



Housing Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 5 March 2026 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)
Councillor Emily Tester (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sam Foster (Reserve)
Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Ketzia Harper
Andrew Eke (Co-opted Member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted Member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Portia Mwangangye (Cabinet Member for Council Homes)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Adam Wood

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Livingstone, Councillor McAsh and Councillor Rose, and Co-opted member Brendan O'Brien.

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

There were no urgent items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillors Harper and Tester disclosed interests as Council leaseholders. Councillor Harper also noted that Item 5 included a report on Voids and referenced the Aylesbury Estate where she lived.

Andrew Eke disclosed an interest as a resident of the Tustin Estate.

Ina Negoita disclosed an interest as a resident of Devon Mansions.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2026 were approved as a correct record.

5. INTERVIEW WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COUNCIL HOMES

The Chair invited Councillor Mwangangye (Cabinet Member for Council Homes) and Officers Hakeem Osinaike (Strategic Director of Housing), Ryan Collymore (Director of Repairs and Maintenance), Paul Murtagh (Design and Delivery Manager), Abi Oguntokun (Director of Landlord Services) and Candida Thompson (Director of Housing Needs and Support) to start the interview by summarising the five accompanying reports and key aspects of the portfolio.

Councillor Mwangangye informed the Commission that in respect of the Fair Street/Devon Mansions, Canada and Kirby Estates QHIP Major Works Projects:

- to date, 27 of the 36 recommendations had been implemented and completed
- resident panels had been appointed to help resolve issues as these arose
- a management action plan was in place with incompletely implemented recommendations having been assigned dates for expected completion

In respect of Voids, Councillor Mwangangye reported that:

- only void council homes came under the Cabinet Member for Council Homes portfolio – those relating to private homes or as empty homes related to homelessness were the remit of the Cabinet Member for New Homes & Sustainable Development
- private sector empty homes were managed and, in some cases brought into the council's supply of housing through, for example, compulsory purchase orders, empty dwelling management orders, and loan funding (with matched funding from owners)
- Southwark had high levels of empty homes as a result of estate regeneration, new builds (where properties were waiting sign-off from surveyors), buildings awaiting demolition (e.g. Ledbury and Marie Curie) and being situated in London where homes were sometimes left empty by property developers and private owners
- to help with homelessness and rough sleeping, suitable properties were made available where possible – currently around 85% of rough sleepers

- were housed in appropriate long-term accommodation
- empty homes were being brought back into use for homeless families
- contractors had been appointed to strengthen existing provision with work underway on the Aylesbury Estate

Regarding downsizing, Councillor Mwangangye reported that:

- the Older People Strategy passed earlier this year detailed the incentives in place to encourage larger properties being made available to families

On *The Good Landlord Plan*, Councillor Mwangangye informed the Commission that:

- resident boards had been launched
- residents would be increasingly involved in procurement and decision-making as with the pilot at Chilton Grove where a resident was sitting on the procurement panel appointing a contractor

The Chair invited the Commission to question the Cabinet Member and Officers – questions included:

- the sum of loan funding for bringing private homes into Council use
- whether downsizing from a 3-bedroom property to 2 conferred the same advantages (in terms of Banding) as downsizing to a 1-bedroom property
- what a temporary accommodation void was
- whether the team managing voids on the Aylesbury Estate sat outside of the main voids service and, if so, the extent to which lessons learned there could be generalised to the wider voids service
- whether Plentific had been used to procure the four contractors
- whether benchmarking data was available to compare Southwark's council housing voids performance with that of other large, local authority landlords
- the value for money guiding the decision to use Taplow for temporary accommodation
- how the new Voids Manager would employ the necessary Council resources
- whether it might be better that residents living in temporary accommodation-assigned Council properties scheduled for demolition in the long-term be offered secure tenancies
- what plans the Council had to deal with upcoming regulation e.g. minimum energy efficiency standards as part of its work on voids

Responding to Commission questions, Councillor Mwangangye and Officers noted that:

- loan funding of £1.1million together with matched funding from building owners would be used to refurbish empty private homes for subsequent leasing to the Council
- temporary accommodation voids were empty properties identified for use as temporary accommodation
- on the Aylesbury Estate, voids would be used for temporary accommodation although they fell into different categories – those in blocks which would not be brought back into use and would be demolished; those in other blocks with different phases or destinations of development; those in Taplow block which had been decanted following identification for demolition and which would now, subject to permission from the Building Safety Regulator, be refurbished and re-let as temporary accommodation
- the Aylesbury Estate represented a special case in terms of voids given the high number of voids there and their context (as opposed to voids generally which occurred in a random fashion as part of the process of housing turnover)
- the team currently working on voids on the Aylesbury Estate was the Council's DLO – this would soon be complemented by additional teams appointed following a Southwark Construction review of the voids management
- the Council's preference was to deliver around 90% of voids work through its DLO and use external contractors only when capacity was needed
- one lesson learned to speed up delays with voids was to have contractors deal with voids as a whole instead of having separate, specialist contractors managing single component parts/systems of the building (e.g. one contractor focusing on electrics, another on plumbing etc)
- four contractors had been brought in to complement the Council's own DLO voids team – these would focus on the Aylesbury Estate and the Taplow block, and the particular and urgent needs there
- Plentific had not been used to procure the above contractors; a pilot was underway with approximately 11 voids being offered on the Plentific market platform
- while benchmarking data of the kind requested existed, it was not available to hand although the Commission was informed that a “good” benchmark was for voids to be around 1% of total housing stock; Southwark's was currently closer to 2%
- current median turnaround times in London were 40 days for minor voids (i.e. those not requiring roof repairs, new kitchens, new bathrooms or similar, significant interventions) and 90 days for major voids
- Southwark was not yet consistently meeting these informal targets
- there were no statutory targets for void turnaround; the aim was first to reach the London median
- value for money had been assessed for the Taplow block – even though it would eventually be demolished and required refurbishing, the rent collected and current expenditure (often very expensive) on temporary accommodation elsewhere meant this was the best course of action
- when properties were offered under secure tenancies, they needed to be let

