

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Housing Board
Held on Wednesday 13 August 2025 at 10:00am
In the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

Present:

Board Members:

Councillors:

T. Johnson Leader of the Council and Chair of the Housing Board
S.J. Thornley Housing and Corporate Assets Portfolio Leader

Tenant and Leasehold Members:

B. Murphy Council tenant of 12 years, retired

Independent Members:

L. Cunnett Homes Manager, Tamworth Borough Council
S. Johnson Director of Governance and Legal, Walsall Housing Group
A. Kenny Former Executive Director of Property, Housing Plus

Also Present:

Officers:

G. Stott Deputy Chief Executive-Place
N Samrai Head of Housing and Corporate Assets
R. Frumenzi Housing Maintenance Manager
C. Hawkins Housing Property Services Manager
L. Tandy Housing Services Manager
H. Campbell Tenancy Services Manager
J. Morgan Assistant Housing Services Manager
M. Berry Democratic Services Team Leader

10. Apologies

Apologies were noted for:

- Councillor P. Haden, Housing and Corporate Assets Shadow Portfolio Leader.
- N. Howells, Tenant and Leasehold Member.
- G. Pace, Tenant and Leasehold Member.
- T. Clegg, Chief Executive.

11. Previous Minutes and Action Tracker

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 May 2025 were agreed and the action tracker noted.

12. Key Performance Indicators - Quarter 1 2025/26

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that at the last Board meeting it had been agreed to circulate the performance information to Board members beforehand to allow time to review the information before the meeting and come prepared with questions.

In respect of the covering report for the performance information, an Independent Member noted surprise that no information was included in the climate change implications, given that properties could face issues such as overheating, damp and mould, flood risk etc. In response, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that this was the first time the report had been produced in this format and was trying to be consistent with the corporate performance report. The Housing Property Services Manager further advised that from the stock condition survey, no issues had been identified in respect of overheating, but some properties were at risk of flooding which tended to be more highways related due to blocked drains/gulleys.

(Clarification: The Climate Change implications section on the Cabinet reports is specifically in relation to the report contents, so strictly speaking it was a performance report so there were no direct implications from the content. More specific reports, for example on policies or for permission to spend would include more detailed climate change implications)

The Chair noted that information could potentially be included in the implications section, but climate change was definitely on the Council's radar.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets referred to an email received from Councillor Samuels yesterday about funding for the provision of seven sustainable drainage pods to be installed in areas of the District prone to flooding. The County Council had an ambition to roll out a further 150 pods across Staffordshire.

The Deputy Chief Executive-Place advised that the Council's new Climate Change Strategy had just been released so there would be a more dedicated focus corporately on such issues. From a housing stock perspective as much funding as possible was being secured to support decarbonisation projects etc.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets congratulated the Tenancy Management team for achieving above target on rent collection rates and the Housing Repairs team for being above target for completion of non-emergency repairs.

An Independent Member noted it would be useful to receive an update on progress with quarter 2 actions as to whether they were likely to slip or be completed. The Deputy Chief Executive-Place advised that the information reported in the corporate-level report would not change but quarterly updates for all actions could be reported separately to the Board.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets reported that the average re-let time for void properties was significantly above target with actions being put in place to reduce the time taken as it was a disappointing position to be in.

The Chair then referred to questions submitted by Tenant Member, Natasha Howells, for response at the meeting:

1. How are the maintenance team planning to decrease the void turn around time?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that:

- The Housing Maintenance team had been trying to do more upgrade works on voids and so short-term void works had not been picked up, thus meaning the average re-let time had not come down and work planning impacted. The proposed new IT system would support the wider work of the service to improve efficiency, service delivery and functionality.

- The Service now had electrical works accreditation which meant that such works could be delivered via the in-house team rather than external contractors, from which performance improvement should hopefully be seen in the coming months.
- Additionally, the Service had a dedicated team focused on quick-hit voids and another for larger scale voids works. Weekly meetings were held with the operatives to get them more involved in the planning process and taking ownership of the work.
- Incidents had been experienced in the first quarter regarding asbestos surveys not coming back as needed and having to be redone, which had added 8.5 days to the re-let process. As a result, a meeting was held with the relevant team and a new process adopted.
- The team had been restructured to ensure sufficient staff were in place for repairs, voids, and damp and mould works to make the Service more robust.

In response to a Tenant Member as to the timescales for implementation of the IT system, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised that work was ongoing, and the business analyst would help with the new system build. The Deputy Chief Executive-Place further advised that a progress update could be provided at the next Board meeting.

In response to a comment from an Independent Member concerning the pre-termination stage of the voids process, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised that the Repairs team undertook this stage of the process and visits had improved via weekly meetings.

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether there was any appetite to complete works whilst a property was still tenanted, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised he was aware this issue had been raised before. The Tenancy Services Manager further advised that the process of completing works whilst a tenant was in the property had been tried, but there were issues around timescales to complete the works leading to complaints and disrepair claims being submitted. As such, there would be concern at looking at doing works beyond low-priority repairs.

In response to a further query from the Independent Member as to what works were contracted out, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised that major works were contracted out, these primarily being kitchen and bathroom upgrades and heating works.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised it was not expected that the voids performance would be turned around by the end of quarter 2 as there were currently six long-term voids to be dealt with, three of which required disabled adaptations. Additionally, one property in Rugeley potentially required underpinning as it had structural defects, with consideration being given to transferring this property to the general fund for use as temporary accommodation.

2. Is it possible when the property is on notice could we not then go and do a visit and establish what needs doing and get the work booked in then?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised it would be hard to establish the full scope of required works at that point, but known issues could be dealt with.

3. I know the report says a lot of void properties need a re-wire, how long does this take on average?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised this probably took five days, with a possibility of three days, but this would affect the overall re-let time owing to removal of wallpapers and carpets and replastering of walls etc.

4. Do we have a figure on how much rental income is lost during void time?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that the figure was £1,141 per property for quarter 1, based on around 50 properties at quarter end.

5. Would it be better to have more staff and then in turn reducing void time for rental income and customer satisfaction?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that conversations had been held about refocusing the team but in the longer term it was expected the available establishment would be sufficient to deliver repairs and voids works if the new IT system did what was required of it.

6. The other issue is that when people are offered a property then they cannot be given a date or even estimate of when the property will be ready - why?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that a lot of this came down to the planning element and the number of voids in place at any one time. The aim was to have a consistently low figure to plan works better and set realistic dates.

7. Non-emergency repairs take up to 20 days and sometimes longer, do we know what sort of issues this is for and average new reports per day?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that issues covered areas such as bricklaying, plumbing, carpentry and electrical works, with most of the trades booked up to late-September to late-November. The new IT system would help with managing these issues as repairs could be better pre-planned.

8. Are there plans for any extra staff in the maintenance team?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised it was considered the team had enough staff for the longer-term but there was scope to improve the performance of the team and once done, see whether there were any gaps in service provision or otherwise.

9. I believe that some years ago maintenance staff were paid on piece rate. May I ask why this was stopped and if productivity has decreased since?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised this would have changed a long time ago before any of the current management team were in place. A decision was made sector wide many years ago to move to salary-based roles.

The majority of the above questions were deemed more operational and not suited to detailed discussion by the Housing Board, as it took up a lot of time. In future, any similar type questions will be addressed very briefly and further detailed written answers can be provided in SharePoint.

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether the Council's Fencing Policy required the Council to replace fencing for its tenants, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised this was currently the case, but the policy was being reviewed by the relevant scrutiny committee.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that the number of tenants waiting for disabled facilities works was going in the right direction following a large influx of requests having been received last year.

13. Housing Services Improvement Plan

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets drew the Board's attention to the projects in the plan marked with an amber progress rating:

- *Reporting of regular inspections of blocks:* this would be picked up as part of the building safety presentation later in the agenda.
- *On-going reconciliation of the HRA asset register:* the Council's s151 Officer had given agreement to the appointment of an interim business analyst to support this work, this would be done through agency recruitment.
- *Review existing contract with grounds maintenance team:* £280,000 per year was spent for the Council's Grounds Maintenance team to provide a service to the HRA and the team had had considerable staffing issues. Following a change in management structure owing to shared services the team had visited the Council's estates. Significant investment had been made in Norton Canes requiring an additional spend of £30,000 on top of the £280,000.

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether the Council engaged with residents when doing such works, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised this had been the case in Norton Canes and would be covered as part of the new specification with the Grounds Maintenance team.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets further advised that the Council did not levy a service charge on residents for this work, with costs being covered from rent payments. Savills had advised that the Council was under collecting by £1m per year, which equated to a significant sum over a 30-year HRA Business Plan period.

- *Review of cleaning contract of communal areas in flatted accommodation:* this was being picked up by the Assistant Tenancy Services Manager and either the existing contract would be renewed or a new one procured.

14. Building Safety (Presentation)

The Housing Property Services Manager delivered a presentation on housing building safety that covered:

- Housing Building Safety Team
- Gas Servicing
- Electrical Testing
- Lifting Equipment
- Asbestos
- Water Hygiene
- Fire Safety

In response to a query from a Tenant Member as to what percentage of referrals the team received for gas upgrades, the Housing Property Services Manager advised the figure would be very low as a 15-year cycle was in place for heating upgrades.

In response to a query from an Independent Member concerning inspections of lifting equipment, the Housing Property Services Manager advised these were done as part of works to ensure the load requirements were ok and it was a requirement of the insurance policy.

An Independent Member requested that for future updates the following information be provided:

- External validation information from CORGI in respect of gas servicing.
- What the remaining 154 actions were for fire safety, what their ratings were and the results of fire door checks.

- Quarter 4 data to include the requirements of Awaab's Law.

(Clarification - Q4 was referred to but possibly in relation to the calendar year, data should be available for Q3 (financial year) as Awaabs Law applicable from October. Added to Tracker to provide for Q3)

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether the fire safety actions would be completed by the end of quarter 2, the Housing Property Services Manager advised they would not, but a programme was in place for how they would be achieved and when by.

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether the two Building Safety Operatives were housing related only, the Housing Property Services Manager confirmed this was the case as previously the related works had been undertaken by a single caretaker. Liaison had been happening with the Repairs team to see what support could be provided from these posts. Having the two roles was necessary to ensure sufficient service cover but there was a need to ensure they had enough work to do - both were trade qualified so were helping out with Housing Maintenance when required.

15. Stock Condition Survey Update (Presentation)

The Housing Property Services Manager delivered a presentation on the outcome of the stock condition survey that covered:

- Purpose and method (69% of surveys completed, expected to be higher figure, 31% not able to access).
- 30-year plan
- Elemental Breakdown
- Energy performance (sample)
- Housing Hazards
- Next Steps

In response to a comment raised by an Independent Member that the regulator was not keen on rolling surveys and plans being based on part-finished work, the Housing Property Services Manager advised that an interim report on the survey had been done for just under 50% completion and the data in the presentation had not changed as expected with the additional 29% included.

(Clarification: 29% was referred to as additional to the interim, but figure is actually 19%, 50% +19% = 69% completed)

In response to a query from the same Independent Member as to why no assumptions had been made for inflation in the 30-year plan, the Deputy Chief Executive-Place advised that this would be double checked but had been accounted for in internal modelling. The Housing Property Services Manager further advised that it would be accounted for in the final version of the plan.

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether the 18% of total plan expenditure for roof coverings was based on age profile or the business plan, the Housing Property Services Manager advised it was the life-cycle of the roof.

In response to a further query from the Independent Member as to whether for the 31% of properties not surveyed the information could be cloned based on the 69% completed, the Housing Property Services Manager advised it could, but it was intended for surveys to be completed on a cyclical basis anyway. There was also a need to understand why surveyors could not access those 31% of properties and to understand why tenants were not allowing access.

In response to a query from a Tenant Member as to the Council's ambitions for the energy ratings of its housing stock, the Housing Property Services Manager advised that the current target was for all properties to be C rated and above by 2030. New build properties were A and B rated which helped to pull up the average. Legally, properties could not be re-let if the rating was below E, but it was expected this would change to a D rating.

In response to a further query from the Tenant Member as to whether any problems were foreseen with completing the remaining 31% of surveys, the Housing Property Services Manager advised it would come down to access, but a harder line would be taken and legal support used if need be.

16. Annual Report to Tenants-Draft Content

In response to a query from an Independent Member as to whether empty garage sites would be let or sold off, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised this work was on the to do list for the medium term. . It was known that some could be sold as surplus land and others redeveloped as had been done with a selection of sites previously.

In response to a further query from the Independent Member as to the number of kitchen replacements, bathroom upgrades etc. the 2025/26 HRA capital programme related to, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised this data could be collated and reported to the Board separately.

17. Board Questions

In response to a comment from an Independent Member that not recording as complaints circumstances where tenants had disagreed with a policy decision taken by the Council may be a breach of the Housing Ombudsman Code, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised this but would checked and reported back, but feedback received from the Ombudsman was that the Council's self-assessment returns had been highlighted as an area of good practice.

(Clarification: the Housing Ombudsman cited the Performance and Service Improvement Report as being good practice, not the self-assessment)

The Tenant Member referred to two questions he had submitted separately regarding the stock condition survey and thanked the Housing Property Services Manager for the prompt responses received.

18. Forward Agenda

The proposed agenda items for meetings 3 and 4 were noted.

19. Any Other Business

In response to a query from a Tenant Member as to whether an update could be provided about the tenant engagement panel, the Assistant Housing Services Manager advised the first meeting had been held at which it was agreed to look at the housing pages on the Council's website to get used to the process. The second meeting of the panel was scheduled for next week.

20. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 5th November 2025, 10am, Esperance Room, CCDC.

The meeting closed at 12:06pm.

