



Draft Private Rented Sector Strategy 2026-2029

Policy, Strategy and Public Affairs
and Private Housing

This is a draft strategy, your input will help shape the final strategy and action plan. We appreciate your feedback and will consider every response.

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Vision

Bristol has a private rented sector that is fair, well-managed, safe, accessible and meets housing need where renters, landlords and agents access and exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.

Creating safe, healthy neighbourhoods, and affordable, safe and good quality homes is a priority set out in our Corporate Strategy 2025-2030. A fair and well-managed private rented sector helps deliver this priority.

Bristol's [One City Plan](#) outlines a shared vision for 'Homes and Communities' which states that: *"By 2050 everyone in Bristol will live in a home that meets their needs within a thriving and safe community."*

We will use the powers and partnerships we have to empower renters, support landlords, and help those in housing need access suitable housing in the private rented sector.

Introduction

Bristol has a thriving £15bn economy, excellent graduate retention, and is consistently rated as 'one of the best places to live and visit in the UK.' However, this success creates challenges, particularly in relation to the affordability of the private housing market. As one of the fastest growing Core Cities, the growing population puts pressure on the cost and availability of housing in the city. Alongside rising costs and increased demand, the Bristol PRS has reduced in size, resulting in increased competition for privately rented properties.

Over a quarter of Bristol's residents live in the private rented sector. It plays a vital role in meeting housing need, enabling inclusive economic growth and preventing homelessness. However, despite the prominence of the sector, it is unaffordable and inaccessible for many. According to ONS figures, Bristol is the most expensive city in which to privately rent in the UK and this has direct and indirect impacts on renters and those in housing need.

With house prices remaining high relative to incomes, we are seeing people renting for longer, with almost 40% of current private renters having rented privately for 3-10 years. Although 59% of those renting privately eventually plan to buy a home, for many, high costs make saving for a deposit unachievable.

Nationally, councils are seeing an unsustainable rise in the number of people presenting as homeless and in need of temporary accommodation. High rents and insecure tenancies mean that the end of a private tenancy is one of the most common reasons people become homeless in Bristol. The cost of providing temporary accommodation has more than doubled in the last five years, with local authorities in England spending approximately £2.8 billion in 2024/25.

Whilst the majority of the PRS in Bristol is of good quality and well managed, there are significant challenges when it is not – impacting individuals, families, and communities. This strategy brings together our approach, establishes our vision for the sector, and focuses on

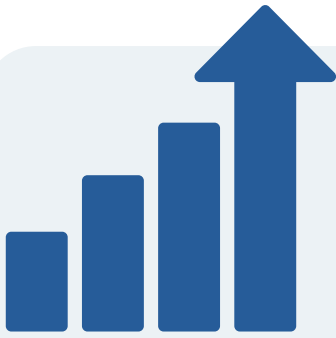
what we are doing to support tenants, landlords and agents, using our legal powers, duties, and building on relationships.

We are committed to working in partnership with key stakeholders across the sector to tackle these challenges through an approach that aligns with the Bristol [One City Plan](#) - which outlines a commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027 and deliver new affordable homes to achieve thriving and safe communities.

In 2022 the [Bristol One City Office](#) established a [Bristol Living Rent Commission](#) (LRC), including representatives from partner organisations, to explore measures to improve quality, accessibility and affordability in Bristol's sector, whilst understanding the unintended potential impacts of rent regulation. These sector experts, renters, landlords and academics investigated the issues faced by the city using data and testimony from organisations, groups, and individuals with lived experience. The evidence sessions were held over six months and heard from invited stakeholders and examined the results of an analysis of existing data on rent levels in the Bristol PRS, carried out by researchers at the University of Bristol.

The work [culminated in the Bristol Living Rent City Commission report 2023](#) which includes recommendations for Bristol City Council and national government. Taken together, the recommendations aim to create a more stable and accessible private rented sector—one where rents are more closely aligned with incomes, standards are consistently higher, and tenants are better able to secure and sustain suitable homes. In January 2023 the Council passed a motion committing to advocating for the legal powers to locally manage the affordability of the private rented sector and the Council's Private Housing Team has developed an Action Plan and reports on progress of these recommendations regularly through the One City Homes and Community Board Living Rent Action Group.

The Renters' Right Act 2025 (the Act) brought in new rights for renters and powers for local authorities regulating the sector. In preparing this Strategy we have engaged sector stakeholders to understand the Act's anticipated impacts and improve partnership working to support the sector. After three years we will review how the Act has affected the sector and the priorities of this strategy.



Bristol is one of the **fastest growing** Core Cities, with a population of around **494,400** in 2024 and has grown by over **11%** over the last decade (2014–2024).

PRS has reduced in size, making up around **27%**

of housing stock in 2023, down from over 30% in 2020.

In England (2023), **6%-13%** of private rented properties have **damp and mould** compared to **5%** of properties overall.

The average home now costs around

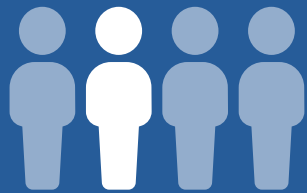
£347,000

(2026).



More than **18,000** households on the **Housing Register**.

Between 2021 and 2025, there was a **51%** increase in the number of people approaching the council because they were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.



Across England, around **one in three** (25%) of private rented households receive some form of housing support.

Over the last decade house prices in Bristol have **risen significantly**, with the cost of a median home estimated to be around **nine times average earnings**.

Bristol is home to

43,700 **full-time students**

aged 18 and over, making up **9.2%** of the total population.



1,900 households in **temporary accommodation** with over half including children



Enablers

Stakeholders

Delivery of this strategy will be enabled through strong partnership of stakeholders working across the city.

- Voluntary and community organisations play a critical role in supporting renters to understand their rights, resolve housing issues and report concerns to the council.
- Representative bodies for both renters and landlords, and managing agents also provide an important voice, advocating on behalf of their members while promoting knowledge and awareness across the sector.
- One City Partners, Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership and other public sector partner such as Avon Fire and Rescue
- Within the council, a range of teams contribute to this work: landlord and tenant liaison functions help to build constructive relationships and improve understanding between groups; the homelessness prevention service provides advice, early intervention and support to help residents sustain or access accommodation in the private rented sector; and specialist enforcement and licensing teams work to ensure compliance with legal standards.

National and local policy context

National legislation and regulatory frameworks are a key enabler of this strategy, complemented by local regulatory tools such as licensing schemes, which allow the council to target specific issues, improve management standards and improve housing quality in the private rented sector.

- Housing Act 2004
- Protection From Eviction 1977
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Renter Rights Act 2025
- Mandatory Licensing
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

A Fairer Rented Sector

The Renters' Rights Act has strengthened protections for tenants, but we know that rights alone do not guarantee fair outcomes. Not all renters are aware of their rights or feel able to use them. Around 20% of renters would not feel comfortable reporting an ongoing or unresolved issue with their property. Ensuring the private rented sector is fair therefore depends on both the legal framework and on people being able to access information, advice and support. We want to ensure that all tenants—particularly those most at risk of disadvantage—are supported to understand and use their rights.

Many people face challenges throughout the renting process and we are committed to ensuring that disabled people or those with a or long-term health condition feel supported to exercise their rights. This includes increasing awareness of the ability to request reasonable adjustments from landlords and agents, such as changes to tenancy terms.

Discrimination based on protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) remains illegal and the Renters' Rights Act has introduced new characteristics it is illegal to discriminate based on: income, having a pet or having a child/children. We are committed to investigating and enforcing against this where we can. Nearly half of respondents to our survey said they had been discriminated against when trying to rent a property and a significant minority said they were discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, nationality and/or immigration status. Guidance on how we can support cases of discrimination can be found on [our website](#), which outlines rights, obligations and sources of help and support.

A strong and effective advice sector is essential to making rights meaningful in practice. Bristol's voluntary and community sector plays a critical role in helping tenants to resolve issues, challenge poor practice and navigate the system. However, we also recognise that this support is under pressure and often constrained by capacity and complex eligibility thresholds.

We recognise that higher compliance in the private rented sector is best achieved when landlords understand their responsibilities. We will therefore focus on clear, proactive communication and guidance. While most landlords want to meet legal standards, many rely on national guidance or advice from agents and professional bodies. We will continue to work with local and national landlord associations, and engage directly through our Landlord Liaison Team, to promote good practice and ensure requirements are understood.

We will:

- Provide clearer information on what happens when someone reports a private rented housing issue, including the likely steps, the evidence they need to provide, and the checks we may make, while being clear that each case is different and subject to our available resources.
- More proactively celebrate the positive outcomes from our regulatory approach, including successful enforcement action and outcomes of our licensing schemes.
- Continue to use the findings from the Landlord Dialogue Survey, supplemented with findings from the Strategy's engagement, to inform how and what we communicate to landlords as we continue to spread awareness of regulatory requirements.

A Well-Managed Rented Sector

A well-managed private rented sector is fundamental to delivering healthy, safe and resilient communities. Our ambition is for all Bristol residents to live in homes that are safe and well-maintained.

Most landlords and managing agents meet their responsibilities, but a minority continue to fall short. The Council plays a critical role in maintaining standards and improving the quality of the private rented sector as a partner, enabler and regulator. We have a duty to address poor property conditions and poor management. This includes tackling serious hazards, improving energy efficiency, addressing damp and mould, ensuring timely repairs, and maintaining fire and electrical safety standards. We also have a duty to create safe, clean and resilient communities, we will address issues such as anti-social behaviour, environmental and poor waste management. We are part of the [West of England Rent With Confidence Scheme](#) an optional accreditation scheme for landlords whose properties meet defined standards. This scheme supports improved quality in the private rented sector while giving landlords access to training, guidance and additional benefits.

Growth in the student housing market has shifted more general needs private rented homes towards student lets, reducing availability for the wider population. While purpose-built student accommodation has increased, it remains unaffordable for many, so demand continues to place pressure on the wider rented sector. This intensifies competition and highlights the need to expand overall housing supply, particularly affordable homes. We will ensure balanced communities which have a mix of tenure to remain stable, cohesive and resilient. Through our partners with the University of Bristol and University of the West of England we work in partnership with the city's universities to plan for and meet the housing and infrastructure needs of students, graduates and staff in a way that supports the wider housing system.

We use a range of powers and tools to deliver a well maintained private rented sector, including enforcing standards, supplementary planning documents, Article Four Directives and property licensing. These tools are applied in a way that is proportionate, evidence-led and targeted, supporting responsible landlords while addressing non-compliance.

We aim to balance engagement and enforcement in our approach. We want to prevent poor outcomes by supporting landlords and agents to understand and deliver on their responsibilities. Where standards are not met we will take firm and robust action. Through our approach we will raise confidence and trust in the sector, ensuring that both tenants and landlords benefit from clear expectations and consistent standards.

Working in partnership is essential to achieving these outcomes. We will continue to work as One Council, and closely with partners, including the VCSE, Avon Fire and Rescue Service and the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership, to identify and address risks, improve safety and respond to issues such as poor management practice and anti-social behaviour in a coordinated way.

To achieve our collective ambition, we will:

- Work as one council to ensure we address poor management practices and quality issues, waste and environmental challenges and anti-social behaviour

- Promote the impact of our regulatory and enforcement activity, to improve awareness and confidence in our role.
- Explore the case for further licensing schemes, where evidence demonstrates a need to: address significant issues with the management of HMOs in an area or poor management and/or conditions.
- Strengthen information to tenants, landlords and letting agents on how and when we will enforce and the steps we will take.
- Support landlord preparedness for future regulatory requirements such as registering on the new Landlord Database, Decent Homes Standard, Private Rented Sector Ombudsman, introduced through the Renters' Rights Act to drive improvements, potentially reducing the need for enforcement.

Access to suitable private housing

Bristol's private rented sector is characterised by high demand and limited supply, which drives high housing costs and creates barriers to accessing and sustaining suitable accommodation. Our ambition is for a private rented sector that provides safe, secure and affordable homes for all residents, and supports the health and wellbeing of people across Bristol. This includes ensuring that housing is accessible and inclusive, and allows residents to remain connected to their support networks, employment and services. We are committed to increasing the availability of genuinely affordable housing across all tenures, including routes into home ownership.

Limited availability of physically accessible homes creates additional barriers for disabled people, who may have to compete for a small number of suitable properties. This can result in people being forced to move away from support networks, services and employment, undermining independence and quality of life. We will continue to support access to Disabled Facilities Grants which can help with the cost of adaptations and work with tenants and landlords to ensure reasonable requests are considered and responded to appropriately.

These sector pressures also contribute to wider challenges, including homelessness. Preventing homelessness relies on early intervention and strong landlord relationships. The private rented sector plays a key role both in prevention and in providing routes into settled housing. We will continue to work proactively with landlords and agents to sustain tenancies and improve access to housing, in line with our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025–2030, which places prevention at its core.

As a local authority, our role is to influence, enable and regulate the housing to improve outcomes for residents, recognising that many of the key drivers of supply and affordability sit outside direct council control.

We use our strategic planning powers to shape the long-term housing market. Through the Local Plan and associated policies, we take a plan-led approach to balancing competing demands on housing, including the provision of student accommodation and more accessible housing for all needs. Our Housing Delivery Plan sets out our ambition to deliver 1,000 affordable homes per

year and how we will use our land, resources and influence to achieve this, including through our housing company, Goram Homes

We also work with the sector to make better use of existing housing stock. Bringing empty homes back into use is a key priority, contributing to increased housing supply and supporting neighbourhood sustainability. Our Empty Property Policy sets out how we will support and, where necessary, intervene to return long-term empty properties to occupation, in line with the One City Plan ambition to significantly reduce empty homes over time.

To achieve an accessible private rented sector we will:

- work with landlords and agents to prevent homelessness through early intervention and by sustaining tenancies.
- bring empty homes back into use by supporting owners and taking action where needed
- continue to support access to Disabled Facilities Grants, working with tenants and their landlords to ensure reasonable adaptation requests are properly considered and responded to, enabling residents to live safely and independently in their homes.
- Continue to deliver homes that meet the needs of the city

Devolution and affordability

We want to improve affordability in the private rented sector so people can thrive in their communities, close to friends, family, work and leisure, while also supporting economic growth across the city. Affordability is the biggest issue for most private renters in Bristol, with average rents now consuming over half of the average local salary. This is compounded by high demand, with over a quarter of the city's population renting privately. Between 2011 and 2021, private rents increased by 52%, while wages grew by only 24%, meaning renters now spend around 45% to 57% of their income on housing. These rising costs are making housing increasingly unaffordable and pushing people away from their workplaces, families and support networks, as well as the services they rely on. At the same time, there is significant pressure on social housing, with over 19,000 households on the waiting list and more than 1,200 households living in temporary accommodation. The cost of private renting affects not only individuals and communities—impacting cohesion and social mobility—but also the city's wider economy by constraining productivity and growth.

Through our Economic Strategy 2025–2035, we have committed to improving the housing affordability ratio. The Bristol Living Rent Commission found substantial support across the city for measures to address the affordability crisis and explored a range of potential models, recognising that further research, engagement and consultation are required to assess their impact. Following this, we have advocated to government, key stakeholders and influencers on the need for affordability measures, and we continue to raise this issue with national government. We are working closely with the Living Rent Action Group, the successor to the Commission, to push for greater devolution of powers to address affordability in the private rented sector. We believe local authorities should be trusted to work with partners to undertake the necessary research and be given the powers to implement locally agreed solutions. We

welcome the Renters' Rights Act, which introduces measures to tackle insecurity, discrimination and unfair rent increases, as well as the additional powers it provides to councils. However, wider systemic challenges, including capacity across councils and courts and a lack of powers to directly influence affordability, risk limiting its effectiveness.

To achieve our vision, we will:

- deliver new affordable and market housing
- continue to work with academics and partners to develop powers that will help address affordability in the private rented sector.
- advocate alongside partners and stakeholders to national government for the devolution of powers needed to tackle affordability and
- will work with the sector to ensure the Renters' Rights Act is deliverable in practice.

Review

This Strategy will be reviewed after five years, in 2029. Which allows time to better understand the impact of the Renters' Rights Act on renters, landlords, council services, and the wider sector.

An Action Plan will set out how we will address the issues raised in this Strategy, including working alongside local and national partners.

Glossary of terms

Accessible Homes Policy and Process - the framework that sets out how the council assesses need for accessible or adapted housing and delivers or supports appropriate solutions—through home adaptations, rehousing, or support services—to enable disabled and older residents to live safely and independently.

Additional Licensing schemes – (see Licensing schemes definition) [apply in areas of the city where the Council has declared additional licensing schemes](#). It applies to privately rented flats or houses, where 3 or 4 people live in 2 or more households and share some basic facilities.

Article Four Directive – a council-led planning mechanism that withdraws automatic development rights in specific areas, requiring formal planning permission to manage the impact of changes such as HMO conversions and protect local amenity.

Civil Penalties Policy - the framework that sets out how the council imposes and calculates financial penalties (fines) on individuals or organisations for breaches of housing law.

EPC - Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) tell you how energy efficient a building is and give it a rating from A (very efficient) to G (inefficient). They'll tell you how costly it will be to heat and light your property, and what its carbon dioxide emissions are likely to be. An EPC also includes information on what the energy efficiency rating could be if you made the recommended improvements.

Enforcement Policy - the framework that sets out how Bristol City Council uses its statutory enforcement powers to regulate standards and management in privately owned and rented housing, including when and how it will take informal action, formal enforcement, or legal proceedings to address non-compliance

House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) - a house in multiple occupation is a type of shared housing. A property is an HMO if:

- three or more people live there, and
- they form at least two separate families or households, and
- at least one person pays some form of rent to live in the property.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) - the method used by local authorities to assess the condition of residential properties by identifying and evaluating potential hazards to health and safety, based on the risk of harm arising from any deficiencies in the home.

Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership – the statutory multi-agency partnership responsible for community safety and safeguarding across Bristol, bringing together key organisations to prevent and respond to crime, anti-social behaviour, and risks to children and adults, and to promote safer communities.

Licensing schemes – statutory tools (derived from the Housing Act 2004) that allow councils to require landlords to register and meet defined standards, in order to improve the quality, safety and management of private rented housing and target poor practice in the sector.

Mandatory licensing scheme – privately let HMOs need a mandatory licence if it has five or more people from two or more households living in it with shared toilets, bathrooms or cooking facilities.

Median – the value that is exactly in the middle of a numerical dataset when it is ordered.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) - the Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Regulations set a minimum energy efficiency level for domestic private rented properties. The regulations apply to all domestic private rented properties that are let on specific types of tenancy agreement and/or legally required to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC).

Protected characteristics – specific personal attributes defined in the Equality Act 2010 that are legally protected from discrimination, meaning it is unlawful to treat someone unfairly because of these characteristics. The Act identifies nine protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

Selective Licensing schemes - (see Licensing schemes definition) [apply to non-HMO properties in areas of the city](#) where we've declared selective licensing schemes.

Strategic planning - the council's plan-led approach to shaping Bristol's long-term development, setting the vision, spatial priorities and policies that guide where and how growth happens and underpin decisions on planning applications.

Supplementary planning document – a planning guidance document produced by the council that provides additional detail and advice on how policies in the Local Plan should be implemented, and which is used as a material consideration in planning decisions.