamentary term.
- **A moratorium on the building of new built-to-rent and purpose built student accommodation.**
- **A ban on landlords serving as elected representatives,** at local and national government.

Social housing:

- **A mass increase in the supply of publicly owned** rented homes, both through building sustainable homes at social rents and properly funded buy-back schemes, as well as protecting all council and social homes from demolition and sell-off.
- **Give local authorities and social landlords first right of refusal on all housing sales.**
- **A legal definition of affordable housing that is strictly tied to social rents,** Mid-Market and intermediate rents should not be used as cop outs.
- **A nationalised house building company** to ensure that money allocated for public building remains in the hands of the public. This would enable a just transition, with thousands of unionised, well paid, secure, green jobs.
- **Increasing the democracy of existing social and council housing** by ending punitive bidding systems, giving tenants the deciding voice in rent consultations, and having clear repairing timeframes and compensation schemes
- **An increase in the requirements of Local Authorities and social landlords to deliver housing that is suitable for disabled people and support for home adaptations**
- **A ban on property developers receiving public funding** who have financial ties to companies which are guilty of human rights abuses, violating international law, and have blacklisted members of tenants or trades unions.



2 A just transition for our homes

Climate change continues to dramatically impact our homes and communities, from our struggle to heat or cool our homes, to extreme weather events such as flooding, fires and storms. We must see bold action to prevent these damaging threats. We need a socialised retrofitting programme to improve the quality of our homes, help us to afford our heating, and future proof houses against the climate crisis.

- **Greater protection for tenants against “renovictions”.** Tenants should not face rent increases or evictions because landlords need to ensure that homes meet minimum energy standards. The cost of home improvements should be met by landlords.
- **Scrap the 20% VAT charge on retrofitting projects.** This acts as a perverse incentive for developers to only build new housing and not retrofit current stock and empty buildings.
- **Greater funding** for retrofitting for social landlords and low-income residents to ensure a just transition for our homes
- **A national retrofitting hub** to provide well-paid apprenticeships, design and deliver a strict accreditation scheme for retrofitting, offer retraining opportunities, and a hub of qualified and competent workers for retrofitting tasks.
- **Encouraging greater community and local ownership** of energy generation through funding for community shared ownership in large commercial energy projects.
- **No public money for private landlords whose properties fail the Repairing Standard.**



3 Stop second homes

No one should own two homes when many have no home

The rise of second homes and holiday lettings across Scotland are a product of our harmful housing system. The shift of housing stock from long-term residential to highly lucrative tourist accommodation forces people into homelessness, pushing up local rents, and makes it harder for people to live and work in their local communities. We believe that there should be no second homes and secondary holiday lets should be strictly reduced and capped in number. Our towns and villages are the source of much of our national pride, created and cared for by their residents and the rural working class. They should not be playgrounds for the rich or investment opportunities for the greedy.

- **Reduce secondary holiday lettings in control zones to 1% of the housing stock available.** Additionally, in blocks of housing residents should be given the right to vote on the approval of any new short term let.
- **Stop short term let operators from receiving relief from Non-Domestic Rates.** Short-term let operators must be subject to non-domestic rates and pay their fair share of tax, to mitigate the strain they put on housing and local services.
- **Increase the registration fee for short-term lets** and ringfence this revenue to respond to local housing need.
- **Introduce a strict and well-funded system of holiday let enforcement** to strike off those operating illegally.



4 Tax the rich, fund public services

A tax system which redistributes wealth, funds public services, and tackles climate change

Our parks and green spaces lie overgrown and unkempt. Our streets and pavements are littered with potholes and refuse, unsafe to use and unsightly to look at. Leisure centres, museums, and swimming pools are facing savage cuts and closures. Our public services have been decimated by over fifteen years of austerity, which have left the essential services our communities depend on underfunded, underresourced, and understaffed. We should use our common wealth to fund our public services.

Yet, our current tax system is regressive and penalises those with the least while protecting those with the most. We need a tax system which redistributes wealth by properly taxing the 1%: landlords, developers, and multinational corporations. The Scottish Parliament has the powers to reform local taxation so that we can meaningfully raise funds for public services. The British Government should in parallel move towards a taxation system that fairly taxes wealth and redistributes that wealth toward those who create it, not those who hoard it.

- **Abolish council tax and replace it with a Land Value Tax (LVT).** Council tax is a regressive tax. We need taxes that actually reflect the value of the property. This can be done through a Proportional Property Tax and in the long-term, through Land Value Tax. By attaching a cost to owning land, this taxation system would diminish the incentive to buy land and property for speculative purposes and share any increases in land values with the public purse.



5 Free public transport

Free, democratically-owned public transport for all

From one community to the next, the reliability, value, and accessibility of transport service is deeply unequal. In rural areas, public transport is a vital lifeline which is being cut, is far too expensive and irregular, and often run by incompetent private companies. In our towns and cities people face high costs just to get from A to B. Wherever you live in Scotland, public transport is a privatised, incompetent mess. Scotland needs a free, sustainable, and truly national public transport system for all.

- **Public ownership of sustainable transport**, by taking all private transport routes and stock into public control across Scotland.
- **Fare caps and integrated payment for all forms of public transport across Scotland**, including buses, tram, rail, ferries and subways.
- **Initially expanding National Entitlement Card (NEC) eligibility** to include those on low incomes, in receipt of benefits, and single parents.
- **Expand the remit of the NEC to include all forms of transport** and all regions.
- **Statutory minimum public transport routes for rural Scottish Communities** to stop our communities from being left behind.



6 A people's planning system

The land beneath our feet should be ours and ours to use

Scotland has the most unequal land ownership pattern in Europe. Half of Scotland's privately owned land is owned by just 432 people, or 0.008% of the population. Land is our greatest asset yet it is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the super rich. This threatens not just our daily access to and use of our common good, but also the future of our planet. Creating a fair distribution of land is fundamental to creating a fair housing system, tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, and redistributing privately held wealth in Scotland. Our planning system should be used to conserve the land, redistribute wealth, and expand community access and ownership. Our land should be in our hands.

Land

- **End the sale of public land for private development** which keeps us locked in the extractive, 'for-profit' system of housing and land.
- **No individuals, companies, or organisations should own more than 500ha of land**, unless they can prove it is in the public interest
- **Public interest tests on sales of land of over 500ha** land in both urban and rural areas, and the ability for local authorities to use Compulsory sales orders to force the sale of land that is vacant or derelict
- **Bringing back land into public or community use** through local authorities using Compulsory Purchase Orders to buy land at near use value price, and support greater ability to do Community Right to Buy bids in urban and rural communities
- **Provide a fully up-to-date land register** that holds information on land value, to increase the transparency around unequal patterns of landownership in Scotland and enable the introduction of a Land Value Tax

Planning

- **Introduce a Community Right of Appeal** to allow communities to contest proposed planning developments and ensure their needs are taken into account
- **Make developers contribute to the building of homes at social rents** on any new development and create a robust system of regulation to ensure this is enforced.
- **All local authorities adopt and enforce the NPF4 target of 25%** of affordable housing, with the aim to increase this target to at least 50%.
- To change the NPF4 requirement of "affordable housing" to strictly "social housing".



LIVING RENT



contact@livingrent.org

Company number SC505467