



Housing Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)
Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Ketzia Harper
Councillor Richard Livingstone
Councillor Jane Salmon
Ina Negoita (Co-opted Member)
Brendan O'Brien (Co-opted Member)

OFFICER
SUPPORT: Adam Wood

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emily Tester and Councillor Catherine Rose.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were no late items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillor Hargrove declared a pecuniary interest as tenant of a Housing Association property and gave his intention to recuse himself from Item 5.

Councillor Livingstone disclosed his employment as a Senior Caseworker for Miatta Fahnbulleh MP, making the disclosure for transparency given that the Housing Associations present would have separate, direct relationships with the MP.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2025 were approved.

5. REVIEW OF SOCIAL LANDLORD COMMUNICATIONS WITH RESIDENTS AND PARTNERS, AND SOCIAL LANDLORD PERFORMANCE

The Chair, Councillor Jason Ochere, provided background to the Item, noting that the Council had been working to develop collaboration with Housing Associations (HAs) including, going forward, via a Council-HA forum.

The Chair also clarified the Council's and HAs' roles and relationships to each other, noting that:

- as a local authority, Southwark set the Borough's housing strategy and managed the housing register as well as owning and managing many properties
- the majority of HAs were not-for-profit organisations, also owning and managing social and affordable homes let directly or through Southwark's choice-based lettings scheme
- HAs were independent from the Council and the Council was not responsible for how HAs operate.

The Chair then invited representatives of the Housing Associations to spend 5 to 7 minutes introducing themselves and to respond to the Commission's particular points of interest (previously emailed to the organisations). These included: HAs' approaches to complying with Awaab's Law; damp and mould; repairs; ASB and community safety; and service charges, among others.

The following Housing Association representatives attended and responded:

- Clarion Housing Association Limited: James Devonshire, Regional Director of Housing
- The Guinness Partnership Limited: Ben Podmore, Director of Operations (Repairs) & Sarah Sargent, Group Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods
- Hexagon Housing Association Limited: Sheron Carter, Chief Executive
- Hyde Housing Association Limited: Mark Batchelor, Property Services Director
- London & Quadrant Housing Trust: Adam Frame, Head of Housing Specialisms (ASB and community safety); Vicky Holland, Head of Healthy Homes; Bev Bennett, Head of Maintenance Services; & Lisa Price, Head of Customer Resolution
- Notting Hill Genesis: Aneka Bogle, Head of Operations & Neil Coils, Assistant Director of Operations

- Peabody Trust: Wells Chomutare, Managing Director (South London) & Eileen McGowan, Assistant Director of Repairs
- Southern Housing: Michael Edwards, Director of Reactive Repairs & Louise Palese, Director of Resident Experience
- Wandle Housing Association Limited: Francis Burrows, Executive Director of Customer and Operational Services

The HAs each presented data on key aspects of their organisation's performance as well as identifying current challenges and strategies for development – topics which were then explored in greater depth via members' questions.

In response to a Commission question asking how ward councillors could support residents in contacting the right personnel within Housing Association organisations, the HAs noted their dedicated elected member contact channels. The Chair asked for each HA to outline their escalation / elected member contact procedure. In general, this happened via dedicated email contacts for councillors to help with directing enquiries to the right person/team within the Housing Association. The Housing Associations would share these contact email addresses with the Commission after the meeting.

The Commission then asked about processes for dealing with damp and mould, and whether these tended to be caused more frequently by a building's structural issues or by overcrowding. The HAs noted:

- that improving ventilation together with relevant education for residents was key
- that both factors were important since overcrowding produced the excess moisture in the first place
- more, better data (e.g. from increased surveying) and technology (e.g. ventilation units which sensed the moisture levels of air they evacuated and others which ionized the air to kill mould spores) were becoming available and longer-term these would help with understanding how best to manage damp and mould
- that the Awaab's Law group in the G15 group of Housing Associations was a useful way to share best practice

The Chair then asked the HAs to share some of the persistent challenges they faced and their plans for resolving these. Some organisation-specific concerns were raised. However, the common challenge was balancing limited resources across competing areas of high needs. Frequently cited examples included the requirement to invest in cladding removal or other remediation works, whilst also meeting targets for repairs, addressing complaints or compliance with Awaab's Law. The pressures here impacted organisations' capacity elsewhere – for some this limited their ability to build new houses. To meet these challenges, the HAs often escalated operational issues collated at committee level to strategic management at Board level where priorities were monitored and adapted.

The Commission then asked whether there were differences in repair needs and complaints between socially rented and leasehold properties, and (if so) how these were managed.

