



The Bristol Living Rent Commission

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The Bristol Context

Most expensive city to rent outside of London

- 2011-2021 the cost of renting privately grew by 52% while wages grew by 24%.
- Median advertised rent increased by 25% from 2018 to 2020.
- When a property gets re-listed its rent increases by roughly 6%.
- Even after adjusting for flat size, rents for cheaper properties in 2018 grew between two and four times as fast as rents for more expensive properties

Growing PRS

- Over 134,000 people privately rent - almost one-third of population. The national average is 19%.
- We anticipate the population reaching 550,000 by 2050 – fastest growing out of Core Cities.

Growing house prices

- Average house price is almost x10 local average earnings – least affordable of English Core Cities.

Rental supply

- The supply of properties listed to rent declined by nearly two thirds from 2018 to 2020.
- The growth of the Bristol universities has resulted in a significant student population increase – over 3,500 student units have been completed since 2006 but this does not meet demand.
- 20,000 households on social housing waiting list.
- Since pandemic, 25% increase in households approaching BCC because of homelessness related issues.



Administrations ambition

- The Mayor's 2021 manifesto
- Renters Summit
- Corporate Strategy and Business Plan
- Golden Motions resolved by Full Council
- Consultation on proposals to introduce new property licensing schemes
- Project 1000
- One City - Homes and Communities Board
- Bristol Living Rent Commission



LRC Goals:

- To explore how to improve affordability of the Bristol private rental market.
- To understand how introducing rent stabilisation might affect the private rental market in the city, including potential impact on housing quality and maintenance.
- To make recommendations regarding which rent controls would be most appropriate and deliverable.
- To explore what additional powers could improve the experience of renting in Bristol, e.g. Landlords database.
- To examine how we could empower tenants' rights (information, transparency, complaints) to improve affordability and quality.



Evidence gathering

- Co-chaired by Cllr Tom Renhard and Professor Alex Marsh from UoB.
- Sector experts, tenants, landlords and academics investigated the issues faced by the city, and heard testimony from other organisations, groups, and individuals with lived experience.
- Multiple evidence sessions held over six months.
- Commissioners attended two preparatory meetings, five evidence sessions and two further wrap up discussions.
- Evidence sessions heard evidence from invited stakeholders and results from analysis of secondary data on rents in the Bristol PRS, carried out by researchers at the School of Geographical Sciences, UoB.
- Two surveys which received around 2,500 responses.



Key findings – tenant survey(s)

- 4/10 respondents saw rent increase in the last 12 months.
- 50% faced a rent burden which accounted for at least 40% of their income. More than 3/10 faced a burden of over 50%. Half of respondents in the 18-24 category facing rental burdens of 50% or more.
- 2/3 experienced “problems” with landlord/letting agent in last 5 years. Younger people & those with a disability were more likely.
- Mould, damp, and plumbing were the most common property issues faced by tenants renting privately.
- 19% had rent increased twice in 12 months, 16% experienced three or more increases during that period.
- 7/10 respondents were not aware how often their landlord was legally allowed to raise their rent.



Key findings (continued)

- 84% of respondents had reported problems with the condition of a property to a landlord or agent. In 10% of cases where a property issue was reported, the landlord or letting agent increased the rent after resolving.
- Over 1/4 of those taking on a new tenancy in the last 12 months stated that to secure a property they had to enter a bidding war.
- 48% experienced additional financial burden of paying rent in advance, separate from any deposit, to secure a property.
- Rent control in Bristol should aim to be comprehensive in scope – applied to the whole private rented sector. More than 9/10 private renters favoured this approach.
- Most private tenants; representatives of community and voluntary sector organisations that work with private tenants, considered rent control to be desirable. Landlords and market intermediaries more likely to find rent control undesirable.



Recommendations

Within the report, the experiences faced by tenants are broken down into key areas of focus.

- These are: Rent charges, Rent burdens, Financial pressures and insecurity, Evictions, repairs, and landlord-tenant problems, lack of affordability and inadequate financial resources, poor living conditions, inequalities in access and discrimination, lack of private rental supply, changes in demand, and reduced generosity of the welfare system.

In total, the final report outlines 29 recommendations – 23 of these were for BCC.

- Focus on improving standards, tenants' experiences, and the accessibility of private renting.
- Reflect that the powers to regulate the market must come from central government.
- Reflect the need to continue the constructive dialogue with renters and other stakeholders in the PRS to achieve the goal of delivering meaningful and lasting positive change for the sector.



Rent Control

- LRC concluded that it could be possible to develop a rent control system that has a broad base of support – if power was devolved to pursue further research into a workable method.
- Considering the rent control policies outlined in the survey, capping the absolute levels of rent, or capping the rate of increase, were both policies that were endorsed by a proportion of respondents and could be considered by BCC following a redistribution of power to LAs.
- In conversation with UoB to discuss how they could support further work aimed at developing a feasible rent control policy for the city.



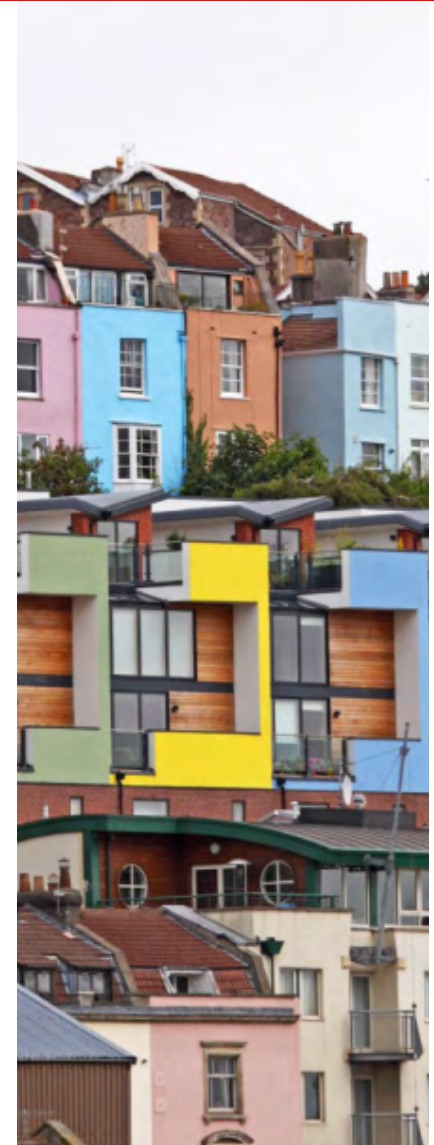
BCC Response

- Golden Motions
- Selective Licensing Consultation
- Sent letters to over 50 stakeholders
- Received letters from: SoS DLUHC, Deputy Mayor London, Director General for Regeneration at DLUHC, Chair of Levelling Up Committee
- Cabinet member took report to LGA Conference & Labour Party Conference
- Recommendations approved by Cabinet
- Started writing a Private Rented Sector Strategy for the City
- Established a Living Rent Commission task and finish group



PRS Strategy

- Articulate Bristol's City Council's strategic vision, standards and approach to intervening in the Bristol PRS.
- To capture the opportunities and challenges for PRS and priority areas for action.
- Better support and information for PRS residents and landlords on their rights and responsibilities
- Articulate how BCC are going to take forward LRC recommendations
- Commit to reviewing approach to enforcement



Lessons learned

- Clear terms of reference
- Tight scope
- Process of approval well set out
- Tight perimeters for academics
- Separate meetings for concerns to be voiced





Questions?

