

Tenant Voice Meeting Minutes (4 June 2026)

Chair: Barbara Rickards

Vice Chair: Lesley Peplow

Attendees:

Tenants

Mac Potts (joined by phone), Leonard Boydell, Kim McBride, Gary Bridge, Richard Hinson, David Thomas, Carol Lawson (Leaseholder rep)

Officers

Lorraine Larini (Head of Housing Standards), Sarah Thompson (Tenant Involvement Manager), Annette Mullaney (Tenant Involvement Officer), Victoria Young (Service Improvement Manager), Dominic Richardson (Allocations Manager), Abigail Downie (Strategy and Performance Manager)

Elected members (observing)

Cllr Kevin Foster

Cllr Jack Proud

3 Performance Information

3.1 Gas Checks: Noted an improvement in gas check compliance following reconciliation of contractor and internal records. The overall picture remains stable.

3.2 Electrical Programme: Good progress is being made with multiple contractors now engaged. The programme is on track to ensure all dwellings have valid electrical safety tests by September.

- A member of the group raised concerns about receiving repeated calls for electrical tests after his property had already been serviced.
- Lorraine confirmed that electrical tests are on a five-yearly rolling programme and contractors should not re-contact tenants if work is complete. She noted that the rolling programme only started in January of this year, suggesting a potential mismatch in recording certificates.
- Abigail acknowledged that delays in receiving certificates from contractors could lead to properties remaining on the "to-do" list. Lorraine clarified that, unlike gas safety checks (which have a 28-day regulatory requirement), there is no specific timeframe for issuing electrical certificates.

3.3 Fire Safety: A regime of fire safety inspections generates remedial actions. A key difficulty is tracking cross-cutting actions that span multiple workstreams and ensuring the loop is closed on all completed actions, distinguishing immediate fixes from longer-term planned replacements.

3.4 Data Submission: Noted upcoming statutory data submissions to central government regarding landlord services and physical condition of homes (due end of June and 12th July).

3.5 Decent Homes Standard: Of properties assessed and interpreted, approximately 44% meet the Decent Homes Standard. This is lower than desired but reflects increased confidence in stock knowledge and targeted interventions. It was noted that many other landlords in a similar regulatory position are still struggling to produce such figures.

3.6 Asbestos Management

- Kim raised a concern about the lack of clear advice for tenants on managing asbestos, particularly in textured ceilings (Artex), when undertaking minor works like changing light fittings or dealing with damage.
- Lorraine confirmed that advice on asbestos is included in the repairs handbook and on the council's website safety pages. She also confirmed that a new leaflet on asbestos management for tenants is being produced, similar to the damp and mould leaflet. This leaflet will include pictures of common asbestos locations and reiterate the advice not to disturb it if unsure, and to contact the council. The leaflet will be brought to a tenant focus group for review.

4 Housing Standards

4.1 Repairs Update:

- **Performance:** Non-emergency repairs are consistently hitting around 90% service levels.
- **Increased Demand:** An overall increase in repair numbers is observed across all categories, attributed to proactive stock condition surveys and compliance inspections generating more reported issues.
- **Backlog:** The council typically anticipates 24,000 repairs annually. A backlog of 3,000 repairs was noted at the end of the last calendar year. This backlog peaked at approximately 5,000 outstanding repairs by the end of April (lower than the projected 6,000).

- **Strategy:** Emergency and urgent repairs continue to be prioritised to mitigate risks to tenants and properties. For routine repairs, longer completion times than the 28-day service level are expected.
- **Resource Allocation:** In-house resources have been diverted, and trusted external contractors engaged. The target is to complete an extra 500 repairs per month, with an estimated 12 months required to clear the backlog.
- **Impact on Households:** Approximately 3,000 households have at least one outstanding repair, though these are not deemed to be a risk to tenants or property deterioration.
- **Staffing:** The team is continually recruiting qualified tradespeople, but are particularly struggling to recruit electricians (currently 15 in-house, with two qualified supervisors). An apprenticeship scheme is an aspiration for the future.
- **Communication:** An update on the repairs strategy is due to be published in the tenant newsletter.

4.2 Empty Homes (Voids) Update:

- **New Lettable Standard:** Following a working group, changes were implemented to ensure empty properties meet a high standard before re-letting, including internal asbestos removal, neutral decoration, and removal of tenant-specific adaptations. This often results in extensive refurbishment requirements.
- **Current Volume:** The number of empty homes has increased to approximately 400 across Selby, Harrogate, and Richmond, representing 4% of housing stock (target is 2.5%).
- **Process:** Category 1 homes (safety checks, minor repairs, decoration) are handled by an in-house team. More extensive capital works (kitchens, bathrooms, roofs) are managed by six external contractors, each working on around 40 homes at any given time.
- **Progress:** The council receives about 40 empty properties per month and needs to return 60 to make an impact on the backlog. This target of 60 returns was met this month, with new contractors in place since December. It is hoped that normal levels of empty properties will be achieved by the end of the year.

