

Cabinet Housing Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 11 June 2025

In attendance:

Councillors:

Flo Clucas, Jan Foster, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Nick Such (Tenancy Services Manager), David Thomas (Interim Services Improvement Lead), Olivia Underhill (Customer Services Manager) and Matt Ward (Head of Housing Services)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Agnieszka Wisniewska

2 Appointment of Vice Chair

Councillor Suzanne Williams was unanimously appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee.

3 Declarations of interest

There were none.

4 Public and Member Questions

There were none.

5 Minutes of the last meeting

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025.

RESOLVED THAT The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025 were signed as a correct record.

6 CEO Briefing (Verbal)

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and highlighted that:

- All local authorities (LA) with retained housing stock are adjusting to the new regulatory environment and particularly the key difference between activity and evidence. Without evidence it is not possible to provide the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) with assurance.
- The Committee has set a clear focus on ensuring the safety and compliance of our homes. Work has been continuing in earnest on both ensuring that we have a clear plan and timescale to complete the outstanding legacy fire actions, and to ensure that the data we hold accurately reflects the situation on the ground. In recent months, some discrepancies have been identified and reconciled through a bottom-up reconstruction by colleagues to ensure that the granularity of the data is accurate. Work is also being carried out to ensure that as fire risk assessments take place the resource is available to manage actions as they emerge to prevent a new legacy situation emerging. Progress is being made that is beginning to deliver dividends and will place the council in a much stronger position with our assurance on safety and compliance.
- As we grow more comfortable with our position in relation to safety and compliance we are also carrying out a reassessment internally on the rest of the Consumer Standards with a fresh set of eyes. The same approach of being extremely self-critical about the evidence we hold will be followed to ensure we can provide critical data and assurance to the RSH. Once the internal process has been completed an external assurance exercise by experts will be carried out to ensure we have a clear road map for what improvements are needed, how they will be delivered and the timescales involved. It is vital that the cultural shift in evidencing our actions is embedded in every level of the housing organisation.
- Stock condition surveys remain a critical piece of work to ensure that we understand our homes. 59% have now been completed which is roughly 200 properties behind the expected timeline. Measures are in place to improve progress and we are continuing to work closely with the contractor. As we reach the higher percentage points progress may slow due to difficulty with gaining access to properties. This is expected but work is beginning to ensure that we can gain access and we are working on communication with those tenants. Once stock condition surveys have been completed we will move to an internal rolling survey approach. We will also be using the data to inform future investment plans.
- The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities has been working closely with the Interim Service Improvement Lead to gain a good understanding of the repairs and technical and investment teams. Aiming to carry out good recruitment in those areas in the next few months.
- The deadline for final business case submissions on local government reorganisation and devolution is in November. We are working through three

options for Gloucestershire. The government has acknowledged that this is a significant piece of work but are clear that they do not want other programmes of work to halt. This will in no way detract from our focus on safety, compliance, and our assurance journey with the RSH.

- Acknowledge that we are not in the position we would want with voids. There have been a number of reasons but largely due to issues identified with ensuring that contractors are appointed safely and compliantly. It is imperative as a local authority that we appoint contractors in the correct way to ensure that they undertake the works in an effective, speedy, and efficient manner. Grateful to colleagues that the number of voids is starting to move in the right direction.
- It has been a challenging few months in our improvement journey with a lot of work carried out behind the scenes. Hopeful that in the coming weeks and months we will see the dividends of this work, particularly in regards to the Consumer Standards. This will be reported transparently to the Committee to ensure that the improvement journey is monitored and demonstrate to the RSH that the Committee is driving this work.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points

- There has been a significant change in the culture and the attitude of staff in the last 9 – 10 months. They now recognise that it is important to be truthful and transparent to customers, rather than telling them what they want to hear. This is building from tenants, trust from councillors, and trust between officers.
- A tenant representative confirmed that the person carrying out their stock condition survey was very professional and personable. It was very convenient that they could attend on a Saturday morning. The surveyor also confirmed that the council was acting very promptly on issues coming out of the surveys.
- It was very positive to see work being done on social housing properties in the councillor's ward.

