More than a Roof

Bristol’s Housing Strategy
2016 – 2020
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Executive Summary

Housing should provide a springboard to achieving a high quality of life and create the opportunity for all to thrive in mixed communities of their choice.

We are delivering this strategy in a rapidly changing landscape. The new policy and legislative changes proposed by the Government will present a very real challenge to both delivery of services and Bristol's residents over the 2015 - 2020 period. There will almost certainly continue to be a shortage of housing, particularly of affordable housing for low-income households. Also the implementation of the proposed welfare reform changes will, very likely, result in more households being unable to afford to rent or buy in the private sector so relying on affordable housing. Therefore the delivery of new housing, especially new affordable housing needs to be prioritised.

In addition, there is still much that needs to be done to improve the city’s housing stock, including:

- Improve housing and management standards in the private rented sector
- Reduce fuel poverty
- Reviewing affordable rented and social tenancies to identify where properties are unaffordable or unsuitable and help tenants to find a sustainable option eg. to move or increase income/minimise outgoings
Lastly, in a challenging economic environment people need good information, advice and support in order to obtain a tenancy and maximise their success as a tenant, whether in social or private rented housing, or as a shared owner.

This strategy is a framework setting direction for everyone involved in housing – residents, housing associations, developers, government bodies, regulators, investors, private landlords, alongside the Local Authority – to do what we can to provide the homes needed and ensure that housing delivers a clear social dividend.

The Housing Strategy will contribute to the Mayor’s Vision for Bristol and its recognition of the need to address inequalities of health, wealth and opportunity in the city, supporting everyone to reach their potential by creating successful places to live, work and play.

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<th>Headline outcomes</th>
<th>Key priorities</th>
<th>Headline actions</th>
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<td>Increase the numbers of new homes</td>
<td>Provide well designed, quality homes that are affordable, sustainable and suitable for people’s needs</td>
<td>Carry out a fundamental review of our delivery arrangements</td>
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1. Introduction

Bristol is a prosperous city, national surveys and media consistently rate Bristol as one of the best UK cities to live in. This acts as a draw for young people and families to live and settle in the city. Bristol’s cultural and educational offer, as well as increasing employment opportunities, is expected to increase the number of people who want to live and work in the city.

Bristol has a thriving commercial centre with a good mix of private and social housing. The urban environment is broken by green space, but there is little available land for building new housing. The city council is bordered by three other local authorities that make up Greater Bristol1. Many households do not distinguish between the different authorities and see these as somewhat artificial boundaries when seeking to access housing. For many people, this offers the opportunity to live within a suburban environment while working in Bristol and enjoying the city’s cultural offer. Accommodation within Bristol is varied with a good mix of styles and property sizes. There are many areas which offer good community living and plenty of open green spaces, making them popular places to live.

However, there is a considerable housing challenge in Bristol and this is growing: it is a city of inequalities with persistent health and wellbeing gaps between different parts of the city; demand for homes continues to grow, with housing becoming increasingly unaffordable for many people; quality of existing homes is often not high enough; and inequalities are reinforced by the way different kinds of housing are distributed across the city. Despite the prosperity within the city, there are substantial problems of deprivation in parts of Bristol. The neighbourhoods that do not share the city’s prosperity often have insufficient good housing, transport and access to employment opportunities.

Bristol has ambitions to be a low-carbon city with high quality of life. It is the first UK city to be a European Green Capital 2015 and a member of Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities.

1 The three other authorities are: North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset, also known as the West of England partnership.
New policy contained within the recent Queen’s Speech\(^2\) and the Summer budget 2015\(^3\) will create a number of further challenges during the period this Housing Strategy covers.

