

DEPUTATION ONE – REGARDING PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING
AND LETTING AGENCIES.

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your deputation.

MR I DALTON: My Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, my name is Ian Dalton. To my right is Gary Kay and to my left is Katy Johnstone.

In the last 15 years the number of people renting in the private sector has doubled across the UK to 8.3 million, with projections forecasting this to increase by a million in the next five years, sending rents up by a further 25% while wages stay still or drop and living standards have plummeted.

Nationally, the housing market might seem healthy; 65% of homes are still owner occupied and homes are still being sold, but to who? In 2012, 85% of prime property purchases were with overseas money and in 2013 40% of purchases were completed with cash. In other words, it is not ordinary people who are buying homes in which to raise a family, it is the wealthy and the super wealthy.

There is a chronic and drastic shortage of affordable homes with a staggering total of 1.7 million people on social housing waiting lists in England – that is one in twelve families. In Leeds over 20,000 families are waiting for a decent affordable home to live in. In 29 of the 30 years leading up to 1978, Local Councils built more than 90,000 homes per year, but from that point neo-liberalism ate into the idea that Councils should provide homes for local populations. By 1999 only 50 homes were built by Councils and 19,000 by housing associations. This is simply unacceptable. It goes hand in hand with creating more demand in the private sector and ramping up rents to make fortunes for profit hungry landlords and letting agents.

The private rented sector is not an easy option for most. Increasing competition due to a lack of affordable options has given landlords and letting agencies the power and taken it out of our hands.

The problem has become so extreme that figures from last year highlighted that 80,000 young people nationally experienced homelessness across the UK. These figures paint a stark human reality to the experiences of ordinary working class people across the UK, but in this city as well. It is meaning overcrowding in cramped conditions with poor and unsafe housing, undoubtedly leading to poor health.

Some Councils, have begun necessary action to tackle this, such as in Newham, Southampton and Liverpool setting up compulsory licensing schemes to ensure certain standards. This is a welcome change of pace in Local Government housing policy. However, it simply is not enough. We need to see the enforcement of rent control on private landlords in order to cap rents at affordable rates, not just rent rises.

This Deputation, organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, is calling upon Leeds City Council to take a similar step. Set up a Council run not for profit letting agency to scrap administration fees levied at tenants by letting agents. It could also demand landlords enforce minimum standards for properties and set a guidance as to what an affordable rent would be. These things should be decided amongst tenants associations, local trade unions, and elected Councillors. Such a scheme has been costed as viable to do so by several university students unions, including York University. If they can do it, why can't the second biggest Local Authority in the country?

This council would set a standard high for the rest of the country and could provide much needed security and safety to thousands of families across Leeds.

We would not stop there however. Building Council housing would provide a more secure solution to some of those issues, yet the 388 homes planned to be built by the Council and over a thousand being refurbished falls far short of what is necessary for the 2,000 people on the Council House waiting list.

The Council should seek to embark on a huge Council house building programme as a long term solution to the housing crisis, utilising reserves but also demanding finance from the Government in order to do so. This should be done in co-ordination with UCATT and other construction unions, employing construction workers on the proper rate for the job and not exploiting vicious umbrella companies that pass employers tax on to workers, resulting in a loss of £30 every week. These companies also blatantly avoid tax, resulting in an estimated loss of £3,800 per year for a single worker.

TUSC supporters and everyone who has signed this petition is calling upon Leeds City Council to undertake these steps. The Council might look upon them as bold proposals but they are. It is a direct challenge to the cartel-like landlords and letting agents who control the market in this city and nationally. To support and immediately see the beginnings of these demands would send a shiver down their spines whilst simultaneously improving the lives of thousands in this city and working people nationally are watching you. We urge you to take such bold steps. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Nash

COUNCILLOR NASH: My Lord Mayor, I move that this matter be referred to the Director of Environment and Housing for consideration in consultation with the relevant Executive Member.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Latty.

COUNCILLOR G LATTY: I second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I call for the vote. *(A vote was taken)* That is CARRIED. Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.