

MINUTES OF THE Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Monday, 9th March, 2026, 6.40 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Adam Small (Chair), Dawn Barnes, John Bevan, Lester Buxton and Isidoros Diakides

ALSO ATTENDING:

287. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

288. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Small.

289. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

290. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

291. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

292. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 15th December 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

293. KPI UPDATE

The Panel received a set of slides which provide an update on a range of Key Performance Indicators in relation to the Housing Service. The slides were included in the agenda pack at pages 15-42 and there were additional slides included in the

addendum report pack at pages 1-4, which gave an update on voids and damp and mould, as requested by the Panel at the previous meeting. The following arose during the discussion of this agenda item:

- a. The Panel sought clarification about whether the information pertaining to repairs completed first time, included appointments that the Council didn't attend i.e. if there was a cancellation or the contractor was unable to attend. Officers advised that they believed it was only repairs that were completed, but that they would confirm this in writing. **(Action: Scott Kay)**.
- b. The Chair noted that it would be useful to know information around the number of appointments that were upheld and conversely, cancelled. The Chair commented that he assumed that a repair wouldn't be listed as completed first time, if it had been cancelled or rescheduled prior to being completed.
- c. The Panel queried how satisfaction with repairs was tracked, and whether a repair would be marked as completed if the resident wasn't happy with the repairs that had been carried out. In response, officers advised that there was an indicator in the slide deck relating to satisfaction with previous repair. Officers set out that if a repair had been completed to the contractors satisfaction it would be listed as completed. If the resident wasn't happy with the repair, then it would be followed up as either a complaint or a separate job would be raised.
- d. In response to a request for clarification, officers advised that tenancy activity related to the range of interactions the Tenancy team could have with tenants, covering things like a visit to a property, initial tenancy visits and a one year review. It was also clarified that the indicator on support plans, related to sheltered housing or good neighbour schemes and there is a one year review that takes place. The support planning is profiled 12 months ahead and a meeting is scheduled. All residents in these schemes have a support plan and this is what is being monitored and tracked.
- e. The Panel sought questioned what happened if the Council did not meet its target on tenancy audits, given current performance levels were quite far off. In response, officers advised that the aim was to cover 20% of all tenancies within social housing stock on an annual basis and that this figures was profiled and reported on through this indicator. Officers commented that they would be looking at how best to report on the management of stock going forwards. The Chair sought clarification about what Members could expect to see by the end of the year in relation to performance on tenancy audits. Officers agreed to provide a written response on this. **(Action: Neehara)**.
- f. The Panel queried what 'out of scope' referred to in relation to damp and mould. Officers advised that this related to where a resident had reported damp and mould but on inspection, it was found to be something else.
- g. In relation to a score of 63% of emergency treatments for damp and mould, officers advised that this score related to the number of cases completed in time and that those that were not completed in time tended to be due to problems with gaining access to the property, for example. Officers provided assurances that they would continue to look at how they could improve their policies and processes in relation to this work.

RESOLVED

The KPI update was noted.

294. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF COUNCIL HOUSING ESTATES

The Panel received a report which set out the overarching picture of how housing estates are managed and maintained across Housing Services. The report provided an overview of the service offer, what teams were responsible for, and how this linked to larger programmes of work. The report was introduced by Neehara Wijeyesekera, Assistant Director for Housing Management as set out in the addendum report pack at pages 5-16. The following arose as part of the discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel commented that in the past there was one named person who was responsible for a particular estate. It was contended that this was no longer the case, and that this had resulted in a lack of accountability for the upkeep and management of estates. In response, officers advised that a model of having one person accountable was not seen to be effective, given the complexities involved. It was suggested that the likelihood of anyone person being able to understand where all of the budgets relating to all the different aspects of managing estates, including long-term agreements versus contractors, was less likely in modern environments. Officers advised that there weren't a lot of neighbourhood managers in any case (four).
- b. The Panel raised concerns around estate inspections, commenting that these tended to be under-resourced and underrepresented. Panel Members suggested that they rarely seemed to receive feedback on the outcomes of these inspections. The Chair gave an anecdotal account of having not received feedback from an inspection that was carried out five months ago. In response, officers advised that there was currently a reorganisation taking place in tenancy services, which would lead to the estate inspection process being led by the Housing Officer directly. It was commented that additional resources had gone in to reduce patch sizes, in addition to retaining the Neighbourhood Improvement Officer role as-is. It was also commented that through better digital tracking of jobs, it would be easier to disseminate information, but this would require a neighbourhood plan model. The Panel were advised that this would take time to establish.
- c. The Panel sought clarification about the difference between a Neighbourhood Improvement Officer and Neighbourhood Manager. The Panel queried who was responsible for the ownership of an estate. In response, officers advised that the Neighbourhood Manager was responsible for a particular location and all of the services in that location i.e. grounds maintenance, inspections, neighbourhood improvements, the ordering of works, and scheduling of inspections. Whereas the Neighbourhood Improvement Officers had the responsibility to track, report, and arrange with various service providers, including around who was able to provide what, and at what price, and whether that would move forward. In relation to communal items and repairs, officers advised that there would be so much investment over the coming ten years that it would be very difficult for one individual to track through all of the work being done.
- d. The Chair noted concerns with the capacity of housing officers to manage the estate inspection process, even with smaller patch sizes. Officers noted that the patch size would be reduced from 700 to 500. The Chair queried whether, as part of the consultation process, Housing Officers had given an indication that the reduction in patch size, would allow them to carry out the estate