Proposed new policies include:

- Welfare benefit reforms – including the benefit cap and universal credit
- Social housing rent reduction
- Introduction of Right to Buy for all social tenancies
- Introduction of higher rent for tenants earning over £30,000

The results of some of these changes are reduced incomes for housing cost and reducing incomes for social landlords who use rental income to provide services and invest in the provision of new homes. This changing context requires a new conversation and a very different response. The welfare benefit reforms could make housing costs increasingly, and for some groups almost completely, unaffordable unless earned incomes rise to compensate. The social housing rent reduction was unexpected and as the business plans would have assumed rental growth, this affects future financial projections and therefore delivery of affordable housing. Right to buy for all social housing tenancies obviously impacts on future revenue as it sells assets providing rental income, as well as removing stock from the rental ‘pool’. Lastly, introduction of higher rent for tenants earning over £30,000 could prove to be costly to manage and be a disincentive to work in some instances.

This strategy describes what we think that new response should look like – for our partners, Bristol’s citizens and the council.

\(^2\) The Queen’s Speech, 27 May 2015  

\(^3\) The Summer Budget June 2015  
2. Links to other strategies

The Bristol Housing Strategy does not stand alone and most of the work operates alongside existing strategies, plans and work programmes. Despite the prosperity within the city, there are substantial problems of deprivation in parts of Bristol. The neighbourhoods that do not share the city’s prosperity have a lack of good housing, transport and employment opportunities. All of the strategies working alongside the Bristol Housing Strategy share a common thread of aiming to reduce social inequality.

This strategy provides a framework for the delivery of the Mayor’s vision by the council and its partners. In addition it will deliver the outcomes from the Mayor’s Home Commission, which was set up in October 2013 and concluded in June 2014. The commission made 20 recommendations, of which most were supported by the City Council. Many of the recommendations have already been put into place and the action plan linked to this strategy will report progress against them4.

The strategy will also link very closely with strategies and plans already in operation, for example the Joint Local Transport Plan, Bristol’s Learning City, Bristol Local Plan, BCC’s Climate Change and Energy Security Framework and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

4 Outcomes can be found in full on page 14
3. Vision

This strategy sets out our vision for housing in Bristol and how we are going to deliver it.

‘...my mission is to make sure the world sees a Bristol where every citizen is participating in our city’s success; and not a Bristol held back by the price of inequality. The city must not succeed only for the benefit of the few, at the expense of the many.’

At the heart of the Mayor’s vision is the need to address inequalities of health, wealth and opportunity in the city, supporting everyone to reach their potential by creating successful places to live, work and play. This strategy recognises that housing is far more than a ‘roof over our heads’; it is a fundamental part of our lives with poor housing or lack of housing affecting health and educational attainment. This strategy has a clear commitment to develop new homes and retrofit existing homes so that they are fit for purpose in the longer-term.

Housing should provide a springboard to achieving a high quality of life and create the opportunity for people to thrive in mixed communities of their choice. We will work together to tackle the range of housing issues that affect people who live in Bristol.

The vision for housing in Bristol has 3 headline outcomes and 6 major priorities and the Council with partners will invest resources in services and changes that help to achieve its priorities in order to get the best housing provision possible. These are:

- An increase in the number of new homes;
- Ensuring the best use of the existing homes; and
- More early intervention to prevent people reaching crisis.

Bristol is in desperate need of new additional housing and this has to be the priority for this Housing Strategy. By working with our partners to put in place the outcomes from the Mayor’s Homes Commission, we can drive forward increases in delivery, but in these challenging times we will all need to innovate to achieve our overall aim of increasing the number of new homes.

These outcomes for the Bristol Housing Strategy are linked to the priorities set out in the Mayor’s vision for Bristol and in Bristol’s Corporate Plan, 2013 - 2017 and will be delivered in conjunction with our partners in the city.
4. Key Facts

194,653 properties in Bristol as at 31 March 2015. 15% owned by the council, 6% housing association, 55% owner occupied & 24% privately rented. The private rented sector has increased significantly since 2001, rising from 12.2% to 22.1% of all accommodation in Bristol (2011 Census).

1,940 (1.3%) of private sector dwellings within Bristol are long-term vacant (Housing Stock Condition survey 2012).

28% of homes receive one or more benefits compared to the national average of 21%. The highest proportion of benefit claimants are living in the private rented sector (Stock Condition Survey 2012).

