# *Housing Improvement Programme Board Meeting*
# Minutes

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| **Meeting:** | Housing Improvement Programme Board (HIPB) |
| **Venue:** | Committee Room 1 (and hybrid via Teams as required/agreed) |
| **Date:** | 22nd October 2026 |
| **Time:** | 16:30-18:00 |

**Member Attendees:** Cllr Rob Lillis (Cllr RL) – Chair & Programme Member Sponsor, Cllr Kate Knott (Cllr KK) – Board Member, Cllr Dave Blackwell (Cllr DB) Leader of the Council and Board Member, Cllr Warren Gibson (Cllr WG) – Vice Chair & Deputy Leader of the Council

**Officer Attendees:** Ian Butt (IB) - Project Sponsor

**Guests:** Steve Colk (SC) - Interim Head of Housing Technical Services, Michael Lerpiniere (ML) - Interim Head of Housing Management, Colin Moone (CM) - Head of Strategic Services, Hannah McInally (HM) – Project Manager, Rebecca Outram (RO) – Policy Officer, Linda Curtis (LC) Compliance Manager, Leigh Donegan (LD) – Administrator, Becky Hennessey (BH) - Senior Leasehold and Customer Relations Officer, Tony Kiernan (TK) – HMS Programme Manager, Damian Roche (DR) – HQN, Louisa Thomas (LT) – Corporate Programme Manager, Lorraine Lesar (LL) – Tenant & Leaseholder Panel representative

**Apologies**: Cllr Jamie Huntman (Cllr JH) – Board Member, Cllr Grace Watson (Cllr GW) – Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Angela Hutchings (AH) – Project Sponsor, Angela Law (AL) - Monitoring Officer, Chris Stratford (CS) Programme Director

| Ref | Item | Lead |
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| 1. | **Welcome, Introductions & Declaration of Interests**<br>Introductions made<br>Apologies received | Chair |
| 2. | **Complaints Scrutiny Recommendations**<br>• The Complaints Scrutiny task and finish exercise was carried out by 5 tenants: a mix of Tenant & Leaseholder Panel members and those who had been through the complaints process and were contacted to take part.<br><br>*The Resident Scrutiny Review report was presented by Tenant & Leaseholder Panel representative Lorraine Lesar. The report is included as Appendix A.*<br><br>• It was clear to the scrutiny group that CPBC show a willingness to improve its complaints service.<br>• Recommendations from the report include improving access to the complaints service; improving information on complaints on the Council website; reviewing complaints response templates (the scrutiny group have suggested a template for consideration); provide complaint handling training; strengthen communication; review record management; introduce mystery shopping to ensure that complaint handling is working as it should.<br>• The Chair, Leader, Deputy Leader & HQN expressed sincere thanks to Lorraine and all Scrutiny Panel members for being involved in the complaints scrutiny and presenting the findings.<br>• All recommendations from the report have been accepted. | |

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| | • The Resident Engagement Team have already started to implement recommendations including enhanced complaints training on how to recognise complaints.<br>• Advice from DR - templates should be used as guides and adapted on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they are personal to the complaints. The template suggested by the scrutiny panel has been shared with colleagues in legal services.<br>• IB thanked the scrutiny panel and welcomed their influence to identify learning in the corporate complaints process.<br>• To improve access to the complaints service as recommended by the report, the Resident Engagement Team are working to introduce a dedicated telephone number for housing complaints. Concerns were raised on how this will be managed and whether there is a risk that the Resident Engagement Team will receive calls that should go to another team as a result.<br>• ML advised that whilst this is a possibility it is worth the risk and the Resident Engagement Team will monitor and manage calls and advise other teams where required.<br>• A suggestion to have a voicemail on the dedicated numbers advising alternate numbers for emergencies was agreed.<br><br>**ACTION:** review implementation of complaints scrutiny recommendations in 6 months. | ML/BH |
| | Cllr DB, Cllr WG and LL left the meeting at 17:00 | |
| 3. | **MRI Housing Management System**<br>• No concerns raised by Project Board that HIPB need to be aware of.<br>• The Rents and ASB modules are up and running effectively. The Housing Management Team are in the process of loading historic cases onto the ASB module. There is no risk of corruption of data whilst loading historic cases onto the system; this is being conducted manually with case files and supporting documents being flagged as historic.<br>• All new cases reported are raised directly in the MRI ASB module.<br>• The HMS project team are ensuring that staff are confident using the modules through training and following up in one to ones and team support.<br>• The project team are creating a library of resources for future training and support access.<br>• The aim of the project team is to use paid consultancy days before the end of the financial year. | |
| 4. | **Housing Improvement Programme**<br><br>*Housing Allocations and Homelessness Service*<br>• The feedback meeting with HAST has been moved from 27 October to 5 November 2026.<br>• The Allocations Policy was approved by Cabinet in September 2026 however CM advised that there will be a significant cost to rush Abritas set up only to transfer to the MRI Allocations module when completed in February 2027.<br>• The risk to waiting until the MRI Allocations module is completed is that the current allocations process will continue to be used until the system is set up. A cleanse of the Housing Register will also need to be completed before moving to the new system. There are no other risks. | |

**ACTION:** CM to update HIPB following discussions regarding the implementation of the new allocations process. CM

- More proactive work needs to be carried out in private sector to reduce temporary accommodation numbers. Asset Review Board are monitoring the need to develop affordable housing options.

*Resident engagement*

- The Housing Management Team met with Tpas to monitor progress against initial scope and next steps. The first 3 stages of the initial scope have been completed – numbers of involved tenants in formal engagement panels are still small but these panels will continue to be utilised for tenant influence whilst CPBC seek to grow numbers.
- It was agreed that stages 4 (tenant training) and 5 (review) of the initial Tpas scope will not be continued. Tenant training will be delivered internally as the panels develop.
- The remaining consultancy days with Tpas will be used to focus on the creation of a 3-year Transparency, Influence & Accountability strategy. The strategy will use data insights (TSMs, complaints, review outcomes), regulatory feedback, and internal business plans where relevant, to agree with tenants, priorities for the next 3 years.
- The creation of the strategy will be influenced by engaged tenants including a wider consultation with all tenants and leaseholders with the aim of implementing into service delivery from March 2027.
- The Resident Engagement Team will continue to go out to tenants and seek their views and feedback outside of the formal engagement panels. Community activities are continuing with a Big Door Knock carried out on 20 October, attended by Cllr RL and Cllr KK.
- Cllr KK suggested a leaflet to leave with tenants communicated with during community events could help improve numbers of engaged tenants. The Resident Engagement Team will action this.

**ACTION:** create leaflet on ways to get involved to leave with tenants at Big Door Knocks and other community events. BH

*Voids lean review*

- A streamlined process for voids following the lean review was introduced on 21 September. Performance against previous processes is reflected in September KPIs and likely will also be reflected in October whilst the process is still embedding and we're letting the homes that were part of the old process. Improvements should start to be reflected in KPIs from November 2026.
- SC is working with corporate on void figures currently on the corporate scorecard to ensure they are accurate and a true reflection of performance.
- A review of the performance outcomes is being carried out in January 2027. A report of findings will be presented to HIPB following this review in February or March 2027 (dependant on Board dates).

*Rent Standard update*

- As part of preparations for rent convergence and ensuring rent accounts reflect all charges, 57 properties were identified as not holding a 1999

property valuation. These valuations dictate the rent setting formula and a result of not having these was that CPBC were unable to determine whether the correct rent has been charged for these properties.

- A review was conducted on these 57 properties and identified that 8 have been overcharged. All current tenants affected by the overcharge will be contacted in person about refunds by 8 November.
- All other properties have been undercharged.
- Rent setting and rent convergence are Cabinet decisions. Cllr RL to raise with Leader and Deputy Leader.

*Mock inspection progress*

- All request for quote bids for the mock inspection have been reviewed and scored and independently verified by procurement colleagues.
- It has been announced that HQN won the bid to carry out the mock inspection of Housing services.
- Preparations are underway with HQN to determine how the process will proceed. Housing staff are also being prepared for the mock inspection process.

*Questions on background papers:*
*HIPB Work Plan*

- Prior to leaving the meeting at 17:00, Cllr DB posed the 92.6 day average relet time and 129.6 day General Needs minor void average relet time for September is unacceptable. Officers advised that these are the result of internal process failings and new processes are being introduced following the voids lean review.

  **ACTION:** breakdown average relet time into 3 sub-categories relating to the internal process in order to monitor performance and possible failure routes. — SC

  **ACTION:** provide benchmark data for void KPIs in order to better understand CPBC performance. — SC

- Cllr DB also voiced his concern regarding the KPI for number of calls missed/abandoned through customer service. In September 2026, out of 636 calls, 217 were missed/abandoned.
- Cllr WG requested to know who missed/abandoned these calls however officers advised that tracking where calls are sent from the main switchboard to the specific Housing service area is not currently mapped. Cllr WG challenged officers on this response.

  **ACTION:** identify how calls are diverted to Housing teams from main switchboard to better aid understanding and monitoring of number of calls missed/abandoned — SC/HM

*Q1 Complaints report*

- Section 6 of the Q1 Complaints report relates to Members Enquiries. Cllr RL raised concern that this does reflect actual numbers of enquiries received.
- BH confirmed that these figures only relate to the official enquiries received through Customer Care. BH has noted Cllr RL comments and will include non-official members enquires received to the next quarterly report.

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| | **ACTION:** add separate table for unofficial members enquiries received to next Quarterly Complaints report. | BH |
| 5. | **AOB**<br>• Meeting closed at 18:06<br>• Next Meeting: 10th December 2026 | |

**Appendix A:**

**Resident Scrutiny Review – Making complaints count**

**October 2026**

**Review period: June to July 2026**

## Welcome to our review

The Resident Scrutiny Panel chose to review how complaints are handled by the Housing Service.

Complaints provide an important opportunity for residents to tell us when something has gone wrong and help identify where services can be improved. A well-managed complaints process should be accessible, fair and focused on learning from feedback.

For this review, we wanted to understand whether complaints are handled effectively, whether residents receive good communication throughout the process and whether lessons learned are being used to improve services in the future for tenants and leaseholders.

Following the review, the Housing Service has developed a detailed action plan setting out how each recommendation will be implemented, monitored and reported.

## What we reviewed

The panel reviewed:

- Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint handling
- Communication with residents
- Response times and updates
- Quality of complaint investigations
- Accessibility of the complaints process
- Evidence of learning from complaints
- Resident satisfaction with complaint handling

We did not review:

- Compensation payments
- MP and councillor enquiries
- Complaint handling staffing levels

## How we carried out the review

Our review took place between June and July 2026.

To help us understand the resident experience, we:

- Reviewed complaint data and performance information
- Examined complaint correspondence
- Reviewed decisions from the Housing Ombudsman
- Held a staff focus group
- Spoke directly with complainants
- Held an improvement workshop

- Developed recommendations for service improvement

**What we found**

We found that significant progress has been made in improving the complaints service.

The introduction of a dedicated complaints team has helped improve response times and to provide greater consistency in complaint handling. The complaints triage process has also improved communication with residents by providing more regular updates and contact throughout the complaints journey.

However, we identified opportunities to further improve the resident experience, particularly around accessibility, communication, empathy and record keeping.

**What is working well?**

During the review we found several strengths:

- The triage process has improved communication and resident updates.
- The dedicated complaints team has improved response times.
- Staff demonstrated a commitment to resolving complaints and learning from feedback.
- There is a clear desire to continue improving the complaints service.

**What we've learnt**

Throughout the review, residents told us that good complaint handling is about more than meeting timescales.

Residents want:

- Regular updates
- Clear information
- Easy access to the complaints team
- Empathy when things go wrong
- Confidence that complaints lead to service improvements

We learned that communication often has the greatest impact on how residents feel about their complaint experience.

**Our recommendations**

Following the review, the Resident Scrutiny Panel identified a number of opportunities to improve the complaints service and the experience for tenants and leaseholders.

**1: Improve access to the complaints service**

Introduce a dedicated telephone number for the Housing Complaints Team, providing residents with a direct route to discuss their complaint and obtain updates on progress.

**2: Improve the complaints section of the website**

Review and update the complaints pages on the Council's website to ensure information is easy to find, written in plain English and clearly explains the complaints process, timescales and escalation routes.

**3: Review complaint response templates**

Update complaint response templates to promote greater consistency and ensure responses are clear, accessible and focused on addressing residents' concerns.

**4: Provide complaints handling training**

Deliver refresher training for relevant staff on the complaints process, ensuring a consistent understanding of complaint handling requirements, roles and responsibilities.

**5: Strengthen communication skills**

Provide staff training focused on active listening, empathy and customer care to support positive interactions with residents throughout the complaints journey.

**6: Improve the quality of complaint responses**

Ensure complaint responses:

- Are written in plain English.
- Demonstrate empathy and understanding.
- Clearly explain decisions and outcomes.
- Include an apology where appropriate.
- Focus on resolving concerns and rebuilding trust.

**7: Review record management arrangements**

Undertake a review of record management processes to improve accuracy, consistency and accountability, ensuring complaint investigations are supported by complete and reliable information.

**8: Introduce mystery shopping**

Explore the use of mystery shopping exercises following the implementation of staff training and service improvements. This would help assess the resident experience, identify any remaining barriers and measure the effectiveness of the changes introduced.

## Resident Scrutiny Panel reflections

Following completion of the review, panel members were invited to provide feedback on both the scrutiny process and the Housing Service's response to the findings.

Panel members welcomed the improvements that have been made to complaint handling, particularly the introduction of the dedicated Triage Team and the improvements achieved in complaint response times.

However, panel members felt there remained opportunities to further improve the resident experience. Members highlighted concerns that complaint correspondence can sometimes feel overly formal and lacking empathy and stressed the importance of ensuring residents feel listened to, respected and supported throughout the complaints process.

The panel also identified concerns regarding the accessibility of the complaints process, including the clarity of information available to residents and the ease of navigating the complaints section of the Council's website. These findings informed recommendations relating to communication, website improvements and resident engagement.

The panel highlighted the importance of ongoing staff training, consistent record keeping and a customer-focused approach to complaint resolution.

Panel members expressed a desire to continue supporting service improvement through future scrutiny activity and suggested that a follow-up review be undertaken once the agreed actions have been embedded to assess whether residents are experiencing improved outcomes.

## Next steps

The Housing Service has accepted the recommendations arising from this review and has produced an action plan to support delivery.