

Council Housing Management Board

Thursday 17th April 2025

Meeting summary

Attendees:

(CW) Councillor Christine Warner – Chair and Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning
(KM) Councillor Keith Miller
(ML) Councillor Martin Loftus – Shadow Member for Homes, Planning and Safer Communities
(KK) Councillor Katie Kendrick
(AB) Allan Batty – Senior Housing Policy Officer, Cheshire West, and Chester Council
(LH) Lucy Heath – Head of Housing, Cheshire West, and Chester Council
(AS) Anthony Spurway – Vice Chair - Tenant Board member
(PD) Paul Doughty – Independent Board member
(JL) Janet Lawton – ForHousing, Head of Housing Management Contracts
(KC) Karen Craig – ForHousing, Performance Lead, Housing Management Contracts
(HS) Holly Southern – Contract and Compliance Inspector, Cheshire West, and Chester Council
(NH) Nigel Hickmott – Tenant Board member
(SE) Stuart Ellis – Finance Manager, Cheshire West, and Chester Council

Apologies:

Ria Siddall-Hardwick
Gemma Davies
Jo Worthington

1. Welcome

The sixth Council Housing Management Board took place with Board members being welcomed by the Chair Councillor Christine Warner, Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning.

CW welcomed everyone and noted the following apologies: Jo Worthington, Ria Siddall-Hardwick and Gemma Davies.

2. Matters arising from last meeting.

The Board discussed the matters arising from the last meeting with updates provided as follows:

Item arising	Update
Allan Batty to submit the Council's formal response to the Government's Rent Setting Consultation once he has received feedback from Craig Ellis from ForHousing.	Completed - Formal feedback to the Government's Rent Setting Consultation submitted.
Councillor Warner to recommend to Cabinet a rental increase of 2.7% for 2025/26.	Completed - Cabinet approved a rental increase of 2.7% for 2025/26 at February Cabinet.
Allan Batty/Stuart Ellis to ensure that the Financial Context table featured in the Board Report details an additional "actual column".	Completed – Additional "actual column" now included within the Financial Context table within the Board Report.
AB asked that either Steve Crane or Janet Lawton send their electrical process to AB and RSH so they can start to establish their own process regarding the above.	Completed – Procedure now developed and being used by operational staff at ForHousing as well as the Council's Legal Team.
Janet Lawton to ask Wates if council tenants can be involved in their service review and in what capacity/format this will take.	Update: JL informed the Board that Council tenants and leaseholders will not be part of the service review being carried out by Wates however, JL explained that tenants and leaseholders will benefit from the system review in terms of improved services.
Janet Lawton to set a target for: % reduction complaints where the customer has not been kept informed. Janet to come back to the Board with the number they could realistically achieve.	Update: This will be picked up as part of the annual KPI target setting process.
Karen Craig to capture all changes to working practices etc as a consequence of complaints.	Update: A detailed record has been developed however, a shortened version is now needed to help summarise the work being done in this regard.

3. Cabinet Member Update

CW explained to the Board that she continues to feedback to her Cabinet colleagues all matters arising from the Council Housing Management Board so to keep them informed of the work the Board is doing with Council and ForHousing officers.

Regulatory Compliance and Performance Board Report covering:

- **Contract Performance**

KC took the Board through the Q3 performance and confirmed that 5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) were on target, 4 were out of target but within tolerance and 2 were out of target and tolerance. A general discussion took place around performance with KC stating that she expected the picture would improve at yearend. For example, KC stated that it was usual at the Q3 period for the rent collected KPI to show as out of target but within tolerance due to the run up to the Christmas period. KM asked when the yearend and 2025/26 KPI Framework would be shared with the Board with AB explaining that there would be a special Board meeting convened next month to review the yearend performance and also to seek Board approval for the 2025/26 KPI Framework.

AS in their absence submitted the following question:

Have PMF 7 / 8a / 8b / 9 / 10 / 12 / 13 been checked for accuracy? If yes, how can the board be reassured on the credibility of the figures put forward by ForHousing?

AB confirmed that the performance dashboard submitted to the Council by ForHousing is validated and verified by the Council's Commercial Management team (Performance & Finance Officer) who will then approve the final submittance of performance.

VA mentioned that PMF 12 and 13 are closely related to the quality of the work, she felt strongly that the quality of the work needs to be improved. VA continued to explain that when tenants respond to this question, it was her view that they are referring to the quality of the work overall not just the process around identifying the problem at the first visit. For example, if a tenant has a leak in the water pipe in the bathroom and an operative comes to repair and only looks at that pipe, but after 2 days the pipe above leaks, this will cause the tenant to be unsatisfied with the repair that was carried out originally. VA explained that in the above example the operative needs to check the water installation as well, not just that piece of pipe. KM agreed that there needs to be an approach taken that results in repairs being carried out right, first time rather than after a second, third or even a fourth time.

- **Stock Quality, Decency, Repairs and Maintenance and Adaptations update**

The Board were asked if they had any questions in relation to the stock quality, decency, repairs and maintenance and adaptations update, with questions being as follows:

KM/AS asked of the 146 stock condition surveys completed during December, what is the process being used to risk assess and ensure the safety of tenants and leaseholders. How can damp and mould be dealt with in line with best practice and current timelines?

JL explained that the current timelines are those used by ForHousing for their own housing stock which the Council has adopted as best practice however, this is likely to change once Awaab's Law becomes law in October 2025. JL continued to explain that in terms of risk assessing, Gareth Frankland in her team will begin to collate all of the findings from the surveys and begin to develop a programme of works so that sub-contractors can deliver the works required e.g. roofing, kitchens, bathrooms etc. With regards to Damp & Mould, AB explained that to ensure the Council has the resource and capacity to deliver the remedial works required, the Council have approved for ForHousing to appoint a dedicated contractor and surveyor to deliver all damp and mould works that has been identified from the stock condition surveys.

AS enquired when will the draft Damp and Mould Policy be consulted on with tenants and leaseholders?

In line with the policy review process, the Council will lead this process with Karen Traynor from ForHousing assisting. The draft Damp and Mould Policy consultation with the wider tenant/leaseholder cohort was due to take place this month (April) however, due to PURDAH this will now take place after the by-election. In the meantime, a meeting has been arranged for Tuesday 29 April 2025 for the tenant board members to review the draft policy before consulting with the wider tenant/leaseholder cohort.

Action: AB to make sure that the wider tenant/leaseholder cohort were provided with the opportunity to provide their views on the draft Damp and Mould Policy.

CW asked for an update on the Compliance policies covering the big six health and safety compliance requirements. AB confirmed that he had been sent these by Steve Crane (SC) from ForHousing and he had spent time going through these. AB confirmed that he returned these to SC around three weeks ago detailing some minor changes and asking that SC insert appropriate housing management contract staff as he deemed appropriate for the roles and responsibilities sections within each of the compliance policies. JL mentioned that she would chase this up with SC after the Easter Break. AB for his part explained that once he has been provided with the final versions he would arrange for these to be uploaded to the Council website.

Action: JL to speak to Steve Crane reference sending the final versions to AB for CW to approve and sign off.

Action: AB to arrange for all final versions of the compliance policies to be uploaded to the Council website.

4. Complaint Panel Update

KM provided an update to the Board regarding the Complaint Panel and the changes to how the Panel will work for this financial year as follows:

- A new template document has been developed for the sample reviewing process that allows the Panel to ask questions whilst also allowing

ForHousing to respond to the Panels questions before the Panel meet. Then as part of the pre-Panel meeting, the Panel will review the answers provided by ForHousing and pick up anything requiring further clarification in the main Complaint Panel meeting.

- As per the HQN led self-assessment against the Consumer Standards exercise, the Panel must become more strategic and gain a clear understanding as to what the issues are around complaints, the improvements needed to reduce an occurrence and how complaint handling response times can be improved.
- Target setting needs to become more in line with the actual response times set out by the Housing Ombudsman. The Panel needed to lead on this and provide reassurance to the wider Council Housing Management Board that response times would be met.

In short, KM explained that the above changes would result in a sample of complaints continuing to be reviewed but more time would be devoted to reviewing the strategic elements of complaint handling and what the stats were telling the Panel/Board and ensuring that the changes needed to address any issues are put in place.

5. Board Terms of Reference

CW introduced this agenda item by stating that the Board Terms of Reference had been altered slightly following recommendations from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). TPAS had recommended that there are two additional sections included within the Terms of Reference as follows:

- Collective Recommendation Making.
- Code of Conduct

CW explained that there needed to be an understanding that the Board is required to make collective recommendation making this is particularly important when she is being asked to recommend anything to the Council's Cabinet. CW also stated that in accordance with advice sought from TPAS a new draft Code of Conduct had been put together which the Board needed to review and approve, then individually sign and return to Allan Batty (AB), Strategic Lead for Council Housing.

CW asked for the Boards view on the above with ML suggested some minor amendments are made to the draft Code of Conduct as follows: to include "Councillor" within the definition section and lastly to make provision that the Chair could also be removed from the Board should they be found to breach the code. CW asked that AB make the above amendments and then send out the revised Code of Conduct for everyone to sign and return to AB by close of play Friday 25 April 2025.

Action: AB to make the suggested amendments as put forward by Councillor Loftus and then send the revised Code of Conduct to all members of the Board.

Action: Board members on receipt of the Code of Conduct, sign and return this to AB by close of play Friday 25 April 2025.

KM asked for an update on the Communal Areas Policy as he had received a number of queries from residents who had expressed a number of concerns. AB explained the background to this policy namely that HQN had advised that this policy needed to be developed and put in place urgently. AB confirmed that there has been considerable feedback from tenants on this with a view that the policy needs to be amended to reflect these views. AB also explained that there was a need to take some time to consider what measures the Council puts in place to help meet the specific needs of those tenants and leaseholders who require access to their mobility scooter for instance. AB mentioned that the policy will be amended to reflect the views of tenants and leaseholders and then an exercise will be carried out to review those low-rise blocks who have tenants or leaseholders with a mobility scooter so that appropriate provision can be put in place. AB confirmed that he hoped that the policy would go live during autumn this year.

Action: AB to amend the Communal Areas Policy to detail the range of support available to tenants and leaseholders and provide a description of the risk assessment process that will be used to ensure that the policy doesn't inadvertently discriminate those tenants and leaseholders with a disability.

6. Council Housing Tenant/Leaseholder Engagement Strategy Consultation

AB provided an update on the above which had been out for consultation from Monday 20 January through to and including Sunday 12 April 2025. AB delivered a presentation which had shown that there was largely strong levels of support for both the aim and objectives set out in the draft Tenant/Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.

AB provided some key statistics as follows:

- 515 visits were made to the designated consultation webpage on the Council's website.
- 195 formal responses received. This is in addition to the 109 tenants and leaseholders that were involved in the development of the strategy.
- Engagement consisted of online survey, social media posts, two press releases, hard copies of the survey were also available.
- Face to face workshop also took place on 6 March 2025 with 13 tenants attending with attendees being asked to provide their views and opinions on both the aim and objectives set out in the strategy.

AB explained that respondents were also asked to provide comments they had with the main themes being as follows:

- Improvements in how the Council/ForHousing communicated with tenants and leaseholders were needed particularly around repairs and maintenance.

- Respondents wanted more opportunities to have a say and engage with staff from the Council and ForHousing.
- Respondents felt there needed to be more of a presence on the estates and operational staff needed to be available at specific times.

AB concluded the presentation by explaining that the feedback will now be used to develop the draft strategy further with Cabinet being asked to approve the final version in September 2025.

7. Regulatory Framework Self-Referral update

Further to a meeting with the Board earlier this month where AB and LH discussed the reasons for the Council making a Self-Referral to the Regulator of Social Housing on the grounds of potential non-compliance with the Safety and Quality Standard, LH confirmed that the Regulator had been in touch and asked the Council to provide further supportive evidence. The Regulator has now reviewed that supportive evidence and have confirmed they are satisfied that the Council has the necessary procedures in place to address any areas of non-compliance. LH continued to explain the Council is required to keep the Regulator informed at a three and six month interval period. LH agreed that she would keep the Board fully informed of any further developments in this regard including the need for the Board to sign off the response provided to the Regulator at the three and six month period.

Action: LH to keep the Board fully informed of any further developments regarding the self-referral and seek Board sign off relating to the updates on performance provided to the Regulator at the three and six month period.

8. Any other business

There was one question around the financial update section as follows:

Could the financial update chart be set out in quarters throughout the year for all departments managing the Council's housing stock on current and future on spending to ensure that getting value of money when analysing this information to make this easier to understand?

SE stated that although he has more than happy to set out the financial information in quarters however, he continue to explain that he wasn't sure this would be particularly helpful. SE explained that the reason for this was that the level of rental income received each month and the contract fee paid to ForHousing are broadly the same each month/quarter. SE stated that the charges for loan repayment, interest payable, insurances, grounds maintenance and support provided by council services are all usually agreed at the financial year end. The consequence of this is that the four quarters would all look very similar or three of the quarters would show 0 against the charges for loan repayment, interest payable, insurances, grounds maintenance and support provided by council services with a large charge then appearing in quarter 4. SE suggested that he get together at some point to discuss the best way to present the financial information to the Board.

Action: SE to contact AS to discuss the financial information provided to the Board and the best way to do this.

Finally, KM wished to thank all involved in resolving the water leak to a tenant who had contacted him

9. Next meeting

Is to be held on Thursday 31 July 2025.

DRAFT

Our council housing vision

“We aim to provide affordable homes of the right type and quality to meet the housing needs of those who are unable to meet their own needs in the housing market now and in the future. We will work in partnership to support our tenants to prosper and improve their wellbeing and ensure neighbourhoods and communities are sustainable, safe, and pleasant.”

DRAFT