

SP 25

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Let Down in Wales
Response from: Let Down in Wales

Let Down in Wales

Campaigning for private rented sector reform

Consultation response: Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee in the Fifth Assembly

1. As a leading campaign on renters' rights, we would like to suggest the Equality, Local Government & Communities Committee undertake an inquiry on the private rented sector. Given the significant developments on this in the Fourth Assembly, due to the Housing Act allowing authorities to move vulnerable people into the private sector, and the Renting Homes Act, reforming contracts and licensing all landlords, we think an inquiry is necessary to establish the main concerns still facing renters.
2. There is a suite of regulations to be made underneath the Renting Homes Act which the Committee will have to scrutinise, many relating to Fitness for Human Habitation Standards (yet to be specified in any real detail). However, Let Down believes this scrutiny would be much better informed if it was first underpinned by a broad inquiry into renters' problems, letting agent fees and the relationship between private landlords and tenants.
3. The Renting Homes Act, unfortunately, massively overlooked the role of letting agents. Whilst modernising the legal term of 'tenant' to 'contract-holder', it failed to address the highly outdated term of 'landlord'. Let Down prefers to use the term 'renter', as it is much more relatable to the people it refers to. Few refer to themselves as 'tenants' and never 'contract-holders'. The Renting Homes Act did not address the increasing situation where renting is outsourced by landlords to have their business managed by letting agents, who act as a middle-man in the relationship between landlord and tenant. They often double-charge by taking fees from both sides, whilst delivering a substandard service. Let Down has campaigned for more regulation on letting agents and for better conditions in general in the private rented sector. This would benefit both landlords and renters.
4. Let Down, along with others like Generation Rent and Shelter Cymru, is currently campaigning for letting agent fees to be abolished as they are a significant factor in keeping renters in poverty. This has already been successfully implemented in Scotland, which now enjoys one of the lowest costs of living for renters. It adds insult to injury that renters in the UK have the weakest security of tenancy in Europe – given that contracts are often only 6 to 12-months long and expire on a regular basis without an opportunity

to renew – yet they still have to pay letting agent fees every single time they are asked to move out. A short inquiry on letting agent fees would be particularly welcomed.

5. Although this Committee has a broad remit, we were concerned to find only two references to housing in the consultation document, both of which mostly relate to social housing. Whilst homelessness duties and housing supply undoubtedly need scrutiny, the private rented sector's importance in both of these areas cannot be ignored.
6. In addition, there is an agreement between Welsh Labour and the Welsh Liberal Democrats to implement a 'Rent to Own model'. Such an unprecedented policy focus will require the Committee to look at the interactions between the house-building sector, the private rented sector and housing associations much more closely.



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