



South Tyneside Council

Housing Scrutiny Committee 24 July 2026

Housing Scrutiny Committee Minutes 24 June 2026

Present: Councillors: Oughton (Chair), Bell, Blair, Mouat, Stonehouse, Turnbull

Independent Scrutiny Representatives: Martin Steele

Tenant Scrutiny Panel Representatives: Tristan Francis, Anne Hetherington

Officers: David Ridley (Assistant Director of Asset and Property Services), David Rumney (Operations Manager - Homelessness and Allocations), Emma Purvis (Senior Democracy Support Officer) & Sean Allen (Democracy Support Officer)

One press officer was in attendance.

1. Chair's Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Agreed: That the minutes were an accurate reflection of the meeting of 18 March 2026.

4. Scrutiny in South Tyneside

This presentation gave an overview of good scrutiny practices and the scrutiny framework in South Tyneside, as well as terms of reference for the scrutiny committees.

It was explained that the Local Government Act 2000 established overview and scrutiny committees as a counterweight to the executive structures created by the act; current legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees could be found in the Localism Act 2011. It was further explained that the purpose of scrutiny was to hold the Executive to account, review, shape and develop Council policy and strategies, ensure best value and performance management, and scrutinise external partners.

It was noted that the following could be scrutinised:

- The Executive (Cabinet)
- Council services and commissioned services
- Organisations with whom the Council has jointly commissioned services
- Health bodies and authorities
- Crime and Disorder

Functions of scrutiny included reviewing and challenging the impact of decisions, carrying out investigations into services and policy areas, involving communities in its work, where appropriate, and supporting and assisting the Cabinet, the Council Leadership and partner organisations in the formulation of future plans. It was advised that scrutiny should provide a “critical friend” challenge, be the voice of the public, and drive improvement in public services; it should not be political or focus on ward-level issues.

The South Tyneside scrutiny framework was included for information, and terms of reference for each Committee were outlined.

It was raised that the scrutiny didn’t seem to be valid as they seemed to come to committee with pre-determined outcomes and referenced the previous administration. It was advised that regardless of the past, the committee did have scrutiny powers and were an important step. It was noted that the aim was to have good cross party working on the committee with the aim to make the council better.

Agreed: That the contents of the presentation be noted.

5. Housing Services– Who We Are

This presentation introduced Members to the Asset and Property Services and provided an overview of the responsibilities.

The report detailed the service repaired and maintained as well as provide tenancy/leasehold management to 15,702 properties. Under asset & property they oversaw a £30m Housing Capital Programme and £18m Revenue

Repairs Programme. Over 90,000 responsive repairs carried out annually with over 3,500 homes improved. They have a work force of 400+.

The Housing and Homelessness area was responsible for collecting approx. £92m in rent to fund services, they handled 184,000 calls with 99.48% calls resolved at first contact. They have a workforce of 200 employees.

The presentation detailed the key responsibilities for each service as well as their legal obligations which were:

- **Highly regulated environment** –Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards and Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- **Statutory obligations** – Homelessness duties (including prevention and relief), allocations, tenancy management and landlord services
- **Compliance with Legislation** –Building Safety Act, Awaab's Law, Renters Rights reforms, compliance regimes
- **Health & Safety Compliance** –gas, fire, electrical, water, asbestos, lifts and building safety.
- **Quality homes** – Regulatory requirements of Decent Homes and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES).

A member queried if the dept that handles the gas regulations were all council staff or if they were contractors. It was noted that it was a mix with 30 council staff and sub contractors as and when required.

The timescale for homelessness cases being handled was queried as it was a long time which was concerning. It was noted that central government set the timescale for 56 days.

Agreed: That the contents of the presentation be noted.

6. Strategic Housing – Who We Are

This presentation introduced Members to the Strategic Housing team and gave an overview of their responsibilities.

It was noted that the team monitored the housing market and worked to make sure there was enough suitable housing for residents. It responded to housing need, helped prevent homelessness and made sure legal and regulatory duties were met.

The service also oversaw housing standards, including supported housing, private rented housing and empty properties. It worked with partners and other services to improve housing and raise standards.

It was noted that the team played a role in planning and development by influencing the Local Plan and supporting the delivery of affordable housing.

A key area of work was homelessness prevention, monitoring duties, delivering strategies and managing supported accommodation while working with partners to support residents and reduce homelessness.

It was explained that the team also focused on housing regulation by preparing for inspections, monitoring performance and strengthening governance, ensuring tenant voices were considered.

Members were advised that achievements included embedding services, preparing for inspection, developing policies and strengthening governance, while future work was expected to focus on improving supported housing, developing a housing strategy and continuing work to prevent homelessness.

A member noted that homelessness should be everyone's issue and wanted to see more work with private landlords, it was noted that this was in place, but that private landlords had to be willing to engage as well.

Agreed: That the contents of the presentation be noted.

7. Quarter 4 Performance Report

This report gave an update on Housing Services performance for Quarter 4 of 2025/26.

It was noted that performance remained strong in most areas. All safety checks, including gas, fire, water and electrical checks, were completed at 100%. Repairs were also completed on time, with both emergency and non-emergency repairs performing above targets.

Customer service had improved, with most issues resolved at first contact, and fewer calls were abandoned. Complaint handling remained strong, with responses meeting targets, and improvements made to how complaints were managed.

It was explained that anti-social behaviour cases were managed within target levels, and joint working with the police and other services had shown positive results.

It was noted that homelessness prevention had improved during the year with more cases prevented earlier, reducing the need for temporary accommodation and lowered costs. This was supported by better joint working across services.

Rent collection was performing well and remained above target despite financial pressures, and a small reduction in rent arrears was demonstrated, showing improvement from the previous year. There were also improvements in managing empty properties, with fewer voids and reduced loss of rental income.

A member asked how much time and effort was given chasing previous tenants with arrears and asked why the council couldn't apply to universal credit to recover the arrears. It was noted that the universal credit policy changed to try and give more control to tenants, however that does have a negative impact when arrears occur. Members commented that that process was designed to stop mollycoddling tenants, but that sanctions and repercussions needed to be made clear.

A member noted that the rent collection results were extremely strong and that while 100% of collection was always the aim, tenancy support and sustainment was also important.

Agreed: That the report be noted

8. Work Programme

This report highlighted the Work Programme for the 2026-27 Municipal Year and provided Members with an opportunity to amend or insert new items for consideration at future meetings.

Agreed: That the work programme be noted.

9. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items to consider..