- **Prioritisation:** Empty homes works are proportioned evenly across all areas (Selby, Harrogate, Richmond) rather than focusing efforts on one specific location.
- **Tenant Scrutiny:** The Tenant Scrutiny Group is reviewing the lettable standard, having sent questionnaires to new tenants (8 responses received so far).
- **Panel Observations:** Kim reported that they were taken to see 8 properties before works had started (and extensive works were required) and they also visited two 'ready to let' properties where works had been completed, and they did meet the lettable standard. Lorraine explained that extensive refurbishments typically take around 10 weeks.
- **Councillor Foster's Input:** Councillor Foster, who was part of the Housing & Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee involved in the development of the lettable standard, advised that decisions were made that might slow the process, specifically the decision to deal with asbestos immediately rather than boxing it off for later but this was to ensure residents receive good homes and is considered a long-term "spend to save" approach, despite the immediate challenges.

4.3 Damp and Mould:

- **Awaab's Law:** Since October last year, there have been over 500 reports of damp and mould
- **Process:** Each report requires attendance, assessment (to confirm damp/mould presence), potential mould cleaning, and identification of the root cause (e.g., blocked gutter, pointing issues) for repair.
- **Challenges:** Current systems are still in development, making case management difficult. A significant challenge is gaining re-entry to tenants' homes to conduct necessary surveys and inspections, impacting service levels.
- **Access to undertake works:** Ideas are requested from tenants on how to encourage re-entry and improve communication regarding the process, potential disturbance, and chemicals used for mould cleaning.
- **Environmental Monitoring:** Environmental monitoring systems are being installed in homes with previous damp/humidity issues to monitor effectiveness of remedial work and alert tenants via an app if parameters are breached, aiding diagnosis.

6. Housing Allocations

6.1 North Yorkshire Home Choice: The service has successfully implemented a single county-wide allocations system and policy.

- **Harrogate Integration:** The integration of Harrogate applicants involved re-registration and streamlining the old list, with over 1,000 Harrogate applicants now fully registered. The system received a full upgrade, enhancing dashboards and performance monitoring.
- **Training and Engagement:** Over 100 staff (internal and external) were trained, and Members were briefed on the new policy.
- **Active Applications:** As of 1st April, there were 7,300 active applications, down from 9,500 on the combined previous lists, due to streamlining.
- **Geographic Distribution:** 30% of applicants are in Scarborough, 21% in Craven and Ryedale, 18% in Hambleton, and 30% in North Yorkshire Council stock-retained areas (Harrogate, Richmond and Selby).
- **Banding System:**
 - **Emergency:** Very limited (3-4 people), for hospital discharges or inability to access essential services.
 - **Gold:** Broader, includes homeless applicants and those with significant health needs.
 - **Silver:** For overcrowded households, those sharing facilities, or with lesser health needs.
 - **Bronze:** For those considered adequately housed, comprising 4,200 applicants (57% of the register). This band generates significant processing work for low rehousing output.

6.2 Homelessness: 593 active applications have a homeless duty (8% of the total register). 108 applicants were approved through resettlement schemes, a 67% increase partly due to Harrogate's integration.

6.3 Disability: 53% of applicants (3,755) self-identify as disabled, with mental health accounting for 34% of these.

6.4 Demographics: Applicants aged 25-45 remain the highest proportion. There was a slight decrease in applicants over 80.

6.5 Property Needs: 1,054 applicants (15% under 60) require bungalows. 53% of active applicants require one-bedroom properties, which often do not align with housing supply (and housing development plans).

6.6 Tenancies Commenced: 1,293 tenancies commenced in the last 12 months, with Hambleton and Scarborough having the highest numbers. This figure may be under-reported due to housing association data submission issues.

6.7 Banding vs. Housing Outcomes: While 53% of the register is in the Bronze band, only 11% of tenancies go to Bronze applicants. Conversely, 55% of homes are allocated to Gold band applicants. The verification process is being reviewed.

6.8 Direct Matches: Over 20% of properties are let via direct match (not advertised), primarily for homeless duties (75% of direct matches). Scarborough accounts for 54% of all direct matches. There is an increasing trend of MPs & Members being approached to push for direct lets.

6.9 Mobility: High mobility is observed in Richmond and Hambleton, with less movement out of Selby.

6.9.1 Challenges: Significant pressure on demand outstripping supply, high homelessness, lack of adapted and accessible properties, and increased scrutiny.