Bristol has a young age profile with more children aged 0-15 than people aged 65+. Bristol’s 82,800 children make up almost 19% of the total population. Whereas, its 58,800 people aged 65+ constitute only 13% of the total population (Office National Statistics (ONS) mid-2014 estimate).

183,900 households projected to increase by 11% by 2022 (DCLG mid-2012 estimate).

There are currently 359 homeless households.

& Rough Sleeping has increased from 9 in 2012 to 91 in 2015 (Bristol Housing Register 2015).

10,443 applications on the Bristol Housing Register (30th June 2015).

Fuel poverty at 17.9% is lower than the rate found in England at 21% (Stock Condition survey 2012).

28% of the homes across the city have a poor energy efficiency rating and have either a Band E, F or G on their energy performance certificate (Housing Stock Condition survey 2012).

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The Black and Minority Ethnic population of Bristol has increased from 8.2% of all people in 2001 to 16% in 2011 (2011 Census).

442,500 population and is expected to rise by 9% in 2022 if trends continue. Since 2004, the population is estimated to have risen by 11.8%, higher than the England and Wales increase of 8.0% (ONS mid-2014 projections).

£198,556 - average house price. Since 2005, average house price in Bristol increased by 29% compared to 16% increase for England and Wales over the same period. (Land Registry House Price Index information for February 2015)

The number of residents aged 75 and over is projected to rise by 22% by 2024 (ONS mid-2014 projections).

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5. Achievements

The economic and political situation in the United Kingdom during the period of the previous Housing Strategy (2010-2015) was difficult. However, the partnership delivered many of the actions within the strategy. The following are some of the key achievements.

1,490 (e) high quality and affordable homes were delivered between April 2010 and April 2015 (Target 2,000)

Brought 3,248 empty properties back into use (target 2,000)

Delivered 615 units of extra care housing by May 2012, with a further build programme in place (target 600 units)

Increased the supply of purpose built private rented sector (private rented sector) accommodation by 46 in 2013/14 and 64 in 2014/15

Maximised resources and reduced waiting times in delivery of aids and adaptations to vulnerable people by reducing waiting time from 2 years to 6 months

Between April 2010 – Oct 2012 provided 3,811 private homes with insulation through BEES (Bristol Energy Efficiency Service) scheme = 136 per month

Pathways (pathway from homelessness to settled accommodation) model in place for high-level, low-level and floating support services. The pathway manages the lettings of 1,172 commissioned units and 660 floating support placements.
6. Challenges

The previous Housing Strategy was published within a time of economic change and this had an effect on the ability of the partnership to deliver the Housing Strategy action plan. Some actions had to be abandoned as they were no longer a priority and many other actions were not completed in full. In spite of these very difficult circumstances there were lots of successes, but it is felt now that the strategy was not flexible enough to respond adequately to the rapid economic and legislative changes that occurred throughout its lifetime.

New legislation was brought in, the Localism Act (2011) and the Welfare Reform Act (2012). The Localism Act devolved more decision making powers to local authorities, including allowing them to restrict access to their social housing waiting lists. In order to reduce demand, many authorities have brought in these changes, but it has had the effect of restricting access at a time when, for many people, their options are limited.

Lack of Choice

Demand for homes is high and increasingly so as the population is growing and changing rapidly. The growing population puts a high demand on both family housing and one-bedroomed housing. Younger people and families struggle to get onto the housing ladder. There are a growing number of older people who may be keen to move into more suitable homes, but much of the accommodation no longer appears to meet their needs. Traditional sheltered housing for older people does not always appeal to people aged 65+ years who are still active but the market for new generation ‘retirement’ homes is underdeveloped.

Private rented sector tenancies currently make up 24% of the housing market in Bristol and this is expected to rise during the life of this strategy. Due to the economic situation in Bristol, many people are increasingly relying on private rented sector accommodation when they would previously have purchased, or at the other end of the market, when they would have rented social housing. This has had the effect of pushing rents up, creating a new market for middle income households and creating a shrinking sub-market at the cheaper end of the market. Some landlords are capitalising on the need people have to find accommodation at a price they can afford by offering an inferior product.

Welfare System

The Welfare Reform Act brought in numerous changes that affected the income of people living in Bristol. Firstly, the ‘spare room subsidy’ (commonly known as the ‘bedroom tax’), meant that social housing tenants could no longer claim benefit for bedrooms they did not require. It has also capped housing benefits to 4 bedroomed properties only, meaning any large families occupying 5+ bedroom private sector houses have to pay the extra rent not covered by housing benefit. Furthermore, for some people welfare benefits have been capped. As a result, some people have not been able to afford their rent and some people have become homeless due to rent arrears.

As a result of the Welfare Reform Act and further government announcements relating to the welfare and benefits system, households in Bristol experienced significant changes to their finance and entitlements.

The announcement in the Queen’s Speech 2015 and the Summer budget 2015, of the Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill, is likely to increase the challenge further. Whilst we have yet to model the impact these changes may have, benefits decreasing at a time when housing costs are rising is likely to continue to produce a significant challenge. In addition, over the next 3 years Bristol will also see the roll out of the Government’s flagship welfare reform policy – Universal Credit.
Insufficient number of new homes

There is a programme to increase housing supply in Bristol. There are 30,600 homes envisaged to be delivered in the city between 2006 and 2026, with a minimum target of 26,400 set out in the adopted Local Plan. Between 2006 and 2015, 16,300 homes have been built in the city. As an urban authority, Bristol does not have extensive land to build new properties and many more homes, especially affordable homes are needed to meet demand.

The diagram on the right shows the effect the lack of new build accommodation, especially affordable housing, has had on various parts of the housing system over the last 5 years.

Increasing demand for affordable housing units

With the economic situation as it is at the moment, demand for affordable housing has risen. At the same time as the recession hit, finance arrangements for Registered Providers changed. Instead of receiving a significant proportion of the build costs as a government subsidy, they had to source private finance to a greater extent and raise rents to fund the additional borrowing. In addition, the cost of construction and land acquisition has continued to rise and there hasn't been the availability of ex-local authority land as there has been in the past.

This has meant that developers of affordable housing in Bristol are taking a much more cautious view about where they build and how much the build costs will be in order to make the development a viable option for them. Often, the small pockets of land in Bristol are more difficult and costly to develop, compared with greenfield sites, and therefore are less attractive. This has meant that when they have identified that they are able to raise finance to build, there has been less appetite for building in Bristol.
Some of the Challenges:

Developing homes and communities that help people make healthy choices and promote healthier living.

Dealing with the challenge of welfare reform changes which will affect many people.

Balancing the pressure to significantly increase the number of new homes and the difficulties of the development when land is available.

Continuing to address the growing homelessness and rough sleeping in the city.

Managing the greater demands caused by changing demographics, such as increasing numbers of families and young people living in the area, an ageing population, and established cultural diversity.

Private rented sector properties make up 24% of the housing market in Bristol.

Need to put in place measures to tackle poor landlords and bring more homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

Reduce the housing equality gap, there are substantial inequalities of health, wealth and opportunity within the city of which housing is a key component.

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes and working to address fuel poverty so reducing the impact of rising energy prices, especially for the poorest families.

Designing to ensure new housing minimises energy use, is sustainable, can stand the test of time and is built to deal with the effects of climate change.

Providing a better housing offer/solutions for older people to give them a choice, help them stay independent and reduce isolation.

Taking opportunities to add value by cross boundary working.

Managing the greater demands caused by changing demographics, such as increasing numbers of families and young people living in the area, an ageing population, and established cultural diversity.

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes and working to address fuel poverty so reducing the impact of rising energy prices, especially for the poorest families.

Designing to ensure new housing minimises energy use, is sustainable, can stand the test of time and is built to deal with the effects of climate change.

Providing a better housing offer/solutions for older people to give them a choice, help them stay independent and reduce isolation.
7. Delivering the Outcomes

**Outcome 1: Increase numbers of new homes**

Bristol does not have enough housing to meet demand and that applies across all tenures. There are over 8,700 homes with planning permission in Bristol (March 2014). Actions are needed to ensure that these houses are developed together with sites allocated in the adopted local plan⁵. The Delivery of new homes will become increasingly challenging, but needs to be a key priority.

