

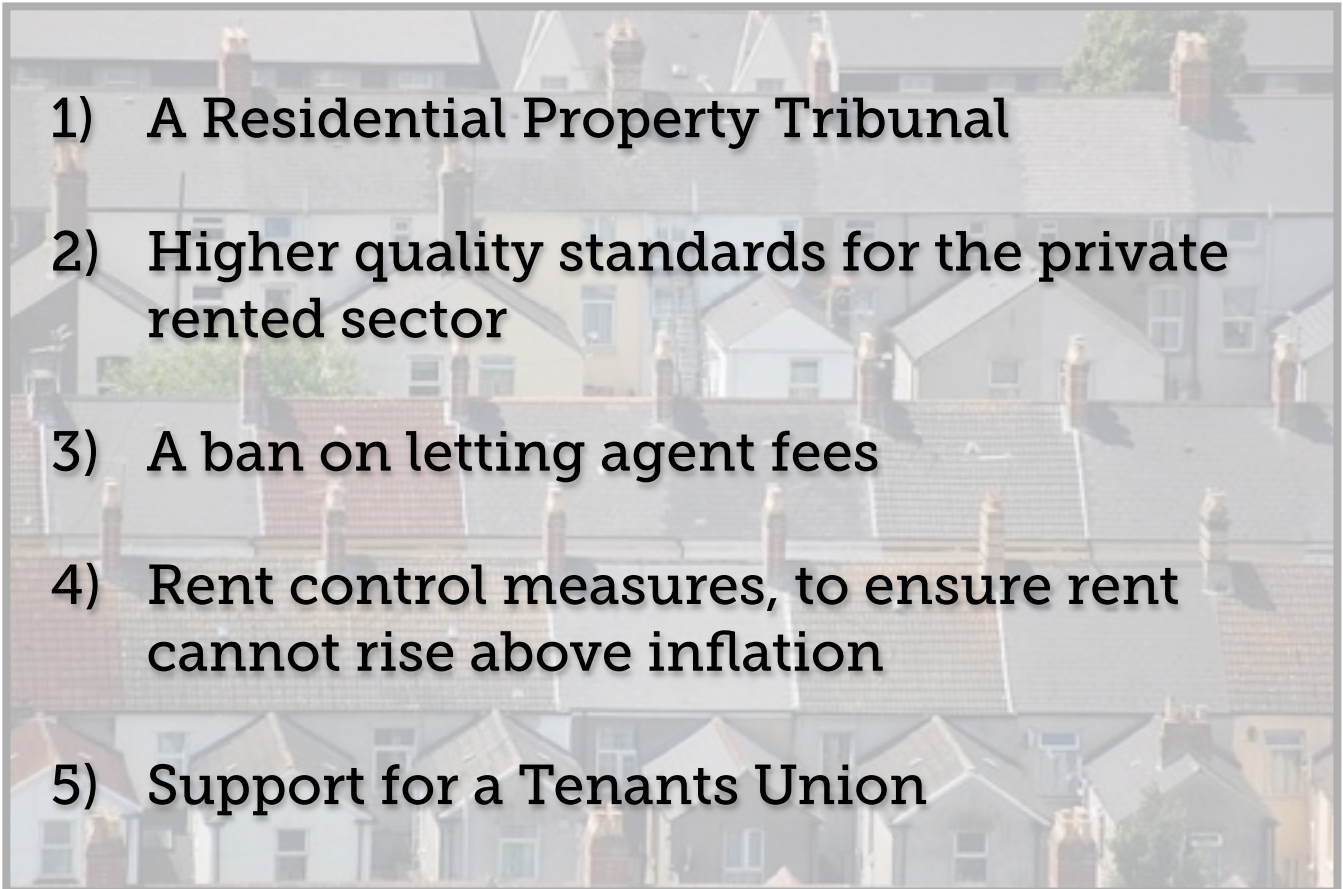
Let Down in Wales

*Campaigning for
Private Rented Sector
reform*

A 2016 Manifesto for the Let Down renters of Wales

Let Down has been campaigning since 2013 for Wales to take a lead on reforming the private rented sector. We believe that whilst the Housing Bill made the positive first step of licensing all landlords and agents, it will still remain incredibly difficult for tenants to survive renting unless key interventions are made by the Welsh Government.

These are the top five legislative proposals that would decisively and permanently improve conditions for tenants.

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- 1) **A Residential Property Tribunal**
 - 2) **Higher quality standards for the private rented sector**
 - 3) **A ban on letting agent fees**
 - 4) **Rent control measures, to ensure rent cannot rise above inflation**
 - 5) **Support for a Tenants Union**



A Private Tenants Tribunal, or an expansion of the Residential Property Tribunal (RPT)

This would encourage and promote mediation between landlords and tenants. It needs to provide a safe, free route for tenants to settle disputes with bad landlords. The Renting Homes Bill originally proposed to make the RPT smaller in scope, but with legal aid being removed and the courts only open to those who can afford it, it's more important than ever that tenants have a safe place to tackle bad landlords.

Higher standards in the private rented sector, with a Welsh Tenants Quality Standard

This would be used in parallel with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) which is used in social housing. This would ensure there is a drive and a level of enforcement to tackle poor standards, without creating the burden on landlords to immediately get properties to a WHQS level. Local authorities also need to be given powers on fixed penalty notices to ensure they can enforce this.



A ban on letting agent fees in Wales

This would go alongside a statutory requirement to ensure all letting agents are part of a redress scheme. Letting agent fees are a business cost and should not be put on the tenants. They ought to either be absorbed by the business or taken from the landlord, the one who owns and profits from the business.

Rent control measures to ensure that rents cannot rise beyond inflation

We would not propose unreasonable restrictions but simply ensure no landlord can use rent hikes in order to kick out tenants. There also needs to be well publicised forms of appeal if a tenant thinks their rent has risen unreasonably, compared to the quality of the tenancy and property.

Support for a Tenants Union

Social housing tenants have more representation by charities and housing associations, but private tenants are often likely to be just as poor and just as vulnerable. Creating a Tenants Union would ensure real tenants can help feed into revisions of the Code of Conduct for landlords/agents. A union could also help with information gathering in order to license all landlords and letting agents — in cooperation with Cardiff Council — and encourage tenants to know their rights and responsibilities within Wales' new tenancy contracts.

The Problem with Renting

These points were found to be the best solutions to the problems that tenants have told Let Down about. Let Down in Wales has been gathering renters' stories from our website, our Facebook and Twitter pages about how their letting agent or landlord had treated them. The vast majority of complaints were about letting agents, some about bad landlords and some purely because renting is hard.

Renting your home is a very insecure way of living. Renters are not just young people anymore. We no longer think we will ever 'get on' the housing ladder, and we're simply too poor to qualify for a mortgage or save up for a deposit. This could be for many reasons, but the real problem is that buying a house is just too expensive for so much of society.

But renters don't always 'mind' renting. Some people might like the flexibility of only staying somewhere for a few months. Some people might have short-term jobs which means they just need to live in a city for 6 months. Some people like the security of having a landlord who is supposed to pay for the high maintenance costs of a property (like included bills or fixing broken boilers).

Many people no longer live in the same house for longer than 1-2 years. Most young people and students will rent for 12 months at a time, moving every summer. Lots of students move accommodation twice every year (say, 10 months renting and 2 months living at home). Renting is a great way for people not sure of where to settle yet or need to move house a lot for family or employment commitments.

However that is not why most people rent. **The vast majority rent not out of choice, but because they're forced there.** They cannot afford a deposit for a mortgage or may not have enough stability or credit to even try buy a house. With house prices continuing to rise, this becomes more difficult for tenants every single year.

Furthermore, with the changes in welfare reform and the lack of 1-2 bed social housing stock, it is expected that the number of private tenants will continue to rapidly increase in the UK. This is even more pronounced in Wales where local authorities can now refer vulnerable people to the private sector. These people, often in desperate circumstances already, are having to leave the security of social housing for the uncertain and often inadequate conditions of private housing.

This, alongside bad landlords and predatory letting agents, make renting is a nightmare. Everyone has a 'renting disaster' story. People share stories about not being able to have hot water for a month because their landlord wouldn't fix the pipes. They move into new houses that are covered in damp, with the electricity broken and no one to fix it. Landlords that only give you one month's notice to move out, because they decided to sell the place. Landlords saying that they want to move back in so demand the house back. Landlords that try and sue you for moving out of their property 6 months early, demanding you see them in court for 6 months rent.

Let Down in Wales has been asking Assembly Members to stand up for tenants and speak up in the Renting Homes Bill about the changes the Welsh Government could make to improve the sector.

Just implementing one of our proposals would vastly change the sector and give tenants a fairer deal.

Find out more about the campaign