7 Compliance Strategy and Policies

Objective: To provide Committee with an opportunity to review and feedback on the Compliance Strategy and associated policies before they are submitted to Cabinet.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, introduced the report and explained that this was the first time that a Compliance Strategy was being recommended for adoption. The Compliance Strategy seeks to set out the three lines of defence on how the compliance programme will be managed to ensure we are getting the right data, that the data is validated and, in some cases, external assurance is provided. The Compliance Strategy has been developed with Pennington Choices and includes an action plan on how our position can continue to be improved. Progress will be monitored through the monthly Compliance Group, which the Chair attends. It will also be reported to the Cabinet Housing Committee in 6-months' time. The Compliance Strategy is supported by six policies developed by

Pennington Choices in line with industry best practice. These documents are legislative and quite technical to ensure that they are legally compliant. As these are not tenant friendly work is also being carried out to review the processes to create internal procedure documents and an annual tenant communication plan is being created to provide key information to tenants. The Tenant Panel were consulted on the policies but no feedback was received.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- To ensure our approach is people based tenancy audits are being undertaken to provide a better understanding of our tenants. Arrangements will be changed to tailor services to tenants' needs better, for example, to provide information in different languages or communicate verbally. Consideration will also be given on how to communicate with tenants who may benefit from more traditional methods, such as noticeboards.
- These policies do not relate to leaseholders, as they have different requirements, liabilities, and obligations. A separate piece of work will consider the needs of leaseholders.
- It was agreed that detailed questions would be shared outside of the meeting.
- Currently data is still stored in a number of systems – primarily QL, Excel and on contractors' portals. We are in the process of moving everything to QL to provide assurance that we have a single source of the truth. Excel provides opportunities for mistakes to be introduced through hidden columns and accidental changes. As this work is completed all data should be stored on either QL or via contractors. Currently a piece of work is also being carried out to understand the capabilities of the QL housing management system, which should be completed in the next few weeks.
- Documotive is a bolt-on system for QL used to store documents, such as communication with tenants.
- Risk management is currently being migrated to Verto. This does not connect directly to QL and we are not aware of whether it may be able to.
- It was suggested that Tenant Voice be used to highlight that new systems and people are in place to encourage tenants who may have had bad experiences in the past and lost faith in the service, to report issues again.
- Privately owned properties and leasehold properties are not required to have valid gas certificates. An encouragement programme is in place to encourage leaseholders to carry out annual checks and provide the certificates to the council. Colleagues are working with the legal team to consider whether terms could be introduced to make this a requirement for new leaseholders. Awareness raising of gas safety checks are being included in the annual service charge paperwork which will be issued in the next few weeks. This will include directions to our gas contractor who would provide discounts to leaseholders.

The Cabinet Housing Committee unanimously recommended that Cabinet:

- a) adopt the Compliance Strategy (Appendix 2); and**
- b) adopt the following Compliance Policies**

- i. **Gas and Heating Safety (Appendix 3)**
- ii. **Electrical Safety (Appendix 4)**
- iii. **Fire Safety (Appendix 5)**
- iv. **Asbestos (Appendix 6)**
- v. **Water Safety (Appendix 7)**
- vi. **Lift Safety (Appendix 8)**

8 Property Compliance Performance

Objective: To provide the Committee with an understanding of our property compliance status and the planned improvements needed to address areas of non-compliance.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities addressed the Committee and explained that the data covered the period to the end of May 2025. She highlighted that significant progress had been made and validation was now occurring at the same time as the report is generated, rather than taking hours of officer intervention. She provided an update on developments over the last week:

