

Bristol's big housing conversation

Accessing council and social housing



Consultation survey

Help us improve the way we let our homes

We are currently reviewing the way we let council and social housing. We want to ensure people have homes that meet their needs, giving priority to those who need it most, and making the application process easier.



The consultation is live until **Friday 7 October**.

If you would like this information in another language or accessible format, please email lettings.review@bristol.gov.uk or call **0117 352 1444**.



Bristol Housing Allocations Review Consultation

The review will give the council the opportunity to look at who is housed, and why, and develop options for how to let social housing in the future.

HomeChoice Bristol (HCB) is the housing register used by the council and partner housing associations to allocate social housing in Bristol. It has a single set of qualification criteria, a priority banding system and an arrangement for advertising properties.

How does the current system work?

Households have to apply to join the current lettings scheme (known as HomeChoice Bristol).

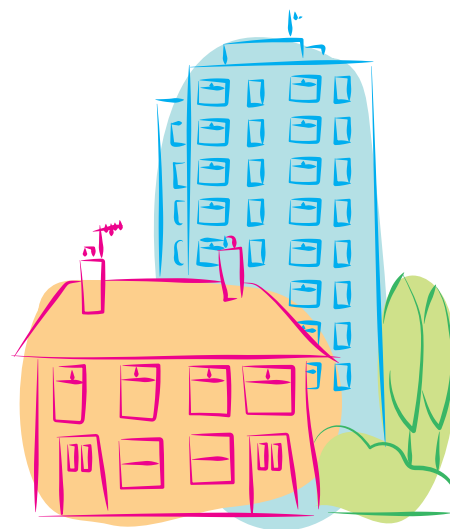
The system has four bands to prioritise housing need where Band 1 is for people in highest need, while those in the Band 4 are deemed to have no immediate housing need.

All properties that are available are advertised through HomeChoice Bristol and applicants can bid on properties that meet their needs. The property will usually be let to the applicant in the highest band who has been waiting longest in that band.

Further information about the reasons for bands can be found online by searching 'HomeChoice Bristol banding criteria'.

There are a number of challenges associated with the current system, including:

- Households in the two lowest bands (3 and 4) receive few offers.
- The shortage of housing stock severely impacts on our ability to provide a satisfactory service.
- It doesn't help create mixed and balanced communities. In fact, it appears to concentrate the numbers of vulnerable households facing poverty in social housing areas and estates.



HomeChoice Bristol applications by band as at April in the last three years

	April 2020		April 2021		April 2022	
	Applicants	%	Applicants	%	Applicants	%
Band 1	411	3	421	3	558	3
Band 2	1,816	13	2,315	14	2,878	16
Band 3	4,703	34	5,430	34	5,665	32
Band 4	7,032	50	7,904	49	8,521	48
Total	13,962		16,070		17,622	

HomeChoice Bristol allocations by band as at April for the two preceding years

	April 2020		April 2021	
	Applicants	%	Applicants	%
Band 1	226	12	180	11
Band 2	1,125	60	960	61
Band 3	350	19	285	18
Band 4	184	10	161	10
Total	1,885		1,586	

Please note: The allocations figure in Band 4 includes **all** allocations, including those made to age-restricted and sheltered properties.

The objective of the review is to implement a revised Housing Allocation Scheme that:

- Houses those in greatest need.
- Is more efficient and user friendly for applicants, the council, housing associations and other partner organisations.
- Gives realistic expectations about being housed to those who join the HomeChoice Bristol register.
- Better supports the creation of mixed, balanced, sustainable communities.

Proposal 1.1: Adopt an alternative approach – ‘managed choice’

What we do now

We use a ‘choice based’ lettings system. This means we give people the chance to choose which council house or housing association accommodation they want. Properties are advertised through HomeChoice Bristol and people bid when properties become available.

When someone finds a property that they like and which is suitable for their needs, they then make a “bid” for it. There may be limitations placed on what they are allowed to apply for and how many bids they are allowed to place.

All bids on a property are automatically put in priority order (based on band and length of time someone has spent in the band) on the property shortlist. Once the advertising cycle has closed, the landlord of the property (Bristol City Council or a housing association) then decide who they will offer the property to.

We currently allocate up to 30% of properties by means of a ‘direct offer’. This is where we proactively match a property to an applicant and offer it to them rather than waiting for them to bid. This is done to speed up the highest need cases by matching them to properties that meet their bedroom need – the most fundamental requirement.

What’s the problem?

Our property supply is seriously limited and doesn’t match the number of people who need housing.

This includes a lack of larger properties (3-bed or more), which presents problems when trying to house larger families in high need.

Many people in Bands 1 and 2 have high expectations about being able to successfully bid on something that meets **all** their needs considering the limited choice we have available.

Due to the extreme limitations in stock we are unlikely to ever be able to completely satisfy most people by meeting all their housing preferences.

What do we propose?

One alternative to choice-based letting is using a managed list. In this model the council takes responsibility for managing the allocation of property to people on the housing register. People do not have the opportunity to independently bid for property and rely on the council to choose for them.

We don’t believe this to be a viable alternative because people prefer to have a degree of choice, and where possible, we want to continue to provide this option.

The council proposes to operate a combination of choice-based letting and a managed list. To start with, we will give people in Bands 1 and 2 the freedom to bid on property independently for a fixed period of time. After that we would take action to match them to a suitable property and make a direct offer, with up to 50% of allocations being made by direct offer. People would also have the option of 'opting in' to managed choice from the start.

What's the benefit?

We believe this will enable us to move people in critical situations into suitable accommodation faster. This includes people fleeing domestic violence or hate crime, living in properties that are severely overcrowded and those at risk of homelessness or already homeless.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to move to a more 'managed choice' approach?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

2. How long should we allow people to bid for before we step in?

- ☐ 6 months
- ☐ 9 months
- ☐ 12 months
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Proposal 1.2: Limiting the number of direct offers

A person is placed in a high priority band based on their need to be housed urgently. Our priority is to house those with the highest levels of need, but this becomes difficult when people reject what may be viewed by the housing provider as suitable offers due to them not being in the right location or not the type of property they would choose. We are therefore proposing to introduce consequences if suitable offers are rejected.

3. How many direct offers do you believe an applicant should be able to decline before a consequence is imposed?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ No consequences should be introduced

4. Which of these penalties do you think would be most appropriate if someone rejects suitable direct offers?

- ☐ Prevented from bidding for 3 months after which they will be reassessed
- ☐ Prevented from bidding for 6 months after which they will be reassessed
- ☐ Prevented from bidding for 9 months after which they will be reassessed
- ☐ Prevented from bidding for 12 months after which they will be reassessed
- ☐ Drop one band
(i.e. move from Band 1 to Band 2, or Band 2 to Band 3) but free to continue bidding independently
- ☐ Removal from the housing register
- ☐ No penalty
- ☐ Other
(please specify):

Proposal 2.1: Managing the mismatch between demand and supply

What's happening now?

There are currently almost 18,000 households on the Housing Register. In 2021/2022 we made just 1,501 lets. In other words, our current supply is less than 10% of current demand.

What is the issue?

Even with major drives to build more homes or acquire property by other means, this mismatch between demand and supply is unlikely to change significantly or fast.

There are currently 9,034 households in Band 4. In line with the last two years less than 161 are likely to be allocated housing, the majority being people who qualify for age restricted or sheltered housing.

This shows that there is currently little to no chance of being successfully housed from Band 4, and being on the register may be giving people false hope. It also takes a great deal of officer time to maintain the high number of applications in Band 4 who are highly unlikely to ever be housed.

What do we propose?

We will continue to allow all eligible applicants to join the register. Those who don't meet the criteria for Bands 1 to 3 will be assessed into Band 4 but in future we propose to restrict their bidding to specific property types.

Those who meet the age criteria in Band 4 would be able bid on sheltered or age restricted properties. Those who don't, would be directed to other housing options like private rented, shared ownership, and community led housing and would not be able to bid with Band 4 status.

This group would be free to be reassessed or to reapply should their circumstances change, and would be able to access the additional information and resources we intend to provide on alternative housing solutions.

This would also allow more officer time to be focused on households in higher priority bands.

5. Do you agree or disagree with restricting bidding for Band 4?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Proposal 2.2. Consider extending support offered to people downsizing

We are considering a pilot that would target people living in properties that have more bedrooms than they need. We intend to assess a range of downsizing incentives to see which ones are most effective.

6. Which of the following do you think is most likely to incentivise under-occupiers to move? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ General guidance or specific information to help them move
- ☐ Financial assistance for moving (including removal of unwanted goods)
- ☐ Support with applying to HomeChoice Bristol and bidding on properties
- ☐ Arranging removals/disconnection and reconnections of white goods
- ☐ Flooring in new property – carpet for lounge and bedroom
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Proposal 2.3. Extend the use of Local Lettings Policies

While most allocations for social housing will be made from the general allocations scheme, different parts of a city may have localised issues which aren't directly addressed by the scheme. To address these situations a Local Lettings Policy (LLP) may be introduced. LLPs place additional criteria or restrictions on certain properties that applicants on the housing register must meet in order to apply to rent them.

LLPs can, for example:

- Apply to housing opportunities within a certain area
- Prioritise applicants with local connections to that area
- Address a local imbalance in access to housing that is out of line with the rest of Bristol

When criteria or restrictions have been applied to a property it will be mentioned in the property advert when someone searches for a home.

An LLP may be initiated by the council or by community groups.

The benefits of LLPs include; maintaining family and extended support networks, supporting the economic sustainability and growth of an area, community cohesion, and supporting local service provision.

7. Do you agree or disagree that Local Lettings Policy (LLPs) should be more widely used?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

There are currently LLPs in place in Lawrence Weston and Lockleaze where 50% of new build properties are prioritised for local people.

They are also proposed to be introduced in areas with development coming forward including:

- Fishponds
- Hengrove
- Horfield
- St Pauls
- Knowle
- Lawrence Hill
- Southmead

8. Do you think an LLP is required in any other specific area?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. If you think an LLP is required in any other specific area, please let us know which area(s) and why:

Proposal 3.1. Improve access for people exiting Adult Supported Care

What do we do now?

Everyone on the Housing Register has a reason for wanting to move, but in practice we can only offer homes to those in the greatest need.

What is the issue?

Focus is on high need cases within Bands 1 and 2. Very few people within Band 3 get housed.

What do we propose?

Whilst there is no intention to change the use of the four-band system, several changes are proposed to prioritisation within the bands.

Many people who are currently living in supported accommodation and have social care needs are capable of living with less support. Helping more of these people to move into social housing with floating support would improve their quality of life, as well as freeing up capacity in supported accommodation for those in greater need.

A target has been set for the next two years to move people with care and support needs who live in supported accommodation. (We are looking for 40 allocations in 2022/23, and 150 in 2023/24).

Whilst this will affect the number of social housing properties available for all other applicants, the council intends to address this by increasing the supply of new build 1-bed properties in the 2023/2024 financial year. It is anticipated that after 2024 the allocation target for this group will be reduced.

10. Do you agree or disagree that improving access for people exiting Adult Social Care is the right thing to do?

- ☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

Proposal 3.2. Band 1 priority for care leavers

All councils have 'Corporate Parenting' duties to help young people who are leaving, and have left, local authority care. By 'care leavers' we mean young people who have in the past been under local authority care but who are now moving towards living independently in the community. We are not referring to young people who may be moving between Children's and Adult Social Care support services.

Currently care leavers who have been assessed as ready to move on from external supported accommodation are placed in Band 1 and other care leavers are placed in Band 2.

Going forward, we propose setting aside a fixed number of properties for care leavers requiring social housing, and placing those care leavers in Band 1 as long as they meet conditions relating to their ability to live independently.

What is the benefit?

This approach would encourage more care leavers to complete the programme that prepares them for independent living. It would also offer a direct pathway out of other forms of accommodation, freeing up supported accommodation for other care leavers. Similarly, young people who wish to move on from care after turning 18 could do so quicker freeing up additional places for children in care seeking homes.

11. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to move more care leavers to Band 1?

- ☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

Proposal 3.3: Band 1 priority for all under-occupiers

What is the issue?

The council needs to make the most effective use of the limited social housing stock available. As we have already noted above, the lack of larger properties (3-bed or more) presents problems given the high demand.

What do we propose?

We propose to move all under-occupiers to Band 1. This is intended to encourage people to free up larger properties that can then be used to house those with larger families. An alternative approach would be to prioritise under-occupiers in specific properties rather than all under-occupiers.

What is the benefit?

By increasing the priority of current under-occupiers, we can free up larger properties.

12. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to place all under-occupiers in Band 1?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



Proposal 3.4. Band 2 priority for all homelessness cases

What is the issue?

Homelessness law is very complex. The council has additional duties relating to homelessness (known as the Prevention and Relief duties). These are in addition to the main (full) homelessness duty. For more information about Homelessness law, search for 'local authority homeless duties' on england.shelter.org.uk.

In terms of the council's allocation scheme, homelessness cases are currently split between Band 2 (for main duty cases) and Band 3 (homelessness prevention and homelessness relief duties).

We propose awarding Band 2 to all homeless households where a main, relief or prevention duty has been agreed.

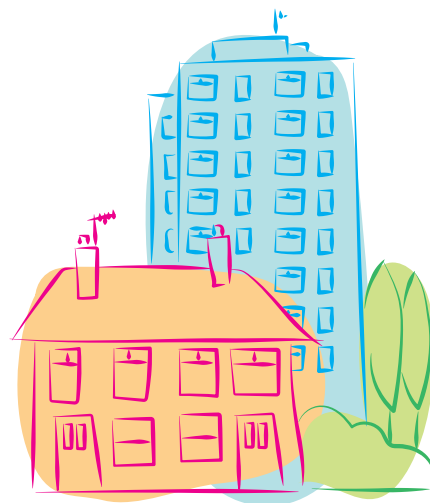
What is the benefit?

It would mean that there is consistency between households owed the main homelessness duty and households awarded other homelessness duties. This would remove delays where they would previously have been in Band 3. There is also the potential to allow direct offers of accommodation earlier thereby reducing and potentially avoiding time spent in temporary accommodation.

However it may ultimately result in more people presenting as homeless rather than less, and it would mean that those households who have no vulnerabilities are given the same priority as those that are vulnerable or in urgent need to move.

13. Do you agree with the proposal to move all homelessness cases to Band 2?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



Proposal 3.5. Create a 'new deal' for the 'homeless at home'

What is the issue?

The current scheme does not sufficiently recognise the housing need of people who live in the home of their parents, or extended family, and looking to move on because they already have a child or are pregnant. Being told to leave by parents, family or friends is one of the main reasons for households presenting as homeless in Bristol.

We propose creating a 'new deal' for people at risk of eviction from a home where they have no tenancy rights. This would allow them to remain in place, where possible, and wait for an offer of social housing. It recognises that a move into emergency accommodation may not be the most suitable solution. People in this situation would be encouraged to remain in place by having their priority within Band 2 adjusted, meaning their priority would improve over time as long as they stayed in place.

What is the benefit?

It would help reduce the numbers currently in temporary accommodation, and while it may involve the same, or a longer wait for housing, it is likely to result in a social housing outcome eventually, and more choice over where that offer is. By contrast, becoming homeless is likely to result in insecure temporary accommodation.

However, it could also lead to more people living with family approaching the council for help, creating additional pressure on limited resources. It could also be seen to disadvantage households who are homeless and have no option but to move into temporary accommodation.

We will also need to ensure that this offer does not result in people remaining in places where they are not safe. We will explain that where it is necessary to ensure their safety, people do still have the option of entering temporary/emergency accommodation.

14. Do you agree or disagree with the 'new deal' proposal?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Proposal 3.6. Conditional retention of 'effective date'

What is the issue

Currently, the longer you spend in a band, the higher your priority becomes. When applicants are reassessed and move between bands their 'effective date' (i.e. the date when an application is assessed into a band) is reset to the date of the change. This is seen to be unfair. Those who have waited for a long time on the list and whose circumstances have worsened feel the date reset penalises them despite their increased priority as they lose out to newer entrants in the higher band.

On the other hand, applicants who are moved down a band due to decreased priority feel they are receiving a double penalty with the date reset further reducing the likelihood of them being housed.

What is proposed

It is proposed that the effective date of application be retained when applications move down in priority and, under certain conditions, when they move up (e.g. if they were previously in the higher band to start with).

What is the benefit?

It would make the system fairer for those who have been waiting on the list for a long time and remove the 'double penalty' if moved down in priority.

15. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to retain the 'effective date'?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



Proposal 3.7. Composite need

Composite need is when an applicant has more than one housing need that makes their situation worse than someone else in the same band. Factors currently taken into consideration include; over-crowding, where someone's health is made worse by their accommodation, domestic violence and/or harassment.

Applicants with more than one housing need are currently placed in the band of their highest priority. Including composite need allows us to make a distinction between cases. However, this does create a high administrative workload. The current process gives cases with multiple needs additional priority by backdating their time in the band by a maximum of six months.

16. Should we amend how we deal with composite need? Select your preferred option.

- ☐ Leave unchanged, i.e. where there are two or more needs a six month backdate is applied
- ☐ Change to where there are more than three needs a backdate of up to 12 months is applied
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Proposal 4.1. Change income and savings thresholds

Currently, where the main and joint applicants have a combined gross annual income in excess of £40,000 per year (not including means tested benefits) they will not be allowed on HomeChoice Bristol.

Similarly, where the main and joint applicants combined have in excess of £40,000 of savings, they will not be allowed on HomeChoice Bristol.

These are two separate thresholds. In response to requests in the early engagements for the income to be lifted we propose amending them as follows on the next page.

Option	Income	Savings
Current threshold	£40,000	£40,000
Proposed threshold	£50,000	£30,000

17. Which option do you prefer?

- ☐ Current threshold (£40,000 income and £40,000 savings)
- ☐ Proposed threshold (£50,000 income and £30,000 savings)
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Proposal 4.2. Change debt threshold

Currently applicants with a debt to the council or our partner housing associations of £500 or more are not allowed to bid until the debt is reduced. There is discretion to waive this policy for applicants in urgent housing need.

18. Do you think that £500 of debt is a fair level for this penalty to be imposed?

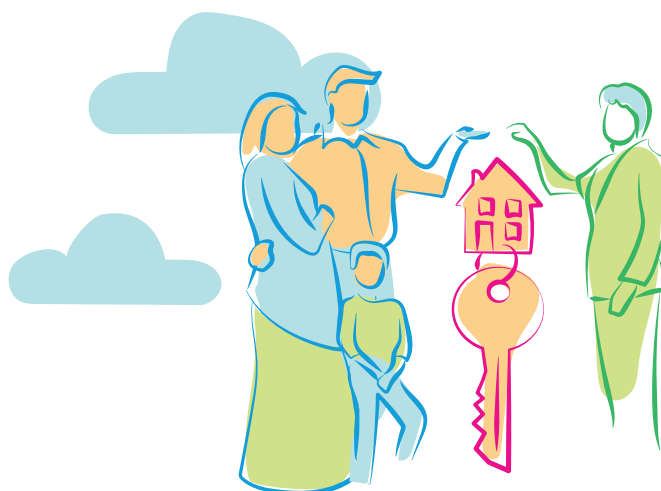
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. If you do not think that £500 of debt is a fair level for the penalty to be imposed, do you think it should be higher or lower?

- ☐ Higher
- ☐ Lower

20. What level of debt should the penalty be imposed at?

£



Process changes

In addition to the proposed changes above we intend making a number of process changes to improve people's experience of the Housing Register. A summary of these can be seen at: bristol.gov.uk/web/councilhomes/accessing-council-and-social-housing

21. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how we could improve HomeChoice Bristol? Please use the box below to tell us if so.

About you

We want to hear from as many people as possible from all parts of Bristol, so we can understand all viewpoints.

It would be very helpful if you could complete the following 'About You' questions. This will help us ensure that no-one is discriminated against unlawfully and will help us see if people in different parts of Bristol and different circumstances have different views. The questions include each of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

All questions are optional. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Personal and sensitive information will be used solely for the purpose of equalities monitoring to ensure that everyone is treated fairly.

Our privacy policy, which explains how we will process your personal information, how long we will retain it and your rights as a data subject is available at bristol.gov.uk/resourcesprivacy.

Please answer the questions on the next page by ticking the boxes that you feel most describes you.

22. Which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ A council tenant
- ☐ A council tenant looking to move
- ☐ Living with family/ friends
- ☐ A housing association tenant
- ☐ A housing association tenant looking to move
- ☐ In temporary accommodation
- ☐ A private tenant
- ☐ A private tenant seeking social housing
- ☐ In supported accommodation
- ☐ A homeowner
- ☐ A homeowner seeking social housing
- ☐ Other (please specify):

23. In which of the following roles are you responding to this

- ☐ A Bristol City Council tenant
- ☐ A local voluntary organisation or other advocacy service
- ☐ An elected councillor
- ☐ A Bristol City Council employee
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other (please specify):

24. If you are currently on the Housing Register which banding have you been given?

- ☐ Band 1
- ☐ Band 2
- ☐ Band 3
- ☐ Band 4
- ☐ Awaiting a decision on banding

25. What is your full postcode, e.g. BS9 3JZ

We are asking this to understand if citizens have different views in different parts of the city and to be sure we have heard from people in all areas of Bristol.

If you are responding on behalf of a business or other organisation, please provide the postcode of the organisation's premises in Bristol.

26. What is your age?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0–10 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45–54 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11–15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55–64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16–17 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65–74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18–24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75–84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25–34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85 + |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35–44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

27. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

28. What is your sex?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not say

29. Have you gone through any part of a gender reassignment process or do you intend to?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

30. What is your ethnic group?*(please tick one box only)*

- ☐ Asian / Asian British
- ☐ Black /African / Caribbean / Black British
- ☐ Gypsy / Roma / Irish Traveller
- ☐ White British
- ☐ White Irish
- ☐ White Other
- ☐ Mixed / Multi ethnic group
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Any other ethnic background
(please describe):

31. What is your religion/faith?

- ☐ No Religion
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Pagan
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other (please describe):

32. What is your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay Man
- ☐ Gay Woman/Lesbian
- ☐ Heterosexual/Straight
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Prefer to self describe (please describe):

33. Are you pregnant or have you given birth in the last 26 weeks?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

34. Are you a refugee or asylum seeker?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

35. We want to make sure our surveys are as good as possible. Please tell us if you agree or disagree with the following statements:**There is enough information for me to answer the questions**

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

The questions make it easy for me to give my views

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

The survey meets my accessibility needs

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



You can complete this survey online at **www.ask.bristol.gov.uk/housing-allocations**

Alternatively please return this booklet in the freepost envelope provided.

Please let us have your feedback by **7 October 2022**.

If you would like this information in another language or accessible format, please email **lettings.review@bristol.gov.uk** or call **0117 352 1444**

