

Cabinet Housing Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 16 July 2025

Present:

Councillors:

Glenn Andrews, Jan Foster, Julian Tooke (Chair) and Suzanne Williams (Vice-Chair)

Cooptees:

Ian Mason and Agnieszka Wisniewska

Councillors:

Rowena Hay (Leader)

Also in attendance:

Gemma Bell (Director of Finance, Assets and Climate (Deputy S151 Officer)), Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Lianne Hearn (Benefits and Money Advice Team Leader), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Paul Leo (Interim Director Housing Transformation), Ellen Pollicott (Community Investment Manager), Justine Skitt (Tenancy Management Team Leader), Caroline Walker (Director of Housing, Customer and Community Services) and Matt Ward (Head of Housing Services)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Flo Clucas and Bozena Tarnawska.

2 Declarations of interest

Ian Mason declared that he is the chair of the Monkscroft Community Action Group, which has received £9k from the community fund of Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC).

3 Public and Member Questions

One public question had been submitted; the response was taken as read.

Question from Ian Mason, Tenant Representative to the Cabinet Housing Committee:

In the light of recent incidents involving the key-fob entry system which have resulted in residents' safety being compromised, compounded by technical issues resulting in residents being unable to gain entry to their homes, can I ask for an urgent update from the housing service. What remedial action is being taken? What mitigations are in place to protect residents' safety? & What is the timescale for this work to be completed?

Response from Caroline Walker, Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services:

The issues at Monkscroft are being investigated. The key fob readers may be presenting an issue, and we are currently exploring options to rectify this and will keep the tenant representative informed.

Historically, there have been issues with network connectivity, these have been addressed by changing the network provider and replacing the modems and SIM cards in the area.

It is worth noting that if there is a breakdown on one of the doors/gates and residents are declined access, an electrician will attend and turn off the system so that tenants and leaseholders can access their properties. The contractor will attend to rectify faults with the door entry system within 24 hours, however, first time fix may not be possible if the equipment needs to be removed from site, repaired and then reinstalled.

We have known for a long time now that our equipment is very old and obsolete. I recommend that strong consideration be made to replace all of our existing doors, door entry systems and intercoms.

Supplementary Question:

Is the equipment being old and obsolete the cause of lengthy delays in repairing problems with doors following repeated callouts, which on occasion have taken over a year. Will the full replacement of all existing doors be further down the road?

Response from Caroline Walker, Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services:

Thank you for raising the issue. We recognise that we need to get better at responding to reported issues quickly. Repairs have become increasingly difficult, and parts have had to be removed for repair off-site. We are happy to review what has happened on specific occasions separately if details are provided. Replacement of the system as a whole will need to be considered to ensure the timing is right and it is prioritised against other planned maintenance. This will be informed by data from the stock condition surveys as part of the planned maintenance programme, which should include the replacement of doors.

4 Minutes of the last meeting

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11th June 2025.

RESOLVED THAT The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2025 were signed as a correct record.

5 CEO/Director Briefing (Verbal)

Objective: An update from the Chief Executive and Director on key issues which may be of interest to the Cabinet Housing Committee.

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and highlighted that:

- It has been a year since housing services were transferred back into the council. There has been significant progress but also challenges over the last 12 months and significant work to do in terms of our improvement journey. There have been some huge positives, including the progress made on the programme of stock condition surveys, and the strides made in improving and understanding our position on compliance and how we address issues.
- Whilst we are not fully through the journey around savings generated, almost £2m savings have been projected from combining pensions. This will provide greater choice in the future for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in terms of financial resilience and where the council chooses to invest.
- We are also seeing the benefits of the combining the strength in capacity and technical knowledge of both organisations. This has been particularly evident in the essential delivery of new homes which is critical in responding to the housing crisis, for example at 320 Swindon Road, which will begin construction later in the year after significant delays.
- There are still challenges ahead and we are continuing to adjust and respond to the new regulatory environment. The first priority will always be the safety and compliance of homes, and it is important to restate that commitment at this significant point. As we review the other Consumer Standards as a collective we will continue to drive for improvement with a clear goal of being a C1 rated housing provider and an exemplar for our tenants, residents and the other providers we work alongside in Cheltenham and beyond. The expectation for the years ahead is that we will reach that standard.
- Bringing together 450 colleagues is a challenge for an organisation's culture and we are continuing to develop our integrated culture. Great work has been done together on developing new organisational values and behaviours and we are seeing progress. There have been some staffing changes during this journey but believe that the foundations for success have been built over the last 12 months. Remain incredibly grateful to housing teams and everybody within the organisation on how we have faced up to challenges and continue our improvement journey. Confident that if we continue to show the same tenacity as the last 12 months we will deliver against our aims.