6.10 Achievements: Successful system upgrade, joined-up approach across North Yorkshire, implementation of the allocations policy, stabilisation of the housing register, and reduction in processing times from six weeks to 14 days.

Tenant Questions:

- **Lettable Assets Errors:** Mac queried if the council is aware of lettable assets potentially not being offered due to errors in the Housing Allocation Management Information System records, where work has been completed but not updated. Sarah requested specific details to pass on to investigate.
- **Home Choice Website Corrections:** Mac reported issues with mismatched eligibility criteria and incorrect property photographs on the Home Choice website. Dom confirmed that the partnership controls the website and can make quick changes, encouraging users to report any errors to action.

6.11 Refusals: Applicants who refuse two suitable properties within a 12-month period will be suspended from the register for 12 months. Withdrawing a bid does not count as a refusal.

6.12 Waiting List vs. Housing Need: The system is based on housing need, not a waiting list. There is no time limit for housing. Applicants are re-registered annually if no contact is made.

6.13 Staffing: The housing allocation team comprises 10 staff and 2 team leaders.

6.14 AI: AI is being used by applicants in review requests, and its potential for speeding up processing is being discussed within the sector.

7. Service Improvements and Complaints

7.1 Service Improvement Team Update:

- **New Capacity:** Two new Service Improvement Officers, Armin and Naomi, joined in April, significantly increasing team capacity. They are reviewing critical processes (e.g., repairs journey, customer communication) and process mapping all housing processes to inform a new housing management system, while also identifying quick wins.
- **Complaints Resource:** Courtney joined in March as a dedicated Complaints Officer for landlord services, complementing Nathan who handles broader community development complaints. An additional part-time Complaint Support Officer started three weeks ago.
- **Policy Work:** Graduate trainee Holly Watson is supporting Policy Officer Imogen on reviewing and developing numerous policies, including decant, grounds maintenance, shared ownership, leasehold, hoarding, pet, tenancy fraud, and tenancy sustainment. Policies implemented a year ago (lettable standard, compensation, repairs standard) are also under review, with compensation policy needing realignment with new Housing Ombudsman guidance. Tenant involvement in policy reviews is encouraged.

7.2 Complaints Handling Update:

- **Initial State (March):** Upon Courtney's arrival, there was a backlog of 65 unacknowledged complaints and over 40 open Stage 1 complaint. A significant number of complaints had been incorrectly marked as "not pursued" or "not investigated" and were not handled compliantly, despite some tenants potentially receiving an outcome.

- **Current Priorities:** Courtney is addressing the backlog, contacting 10 tenants per week whose complaints were not pursued to ascertain if they wish to proceed. Responses are mixed, with some satisfied, some wanting the process for learning, and others wanting full investigation.
- **Volume:** The team is averaging 40 new Stage 1 complaints per month for landlord services alone.
- **Resource Need:** It has been identified that further resource is required, ideally two complaints officers, to manage the volume and allow for separate officers to handle Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations.
- **Performance Reporting:** For the year-end submission to the regulator, it will be reported that 49% of Stage 1 complaints and 9% of Stage 2 complaints were dealt with compliantly. This is expected to raise serious concerns with the regulator and ombudsman, with whom discussions are ongoing. A conservative reporting approach has been taken.
- **Improvements:** Courtney has significantly improved and documented the complaints process, and the complaints policy has been revised to be fully compliant with Housing Ombudsman recommendations. Since 1st April, all new complaints acknowledged have been dealt with compliantly (100%). The time taken to acknowledge complaints is still impacted by the backlog.
- **Future Focus:** The strategy is to separate legacy issues (pre-1st April) from current performance. Additional capacity is needed to enhance learning from complaints and provide staff training.
- **Self-Assessment:** An annual self-assessment of compliance with the Complaint Handling Code has been circulated to tenants for their input, with a preference expressed for a dedicated session to review it collectively.
- **Tenant Query:** Mac raised a complaint topic discussed with Lucy and Abigail yesterday, which he will forward to be sent for Vicky's attention.

8. Action Items

- Lorraine: Double-check Mac's electrical test issue regarding repeated calls for service.

- Vicky: Arrange a dedicated session with tenants to collectively review the Complaint Handling Code self-assessment, inviting Courtney to attend.
- Tenant Involvement Team: Mac's emails to Lucy to be circulated to specific remits for investigation and response.
- Action to be picked up outside of this meeting by Abi & Lorraine, relating to 4 Housing Standards – 4.1. Repairs Update
- Action to be picked up outside of this meeting, being passed on by Lucy Tyne to Victoria Young, regarding Complaints – Section 3.1
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9. AOB

- The garden competition will be launched in the "Open Door" newsletter – update to follow on email with further details on this.
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- **Next Meeting:** 15 September