

Responding to people living in vehicles 2026 - 2031

Policy proposal for public consultation





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Policy context

This policy has been developed in response to the significant increase in the number of people living in vehicles across Bristol, which has risen by more than 300% since 2019. This increase creates a range of social, public health, and environmental challenges for the city and people living this way. Vehicle dwelling has complex and varied causes, including the affordability of housing, economic hardship, health issues, and alternative lifestyles.

As numbers have grown, we have seen an increasing impact on: the health and safety of people living in vehicles, access to public spaces, obstruction of roads, and community cohesion. Many people living in vehicles experience poor mental and physical health, limited access to sanitation, barriers to services, and stigma. The presence of lived-in vehicles also raises concerns for the wider community and partner agencies, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour, public health risks, environmental waste, access to and enjoyment of parks and green spaces, and road safety.

Bristol City Council does not recognise people, or groups of people, living in vehicles on highways or council-owned land (without consent) as a sustainable or safe way of living, or a housing solution. The significant rise in the number of people living this way in Bristol is part of the broader national housing crisis that has left many unable to access secure, affordable accommodation, which cannot be fully addressed locally.

In this context, this policy has been developed based on these principles:

- **Respect and inclusion:** Respect for the rights of all Bristol citizens vehicle dwellers and other residents, with recognition that vehicle dwellers are not a homogenous group. They include working professionals, families, older people, cultural travellers, and individuals experiencing poverty or trauma.
- **Support throughout:** Proactive multi-agency outreach will seek to address needs early, with a focus on health and finding routes into secure accommodation.
- Fair enforcement: Consistent, impartial, and evidence-based enforcement when taking action to
 move people living in vehicles off Bristol highways or council-owned land. Welfare, safeguarding
 assessments and support will also be available before, during, and after any enforcement action is
 taken by the council.
- **Safe alternatives:** Expanding our provision of temporary Meanwhile Sites to provide safe, managed spaces with basic amenities and support for people living in vehicles.
- **Participation:** Supporting the involvement of both people with lived experience of living in vehicles and the settled community in policy design and review.

2. Policy aims

The policy explains how we will respond to people living in vehicles on highways or council-owned land to achieve these aims:

- To balance the needs of all communities by addressing public health, welfare, safety, and environmental concerns through multi-agency working.
- To support the health and wellbeing of people living in vehicles by taking a proactive approach to the provision of health, housing and welfare advice and support.
- To promote inclusion and reduce stigma by recognising the diversity of people living in vehicles, using respectful language, and involving their voice in the design of services.



- To significantly reduce the number of people living in vehicles on highways and council-owned land (without consent) in Bristol, by offering Meanwhile Site pitches to those who qualify, welfare advice and help finding ways to move into fixed accommodation.
- To take a clear, proportionate, and evidence-based approach to enforcement.

In pursuing these aims, the council recognises that the expectations and standards of behaviour that are applied to people living in vehicles should be the same standard as that expected of all of citizens.

Anti-social behaviour and criminal activity is not acceptable from any section of the community. Dealing with criminal behaviour is almost invariably the responsibility of the police. Other agencies may be involved, depending upon the nature of the crime.

The council will review progress against the aims of this policy on an annual basis throughout the five-year policy lifecycle.

3. Links to the Corporate Strategy

This policy relates to the following goals and themes from Bristol City Council's Corporate Strategy 2025-2030:

Corporate Strategy Goal 3: Many communities

This policy recognises the diversity and complexity of vehicle dwelling communities, including cultural identities and experiences of stigma. The policy development process focused on participation and engagement with people living in vehicles and the wider community, in line with the strategy's commitment to work with all our people and communities to improve their quality of life. As part of this, we are in the process of supporting the establishment of a recognised 'voices group' to better understand the views and needs of people living in vehicles.

Corporate Strategy Goal 4: Prevention focused

The policy places an emphasis on proactive engagement to build resilience, prevent harm, and improve lives. This supports our strategic aim to get ahead of problems before they happen by supporting everyone to get the right support in the right place at the right time.

