

18 JUNE 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 18 June 2025

- * Cllr Steve Clarke (Chairman)
- * Cllr Kate Crisell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

John Adams
* Hilary Brand
* Sean Cullen
* Richard Frampton

Councillors:

* Patrick Mballa
* Neville Penman
Neil Tungate
* Barry Rickman

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Steve Davies

Councillors:

Dan Poole

Also In Attendance:

Officers Attending:

Richard Knott, David Brown, Tim Davis, Paul Thomas, Sophie Tuffin, Amanda Wilson, Saqib Yasin, Lee Ellis and Daniel Reynafarje.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Tungate. Cllr Rickman was in attendance as a nominated substitute.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 March and 12 May 2025 were confirmed as correct records.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A member of the public, Mr Fox was present and addressed the panel under Minute Item 9.

7 TENANT REPRESENTATIVE ON THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

The Tenant Engagement Manager presented a report detailing the Social Housing Regulator's requirement for housing providers concerning transparency, influence

and accountability as part of the consumer standard. Within the standard it was noted that a registered provider must give tenants a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise landlord strategies, policies and services.

It was proposed that Mr Melvyn Utley be co-opted to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Upon invitation by the Chairman, Mr Utley thanked the Panel for the opportunity to represent the tenants and felt that as a tenant of the Council for forty-three years he would bring knowledge and expertise to the role of tenant representative. Mr Utley confirmed that he wished to help the Council and tenants be able to communicate with to each other better.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel supported and approved a tenant representative to be co-opted to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, as a non-voting member, for a period of one year, whereby a review would take place to ensure effectiveness.

8 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS

An overview was provided by the Strategic Director – Housing and Communities on the activities covering Public Space Protection Orders 1 and 2, enacted by the Council in July 2023.

A member asked about areas within the National Park, where the Council was unable to erect signage, and how members of the public would be informed of PSPOs. In response, it was confirmed that the consultation would provide an opportunity to start an awareness campaign, which would include social media, press, etc. In addition, the Council would be looking at alternative locations for a poster campaign via holiday lets, campsites, etc. to promote the New Forest code and respecting the beauty of the Forest. This proposal was welcomed by the Panel.

It was confirmed that the original intention of PSPOs was to educate the public, with a balance needed between promoting tourism but at the same time not making the experience of anyone visiting the Forest a negative one. Officers had been trained to engage with the public around education and a proportionate response. Should this engagement not lead to the activity stopping, fines would then be issued.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel supported that a public consultation be undertaken to evidence and support the renewal of the orders in their current form from 1 July 2026.

9 COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT

Mr John Fox, a Housing Tenant addressed the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and raised concern that despite completing stages 1 and 2 of the Council's complaints procedure, he'd been denied an opportunity to provide feedback on that process. A copy of the statement read out by Mr Fox, was attached.

The Strategic Director Housing and Communities thanked Mr Fox and confirmed that he would review the concerns raised and contact him personally to discuss the concerns.

The Service Manager – Legal and Information Governance presented the report detailing the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, draft self-assessments against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Codes and the governing body's response.

The report also outlined some of the key changes to member scrutiny of complaints following the Complaint Handling Codes from both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman taking effect on 1 April 2024.

It was confirmed that this was the first time that the annual complaints report had been brought to the Panel and this was due to providing increased scrutiny on the housing elements of the report, prior to the report being submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Members were requested to review section 6 of the report which dealt with complaints from tenants and provided a review of the number of complaints received, complaint findings, themes of complaints, the stages, timescales and some of the key headline data. Section 8 would cover tenant satisfaction measures. Section 9 detailed learning and provided examples of case studies where complaints had been used to drive service improvements and make positive change. Section 10 detailed Ombudsman decisions which had had been received. The annual report also included examples of where complaints had not been accepted and the reasons for this.

A Panel member asked whether there was a process for logging and managing complaints received by members. In response, it was confirmed that complaints would be passed through to the relevant department to work with the complainant to resolve the issue and that these complaints would not be separately recorded. Any complaint which escalated to a corporate complaint, would be captured within the main figures.

A member noted that there has been a 474% rise in complaints reported to the Housing Ombudsman for all landlords, concerning substandard living conditions between 2019-20 to 2024-25, so the Council's own increase was not out of step. In response, it was confirmed that there had been an increase in both corporate and housing complaints. This was potentially due to changes in complaint handling regarding transparency, accessibility and raising awareness of the process. An example was provided of using the Home Talk magazine to communicate the complaints process. Complaints regarding the Council to the Ombudsman remained relatively low and it was felt that this was due to the Council trying to resolve complaints at earlier stages, although complainants were always advised of their right to escalate a complaint.

It was noted that in the recording of complaints, they often had multiple themes and therefore Officers had to make a subjective judgement as to what the most prevalent theme was. One area was delays and missed appointments, which could be down to staff availability, general organisation, etc. This was being reviewed to try and reduce the incidences by monitoring recruitment and retention of staff and whether external pressures and planning in advance, would be able to mitigate those circumstances.

A Panel member felt that although there had been an increase in complaints, it was positive that the public and tenants felt confident that they could complain.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25.

10 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION ACT: PART 1: PROGRESS REPORT ON CONSUMER STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION

The Assistant Director – Housing presented a report which provided an update on the Council's progress in meeting the requirements of the Tenancy Standard and confirmed that all the main policies should be completed by the end of September 2025. It was also confirmed that there was an existing Tenancy Policy. However, it was dated 2017 and therefore needed to be revised.

A member asked what specific steps were being undertaken to enhance tenant engagement and transparency. In response, it was confirmed that restructures had been undertaken, along with a fully staffed tenant engagement team, awareness raising, training, culture change and tenant participation. The Council had Officers and members who cared about the tenants but that improvements could be made to more effective communication better. An improvement was also required in IT and data capture, due to the number of systems, which required upgrading in the repairs service. The identification of gaps would help to improve compliance with the Consumer Standards. The gaps identified to date related to policies which needed to be updated, rather than not health and safety issues.

A member raised whether officers were working with external partners in tenancy sustainment and preventing eviction. In response, it was confirmed that the new Anti-Social Behaviour and Tenancy Sustainment teams played a part in supporting tenants and support was provided to ensure that people could afford their tenancies before they moved in and making sure the allocations procedures were fair. This was resource intensive due to the increasing number of vulnerable people. The Council worked with the Tenants' Involvement Group and with partners, such as mental health services, the police, social services, children's services, etc.

It was confirmed that all 5,200 tenants had been contacted to ask if they were willing to provide data on themselves and their household. The return rate was around 30%. Customer facing staff were also asking tenants if their data needed to be updated. This would be an ongoing piece of data collection and integrity. It was hoped to be able to provide some initial reports by the end of the summer.

It was confirmed that other Councils' inspection judgements were monitored by Officers.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the Housing Department's compliance against meeting the Tenancy Standard as part of the preparedness for inspection and positive tenant outcomes and noted that the Tenancy Policy (2017) was currently being revised to address any gaps with compliance with the Tenancy Standard.

11 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION ACT PART 2: 2024/25 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURE PERFORMANCE

The Tenant Engagement Manager and the Tenant Representative presented the report on the Council's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) performance for 2024/25.

The TSM's were reportable to the Regulator of Social Housing and allowed the Council to check its performance but more importantly it enabled tenants to review the Council's performance and hold the Council to account. Specifically, the tenant perception survey had improved from the previous year and the safety and compliance internal measures was good. This was a recognition of the hard work that Officers had put into the housing services. Those measures also highlighted and offered opportunities for continuous improvement, particularly focussing on repairs, maintenance and complaints where it was recognised that improvements were needed. Tenants had stated that this accountability was key enabling them to influence the service. The increase in complaints should not be shied away from and showed the work which had been undertaken to make sure that tenants trusted the Council to be able to submit a complaint.

A member raised concern that those in the 25 to 34 years age bracket were the most dissatisfied tenants and questioned how officers ensure that they engage with the right people. In response, it was confirmed that the key was ensuring officers were visible and accessible, by visiting the estates and Hubs, alongside a well-established Tenant Group, which kept Officers informed. Coffee and conversation days were being created, along with community days, which were all advertised, along with formal and informal estate walkabouts. This built trust with the tenants.

A specific question was raised on dissatisfaction with mould or damp and the Panel was pleased to see a large feature in the winter edition of Home Talk, on its prevention. In response, it was confirmed a large piece of work was being undertaken on resident engagement and explaining how tenants could prevent mould or damp in their homes.

The Panel questioned the reasons for the 4% drop in well maintained homes. It was confirmed that there could be a number of reasons for this including damp and mould being a common theme. There was more work that could be undertaken around this as well as analysing repair timescale, etc.

The Tenant Representative felt that the route to engagement with younger tenants was via direct contact through walkabouts on estates and an example was provided of a recent event at Hounslow. Two tenants who had attended the event had recently become involved further. If tenants saw the Council in action, wanting to make improvements which tenants could respond to, then they would get involved. Members also needed to remember that there were a lot of satisfied residents and often they would not engage in matters.

It was confirmed that once work had been undertaken there was a process to check that the work had been completed and had resolved the issue.

Every complaint was handled in the same way, through the complaints process, with a defined timescale when a resident would be contacted.

The rise in anti-social behaviour complaints was noted to be due, in part, to the way reports were now robustly captured compared with last year.

It was confirmed that the terminology used in surveys was in a prescribed government format.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel reviewed this year's Tenant Satisfaction Measure results, to enable effective scrutiny of the housing service's performance and views of tenants in relation to the services they received.

12 HOUSING MAINTENANCE COMPLIANCE PERFORMANCE

The Service Manager – Housing Maintenance Programs and Services presented a report which provided the next scheduled update on housing compliance performance across a range of statutory safety requirements.

As a result of improved tenant satisfaction measure scores for areas like gas safety, asbestos management and water safety the Council's internal key performance targets would be increased and monitored through a series of digital dashboards to continue to drive forward improvements.

A member asked whether consideration had been given to the use of electric boilers. In response, it was confirmed that across the housing stock there was electric heating but it was generally air source pumps or night storage heaters. Currently, gas central heating was the preferred choice as it was the most affordable form of heating.

In addition, it was confirmed that the Council would be compliant with Awaab's Law ahead of its implementation date.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Maintenance Compliance Performance report was noted.

13 HOUSING LANDLORD STRATEGY

The Assistant Director – Housing provided an overview on the proposed Housing Landlord Strategy 2025-2030 which made sure that the Council was accountable and transparent in its delivery of the housing landlord services and its investment plans.

It was confirmed that the Council had the right people and systems in place in order to deliver the priorities in the Housing Landlord Strategy, although requirements of LGR needed to be factored in.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel supported the adoption of the draft Housing Landlord Strategy 2025-2030 presented at Appendix 1.
2. That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel delegated minor amendments to the Assistant Director – Housing in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness.
3. That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommend the draft Housing Landlord Strategy follows on for adoption to:
 - Cabinet – 6 August 2025
 - Public Consultation
 - EMT – proposed final version.
 - Cabinet – final sign-off.

4. That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel formally noted the agreed investment plans inclusive of the existing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget commitments as made public within this draft Housing Landlord Strategy and at Appendix 2.

14 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY PLAN

The Service Manager – Housing Strategy and Development provided an overview of the Affordable Housing Delivery Plan.

The overview included completed schemes, redeveloped Council land, delivery of Local Plan polices, Section 106 Units and the rise in building costs. Some significant achievements were highlighted. However, it was also confirmed that the Council had not been able to secure or deliver every opportunity, e.g. Hythe Police Station. Recent concerns in the national media surrounding shared ownership were also referenced, and members of the Panel were reassured that to date there had been no formal or ombudsman complaints related to NFDC shared ownership homes. Additional measures were being looked at to further reduce risk and to provide additional information.

It was confirmed that any defects which had been identified were being addressed by the contractor at the development at Moor Close, New Milton and that all Section 106 properties were being built to building regulations. Whilst some Section 106 homes were being built to exceed minimum building regulation standards, only Council commissioned schemes had so far been built to meet the proposed Future Homes standards

RESOLVED:

That the updated Housing Development Plan and the achievements to date were noted.

15 CORPORATE PLAN: KEY PERFORMANCE DATA QUARTER 4

An overview was provided by the Performance and Insight Manager and the Panel considered the Corporate Plan Key Performance Data for Quarter 4 covering the period January to March 2025.

Concern was raised that the number of people in emergency accommodation had not reduced as planned and this would have a significant impact on the Council's general fund. In response, it was stated that the figure was slightly under the target line over the past year. However, it did continue to present challenges and there had been investment in training and the recruitment of additional homelessness staff.

A Panel member questioned why exit interviews were optional. In response, it was confirmed that the Executive Management Team had raised this concern. Although all departing employees were offered the opportunity to participate in an exit interview, the uptake had been minimal. Consequently, the available data was limited to those individuals who choose to engage in the process. Based on the responses received, a significant proportion of exits were due to retirement.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the HR team would undertake a data collection exercise in collaboration with line managers, who were often aware of employees' destinations or other reasons for their departure from the organisation.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel considered and reviewed the Quarter 4 dashboard.

That the Panel considered and reviewed the refreshed targets for 2025/26.

16 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25

The Performance and Insight Manager provided an overview of the Corporate Plan: Annual Performance Report 2024/25.

The report was a strong account of the work carried out across the Council services.

The Panel expressed positive views on the Annual Performance Report.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel reviewed the Corporate Plan: Annual Performance Report 2024/25.

