Housing Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 14 July 2026 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Hellen Benavides (Chair)
Councillor Pascale Mitchell (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Andy Bates
Councillor Stephanie Cryan
Councillor Felix Hamer
Councillor Leigh Richman
Councillor Janice White
Andrew Eke (Co-opted Member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted Member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Reginald Popoola (Executive Member for Council Homes)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Adam Wood

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Co-opted Member Brendan O'Brien.

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

There were no disclosures.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2026 were noted.

5. PROGRESS ON THE GOOD LANDLORD PLAN

The Chair introduced the item, thanking officers for the report which the Commission had received, *Good Landlord Plan Progress Update*, and accompanying *Financial Appendix*.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Council Homes, Councillor Reginald Popoola, to communicate the administration's priorities and add any comments to the report. Alongside Councillor Popoola were senior officers introducing the report: Hakeem Osinaike (Strategic Director of Housing), Ryan Collymore (Director of Repairs and Maintenance), Abi Oguntokun (Director of Landlord Services), Candida Thompson (Director of Housing Needs and Support) and Dominic Cain (Director of Customer and Exchequer).

Councillor Popoola spoke first, outline the Joint Administration's three priorities: repairs (in particular, getting the right information to get the work done first time); reducing the number of Voids; and rebuilding trust with residents.

Officers then focused on the report. Hakeem Osinaike spoke first to thank the Commission for requesting the report and the invitation to address members, adding that work had progressed and discussions with the Regulator for Social Housing were now focused on moving to C2 from an initial C3 (bordering C4) judgement. Hakeem reaffirmed the Council's commitment to becoming a good landlord and acknowledged the work needed to address the three priorities outlined by Councillor Popoola. The response from residents was a part of the work – responses from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey over the last three years showed increased resident recognition of improving services. Hakeem then passed to officers for summary updates relating to their areas of responsibility.

Abi Oguntokun discussed the work carried out in Landlord Services including:

- redesigning the estate inspection process with residents and stakeholders through a focus group
- using data and reporting tools, including Fix My Street, to target resources on waste and environmental issues
- continuing the programme of inspections and repairs to improve the safety and accessibility of estates' play areas
- implementing and embedding the revised anti-social behaviour procedure
- strengthening oversight of ASB risk assessment processes and system coding

- allocating additional resources to reduce and clear communal repair issues on estates
- progressing waste and environmental improvement work
- completing ongoing play area works
- implementing the Resident Engagement Strategy approved in December
- continuing training for resident board members so they can scrutinise services, challenge performance and support strategic decision-making
- establishing a new resident advisory panel to strengthen resident influence at a strategic level
- improving “You said, We did” feedback to close the communication loop with residents

Ryan Collymore then focused on Better Homes and Better Repairs outlining the work undertaken. This included:

- improving compliance measures and setting up a project to increase the likelihood of accessing properties (a key issue was gaining access to undertake works needed)
- increasing electrical testing to 88%
- using stock condition survey results to shape the Council Housing Investment Strategy due to go to Executive in December – this was currently showing an estimated decency rate of 92%
- improving emergency and non-emergency repairs
- strengthening resident communication
- progressing the Voids Improvement Programme now underway
- consulting residents on the Repairs Policy before it being considered at September Executive

Dominic Cain explained the progress in Better Customer Service including:

- reducing overdue stage 2 complaints, aiming to clear the backlog by September
- rolling out customer service training to all operatives in the contact centre
- improving repairs diagnosis at the first point of contact
- strengthening quality assurance and service improvement in the contact centre
- providing staff with better tools to resolve enquiries first time
- improving online access to service charge information
- managing contact centre resources flexibly to maintain reasonable waiting times

Candida Thompson referenced progress in the Better Customer Service ‘pillar’ of work and Housing Needs and Support. These included:

- maintaining faster stage 1 complaint response times and preventing new backlogs - stage one complaints were at their highest in May 2025 with over 740 complaints in the backlog, since reduced to zero in September 2025

and maintained at zero since then
- embedding quality assurance to identify trends and root causes, and help teams learn and improve
- reviewing the casework system to track complaint actions and resolutions so that stage one complaints are not escalated to stage two
- expanding face-to-face homelessness advice through Bournemouth Road and family hubs (in Peckham and Bermondsey) including through collaboration with Social Care
- developing a new governance, assurance and performance framework to align resident priorities, regulatory requirements and the Council's outcomes including work mentioned setting up a resident advisory panel to strengthen resident-led scrutiny

Hakeem reported the progress made on new homes despite pressures from construction costs and borrowing rates. New ways of working would include partnerships with developers. Lastly, Hakeem addressed the need for estate renewal and the work being undertaken to bring older homes up to current building safety regulations.