Corporate Strategy Priority 2: Children, family and adult wellbeing

The policy promotes health equality by taking a multi-agency approach to offering support to individuals and households living in vehicles. This approach to support is proactive, supporting our strategy of making sure people access local support at the right time.

Corporate Strategy Priority 3: Creating safe, healthy neighbourhoods

By offering tailored support, help finding routes into secure accommodation, and more temporary site pitches, the policy supports our strategy of ensuring public spaces are safe, clean and accessible for all, and supports our work with Bristol Waste to keep streets clear. The use of planning powers to expand our provision of Meanwhile Sites reinforces our commitment to improving public spaces and making sure changes promote safety and wellbeing.



4. Scope

This policy applies to people living in vehicles located on a highway or on any council-owned land (without consent) in Bristol, regardless of the type of vehicle or reason for living in the vehicle.

This policy does not apply to people living in vehicles on private land in Bristol.

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities living in vehicles are supported under statutory guidance due to their recognised ethnic identities. The delivery of this policy will be carried out with due regard to their rights, needs, and the council's duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Where members of the GRT community are identified within other groups of people living in vehicles, the council's GRT Team will lead our engagement response in accordance with their policies and protocols.

This policy does not apply to vehicles that are abandoned. Abandoned vehicles will be managed separately under established highways procedures and abandonment protocols.

5. Policy

This policy outlines our new integrated response approach, which combines: proactive outreach to support people living in vehicles, advice and support to find secure accommodation, temporary pitch offers, and consistent enforcement to support the safety and wellbeing of both people living in vehicles and the wider community.

- We will take a proactive and balanced approach to people living in vehicles, prioritising support and taking enforcement action where appropriate.
- We will take a multi-agency approach to health, substance misuse, and homelessness issues to better support people living in vehicles.
- Subject to availability and eligibility, we will offer Meanwhile Site pitches to support safe and hygienic alternatives for people living in vehicles who have a connection to Bristol.
- We will take a clear, proportionate, and evidence-based approach to taking enforcement action to move people living in vehicles off highways and council-owned land (without consent), prioritising action against the most unsafe and unsustainable vehicle groups.

a. Support

Support is at the forefront of our response to people living in vehicles. We will proactively seek to identify the needs and vulnerabilities of people living in vehicles. This includes facilitating access to health services and co-ordinated support to find ways for people to move from living in vehicles into secure accommodation.

Proactive outreach

- Proactive outreach will be provided by outreach workers who are part of the Bristol Street Outreach Service, supported by a health liaison worker and a specialist social worker.
- The primary objectives of outreach are to ensure that health and welfare needs are identified, and to assess the needs of people living in vehicles to find routes out of vehicle living if this need is identified.
- Outreach will build relationships and will carry out regular door-knocking and follow-up visits to ensure proactive engagement, including where access is not initially gained.



 Outreach will prioritise areas and vehicle groups where there is likely to be the highest need for support, as well as being a presence at Meanwhile Sites.

ii. Multi-agency co-ordination

• The outreach workers will be supported by the council's Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Public Health, and Homelessness Prevention teams. This allows us to make a holistic assessment of needs and collect data used to focus resources where most needed.

iii. Support to find accommodation

- We aim to offer advice and support to help vehicle dwellers plan a move away from living in vehicles or find safer and more sustainable options that are not on the highway or councilowned land (without consent).
- In addition to the Meanwhile Sites and general welfare rights advice, the primary offer will be to access private sector accommodation or a move into supported accommodation where this would be appropriate.
- Outreach Workers will liaise with the Homelessness Prevention Team to ensure full assessments under homelessness legislation are completed where appropriate.

b. Meanwhile Site pitches

To compliment this proactive support model, we are expanding the number of Meanwhile Sites as a way of improving provision and reducing the number of people living in vehicles on highways and council-owned land. Meanwhile Sites are temporary, licensed spaces that provide access to basic amenities for a weekly service charge.

Our consultation engagement process, the Bristol Model, and our 2023 Health Needs Analysis tells us that people living in vehicles lack access to basic sanitation and amenities, including toilets, clean water, and waste collection, whilst vehicle dwellers who have moved to Meanwhile Sites tell us the sites provide a safer environment. With a clear code of conduct and council management, risks to hygiene and cases of anti-social behaviour are reduced when compared to unmanaged lived-in vehicles located on highways or other council-owned land.

- Subject to availability and eligibility, we will offer a temporary Meanwhile Site pitch to individuals or households living in a vehicle located on a Bristol highway or councilowned land (without consent).
- When allocating Meanwhile Site pitches we will ensure we meet duties under the Equalities Act 2010. See Appendix 1 for more information about how we manage and allocate pitches on Meanwhile Sites.
- Outreach workers will support vulnerable vehicle dwellers who have a local connection to another area to return to that area to access accommodation and support.

c. Enforcement

Local authorities and the police have a range of powers available to take enforcement action against individuals or groups of people living in vehicles on highways or council-owned land (without consent). Appendix 2 outlines these powers and the circumstances in which we might use them.

Our policy is to act quickly where necessary, however the legal processes involved can take months.



















Our enforcement approach involves an initial assessment and immediately starting action in some circumstances. In all other cases there will be a three-month support period, after which our priority is to remove the vehicle or vehicle groups from their location.

Initial assessment

Once the council is made aware of people living in vehicles on a highway or council-owned land (without consent), an initial assessment will be made to determine the level of impact on the local community, environment, or location. This will lead to either immediately starting enforcement action, or the initiation of a three-month period during which the support offer outlined in Section 5a - 5b will continue to be prioritised.

ii. Immediate action cases

- Immediately starting enforcement action will be required where there is dangerous obstruction of a highway, or we identify a serious impact on the local community, environment, or location directly linked to the person or people living in vehicles.
- Appendix 3 provides examples of dangerous obstruction of a highway or serious impact.
- The council's priority will be to use enforcement powers that remove the lived-in vehicles from the highway or council-owned land.
- The council will endeavour to carry out a welfare assessment of the person or people living in vehicles before any enforcement action is taken.

iii. Time-limited support period – all other cases

Where immediate action is not taken, a period of up to three-months will begin from the date of the initial assessment. Three months is the same period we use for groups of rough sleepers on council-owned land.

Officers from our enforcement team will encourage vehicle dwellers to leave the highway or council-owned land within three months.

During the three-month period:

- The council will continue to prioritise the proactive support offer described in Sections 5a 5b, which includes an assessment of welfare, advice and support to find secure accommodation, and Meanwhile Site pitches subject to eligibility and availability.
- If the offer is accepted, we will support the individual or household to progress their housing or Meanwhile Site offer.
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) or other interventions may be used during this period to manage or contain the impact of the vehicle group without seeking their removal from the highway or council-owned land, in line with Bristol City Council's Corporate ASB Policy, Enforcement Policy, and other relevant council policies.
- Multi-agency case conferences may be used to co-ordinate support and monitor the impact of the vehicle group.
- Where new evidence indicates a serious impact during the three-month period, the council will reassess the need to take immediate action.



















iv. Review and enforcement

At the end of the three-month period, our priority will be the removal of any remaining vehicles from the highway or council-owned land.

• Where people have declined the support offer, are not engaging, or are not eligible, the council will start enforcement action required for their removal from the highway or councilowned land.

Where an eligible vehicle dweller has accepted an offer of a Meanwhile Site pitch, but no pitches are available, they will be put on the Meanwhile Site waiting list, and the council will assess the situation on a case-by-case basis.

- We will consider the welfare needs and vulnerabilities of the individual or household, and the impact of their presence on the local community and surrounding environment.
- Based on this assessment, we will either exercise discretion to extend the three-month support period or will consider other remedies to address the presence of the vehicle dweller at their current location.

Enforcement against people ineligible for a Meanwhile Site pitch

For individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria for a Meanwhile Site pitch:

- Under 18s: Enforcement action will not be taken against under 18s except in exceptional circumstances. The council will make an immediate safeguarding referral and engage Children's Services to address welfare and accommodation needs.
- People with no Bristol connection: Enforcement action may be taken against people with no Bristol connection. Vulnerable vehicle dwellers will be supported to return to an area where they do have a local connection. Such decisions will be made in line the council's human rights and equalities duties outlined below.
- Vehicle dwellers subject to immigration control: Enforcement action may be taken against vehicle dwellers subject to immigration control. Such decisions will be made in line the council's human rights and equalities duties below.

iv. Evidence-based

All decisions to take enforcement action, whether immediate, during, or after the threemonth support period, will consider the circumstances of every vehicle or group of vehicles on a case-by-case basis and ensure the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 guide our chosen response.

The council will, at its discretion, use statutory powers to resolve issues presented and manage the impact of vehicle groups without resorting to eviction-type enforcement where there are reasons to do so.

All decisions taken by the council will have considered any obligations it has to a vehicle dweller under, for example, the Care Act 2014, Housing Act 1996, Children Act 1989, Mental Health Act 1983, and other relevant legislation.



















Equalities 6.

The Equality Act 2010 gives public authorities a general duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not, when carrying out their functions. Local authorities must always be able to show that they have properly considered the equalities implications of their policies and actions and be able to demonstrate that their policies and actions are proportionate bearing in mind all the circumstances of each case.

As part of our policy development process, we will complete an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of this policy before its implementation.

Glossary 7.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB): Bristol City Council adopts the definitions of anti-social behaviour (ASB) set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Part 1 of the Act defines ASB as:

- Any act that causes, or is likely to cause, nuisance or annoyance to a person in respect of their dwelling, and
- Any act that causes, or is likely to cause, alarm, harassment or distress to a person not in respect of their dwelling.

Assessment under homelessness legislation: This refers to local authority duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This means we have legal responsibilities to help people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Depending on the person's circumstances, this can involve creating a personal housing plan, helping to find a home before they become homeless, helping a homeless person find somewhere to live within 56 days, and finding long-term accommodation.

Bristol Street Outreach Service: A service commissioned by Bristol City Council and provided by St Mungo's, which supports people sleeping rough in Bristol. The service connects individuals with resources and support to access accommodation, healthcare services, substance abuse support, and assistance with other needs.

Council-owned land: Land that is legally owned by Bristol City Council. This commonly includes public parks, open spaces, land held for future development or community use.

Enforcement Team, Neighbourhood Enforcement Team (NET): A Bristol City Council team that manages nuisance complaints related to noise, smoke, light, licensing, waste in gardens, environmental crimes including littering, dog control, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles, graffiti, fly posting, domestic and commercial waste, highways enforcement including obstruction, overhanging vegetation, tables and chairs, selling vehicles on the street, and managing vehicle dwellers on the highway.

Equalities Act 2010: A law that protects individuals from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation based on their protected characteristics. Local authorities, as public bodies, are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires us to consider discrimination and the needs of people who are disadvantaged or suffer inequality when we make decisions about how we provide services and implement policies.



















Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA): An evidence-based assessment designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation, or disadvantage any protected groups from participation.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT): An umbrella term that describes a number of ethnic and cultural groups. Ethnic Travellers include:

- English and Welsh Romany Gypsies and Scottish Travellers (who are also a Romany group)
- Eastern European Roma
- Irish Travellers

These GRT communities are minority ethnic groups, as defined under the Race Relations Act and with protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010).

Human Rights Act 1998: A law that sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to. It incorporates the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into British law.

Licence agreement (Meanwhile Site): A written agreement between the council and the occupant(s) of a Meanwhile Site outlining their rights, responsibilities, and conditions for use of the site.

Meanwhile Site: Land owned by Bristol City Council that is unoccupied or earmarked for future redevelopment where vehicle dwellers can stay with access to basic amenities and a designated Bristol City Council point of contact. The land may also be in the process of being sold off, have planning consent for residential or commercial use, or waiting for a new usage, and therefore available to be used as a Meanwhile Site.

Private Rented Sector (PRS): Any property that is privately owned - rather than owned by a local authority or housing association - and being rented out as housing.

Supported housing: Accommodation provided with additional tenancy support for individuals with specific needs.

Vehicle Dweller, people living in vehicles: A person, or household, who uses a motor vehicle, caravan, campervan, or similar vehicle as their primary home.

Vehicle: In this policy a vehicle means anything that looks like or was part of a vehicle, even if it's broken down or not roadworthy. This includes things with or without wheels and includes anything attached to the vehicle, like a trailer or load.

This also includes caravans, which according to the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 are:

- Any structure designed or adapted for people to live in, and
- Capable of being moved from one place to another, either by towing or transporting it on another vehicle or trailer.

Caravan might refer to a motor vehicle adapted for people to live in, like campervans, but does not include tents or railway carriages.



















8. Related links and documents

Corporate ASB Policy

Corporate Strategy 2025-2030

Enforcement Policy

Health Needs Analysis of People Living in Vehicles in Bristol

Rough Sleeper Encampments Policy

Vehicle Dwellers - The Bristol Model

Vehicle dwellers in Bristol

9. Appendixes

Appendix 1 - How we manage and allocate pitches on Meanwhile Sites

a. Management

Each site includes:

- A clean water source
- Waste disposal for household waste (general waste and recycling)
- Chemical toilets
- A designated Bristol City Council contact

Sites are securely gated, managed by council officers, and governed by clear licence agreements outlining safety, conduct, and environmental standards. This includes a behaviour policy aligned with Bristol City Council's Corporate ASB policy.

b. Allocation of Meanwhile Site pitches

When allocating Meanwhile Site pitches we will ensure we meet duties under the Equalities Act 2010.

Our approach to allocating Meanwhile Site pitches includes requirements for applicants:

- not to be subject to immigration control
- be aged 18 or over
- have a local connection to Bristol

A person will have a local connection to Bristol if:

- They have been living within the Bristol City boundary continuously for the last two years immediately prior to the date of their application, or
- Their normal place of work (paid employment and not voluntary work) is in Bristol, or



• They have close family currently living in Bristol who have lived in Bristol continuously for the last two years immediately prior to the date of application, and they need to live near that person to provide or receive care.

Close family is intended as immediate family (i.e. parents, dependent and non-dependent adult children and siblings).

As well as having to prove a local connection, the council may exclude certain people from getting a Meanwhile Site pitch or joining the waiting list. Reasons for exclusion include:

- Previous eviction due to serious anti-social behaviour
- Persistent failure to pay rent or other accommodation charges
- Persistent noise nuisance
- Illegal behaviour
- Threat of or actual violence
- Supplying false or misleading information to obtain a tenancy, Meanwhile Site pitch, or position on Meanwhile Site pitch waiting list
- Racial or other harassment
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Loss of security of tenure due to breach of postponed order
- Having been guilty of unauthorised subletting
- Deliberate worsening of current 'housing' situation without reasonable cause
- Moved onto a site without permission in advance.

Appendix 2 – Enforcement powers and when we might use them

a. Byelaws

A byelaw is a local law made by a council to manage specific issues in their area. It usually tells people what they must do or must not do in a particular area. If someone breaks a byelaw, they can be taken to court and fined.

Byelaws rely on criminal prosecution, which means the council must identify and act against specific individuals. They do not prevent the behaviour from happening again, instead they punish it after it occurs.

b. On council-owned land

Order for possession of land (Part 55 Civil Procedure Rules - CPR 55): This is the usual route to deal with trespass on council-owned land. The council applies to the court for an order for trespassers to leave. Two working days' notice of proceedings must be given, and it can take eight to ten weeks to obtain a court order, which can then be enforced against large groups.

Example: A group of vehicles set up on a public park owned by the council, leading to complaints of damage to the grounds and nuisance. The council could initiate CPR 55 proceedings to obtain a court order for their removal.



















The council can include other land that adjoins the trespassed land to ensure that the trespassers do not move nearby.