17 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Panel received updates from the Portfolio Holders.

The Portfolio Holder Community, Safety and Wellbeing provided an update on the following:

- Environmental and Regulation Food Safety Inspections Team had a busy start to the financial year inspecting the higher food risk businesses, carrying out annual inspections of caravan sites and renewing animal welfare licenses.
- The Operations Team had worked on event notifications and visiting sites to ensure events operated safely, had effective noise management in place and correct licences.
- Consultation on the Air Quality Strategy had closed on 5 May 2025 and Officers were reviewing the responses.
- The bathing season had started, and signage was in place at designated bathing beaches and at the River Avon at Fordingbridge.
- Introduction of a new Taxi Licencing Policy had gone well. When drivers renewed their private hire vehicle licences they were now required to have door signage on each of their rear passenger door panels to show the vehicle was licenced by the Council.
- The development of the new Cultural Strategy for the District continued, alongside working with partner organisations.
- Emergency Planning were continuing to work closely with Parish and Town Councils to help them prepare for any possible future adverse weather conditions.
- The promotion of community grants which could be used to build community resilience.

- Community Safety hosted and delivered a three-day weapons prevention training programme.
- Safer New Forest Community Engagement events had been held across the District.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness provided an update on the following:

- The opening of Wooldrige View, New Milton. This was a care home operated for Hampshire County Council which provided care, along with independent living.
- Attended a groundbreaking event at the Becton Centre, New Milton, with 27 flats that the District Council would have nomination rights to.
- The Salisbury Road, Totton site would provide eight temporary accommodation units, in addition to the six coming on stream in New Milton.
- Visited the shared ownership properties in Brockenhurst, which were located five minutes' walk from the railway station and ten minutes from the shops. They were stunning properties.

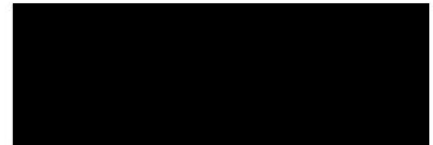
18 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN

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18th June 2025

To members of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Complaint reference: S/06013/25

My representation today directly addresses paragraph 8.17 on page 68 of your Item 6 public reports pack.

8.17 As a result of an action identified in the 2023/24 Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report:



- We have introduced a feedback form for complainants to complete follow receiving a stage 1 or stage 2 complaint response.

Despite completing Stages 1 and 2 of the council's complaints procedure, I have been denied the opportunity to provide feedback on that process, as referenced. Therefore I believe speaking to this panel is the only way I can highlight the unfair treatment and disability discrimination I have experienced in that complaints process.

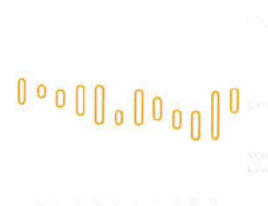
A recent application to install an EV home charger at no cost to the council was refused on unsubstantiated health and safety grounds.

This installation is essential. My Motability car replacement is due in January 2026, and Motability is encouraging customers to switch. Public charging is not economically viable, costing around 75 pence per kilowatt compared to my energy supplier's EV tariff of just 7 pence per kWh.

More critically, public chargers pose significant accessibility and safety issues for me. As someone with a severe walking disability, I am very unstable and prone to falling, especially in darkness, making using them a considerable personal risk.

My complaint's denials contain unsupported health

[Back](#) Walking Steadiness
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Very Low-Low ⓘ
Jul 2024 – Jul 2025



and safety assertions. No risk assessment has been undertaken by the council, an absence confirmed in my Stage 2 reply. I proactively offered mitigation measures recommended by the highway authority, but these have been ignored.

Furthermore, the council itself provided me with a Disabled Facilities Grant -funded hardstanding beyond my garden gate, after refusing a driveway application. Yet, the council denies that I have a designated parking place, ignoring their own provision.



Electric vehicle charging guidance for residents

My car is always parked within three feet of my garden gate, leaving no space for anyone to pass, thus negating any trip hazard assertion.

To assert risk without documented evidence, especially when contradicted by the council's own parking provision and highway authority recommendations, raises serious questions about fairness and prejudice. How can the decision possibly be fair?

Therefore, I respectfully ask the panel to thoroughly review the officers' decision, overturning the refusal and to grant me consent.



I cordially invite panel members to visit my home and see the site for yourselves, to understand why the officers' rationale for refusal was unfounded and therefore unjust.

By speaking to you today, I hope the council will choose to put things right before I raise this matter with the Housing Ombudsman. I am confident the Ombudsman will concur that the council's decision was prejudiced and fundamentally unfair.

John Fox