

**Minutes of a meeting of the  
Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the  
Scrutiny Committee)  
on Thursday 6 March 2025**

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**Committee members present:**

Councillor Diggins (Chair)

Councillor Jupp

Councillor Mundy

Councillor Rawle

Councillor Stares

Councillor Linda Smith

**Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Nerys Parry, Director of Housing

Katherine Mayes, Customer Care and Complaints Manager

James Pickering, Welfare Reform Manager

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

Courtney Bennett, Regulatory Services Manager

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Uswah Khan, Committee and Member Services Officer

**34. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Qayyum.

**35. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**36. Chair's Announcements**

None.

**37. Selective Licensing Implementation Update - Year 2**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, and Courtney Bennett, Regulatory Services Manager were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Rawle asked about the inspection targets for year 3 and 4 of the scheme and how it could grow. The Regulatory Services Manager responded that, over a 5-year period, 60% of properties would be inspected, with a target of 400 inspections by the end of the scheme, focusing particularly on priority 1 properties.

Councillor Rawle also questioned the priority list for housing inspections and the progress of the tenant union meetings. The Regulatory Services Manager clarified that houses ranked 5 would not be reviewed, and inspections would focus on properties with a high likelihood of issues. She added that tenant campaigns, set for year 3 (the current year), would be launched next month, and efforts were being made to reach out to other groups.

Councillor Diggins asked if there had been an increase in reports that led to inspections. The Regulatory Services Manager responded that while this data wasn't included in the report, it could be reviewed for Councillors outside of the meeting.

Councillor Rawle inquired about a realistic timeframe for clearing the backlog, specifically asking if 16 weeks was a reasonable target. The Regulatory Services Manager confirmed that 16 weeks would help clear the backlog and said she would verify and follow up on this. Councillor Smith added that, since the scheme was only authorised for 5 years, they had already started considering applying for a renewal. She mentioned that they were lobbying the government to extend the duration of the licensing scheme.

Councillor Rawle raised concerns about managing capacity for the second round and asked about the lobbying efforts currently underway. She wanted to know when to focus on the capacity needed to handle the next round of administrative work for scheme renewal and how this may impact the current enforcement efforts. The Regulatory Services Manager explained that the application team, which handles renewals, was separate from the inspection team, so inspections wouldn't be affected. The application team had a flexible staffing structure that could be adjusted as needed. Regarding the scheme's length, the Manager noted that the Renters' Right bill, currently going through Parliament, included provisions that could benefit enforcement, local authorities, tenants and citizens.

Councillor Mundy asked if there were any preferred landlords or if it was too early to tell. He also asked if the scheme was expected to have a positive impact on reducing the number of people needing to use the housing register, and how progress would be tracked. Councillor Smith responded that there were no preferred landlords, as the standard was a 5-year license unless a landlord failed to meet the required thresholds. Councillor Mundy further asked how many landlords were on a reduce timescale license due to concerns. The Regulatory Services Manager stated that she didn't have the exact data but could obtain it. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager added that he wasn't sure either but would check if there had been an increase in the number of people on the housing register due to landlords with higher bans.

Councillor Diggins raised a point about landlord intervention, asking how follow-ups were managed to ensure landlords were taking the necessary actions. The Regulatory Services Manager explained that follow-up actions were part of the enforcement process and guided by corporate enforcement policies. While there might be times where hazard awareness needs to be addressed, the primary goal was to ensure action was taken, whether through improvement notices or schedule of works.

The Panel agreed to make the following recommendation:

1. Compile data from proactive visits to look at the condition of the private housing stock in Oxford.
2. Prioritise the media campaign, track tenant engagement and review the success of the campaign.

*The Regulatory Services Manager left the meeting.*

### **38. Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing and Kat Mayes Customer Care & Complaints Manager were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Diggins asked if there was a proactive approach to complaints and whether this would positively contribute to residents feeling like they were being listened to. The Customer Care & Complaints Manager responded that there was always the consideration of whether they were communicating their services effectively and managing expectations. She added that they were always trying to provide a next step, and if they could demonstrate to people that they were making progress, it would be a positive move. This was something they hoped to prioritise.

Councillor Diggins inquired if there was a demand from residents for this approach, or if it would be worthwhile to move to a model where 'you complained, actions were taken'. She further asked why they stuck with the terms upheld and not upheld. The Customer Care & Complaints Manager explained that while they did not explicitly define upheld and not upheld, they still used those terms so that residents would have an expectation of a clear outcome. However, they were moving away from these terms, and it was something they were still referring to, though there was a risk of being penalised unless they found another way to use the terminology.

Councillor Diggins raised concerns about the complexity of MRC and the governing body and asked whether there was a way to streamline or redefine the process. She also asked if Cabinet should see the reports. The Customer Care & Complaints Manager responded that Cabinet received the annual complaints handling and services improvement report, which was published alongside a statement from the governing body. Ombudsman had recently confirmed that they considered Cabinet to be the governing body. The Customer Care & Complaints Manager added that the term regularly used had not been defined, so they hadn't yet worked out the best mechanism for this.