- inspection process. In response, officers advised that the consultation process had been looking at the role and duties of housing officers. It was stated that to some extent, it would depend on the experience levels of individual staff members. There would be a process of training and shadowing introduced to facilitate this change. Furthermore, there would be a review of the restructure after six and then twelve months.
- e. The Panel commented that the budget for neighbourhood works seemed quite small. The Panel raised concerns about the standard of grounds maintenance carried out by the Parks service, and suggested that this should be benchmarked against the grounds maintenance carried out by housing associations like Berkley Homes. In response, officers acknowledged that there were ongoing challenges around grounds maintenance performance. The Panel was advised that there was an improvement plan being developed and that the Parks service were meeting residents through a task and finish group. Officers set out that they were looking to have a new model of service delivery in place, and that there was a commitment that the service offer would be transparent and deliverable. Officers cautioned that this was a big piece of work and it would take some time to implement.
 - f. The Panel sought clarification about transparency of grounds maintenance charges and whether residents could expect to see how many times the grass would be cut a year, for example. In response, officers advised that the charge was an annual figure at present, which is apportioned across tenants and leaseholders directly through a service charge. Officers advised that the transparency piece through the service provider is looking to model how many grass cuts and what the profile is across the year. In terms of timescales, officers commented that it would be six to eight weeks to conclude the task and finish group and the expectation of what residents/leaseholders could expect would become clearer after it had concluded. The service would then examine what the SLA would look like and what the monitoring arrangements would be.
 - g. The Panel sought further details behind the £2m ground maintenance budget being ringfenced within Parks. Officers agreed to provide a written response. **(Action: Neehara).**
 - h. The Panel cautioned about low turnout on estate walkabouts, given that those who attended got to set the rating for the estate inspection. The Panel suggested that that it would be useful to have a breakdown of the number of residents attending the inspections. In response, officers advised that they would provide a written answer to the Panel. **(Action: Neehara).**
 - i. The Panel sought assurances that the additional demands on housing officers arising from the Housebuilding Programme had been factored into the plans for the department. In response, officers advised that it was expected that additional stock levels would be a benefit as it would provide economies of scale, and that rents and income levels should be proportionally higher for new builds compared to existing stock. The Panel was advised that these assumptions were built into long-term HRA planning.
 - j. The Panel reiterated their belief that having a named officer who was responsible for a particular estate was something that the Council should be aspiring to. Concerns were raised about a level of duplication in the roles of Neighbourhood Manager and the Neighbourhood Engagement Officer, and the value for money considerations involved in having two different roles. The Panel set out that there were a range of different issues that often arose on

- estates, such as ASB, parking, disruption caused by major works. It was suggested that having one designated point of contact was essential to engaging with residents around these issues. The Panel also commented that a number of the notice boards across estates that stated who to contact, were out of date. The Chair emphasised the fact that there was a strong local identity on many estates and that it was important that the people responsible for managing that estate understood this.
- k. The Panel queried at what point a repair became major works, and questioned the extent to which priority was given to high impact, low cost repairs such as painting railings or mending fences. In response, officers advised that this fell under the category of a planned reactive maintenance programme and that discussions were underway within the service to look at how a reactive maintenance programme could be set up. Officers also advised that they were looking at whether some of these works could be done as part of Decent Homes.
 - l. The Panel resolved to receive further information at a future meeting around a detailed breakdown of the estate management budget, and whether this was sufficient. **(Action: Scrutiny Officer).**

RESOLVED

- I. That the report was noted.
- II. The Panel welcomed the proposed adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan model and recommend that Cabinet consider adopting this model sooner, given the urgent need to improve the communal areas of the Council's estates.
- III. The Panel recommended that there should be a single person responsible for the management of a particular estate.
- IV. The Panel recommended that Cabinet give further consideration to whether Housing Officers were the most appropriate person for undertaking inspections of estates, given their current workloads and expressed concern this was not the appropriate solution.
- V. The Panel recommended that Cabinet consider undertaking a benchmarking exercise of its internal performance of grounds maintenance on estates with local Housing Associations.

