



The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

Reply to Telephone
E-mail
Date

Mayor Marvin Rees
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27 June 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Bristol Living Rent Commission

We are writing to you following the publication of the Bristol Living Rent Commission's report into Bristol's Private Rented Sector (PRS), and the challenges faced by tenants in the city.

In the 2021 mayoral manifesto, we pledged to make Bristol a "living rent city" and lobby central government for rent control powers. As a core city and local authority, we have been using our existing powers to try and address the issues of affordability, quality, and access within the PRS, including the roll out of licensing schemes and building new homes. 2,563 new homes were built in Bristol in 2021/22, exceeding our ambitious targets, including the largest number of new affordable homes in more than a decade. 90% of these new homes were built on previously developed land.

Despite our best efforts, our ability to meaningfully influence PRS affordability is limited and for too long, those who live in private rented accommodation have not had adequate protections.

In Bristol, 29% of households rent their accommodation from a private landlord which is significantly above the UK national average of 19%. Spiralling private renting costs are having a negative impact on the sustainability, productivity, and resilience of our city. We are seeing Bristol residents pushed further from their place of work, family, and support networks.

The Bristol Living Rent Commission was launched to look at issues in the city's PRS and assess ways to address rising costs, as well as the lack of security that renters have. The commission was made up of sector experts, tenants, and landlords. The commission found that there is popular support for rent control in Bristol as a response to affordability problems. We have included a copy of the executive summary with this letter and the full report is available [here](#).

The Living Rent Commission are calling on the government to:

- **Devolve powers to councils to allow local authorities to shape and influence the affordability of the PRS.**
- **Ensure the benefits system recognises actual housing costs. Restoring Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile of local market rents would be an important initial move in this direction.**
- **Urgently increase the supply of social housing. This is integral to the long-term affordability of housing.**



As an administration we broadly welcome the Renters (Reform) Bill. It contains some positive reforms for renters and the PRS. There are several new burdens for local authorities contained within the bill, so government must ensure local authorities have the resources to deliver against these commitments. We would urge the government to consider the following points to strengthen the Bill:

- While the Bill does attempt to provide greater security for tenants it does not go far enough and creates loopholes which could undermine its overall intent. **As currently drafted, landlords could skirt the proposed measures by using large rent hikes to force unwanted tenants out of their accommodation.** This apparent loophole must be addressed. **Government should consider applying a cap to the amount that private landlords can raise rent in each year to help tackle this.**
- The Bill also needs to include a consistent approach on the rules for introducing new licensing schemes. **We would encourage government to remove the requirement for Secretary of State approval for larger sized selective licensing schemes (to be in line with additional licensing of small Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)).**
- We welcome that enforcement powers will be strengthened particularly in relation to targeting criminal landlords. We would encourage the Government to include measures to **improve letting and management practices and behaviours including banning the practice of “bidding wars” and better, more responsive repairs and maintenance.**
- Under the measures, landlords will also be able to evict “anti-social” tenants and “irresponsible renters” with greater ease. These are subjective terms; **clear definitions should be consulted on to ensure they are robust and cannot be used vexatiously to remove unwanted but responsible tenants.**

We trust that you will find the Bristol Living Rent Commission report, and our thoughts on the Renters (Reform) Bill, informative. Given the significance of this issue, we look forward to hearing from you so that we can work together to improve the PRS.

Yours sincerely,

Marvin Rees
Mayor of Bristol

CLlr Tom Renhard Cabinet
Lead for Housing Delivery and Homes