

Motion 2: Growing our union, building our power

Submitted by: Coordinating Group

The London Renters Union was founded with a core belief that if we organise a powerful enough base of working-class renters in London, fighting together with collective solidarity around shared interests, we can transform the housing system.

Building the base of our union was the bread and butter organising in the early years, slowly building big branches which represented the diversity of our communities. We spent every weekend and many evenings on the street corner, speaking to people about our vision and signing up new members. This base-building work was what made everything else possible: branches, disputes, training, and eventually, citywide campaigns. This spirit of reaching out, of growing, and of building our power, is the spirit of this motion.

The union's membership is stronger than ever: we have more members in elected leadership positions than ever before, citywide and in branches; we have new and established ways to get our membership active; we've successfully set up new branches in boroughs we weren't organising in before, and we've gained big material wins around the city with #SideWithRenters and in more recent campaigns such as #NotAnotherWinter in Brent.

But now is the time for us to pull together and make our union ten times more powerful – now is the time to grow, and this can only be achieved by a mass effort by the union's members. Bigger and more crucial fights are looming: rents are soaring, councils are flailing, the Renters Reform Bill is in the balance and government housing policy is in flux. A new government is on the horizon which will not be friendly, but will be susceptible to pressure. For the first time in decades there have been eviction bans and rent controls in place in some parts of the UK in last few years, and the window is open to fight for them in London. To fight on that level, and to win, we have to grow our current active membership and our total membership across the board.

We also have to grow our total income from membership subs. This will allow us to increase the staff team sustainably, protect the union financially by making us less dependent on grant funding, and safeguard the union's mission by ensuring we are financially owned by our members.

Increasing membership will also make the union more resilient (introducing new people and capacity to offset the risk of burnout).

For all these reasons, the union agreed last year that the time was right for a sustained push to increase the union's membership, and set a target for 800 new members in 2023. This has led to some brilliant experimentation and successful recruitment measures in some branches. However, for various reasons there hasn't yet been a large joined-up effort across the union on the level that we called for, and as a result, our membership has grown in 2023, but by less than the 800 we wanted to aim for.

We all can see the power of the union when we reach out into our communities, recruit our neighbours, fight in solidarity and win, and we know that this begins with outreach. Now more

than ever, with years of experience up our sleeve, we should boldly launch the new union-wide recruitment effort that we approved last year.

Goals

Setting goals is an important way to hold ourselves collectively accountable to carrying out our decisions.

- The union resolves to increase the number of paying members by 25% in 2024, with at least half of the increase coming from recruiting new members.
- Branches will work with the union's Membership and Operations Coordinator to translate this into a local target for each branch, taking account of local factors.
- The Coordinating Group is empowered to make an adjustment to the overall target at the halfway point of the year if necessary. The CG is asked to set long-term membership growth targets and present them at next year's AMA.

Next steps:

- Relaunch a union-wide Membership and Outreach Working Group, including members from each branch, to share knowledge and experience of local successes and plan how to create and take advantage of mass recruitment opportunities and place-based recruitment opportunities.
- Phase out the offer of free membership for new members, and instead have a very low minimum sub of £1 per month. A small number of free trial memberships can be offered by each branch through in-person outreach.
- All current memberships will stay valid, but non-paying members are encouraged to set up a small monthly payment. Branches should discuss the importance of membership subs at meetings and through phonebanking.
- Invest in activating and retaining new members: the union will make resources available for members to run induction activities as well as outreach, to improve retention of new members.
- To further improve retention of new members, staff will improve our tech systems for contacting new members, for helping new joiners to access branch spaces like WhatsApp groups, and for maintaining clearer communication about ways to get involved with members who join in areas where the LRU does not have branches.
- Make sure that our public-facing communications show the union's active, fun and impactful day-to-day activities. Invest in fully redesigning and updating the union's website to make it a better tool for showcasing the union's work.
- Create low-tech ways of paying subs such as cash payment, to avoid excluding people with less digital access.