- Incredibly grateful to the teams on a day-to-day basis who make sure residents are safe in their homes and continue to deliver an excellent service.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities addressed the Committee and highlighted that:

- An all-housing team meeting had been held, and it had been brilliant to get everyone in the same room. All of the team are engaged and dedicated to delivering great services, with positive challenge as activities were carried out to consider things we think we can improve.
- Next week we will be going out to advert with a number of posts including a senior management position for Head of Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements, two Operation Manager posts (to oversee repairs and voids, and technical and investment respectively), and a Head of Property Compliance. We hope that we will get good applications to bring stability to that side of the housing service. In the interim Pennington Choices have been engaged to provide additional support, advice and assurance to the existing compliance team whilst they do not have a manager. Also aiming to appoint someone to oversee the technical, investment and planned maintenance teams on an interim basis whilst recruitment is carried out.
- The Head of Housing Services has taken over management of voids to address ongoing delays. This is now moving in the right direction with 12 voids brought back in for reletting, and 16 due back in the next two weeks. The Leader has also signed a decision notice to appoint a new contractor focused on voids. Thanks to everyone who has worked tirelessly in this area.
- On the 17 July a new monthly housing leadership team walkabout will begin to allow tenants the opportunity to talk to members of the team and provide feedback. The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services, Interim Housing Transformation Director, and Head of Housing Services will be visiting Moors Avenue, St. Peters Close and Yarmouth Terrace between 11am and 1pm. This has been advertised via social media. Walkabouts will be carried out monthly at different locations until Christmas.

In response to Members' questions, the Director of Governance, Housing and Communities confirmed:

- The walkabout locations have only been confirmed on the 16 July to ensure that the areas cannot be prepared in advance. The relevant Ward Members will be informed of the visit.

6 Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan

Objective: To provide committee with an opportunity to review and feedback on the Customer Engagement Strategy before it is submitted to Cabinet.

The Community Investment Manager introduced the new Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan for 2025–2028 created in collaboration with Campbell Tickell and the Comms Team. She explained that it outlines how the housing service will work with

tenants and leaseholders to shape the services provided and reflects the council's responsibilities in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and the Consumer Standards. The plan outlines four core priorities – empowerment to give tenants real influence in decision making, inclusion to ensure that everyone including underrepresented communities' voices are heard, communities to build stronger connections, and improvement to ensure we continue to adapt to feedback. It expands our offer and creates more flexible ways for residents to be involved. A Resident Engagement Officer has been recruited who will support in the delivery of the plan. Success and progress will be measured against engagement levels, diversity, satisfaction trends and tracking how feedback leads to policy change and improves services.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Highlighted that the housing service is about people not buildings, and this work being carried out is the vital link. It is great to see all the opportunities and support being provided to tenants now compared to decades ago.
- Alongside the formal structure it is great to see that colleagues and tenants have the ability to get together and share ideas and feedback in an informal setting.

The Cabinet Housing Committee UNANIMOUSLY recommended that Cabinet adopt the Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan.

7 Tenancy Policy and Decant (required move) Policy

Objective: To provide committee with an opportunity to review and feedback on the Tenancy Policy and Decant (required move) Policy before they are submitted to Cabinet.

The Tenancy Management Team Leader introduced the new Tenancy Policy and explained that it is an overarching policy that ensures tenants are aware of their rights. It explains CBC's approach to the types of tenancies granted, the security of their tenure, how to end tenancies, how to change tenancies, mutual exchanges, successions, and lodgers and subletting. Alongside each of these areas will be a process procedure for colleagues to follow to ensure we are delivering the same service for tenants. There is also a complaints and appeals process included. The separate procedures will allow us to respond quickly to feedback if issues are identified, without the need to bring the full policy back to Cabinet.

The Tenancy Management Team Leader introduced the new and Decant (required move) Policy and explained it outlines when and why we would move tenants to a different property on a temporary or permanent basis. The policy also includes a complaints and appeals process. A detailed process and procedure sit behind the policy that has been reviewed by the Empty Homes Team, Planned Maintenance Team and Repairs Team to ensure we are working together to provide the best service for tenants.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The Decant (required move) Policy does not apply to situations where tenants need to move due to changes in their circumstances, for example the need for accessibility adaptations. These situations would instead be handled through the tenants approaching the Housing Options Team, who will arrange a transfer between properties after determining their priority level. Decant (required moves) specifically relates to situations where a property is no longer suitable, normally due to the condition of the property.

The Cabinet Housing Committee UNANIMOUSLY recommended that Cabinet adopt the Tenancy Policy and Decant (required move) Policy

8 Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2024/25 Submission

Objective: For information committee members will be provided with a copy of the full TSM submission made to the Regulator for 2024/25 (deadline for submission 30 June 2025).