The Chair then invited Commission members to ask officers and the Executive Member questions – a summary of these (and responses) is listed below, grouped by theme when appropriate.

Questions relating to Finance explored:
- HRA sustainability given the potential for industrial action, new costs emerging from the Stock Condition Survey and/or implementing the second stage of Awaab's Law
- detail regarding the services or activities which would be reduced to fund improvements to Housing's processes and IT, or other spend
- how contract management, voids, new-build oversight and frontline staff would be adequately resourced
- why HRA income was projected to rise by only 3.2% despite rent certainty and rent convergence changes
- the financial impact on the Council of heat network regulation requirements
- the proportion of spending which was statutory

Officers responded, noting that:
- statutory obligations remained the first priority
- the Stock Condition Survey indicated over 90% of homes were currently considered decent, higher than previously estimated – although this was based on data collected from 30% of Southwark homes, the sampling had been selected to be representative of the total population of homes
- high-rise building safety works remained a significant financial risk
- the Plan and its activities relating to frontline staff, Voids, IT projects etc were funded although the HRA was being managed flexibly so that

investment could be redirected if new issues emerged (from the Stock Condition Survey, for example)
- the Council, through various boards, worked with residents to explore how priorities might be ordered (albeit with health and safety the most important of these)
- the Department would share more detailed breakdowns of future savings with the Commission – there had been reductions in some areas, e.g. the kitchens and bathrooms programs, to achieve the work required under other parts of the HRA especially when these were statutory or involved health and safety, although most savings were achieved through greater efficiencies rather than stopping providing services
- the council had been preparing for additional Awaab's Law requirements and had a Damp and Mould team in place to deal with obligations – work was not complete but the gaps needing work were known
- contingency plans existed for industrial action – in the event of strikes, services for residents would continue as best they could
- the focus was on meeting health and safety obligations first, then exploring what services, processes or initiatives might be affordable with teams expected to achieve efficiency savings rather than simply stopping services
- rental income growth was outstripped by inflationary cost increases and the gap was widening, exacerbated by HRAs having to pay for new, additional costs such as subscriptions to regulatory bodies

In response to a question on what the council was doing about St James Estate residents facing rent increases and potential eviction, the Executive Member for Council Homes cited his meetings with key personnel and the TRA in support of the Council's work preventing the eviction of approximately 180 households. He also noted the Council was using multiple services to support affected households and that upcoming meetings had been planned for the Leader to meet with residents.

To questions regarding the Voids programme, Ryan responded noting that:
- a 'One Voids' team coming under one director (Ryan) was being re-established
- a key-to-key process would oversee the keys being obtained from the resident services officers and those keys then being issued to lettings officers
- challenges around key management, meters and pest control (among others) were now understood and the next few months would be used to develop the service
- he was confident about the Council's ability to deliver the changes needed because they had a much clearer understanding of the issues and how these could be overcome, and also because in the future oversight would focus on the key-to-key voids process, rather than on each team's contribution
- if the Commission wanted, it would be possible to provide regular updates

on Voids including descriptions of the key issues, the number of voids and their status
- future reporting on Voids could include days for completion although this may show an increase before a reduction as the backlog would 'inflate' the average times required

In response to a question about new homes progress, costs and value, Hakeem responded that:
- 3,000 new homes had been built of which 800 were on site
- the money funding the new homes came from HRA borrowing, the GLA's Affordable Housing Grant, Right to Buy receipts, and Section 106 receipts
- value for money would be determined by the people living in the homes – with 23,000 households on the waiting list and over 4,000 households in temporary accommodation, 3,000 new homes was a small but important step

On potential fatigue with resident engagement, Abi noted that:
- the Resident Engagement Strategy had tried to avoid this through widening the pool of residents involved (e.g. by limiting board representation to unique residents so that the same people were not assigned multiple roles)
- additional methods had been employed to encourage a wider pool of residents engaging and to limit the impact of engaging e.g. through arranging meetings at more convenient times, door-knocking in areas with low representation and targeting younger people (a currently underrepresented group)

Councillor Popoola added that some groups were underrepresented in resident engagement (especially regarding age, race and LGBTQ status) and this created challenges for policy development and, ultimately, for building trust. He noted therefore, the strategy's importance for increasing and broadening resident representation and engagement.

Asked what success would look like after one year and after four years of the administration, Councillor Popoola responded that:
- success after one year would include reducing voids and increasing meaningful resident participation
- longer-term success would mean better repair performance, cleaner estates, a stronger HRA, and improvement in the council's C3 rating

Responding to why Executive Reports on estate regeneration, on DPAs, and on allocations policy had been removed from the forward plan:
- Councillor Popoola wanted more time for the allocations policy to focus closely on need
- Hakeem said he we would find out why reports on estate regeneration and

DPAs had been moved

On whether the removal of housing list-based incentives for engaging with the Council might be reconsidered, officers responded that the new policy (still to go before the Executive) focused on those with the greatest need for housing keeping contributions in the form of voluntary work or engagement as separate activities.

To a question on staff wellbeing and support, including how staff might be feeling and how they could be helped to feel more empowered to do their jobs, officers responded that:

- they were aware of workload pressures and that additional staff recruitment and service redesign were planned which would help increase capacity
- in terms of listening and supporting staff to deliver, a service-wide away day had helped and feedback from staff was being used to identify and respond to challenges
- for repairs, where work was not routed through the Council's own staff operatives and contractors were instead used, these contractors received training on Southwark's ways of working and expectations
- staff survey feedback was used to create action plans and address issues staff experienced

On whether incentives and recognition schemes such as an estate or area-based competition could improve outcomes, officers noted that similar ideas had been used before and could be effective. £100,000 was allocated for various rewards and incentives including a payment of £100 to volunteers for participating in board meetings.

When asked about information-sharing between RSOs and ward councillors, Councillor Popoola responded that RSOs were keen to provide updates, including on meetings which ward councillors were unable to attend. Part of building trust was the development of excellent relationships between officers, ward councillors and TRAs so that issues could be resolved quickly and effectively. Officers also noted that in the new estate inspection process, ward councillors would be invited to estate inspections and would be forwarded copies of Estate Inspection Reports.

To a question on how Southwark's housing staffing levels compared with those of councils graded C1 by the Regulator of Social Housing, and relatedly, how – in the absence of additional funds – resources could be switched to provide the major works contract management needed to gain a higher grading, officers responded that:

- the department was not under-resourced and staffing levels were not hindering high quality services – instead, more efficient ways of working were necessary

Additional questions and comments included:

- whether more specific data illustrating projections and trajectories of strategy outcomes of strategies could be included in future reporting
- whether more reference could be made to street properties or properties in general as the commonly used term ‘estates’ did not capture the locations of all the Council’s housing
- whether call centre staff – in the main brilliant – could be reminded not to put voicemail on or to cut people off

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2026-2027

The Chair invited Commission members to propose scrutiny topics for potential inclusion in the 2026-2027 work programme. The topics suggested included:

- pre-scrutiny of the Council Housing Investment Programme, housing-related finances including HRA sustainability
- ongoing progress updates on Voids
- Allocations policy
- estate maintenance – a deep dive to include residents and understand their concerns but also to share good practice across the estates and potentially also contribute to efficiency of service work
- Repairs, damp and mould review
- estate management review
- resident engagement and governance
- readiness for re-inspection by the regulator
- Council engagement with TMOs
- temporary accommodation
- lifts and doors
- a 1-year review of Plentific (e.g. in early 2027) including comparison of costs and standard of work e.g. DLO vs contracted works
- review of how staffing resources are deployed via (1) benchmarking – internally with other Council departments and (2) externally, what other Councils are doing but with additional focus on staff welfare and the pressure RSOs are under as their workload assumes new aspects of the GLP (for example)
- review of RSO satisfaction and wellbeing – exploring potential of a Service Level Agreement; understanding the challenges they face perhaps through on-site scrutiny work or by inviting them to Scrutiny
- “Follow a complaint” – the journey from the moment it is logged to its resolution
- Major Works programmes including Chilton Grove, Canada Estate, Devon Mansions, Kirby Estate and Arica House
- broaden scrutiny methods and/or incorporate more ways for residents to undertake scrutiny – particularly regarding place-based, resident-focused

issues, TRA work etc

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions.

Meeting ended at 9:45pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: