



# **Bristol City Council Homelessness Supported Accommodation Pathways – Adults (22+)**

**Draft Commissioning Plan  
January 2024**

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# Section A – Introduction and context

## Purpose of this document

This draft plan has been prepared for an engagement exercise about our proposals related to accommodation services to protect people from homelessness from October 2024. We are keen to get views on these proposals from people who have used homelessness services, providers of homelessness services, landlords, and any other people with a stake in homelessness services in Bristol.

This draft plan is provisional and subject to change following the end of the engagement process. Feedback received will be critical in shaping the pathways and how we commission services. We may also have to amend the plan to align with any final budget constraints.

## What are we trying to achieve

Preventing homelessness before it reaches crisis point is vital to the city, and is a key strategic priority. However, the focus of this plan is about how to help people recover from homelessness, and ensure that homelessness is not repeated, by providing sustainable accommodation with support to adults aged 22 or older. There is a separate plan for services for young people (aged 16-21) and for families facing homelessness. This plan does not include new Housing First units that will be delivered with funding from the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme, although these units will provide an excellent option for people for whom traditional homelessness services have not been successful.

We want homelessness supported accommodation services to achieve the following:

- Help households to access and/or provide the right type of accommodation (based on their needs) once they have become homeless;
  - Reduce the number of people sleeping rough; and
  - Reduce the need for more expensive forms of emergency accommodation.
- Help people to gain the skills to prevent them becoming homeless again.
  - Improve numbers moving on to independent living or positively within pathway;
  - Build resilience and help people access training/employment;
  - Improve access to specialist treatment and support for people to enable long term recovery – for example around drug or alcohol use or mental ill health;
  - Reduce repeat incidences of homelessness, including amongst people who experience multiple disadvantage and people for whom the existing pathways has not worked.

In order to achieve these objectives, we need to:

- Align supply and demand so that the right type of accommodation is available at the right time to people in need;
- Make the most efficient use of accommodation by:
  - Keeping void times to a minimum;
  - Helping people move on in a sustainable way as quickly as possible;
  - Reducing the number of refused referrals (by both providers and service users);

- Maximise opportunities for more holistic commissioning and benefit from other initiatives (e.g. Rough Sleeping Initiative funded services/ Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme move-on accommodation / Substance Misuse Team commissioning / Changing Futures);
- Make sure that services are flexible enough to deal with changing demands, including new models of provision;
- Seek out and incorporate the view of people who are homeless;
- Maintain/ develop a healthy provider market;
- Support providers to work in partnership with each other and wide support systems (e.g. health, employment);
- Commission efficiently with consideration to the time required from both commissioners and providers;
- Ensure that ongoing contract management arrangements are both proportional and meaningful;
- Ensure that homelessness support service work in line with Trauma Informed Principles.

## Local strategic context

**Bristol One City Plan (fourth iteration) 2023<sup>1</sup>** – The One City Plan sets out a path to a 2050 Bristol that is a ‘fair, health and sustainable city, a city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success’. Bringing together a huge range of public, private, voluntary and third sector partners, the One City Plan sets out a vision of Bristol in 2050, including where:

- Everyone in Bristol will live in a home that meets their needs within a thriving and safe community which is accessible to everyone;
- The last sleeping bag used on the streets of Bristol by a homeless person was in the 2020s;
- We now have the lowest rate of homelessness for any city of its size across the UK.

**Bristol City Council Corporate Strategy 2022-2027<sup>2</sup>** - Informs everything the council does and sets out its main priorities, including:

- Reducing and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, tackling the underlying causes;
- Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation;
- Where people have high or complex needs, take a ‘Housing First’ approach to provide stable accommodation at the start of providing wider support.
- Help prevent homelessness by building and retaining social housing, supporting good mental and physical health, developing employment and skills opportunities, taking ethical approaches to debt collection, and responding to the diverse needs of different people.

**Bristol Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024<sup>3</sup>** – Provides a five year roadmap for tackling homelessness, focused on five key priorities; (1) Tackling Rough Sleeping; (2) Prevention and Early Intervention; (3) Improving Health and Wellbeing, Skills and Aspirations; (4) Delivering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all Services; (5) Working in Partnership. A revised Strategy is currently being developed and will be consulted on separately.

**Drug and Alcohol Strategy for Bristol 2021-2025<sup>4</sup>** - Sets out the city’s vision for reducing harm from alcohol and other drugs between 2021 and 2025.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bristolonecity.com/about-the-one-city-plan/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/policies-plans-and-strategies/corporate-strategy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/policies-plans-and-strategies/housing/housing-strategy-and-supporting-strategies>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/policies-plans-and-strategies/social-care-and-health/drug-and-alcohol-strategy-for-bristol>

## Budget

Current Pathway services were commissioned in October 2017 for a maximum of 7 years and contracts did not include any inflationary uplift. Support is provided by Registered Providers and/ or charities who do not take a profit margin on these contracts, but deliver services due to their mission and values around tackling homelessness.

The majority of Pathway units are owned by Registered Providers and are therefore exempt accommodation, with rental costs recoverable from Housing Benefit. BCC is currently looking to extend this type of accommodation through the Supported Singles and Couples Accommodation Framework as it is much cheaper than unsupported temporary accommodation provided by private landlords.

Pathways 1-3 and the Pathways Resettlement Service are funded by Housing and Landlord Services. Due to exceptional levels of inflation and increased provider costs, an uplift was agreed upon for the final year of Pathways 1-3 (starting October 2024) with no further contribution required from BCC. This was achieved through: (a) one-off external grant funding; and (b) reducing the budget of the Pathways Resettlement service and reallocating funds to Pathways Accommodation.

BCC is not immune to current economic pressures and must therefore seek to constrain spending rather than increasing budgets. However, if contract values for the new services are not uplifted to at least this level, BCC will see a reduction in the number of units it commissions. As the demand for homelessness accommodation continues to rise, losing units from Pathways will increase the take up of temporary accommodation, which is less cost effective than Pathways accommodation. It is anticipated that freezing the budget at 2017 values would lead to the loss of 190 units from Pathways. To replace these using Temporary Accommodation would cost £1,569,032.

As such, a 'spend to save' proposal is being taken to February Cabinet to approve an increased baseline spend for Pathways by a maximum of £557,560 p/a (from £4,824,314 p/a to a maximum of £5,381,874 p/a). Our expectation is that, if accepted, this increase should allow us to recommission a similar level of provision to current supply. Alternative grant funding sources will be sought to contribute, if possible, to reducing the level of increased budget required over time.

Pathway 4 is funded by Public Health. It is evident that having somewhere stable to live can significantly affect health outcomes and providing housing support for drug and alcohol users working towards recovery continues to be a priority. Public Health are therefore proposing to increase baseline contract values by 5% from £750,000 p/a to £787,500 in line with other Public Health services.

## Methodology

The plan has been developed following analysis of data, reviews of current service provision and early engagement with stakeholders.

An equalities impact assessment is being developed for this project and will be further developed during the engagement period.

This plan has been developed by the council's Homelessness Contracts and Commissioning Team, with a multi-disciplinary project board providing governance, including the following Bristol City Council teams: Public Health; Homelessness Prevention Team; Adult Social Care; Corporate Finance and Procurement

# Section B - Analysis

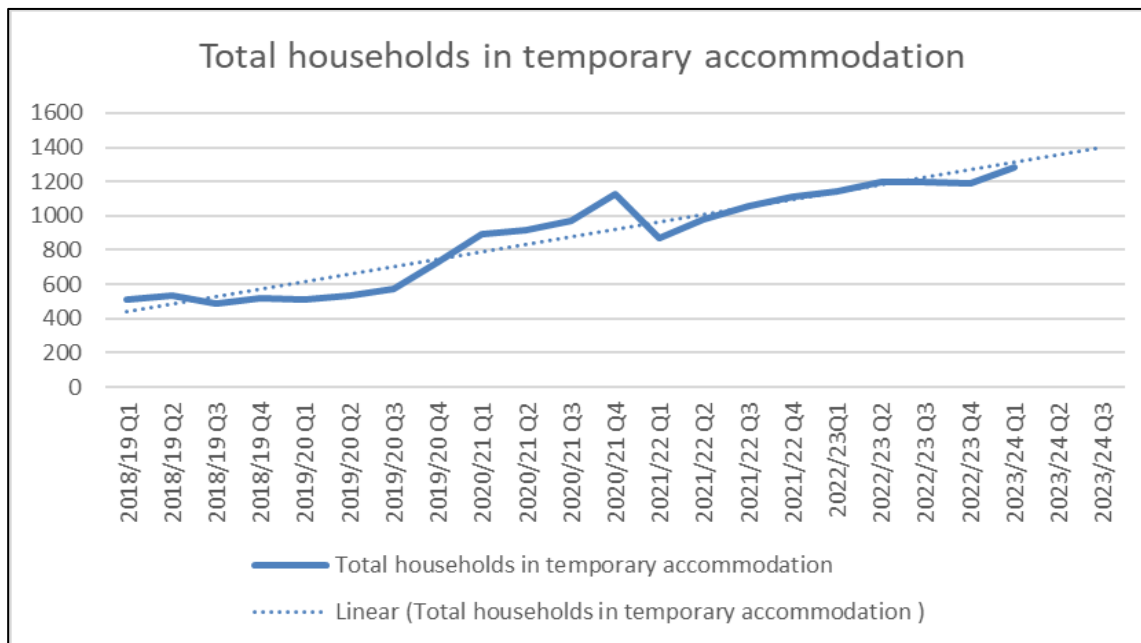
## Overview

There is rising homelessness in Bristol as the gap between demand for and supply of affordable housing in the city grows. Monthly rough sleeping figures show significant rises in average rough sleeping year-on-year, which correspondingly increases demand for pathway accommodation and support. Likewise, overall presentations for homeless individuals and families have steadily increased annually, after a drop between 2020 and 2021, as has the number of people living in temporary accommodation as an interim solution to their homelessness.

'Monthly rough sleeping' counts show all people who have been found bedded down in Bristol over the course of the month. This suggests significant rises in the number of people sleeping rough in the city.



The total number of households in temporary accommodation reached 1,348 at the end of August 2023:



## Profile of service users

The following shows how the profile of people using homelessness services compares to the profile of the general Bristol population:

Protected characteristic	Bristol Demographic	People using homelessness services
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49.7%	72.4%
Female	50.3%	27.6%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Bisexual	3.1%	2.3%
Lesbian or gay	2.2%	2.0%
Heterosexual	85.5%	74.4%
Prefer not to say		4.5%
Unknown/not answered	8.5%	15.9%
Other	0.7%	0.8%
<b>Disability</b>		
Disabled	10.7%	9.6%
Not Disabled	89.3%	90.4%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Total BAME	18.9%	45.9%
Total White (including White Irish, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and 'Other White')	81.1%	54.1%
<b>Age</b>		
16-24	32.6%	2.5%
25-64	54.4%	95.0%
65+	12.9%	2.5%

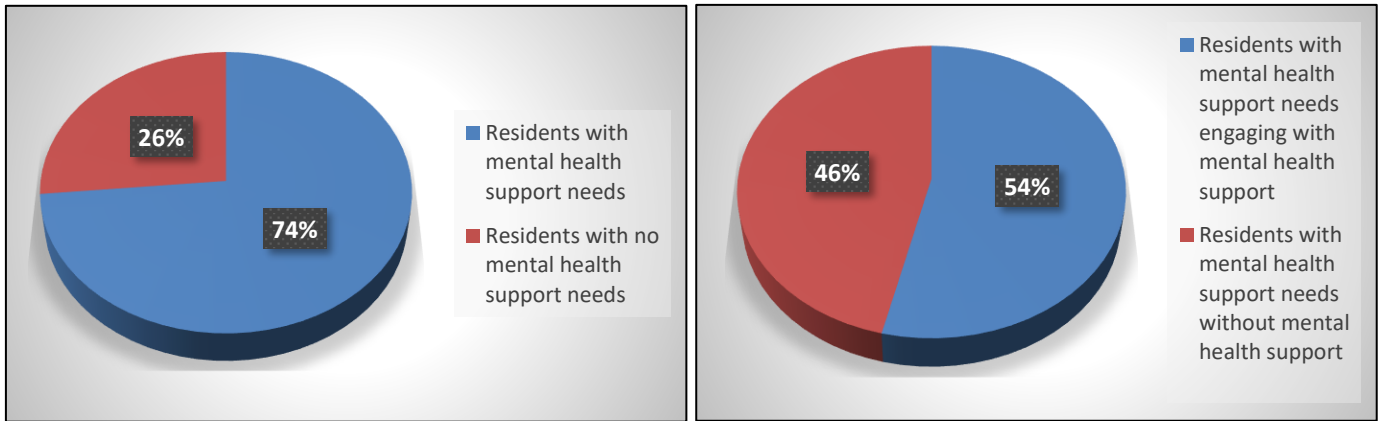
People using homelessness services' from HSR placements data for period 28.10.17 to 27.10.23. Bristol demographic data from [www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/6218-equalities-statistics-april-2023/file](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/6218-equalities-statistics-april-2023/file).

Further detail is included within a separate Needs and Demand Analysis which will be available during the engagement period.

## Needs of service users

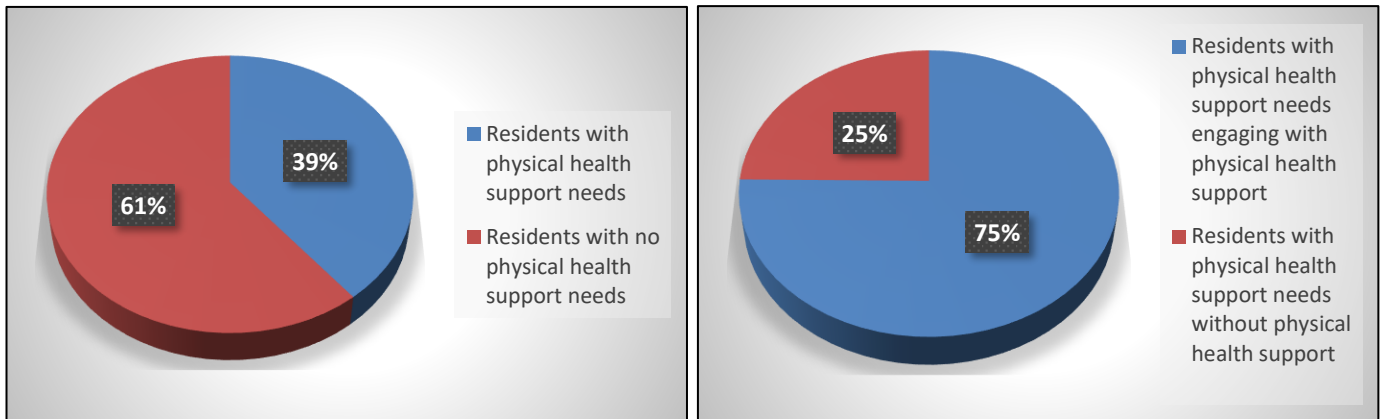
The information below sets out a summary of clients' needs from the adult pathways, collated from returns from Q2 2023 (01.07.23 – 30.09.23).

**Mental health needs:**



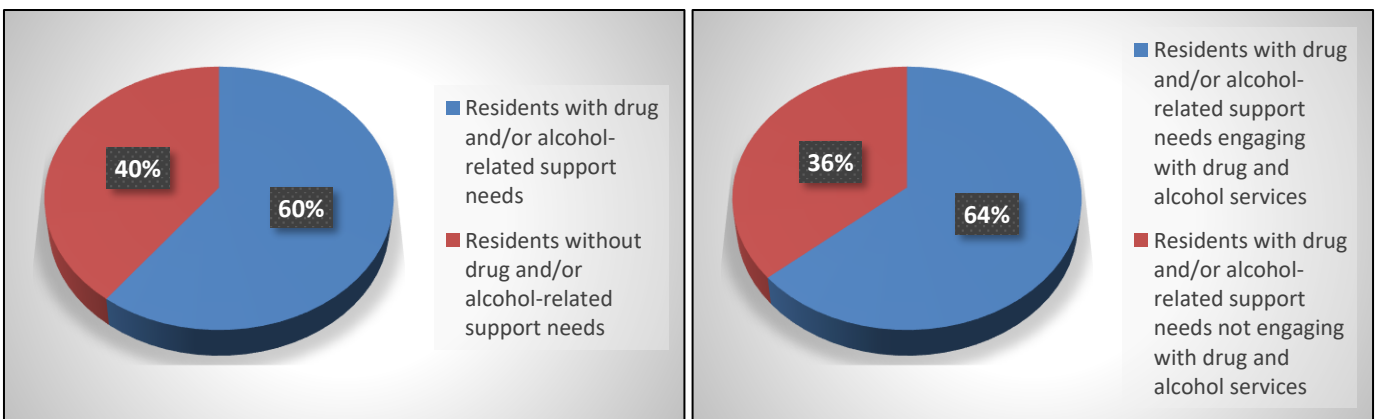
At the end of Q2 2023, there were 812 residents in adult pathways accommodation. Of these, 597 (74%) have support needs related to their mental health. Out of the 597 residents with mental health support needs, 321 (54%) are receiving support to address or manage these needs.

**Physical health needs:**



Of the 812 total adult pathway residents, 318 (39%) have physical health-related support needs. Of these 318 clients, 239 (75%) are engaging with relevant support.

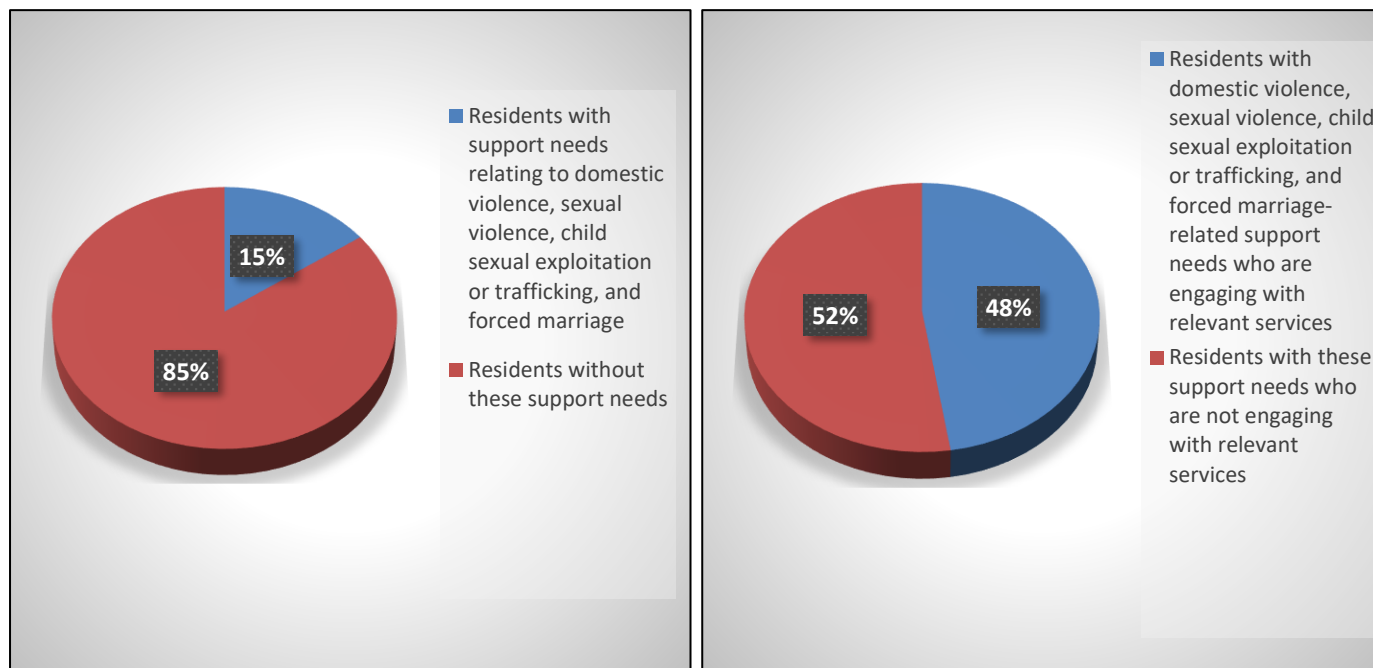
**Drugs and alcohol**



490 (60%) of the 812 total adult pathways residents have identified an issue with drug and/or alcohol use. Of the 490, 312 (64%) are engaging with drug and alcohol services.



## Violence and exploitation



122 clients (15% of the total) have support needs relating to domestic violence, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation, trafficking and forced marriage. 55 of them are women living in pathway three accommodation. 58 clients (48% of those with these support needs) are engaging with relevant services.

## Current supply

For single adults and couples aged 22+ there are around 850 units of supported accommodation, including 140 units of specific substance misuse accommodation. Current contracts expire at the end of October 2024.

Services are organised into 4 'Levels' of support. Level 1 services have 24/7 staffing on-site. Level 2 services have staff on site 9am-5pm from Monday to Friday. Levels 3 and 4 services have visiting staff. Clients typically move through one or more of these levels before moving into their own unsupported accommodation with support from the Resettlement Service.

Referrals into L1 services go through the Council's Interim and Supported Accommodation Team, with the exception of Outreach Access Beds (OABs) which the Outreach Team can use for people found rough sleeping. 4 out of 5 moves into Levels 2-4 are agreed between the providers of each Pathway to generate movement through and out of Pathways. 1 out of 5 moves into Levels 2-4 are taken via the council's Housing Support Register (HSR) which people access following a referral by the council's Homelessness Prevention Team, the Outreach Team or Young People's services.

The following diagram represents the current Pathways provision.

**Key**

No. of OAB's – {units}  
 No. of Units – {capacity}

### Distinct Pathways Diagram



## Stakeholder feedback

We have been gathering the views of stakeholders about what works well with the current provision, and what needs to be improved in early engagement sessions. Initial themes are summarised below. Following engagement on the Draft Commissioning Plan a full 'You said, we did' document will be produced setting out how feedback will be incorporated into the design and implementation of services.

### Feedback from service users

- Safety and feeling safe is a key requirement of Pathway services.
- Lived experience in workers is helpful – “what’s understood doesn’t need to be explained”.
- In general, clients expressed a preference for self-contained properties, particularly where they had previously experienced issues with other residents in shared accommodation.
- Clients generally viewed the private rented sector as unappealing, having experienced or heard of issues with the private rented sector including rogue landlords, instability, affordability and issues with others in shared accommodation.
- A number of clients expressed a desire for social housing, wishing to move from Pathways into permanent accommodation.

### Feedback from service providers/ referrers

- The Pathway model has significantly improved partnership working and makes for a smoother client journey between services.

- People agreed with the principles behind the Trusted Assessment, however in practice providers don't feel they can rely on information to be complete or accurate.
- There is a need for more Level 2 (medium support) accommodation.
- Referrers noted that due to a lack of options, clients are referred to services based on where there are vacancies, rather than based on the service that would best meet clients' needs.
- Self-contained properties, particularly when let on ASTs, make it difficult to move clients on and conflict with the temporary natures of Pathway accommodation.
- Larger hostels aren't suitable for a significant proportion of clients, including those who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and those who don't have drug or alcohol needs.
- There doesn't seem to be a significant difference between Levels 3 and 4.
- There are groups of people who are not well served by pathways, including those with dogs, couples, and clients who present an arson risk.
- The quality of some buildings needs improving.
- There are issues with some landlords whose policies don't correlate with Pathways expectations (e.g. timescales for re-letting a void property).
- Move-on into independent accommodation is very challenging to both social housing and the private rented sector.
- There is a lack of Pathway-wide client involvement.
- There is a need to think about how we use data better to better understand how the system is working collectively and to identify and meet the needs of individuals who revolve around services without a positive outcome.
- High staff turnover in the sector affects the quality of support provided to clients.
- There needs to be a greater focus on supporting clients into employment.

# Section C – Commissioning Proposals

The following sections contain a number of proposals setting out how we think we can improve homelessness services and better meet demand. These are presented for feedback and will not necessarily all be included in the final plan. In particular, if the proposed overall budget for these services is not accepted then revisions to the final plan will be required.

We are looking to make the following changes to the existing model to improve outcomes for clients:

## 1. Retaining the benefits of a partnership approach to working, whilst considering how contracts are structured

Current services are grouped under 4 Pathways with each Pathway having a lead provider responsible for leading partners to meet shared outcomes. BCC holds a contract only with the lead provider, who in turn enters into sub-contracts with other providers in the Pathway. The Lead Provider employs an individual ('the Pathway Lead') who holds a number of responsibilities including overseeing client moves between services, monitoring and improving client outcomes, resolving issues and being the main point of contact between providers and BCC.

This model has been beneficial for many reasons, including facilitating cross-sector partnerships, creating a smoother journey for clients and structuring services more cohesively into 4 cohorts (men only, women only, mixed sex and substance use). Contract monitoring has also been simpler for BCC in only having to meet regularly with the 4 lead providers, rather than every provider delivering services.

However, there are also some disadvantages. The lead provider/ sub-contractor model can make implementing changes challenging. Lead providers have noted that they don't feel like they have the authority to make decisions on behalf of other providers in the Pathway, making changes conditional on the agreement of all providers. This makes it difficult to implement strategic changes to a whole Pathway, particularly where some providers may be more negatively affected than others.

While the Pathway Leads have done incredible work bringing diverse partners together, there is a risk that by being a step removed BCC has less insight into and control over day-to-day service delivery. And when there are issues that require improvements, providers are arguably less accountable to another provider than they would be directly to the council.

We are therefore seeking views on the best way of organising services in to contracts while retaining the excellent collaboration and joint-working that exists across Pathway services. We are seeking views on:

1. Contractual relationships: Should contracts continue to be between BCC and one lead provider, who sub-contracts with other providers in the Pathway? Or should contracts be between BCC and each provider without the need for sub-contracts?
2. Day-to-day coordination and monitoring: There is a clear need to have individuals with responsibility for areas including overseeing client moves between services, monitoring and improving client outcomes and resolving (currently the Pathway Leads). Should this role continue to be held by an individual from one of the providers delivering services? Or should this function be taken in-house by dedicated individuals within BCC?

## **2. Increasing the number of Level 2 units to better meet current demand and facilitate throughput**

As noted above, demand for Pathways accommodation in general exceeds our current supply, however certain services are significantly oversubscribed whereas others have much lower demand. In particular:

- There is an acute need for more Level 2 accommodation to help people transition from high support, Level 1 services to low support accommodation. Level 2 has the fewest units of accommodation across Pathways 1-3, creating a bottleneck which restricts throughput.
- There is the lowest demand on Level 3 and 4 accommodation where we have the greatest number of units. BCC also secured significant funding under the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) which is introducing around 150 'Move-On' homes for people who have experienced homelessness; the majority of these units will offer similar levels of support to Pathways Levels 3 and 4 which will further ease demand.

We are therefore proposing to reconfigure some Level 3 and 4 accommodation as Level 2 with a focus on Level 3 and 4 buildings that have space for staff to work on site, more flexible tenure (i.e. Licences rather than ASTs) and at least 5 units of accommodation.

It is likely that this proposal will lead to an overall reduction in Pathway units. In real terms, the proposed increase in budget for Pathway accommodation will just cover inflationary costs. As Level 2 accommodation is more expensive to run than Levels 3 and 4, we will therefore have to make savings elsewhere to commission more Level 2 units. We propose making these savings by reducing the overall number of Level 3 and 4 units given that this is where demand is lowest. We don't however want to lose units from the sector entirely, so our intention is to advocate that any units lost from Pathways become long-term accommodation for Pathway clients who no longer require ongoing support.

## **3. Combining Levels 3 and 4 to create consistency and limit the number of Pathway moves before a client moves into independent accommodation**

In the early engagement sessions, stakeholders questioned whether there was a real difference in the support provided at Level 3 and at Level 4. Funding for Level 3 services has historically been higher than for Level 4 services, however the majority of Level 3 and 4 services commit to providing a similar number of hours of support per client each week.

The similarity in support offered also creates confusion for referrers and clients as to where clients should be referred. Some clients are also moved from Level 3 accommodation to Level 4, creating another short-term move for clients which doesn't align with trauma-informed practice that seeks to create stability and security.

We therefore propose combining Levels 3 and 4 into one Level, which we will call Level 3. This would create a simpler breakdown of all services into one of the following levels:

- Level 1 (High Support)
- Level 2 (Medium Support)
- Level 3 (Low Support)

To ensure fairness to providers and value for money for the council, we will be looking to reduce current Level 3 costs to align with (uplifted) unit rates for Level 4, with any savings used to fund additional Level 2 units (as in Proposal 2).

## 4. Creating a move-on protocol to facilitate greater move-on into the private rented sector

Move-on from supported accommodation is the ultimate aim of services, however due to the overwhelming demand for accommodation in Bristol clients often become stuck in Pathways accommodation which can lead to frustration and tenancy breakdown.

Overall, clients feedback indicates a strong preference for social housing. A number of clients fed back that they had experienced or heard of issues with the private rented sector including rogue landlords, instability, affordability and issues with others in shared accommodation. Clients expressed a desire to move from Pathways into accommodation that was as permanent as possible.

While there are significant challenges with accessing good quality, private rented accommodation in Bristol, accessing social housing is becoming an increasing unrealistic option for many clients. As of 02/11/23 there were 21,142 household on Home Choice Bristol, with only around 1,500 properties allocated each year. In 2022/23, the average time it took for an applicant in Band 2 to be housed into a 1 bed property was 562 days.

The following table shows the average placement duration for the final service that clients resided in before moving onto both private rented sector and social housing, with data taken from the start of contracts (27/10/2017) until 19/12/23:

<b>Departure Destination</b>	<b>Number of Moves</b>	<b>Average of Duration of Placement in days</b>
Social Housing	938	551
PRS	262	336

Despite the huge difference in placement durations, stakeholders noted that if clients refuse to consider private rented accommodation as a move-on option then there is little providers can do and, ultimately, clients can wait in Pathway accommodation, regardless of whether they need support, until they receive an offer of social housing. Given the mounting pressures on BCC's temporary and supported accommodation, this is not a position that can be sustained.

We therefore propose creating a move-on protocol, with input from the sector, to clearly outline expectations for move-on across all Pathway services. This will outline:

- Expectations on clients for pursuing accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Support that will be offered for finding and sustaining private rented accommodation.
- What constitutes a reasonable offer of private rented accommodation.
- Consequences for refusing a reasonable offer of private rented accommodation.
- Very limited situations in which it will be reasonable for clients to wait for an offer of social housing – i.e. where there are demonstrable reasons that the private rented sector is not a sustainable option for a client.

We also propose changes to the Priority Move-On Scheme to allow residents to retain their banding if they move out of Pathway accommodation into the private rented sector, or into sustainable accommodation with family with friends. This would support the above protocol by allowing residents to continue to pursue social housing whilst freeing up Pathway units for those who need them the most.

## **5. Bringing resettlement support within the responsibility of accommodation providers, rather than commissioning a separate service**

A Resettlement Service was commissioned alongside the four Pathways to provide transitional support to clients who move on from Pathways accommodation and into independent accommodation. This service was reduced in 2023, with savings used to retain Pathway accommodation that would otherwise have been lost.

The Resettlement Service did not receive enough referrals from Pathway services to operate at full capacity. Feedback noted that it may be more beneficial for services that have a pre-existing relationship with clients to continue to offer time-limited transitional support when they move-on, rather than requiring clients to start working with a new worker at a time when they're already experiencing lots of change. To prevent double funding support from accommodation and a resettlement worker, the Resettlement Service could only start working with clients two weeks before they move, which it was noted didn't give sufficient time to build relationships and plan for a client's move.

We propose decommissioning the Resettlement Service and instead using funding towards accommodation-based services, with the requirement for all providers of accommodation-based services to offer time-limited transitional support when clients move-on.

## **6. Reviewing allocation guidance, including the use of Outreach Access Beds and Crash Pads**

Currently, referrals to Level 1 services are made by BCC's Interim and Supported Accommodation Team, with the exception of a designated number of Outreach Access Beds (OABs) that the Outreach Team can use for housing rough sleepers. Some Level 1 services also have crash pads which are designed to offer short-term emergency placements, but often end up housing clients for extended periods of time.

Four in five vacancies at Levels 2, 3 and 4 are allocated to existing Pathway clients who require a move to higher or lower supported accommodation. These moves are agreed by the Pathway Lead at Operational Management Groups. One in five vacancies is allocated to individuals who are not already in Pathway accommodation but on the waiting list for services, with allocations made in accordance with prioritisation guidance published on the Housing Support Register. There are no OABs in Levels 2, 3 and 4.

This system is designed to prioritise moving existing Pathway clients through and out of the Pathways and into independent accommodation. It has however been noted that it is extremely difficult to quickly place clients, including rough sleepers, who do not require Level 1 accommodation, into suitable Pathways Accommodation due to the limited vacancies that come up (particularly in Level 2 and 3 services) and the policy of allocating four in five placements to existing Pathway clients. As a result, clients are often referred to services which they are more likely to be able to access, rather than the services which are most suitable for their needs.

We propose reviewing the allocation guidance and use of OABs and Crash Pads to ensure that individuals with the greatest need can access Pathways accommodation, and access accommodation at the level that is most suitable.

## 7. Working towards smaller hostels that align with best practice in the sector

The homelessness sector is moving away from large homelessness hostels as these are no longer considered best practice. BCC similarly has ambitions to move away from the larger services we commission, however we have to balance this against a growing need for supported accommodation and a challenging housing market from which to find more suitable buildings.

Longer contract durations are helpful for giving security to providers and giving time to embed and deliver service improvements, however we need to balance this against the flexibility needed to pursue new opportunities should they emerge in the next few years.

We therefore propose including sufficient flexibility in the contracts of larger services to ensure that emerging opportunities can be explored, whilst at the same time working with providers of larger hostels to mitigate the concerns raised by clients and other stakeholders.

## 8. Reducing subsidy loss

As Pathways accommodation is supported accommodation, financial support with rental costs comes under Housing Benefit rather than Universal Credit. BCC pays out rental costs through its Housing Benefit system, but can claim back these costs as subsidy from central government. The rules regarding subsidy are complex, but broadly speaking where Pathway accommodation is owned by a Registered Provider of Social Housing (RP), BCC can claim back 100% of the costs. Where accommodation is not owned by a RP, BCC can only claim back a set amount in subsidy which is often significantly less than the full rental costs. The difference between what BCC pays and what it can recover in subsidy is referred to as 'subsidy loss', and must be covered by other local authority funding.

The majority of Pathway units are owned by Registered Providers and therefore rental costs are fully recoverable by BCC from central government. However, a small proportion do not meet this exemption, and are contributing towards a growing subsidy loss expenditure on the council which limits spend on other key areas. Reducing this financial pressure is a key corporate priority.

We are in discussions with various stakeholders to understand what we can do to mitigate subsidy loss, and will require providers who are contributing towards the subsidy loss expenditure to take steps to reduce this pressure.

We propose that we will not commission accommodation that is contributing towards subsidy loss, unless there is a clear plan in place to resolve this within the first 12 months of new contracts.

## 9. Reviewing the inclusion of mother and baby units within single adult contracts

BCC currently commissions 25 units of mother and baby accommodation within the Women's Pathway (Pathway 3). These units are co-located at Phoenix Place with 30 units for single homeless women. It has been highlighted that there is a risk that single women, who may have experienced trauma around losing children, may find it difficult to share a space with women who are accommodated with their children. Similarly, while the single homeless provision at Phoenix Place is low support (Level 4), there are instances where clients with higher support needs are accommodated who could potentially impact on the safety of small children.

We propose reviewing the suitability of this mix of single homeless accommodation and mother and baby accommodation.



## 10. Improving the Trusted Assessment process

The Trusted Assessment is a common referral form on BCC's Housing Support Register. Referrers populate the assessment to allow accommodation providers to assess whether a client is suitable for their service. A key idea is that accommodation providers can rely on the Trusted Assessment to determine suitability without having to conduct their own, separate assessment process which would require the client to tell their story to multiple times, creating a risk of retraumatising the client.

However, providers have highlighted that information on the Trusted Assessment is often incomplete or incorrect. Providers gave examples of where a client was accepted for a service, only to have much higher support needs than what was indicated on the Trusted Assessment. Providers also noted that it is not unusual for a client to be referred to multiple support levels to give the best chance of getting them a placement, rather than referring to the most appropriate level of support.

We propose reviewing how the Trusted Assessment is working in practice, and looking at how we increase confidence in the accuracy of information recorded (e.g. by rolling out training or making it easier for partners to talk to each other about queries).

## 11. Reviewing the use of self-contained properties, with a particular focus on properties let on ASTs

Clients fed back that they prefer self-contained accommodation, noting that there can be challenges in sharing a space with other residents. Some clients will only be able to move into self-contained accommodation (e.g. for medical reasons) so it is important to have self-contained units at different support levels. However, it was noted that it can be difficult to move clients on from self-contained accommodation, particularly if the move is into shared accommodation as this can feel like a step backwards for clients.

Linked to this, many self-contained properties are let on Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) which conflict with the temporary nature of Pathways accommodation. Providers have noted that ending ASTs is often a long and expensive process, which makes it difficult to move clients on and to manage challenging behaviour quickly.

We propose moving away from the use of properties let on ASTs, particularly at the higher support levels where there are more likely to be tenancy issues which require swift action. We are also seeking feedback on how best to use self-contained properties within the pathway to provide options for clients who cannot share, whilst avoiding these units becoming long-term accommodation in what should be a temporary Pathway.

## 12. Engaging landlords to increase the quality of accommodation and reduce voids

Clients and providers fed back that there is varying quality of accommodation within Pathways with discrepancies around how much landlords invest into the upkeep and feel of accommodation.

The time it takes to complete void works after a client leaves also varies significantly between services. There is a particular difficulty when a support provider manages accommodation on behalf of a landlord who has responsibility for repairs and/or void works. Support providers commit to turning round voids within a timeframe as defined in the service specification, however landlords are not always aligned

with these expectations which can cause delays to letting valuable accommodation units for people who need them.

We propose having minimum accommodation standards for all Pathway accommodation, including a requirement for providers to evidence that landlords have committed to meeting expectations around meeting void targets. We will include a mechanism to claw back support funding in cases of persistent breaches of these expectations.

### **13. Exploring Pathway wide client involvement**

It has been suggested that, in addition to providers considering how best to involve clients in decisions about the design and running of their own service, it would be beneficial to have a small budget for promoting Pathway-wide client involvement. As there is no additional funding, this budget would need to be taken from the overall Pathways budget.

We are inviting feedback on whether it would be beneficial to have a budget for Pathway-wide client feedback and, if so, what this budget should cover (e.g. incentives for participation in client involvement activities, travel costs, costs for room bookings, salary costs towards a dedicated worker).

### **14. Using data better to improve outcomes for clients**

Services are monitored against key performance indicators every quarter by BCC. However, quarterly reports are very high level, showing performance across each Pathway against a number of indicators (e.g. planned departures, void times) rather than broken down against services. This makes it difficult to understand where services are working particularly well (so that good practice can be shared) or particularly poorly (so that issues and barriers can be tackled).

Similarly, we do not currently have data on clients' journeys through a whole Pathway to understand how the system is working collectively. This would be helpful for understanding, for example, how long clients spend in Pathways accommodation before exiting, or to highlight groups of clients who revolve around services for long periods of time.

We propose reviewing the way we use data to better understand Pathway services and how we can improve outcomes for clients. Any new monitoring will be evaluated to ensure that it is as streamlined as possible to complete, and essential for improving outcomes for clients; we do not want to introduce burdensome reporting requirements which unnecessarily take providers away from the core work of supporting clients.

### **15. Considering how pathway services relate to other homelessness services in Bristol**

Since pathway services were last commissioned in 2017, BCC has been successful in securing funding through a number of short term (maximum of 3 years) DLUHC programmes including the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and Single Homelessness Programme (SHAP). Housing Options are also in discussions with colleagues in Adult Social Care around the ongoing delivery of a High Stability Housing service in Bristol.

We will review how these services best complement Pathways accommodation, as well as considering the impact of funding streams ending part way through Pathway contracts.

## Section D – Process for recommissioning

### Process for recommissioning

Current contracts expire at the end of October 2024. Current Pathway contracts were directly awarded in 2017 as there were insufficient options in the market to run a competitive tender process. BCC will undertake soft market testing to explore whether there are new providers who have the ability and resources to provide supported accommodation in Bristol under new contracts. A final decision on the most appropriate procurement route will be taken after this soft market testing is concluded, based on what is best for the service as well as being compliant with the Bristol City Council Procurement Rules and Public Contract Regulations 2015.

Contract values will be set with reference to indicative unit costs for each Level of accommodation. This proposal does not mean applying one single price per unit at different levels, but does mean that any differences in the support contract will need to be justifiable as transparent exceptional costs and subject to set ceiling costs at each level. Overall we will aim to standardise support costs wherever possible.

Contracts will be for an initial term of 3 years from the end of October 2024 with the option to extend for a maximum of 2 further years. The contracts will encourage ongoing service improvements and scope for variations in contract terms where necessary/appropriate. Any option to extend would be dependent on performance.