



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 10 JULY 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor O'Neill (Chair)
Councillor Bajaj (Vice Chair)

Councillor Gregg
Councillor Mahesh

Councillor Singh Sangha
Councillor Zaman

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16. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

The Chair asked members to declare any interests in the proceedings, for which there were none.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes from the meeting held on 22 April 2025 were included in the agenda pack and asked Members to confirm whether they were an accurate record.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes for the meeting on 22 April 2025 were a correct record.

19. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2025-26

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Councillor Molly O'Neill
Councillor Deepak Bajaj

Councillor Hanif Aqbany
Councillor Mohinder Singh Sangha
Councillor Syed Zaman
Councillor Jaialtilal Gopal
Councillor Ravi Mahesh
Councillor Mick Gregg

20. DATES OF THE COMMISSION 2025-26

The dates of the meetings for the Commission were confirmed as follows:

10 July 2025
26 August 2025
11 November 2025
13 January 2026
17 March 2026
21 April 2026

21. SCRUTINY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

22. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded members of the role of scrutiny as a critical friend and a place of challenge, emphasising the need to do so respectfully. She further noted that in the future, certain reports for information would be considered as read, excluding the need for officers to present them, thereby allowing discussions to proceed based on the documents.

23. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

It was noted that none had been received.

24. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

25. HOUSING SCRUTINY OVERVIEW

The Chair noted that the presentation had been sent out previously and invited members to ask questions or seek clarification on any aspect of the presentation.

There were no comments.

26. INCOME COLLECTION ANNUAL UPDATE

The Housing Head of Service provided an annual overview on rent collection within the Council's general housing stock covering the financial year (FY) April 2024 to March 2025.

It was noted that:

- The FY was marked by outstanding performance, with almost 99% of rent collected. When benchmarking with other urban authorities, Leicester had amongst the highest collection rates and lowest eviction levels.
- By the end of the FY, £1.7m arrears were outstanding, which was 15% lower than the previous FY. Despite increasing pressures, rent rates remained lower than the previous years, and the housing team had managed to keep them steady.
- Like most social landlords nationally, the Council faced significant challenges with the collection of rents and service charges because of the widespread deprivation and cost-of-living crisis, conditions which significantly affect Council tenants.
- Notwithstanding the challenges, performance remained strong as only four (4) households were evicted in the past year, none of which were families. The Council continued to support people in sustaining their tenancies, with most evictions related to property abandonment, e.g. the tenant had already left
- Since April 2024, 59 rental possession claims were instituted in court, which equated to an average of 5 cases per month, compared to pre-COVID averages of 80 cases per month. This reflected a 90% annual reduction, which was a significant accomplishment.
- The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Household Support Fund (HSF) played a vital role in achieving the foregoing successes. In the past year, nearly £1m was allocated to support approximately 1400 vulnerable tenants. An additional £800k had been allocated this year, and the Housing Division would continue to focus on targeting those who were most in need.
- A key consideration for providing support was for the tenancies to be sustainable and for tenants to have the mechanism for managing future rent payments - there were payment plans in place to support this. Additionally, over 5,000 tenants had received support with utilities and food.
- A key challenge was the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC). Currently, around 9300 tenants (constituting about 50% of Council tenants) were claiming UC, 52% of whom were in rent arrears. To manage this, a specialist team of Rent Management Advisors worked closely with the most vulnerable and complex cases. The team's work was critical to tenancy sustainment, as in the past year, 1,111 referrals were handled (9% higher than last year's), 77% of which were identified as having vulnerabilities.
- Pressures from the rise in inflation and the ongoing changes to benefits were likely to intensify in the coming year. However, the Housing team

remained confident in its position to navigate these challenges.

The Deputy City Mayor, Housing, Economy and Neighbourhoods commended the performance for the FY, noting that it demonstrated the Council's commitment to supporting its residents to remain secure in their tenancies and making effective use of processes and available discretionary funds.