Injunctions against people living in vehicles or trespassing on land: The council can apply to the court for an injunction to prevent or prohibit parking, camping, or residing on land. Non-compliance with an injunction can lead to imprisonment or a fine.

Injunctions can cover adjoining land and multiple individuals, and can apply to newcomers at any time for up to a year. The council can apply for permission to remove vehicles under the injunction.

Example: After repeated removals of lived-in vehicles from a park using possession orders, groups of vehicles continue to relocate to nearby council-owned land, leading to ongoing complaints. In response, the council could apply for a 12-month injunction covering all open spaces within a reasonable distance, as approved by the court. This will depend on the evidence presented by the council.

Newcomer injunctions: A specific form of injunction against individuals who cannot be known at the time the order is made. This is often used to target future unlawful activity by changing groups.

Example: If a particular site consistently experiences new groups of vehicle dwellers arriving after previous groups have left, a newcomer injunction could be sought to prevent groups of unknown individuals on that specific land in the future.

c. On both council-owned land and public highways

Notice under Section 77 and Section 78 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994:

This notice directs occupiers to leave within a reasonable time and is served on each person or vehicle occupying the land. If they fail to leave, the council can apply for an order to force the removal of the vehicles. Occupiers must be given at least two days' notice of the hearing. If satisfied, the court will make an order allowing for vehicle removal, and the council must give at least 24 hours' notice before attempting removal.

The council can also use CPR 55 in relation to the highway and can include other highways not trespassed upon. Public highways could also be the subject of an injunction.

Example: Inhabited vehicles are parked on a public highway. After welfare checks and a notice to leave, if the vehicle remains, the council could seek a Section 78 order for its removal.

d. On public highways

Section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 (Removing Obstructions): This power allows for the council or police to prosecute anyone wilfully obstructing a highway.

Example: A large vehicle, whether inhabited or not, is parked in a way that impedes the flow of traffic or pedestrian movement on a highway. This power could be used to remove the obstruction.

Section 143 of the Highways Act: This allows the council to serve notice on the owners of structures on the highway, giving a set time to remove them after one month. The definition of a structure is wide and can include something which is on wheels.

Example: A static caravan, even if inhabited, is on a public highway without authorisation. A Section 143 notice could be served for its removal.



















Appendix 3 – Serious impact

This appendix provides a non-exhaustive list of factors that might indicate a serious impact on the local community, environment, or location.

These factors are intended to support consistent decision making. The council has discretion to manage situations through anti-social behaviour tools, targeted support, or other proportionate interventions.

There may also be circumstances not listed where the evidence available justifies immediate enforcement action.

Obstruction of a highway

- Clear obstruction of emergency access routes, dangerous narrowing of highways, or visibility impact near bends or junctions.
- As the highway authority, the council will determine whether an obstruction requires the vehicle or vehicle group to be removed in line with statutory duties.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

• Evidence of criminal activity or anti-social behaviour. Examples include, breaches of the peace, acts of vandalism or intimidation, drug-dealing, and large gatherings causing sustained disturbances.

Health, welfare, and safeguarding

• Evidence of urgent welfare concerns requiring immediate intervention. Examples include children or vulnerable adults in unsafe conditions or locations, exploitation, human trafficking, and modern slavery.

Location

- Vehicles are located either on, or in close proximity to, sensitive locations.
- Examples of sensitive locations could include:
 - schools
 - children's play areas
 - parks and green spaces
 - locations where individual or groups of vehicles have been removed one or more times within the last six months.
- When assessing the impact of vehicles at any location, we will consider the number of vehicles and their density. For example, larger groups of vehicles may be considered more likely to cause disruption.

Waste and fly-tipping

• Evidence of noise, fly-tipping, human waste, fires, or hazardous materials.























Documents available in other formats:

You can request a paper copy, alternative format or translated version of this document by contacting the Gypsy Roma Traveller team by email at

vehicle.dwellers@bristol.gov.uk or by phone on 0117 9223921

BD17522







