

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Housing Board
Held on Wednesday 14 May 2025 at 10:00am
In the Datteln Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

Present:

Board Members:

Councillors:

T. Johnson	Leader of the Council and Chair of the Housing Board
P. Haden	Housing and Corporate Assets Shadow Portfolio Leader

Tenant and Leasehold Members:

B. Murphy	Council tenant of 12 years, retired
G. Pace	Council tenant of 30 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:

T. Clegg	Chief Executive
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
J. Morgan	Assistant Housing Services Manager
M. Berry	Democratic Services Team Leader

Observer:

J. Grannell	Advisor, TPAS
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1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Board and invited all present to introduce themselves.

Apologies were noted for:

- N. Howells, Tenant and Leasehold Member, and
- H. Campbell, Tenancy Services Manager.

It was noted Councillor S.J. Thornley, Housing & Corporate Assets Portfolio Leader and Vice-Chair of the Board would be delayed arriving (NB: Councillor Thornley did not end up attending the meeting).

2. Key Performance Indicators and Performance Overview

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets took the Board through the 2024/25 year-end position for the Housing Services' key performance indicators (KPIs), drawing specific attention to those areas where performance exceeded target or was more than 5% below target. Each service manager provided additional context on the KPIs where relevant.

Board members then raised the following comments/queries on the performance information, with responses provided by officers (*shown in italic text*):

1. The 65% target for completion of non-emergency repairs on time seemed to be quite low.

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that the NEC console and Go Mobile app were not helping with management of repairs works, with a paper-based system having to be used. As such, work was being done to secure a new system which should help improve the target and overall performance of the service.

2. Were all backlog repair jobs categorised?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that this was the case, with category one repairs being given priority status.

3. What was the 2025/26 target for completion of non-urgent repairs?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised targets were currently being reviewed but had to be set by the end of this month. The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets further advised that the Assistant Housing Services Manager was going to be doing some sector benchmarking of data to help with setting new targets.

An independent member noted it would be worthwhile speaking to customers about what they think relevant targets could be.

4. What would happen if the backlog of repairs increased again?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that funding had been agreed for an additional contractor to help deliver the repair works. The contract would be for an initial 12-month period with a view to extending for a further 12 months. The initial priority would be to focus on clearing the backlog before moving onto other categories of repair works.

5. It would be good to see what was driving the repairs to determine whether investment was needed in the housing stock to reduce the need for repairs in the first place.

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised he was working closely with the Housing Property Services Manager on improvements to the stock.

6. Was the external contractor trade specific?

The Housing Maintenance Manager advised that the contractor had multi-trade skills.

7. In respect of the building safety data, how much confidence was there that the data presented was accurate, given that all aspects had achieved the 100% target?

The Housing Property Services Manager advised that he was confident with the figures reported.

An independent member recommended that the data be externally validated. The Housing Property Services Manager advised that some of the data was both internally and externally audited. The independent member raised it would be helpful for the Board to also see that data.

8. Was the Council aware of some current dissatisfaction raised by tenants about the company used for undertaking gas safety inspections?

The Housing Property Services Manager advised that the Council was aware, and had met with the company concerned to ensure improvements were made.

9. How many housing and mutual exchange applications were received each week?

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that circa 30 housing applications were received weekly, and only a low number of mutual exchange applications.

10. Was there any data available on the percentage of applicants who did not progress through the banding stages or did not complete their applications at all?

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that this data was not collected at present but could be sourced from the application system.

11. A common issue raised by applicants was about not receiving a decision as soon as their application had been submitted.

The Chair noted that part of this was about applicants' expectations of the Council and how the Council communicated with them and managed those expectations.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that almost a year had been spent redesigning the application form following a scrutiny committee review into the application process. The Assistant Housing Services Manager further advised that the views of tenants were sought as part of the review.

12. Commentary being provided in the report was useful, particularly for those actions/indicators that had not achieved their target.

13. Whilst the number of adaptations delivered being greatly above target was positive for the customer experience, had this had a significant budgetary impact?

The Housing Property Services Manager advised that this was correct, and discussions held with occupational therapists on what works to be done and getting their professional opinion before the works were carried out. It was however expected that the number of adaptations would reduce in 2025/26. Furthermore, work was being done to find better ways of managing and recording information and matching up new tenants as best as able to do so with the properties available.

14. Was the target for adaptations budget driven and why was it so out of kilter with the year-end figure?

The Housing Property Services Manager advised that the target was based on previous year's figures and the number of requests received.

15. Did the Council have a policy in place for the type of bathroom to be installed in a property as there appeared to be a recent increase in wet rooms being provided?

The Housing Property Services Manager advised that tenants were given a choice as to what type of bathroom they wished to have installed, but the Council would look to install level access bathrooms if such a need was identified.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets noted there had been a recent issue of registered providers in the District not wanting to make adaptations to their own properties so were sending tenants to the Council instead. The Council had pushed back on this to make the providers take responsibility for adapting their own stock.

16. For new build Council homes, consideration should be given to ensuring door widths were widened to support customers going forward.

17. Adapting properties was focused on existing tenants/applicants on the waiting list, but this could create future challenges if those adaptations were no longer required.

The Housing Maintenance Manager noted this was an issue and that much of the existing stock was not built to meet the requirements of being adapted.

18. In respect of complaints, did the Council take learning from the Housing Ombudsman reports/feedback?

The Assistant Housing Services Manager advised that this was the case, and officers were also asked to identify any learning from internal stage 1 and 2 complaints.

19. Did the Council have any issues with 'ambulance chasers'?

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that it did, mainly in respect of disrepair claims.

20. Were complaints received managed centrally?

The Assistant Housing Services Manager advised that whilst complaints were submitted and recorded centrally, housing related complaints were responded to directly by the service. The Chief Executive further advised that in some instances complaints came in as MP enquiries so were dealt with on that basis.

21. For the KPI on percentage of empty dwellings, it would be useful to also have the figure of the number of dwellings this applied to.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that in respect of the re-let time for void properties, the current process was that if a kitchen or bathroom required replacement within two years then this would be done when the property became void, but this had an impact on the turnaround times. As such, views were sought on whether tenants should be offered to move into a property prior to works being undertaken, having given them the chance to input into what improvements they wanted making. Comments raised were:

- This could be presented in a positive way if tenants were offered input into what fittings they wanted installed.
- It would be better to do the works when the property was empty to reduce disruption for the tenant and it may be better to produce a separate KPI for capital works.
- There was a need to strike a balance between the customer experience of the works being done prior to or after having moved in, with the rental income loss from properties being void. The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that the rental income loss data could be included in future performance reports as it was currently collated but not reported anywhere.

The Head of Housing and Corporate Assets then provided a brief overview of the tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs), management and perception measures. An independent member noted there was a need to consider the perception measures in the context of whether respondents would have had experience of what was being asked.

Views were then sought on whether the Board was happy to receive each quarter the corporate KPIs and the management TSMs or a combination of both, or whether a separate suite of indicators for reporting to the Board.

The Board agreed it would like to see both sets of data going forward as the information presented in the meeting had been important for helping the Board to understand the Council's performance and meet the requirements of the terms of reference.

3. Current Issues

The Board was provided with an overview of the current issues within the Housing Service:

- ICT System:
 - The Housing Services Manager advised that the NEC System had been implemented in 2014/15 with mixed success. It had been working well for the Tenancy Services team, but less so for Property Services and Maintenance.
 - The Housing Maintenance Manager referred to the issues raised earlier in the meeting about maintenance jobs having to be managed in a paper-based format, noting that a more suitable system was required to drive efficiencies, identify where issues existed and direct resources more effectively.
 - In response to a query from an independent member as to whether any external advice had been sought for changing the IT systems going forward, the Housing Services Manager advised that external support had already been sourced to help review what future IT system needs would be across all of the Housing service areas. The Housing Maintenance Manager further advised the aim was to produce a true specification of service need to ensure the right solution was provided.
 - Linked to the above, the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that funding was being secured for a replacement system and the provision of specialist staffing resource with knowledge of IT systems. The Deputy Chief Executive-Place noted that IT issues were the biggest risk to the Housing Revenue Account work, so the Board's support would be sought to get these improvements made.
- Repairs Backlogs - discussed under agenda item 2.
- Empty Property Management - void re-lets - discussed under agenda item 2.
- Stock Condition Survey Final Report and HRA Business Plan:
 - The Housing Property Services Manager set out the background of the survey work to date, advising that in 2022/23 an initial survey of 20% of the housing stock had been commissioned, of which 15% had been successfully completed (the remaining 5% were non-respondents). In October 2024 the decision was taken to have the remaining 80% of the stock surveyed. So far, circa 50% of the work had completed, with a target finished date of the end of June 2025. Following that, the data would be reviewed and work streams produced to bring the stock up to decent standard.
 - In response to a query from the Chair as to whether any initial themes were coming through from surveys completed so far given the age of the housing stock, the Housing Property Services Manager advised the main issue coming out was replacement of roofing, as much of the original stock still had the same roofing. This was expected to come out of the service being the only area without a works programme already in place.
 - The Deputy Chief Executive-Place noted that the Board would receive a full update on the stock condition survey at its next meeting as the final survey results would be available along with initial work planning outcomes. The survey results would be used to develop the next 30-year HRA Business Plan and help to establish a timeline of works and how those works should be categorised.
 - In response to a query from an independent member as to whether the Council had a policy for fencing, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised that no specific policy existed, but fencing would be replaced if it was within the Council's boundary lines.

- In response to a query as to how the Council was going to implement the requirements of 'Awaab's Law' from October 2025, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised that relevant officers were already being trained, and a supervisor recruited with a specific focus on damp and mould hazards. A team restructure had also been done to provide more support for this work. A case management system was also being adopted to monitoring reporting and remediation of such issues. Additionally, the requirement to respond to emergency repairs within 24 hours further highlighted the need to address the earlier mentioned IT issues and have a dynamic reporting service in place for use by the maintenance operatives.
- An independent member suggested that for future performance reports, a KPI be included on how the requirements of Awaab's law were being managed/monitored.
- An independent member noted there was a need to think about what support was provided to customers who were experiencing damp and mould issues through no fault of their own. In response, the Housing Maintenance Manager advised this would involve joint focus with Tenancy Services. The new proposed case management IT system would allow tenants to download an app offering advice on ways to reduce damp and mould in their homes. Additionally, a company had been spoken with this week about provision of a plug-in device that could eradicate mould. Costs were £700 for a portable device and £1,200 for a fixed device.
- An independent member noted that given the cross-cutting nature of the issues identified, component parts of the Housing service should seek to pool resources where able to do so.
- Inspection Ready? (Housing Services Improvement Plan):
 - In response to a query from an independent member as what inspection rating the Council predicted to receive from the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets advised that:
 - Whilst a high rating is aimed for, the key issue is securing additional resources to deliver the required actions in the improvement plan that could hopefully achieve this.
 - Some additional resource had already been secured for compliance works, but more was needed in respect of policy development and service improvement.
 - A meeting is happening soon with West Lancashire Borough Council as one of only three local authority landlords who has achieved a C1 rating, to seek some advice and guidance.
 - The provision of tenant profiling data was currently being explored with Legal Services, specifically issues around tenant consent and the collection of special category data.
 - Following any subsequent rating, an action plan would be developed to help achieve/maintain a C1 rating.
 - Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had recently acknowledged that inspectors needed to be trained to understand the differences between local authority landlords and registered providers, particularly around staffing resourcing and requirements.

4. Overview of Complaint Themes

The Board noted the following overview regarding Housing specific complaints (more detail on which had been provided under agenda item 2):

- Repairs, cyclical maintenance and upgrades made up the majority of complaints.
- Not being completed on time, lack of communication in the process or issues with contractor performance on gas servicing and kitchen/bathroom upgrades.
- Other complaints about:
 - The condition of properties on re-let.
 - Housing application decisions / waiting time for a property.
 - ASB, neighbour disputes.
- Communication was at the centre of a lot of issues.

5. Tenant Engagement Update

The Board noted the following updates in respect of tenant engagement work:

- Circa five tenants had so far been identified for the new Tenant Scrutiny Panel, with the deadline for expressions of interest being 31 May. It was hoped to hold the first meeting of the Panel in early June.
- The latest tenant newsletter was sent out to all tenants in late April / early May and included information about the Housing Board.
- Work was being undertaken with Independent Living Schemes to set up a small tenant panel. Introductory discussions had been taking place to identify tenants interested in forming these panels to understand the issues they faced in the schemes.
- A complainant had made a suggestion for improvements on the timing of text reminders for repairs. As a result, the reminders had been changed to the morning of that day instead of 5pm the day before. This demonstrated the Housing service was listening to the tenant voice and valued their feedback in shaping services.

6. Board Questions

In advance of the meeting, a tenant and leasehold member had raised the following query:

“What is the current percentage of stock completed by Rapleys for the Stock Condition Survey?”

The following response was provided:

“As at 2 May 2025, 50% of the stock had been completed.

4,498 survey instructions of which 2,238 were completed; 377 with 3x no access; and 9 refusals.

We are forecast to have everything either surveyed or no access procedure exhausted by end of June 2025.

Inclusive of the 2022-23 surveys the total completed is circa 65% of the stock.”

The tenant member provided context to why the question had been asked, advising that letters sent to residents had implied the surveys would be carried out in March and April, but the performance report implied a different timescale.

The tenant member further advised it had been apparent that not all residents received second letters inviting them to book a survey appointment and so there was concern around how this work had been communicated to residents.

By way of follow-up question, the tenant member queried how many tenants had contacted the Council to book an appointment following receipt of the second letter. The Housing Property Services Manager advised this would have to be checked and report back separately.

7. Forward Agenda

The following items were noted for consideration at forthcoming meetings of the Board:

Meeting 2:

- Performance-standing item.
- Housing Services Improvement Plan-standing item.
- Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report.
- Stock condition, asset management, investment and capital works programme-update (main item).
- Annual Tenant Report-draft review (if available).

Meeting 3:

- Consumer Standards Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan.
- HRA Budget and Business Plan-half yearly review (if available).

In respect of the performance data, it was suggested that as raised earlier in the meeting, additional commentary for each action be provided in the report so questions could be focused on specific areas rather than going through the report page by page.

8. Any Other Business

In response to an independent member as to what the Council wanted from the Board going forward, the Chair advised it wanted the Board to achieve consensus on matters and be a critical friend by providing views, ideas and critiques on the matters within the Board's remit. The Chief Executive further advised that the Council was very self-aware that whilst it had a good Housing Service in place, it wanted to service to be better, noting that it would be facing several challenges from Government, regulators and customers to deliver service improvements, so the Board would be crucial in helping to provide the tenants and independents members perspectives.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 13 August 2025, 10am, Esperance Room, CCDC.

The meeting closed at 12:08pm.