In response to questions and comments, the following points were made:

- The effect of added pressures, like reduction in housing support and migration of 50% tenants to Universal Credit, would be mitigated against in some of the following ways:
- By constantly evaluating the availability of the right resource within the team e.g. the establishment of the Rent Management Advisory team to fill service gaps.
- The caseload of income officers would be constantly reviewed to allow for fresh perspectives on issues. Pop-up sessions had also been established.
- Staff had also recently received training on Council Tax Support to better assist struggling tenants.
- The HSF had a robust process for ensuring it was correctly allocated. The Housing team was working with the Revenue and Customer support teams to identify the most vulnerable, and there was data sharing with DWP, ensuring early intervention and supporting with UC claims, so that tenants do not miss their transitional period.

It was further noted that:

- The £1m HSF referenced in the report was primarily used for rent arrears support, and in some exceptional cases, district heating arrears. There had been an additional amount allocated for food utility and heating. Historically, tenants were able to benefit from HSF once, but the current process allowed for discretionary allocation, depending on the circumstances of the beneficiary. This process was subject rigorous scrutiny.

AGREED:

The Commission noted the report.

27. STOCK CONDITION - PROPERTY MOT

The Head of Service presented a report on the condition and management of the Council's housing stock. It was noted that:

- All homes were visited on a regular basis and the stock was currently 99.5% compliant with the Decent Homes Standard.
- A rolling 5-year Home Health Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspection plan had commenced and all homes had been visited in the previous 5 years by an officer who was able to identify any risks and arrange for them to be remedied.

- 2 separate IT systems had been simultaneously managed to keep track of the stock condition.
- The new Assets module was key to demonstrating strong compliance, along with the resources required by technical services that managed this.
- The report highlighted the key spending areas that were over £40 million, all of which were agreed as part of the HRA budget. There were other smaller-scale items at a property level, and information was held on elements such as expected replacement timeframes.
- When elements were due for replacement, an inspection took place to ensure work was prioritised appropriately. The largest area for refurbishments was the kitchen and bathrooms. The intention had been to replace all kitchen and bathrooms but due to increasing costs and budget pressures, this was reconsidered to ensure that all kitchens and bathrooms met the decent homes criteria and were replaced as soon as possible.
- The elements that were changed on a periodic basis were listed in the report.
- Stock condition was assessed in many ways, including:
 - When properties were void, their condition was assessed to ensure they met the decent homes standard and disruptive works were checked and carried out.
 - Safety inspections such as gas safety inspections were carried out annually. The gas engineer also reported any other areas of concern after visiting the property.
 - Tenants were able to contact the service if they wished to make alterations or improvements in a property and as part of this, an inspection occurred
 - Inspections occurred during mutual exchanges. The exchange could not occur unless both properties met the decent homes standard.
 - An established process was in place for damp and mould complaints which allowed a 4-week turnaround period for inspections. Priority repairs were required to be inspected and completed within 4 weeks.
 - Responsive repairs were ongoing with around 80,000 occurring annually.
 - There were 30 Neighbourhood Housing Officers who responded to tenancy management enquiries and were also able to refer any repairs through to Technical Services.
 - The team worked closely with other services such as occupational health, environmental health and social workers so any concerns could be investigated.
 - Referrals were received through customer service.
 - Regular risk assessments were carried out of communal spaces containing asbestos.
 - Periodic Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) were carried out.
- The Compliance Team was now in place, and it was intended that low-risk blocks could now be checked as well as high-risk ones.
- IT systems confirmed that all houses had been visited at least once in the last 5 years.

- A new NEC module was being implemented, which would allow the council to interrogate the information on the housing stock better. This system would allow asset management and Health and Safety surveys to be conducted in real time using handheld devices, with data automatically updated in the IT system. The module was expected to be operational by September 2025, with some recruitment needed to support the new model.

In response to comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Gas safety checks were carried out by staff while EICR was carried out by contractors and in-house staff.
- Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) but they were completed in line with the identified risk frequency for that block, every 12 months in high-risk blocks and sheltered accommodation. In purpose-built accommodation, they were carried out every 5 years. A Fire Risk Assessor was directly employed in the division, but the vast majority of FRA were completed by contractors.
- Many priority works were completed within the 10-day target. However, work occurred outside of this timescale if it was inconvenient or disruptive for the tenant. The difficulty of access to the property was an issue in causing backlogs.
- A report was scheduled on Repairs and Maintenance for the next Housing scrutiny meeting. This was intended to include damp and mould updates, which were on a significant downward trajectory.
- Concerns were raised that the capital work programme was based on a 16-year-old survey. Members were reassured that before any capital work to properties is implemented, the Housing team would re-inspect and update the available information. £170 million had been spent on housing improvements in the last 10 years.
- While the Health and Safety regulations required more frequent inspections moving forward, so far, no category 1 hazards had been identified as part of the initial HHSRS inspection completed. The ongoing stock check had ensured that the stock was in a good, compliant standard in line with officers understanding. However, the process adopted was being moved to a more regulated method.
- The division was confident that the capital programme would be effectively delivered, particularly given the introduction of the new IT system. A 5-year investment strategy would also be developed using the intelligence from the HHSRS inspection to focus where investment capital was spent.
- Members commented that increasing the number of property MOT's was an investment that could save money in the long term. However, concerns were raised around the resources required to ensure that the inspections were carried out. In response, it was noted there was to be a new team manager, with 6 surveyors directly employed, this would be reviewed on an ongoing basis. Colleagues in the private sector were going to support them with their training. Opportunities were intended to be offered for technical staff to develop, and the apprenticeship offer was still very strong across the trades and craft staff. This was to support the existing apprentice programme.

- EPC's lasted for 10 years, but there was no current requirement for them to be provided if it had lapsed. They were only provided in the event of a new letting / tenant.
- The Local Authority had been fortunate in its stock; there were lots of traditional builds, and there were no remediation works because of building safety. Robust decisions had been made in terms of sustainable investments, and the division had been invested in the people and the stock. The management of the stock had put the team in a position to proactively identify potential issues that could be revealed by the surveys.
- Communications were issued prior to an appointment, as well as there being an Access Policy so that tenants understood the purpose of the visit.
- New recruits were to be resourced from the Revenue Budget.
- Where there was similar house types with the same issues identified, it was logged on the dashboard so that trends were identified, and remedial works could be carried out.
- A key cause of damp had been identified as ventilation, so this required communication with tenants.

AGREED:

The commission noted the report.

28. FIRE SAFETY

The Housing Head of Service presented a report on the fire safety conditions within the Council's residential buildings. Members were invited to provide comments and ask questions, and the following were noted:

The outstanding risks in the 12-month category were low-level / priority repairs, and do not have an impact on the fire safety. These issues were usually identified by Building Responsible Officers during routine inspections. More urgent repairs fell under the 10-day category. Importantly, no jobs were cancelled following a fire safety inspection; all repairs had to be completed.

The Housing Team maintained a robust plan for dealing with management actions (e.g. rubbish in communal spaces). Safety remained a priority, and combustibles were not permitted in communal spaces.

Fire inspections were carried out daily based on risks. The high-risk buildings were managed in accordance with the Building Safety Act. Due to ongoing inspections, there were currently no outstanding fire safety inspections.

AGREED:

The Commission noted the report

Information on the average wait time for the 452 low-level fire risk repairs to be shared with the commission

29. PRS STRATEGY/RENTERS REFORM BILL

The Director of Housing and the Head of Regulatory Service presented a report on outlining recent and upcoming developments aimed at the improvement of private rented sector stock within the city. The presentation covered:

- The Renters' Rights Bill (RRB)
- The Supported Housing Act 2023 (regulations) (SHA) and;
- The introduction of a refreshed Private Rented Sector (PRS) strategy.

The Renters' Rights Bill

The RRB was currently at the report stage in the House of Lords and was anticipated to come into force by summer 2025. There were several facets to this bill which would be introduced in phases, though no definitive timescales had been set for this. Key changes introduced included:

- Abolition of Fixed Assured Shorthold Tenancies, which would be replaced by periodic tenancies, giving flexibility to tenants by allowing them to remain in a property until they decide to end the tenancy by giving two months' notice.
- Restriction to a limit of one rent increase per year by landlords.
- Abolition of s.21 (no-fault) eviction. The change in law came with the requirement for landlords to go to court with a justified reason for eviction
- Ban on rental bidding war, preventing landlords from encouraging tenants to outbid one another for properties.
- The introduction of a new PRS ombudsman to oversee complaints from individuals and hold landlords accountable.
- The introduction of a PRS national database, where landlords would be required to register, enabling Local Authorities to identify and track problems in the area, especially in relation to landlords that own multiple properties.
- The Decent Homes Standards would be extended to PRS properties.
- Introduction of Awwab's law in relation to damp and mould, new service standards and timescales for response would apply to social landlords and PRS alike.
- Prohibition of discrimination against people who were on benefits from renting properties.
- These changes had wide-reaching implications across the service areas (detailed in the report) - existing powers would be extended, and additional responsibilities placed on the Council. To manage this, a Project Board had been established to coordinate the Council's response to these changes.
- New funding was expected to assist the Council in meeting these new obligations, but details of this were not yet available.

Supported Housing Act (SHA)

- The Act was already in force and its objective was to address issues around quality of accommodation, care and support not matching the rent levels paid in Supported Exempt Accommodations (SEAs) (i.e. accommodation linked to care leavers, domestic violence survivors, refugees, prison leavers).
- There was previously no regulation that empowered local authorities to deal with such issues, but the SHA gave new powers to:
- Set a local strategy for supported housing
- Have a licensing regime that would enable the Council to influence the quality of stock and investigate the quality of care and support provisions that individuals were entitled to.
- The Council was proactively mapping all existing SEAs within the city and had established a partnership board that includes Housing, Neighbourhoods and Social Care to ensure collaboration in delivering on the different elements of the Act.
- Council was also considering what this would mean from an inspection regime standpoint, for both the accommodation and social care inspection.
- The department was still awaiting clarity on what government funding would be made available to implement these changes effectively.

The PRS Strategy

The Council was developing a revised PRS strategy aimed at delivering a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting both tenants and landlords. The new strategy would incorporate the Council's responses to the RRB and SHA, given their direct relevance to it. Some key points noted were:

- The strategy had key strategic priorities (set out in paragraph 3.22 of the report) covering improving standards, improving support, improving enforcement and protection, strengthening intelligence and promoting a joined-up approach.
- The Council was at the stage of developing a formal revised strategy

The Deputy City Mayor for Housing, Economy and Neighbourhoods acknowledged the potential tension between the priorities of the Council and those of landlords. She emphasised that the updated strategy aimed to take on board the challenges and needs from both sides while responding fairly to them, as well as maintaining positive landlord relationships.

In response to questions, it was noted that:

- There had been a recent uplift in section 21 cases because PRS landlords were concerned about the new RRB changes. The Council had a close relationship with the courts and had information regarding the uplift e.g. where historically there were 16 cases requiring temporary accommodation weekly, the past week had seen a spike to 23 cases. The Council had increased Homelessness Prevention officers from 14 to over 30, to have sufficient resources to deal with this.

- Another way for managing this ongoing pressure was the delivery of 250 temporary accommodations, and a record number of permanent accommodations was underway
- The abolition of no-fault evictions had positively impacted landlords' response to the Council's incentive scheme. This was mutually beneficial because it provided security for the landlord, as well as increasing the Council's access to PRS stock.
- In response to the question about how the discrimination against individuals on benefits would be regulated, it was noted that unless there was explicit evidence against the landlord, enforcement would be difficult. However, registration of a landlord on the National database would make it easier to identify trends and build an evidence base that would allow for formal action.
- Regarding the monitoring of estate agents, it was stated that educating them on their legal obligations would potentially lead to a culture shift and relationship. However, where concrete evidence of discrimination was available, formal action could be taken. Additionally, civil penalties for selective licensing breaches were being issued to not only landlords but also to letting and managing agents when appropriate.
- To balance engagement with landlords and regulatory enforcement, the Council aimed to support compliant landlords while taking action against those who failed to meet their obligations. In support of this, there was ongoing proactive engagement with landlord forums and representative groups. This relationship building had increased the confidence and trust of landlords in the Council to utilise their stock, and had resulted in 240 PRS properties secured last year, with a target of around 500 this year. Beyond this, there was the "call before you serve" initiative, which encouraged early dialogue between landlords and the Council to resolve issues before a formal notice was served.
- Work was ongoing to establish the necessary regulatory structures to deliver the requirements of the RRB, SHA, and the PRS strategy.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

30. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited members to make suggestions on items that they wished to be included in the work programme. There were none.

31. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair informed members of the possibility of conducting some informal scrutiny on Housing Allocation. She noted that the meetings would be held online and welcomed ideas and suggestions from members.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 19:28.