This strategy has been written to reflect the council’s adopted local plan, which allocates a large number of sites for the development of homes across the City to meet the demand for housing and improve affordability. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)⁶ assesses the future requirement for homes in the Wider Bristol Housing Market Area (HMA)⁷ in the period 2016 to 2036. The SHMA objectively assessed need is for 85,000 homes to be built across the Wider Bristol HMA over a 20 year period, with 29,100 of those defined as affordable housing. The need for affordable housing in Bristol alone is 18,800 which equates to 940 homes per year. A Joint Spatial Plan is being developed across the West of England which will set out how the future need for housing will be met.

Increasing the number of new build units in the city is not a short term solution and, as discussed previously, is not an easy challenge. However, we cannot underestimate its importance in improving the situation for Bristol residents. The diagram to the right shows the differences if there are enough homes built, especially affordable homes.

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⁵ Full Local Plan is published here: www.bristol.gov.uk/page/planning-and-building-regulations/bristol-local-plan

⁶ Full SHMA is published here: www.westofenglandlep.co.uk/assets/files/Transport%20and%20Infrastructure/Duty%20to%20Cooperate/2015%2007%2028%20Wider%20Bristol%20HMA%20FINAL%20report.pdf

⁷ The HMA includes Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset.
In order for the Mayor to be clearer about how delivery of the vision is achieved, 4 commissions were set up. The Homes Commission is the most important one for the delivery of the Housing Strategy and representation on the commission was comprised of independent experts. Having considered the recommendations, these are the ones we are taking forward:

- Proactively looking for opportunities to create additional housing land and site assembly options
- Enhancing the role of the Bristol Property Board
- Creating a Revolving Investment Fund to support stranded assets
- Creating value from regenerating brownfield/greyfield areas of land and sites
- Preparing an annual “LAND” Prospectus for Housing
- Establish a specialist stalled site unlocking team in the council
- Developing and nurturing an alternative homes sector
- Prioritise delivery of more homes in the short term and more affordable homes over the longer term
- Ensure new homes planning targets over the longer term are both supported by robust evidence and are planned for on a sub-regional basis
- Compulsory Purchase Order
- Creating a ‘Results-not-Process’ Culture
- Introduce end-to-end programme management
- Post Implementation review of new organisational arrangements
- Ensure robust accountability and scrutiny for implementation of the Affordable Housing Delivery Framework
- Raising or eliminating the HRA borrowing cap
- Council wide review of land and property assets for potential housing development
- Fully examine the Municipal Housing Company model
- Review action to bring more empty private homes into use
- Use of Universal Credit

These recommendations will all be delivered through the Housing Strategy Action Plan to ensure that actions are put in place against the recommendations and that the outcomes are monitored on a regular basis.
Provide well designed, quality homes that are affordable, sustainable and suitable for people’s needs.

It is important to remember that although there is a substantial need for new homes in Bristol, they still need to meet at very least our minimum standards. We want to provide well designed, quality homes that have a good energy rating which will enable people to reduce living costs and avoid costly repairs. This strategy will respond to that and alongside this will find ways to respond to the increasing need for affordable housing in Bristol. In order to achieve this it will be necessary to review the operation and partnerships in place to deliver housing currently.

However, due to the welfare reform changes proposed and the fact that in Bristol the private rented sector is growing rapidly, we need to examine the possibilities of either the council and/or partner(s) becoming a provider and manager of private rented sector properties on a significant scale. There are examples from elsewhere of using institutional and charitable investment to do this. This would widen their sphere of business, use balance sheets as security and also provide a value for money service for potential tenants.