Responses from the HAs noted that:

- processes for managing repairs and complaints were generally the same for socially rented and leasehold properties
- where there were differences in repair needs/complaints between tenure types, this tended not to be because Housing Associations managed repairs differently but because of other factors – for example, the high, multiple support needs of tenants in some cases meant they were experiencing significant levels of stress and reporting repairs may not be a priority for those customers relative to other challenges
- it wasn't always straightforward to compare repair needs of socially rented properties with leasehold properties because for some HAs, housing stock was mixed tenure
- they would be happy to supply any related data to the Commission following the meeting

In response to a Commission question about how the HAs could support the Council's work and, vice-versa, how the Council might support their activities, HAs noted:

- that coordinating actions and solutions between Housing Associations and other social landlords (including the Council) was sometimes a challenge in terms of resident satisfaction, ASB and the quality of neighbourhood life or realm more broadly
- that developing partnership working was key to solving the above challenges which lay outside the responsibility or influence of any one organisation
- that deeper, ongoing engagement with the Council would be helpful for improving outcomes for residents
- that facilitating communication and partnership working between officers in the Council and their equivalents in HAs would make their work more effective
- that continued discussion through, for example, the current meeting and the forum being developed by officers in the Housing Department, was particularly useful for enabling smaller HAs to take part in exchanging resources and knowledge
- that for Housing Associations to know how they could help and work supportively with the Council, it would help to know the challenges the Council is facing

The Commission then asked how it might help Housing Associations partner with developers to deliver social housing and also if it should look at anything in particular when reviewing planning applications to ensure the Council was approving proposals which might appeal to HAs.

The Housing Associations responded that:

- the Council could help by brokering and supporting relationships between HAs and developers so that opportunities for investment were more widely known
- that new development was a challenge for some HAs given the current financial context – the focus now lay in improving existing homes

In response to a Commission question exploring whether there were opportunities to improve the housing allocations system, the HAs identified:

- that managing transfers could be challenging given the lack of available housing
- that particularly for an HA where the Council had 100% of nominations, opportunities to free up new options within the system were limited
- that accelerating nominations (although complex) could help to speed up subsequent stages of the process
- that a downside of slow allocation and transfers was sometimes overcrowding with the knock-on effect of increased likelihood of damp and mould

The Chair then noted increasingly costly service charges for leaseholders as an issue which Councillors frequently encountered. He asked if the HAs could explain the increases and also whether if, in their opinions, it was correct that delays in auditing contributed to the increases.

In response, it was first pointed out that HAs could not subsidise leasehold properties in any form – if a valid management or works cost derived from a leasehold property, the HA was obliged to forward it to the leaseholder. In terms of substantive causes to increased charges, however, the Housing Associations identified the following as contributing:

- increasing regulation
- an imperfect insurance market where insurers had increased premiums significantly
- increases in wholesale fuel prices due to external shocks e.g. wars

It was also observed that, in some cases and particularly with shared ownership, communications had not provided clarity around the service charge increases. It was agreed that leaseholders having as much warning as possible of increases as well as the reasons driving them was very useful. Lastly, it was noted that detailed

breakdowns of service charges were made available by some social landlords and these could potentially serve as a model for others.

The Commission then focussed on HAs' relationships with contractors – in particular, how the HAs managed substandard performance around contractors' delays or their not turning up when expected and so frustrating residents. HAs noted:

- the wider context where – for those HAs relying on outsourced contractors – contractors were seeking to make maximum profits while HAs were looking for the best outcomes for residents. Aligning those interests (to the extent it was possible) required constant monitoring and work
- that a response to the above was to bring repair operations in-house, something which many HAs did and others were seeking to do although recruitment issues were challenging
- their work to support in-house operatives with health and wellbeing – a day's sickness meant 4 or 5 customers not getting their repairs or work done
- a range of measures (e.g. Right First Time), incentives and penalties to encourage contractor performance – many HAs were revising their procurement contracts so they had clearer KPIs and stronger penalties
- additional strategies to attempt to improve contractor performance e.g. procuring smaller contractors with more business with the HA encouraging better results, and co-locating repairs call handlers with repair planners so that information on delays or changes to appointments etc could be passed more easily between teams
- that when contractors appointed sub-contractors, communications around appointments could break down more easily so that text message updates about delays, for example, might not be received by the customer

The Chair thanked Housing Associations for their time and requested they supply the Commission, via follow-up email responses, with:

- information on how repair classification is designated and communicated to residents (e.g. what constitutes urgent, routine, and emergency repairs for each housing association) so that councillors can see what residents might expect for repairs service and support them accordingly
- their quality assurance procedures for ascertaining repairs had been carried out appropriately
- data on differences in repair needs or complaints between socially rented and leasehold properties and, if differences existed, how they were managed
- examples of how individual HAs could support Southwark Council's work and how Southwark Council might support theirs

6. COMMISSION DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Discussion focused on the process for reviewing draft recommendations and finalising these at the Commission's next meeting on 5 March 2026. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would forward a document with links to recordings of the various Commission discussions across the year's meetings. A pre-meeting could then be used to collate and refine the recommendations to be discussed and agreed on 5 March 2026 in addition to any arising from the discussions and interview with the Cabinet Member for Council Homes scheduled for the same meeting.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

The Commission discussed the content and arrangements planned for its 5 March meeting.

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would ask for written reports: (a) updating the Council's progress implementing the recommendations from reviews of the Canada Estate, Fair Street / Devon Mansions and Kirby Estate and from its own investigations; (b) on progress implementing The Good Landlord Plan; and (c) on the Council's work on Empty Homes, Voids and related issues.

The interview with the Cabinet Member for Council Homes, Councillor Portia Mwangangye, planned for the meeting, would therefore include discussion around the topics of the written reports, above, and on the Council's work supporting social landlord performance and communications (including the evidence and discussion heard this evening from Housing Associations).

Meeting ended at 10.05pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: