

MAKE RENTING NORMAL AND NOT A RIP-OFF

There is a place for a private rented sector. But experience shows that it needs to be well regulated and the difference in power between landlord and tenant corrected. We would:

- *Reform the private rented sector* by introducing a 'living rent' tenancy (including five-year fixed tenancy agreements), smart rent control that caps annual rent increases linked to the Consumer Price Index, security of tenancy and local not-for-profit letting agencies, and abolishing letting agents' fees and insurance-based deposit schemes.
- Set up a *Living Rent Commission* to explore whether controls could bring rents more in line with local average incomes.
- Introduce a mandatory *licensing scheme for landlords*.
- Abolish landlord perks, such as *tax deductions* against a variety of expenditures, including mortgage interest relief. Ending mortgage interest tax relief alone will raise £5.8 billion a year.
- Increase the supply of small lets by raising the tax-free amount under the *Rent a Room Scheme* to £7,250 a year.
- Abolish the '*bedroom tax*', which has saved less than £400 million a year. A Department for Work and Pensions report found that more than half of affected tenants have cut back on essentials, and only 1 in 20 has downsized.
- Bring *Housing Benefit* for all age groups back *in line with average market rents*, so that it provides all citizens with the means to meet their housing costs, costing £2.3 billion a year.
- Subject the *Shared Accommodation Rate* to a comprehensive review to ensure it reflects the real cost of renting shared properties.
- Change the *definition of affordable rented housing* to depend on local median incomes and not on local market rents.

The 'bedroom tax'

The 'under occupancy charge' – the bedroom tax – came into effect in April 2013.

- It affects nearly 500,000 people – the equivalent of a city the size of Leicester.
- Two-thirds of those affected are disabled.
- Cash-strapped housing associations have spent millions helping affected tenants.
- By February 2014, two-thirds of residents hit by the bedroom tax were in rent arrears.
- The Tories devised it, the Lib Dems backed it and Ed Miliband took a year to decide he didn't like it.
- Green MP Caroline Lucas has voted against the bedroom tax at every opportunity.

Green councillors and homelessness...

In Solihull, Green councillor Chris Williams publicised the plight of a woman who had just had a heart transplant and her 14-year-old daughter who were forced to live in a private hotel for 18 months with rats running through their room as they slept. Since then Solihull has reduced the use of B&Bs to house the homeless.