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<tr>
<td>• Carry out a fundamental review of our delivery system in order to:</td>
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<td>• Deliver increased number of new homes (both affordable and market housing) in order to meet demand</td>
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<td>• Ensure better partnership working</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create employment opportunities within the development of new homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evaluate different build models eg. experiment with different options that create higher density, modular construction, custom build, build to rent</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Complete the Joint Spatial Plan for the West of England</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consider establishing a not-for profit private rented sector provider, as an alternative to the market</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Scope and develop a business plan with a range of delivery models</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implement the Mayor’s Homes Commission agreed recommendations</td>
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<td>• Expand on the work to deliver homes for particular groups to maximise opportunities and choice within the housing system, by:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Working with a delivery partner provide 12 additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches &amp; 3 travelling show people pitches by 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commissioning extra care housing schemes, as part of our Bristol Retirement Living plan, producing a total of 222 affordable flats and 764 flats for private sale to older people by 2023</td>
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Outcome 2: Deliver the best use of existing buildings

This strategy will promote the best use of Bristol’s current housing stock and facilitate partners to build the type of housing that is needed for the future needs of the city’s population and its environmental sustainability.

In order to meet some of the demand within Bristol and improve the housing offer for people, it is important to work with the housing that we have, making sure that our current resource is optimised and that we are working towards increasing standards. While new build is vital to meet the city’s needs, in practice it only adds between 1% and 2% additional homes per annum.

There are three parts to optimising existing housing:

1. **Raise standards in the Private Rented Sector**
2. **Deliver the best use of existing housing**
3. **Reduce empty homes, particularly in the private sector**

Raise standards in the private rented sector

The private rented sector is growing rapidly in Bristol and although the majority of landlords provide a good standard of accommodation and service to their tenants, there are a growing number who do not. Within the last housing strategy period work was carried out to increase quality and management standards by launching a discretionary licencing scheme in the Stapleton Road area (which was identified as a key area for poor quality accommodation and poor landlords). So far this appears to be having a positive impact, and we will consider extending this to other parts of the city where similar conditions prevail.

In addition, there are further opportunities to provide support to private landlords and tenants which will be explored within this strategy, including implementing the West of England rental standard and working with ACORN to support their Ethical Lettings Charter.

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**Raise standards in the private rented sector**

- Increase housing and management standards in the private rented sector
  - ‘Roof over my Head’ training for potential tenants
  - Advice, guidance and training for landlords
  - Exploring over the next 12 months whether a grading system to raise standards in the private rented sector is viable
  - Investigate using longer term tenancies
  - Implement the West of England lettings standard
  - Continue to provide support to groups seeking to improve standards, such as ACORN (including supporting their Ethical Lettings Charter)

- Identify and take action on poor quality private rented sector properties
  - Consult on potential for roll-out of further discretionary licencing schemes in areas of poor housing
  - Target intervention at the bottom of the market, including prosecutions of rogue landlords
Deliver the best use of existing housing

As well as ensuring the delivery of sites already identified for additional homes, it is important that we maximise the use of the accommodation we already have. As a stock retaining authority Bristol City Council (BCC) has ownership of around 28,000 properties and BCC homes make up 15% of the total housing in Bristol, with housing associations owning a further 6%. Combined with the 24% of private rented homes, 45% of the homes in the city are rented. There are around 10,000 applicants on the Bristol Housing Register looking for social housing, so maximising the use of our properties can go a long way to aiding the resolution of the housing shortage in Bristol.

Moreover, both under occupation and the vacancy rate in the private sector are a barrier to better utilisation. As part of the Bristol Ageing Better programme, led by Age UK Bristol, and the Better Care Bristol programme, we need to develop a more joined up approach to advice on housing issues and a better housing offer for older people enabling them to downsize to homes that are better-suited to need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Reduce overcrowding</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduce overcrowding by working directly with households to enable moves to take place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Reduce the number of under occupied properties</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduce under occupation within social housing tenancies by developing improved incentive schemes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create a better offer for older people that allows more people to live independently for longer in a home that better meets their needs, including extra care housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Improve the match between demand and what is available</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Build on Bristol Housing Partnership’s ‘Housing Futures Work’ by reviewing existing social housing stock to assess future viability and suitability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create a database of all properties with adaptations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish what homes are in greatest demand and consider how to best utilise the available social housing stock</td>
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Reduce empty private homes

Bristol has carried out a very successful programme of reducing empty homes and bringing them back into use. It has brought 3,248 properties back into use between 2010 - 2015. Work in this area is on-going, but targets will need to reflect the fact that achieving results is going to become more challenging and we need to evaluate the previous work to see what a future work programme might look like. Also properties that have been brought back into use have mainly gone into the private sector (for sale or private rent) not the social sector. It is important now that we look at increasing the affordable housing provision gained from this resource.

- Evaluate previous successes and set targets for future work
- Increase affordable housing provision from the homes that are brought back into use
- Consider extending the Empty Homes Programme to those empty commercial properties which have permitted development as residential, evaluate the costs and benefits
Outcome 3: Intervene early before a crisis occurs

Although this strategy is prioritising the delivery of new homes, the very real issues of rising homelessness and decreasing access to housing mean that there needs to be a focus on early intervention, prevention and enabling access to housing. Our aim will be to shift resources to tackle the causes of problems rather than just treating the symptoms.

Inherent within this will be a focus on intervention that can reduce the number of specialist interventions and prevent crisis. In order to achieve this, the strategy will focus on working in partnership to bring resources together in order to maximise the impact of any interventions. Partnership working will also enable specific targeted work to be carried out with those individuals or families that we can anticipate may have difficulties without effective support or intervention. The ‘Think Family’ programme is being expanded to work with households predicted to be at risk of crisis. This will include those at risk, for example, due to loss of income, domestic abuse or family breakdown – all of which can result in homelessness. This can be expanded by enlarging the role of social landlords as part of a ‘housing plus’ service.

Bristol will use evidence from the Universal Credit pathway authorities (Department of Work and Pensions) to identify and eliminate some of the anticipated impact of upcoming welfare reform.

Bristol has recently revised its Preventing Homelessness Strategy and identified six key priorities:

1. Minimise homelessness through early intervention by understanding and tackling the (often complex) reasons behind it, with special emphasis on young people.

2. Ensure consistency of approach, timely advice and earlier referrals from all agencies, even ones not always involved with homelessness.

3. Improve: access to, the amount of, the stability and quality of the private rented sector; myth busting and encouraging new build, leasing, licensing and accreditation.

4. Continue to assertively tackle rough sleeping; target those clients with complex, multiple needs.

5. Make more direct links between homelessness and the housing, health and wider policy agenda.

6. Ensure the right support is in place and that those ready to do so move-on promptly and reduce repeat homelessness.
**Sustaining homes**

- Map the risk for households and put in place appropriate support as early as possible
- Evaluate the success of the pathways from supported housing and redesign services where households are struggling to sustain independence
- Reduce fuel poverty and energy costs within social housing tenancies
  - Expand the Healthy Home Zone initiative
  - Promote the Bristol Energy Company
- **Deliver the Preventing Homeless Strategy and action plan, specifically:**
  - Reduce rough sleeping
  - Reduce the number of young people becoming homeless
  - Work with the Big Lottery funded Golden Key programme to achieve ‘system change’ for those with the most complex needs
- **Support older people**
  - Reduce social isolation and working to deliver the Age Friendly City Programme

**Sustaining occupation**

Bristol will adopt a holistic approach to tenancy by viewing the whole of the lifetime of a tenancy and identifying key points of increased vulnerability, such as: tenancy start; loss of employment; having a child. We will focus resources at the start of tenancy and pre-tenancy with accredited pre tenancy courses, and offering, introductory tenancies that have checks to identify vulnerability built in. As well as working with partners both internally and externally to spot and tackle early indicators of vulnerability or social isolation to support tenants to stay in their homes for as long as possible.

Working in partnership with advice agencies and housing associations we will work to prevent crisis and support successful tenancies. Bristol is fortunate that it has a wide provision of advice services in the city that has so far been largely unaffected by public spending cuts. However, there has been £500,000 lost from advice services through changes in legal aid provision. Since the development of the last strategy, the impact of welfare changes, the recession and rising homelessness has meant that more households have reached crisis, even though a very high proportion of households still have a successful prevention intervention.

