

Cabinet Housing Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 26 November 2025

Present:

Councillors:

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

Cooptees:

Ian Mason and Lizzie Mawdsley

Also in attendance:

Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Gemma Rowberry (Head of Regulatory Compliance), Caroline Walker (Director of Housing, Customer and Community Services) and Matt Ward (Head of Housing Services)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Agnieszka Wisniewska.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Public and Member Questions

Two public questions had been submitted; the responses were taken as read.

Question from Mr. Richard Lawler

Standards for Waste and Recycling in Council Housing

At Cobham Road and Queen Street, communal bin areas are currently located on mud or damaged surfaces, with no secure compounds and some blocks having no recycling facilities at all.

What plans does the Council have to ensure that all council-housing sites meet a clear minimum standard for waste storage — including hardstanding, individual household bins rather than large industrial ones where appropriate, secure cages,

CCTV at hotspots, and full recycling provision in line with Cheltenham's household waste standards?

Response from Councillor Julian Tooke, Chair of the Cabinet Housing Committee

Thank you for your question.

As a council, we are committed to identifying and upgrading bin areas that do not meet modern regulations or an acceptable standard. These improvements are dependent on factors such as the availability of suitable space, obtaining necessary planning permission, and securing sufficient budget. We have already upgraded a number of bin areas, and this work forms part of an ongoing programme of improvements.

Both 220-234 Swindon Road (adjoining Queen Street) and 28-33 Cobham Road have been identified for improvements, with the addition of hard standing for the bin areas, in the 2026-2027 financial year. This work will be managed by our Technical and Investment Team and will be overseen by our Senior Building Surveyor.

Question from Mr. Richard Lawler

Leadership and Accountability for Estate Improvements Does the Cabinet Housing Committee agree that the current conditions at these sites fall below what residents should expect from a modern, well-managed social-housing environment — and that rectifying them is an equality and dignity issue as much as an environmental one?

If so, would the Cabinet Housing Committee consider assigning a named senior officer to take direct ownership of coordinating the necessary improvements — recognising both the scale of the problem and the need to manage workloads across the Housing team — and arrange a joint on-site visit with ward representatives and interested parties?

Response from Councillor Julian Tooke, Chair of the Cabinet Housing Committee

Thank you for your question.

As a landlord we are committed to putting our tenants and leaseholders at the heart of our services and to listening and responding to concerns as they are raised, whether they are environmental, neighbourhood, community, or otherwise. We want all our tenants, leaseholders and shared owners to live in communities where they feel safe, that they are proud of and where everyone can thrive

As a committee we are unable to take decisions on the allocation of resources, however, we are confident that officers will take action as stated in my previous response to the question. If after those actions have been taken, they are still

unsatisfactory please feel free to get in touch again.

Supplementary Question

Residents at Queen Street have raised concerns with me about the condition and design of the bin store. They tell me they often have to climb over rubbish just to reach the bins and many bags are now being kept on balconies because the waste area isn't fit for purpose. Can I ask whether the current bins and waste storage arrangements are considered appropriate for this site, and, if not, what steps the council's housing service will take to bring this block up to a safe and accessible standard.

Response from Councillor Julian Tooke, Chair of the Cabinet Housing Committee

Unable to comment on the legalities and what is defined as safe and accessible in law as this is not my area of expertise. What I can say is when I look at the photo it does not look great. Thank you for raising this with the committee. It is really important that concerned residents and people like you who care bring up these things, we take them very seriously. The Head of Housing Services will take this action away and will come back to you with a response, including a time frame.

Once again want to emphasise how grateful we are that you have brought this up. On this committee our job is not to be a member of the council, but to act as a check and balance to the council.

4 Minutes of the last meeting

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2025.

RESOLVED THAT The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2025 were signed as a correct record.

5 CEO/Director Briefing (if required) (Verbal)

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

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities noted that there was no update on this occasion.

6 Rent Setting, Repairs, Empty Homes (Voids) and Recharge Policies

Objective: To provide the committee with the Rent Setting, Voids, Recharge and Repairs policies for sign off and recommendation to cabinet for approval

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities introduced the updated policies for consideration and recommendation to Cabinet for final sign-off. She explained that:

- The Rent Setting Policy explains how rent is set and reviewed, and sets out the differences in the types of rent.
- The Recharge Policy seeks to provide information to tenants about when they may be recharged for repairs. For example, if tenants have caused deliberate damage to the home the council may seek to recover the costs of repairing the damage from the tenants. This includes broken doors, windows, lost keys and unsafe DIY. It also provides information about when charges would not apply, for example if the damage was a result of crime and there is a crime number, or if it is a domestic abuse case.
- The Empty Homes (Voids) Policy sets out how voids will be managed going forward and sets out clearly what tenants can expect when they move into their new home, through a Lettable Standard. It also includes key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure the committee and tenants are able to hold the council to account and track performance.
- The Repairs Policy covers repairs and maintenance for tenanted properties. Initially this had been intended to also cover leaseholder properties but feedback from the Leaseholder Forum made it clear that combining the two was leading to confusion and making it hard to follow. Currently working on a separate policy for leaseholders which will be taken to the Leaseholder Forum for consultation and then will be brought to the committee in January 2026.
- Each policy has had an equality impact assessment carried out and a summary document for tenants has been produced to aid with understanding and digestion. These will be provided to tenants via the website.

The committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Concern was raised about how kitchens are dealt with. It was noted that the policy does not include that when a kitchen is taken out, it must be replaced fully. It is important to ensure that the process ensures that nobody gets half a kitchen, and equipment matches. It was confirmed that an ongoing piece of work is being undertaken with the installation contractor and that this will be considered for inclusion within either the policy or the process documents that sit behind the policy.
- Previous discussions around the disposal of items that are still in good repair being removed were highlighted as non-sustainable. A hope was expressed that the council can move to a position where wherever possible improvements are maintained, especially as incoming tenants may not be able to afford to replace them. The Head of Housing Services assured the committee that where possible items are maintained. However, there are occasions where this is not straightforward. For example, kitchens and bathrooms need to have non-slip flooring to ensure safety, sometimes flooring has been fitted around furniture that has been removed, and sometimes there are asbestos tiles underneath. Where anything remaining is adequate a discussion is had with incoming tenants to confirm whether they would like to keep the items. If items are kept they will be noted on the tenancy sign-up as gifted, to reflect that the council will not maintain non-standard fixtures and fittings.

- If a private sale has occurred on the private market leaseholders may not be aware that there could be asbestos floor tiles that could be disturbed if removing flooring. This will be included within the Leaseholder Handbook to ensure that they are aware of the risk and consideration will be given to how to improve communication on this matter. Most asbestos tiles have already been removed but they may still be present in a minority of properties.

The committee recommended that Cabinet approves:

- **The Rent Setting Policy (Appendix 2)**
- **The Recharge Policy (Appendix 5)**
- **The Empty Homes (Voids) Policy (Appendix 8)**
- **The Repairs and Maintenance for Tenanted Properties Policy (Appendix 11)**

7 Compliance Performance data for October 2025 and KPI reporting for Q2

Objective: To provide the committee with key performance information relating to voids, arrears, day to day repairs, ASB and property compliance.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities presented the report to the committee and provided the following updates:

- There are now five outstanding properties in relation to gas compliance, as one property has been handed back where the gas has been capped. There is no particular cause for concern with the remaining properties.
- At the time the report was written there were 15 actions relating to the installation of windows. This is now down to eight, with one property in each of the eight blocks waiting to be completed. Although three properties have been completed in each block, the action cannot be closed until the remaining properties are fitted. The delay in installation is due to a lack of access to the properties, so the usual no access procedure is being followed to gain access.
- Further detail around the stock condition surveys has been included in the report, including a breakdown of how many have been completed and what kind of archetypes. Future reports will also include data around the Decent Homes Standard compliance. Currently operating at 2.3% of homes not meeting the Decent Homes Standard, which relates to 108 properties. 77 of these relate to thermal comfort, and 31 relate to component failures, normally a kitchen or bathroom that needs replacing.

The committee's discussion raised the following points:

- Three high risk compartmentation issues were due to be completed on the 24 November but have been delayed due to contractor issues. Assurance has been given by the contractor that it will be signed off by the end of the month.
- The components listed in the report are generally kitchens or bathrooms with an element that cause them to not meet the Decent Homes Standard. An early draft of the 5-year planned maintenance programme has now been produced. Officers will compare properties that do not meet the Decent

Homes Standard against this plan to identify when it is scheduled for replacement and decide whether to reschedule it to an earlier point.

- Thermal comfort essentially relates to whether a house is too hot or too cold due to physical issues with the property. For example, due to window draughts, lack of draught excluders or over insulation.
- It is unlikely that 100% of stock condition surveys will have been completed by December. Currently trying to gain access to outstanding properties but this is a long process and has not yet been tested whether the court will allow forced access. Suspect that the courts will not allow forced access. Continuing to try new methods to carry out surveys, for example by carrying them out at the same time as responding to requested repairs.
- All social housing providers have been targeted with achieving EPC C or above by 2030. Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) reviews were taken out of the stock condition surveys to speed up the process. Aiming to provide details of properties EPC rating in future reports as the data is now available on the system. Already retrofitting properties which are below EPC C in an ongoing decarbonisation programme using Wave 3 funding from the government. This will also resolve some of the thermal comfort issues identified.
- Point 1.3.1 refers to one high-risk fire action awaiting determination on costs. Whilst it feels like this should be an easy decision it can be a significant cost. For example, internal compartmentation work can be in the hundreds of thousands of pounds range. The work will be carried out regardless of the cost, but it will need to be scheduled as part of the capital programme of works which is currently being discussed. Also need to ensure that contractors have priced the work to be compliant with the procurement process. Whenever a high-risk action is identified mitigations are put in place to minimise any risk and ensure tenants are protected whilst corrections are carried out, for example by changing evacuation procedures. However, they will continue to be listed as high-risk despite the mitigations in place to ensure the correct focus remains.
- The data from the stock condition surveys is being used to generate a future planned maintenance programme which will cover at least the next five years. This will be consulted on with both tenants and leaseholders, to ensure they are aware of what is coming down the line. It will not be possible to confirm how much things are going to cost at the consultation stage, particularly for the work scheduled for later years of the programme, but it should give an idea of what work is expected. There will always have to be some flexibility to the programme as elements such as roofs could fail unexpectedly and work will need to be reprioritised within the budget. It will be vital to keep tenants and leaseholders updated when these changes occur and be clear when delayed work will be completed. Accept that this is something that has failed in the past but that is being improved.
- Understand that changes can be very concerning for leaseholders. The Head of Housing Services will be bringing forward a policy around section 20s in early 2026 to clarify how the process works. Leaseholders will be consulted

on this policy. The process will also be helped by having a planned maintenance programme providing clearer insight into anticipated costs. Whilst this may change due to urgent works appearing, the council will accommodate leaseholders experiencing financial challenges through the various options available.

- Legally new leaseholders are provided with section 125 notices which commits the council to the work detailed. Anything additional added cannot be charged to the leaseholder. However, this is only for new leaseholders. During private sales the purchasing solicitor can request information on what work should be anticipated from the Technical and Investment team.
- Good to see that significant progress has been made around the stock condition surveys, which has been a significant concern. It was also highlighted that the surveyors have been very positive about the council's responsiveness to issues being identified. Pass on thanks of the committee to officers for the tremendous amount of work that has been carried out since housing has been brought back in-house. Enables the council to make tenants aware this is about their homes, and making sure that things are being done to improve them and make them better. Thank staff for understanding how important tenants are, and embracing this improvement journey.

8 Housing Services Health and Safety Report

Objective: To review health and safety activity that has been undertaken during the period, whether it was successful, and identify current tasks and challenges being faced.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, introduced the report and explained that it covers the work that has been happening relating to health and safety from July to September. This has included an inventory check of health and safety equipment, and Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) training, with a HHSRS policy due to come to committee in January. The Ubico compliance team have also carried out an audit which has resulted in some actions which are currently being worked through. The report also includes an incident report covering April to September. The highest number of incidents remains unacceptable behaviour, generally verbal abuse from tenants towards staff. It also includes details of RIDDORs (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations), house fires and near misses.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The number of unacceptable behaviour incidents have come down significantly over the last few years.
- The causes of the increased number of fires have almost exclusively been related to e-bikes. A policy on managing this risk, incorporating best practice, will be brought to the committee in 2026.

9 Housing Improvement Plan

Objective: To provide the committee with a progress update on the Improvement Plan developed to resolve areas of non-compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards.

The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities introduced the report and explained that the new Consumer Standards had been introduced in April 2024. At some point the council will be inspected against these Standards and will be given a C1 – C4 grading. A number of gap analyses have been completed and a self-assessment has been included with the report. This has enabled a Housing Improvement Team to be created with an officer leading each Standard, which meet as a programme board monthly to review progress. Reports will be brought to the committee quarterly to report key highlights, risks and issues from the previous quarter, to enable the committee to hold officers to account. Progress on the improvement journey will also be reported regularly to the Tenant and Leaseholder panels and will be in the public domain, which will enable people to ask more questions.

The self-assessment was completed in August and the Housing Quality Network (HQN) were commissioned to review the self-assessment. This was initially reviewed on a desktop exercise basis, followed by a number of interviews, with a feedback session a fortnight ago. The feedback revealed no major surprises, with actions emerging matching those already on the action plans. Praise was given to the compliance strategy, it was highlighted that tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) were strong when compared to the sector, and the overarching structure and governance was considered generally very good. The Director of Governance, Housing and Communities was pleased that HQN had confirmed that all staff were helpful, engaged and knowledgeable. Improvements were identified, for example updating policies that still say CBH which can be easily fixed. Where actions are longer term a plan is being created with key milestones that will be brought to the committee from January. HQN have also been asked to undertake a full mock inspection in January, which may include interviews with members of the committee. A feedback report will be produced at the end of the mock inspection, which will be shared with the committee.

10 6 monthly Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Tracker Update

Objective: To provide the committee with the 6 month position in relation to tenant satisfaction measures.

The Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services presented the report and explained that an independent company, Acuity, carry out telephone surveys with 250 different tenants every quarter. Key messages are that overall satisfaction has increased by 3% and the council is performing above 80% in six areas. The council is performing below 70% in relation to complaints handling, response to anti-social behaviour, and listening to tenant views and acting upon them. Currently

working on these areas and have contacted every dissatisfied customer identified through the survey to try to resolve any issues. This also allows themes to be identified to feed into future plans. In the past this has included the introduction of a text survey for those who have engaged in the complaints process, however this has had a very poor response rate. So the next step is to carry out a scrutiny meeting with those who have made complaints to understand if there are improvements that can be made to the process and to hopefully influence perceptions going forwards.

The Committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The TSM for complaints handling is complicated by the fact that regularly only 2 out of 10 people surveyed have actually made a complaint. So most are offering an opinion on a service they have not used. Where a complaint has been made, the outcome can also influence how people feel about the process. The questions are prescribed by the government, so it is not possible to change how this data is collected. This is a sector wide issue and concerns were raised about the TSM during the consultation period but were not acted upon. It is important to continue to seek to make the process better, which is why additional feedback from those who have used the service is being sought.
- Continuing to develop approach to contractor management and have been considering the process at leadership team. This should include quality testing a percentage of the work by the council to ensure work is being completed to a good standard. Not quite there yet but it is being worked on.
- The self-reported data shows a third of respondents reporting issues with damp, mould and condensation (DMC), which does not match what has emerged from the stock condition surveys. This is a good example of the importance of the follow-up calls. Around 18 months ago the organisation developed a sophisticated approach to DMC which involves scripts in the contact centre to understand the size and severity of the issue. Issues picked up through the quarterly surveys undergo the same process, so even if the tenant has not reported the problem directly, it will be picked up and remedied through the follow up call.
- Leaseholders are currently not adequately involved in the feedback process around repairs in communal areas. This is part of the regulatory standard and is an area of development for the council, to ensure that the feedback and communication loops are working well.

11 Q2 2025/26 Housing Complaints and Compliments Report

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

The Director of Housing – Customer and Community Services introduced the report. She explained that there had been difficulties in quarter one with processing complaints on time and delivering on target. With the support of the Director of Governance, Housing and Communities changes have been made so that all stage

One complaints are now dealt with by the Complaints team, effectively providing a resolution function. This approach has proved very positive as complaints are being processed far more quickly and less extensions are being requested. The increased effectiveness of the team has also shown a marked reduction in the numbers of complaints progressing to stage two, with complaints being resolved at an earlier stage. This also means tenants are being spared a lengthy complaints process.

There are issues with the number of complaints relating to kitchen and bathroom installations. This is a major area of concern as kitchen and bathroom replacements should be a positive experience for tenants and should not be generating the level of complaints that are currently occurring. Working extremely hard with the contractors to bring this to a better position.

The committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The Cabinet Member Housing and Customer Services explained that she had met with the Housing Ombudsman a few weeks before, and had reviewed the numbers of complaints at stage one and stage two for a range of organisations. The council's number of stage two complaints is very small in comparison to most housing providers. It is brilliant to see these complaints being resolved at stage one, whilst continuing to learn from the complaints that are being received to help resolve wider themes of dissatisfaction.
- The team were complimented for the learning framework and the positive step of embedding this into QL and other systems going forward. Will continue to drive improvements in the future as it provides a mechanism for learning where things are going wrong.
- It was noted that compliments are harder to achieve than complaints, and it was good to see these also included in the report.

12 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 addressed the committee and explained that the Leaseholder Forum has agreed their terms of reference. They are aiming to be more forward looking and will carry out four formal scrutinies a year. The first identified areas of focus are repairs and maintenance, service charges, major works and communications which will include updates throughout the period. They have also reviewed the housing Repairs and Maintenance policy, which has led to this being split into separate tenanted properties and leasehold policies. The latter will be reviewed by the Forum before being brought to the committee.

The committee's discussion raised the following points:

- The decision by the council to set up a separate leaseholder panel was one of the best decisions made when the governance process was decided. It was a missing loop and the feedback provided is really paying dividends from an officer perspective. Providing rich feedback that is very useful in building the

housing service. They thanked everyone who sits on the Leaseholder Forum and the Tenant Panel.

- A number of tenants have approached the Tenant Representative privately and asked him to raise their concerns about the replacement of housing benefit with Universal Credit and the position this has put tenants in. When tenants are forced to migrate the housing benefit element of Universal Credit does not pay on the due date specified in their tenancy agreement, but pays a month in arrears. This means that all migrated tenants are receiving letters telling them they are hundreds of pounds in arrears through no fault of their own. This is not just a Cheltenham problem, it is being experienced nationwide. It is particularly challenging for vulnerable tenants who are suddenly expected to make up this shortfall. This is not the fault of the housing service but is leaving them with a lot of frightened, confused and concerned tenants. It was agreed that the Chair should write to the MPs for Gloucester and Tewkesbury to request a meeting with the Minister on behalf of the committee on this matter.
- It was also confirmed that the council's Benefit and Money Advice team are continuing to support tenants with this matter and are trying to be proactive in identifying tenants who will be experiencing this problem. When tenants fall into arrears the council is required to send a letter to them but they also make contact directly and deal with the situation as sensitively and empathetically as possible. This can include looking at payment dates, agreeing an additional amount to be paid each week, or paying during rent-free weeks to make up the shortfall. Each individual or households' finances are checked before entering into any payment agreement.

13 Review of the Housing Committee Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

14 Items to be referred to Cabinet

The committee recommended the following policies to Cabinet:

- The Rent Setting Policy
- The Recharge Policy
- The Empty Homes (Voids) Policy
- The Repairs and Maintenance for Tenanted Properties Policy

15 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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