- through the allocations policy (i.e. be publicised and have bids invited)
- tenants should receive the same service whether in temporary accommodation or if they had secure tenancies
- offering secure tenancies to residents of properties scheduled for demolition could be misleading to residents
- a Voids Manager was being recruited – they would have their own staff and be able to call on wider resources to deliver on the voids process
- in the short-term, additional resources would increase capacity and help to reduce the backlog in voids whilst the longer-term changes (including the Voids Manager, indicated above, who would manage the strategic delivery of void turnaround as an end-to-end process) would make future work more efficient and the service would be happy to report on this once the Voids Manager had been appointed and had had time to improve practices
- in terms of meeting upcoming regulation such as minimum energy efficiency standards, findings from the ongoing Stock Condition Survey would inform future planning as to how best to comply with regulation – whether through a specific programme of works or by tackling voids as and when they presented

The Chair then moved to Commission questions on the progress implementing recommendations on Fair Street/Devon Mansions, Canada and Kirby Estates QHIP Major Works Projects including:

- whether the target dates, where indicated, were realistic
- whether residents were being kept abreast of targeted deadlines and revisions to these
- what the council was doing in response to Recommendation 8 of the Management Action Plan (incentives to consultants to reduce costs of contracts) and what would have happened by the end of March
- how regular communication by officers as to progress/stalling of implementation activities could help to build trust between parties (relating to Recommendation 21 of the Management Action Plan – conduct of TRA members and officers)

Officers responded, noting that:

- target dates were realistic and, if revisions were necessary, reasons why were given
- in some cases e.g. with works on Devon Mansions, there had been very large dumps of contractor work logs and other information and this was taking a long time to work through
- a newsletter had been sent to residents in October informing them of the works planned and finishing dates, and meetings were planned with residents to provide updates directly
- consultants were now managed more directly through KPIs and were paid a

fee instead of a percentage of the contract value

- the department did need to improve its communication with residents on updates to projects – with the new approach on the Consort Estate, this was happening via regular meetings with residents, leaseholders and tenants

The Chair then invited the Commission to explore *The Good Landlord Plan* and updates. Questions were asked on:

- how the Resident Engagement Strategy was developing
- whether the Stock Condition Survey was on track
- what the status of residents sitting on boards was – whether council staff or volunteers
- what developments might be communicated regarding the Abbeyfield Estate on timescales for regeneration and when decisions would be taken on how regeneration would be carried out
- whether the proportion of homes judged to be decent in initial findings of the Stock Condition Survey matched expectations
- whether Plentific was costing as expected, if there were any unexpected issues and if Officers were satisfied with it
- whether findings from the Stock Condition Survey would be shared with residents including at an individual property level

Officers responded, noting that:

- on the Resident Engagement Strategy, a training provider had been commissioned to support the development of the recently launched boards and a resident-friendly version of the strategy was in development
- also on the Resident Engagement Strategy, where focus groups of residents provided recommendations, they were fed back to and so kept informed on how implementation of the recommendation was progressing
- the target for the Stock Condition Survey internals was 20% by the end of March – work was ahead of target
- residents on the boards set up as part of the Resident Engagement Strategy and *The Good Landlord Plan* were not council staff but paid volunteers, paid in recognition of their time
- from an upcoming meeting between Councillors Mwangangye and Dennis, and a subsequent Cabinet paper, more information on how Abbeyfield Estate regeneration might take place would be shared with the Commission
- prior to the Stock Condition Survey, 74% of the Council's homes were estimated to meet the decent homes standard – the current, partially completed stock condition survey suggested 88% decency
- use of Plentific had started in November and there was not currently enough detail to analyse costs although the increased visibility of contractor performance through indicators such as *Right First Time*, *First Time Fix Rate* and *Appointments Made and Kept* showed quite good or good

performance

- once the Stock Condition Survey had covered 40% of properties, an asset management strategy would be developed with residents invited to consider how money should be spent on the issues identified
- the purpose of the Stock Condition Survey was to inform investment decisions regarding the maintenance of the Council's housing stock, not to provide individual, household-level feedback on the state of a particular property

6. COMMISSION DISCUSSION OF DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

The Commission discussed the recommendations it might make to Cabinet as a result of its scrutiny work over the previous three meetings and the meeting underway. A draft report containing some potential recommendations had been provided to members of the Commission and, following discussion and amendment of these, a definitive list of recommendations was formulated.

AGREED:

That the Commission's Scrutiny Report be sent to Cabinet.

7. CABINET RESPONSES TO THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION'S "OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF THE CANADA ESTATE 2017/18, FAIR STREET / DEVON MANSIONS 2018/19 AND KIRBY ESTATE 2028/19 QHIP MAJOR WORKS PROJECTS" REPORT

This item was taken at the end of Item 5 Interview with the Cabinet Member for Council Homes.

NOTED:

Cabinet's responses to the Commission's recommendations contained in the report "Outcome of the Review of the Canada Estate 2017/18, Fair Street / Devon Mansions 2018/19 and Kirby Estate 2028/19 QHIP Major Works Projects"

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

This was the final meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Commission for this municipal year.

NOTED:

The work programme for the 2025-2026 year.

Meeting ended at 10:15pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: