



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 22 APRIL 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Zaman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bajaj
Councillor Gopal

Councillor Halford
Councillor Modhwadia

In Attendance

Deputy City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin – Housing and Neighbourhoods

* * * * *

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O'Neill and Waddington. Cllr Greg was absent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members of the commission to declare any interests for which there were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes for the meeting on 18 March 2025 were included within the papers and asked members for comments.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 were a true and accurate record.

4. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

It was noted that none had been received.

6. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

7. SUPPORTED HOUSING

The Deputy City Mayor for Housing, Economy and Neighbourhoods introduced the report. They noted that it was a very important piece of work, with unique challenges that focused on the best practice nationally.

The Head of Service for Housing delivered the report, and it was noted that:

- Previous reports had been brought to the Commission, which highlighted how the tenant population had changed in recent years.
- There was an increasing number of tenants with complex health and support needs who were unable to sustain independent tenancies. The purpose of the report was to propose the development of further options for supported housing for Leicester City Council tenants and to assess the projected needs of tenants.
- In the past, the council had supported housing available for tenants. However, the schemes had now closed, leaving limited options available for Leicester City Council tenants.
- The STAR Service had bridged the gap by offering floating support. Following this, the service had received excellent feedback, with users describing the support received as life changing. However, there were still some tenants that the service was unable to support effectively. This was due to a variety of factors, such as: substance abuse, mental illness, domestic abuse, being prison leavers or a combination of all these factors. These factors could result in antisocial behaviour, cuckooing, rent arrears and homelessness.
- The impact of these pressures on local services and residents could be quite substantial. Similarly, the impact on individuals was very harmful as they were often placed in tenancies that they were unable to sustain with the Leicester City Council.
- To alleviate this, a Help Beyond Housing Team had been formed with funding awarded from the Department of Health. The team had worked with the most complex tenants and had been successful in stabilising tenancies. This had significantly reduced instances of rough sleeping among council tenants.

- Currently in Leicester, there were three (3) council-funded housing options for residents:
 - Homelessness Provision (Temporary Accommodation)
 - General Needs
 - Supported Living and Extra Care (Provided by Adult Social Care)
- There were currently no suitable accommodations to place tenants who had failed their tenancies a few times as a result of substance use and alcohol dependency, particularly within the Council's funded housing options.
- Leicester also had a significant amount of unmapped and unregulated supported housing. Under new legislation, local authorities were now required to oversee and regulate these services, which would be undertaken as an additional project.
- The supported exempt accommodation was being proposed to target tenants who were currently unable to sustain successive tenancies. The proposal for this specialised housing option was driven by the following:
 1. It had been identified that managing such tenancies required significant resources, and the associated impact on other residents led to numerous complaints, enquiries, and incidents of crime and disorder on Council estates.
 2. Temporary accommodation presented a significant cost, particularly due to the need to move not only individuals, but sometimes neighbouring households affected by tenants' behaviour.
 3. In some cases, tenants had to be relocated because they had become targets of criminal activity, including cuckooing and similar issues.
 4. Associated costs, including voids, repair works, and compensation awards following complaints, were continuing to increase.
- Data from homelessness assessments and drug and alcohol needs assessments showed that Leicester had a higher percentage of individuals in drug treatment with housing problems compared to national figures:
 - 18.1% in Leicester vs. 13.5% across England.
 - 14.8% of those with no fixed abode in Leicester had urgent housing needs, compared to 7.5% nationally.
 - Within the homeless pathway, 20% of single people were identified as having complex support needs.
 - Current data identified 71 tenants who would benefit from supported housing.

The projected need included:

- 11 units of low-level "trailer" supported accommodation
- 24 units of medium-level supported accommodation
- 36 units of high-risk, long-term supported accommodation

The high-risk accommodation had been identified as the most urgently needed, and the recommendation was for identified buildings to be repurposed or purchased for use as supported housing.

- Affordability would be a key consideration, with the schemes intended to reduce overall budget pressures by enabling people to move into more appropriate, settled accommodation.
- An initial feasibility study had taken place for Welford Road, currently a block of general needs housing. Local ward councillors would be consulted if this site proved feasible.
- The Zip Trainer Flats scheme had already been established and had proven successful in helping tenants develop the skills needed to integrate back into the community before moving on to an independent tenancy.
- The lower-level accommodation had already been set up as part of this initiative, but higher-level supported accommodation was now urgently needed for those unable to sustain tenancies in general needs housing.

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

- An analysis had been carried out to ascertain tenants who needed to be moved and the reasons why, and the data identified a number of people who were continuously failing successive tenancies. The STAR Service was typically used to support people for 6-12 months, but some people were being supported for years, due to their need for on-site support which was unlikely to end. Work was continuing to source suitable accommodation for these tenants, including options like the Welford Road Study and supported accommodation that was available through Adult Social Care.
- The Council needed to be mindful to ensure that sourcing additional supported living accommodation would not affect the general housing provision. There was a separate acquisitions programme that focused on general needs housing. Existing stock within the city would be reviewed, as it may not be utilised to full capacity. The report showed that general needs housing was not appropriate for the people who needed supported housing. As such, there might be a change from what was historically 100% general need housing to 95% general need and 5% supported housing.
- The Supported Housing Act 2023 was voted in by the previous government and had cross-party support. Due to the change of government following the General Election, there was a delay to the Act being implemented. The consultation started around a month ago and was still ongoing.
- Leicester's higher percentage of individuals in drug treatment with housing problems compared to national figures was partly due to the level of deprivation in Leicester, which could lead to more complex lifestyles. Additionally, local authorities had faced significant funding cuts from the Central Government, which caused local authorities to suffer disproportionately and had taken away their ability to be able to support people in high need.
- The local plan sets out that the council could ask providers of larger sites to facilitate 30% affordable housing. The new local plan proposals

also included the requirement for people to include larger sites of 30% affordable housing. When the owner/developer believes they cannot meet this requirement for smaller sites, it becomes a localised discussion between the planning department and the actual owners of the land in relation to what level of affordable housing development was appropriate for that specific smaller site.

Members congratulated the Housing Team on The Zips Building, following a site visit.

AGREED:

1. The Commission noted the report.
2. Feedback from residents of the Zip Building to be added to the work programme.

8. REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

The Housing Heads of Service provided an update on the Repairs and Maintenance team's performance. The following key points were noted:

- The report was written in February 2025, and the presentation would highlight areas of concern and the progress recorded to date.
- The council managed 19,500 properties and 1,700 leaseholders across the city. The repairs team were responsible for repairs, compliance works (gas, fire, electrical, lifts), maintenance, and renovation works across the property stock. These were categorised under responsive repairs, emergency out-of-hours repairs, compliance work, planned maintenance, and renovation of void properties.
- Repairs generally fell into three categories:
 - Priority 1 (emergency repairs): Response time within 24 hours.
 - Priority 2 (routine repairs): Response time within 10 working days
 - Priority 3 (programmed repairs): Response time between 8 – 52 weeks.
- The team were working on improving current performance timescales in the coming months and adopting a new approach to ensure consistent data reporting and alignment with the requirements of the Social Housing Regulator.
- A major challenge faced by the team was resourcing, which was a national issue, particularly within the construction industry. However, there had been some recent improvements given the collaboration with the recruitment team through the apprenticeship programme.
- Another concern was job cancellations, with around 20,000 jobs cancelled this financial year, representing about 16% of all repairs. It was noteworthy that the repairs trend showed an increase in repairs reported, completed and cancelled in 2024/25.
- There had been improvements in the repair KPIs since the report was written. An example given was that outstanding repairs had now reduced

to less than 10,000, while out-of-category repairs were now about 4000. The team, however, recognised that the overall performance was below target on the percentage of repairs for general repairs, and efforts were underway to close this gap.

- The out-of-category repairs primarily involved external works, which were relatively low risk. Over 60% of the outstanding repairs had had an initial visit, which helped to evaluate vulnerabilities and expedite the repairs (if necessary), based on findings.
- The reduction of out-of-category repairs was, however, a priority, and the HRA Safety Oversight Board had been set up to receive a monthly progress report on the set targets. The Board had also agreed on a set of options to increase capacity and reduce the number of outstanding jobs, including additional contractor support, overtime support for operatives, implementing increased performance targets, and changing the process of how jobs are dealt with.
- Most properties had annual visits (eg/ Annual Gas Safety check), which allowed tenants to raise concerns. Tenants could also report repairs through other available channels, and staff were trained to proactively identify repair needs during their visits.
- The team was on track to meet the current projections for improvements over the next months, and steps had been taken to achieve this. Some of these were moving forward with a dedicated repairs contractor that meets the scope of requirements. The team also ensured that the right types of contractors were doing the required work, additional support was provided when needed, and resources were moved to areas where there was an increase in demand to enable the right level of capacity.

Compliance-Related Repairs

- The team were well-established and had good processes in place for gas and fire. However, electrical EICR compliance was relatively new because it came into effect in April 2024, when domestic properties were mandated to carry out testing on a 5-yearly basis. To meet this requirement, a contractor had been engaged, and there was additional support in place internally. It was also planned that the apprenticeship programme would bring 11 more electricians onboard, which would improve the overall position of the team.
- The communal EICR (Electrical Installation Condition Reports) compliance was currently at 89 % and was expected to be 100% in the next few weeks. The goal was for domestic EICR to be 60% compliant by financial year-end.
- The challenge of the unavailability of tenants, leading to cancellations, also manifested under this category of repairs. There were plans to improve this via Housing Online and through improvements of the processes by which tenants were engaged.

Gas Compliance

- The compliance rate was currently at 99.78%, but for some years, the compliance rate had been 100%, and the plan was to keep it this way. The principle utilised to maintain this high level of compliance would be extended to electrical compliance, including embedding similar processes, quality assurance, and quality control.
- There had been an improvement to the performance since the report was written, for example, the total outstanding repairs had reduced to 825 and out-of-category repairs to 459. The out-of-category target for gas by year-end was 0.
- There were no gas safety critical repairs that were out-of-category because of the established process for dealing with this. Where there was a complaint of a potential gas leak, the contractor would attend within 4 hours to investigate. A follow-up visit would also be arranged, and any necessary works undertaken. Tenants would be given safety advice, e.g., ventilating the property, etc.

Fire inspection

- Performance was generally good, though further improvements were required. 90% of the repairs were completed within the category, with most issues stemming from the inability to gain access to the properties.
- Another challenge was the wrong categorisation of complaints, which usually required housekeeping and re-categorisation.

Damp & mould

- There continued to be an upward trend in demand, which had doubled compared to 2021-2023. This was a priority, with a new contractor engaged and the internal processes changed to ensure the right resources were available. There had been significant improvements since writing the report. Repairs in out-of-category, which were previously 1514, were now down to 1127. Based on the current progress being maintained, the team was projecting 0 out-of-category repairs by year-end.
- The team's approach was to ensure compliance with Awab's Law (which was due to come into force in October 2025), refocus resources, and remove immediate risk by visiting properties which had outstanding damp work. The team was also collaborating with the Public Health team for a strategic needs assessment to understand vulnerabilities.

Voids

The voids team had made significant improvements over the last three years, achieving a sustainable vacancy rate of 1.45%, which was below the standard 2% target. Traditional capital works continued to be undertaken, including boilers, kitchen refurbishment, etc.

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

- Regarding concerns about the level of electrical safety compliance, it was clarified that:
 - the need for an ongoing 5-year compliance electrical safety check was a new requirement and mandatory for local authorities. Previously, the council ensured safety by undertaking rewires and upgrade programmes, which ensured that no property was left with a wiring system older than 30 years. Additionally, EICR was carried out during mutual exchanges or new lettings, and Minor Work Certificates were issued for circuit upgrades to the kitchen/bathroom refurbishments. Emergency electrical issues reported by tenants were addressed within 24 hours. Therefore, the housing stock was safe in the first instance.
 - There was an ongoing procurement exercise ending in June, which would facilitate 4000 EICR annually. It was projected that by year 4, the council would be fully compliant.
 - Additional electricians and Quality Control (QC) officers were being recruited, with a projected 60% completion rate by the end of the first contract year.
- Assurance was given that out-of-category repairs did not include gas safety concerns, and as such, did not pose any immediate risk to the tenants. If a repair was deemed critical, the operators would attend within 24 hours to make it safe. All gas staff were also trained and competency tested every 5 years to ensure they could identify gas safety issues and unsafe situations. The Quality Control team also regularly checked that inspections were carried out on operatives and compliance with regulations was ensured.
- It was observed that the report seemed imbalanced by placing the responsibility for all cancellations on tenants, and a more balanced view was encouraged to help identify improvement areas. In response, it was noted that steps were being taken to ensure operatives genuinely attempt to reach tenants rather than simply marking jobs as visited. An example was to build some questions that allow the council to monitor the amount of time spent by and attitude of the contractor on the property during visits.
- Additionally, there was no motivation for contractors to leave the jobs undone as they were not paid for uncompleted tasks. The council was already using text messages and advance phone calls to inform tenants before arriving for jobs, but cancellations remained a challenge. It had been observed that the rate of cancellation was higher for compliance works, compared to repairs raised by tenants.
- It was suggested that financial penalties could be imposed to curb frequent cancellations, but this was deemed inappropriate given the financial vulnerability of many tenants. Other suggestions explored were for the system to allow tenants to select suitable appointment times, extend the hours dedicated for repair work, and incorporate the options for tenants to be able to amend or reschedule their appointments. While these suggestions were acknowledged, it was noted that the uptake of evening and Saturday appointments had been low.

- There was a call for improvements to repairs to match the standards of gas safety, through improved communication with tenants and the full use of available tools.
- With the increased reporting of damp and mould, it was noted that this only reflected rising demand and remained a priority for the council. Officers were usually quick to respond to complaints and would visit the property to assess the risk levels. However, there was more work to be done on getting the right message out during the first visit.
- Over 95% outstanding damp and mould jobs referenced in the report had already been assessed by a fully qualified technician. Cases that were deemed urgent were usually escalated for immediate remedial action. As part of the technician's visit to assess the level of damp and mould, there would be a full specification of all things required to be done.
- Addressing damp and mould often required multiple visits due to case complexity, requiring a phased and monitored approach. The council would, however, not remove the jobs from the system until completion was attained.
- The council had increased its resources within the damp and mould team, as well as contractor capacity, and this was already making a massive difference. An end- to-end process review was underway, and a risk-based approach was being adopted to support vulnerabilities.
- On voids, the vacancy rate was currently 1.45% which was lower than the standard 2%.
- Duplicate repairs often arose from the same issue being reported via different channels or descriptions. The council was reviewing its systems to streamline this process.
- Regarding the timeline for radiator replacement, it was stated that this could be immediate or require a special order depending on the size or type of radiators. While the council kept a good stock, it was unlikely to have all the specs required. A procurement exercise for a new materials framework had just been completed and would see daily replenishment of commonly required items like radiators.
- On the concern raised about the high cost of district heating, it was noted that installation of meters was voluntary, and the data and statistics showed that users typically saved money from having a meter installed. Complaints tended to come from those with technical issues or systems on continuous hot water loops.
- Persons experiencing technical issues with their heating were encouraged to report so that the faults could be addressed, and overcharges (where found) could be refunded.
- A proposed property MOT for properties was suggested, to enable the council to move from reactive to proactive maintenance. It was noted that the council was considering a housing health and safety system model that proactively identifies issues.

Action:

1. The commission noted the report
2. A bi-annual performance update on repairs to be provided to the commission.
3. The recommendation for annual proactive property MOTs to be added to the work programme.

9. APPRENTICE PROGRAMME AND WIC

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- The report provided an update on Women in Construction and Apprenticeship Programmes within the Housing Division, delivered by Leicester City Council.
- The Women in Construction initiative had been run in partnership with Leicester College for over 20 years and took place annually in February.
- In 2024, for the first time, an additional Women in Construction Week was held at the Council's Construction Training Centre of Excellence (CTCE) to increase uptake by delivering the programme across two weeks and two venues.

The programme aimed to:

- Challenge outdated stereotypes that trades were only suitable for men.
- Showcase the Council's qualified tradeswomen, many of whom had progressed through the apprenticeship route.
- Demonstrate the Council's leadership in diversity and inclusion within its trade's workforce, which had received national recognition.
- Provide a supportive environment for women of all ages to try different trades, build confidence, and develop skills for use at home and in work.
- Promote and encourage applications for trade apprenticeships.
- The Council had historically offered 30 apprenticeship posts but increased this to 40 last year and then to 50 for the current year, starting in September, which was ahead of many similarly sized local authorities.
- The Council expanded its partnerships beyond Leicester College, now also working with:
 - Stephenson College
 - Smart Gas (gas apprenticeships)
 - Langley's (roofing apprenticeships, addressing a key skills gap)
- The Women in Construction initiative had traditionally been held during February half term, but recognising the challenges this posed for caregivers, an additional term-time session was delivered in March at CTCE.
- The additional session proved very popular, with positive feedback received, and plans were in place to continue offering multiple sessions in future years.

- 130 women attended over the two-week programme, participating in sessions focused on carpentry, plumbing, tiling, and painting and decorating.
- Most sessions were led by female operatives, although some male staff also participated to reflect the mixed-gender nature of the workforce.
- Feedback highlighted increased confidence in practical skills and improved awareness of job opportunities within the Council.
- Promotional work had been carried out via colleges, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), social media, and other local media outlets.
- The Council had also begun engaging more with faith groups to better promote opportunities among women and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, with plans to expand this approach.
- In the previous year, the Council received 326 applications for its advertised apprenticeship vacancies. Of the successful applicants:
 - 3 were BME candidates
 - 3 were female
 - 2 were LAC/Leaving Care candidates (LACs)
 - 2 declared a disability
 - 1 was from Leicester to Work
 - 1 was from the Armed Forces community
- All apprentices remained in employment, which was considered a significant achievement, particularly for care leavers who often faced personal challenges.
- The Council continued to work closely with Children's Services to both promote apprenticeship opportunities and ensure care leavers received sustained support.
- Some care leavers had successfully progressed into permanent operative roles and were now actively promoting apprenticeships to other LACs.
- Work would continue to improve opportunities -the next steps were:
 - Continue running multiple Women in Construction sessions annually.
 - Deliver programmes both via Leicester College and its own CTCE site.
 - Further develop outreach to faith and community groups, with a focus on increasing uptake from BME candidates.

In response to questions from members, it was noted that:

- In Leicester, women made up 20% of those entering craftwork roles, significantly higher than the national average of just 1%, and twice the rate of comparable local authorities.
- The Women in Construction (WIC) and apprenticeship programme traditionally targeted the 16-25 age group (a younger dynamic). However, recent cohorts have seen participation from a broader age range, including individuals in their 50s making complete career changes. This diversity was seen as a brilliant influence on the younger participants.
- The team worked closely with schools and colleges to encourage participation from sixth form and GCSE students in the programmes.

- The apprenticeship framework was designed to meet the needs of the council workforce. As such, there was a pathway for the apprentices to transition into permanent roles, provided they met the requirements.
- The apprentices received guidance on development opportunities that had proved effective. Currently, there were three female supervisors in the craft workforce, 2 of whom came through the apprenticeship route.
- A recommendation was made to include children with special educational needs in future apprenticeship programmes to enhance inclusivity.

Agreed:

1. The commission noted the report.
2. The application link for the apprentice recruitment programme was to be shared with members.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair informed members that they were welcome to recommend items that they wished to be included in the work programme for the new municipal year.

12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The chair thanked members for their contributions throughout the municipal year. There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 19:37.