The continuation of this provision and ensuring that advice and support is received in a timely manner lies at the heart of early prevention; the re-commissioning of advice services in 2016 provides an opportunity to examine housing advice, alongside other related advice and use evidence of ‘what works’ to commission and provide new services.

The existing Heathy Home Zones programme will be extended, as it is a well-evidenced way of helping older and disabled to remain happily and safely in their own homes.
Enabling access to housing

In order to address the challenges faced by the housing market and welfare benefit cuts, we will work innovatively and creatively with landlords, tenants and employers to maximise working opportunities as well as working with partners to promote and champion:

- Employment skills
- Digital inclusion
- Financial inclusion
- Personal budgeting support
- Understanding the responsibilities of being a ‘good’ tenant
- Access to learning opportunities

We will also encourage all landlords to take an active approach in reviewing tenancies, so those who can afford to move are helped to move elsewhere and those who cannot afford their current accommodation, helped to move into something more affordable.

Sustaining homes

- **Work with registered providers to reduce the need for affordability checks**
  - Gather evidence around the consequences and benefits to the applicant

- **Respond to welfare reform changes**
  - Evaluate the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit and design early action for those households most at risk

- **Work with children and families**
  - Supporting the Think Family work, so that housing providers are part of the ‘team around the family’ providing holistic solutions

- **Aid tenant success**
  - Introduce readiness training – working to maximise income, manage budgets and behaviours (expand the Roof Over my Head programme if it proves successful)
  - Maximise employment opportunities by incorporating the Learning City aims

- **Maximise the opportunities for people with learning disabilities or mental health issues to live independently or in alternative supported independent living schemes**

- **Work with Public Health to identify ways in which housing providers can contribute to better health outcomes, including dementia friendly housing**
The Housing Strategy is a key strategy for Bristol City Council and the following graphic shows where it fits with other key plans and strategies.

As the delivery agent for the Bristol Housing Strategy, the Homes4Bristol (H4B) Board contains representatives from all aspects of the housing system in Bristol. The Bristol Housing Partnership (BHP) is the forum for all social landlords to discuss joint ventures, share experiences and deliver joint actions. The Housing Strategy actions are represented within the BHP action plan, so there is a close working relationship between the BHP and H4B. Bristol City Council supports and feeds into both of these groups, as it does with other housing delivery groups/forums in the city.

Crucially, the council cannot and will not deliver this housing strategy in isolation. There is a central role for Bristol City Council, and we are also clear that leadership in Bristol extends beyond the council. The approach should apply to all homes in Bristol, which everyone involved in building and managing homes and supporting the people who live in them, has a role to play in delivering it.

This strategy has been developed in conjunction with all delivery partners and does reflect priorities and strategies of other organisations in the city. However, there is an expectation that in ‘signing up’ to the strategy partners will align their own strategies and business plans to the strategy outcomes. H4B will be doing further work to develop key performance measures to gauge progress, and further work on governance to create accountability for delivery across the system.
9. Governance and implementation

This strategy was developed by the strategic housing partnership for the city, Homes4Bristol. However, moving forward Homes4Bristol will be replaced with an expanded homes delivery board. This board will be co-chaired by the Mayor, alongside Louise Swain the CeO of Curo, one of our principle housing association partners.

The board will contain representatives from all aspects of the housing system in Bristol, ie. finance, developers, private landlords, supported housing, registered providers, advice agencies and Bristol City Council. This board will develop the action plan.

10. Action Plan

This strategy sets out what the City Council and its partners want to achieve on housing.

While it describes a number of initiatives that are already in progress or in development, it does not offer the full detail of how we will achieve our objectives. In some instances, we do not yet have the answers. In others, there is not space here for all the detail. In many cases, we will want to consult further with residents and partners before finalising plans and putting them into action.

The action plan – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed (SMART) – will be in place by July 2016 and will be rolled forward annually for the duration of the strategy.