

Housing Engagement Board

Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting

held on Monday, 25 September 2025

from 2pm to 4pm

in the Monkfield Room, South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne

Attendees: Cllr John Batchelor – Chair
Vivienne Till (Elected Tenant Representative) – Vice-Chair
Cllr Eileen Wilson
Cllr Heather Williams
Peter Campbell (SCDC – Head of Housing) (on-line)
Amy Stock (Elected Tenant Representative)
Laura Nelson (Elected Tenant Representative) (on-line)
Margaret Wilson (Elected Tenant Representative)
Michael Luffman (Elected Tenant Representative)
Patti Hall (Elected Residential Leaseholder Representative)

By Invitation: Ivor Grant (Tenant Volunteer)
Geoff Clark (SCDC – Service Manager – Tenancy and Estates)
Eddie Spicer (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Assets) (on-line)
Dave Armitage (SCDC – Resident Involvement Team Leader)
Bronwen Taylor (SCDC – Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker
Gina Manderson (SCDC – Resident Involvement Communications Officer)

Apologies: Jim Watson (Elected Tenant Representative)
Julie Fletcher (SCDC – Service Manager – Housing Strategy)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at 2.02pm and all present introduced themselves.

The Chair advised that the meeting would be recorded for the purposes of minute taking.

2. Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

3. Minutes of previous Meeting – 21 July 2025

The Chair referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2025.

The minutes were approved by the board as a true reflection of the meeting.

3.1 Matters Arising from previous Meeting – 12 December 2024

The matters arising from the previous meeting are below.

Item 4.1 – Action : Julie Fletcher to change the wording in Point 10.2 in the ASB Policy from “non-council tenant” to “anyone not a council tenant”.

Report back: The wording has been changed.

Item 4.2 – Action: Dave Armitage to set up a meeting with Martin Lee, Housing Accountant, to go through the HRA account with the tenant volunteers.

Report back: The meeting will be held on 2 October 2025.

Item 4.6 – Action: Dave Armitage to set up a meeting with the tenant volunteers to discuss the process to follow on the Empty Properties Re-let Standards Scrutiny Project.

Report back: Dave Armitage to set up a meeting once the mock inspection by HQN has been completed.

Item 5.4 – Action: Amy Stock to send Eddie Spicer examples of late postal notifications from Mears about annual gas check appointments she received from tenants.

Report back: Eddie Spicer advised that the letters were sent from Mears central office and not their local branch, however, his team were investigating the matter.

4. New Matters

4.1 Water Meter Project

Peter Campbell advised the council had received funding from government to look into fitting restrictors to water meters. He said that this would be a way of reducing water usage and saving money. He added that tenants with medical needs would be exempt from this. He said that we were doing this in conjunction with County Council and that we would be going out to tender in October 2025.

A discussion on the restrictors, the flow of water and usage was held.

The Chair said that assurances were needed in that the equaliser flow should not affect the end user.

Eddie Spicer said that restricting the flow of water would save money in the long term. He explained that this did not affect the amount of water used, but the flow of water, for example when having a shower.

Ivor Grant asked when these would be installed.

Peter Campbell said that we do not have a date as we would be going to tender and then negotiations with the contractors would start.

4.2 Housing Enforcement Report – 2024 to 2025

Geoff Clark presented the report included in the pack.

The Chair asked if some of the cases were still ongoing.

Geoff Clark said that some were and advised that some cases were more complicated than others.

A discussion on the different types of cases, statistics and trends was held.

The Chair said that this report reflected that a great deal of work went on behind the scenes.

4.3 Resident Involvement Annual Report – 2024 / 2025

Dave Armitage presented the report included in the pack.

The Chair asked if the newsletters were well received.

Margaret Wilson said they were. She referred to the communal garden scheme on page 25 of the report and thanked Dave Armitage who was instrumental in arranging this.

Geoff Clark asked if this had been included in the newsletter to which Gina Manderson said that it had been.

Cllr Heather Williams referred to page 24, car parking on grass verges, and said that there was not enough parking in her ward.

Eddie Spicer advised that they were looking at parking areas. He advised that getting planning permission was difficult unless it was SCDC's land.

A discussion on parking issues was held.

4.4 Special HEB Meeting – 29 October 2025

Dave Armitage advised that a special HEB Meeting would be held on 29 October 2025 to approve the following policies:

- Electrical Management Policy
- Gas Safety & Servicing Policy
- Water Hygiene Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Assignment Policy

Cllr Heather Williams advised that the Anti-Racism Charter anniversary event was being held on the same day from 10am to 11.30am.

Bronwen Taylor said she would look at an alternative date.

Action: Bronwen Taylor

4.5 Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders – 2024 – 2025

Gina Manderson referred to last year's annual report and advised that she would be starting work on this year's report in the next few weeks. She said she would email a copy of last year's report to the board and she asked them to provide her with suggestions to be included in the report.

Action: Gina Manderson

5. New Matters

5.1 Forward Plan 2024 / 2025

Dave Armitage referred to the Forward Plan included in the pack and explained the purpose of the document. He went through the items planned for the coming months.

Margaret Wilson asked for the word “void” to be removed from all documents.

As this was an industry term, it was agreed that the word would be removed where applicable.

5.2 Contracts Review Panel

Geoff Clark advised that regular meetings to discuss the landscapes contract were held with tenant volunteers and a representative from SP Landscapes, the last one being on 3 September 2025. He said that the Grounds Maintenance Service Standards document had been updated and that the grass cutting schedules would be sent to the panel at the beginning of each month. He reported that the next contract to be reviewed was the Alarms and Monitoring Service for tenants and that he would be involving tenant volunteers in the tender process.

A discussion on the switching over to digital alarms was held.

5.3 Policy and Procedure Panel

Ivor Grant said that he was not aware that he had to give a presentation and that he had been made aware of this earlier that morning. He added that he was not aware that he was officially the Chair of this panel as he was advised that he would first need training.

Dave Armitage confirmed that he was the Chair, from the date that Brian Burton had stepped down, and that he would arrange training as requested by Ivor Grant. He said that Ivor Grant was not asked to give a presentation but to give feedback, if needed, on the notes from the meetings held which were included in the pack.

Bronwen Taylor advised that Brian Burton had drafted and circulated the meeting notes from the meeting held on 30 July 2025 and that she had circulated the meeting notes, drafted by Laura Nelson, from the meeting held on 3 September 2025. She added that she had not received any queries on the meeting notes.

Cllr Heather Williams referred to Policy Language in the notes on page 43 of the pack and said that conditional language should not be used as it could be manipulated.

Eddie Spicer said that these policies are backed up with legal documents in order to stand up in court.

A discussion was held on what decorating or alterations could be made by tenants, without getting permission from the council, was acceptable. It was agreed that minor alterations, such as putting up shelves or painting was allowed, however, major alterations, such as knocking down walls or running electric cables to an outside building was not allowed.

5.4 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Review Panel

Margaret Wilson referred to the notes included in the pack. She referred to the Ombudsman's definition of complaints which reads " An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals."

Margaret Wilson said that when tenants submitted a complaint, it was often treated as a service request.

Peter Campbell said that he did not agree with Margaret Wilson. He explained that when an issue was first reported, it was a service request and if there had been a failure in that service, any subsequent contact was treated as a complaint. He added that we have checked our complaints policy and we were compliant with the Ombudsman's code for complaints.

Cllr Heather Williams gave an example of an elderly tenant who had lost the heating in her lounge last winter and because it was only lost in one room, it was not treated as an emergency. She asked what would be classed as an emergency repair.

Eddie Spicer said that as the heating was lost in one room only, it would not be classed as an emergency. He explained that the procedures on how we respond to issues had been changed slightly and the following were the updated response times:

- Emergency repairs – 4-hour response
- Standard repairs – 24-hour response

Cllr Heather Williams asked if Mears used a 3rd party on weekends and bank holidays, and she gave the example of a tenant whose washing machine, which had not been installed properly, had leaked and flooded her kitchen floor.

Eddie Spicer said that repairs reports were dealt with by the main branch between Mondays and Fridays, and the Milton Keynes branch for out of hours reports.

Margaret Wilson said that she felt that Sheltered Housing should be more closely aligned to General Housing protocols. She explained that sheltered housing tenants had to use a different system of reporting repairs which was either through their Sheltered Estate Officer (SEO) or by calling Mears directly. She added that the SEOs often reported that they were not given details of when or whether the repairs had been done in Communal Halls.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Grounds Maintenance Maps

Margaret Wilson referred to the progress on the updating of the grounds maintenance maps and asked how many had been updated.

Geoff Clark advised that this was an ongoing process and that he did not know how many had been updated, however, he would check with the officer.

Action: Geoff Clark

6.2 Electrical Notice

Margaret Wilson referred to the email sent by Dave Armitage regarding the sample of a “Final Warning Electric Safety Check” notice which would be stuck on doors of tenants, where electricians had been unable to conduct an electrical safety check, to advise them that their property was non-compliant and that they could face legal action. She added that she felt it was quite harsh.

Dave Armitage explained that a change of legislation was being introduced in November 2025 whereby it would be mandatory for electrical inspections to take place and the notice sent in his email was an example of one that had been used by another organisation. He said the email was sent in order for tenant volunteers to provide feedback and to give their thoughts on the document. He added that the intention was not to name and shame people.

Eddie Spicer advised that this legislation would be applied to both social and private housing, which gave legal backing to access properties in much the same way as with gas inspections. He said that we already had a robust process in place for gas inspections and that we had backing from our legal team. He added that Geoff Clark's team assisted with gaining access to properties.

7. Meeting Date for 2025 / 2026

The Chair referred to the meeting date for 2025 / 2026 as follows:

- 11 December 2025 (venue to be confirmed)
- 26 March 2026 (venue to be confirmed)

8. Closing

There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.48pm.