295. LEGAL DISREPAIR

The Panel received a report which provided an update in Legal Disrepair cases. The report set out the current status of legal disrepair claims, as well as the work being undertaken to meet the strategic objective of reducing open case levels to a business-as-usual scenario. The report was introduced by Scott Kay, Assistant Director for Repairs and Compliance, as set out in the addendum report pack at pages 17-26. Richard Purvis, Senior Disrepair Manager was present for this item, along with the Interim Director for Housing and Cllr Sarah Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning. The following arose as part of the discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel sought clarification around how long officers anticipated it would be before maintenance was of a standard that the number of claims would be significantly reduced. In response, officers stated that the report set out a trajectory of caseloads at paragraph 4.11. The Panel was advised that, in essence, the length of time would depend on how much the Major Works

- programme was scaled up, as well as the number of claims that the Council received.
- b. The Panel queried the extent to which an increase in the number of damp and mould cases was anticipated following the introduction of Awaab's Law. In response, officers advised that the organisation did see a bit of spike following the introduction of the legislation, but that the increase was not as large as it might have been. It was suggested that the change had been widely publicised in the media in the run up to it being enacted. Officers set out that they were comfortable that the Council had adequate resources in place to deal with claims at the level they are at present. The service was also working to increase supply chains in order to deal with any future spike in claims as-and-when that might happen.
 - c. The Panel raised concerns around a failure to deal with regular repairs and these ending up being escalated into legal disrepair claims. In response, officers acknowledged that there had been some issues with the volume of calls into the call centre and the ability to handle all of those calls. In response to this, additional routes for reporting repairs directly through to the repairs team had been established, to sit alongside the call centre. It was commented that improvements to customer satisfaction scores had started to happen. The Corporate Director advised that additional resources had been put into customer services and that there was ongoing transformation work to improve digital contact with the Council.
 - d. The Panel queried the report's assertion that part of the solution was that sector reform was needed, in order to prevent the incentive for volume-based litigation firms. The Chair suggested that the claims were a problem only if they were legitimate claims. In response, officers agreed that claims needed to be valid, but cautioned that the legal standard was very low. The Panel was advised that even in cases that could be defended through the legal process, the claim still had to be treated as a disrepair claim - which took up additional resources to resolve that claim. Officers clarified that the salient point was that the resolution process under the protocol was not very cost effective. The legal costs in defending these claims were high, especially given the low legal standard. Furthermore, repairs were delayed by the legal process, which often made the repair more expensive to resolve.
 - e. The Panel welcomed the progress that had been made overall on the issue of legal disrepair. The Panel advocated that the Council should be doing all it could to clear the backlog and to pre-empt cases from going to court in the first place given the costs involved, rather than challenging claims and effectively seeking to prevent people from claiming their rightful compensation. The Panel commented that the Council's expectation should be that there are zero cases of legal disrepair.
 - f. The Chair requested that in future, graphs in reports show the figures on the axes rather than just the trend. **(Action: Officers to note).**

RESOLVED

Noted.

296. NEIGHBOURHOOD MOVES SCHEME

The Panel received a report on the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme. The report set out the background to the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme (NMS) including its introduction and the results of the scheme on the Council's allocation and letting of homes. The report also set out the existing proposed changes as part of the Allocations Policy consultation that was authorised by Cabinet. The Consultation questions were appended to the report (Appendix 1). The report was introduced by Rachel Sharpe, Interim Director of Housing, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 43-51. Appendix 1 was included in the addendum report pack at pages 27-28. Maddie Watkins, AD for Housing Demand and Cherie Lee-Hemley, Neighbourhood Moves Scheme Manager were present for this agenda item. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning was also present. The following arose as part of the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel sought clarification about whether the Council had any leverage over housing associations to make them deal with under-occupancy. Officers replied that, in general the Council did not have any powers with housing associations in this regard. Housing associations have a general duty to meet housing need and to cooperate with local councils. Housing associations have their own allocations policies and the authority does not have any control over that. Officers referred Members to paragraph 5.3 of the report which set out that one possible inclusion for a future Neighbourhood Moves scheme was to include housing association tenants that we nominated, as being eligible for the Neighbourhood Moves scheme.
- b. The Chair queried why the percentage of eligible residents who applied for NMS was quite low at 18% and what reason people gave for wanting to move. In response, officers advised that the most common reason was overcrowding, with under-occupiers next. Officers noted that there were other people who were adequately housed in terms of the number of bedrooms, but they had other problems such as disrepair or level access requirements. The Neighbourhood Moves Scheme Manager set out that she had been in the organisation since 2023 and that it was only now that the scheme was getting going, with the scheme being spread by word of mouth from residents who had used it. Officers set out that under-occupiers tended to be difficult to relocate due to modern developments having smaller gardens and lack of available parking.
- c. The Cabinet Member advised the Panel that there was a report going to Cabinet on 10th March on the Council's downsizing policy. The Cabinet Member commented that there was more that the organisation could do to incentivise under-occupiers to downsize. The Chair noted that this was something that should be looked at in a future scrutiny meeting.
- d. The Panel queried whether there was any information available around the cost of overcrowding to the Council. In response, officers advised that it was not possible to accurately determine the cost due to the multiple variables involved, including the number of non-dependant adults living at home and the extent to which this could be mitigated through things like employment support. Information was available from the housing register that set out the extent and scale of overcrowding, as well the reasons that people gave for applying to the NMS. Officers agreed to supply this information to the Panel. **(Action: Maddie Watkins).**
- e. The Chair clarified whether the report identified that around one-third of moves under the NMS were in situations that there was no net-gain to housing needs

- on the housing register. Officers confirmed that the figure was 36%, which meant that in 64% of cases there was a net-gain.
- f. The Panel queried what was being done to look at families who in four or five years' time might have a change in circumstance and may want to downsize. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the organisation was making a start through various policies and procedures, such as the downsizing strategy, but that the organisation hadn't done this for a long time. The Cabinet Member commented that she thought that it would come down to being able to provide enough capacity to properly support people through the process, rather than money. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health set out that the Older Person's Housing Strategy was also being considered at the next Cabinet meeting. The report was due to go out to consultation on a 15 year strategy. It was stated that the Council needed to have a strategic package of appropriate housing for people as they go older.
 - g. The Panel raised concerns about the levels of severe overcrowding in the borough and suggested that tackling this issue should be a priority for the authority. In response, officers advised that in the proposed changes to the scheme, as set out in the report, there was an option to utilise the NMS to respond to overcrowding and under-occupying in a more specific way. It was noted that the NMS was part of the allocations policy, which is out to consultation in the summer. One of the options put forward in the report was to continue with the NMS, but limit it to instances of severe overcrowding and under-occupiers. Officers emphasised that there was a spectrum of ways that the NMS could be used to meet housing needs in the borough.
 - h. The Chair queried the presence of a catchment area of 250m, suggesting that there was an imbalance in the west to the east of the borough in terms of the number of Council homes. The Chair suggested that he would like to see a degree of flexibility in the catchment area to reflect the fact that most schemes are in the east of the borough. Similarly, the Chair suggested that only applying it to schemes of ten or more properties disproportionately impacted the west of the borough. In response, officers advised that they were happy to take this feedback on board as part of the consultation process.
 - i. The Panel commented that allowing another move under the NMS within five years seemed very generous. In response, officers clarified that there wasn't any limit in the scheme at the minute and that the proposal sought to introduce a time limit. Officers clarified that in general, a move under the scheme would not be considered at present if you had been living in your property for less than one year.

RESOLVED

- I. That the report was noted.
- II. That Cabinet should consider revising the future Neighbourhood Moves Scheme so that a portion of the properties available through the scheme are reserved for households outside of the designated area experiencing severe overcrowding. Priority for these homes would be given to families living in severe overcrowding, based on the length of time they have been affected.
- III. That Cabinet consider how the current Neighbourhood Moves Scheme may inadvertently deprioritise families in areas of the Borough where fewer properties are being built. Consideration should be given to an amendment to

- the area of households within scope for a NMS property could be flexible to reflect the number of new builds or prospective builds in an area so that all residents can see the benefit of the Council's housebuilding programme.
- IV. That Cabinet should also consider introducing a minimum period since a household's last move before they are eligible to move again under the scheme, and that this period should exceed five years. The Panel recognises, however, that an exception should apply where a family is willing to downsize, given that the needs of families with teenage children can change significantly over time. The Panel further believes that priority within the scheme should be given to families who have experienced a change in circumstances, such as the onset of significant health issues, a disability, or children with SEND.

297. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Noted.

298. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

299. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

None.

CHAIR: Councillor Adam Small

Signed by Chair

Date