Councillor Diggins then asked if feedback had been provided to housing Ombudsman regarding the complexity of the regulations and how difficult they were for Councils to follow. The Director of Housing acknowledged that there was a level of complexity for local authorities. Fitting into regulatory framework in a complaint manner had been challenging, but it was necessary to find a clear and effective way to address this.

The Director suggested a recommendation for part of their developing work in the tenant reset space: they hoped to form a group of residents who would review the complaints, and the structures around tenant involvement would eventually feed into a tenant leaseholder board.

The Panel agreed to make the following recommendation:

1. Develop work on the tenant involvement board and the frequency of reporting.

### **39. Building Safety and Compliance**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager, and Aidan Heed, Senior Surveyor (Interim) HRA, were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Diggins asked for clarification on whether they were awaiting confirmation of responsibility, particularly if that was due to shared ownership and responsibility. The Director of Housing responded that she would look into it further.

Councillor Diggins inquired about the mould and damp issues, asking if the downloaded app was more beneficial to the company than the tenants. The Director of Housing explained that when they address damp and mould issues, they are required to install smart links to monitor the effectiveness of the work and to track whether the damp and mould return. She emphasised that the app was primarily for the company's use in monitoring the property.

Councillor Diggins asked about the timescale for achieving compliance with the FRA inspection actions. The Director of Housing stated that she did not have sufficient clarity at the moment, but assured the Councillors that it was a priority to resolve this for the company.

Councillor Diggins followed up on the target for actions, asking whether the goal was to have fire risk actions due but not overdue. The Director of Housing confirmed that this was the ideal target. Councillor Diggins then asked about Q3, noting that around 50% of actions were overdue, and whether that would change. The Director of Housing confirmed that this would improve in Q4.

The Director of Housing stated she would provide a follow up report to the panel next time.

### **40. Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager and James Pickering, Homelessness Prevention Manager, were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Diggins asked whether the reduction in the number of households with children in hotels over the past 6 weeks was a direct result of the mitigation measures implemented. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager explained that they had adopted a highly focused approach for families, holding weekly meetings with both the management team and frontline staff. He added that during these meetings, they reviewed every family in the hotels, going through the list line by line to ensure they

were moved out as quickly as possible. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager said that while it was difficult to measure the effectiveness of the prevention measures in terms of stopping families from becoming homeless, he noted that they had seen positive results in terms of outcomes.

Councillor Diggins then inquired about the impact of allocating 25-40% of available social housing to homeless prevention and whether this had any knock-on effects. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager said it was having an effect, as there was never enough social housing, given the high demand in Oxford. He explained that in line with statutory obligations, they had increased the percentage of homes reserved for the homeless list facilitate moving families out of hotels. This meant fewer homes were available for the general register, so they had to carefully manage this balance, which they were managing at the moment.

Councillor Diggins asked about the pressures posed by asylum seekers in Oxford and whether this would affect the decision-making process on applications or continue to be an ongoing challenge. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager responded that it was difficult to predict but noted that the government had extended the notice period for hotels, providing more time to carry out prevention work. He mentioned that they had an officer dedicated to handling evictions from the hotels as part of the homelessness efforts, and they commissioned services to support this. Councillor Smith added that the increased rate of processing since June had increased pressure on the Council, resulting in a faster pace of decision-making and creating a further knock-on effect.

#### **41. Housing complaint case to Ombudsman**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Director of Housing, Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager and James Pickering, Homelessness Prevention Manager, were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

Councillor Diggins asked is there was anything that could come out of the situation that might lead to a rethinking of the service levels, particularly in how to approach certain areas to ensure things were working properly. The Homelessness Prevention Manager explained that since covid, they had revamped the processes that were officer-lead. The customer experience had been redefined, now driven by expertise in the options officer, which allowed for more engagement and quicker decision-making. All manual processes had been automated and secured within systems, effectively eliminating the risk of lost forms. They had also increased training for new staff, which had been challenging, but their recruitment efforts had paid off. With top training in place for officers, the improvements were reflected in performance figures, showing positive progress.

#### **42. Notes of the previous meeting**

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 and the extraordinary meeting on 27 November as a true and accurate record.

### **43. Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan**

The Panel noted the Committee’s current work plan.

### **44. Report back on recommendations**

The Panel noted that, at its meetings on 13 November 2024 and 11 December 2024, Cabinet considered the following reports from the Housing and Homelessness Panel and made responses to the recommendations:

- Furnished Tenancy Scheme
- HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5 Year Investment Programme
- Tenancy Engagement and Management Cabinet’s responses to recommendations were presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its meetings on 2 December 2024 and 14 January 2025 for noting.

The Panel noted Cabinet’s responses to its recommendations.

### **45. Dates of future meetings**

The Panel noted the dates of future meeting.

**The meeting started at 6:02pm and ended at 7:52pm.**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Monday 7 July 2025**

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*Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired*

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued*

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