

Living Rent Commission (LRC) Recommendations: Completed, current and proposed actions.

Recommendation	Action being taken	Completed (Green)/Ongoing (Amber)/Not feasible (Red)
<p>1. BCC should recognise that there is substantial popular support for rent control in the city as a response to affordability problems, although there are also concerns about negative impacts. Further work should be undertaken to take forward the proposals explored in this report and seek a coalition of support for a more specific policy design. This work should be in collaboration with sector stakeholders and ensure that tenants' views are integral to the process. We sought views on four example policy designs (see chapter five). We suggest that our example policy B – which involved initial rents being based on a property's characteristics, increases within tenancies being fixed at a maximum annual percentage, and changes between tenancies being regulated by their relation to the current market average - could form a potentially fruitful starting point for this discussion. We anticipate that it could also be appropriate to open up a range of further policy designs for detailed consideration.</p>	<p>A Bristol Living Rent Commission Task and Finish group was launched in November 2023 following publication of the LRC report. The group includes a range of sector stakeholders and will continue to meet to discuss the findings and recommendations of the report.</p> <p>Communication with University of Bristol's Policy Bristol team continues in relation to further rent control modelling.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>2. Proposals for a rent control policy should include an assessment of how rent control fits within the broader housing policy portfolio. Decisions about future policy direction should be made based on the portfolio of policies available, rather than on rent control in isolation. Great care is needed when proceeding in the direction of rent control.</p>	<p>BCC does not currently have the power to implement rent controls and consequently no conversations have taken place with relevant service areas about its place in the housing policy portfolio.</p> <p>BCC has lobbied central government for the power to implement rent controls and if this is granted then the relevant conversations will take place. We continue to monitor the governments commitments around Renters Rights Bill and wider devolution.</p>	<p>Not feasible</p>

<p>3. In parallel with the recommendations above, a communications strategy to address policy risk should be developed. Talk of “rent control” without providing any detail of what that would mean can lead to negative side effects when sector actors, particularly landlords, assume the worst. Yet, it appears that support for our example policy that proposed the hardest, most interventionist form of rent control was not broad-based. Regulation that is primarily aimed at stabilising the market and curbing excesses do not necessarily undermine the business models of responsible landlords. Communicating about proposed policy design can be extremely important.</p>	<p>We continue to work closely with the Communications and Private Housing team(s) to make sure we are sharing information and updates relating to the PRS which are clear, detailed, and evidenced. This includes any correspondence on rent control.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>4. The council should consider whether it is desirable to advocate for a rent freeze as a short-term crisis measure. Such a freeze is currently in operation in Scotland and city leaders elsewhere in England have called for similar measures. Commissioners from the tenant community, and a proportion of tenants responding to our survey, were strongly supportive of this approach. Such a freeze would have significant implications for the housing market.</p>	<p>The council will continue to conduct public affairs activity which looks to promote the report recommendations in Westminster, lobby government, and call for devolution of rent control powers to local authorities.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>5. The commission endorses the council’s firm policy stance against poor property and management standards in private renting. This approach should be reinforced and extended. The council should review how it communicates its work in this area including its strategies, associated enforcement action, and licensing work - to make sure that the effectiveness of the approach is fully appreciated by those who are affected by it.</p>	<p>The council is continuing to take a firm policy stance against poor property and management standards. The promotion of our service successes and policy work have been extended through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing press releases on relevant enforcement action. • Sharing relevant statistics and enforcement outcomes at the landlord panel, which comprises of West of England local authorities and a number of landlord and agent organisations. 	<p>Completed</p>

	<p>The council is planning to start publishing performance outputs on BCC webpages and via landlord and tenant bulletins.</p>	
<p>6. Review whether the balance between informal and formal enforcement action on poor property standards is striking the right balance. There are concerns that the use of informal action exposes tenants to the risk of retaliatory eviction. We note the motion to Full Council in January 2023 which highlights the greater use of formal improvement notices to address property condition. This approach could provide tenants with greater protection.</p>	<p>The changing national policy agenda could impact the power and extent of the council's enforcement approach. Given this, the council will continue to consider how to best use the enforcement powers at its disposal, including reviewing best practice in cities with similar challenges, and evaluate the enforcement approach as appropriate considering any legislative reforms.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>7. Embrace the potential of a regulatory regime that is more collaborative and networked. Explore more fully the role that organisations in the private and not-for profit sector can play in the effective regulation of private renting, in partnership with the council, particularly through improving the flow of information and timely identification of issues.</p>	<p>The council is further developing existing relationships and arrangements by liaising with third sector and private rent organisations to discuss key issues to ensure that we improve the flow of information between the sector and BCC.</p> <p>Landlord and tenant liaison engagement takes place through the following channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlord bulletins • Tenant bulletins • Meetings with various landlord and agent groups, e.g. the West of England landlord panel • Meetings with various tenant organisations, e.g. Bristol Student Community Partnership <p>A survey was sent out to tenants' organisations to request feedback on what they felt were the main challenges, what private housing information they felt was lacking in public domain, and what they felt Private Housing Service could do work collaboratively.</p> <p>The service is also connecting with other relevant BCC teams to determine appropriate information dissemination.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>


<p>8. The commission recognises the council’s commitment to tackling discrimination in the private rented sector. To move this agenda forward effectively it is important to ensure that responsibilities within the organisation are clearly allocated and accountability mechanisms are clear. The development of local strategies and action plans for tackling discrimination would benefit from the formal involvement from renters and organisations that work with them as part of a co-production process. While national government has signalled an intention to legislate to address discrimination, this process is moving slowly and it is important to maintain momentum locally.</p>	<p>The council has introduced a discrimination clause in licence conditions for new licences. An anti-discrimination clause is also included in the Rent with Confidence conditions.</p> <p>A tenant’s guide to private renting is due to be published soon which covers discrimination and how tenants can take action. Various tenant organisations have contributed to its content.</p> <p>The council continues to explore ways that Trading Standards legislation can be used to tackle discriminatory practices in the private rented sector.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>9. We note that the recent motion to Full Council condemned the practice of bidding wars: that is, landlords or letting agents increasing rental income by requiring prospective tenants to compete against each other to bid above advertised rents. We commend the council’s aspiration to identify mechanisms to end this practice. We note that an initial step would be for the council to signal its intent by sending a clear public message condemning the practice via its formal communication channels.</p>	<p>The council has adapted its communications to reflect this recommendation. This will continue to be supported by the external communications teams.</p> <p>A statement regarding the practice of bidding wars was circulated via the landlord bulletin mailing list by Councillor Kye Dudd, former Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Energy.</p> <p>Bidding wars are covered in the new tenants’ guide. The advice given is to avoid agents who encourage prospective tenants to bid against each other.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>10. Take steps, working with industry bodies and other stakeholders, to raise the performance of poorer quality letting agents to the standard of the best.</p>	<p>Investigations and legal compliance audits are routinely carried out by the council into letting agents that generate complaints. Both formal and informal action is taken, in accordance with the BCC enforcement policy, to ensure that Bristol letting agents protect client money in accordance with the rules, do not mislead tenants and do not charge prohibited or hidden fees.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>11. The expansion of area-based and</p>	<p>The council introduced new licensing schemes on 6 August 2024. These include:</p>	

<p>selective licensing could be part of a firm stance towards improving standards. Demonstrating the effectiveness of existing uses of this policy approach should be integral to any future expansion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A citywide Additional licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). • A Selective licensing scheme covering most other privately rented properties in the Bishopston and Ashley Down, Cotham and Easton wards. <p>The council will start to publish performance outputs on BCC webpages and via landlord and tenant bulletins.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>12. BCC should ensure that the fees and administrative processes associated with licensing schemes are no more of a burden on landlords than necessary.</p>	<p>Licensing fees only cover the costs for running each licensing scheme and the costs for delivering licensing related work.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>13. Review the way that information about the private rented sector is currently shared. This includes information on rights, obligations, and sources of help and support for both tenants and landlords. Map out which organisations are sharing information, with whom and when. Explore the potential for new collaborations to ensure accurate and timely information is reaching more of those who need it.</p>	<p>The council has carried out basic mapping of existing tenant’s organisations to determine the type of information, advice, and services they provide.</p> <p>A survey was sent to tenant organisations to request feedback on what they felt were main challenges, what private housing information they felt was lacking in public domain, and what they felt the council could do to work collaboratively.</p> <p>The council is continuing to work in collaboration with University of Bristol and UWE in relation to finding accommodation for students in Bristol and providing advice for international students.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>14. Review the content and form of information being shared. The review should cover the accessibility and comprehensibility of the information. It should consider whether new media or formats present opportunities to communicate the message more effectively. It should explore whether there is learning about what works that can be shared more effectively between information providers.</p>	<p>Basic mapping of existing tenants’ organisations has been carried out to determine the type of information, advice and services they give. A survey was sent out to tenants’ organisations to request feedback on what they felt were the main challenges in the current climate, what private housing information they felt was lacking in the public domain and what they felt the Private Housing Service could do to work collaboratively with sector stakeholders.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

	<p>Welcoming Spaces are now being used for the circulation of some private housing information.</p> <p>The council will continue to review the accessibility of information and communication through the following avenues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult accessibility guidelines when making improvements to the BCC website. • Use of more infographics. • Use of social media. • Consider printing tenant leaflets and tenant pack for those with poor digital literacy. Ensure this information is shared in Welcome Spaces and relevant community centres/libraries. • Continue to engage with the council equalities team for advice presenting information and accessibility. 	
<p>15. Produce locally tailored versions of national documentation to ensure that Bristol's landlords and tenants are clear on its relevance to them.</p>	<p>A tenant's guide to private renting in Bristol is due to be published soon.</p> <p>Specific webpages on the council website are available. These include documentation on areas such as damp and mould and include a checklist and leaflet.</p> <p>Basic mapping of existing tenant organisations has been carried out to determine the type of information, advice, and services they give and require. This included a survey.</p> <p>The council is establishing how equalities monitoring can be improved in relation to who is using the private housing service and accessing data.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>16. Set up a single, easily discoverable location online for presenting the range of relevant information for landlords, tenants and letting agents.</p>	<p>The council continues to explore how best to present information to tenants, landlords and letting agents and the service is mapping existing webpages to identify areas for improvement.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

	Housing and landlord services have inputted into the development of the council's first Accessible Communications Policy which is due to be adopted this year.		
17.	<p>Review the data on the private rented sector that is routinely collected. Evaluate the benefits and costs of collecting additional information – for example, on rents and tenant incomes – to enhance understanding of how the housing affordability situation is evolving.</p>	<p>Equalities monitoring forms have been added to online Private Housing Service forms for service users and equalities data of consultees from a recent licensing consultation has been obtained.</p> <p>There is some data sharing with/received from external partners in relation to some elements of equalities monitoring data. A commissioned Housing Stock Model report provides information on deprivation and house conditions which has been used to determine suitable licensing areas.</p>	Ongoing
18.	BCC should continue to do all it can to increase the supply of new social housing. It should continue to make the case to central government regarding the pressing need for more funding for social housing and the need to ensure that the welfare benefit system takes sufficient account of actual rents to ensure that housing costs are affordable.	<p>The council will continue to build affordable housing, with a focus on social rented homes, with support to maximise delivery through housing associations.</p> <p>The council will continue to communicate its key funding asks to government in relation to social housing.</p>	Completed
19.	BCC should review administrative processes associated with planning and development control to ensure that they are as streamlined and efficient as possible.	The council is exploring this through local plan policy and continued government engagement through the LGA, highlighting capacity restraints faced by planning departments and the need to review fees.	Ongoing
20.	Enhance support for diverse, innovative community-led initiatives to develop new housing. This could include reviewing land made available to community-led organisations through the public land disposal programme; advocating for the involvement of community-led organisations in private sector led developments; or supporting appropriately	<p>The draft Local Plan outlines how the council wants to support the delivery of community-led housing. The council is working with various communities to help bring forward proposals to meet their local housing needs.</p> <p>This policy offers an approach to delivering land for self-build and custom housebuilding to help meet</p>	Ongoing

<p>tailored organisational capacity building to bring development sites forward.</p>	<p>identified demand across the city as well as community-led housing to address the local need for affordable homes. This will be achieved through site allocations and other policy mechanisms to support delivery.</p> <p>The council will continue to build on existing relationships with community-led organisations to further enhance its approach to community-led housing delivery, including lobbying national government for the reinstatement of the community-led housing sector.</p>	
<p>21. Ensure that there is clarity over the way that the city's universities' strategies are having an impact upon, and will further impact in future, the housing market. Initiate timely action, such as accelerating approvals for the development of purpose-built accommodation in appropriate locations, to mitigate any side effects.</p>	<p>The Bristol Local Plan considers the need and demand of the cities' two universities and the provision of purpose-built accommodation in appropriate locations is supported by the council.</p> <p>The council is committed to managing the development of student housing to safeguard existing communities and there will be a cap on the number of student homes that can be built in each area. In doing so, the council recognises the impact of university expansion but accepts that some supply is required to tackle a growing issue.</p>	Completed
<p>22. The council should seek to ensure that new purpose-built student accommodation is as affordable as possible and available to students in all years. Consideration of this issue should be integrated into the current local plan review process.</p>	<p>The Bristol Local Plan is currently undergoing review having been submitted to the Secretary of State in April 2024.</p> <p>The Plan looks to ensure that students are provided with the best possible learning experience when coming to study. This includes the provision of high quality, well managed, safe and accessible purpose-built accommodation. This also means access to a wide choice of quality accommodation at affordable prices.</p>	Completed
<p>23. Examine in more detail the evidence on the impact of short-term lets like AirBnB, second homes, and holiday lets on urban housing markets and, specifically, the effectiveness of</p>	<p>The council responded to government consultations regarding short term lets and supported proposals under the previous government to devolve the powers</p>	Completed

<p>strategies that have sought to regulate these subsectors.</p>	<p>for the introduction of a registration system for short term lets and the creation of a new planning use class.</p> <p>The council will continue to respond to government consultations in relation to this area, helping establish a clear evidence base on the impact of short-term lets on Bristol.</p>	
--	---	--