- 6 of the 33 outstanding asbestos surveys have been completed and all others are scheduled to be completed by the 14 June.
- Legacy fire risk actions have reduced from 93 to 62. Of the remaining actions:
 - o 20 relate to new windows. A manufacturer has been appointed with a 12-week lead time and an existing contractor identified for installation once they are received. A letter has been drafted to tenants to update them on what is happening.
 - o The remaining actions relate to compartmentation and fire stopping. This work has begun and, where required, contractors are being resourced appropriately.
 - o Hopefully, all legacy actions will be completed by the end of October.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Fire risk actions remain the Committee's upmost priority. It is reassuring that we are now getting accurate and transparent data, with nothing hidden. It is also important whilst actions are resolved that mitigations are in place and are clearly communicated to tenants.
- All fire risk actions were originally assessed as being high risk as they had passed their completion target. Each fire risk action has now been investigated and been reassessed alongside the mitigations in place, and all are now assessed as medium or low risk. It was agreed that an update with these new assessments would be issued following the meeting.
- Smoke and CO2 alarms are described as components within the report. All are currently up-to-date and are either wired or battery operated.
- Hopefully by the next meeting an updated performance report will be provided based on a new dashboard produced automatically by the system. This should be much easier to read and understand. This report should be created at the touch of a button to ensure we have accessible, up-to-date information.

9 Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

Objective: To provide Committee with an opportunity to review and feedback on the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy before it is submitted to Cabinet.

The Tenancy Services Manager presented the Housing Service Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy to the Committee and explained that it had been substantially revised as part of a programme of work reviewing the ASB service. The objectives of this review had been to ensure that the policy talks to tenants, provides clear information about what constitutes ASB, explain how agencies work together, and what service and outcomes customers can expect when they report ASB. This policy will form the basis of increased communication with tenants so a summary document has been provided alongside the policy to provide a more accessible document with a younger reading age and clearer language.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- It is very positive to see coercive control contained within the policy as an example of ASB, but it would be beneficial to see this included within the tenant communication document as well.
- The policy is for council tenants. It is hoped that a more tenure neutral approach will develop over time by bringing all services together and through the benefit of having teams working together more closely.
- There is a very fine line between ASB and criminality and the policy tries to differentiate between the two but there are areas where behaviour may fall under both. The ASB service will always support tenants to report incidents to the police where they wish to do so. We are lucky that we have a strong relationship with the local police and can follow a joint working approach. Where criminality occurs we always want to ensure the police have primacy on investigating, but there are also actions the council can take through ASB powers and tools.
- A tenant representative raised concerns that the police are less responsive to reports of criminality within areas with a high density of social housing. It was noted that this was a matter for discussion with the police and that it would be inappropriate for the Committee to comment upon.
- Constituents often speak to councillors about ASB and a common concern is that they wish to maintain their confidentiality. It is important to provide platforms where people can easily provide information with this layer of protection. When this is communicated it is important that tenants are assured that it is easy to report and their anonymity will be protected.
- The Cabinet could choose to include information on ASB within the annual letter to all residents about council tax, if they feel it would be beneficial.

The Cabinet Housing Committee unanimously recommended that Cabinet adopt the Housing Service Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

10 Housing Complaints and Compliments Report - Quarter 4

Objective: To provide an overview of housing related complaints and compliments, identifying key areas of dissatisfaction and areas for learning and service improvement.

The Customer Services Manager introduced the quarter 4 and annual housing complaints and compliments report. She highlighted that the report showed improvements in complaints regarding staff attitudes, which shows the effectiveness of previous learning from complaints. The Complaints Officer is currently working with investigating officers on improving response times. Feedback sessions are also being carried out to identify any learning points and changes that can be made to reduce the number of complaints received and the numbers of escalations to stage 2.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Leaseholders are able to use the complaints process and communication is carried out with them individually about their complaint. The Tenant Voice also includes an annual report on complaints and what has been learnt from them.
- The figures in the report do not neatly align due to the 10-day response time and potential extensions. Complaints reported in one month, may not be actioned until the following month.
- A response is defined as a formal written response provided after they have met with the investigating officer, discussed their complaint, and investigated the issue. An initial acknowledgement is received before the formal response which informs them of the investigating officer and confirms the 10-day response time. If an extension is required due to complexity this is also communicated with tenants and confirmed in writing.

11 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 leaseholder representative updated the Committee on the most recent meeting of the Leaseholder Panel on 3 June. She explained that they had:

- Met with the new Resident Engagement Officer who will support both the Tenant and Leaseholder Panels.
- Discussed the new fire safety S20 notice with the Asset & Investment Management, which leaseholders had many questions about. They had clarified that charges will only apply where remedial work is necessary.
- Reviewed stock condition survey progress which will inform the development of the 10-year maintenance programme, and will help leaseholders forecast potential future costs.
- Agreed a membership cap for the Panel of 10 members.
- Been introduced to the action tracker to monitor follow-ups and commitments.
- Expressed the training needs to be delivered to the Panel.

- Expressed the need for leaseholders to be more involved in the cost discussion for future planned works. Particularly in planned works and S20 where leaseholders can inspect contracts and submit observation during consultation. They recognise that contractor selection remains outside leaseholder control due to legal requirements and protocols. However, they would like to be able to inspect work once finished.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Communication could be generally improved with leaseholders, but specific concerns were raised around lack of consultation, specifically in relation to contractors and how the building is looked after.
- Dealing with major works is a challenging and costly process and we have to strictly adhere to the S20 consultation process. Currently the council is looking at improving the legal documents wording to provide a clearer version with better rationale behind it to show the cost benefits. The leasehold team are working with colleagues in technical and investment to ensure that this is considered from leaseholders' perspectives. This will include consulting with the Leaseholder Panel at the start of significant works on communication to ensure it is clear and provides information that is needed. Whilst this will not be possible at all times, we want to ensure that we are continuing to improve the service for leaseholders.
- We will consider how leaseholders can be involved in assessing work once completed, depending on the safety of the situation. Feedback is provided as part of the final part of the S20 process which is often where enquiries are received on what work was carried out. It is important to ensure that leaseholders are involved in the feedback loop to maintain quality and ensure issues that may have emerged are factored into which contractors are used.
- The tenant representative raised issues that tenants are experiencing when they request that Universal Credit (UC) payments are made directly to the landlords. There is often a delay in this process which means that tenants receive the first 5-6 weeks of rent payment themselves, and due to communication issues they are not always aware that this money is for rent and they need to pay it to their landlords. Despite trying to do the right thing tenants can unknowingly end up with £500-600 of rent arrears which it is difficult for them to repay. As UC migration continues this is likely to become a growing issue if the council do not take mitigating actions. Tenants are also being expected to inform the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) of rent increases, even if they have informed them that they will be unable to manage this, and will be liable for the shortfall themselves. This will create additional issues. Tenants will continue to be supported proactively by the council through their income officers, the benefit and money advice team, and the training and employment service. The Committee agreed that as a national issue this should be discussed with local MPs to ensure that this matter can be addressed with central government. An update on the rent collection will be provided to the Committee later in the year.

12 Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- A full mock In Depth Assessment is being commissioned which will prepare the council and the Committee for the RSH's inspection. This will also identify any training needs that are required.
- The HRA budget monitoring report at the 16 July meeting will also include a rent collection report.
- The 16 July meeting will also include the annual tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) submission. In future years this will be brought to the Committee in June to allow scrutiny before submission.

13 Items to be referred to Cabinet

The Committee recommended that Cabinet:

- a) adopt the Compliance Strategy (Appendix 2); and
- b) adopt the following Compliance Policies
 - i. Gas and Heating Safety (Appendix 3)
 - ii. Electrical Safety (Appendix 4)
 - iii. Fire Safety (Appendix 5)
 - iv. Asbestos (Appendix 6)
 - v. Water Safety (Appendix 7)
 - vi. Lift Safety (Appendix 8)
- c) adopt the Housing Service Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

14 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 briefing note was noted

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