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities introduced the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) submission to the Regulator for Social Housing for 2024/25. She noted that this reflected the position as of 31 March 2025 and that benchmarking information on this data will be provided to the Committee in the future. She explained that the intention in future years will be to share this document with the Committee prior to submission.

9 End of Year 2024-2025 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Monitoring Report and Rent Collection Update

1. **Objective:** To provide a monitoring position statement for the HRA against the budget approved by Council on 23 February 2024, highlighting any key variances, together with an update on rent collection performance for the financial year 2024/25

The Director of Finance & Assets introduced the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn report for 2024-25 against the revised budget approved by Council in February 2025 (originally approved before the transition of housing service in February 2024). The revised budget forecast the HRA would generate an £89k surplus in year which would maintain the revenue reserve at just over £1m. Historically the target has been at £1.5m and forecasts had shown this would drop in the medium-term. Efficiencies achieved through bringing the housing service back in-house will be key to recovering that reserve. As the operating accounts show a deficit of £332k has been reported which has taken the reserves down to just over £600k. The main drivers of this deficit are delays in void turnarounds, including additional council tax liabilities and rent loss, and the structure of the original budget where slippage in funded planned maintenance has led to more costs being charged to the HRA for reactive repairs. This overspend shows the importance of having really accurate data and forecasting, which will be provided through the changes to the service area currently being undertaken. Whilst this is not ideal, similar issues

with the general balances have been overcome in recent years and the same discipline will be applied to the HRA with a full review of the structure of the budget, the data underpinning forecasts and the feasibility of savings post-transition. There is a balance to be struck between addressing compliance and safety and continuing to be financially sustainable.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The change from the forecast in February is due to what the Finance Team have been able to draw and utilise from the housing management system, QL. A significant amount of work has been carried out on the inputs into the system and as data improvements continue, we are confident that forecasting will be better.
- The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) is subject to a triennial evaluation which will occur in the 2025-26 financial year. It is anticipated that the output of this evaluation will see savings in both the general fund and HRA from the 1 April 2026.
- The data from the stock condition surveys will inform the planned maintenance programme. Once this data is in QL the cost implications will be included within the next forecast.
- CBH reserves have supported a lot of transition activity during the last year. The CBH draft accounts are currently being finalised, with audit scheduled for August, and will be published in due course.
- Provision of bad debt has seen a huge improvement over the last year, with the amount of write offs reduced due to the teams' positive performance. Aware of the current national challenges but are comfortable with the position of the bad debt provision.

The Head of Housing Services provided a presentation on rent collection performance for 2024-25. He highlighted how the Rent Accounting Team, Income Team, Benefits and Money Advice Team and Training and Employment Services work to support tenants through a range of mechanisms, sustain tenancies and recover rent arrears. He explained what steps had been taken over the last year and the improvements in figures that had resulted.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- It was fantastic to see the community support and training and employment measures provided, reflecting that social responsibility sits alongside rent collection.
- Repayments are commonly paid to tenants due to overpayments made during rent-free weeks and to address backdated payments from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- The Tenant Representative's personal experience of the benefits brought by the Money and Benefits Advice Team and the Skills Hub was highlighted. They are excellent initiatives that have helped many tenants gain jobs and have changed peoples' lives.

10 Updates from the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels

Objective: To highlight the ongoing activities of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels and provide an additional opportunity for tenant and leaseholder voices to be heard.

The Chair noted that the Leasehold Representative had provided an update following the most recent Leaseholder Panel which had highlighted questions around service charge transparency and work quality, which had recently been discussed at the last meeting of the Cabinet Housing Committee. He welcomed the fact that leaseholders had been encouraged to report issues early. Requests had also been made for clearer guidance on leaseholder rights.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities commented that as part of the work being undertaken on the Consumer Standards and the improvement plan a successful workshop had been held with officers last week looking at one of the Standards and identifying gaps. She noted that some of the things identified also reflected issues raised by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels. Two more workshops are scheduled to review the remaining Standards and, once completed, an action plan will be developed and shared with the Committee, tenants and leaseholders to address the issues being raised.

The Tenant Representative noted that the next meeting of the Tenant Panel will be taking place on the next day, so she will provide an update at the next meeting.

11 Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan

The Housing Committee Forward Plan was noted.

12 Items to be referred to Cabinet

The Cabinet Housing Committee referred the following items to Cabinet for adoption:

- Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan
- Tenancy Policy
- Decant (required move) Policy

13 Briefing Note - Housing Sector Insight

Objective: To provide the Committee with an overview of recent developments in the housing sector and provide opportunities for horizon scanning.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities noted that the world of housing is changing rapidly at the moment with many government announcements. As many as possible have been captured within this briefing document, but any missing will be included within the next briefing note.