

Homes for everyone

Draft housing strategy for consultation

Brighton & Hove City Council

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Foreword

Brighton & Hove is a city of huge ambition, fabulous diversity and significant opportunity. We want a city we can all be proud of, a city that is fair and inclusive and a healthy place where people can thrive. Homes for everyone is central to the council's vision for a better Brighton & Hove for all. It is also a call to action.

This draft housing strategy sets out our goal to deliver accessible, affordable and high-quality homes for everyone in Brighton & Hove. However, we recognise that we can't achieve this on our own. We have increasing demand for our services and a number of legal duties, but we also have shrinking resources. What we can do is provide leadership, build partnerships and encourage creative, bold and innovative solutions to the housing crisis.

Housing supply and affordability is a significant issue for the city, with many people unable to afford a mortgage or pay their rent. Some are forced to live in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions. Others must look outside the city to find homes that meet their needs.

We have a strong track record of delivering new homes that are genuinely affordable and built to high environmental standards. We also have an ongoing programme to improve our existing council homes and to ensure that all homes in the city are fit for purpose and sustainable.

Preventing and alleviating homelessness is a key statutory duty for the council. We will continue to do everything we can to make sure that people are treated fairly and with respect, whatever their housing situation. The most vulnerable deserve our support and we will always prioritise their needs. This includes support to access appropriate housing and to maintain independence and dignity.

We are committed to putting people at the heart of housing in the city. We want our tenants and leaseholders to work with us to improve our housing services. We know that we don't always get things right, but we are committed to doing our very best.

We are resolute in our ambition to achieve a better Brighton & Hove for all. The challenges ahead are significant, yet we are confident the aims set out in this draft strategy can help deliver our goal of accessible, affordable and high-quality homes for everyone.

The input of the city's residents and our partner organisations is vital in helping us shape this strategy and achieve those goals. Please share your feedback on this draft housing strategy.

Councillor Gill Williams

Chair of the Housing and New Homes Committee, Brighton & Hove City Council

Introduction

This housing strategy outlines our proposed priorities for the next 5 years and describes the steps we will take to deliver them. The strategy will guide our actions as a council and demonstrate to residents and our partners that we are serious about tackling the housing crisis in the city.

The council plan 2023 to 2027 sets out a vision for a better Brighton & Hove for all. It includes our plans to make the city fairer and more inclusive, and a safer and healthier place to live. As a council we will improve our services by putting residents at the heart of all we do.

The housing strategy supports the delivery of the council plan. It provides a framework for more detailed housing plans, including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Housing Allocations Policy, new housing supply and our housing asset management approach. It connects to other major strategies and plans including the City Plan, Economic Strategy, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Local Transport Plan and more.

The housing strategy is about more than council housing services. We want to shape and deliver a shared long-term agenda with our partners in the city and, critically, with our residents, local partner organisations and the wider community.

This strategy is a high-level document that sets out the council's vision for housing in the city. The 5 priorities we have identified will help focus our efforts to deliver accessible, affordable and high-quality homes for everyone in Brighton & Hove.

Our strategic priorities

1. Improve housing quality, safety and sustainability
2. Deliver the homes our city needs
3. Prevent homelessness and meet housing need
4. Support independence and improved health and wellbeing for all
5. Provide resident focused housing services

In delivering our strategy we will strive to incorporate the following principles in everything we do.

Principles

- Collaborate and innovate
- Invest in our existing homes
- Listen to our residents and treat people with respect
- Address diverse needs and provide fair access to services
- Take into account the climate and biodiversity crises
- Manage our budgets effectively and make best use of our resources

The policy context

The council has a wide range of housing duties and responsibilities. These include allocating social housing, providing housing advice and information, preventing homelessness, and developing new housing to address local needs.

Since our last housing strategy was agreed in 2015, major changes in national housing policy have been introduced. The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) significantly changed our legal duties towards households facing homelessness, with a greater emphasis on preventing homelessness. We responded, reviewing our homelessness and rough sleeping services and setting out plans for further change in a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025.

The Grenfell tragedy in 2017 raised fundamental questions about fire and building safety. For landlords, developers and property owners, including local authorities, the Fire Safety Act (2021) and Building Safety Act (2022) have introduced new regulations and new safety requirements, particularly in relation to multi-occupied residential property.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act (2023) regulates the activities of social housing providers and sets standards for their conduct and performance. It aims to give tenants a real voice and requires landlords to be more transparent about their performance. If it becomes law the Renters (Reform) Bill, introduced to Parliament on 17 May 2023, will bring major changes for the private rented sector.

Building a new supply of high-quality affordable homes is a key priority for the council. The urgent need for more social housing is a national priority, with funding opportunities available to support delivery. The council has a record of successfully unlocking funding through the Homes England Affordable Homes Programme to help deliver our new build programme. We will actively seek other funding opportunities to advance our priorities.

What does the data tell us?

INFOGRAPHICS COVERING THE FOLLOWING

In 2021, Brighton & Hove's population was 278,000

- 17% under the age of 16 compared with 21% in England and the south east
- 9% aged 19 to 22 (5% in England and 4% in the south east)
- 19% are 60+ (25% in England and 26% in the south east)

In 2021, there were 130,840 homes in the city

One in 3 households have at least one disabled member

7 neighbourhoods in the city are in the 1% most densely populated areas in England

37,000 students attend the city's 2 universities

There are more than 4,200 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the city

18.7% of residents aged 60+ living in income deprivation (England 14.2%)

One in 4 children living in poverty in Brighton & Hove (one in 3 in England)

33% of homes are rented privately (20% in England and 19% in the south east)

Brighton & Hove has around 11,900 council-rented homes

7,637 households on the housing waiting list (December 2023)

More than 1,700 households in temporary and emergency accommodation (February 2024)

£16.9 million cost of temporary and emergency accommodation in 2022/23

661 additional council homes 2015 to 2023

1,470 additional affordable homes 2015 to 2023

£421,950 average house price (August 2023)

Average house prices are 12.3 times average earnings in the city (2022 - England 8.3, south east 10.4)

Average private rent £1,300 per month in Brighton & Hove (September 2023 - £850 England, £1,050 south east)

[Table] Average rents - Room £607, Studio £814, 1 bed £1,025, 2 bed £1,375, 3 bed £1,790, 4 bed £2,500

58% of Brighton & Hove's housing was built before 1940

18% of private rented homes likely to have at least 1 serious hazard

472 households prevented from becoming homeless in 2023

41 people sleeping rough on official count night in November 2022

Brighton & Hove has 2,696 homes with support and 826 homes with care

Priority 1: Improve housing quality, safety and sustainability

Why this is important

We need to make the most of the housing that we already have. Around 80% of the homes that will exist in 2050 have already been built. Many of these properties, across all types of tenure, need work to ensure that they are suitable, safe and sustainable, now and in the future. Some properties, however, have reached the end of their life and need to be replaced.

The council manages approximately 12,000 rented and 2,700 leasehold properties and we need to invest more, particularly in improving health and safety. We will continue to invest in our buildings and in fire prevention, gas and electrical safety, asbestos, legionella and other health and safety risks such as damp and mould, to ensure safe, good quality council homes. Registered providers of social housing are subject to the same regulatory framework as the council and will be reviewing their investment priorities to meet the required standards.

The growth in the private rented sector in Brighton & Hove means that nearly one in 3 households in the city are renting privately. While most landlords operate responsibly, there are concerns that some do not. As a result, we need to improve the management, standards and quality of homes in this expanding sector.

Improved energy efficiency plays a major role in reducing the city's carbon footprint. It also reduces costs for households and helps tackle the continuing cost of living crisis. We will invest in improving the energy efficiency of council homes and, where possible, support other residential property owners to make improvements. Where appropriate, we will use our powers to enforce standards in the private sector.

What we will do

1.1 Improve the quality of council homes and estates

- Provide an effective, efficient and timely repairs, maintenance and planned improvements service for our homes including moving toward a more planned, preventative model for maintaining and upgrading council homes.
- Carry out a programme of planned work to ensure that council homes are upgraded to agreed timescales.
- Continue to reduce the backlog of routine housing repairs.
- Develop and implement a new Housing Asset Management strategy to ensure we understand the condition of our homes and inform the delivery of our planned and major works programmes.
- Ensure that all council-owned homes meet the national Decent Homes Standard.

1.2 Prioritise building and fire safety improvements

- Invest in building and fire safety to meet our new duties under the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022.
- Ensure that the council complies with health and safety requirements in all our homes.
- Ensure the council complies with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and meets the Regulator of Social Housing consumer standard on safety and quality.

1.3 Improve standards in the private rented sector

- Improve the condition of Houses in Multiple Occupation through the existing mandatory licensing of larger properties and consider introducing an additional licensing scheme for smaller properties.
- Introduce selective licensing schemes in areas of the city where the evidence supports it.
- Enforce minimum energy performance standards in the private rented sector in line with legislation.
- Work with landlords to identify and make improvements to their properties and, where appropriate, use our powers to enforce essential work.
- Prepare for expected changes as a result of the Renters Reform Bill being approved by parliament.

1.4 Improve sustainability and energy efficiency

- Improve the energy performance of council homes through investment, including improvements to roofing, windows, doors, building fabric, heating and hot water systems and solar panels.
- Support private sector landlords and owner occupiers to improve the energy performance of their properties by promoting access to grant funding and signposting to home energy efficiency advice and support.
- Improve the sustainability of our housing by reducing our carbon footprint, minimising waste, adapting to climate change and enhancing biodiversity.

How we will measure progress

Each year we will update on the following indicators

- % of routine council housing repairs completed on time
- % of council homes that meet the government's Decent Homes Standard
- % of houses in multiple occupation where all special conditions have been met
- Energy efficiency rating of council-owned homes
- Number of fully licenced properties within mandatory, additional and selective licensing schemes
- Number of fines issued for private rented homes that do not meet required EPC ratings

Priority 2: Deliver the homes our city needs

Why this is important

Good quality housing and infrastructure has a key role to play in improving quality of life, boosting the economy and making the city a place where people are proud to live.

Brighton & Hove is an expensive place to live and even some affordable homes are beyond the reach of many. We know that there is a particular shortage of family-sized homes in the city. Our evidence shows that families who cannot afford to rent privately or buy in the city migrate to surrounding areas and commute to work in the city.

We are not helped by limited availability of land, competition for other land uses and the need to ensure we support facilities such as schools, health facilities, open space and transport infrastructure. High land values and the viability of development continue to present barriers to accelerated development.

The city has two universities with 37,000 students. The growth in purpose-built student accommodation has encouraged a better balance of student housing. We support the return of family sized housing to the wider market.

We can't overcome the mismatch between supply and demand, but we can focus on providing more social and affordable housing either through our own new build programmes, partnership initiatives, developer contributions or registered providers. To truly level up, we know we need more affordable housing options, from social rent to home ownership. We also need a range of options for our diverse population, including homes which can be adapted to changing needs, as well as temporary and supported accommodation. Using the council's own assets and resources and prioritising brown field sites to bring forward new homes is key to successful delivery.

We need to continue with our successful programme to convert private housing into social housing through buy back and other acquisition programmes. As part of our ambitious programme to provide new homes, we will incorporate the physical, social and green infrastructure needed for communities to thrive. Our developments will be sustainable, keeping costs down and reducing impact on the environment.

What we will do

2.1 Increase the supply of high-quality homes that meet the needs of our communities

- Work with partners to ensure there are new homes that meet the needs of residents.
- Review our housing development targets through the refresh of the City Plan.
- Seek a balanced mix of property sizes and tenures appropriate for the future needs of the city, including family housing and homes that can be adapted to changing needs.
- Identify opportunities to develop new sites, including opportunities for developing and regenerating council-owned land and assets.

- We will be innovative, including using modern methods of construction and building partnerships to design creative solutions.
- Design new homes that are easy to maintain and manage and meet the highest environmental and sustainability standards.
- Build a range of adaptable and specialist homes to meet people's varying needs throughout their lives.
- Work with the city's further and higher education sector to assess future demand and potential locations for new student accommodation.
- Encourage sustainable and flexible design of student accommodation to enable it to be repurposed for other uses if appropriate.

2.2 Increase the supply of affordable homes

- Increase the number of new affordable homes delivered by the council and other providers of social housing.
- Buy back council homes lost through the right to buy or where economically viable.
- Deliver lower cost and council homes through our partnership 'Homes for Brighton & Hove'.
- Develop a protocol setting out how the council will work with developers to maximise the provision of affordable housing.
- Increase options for low cost, affordable ownership through First Homes and other shared ownership schemes as a route to affordable housing for essential workers.
- Use local criteria for access to affordable housing provided through Build to Rent schemes to ensure prioritisation of local people on lower incomes, essential worker roles that are hard to recruit or retain and disabled people.
- Review the Transfer Incentive Scheme to address under-occupation and ensure that people are in homes that meet their needs.

2.3 Create places where people are proud to live

- Through the City Plan, our planning service will make sure that new homes for everyone are good quality and sustainable.
- We will work with residents to make sure that spaces and places are designed to support and strengthen all our different communities.
- Ensure our housing estates are clean and well maintained.
- Explore options to reduce short-term lets.
- Introduce a registration scheme for short-term lets in line with legislation and guidance.
- Apply a Council Tax premium on second and long-term empty homes to encourage owners to bring them back into use.
- Work with property owners to bring long-term empty housing back into use.

How we will measure progress

Each year we will update on the following indicators

- Number of additional affordable homes delivered by the council (new build, acquisitions and conversions)
- Number of additional affordable homes delivered by Registered Providers
- % of affordable homes achieved in new housing developments

Priority 3: Prevent homelessness and meet housing need

Why this is important

Many of our residents are increasingly facing severe and challenging housing needs. The increasing costs of housing, loss of privately rented homes, changes in national policy and a shortage of genuinely affordable housing have led to an increase in the number of households at risk of homelessness.

Our approach is to prevent homelessness before people become homeless. We recognise that tackling and preventing homelessness requires a holistic approach that goes beyond council housing services. We will work with individuals, families, landlords, other council services and public sector bodies to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy outlines our approach in more detail.

The number of households living in temporary and emergency accommodation has risen to unprecedented levels. Temporary and emergency accommodation is expensive. It is also insecure and may feel unsuitable for many placed there. We know that the experience of living in temporary accommodation has a negative impact on children and vulnerable adults.

There is a high demand for housing from people in urgent housing need, including those fleeing domestic violence, vulnerable families, refugees and asylum seekers, and people with complex needs. We will ensure that in responding to urgent need we will tailor our response to ensure fair access to support and services.

What we will do

3.1 Increase our effectiveness in preventing homelessness

- Deliver an improved homelessness service through the homelessness transformation programme to focus on the needs of clients.
- Work with partners to educate and increase awareness of homelessness prevention and housing options.
- Encourage people to access our support services early to help prevent them becoming homeless.
- Support people to maintain their tenancies and offer advice and assistance to prevent them becoming homeless.
- Use our allocations policy to support the prevention or relief of homelessness

3.2 Reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation

- Review the housing allocations policy to ensure that allocations are fair and give all communities reasonable access to our housing.
- Reduce our overall use of temporary and emergency accommodation.
- Use Private Rented Sector Offer Policy where suitable and appropriate.

- Convert temporary accommodation to assured shorthold tenancies where suitable and appropriate.

3.3 Focus our assistance on people who need most help

- Support rough sleepers to access services and accommodation.
- Commission supported and accessible accommodation to meet the needs of vulnerable households.
- Work with our social care and health colleagues to address the housing and support needs of those in urgent housing need.
- Develop joined up approaches for those most at risk of harm or where there is greater impact if they become homeless.

How we will measure progress

Each year we will update on the following indicators

- % of homelessness cases presenting during the prevention duty stage
- % of homeless prevention cases closed with a successful prevention outcome
- Total number of households in temporary accommodation
- Number of verified rough sleepers
- % of people feeling safe after leaving refuge
- Take up of housing options

Priority 4: Support independence and improved health and wellbeing for all

Why this is important

The quality, location and cost of our homes play a role in our overall wellbeing, underpinning our health, relationships, security, and the environment around us. Ensuring people have appropriate, good quality housing can help them retain their independence, and promote their health and wellbeing for longer. It can help delay or reduce their need for social care and health services in the future.

The places we call home extend beyond the walls of our house or flat. Safe, healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods are critical for wellbeing. Safe neighbourhoods allow residents to live free from fear and anxiety. Healthy neighbourhoods provide easy access to green spaces, healthy food options and opportunities for physical activity. Inclusive neighbourhoods embrace diversity and foster a sense of belonging and connection.

The council is corporate parent to around 360 care leavers. Like any parent, we have a role to play in supporting these young people secure appropriate accommodation and live independently.

Disability and physical health needs can restrict the ability to live independently without home adaptations. Our disabled facilities grant scheme helps people remain in their home for longer and has a significant impact on wellbeing and quality of life. We also need to make better use of assistive technology to support residents to remain independent.

There is a wide range of supported and specialist accommodation in the city, but we need to ensure we are providing the right accommodation and support to people with specific or complex needs. This includes, but is not limited to, care leavers, recent prison leavers, vulnerable parents and children, people with a learning disability, people with autism and those with substance dependence or mental health issues. Our sheltered accommodation offer also needs to change to fit the changing needs of our ageing population.

What we will do

4.1 Work with partners to develop safe, healthy and inclusive estates and neighbourhoods

- Involve residents and community organisations in the design of safe housing and estates in the city.
- Invest through our estate investment and development budgets in environmental and communal area improvement work on our estates based on resident priorities.
- Work with our residents and partners to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and hate crime on our estates and council homes.

- Increase our support to more vulnerable clients and communities in our council homes.
- Move to more proactive tenancy and estates management including tenancy visits and estate inspections.

4.2 Support people to live independently

- Support people to live independently through investment in adaptations to existing homes.
- Review the provision of exempt supported accommodation in the city and develop a Supported Housing Strategy to ensure we meet the needs of vulnerable households who need our services.
- Commission supported housing which addresses the needs of people with complex needs.
- Deliver new supported housing for people with physical disabilities.
- Prioritise support for the most vulnerable households to help them manage their tenancy, prevent debt and remain in their homes.
- Continue and improve our work with colleagues in adults and children's services to design and commission jointly.
- Provide accessible information and advice to people who want to move to accommodation which is better suited to their needs.

4.3 Promote healthy housing for our residents

- Prioritise dealing with damp and mould and other health hazards in our properties and the temporary accommodation we use.
- Promote opportunities for improving energy efficiency so that people's homes are adequately heated and properly ventilated.
- Take action to reduce overcrowding and ensure privacy.
- Ensure sufficient amenity space is delivered on new housing developments.

How we will measure progress

Each year we will update on the following indicators

- Planned moves from supported accommodation
- Unplanned moves and evictions from supported accommodation
- Private sector housing – average weeks taken to approve Disabled Facilities Grant applications
- Council housing – average weeks taken to approve applications for major adaptations
- Number of tenants, across tenures, supported through our tenancy sustainment service

Priority 5: Provide resident focused housing services

Why this is important

We are determined to ensure that residents in our homes are safe, are listened to, live in good quality housing and have access to redress when things go wrong. Following the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, new legislation affecting all social landlords has established a Regulator of Social Housing. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 requires the council and other social landlords to fully meet and ensure compliance with the new regulatory framework.

We are committed to achieving equitable outcomes for residents by providing fair access to services and meeting the diverse needs of our residents. This means listening to residents and acting on what they tell us. It also means treating people fairly and with respect. Our Engagement Framework, Accessible City Strategy and Anti-Racism Strategy will guide our approach.

To turn our aspirations into reality we know that we must innovate, as well as draw on evidence of what works from elsewhere. We must make the most of our own and external sources of funding and work collaboratively with our partners on joint priorities, sharing information about our assets and investment plans to ensure alignment with the needs of the city.

What we will do

5.1 Listen to and engage with our residents

- Broaden and strengthen engagement with council tenants and leaseholders by providing a range of opportunities to engage more diverse voices.
- Implement the council's Engagement Framework and provide fair and accessible opportunities for people to influence decisions on issues which affect them.
- Improve our processes and systems for handling resident complaints to ensure they are addressed fairly, effectively and promptly.
- Work with people with lived experience to design improved housing pathways and services.
- Capture learning from complaints to identify issues and help us improve our performance.
- Communicate clearly and provide information so that people understand what they can expect from us.
- Collect and share information about our performance

5.2 Ensure our housing services are accessible, fair and inclusive

- Take action to deliver equitable outcomes and fair access to our services.

- Collect and use information and data to help us better understand and respond to the diverse needs of our residents, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers and additional support needs.
- Optimise the local benefits and social value of our inhouse repairs and maintenance service.
- Support social value and community wealth building through our contracts and the procurement of major works.
- Recruit and retain staff from all the city's communities to ensure a fair and inclusive workplace and ensure our workforce reflects the community we serve.

5.3 Deliver effective, high quality housing services

- Continue to improve local housing management services in line with local priorities.
- Increase our use of data and technology to manage council properties more effectively.
- Ensure that our housing workforce has the relevant skills and competencies to deliver an effective service to residents.

5.4 Work with our partners to agree and deliver shared priorities

- Cooperate with our partners to promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in our estates and neighbourhoods.
- Develop and deliver integrated services at a neighbourhood level.
- Design services to address the needs of our most vulnerable residents, including people with multiple and compound needs.
- Learn from others and share good practice by engaging with regional and national networks of housing authorities and providers of social housing.
- Proactively engage with regulatory bodies.

How we will measure progress

Each year we will update on the following indicators

- Complaint responses within 10 working days
- Calls answered by Housing Customer Services
- Surveyed tenants satisfied with repairs (standard of work)
- Surveyed tenants satisfied with repairs (customer service)
- % of rent collected from current tenants of council homes

Delivering the strategy

The housing strategy and its priorities are complemented by linked and supporting strategies and plans which set out in more detail what we will deliver. These include the City Plan, the Economic Strategy, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Plans to improve the council's effectiveness and to modernise our ways of working, are set out in our Customer Experience Strategy, Business Framework, Our People Strategy, the ICT and Digital Strategy, and corporate modernisation programmes. Our Anti-Racism Strategy and Accessible City Strategy aim to create cultural change and lead to more equitable ways of working and delivering our services.

Directorate and service plans provide details of the key actions, projects, timeframes, and measures that support the delivery of the housing strategy. These are updated annually.

The Housing Revenue Account contains the income and expenditure relating to the council's social landlord duties. It is a ring-fenced budget that covers the management and maintenance of council-owned housing stock. It includes substantial investment in building, health and fire safety compliance and in anticipation of the strengthened role of Regulator of Social Housing, ensuring adherence to their consumer standards. The budget also continues to support investment in new housing supply and sustainable homes as well as in the work of our housing services.

