

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair), Councillor Jane Spilsbury (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, Bill Hartnett, Jen Snape, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Matthew Eccles, Debra Goodall, John Leach, Simon Parry and Judith Willis

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th June 2025 Members pre-scrutinised the following items on the agenda for consideration at the Executive Committee meeting:

- Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment Complaint Handling Code
- Housing Regulator Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Shareholders Committee Annual Report

At the end of their discussions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendations contained within the reports but made no additional recommendations.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their hard work in pre-scrutinising these reports prior to the Executive Committee's consideration.

Chair

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13th May 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. WARM HOMES LOCAL GRANTS FUNDING AND RESOURCES

The Climate Change Manager presented a report on the subject of Warm Homes Local Grants (WHLG) funding and resources.

The Executive Committee was informed that the WHLG funding was being provided by the Government to assist householders in improving the energy efficiency of their properties. Owner occupiers on lower incomes would be eligible to apply for this funding, as it was designed to help alleviate fuel poverty. Properties would need to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D – G in order to be eligible for funding. The Council had chosen to focus allocation of this funding to owner occupiers living in the Woodrow area, where there were higher levels of deprivation than in some other parts of the Borough. Whilst Council House properties would not be eligible to receive funding through this scheme, there was a separate Warm Homes Social Housing (WHS) fund that Council tenants could benefit from.

The Council had been allocated grant funding to spent on WHLG for a three-year period, starting in 2025/26. The funding could be spent on a range of measures including the installation of insulation and of solar panels. Officers were estimating that there would be an average spend of £15,000 per property using this funding. Act on Energy would work with the Council on the project and would provide support to owner occupiers during the process.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The monitoring update reports that the Council would be required to provide on a monthly basis to the Midlands Net Zero Hub (MNZH) regarding local progress with the project and the potential for this data to be shared with Members.
- The funding that had been allocated to the WHLG for the three financial years starting in 2025/26 and the reasons why the allocation for the first year was lower than subsequent years. Officers suggested that this could be due to previous experiences with similar grant funding initiatives, which had

tended to report increases in demand for funding in later years of a project.

- The number of properties that the Council was expecting to assist using the WHLG grant funding in each year and the extent to which there would be the flexibility to provide support to more properties than anticipated. Officers clarified that this was based on assumptions that maximum levels of expenditure would be required for each property, however, should this not be the case then more eligible properties could potentially receive support.
- The benefits arising from the potential to co-commission suppliers of the works funded by the WHLG and the WSH. The Committee was informed that a joint procurement exercise could be undertaken and it was anticipated that this would result in efficiency savings.
- The need for thorough planning and community engagement to be undertaken in order to enable eligible households to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the WHLG funding. It was noted that the Council would approach eligible owner occupiers directly.
- The fact that through this scheme, improvements would be made to the energy efficiency of eligible properties at no financial cost to the owner occupiers.
- The benefits to addressing health inequalities in the Borough arising from improving the energy efficiency of properties.
- The lack of certainty about whether further WHLG funding would be made available to local authorities at the end of the three-year period. Members expressed their hopes that this or similar funding would be made available by the Government again in the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer to reflect in the Capital Programme the grant funding in 2025/26 and to include the 2026/27 and 2027/28 funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the Warm Homes Local Grant (WHLG) (as shown below).**

Year 1 2025/26	Year 2 2026/27	Year 3 2027/28
£63,576.92	£261,000	£252,300

RESOLVED that

- 2) **authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity to administer the funding received in the**

WHLG in line with the grant conditions and any alterations to the delivery programme.

6. HOUSING REGULATOR TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

The Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented a report on the subject of the Housing Regulator Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

Members were informed that the Housing Regulator had introduced 22 tenant satisfaction measures in 2023. These measures were designed to help regulate the performance of housing providers, including Redditch Borough Council. The Council had monitored the authority's performance in accordance with these measures in 2023/24 and 2024/25 and the data for both years had been included in the report for Members' consideration.

There were two key elements in the report that were highlighted for the Executive Committee's attention:

- The Tenant Perception Survey results for the two years, which highlighted that there had been improvements to performance in most areas. A change had been made to the survey in 2024/25, compared to the previous year, through the inclusion of free text comment sections to enable the Council to assess the reasons for particular responses to certain questions. In considering the results for this section, Members were asked to note that the Repairs and Maintenance team had recruited a number of new team members and invested in modernising technical equipment during this period.
- The Council's responsibilities as a landlord and how the authority was performing compared to other providers. The Council was performing well in many areas although improvements still needed to be made in Repairs and Maintenance.

Officers were in the process of developing an improvement plan and this was at an interim stage by the date of the meeting. A response from the Housing Regulator to the latest inspection of the Council was due to be announced publicly in July 2025 and a report would subsequently be presented on the outcomes of this process for the Executive Committee's consideration in September 2025.

Members subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so commented on the following areas:

- The hard work of officers to try to improve performance and the need for further work to be undertaken.

- The 100 per cent compliance with key requirements that had been reported for important areas such as gas safety checks.
- The positive intentions amongst officers and Members to make further improvements, as demonstrated by the interim improvement plan.
- The value of introducing a panel of local housing tenants to scrutinise housing performance. Members commented that this development would be welcome and the panel could act as the tenants' voice.
- The action that was being taken to modernise housing services, including through investment in digital services.
- The introduction of new teams to help address issues that impacted on tenants, including a new Damp and Mould team.
- The sites visited by Members during recent ward walks with officers and the opportunities that this provided to Members to engage with residents directly, including with regard to any housing issues that tenants might be experiencing.
- The need for the Council to communicate effectively the work of officers in relation to improving the performance of Housing Services.
- The information included in the report that revealed how the Council's performance compared to median performance levels and the need for the authority to be as ambitious as possible, in terms of aiming to perform at a level exceeding this. Officers clarified that the data for the median performance levels had been included to enable Members to compare the Council's performance to average performance levels in the sector. However, Members were assured that the Council was striving for excellence.
- The levels of requests for support received by Members from tenants relating to housing matters. Members commented that this tended to occur where officers did not communicate effectively with tenants and this needed to continue to be addressed moving forward.
- The data that had been reported in respect of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and the extent to which this data was accurate. The Committee was informed that Officers had identified this as a matter that required further investigation as it was recognised that this might not be accurate.
- The frequency with which Officers had previously reported on the Council's performance in respect of the Housing Regulator's tenant satisfaction measures. Members were informed that this had been identified as a gap in reporting procedures and for this reason officers were proposing to report to the Executive Committee on a quarterly basis in future.

- The opportunities that would be provided for tenants to submit expressions of interest to participate in future panels that would represent the voice of housing tenants.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Council's 2024/25 Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the Housing Interim Improvement Plan be approved; and**
- 2) **a quarterly update on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (Landlord) and progress against the Housing Improvement Plan be reported in future to the Executive Committee.**

7. SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair of the Shareholders Committee in 2024/25, Councillor Sharon Harvey, presented the Committee's Annual Report for the 2024/25 municipal year.

Members were advised that the Shareholders Committee had held formal meetings during the year focusing on the work of the Council's company, Rubicon Leisure Limited. The Committee did not have decision making powers in respect of operational matters, which were the domain of the Rubicon Board. However, there were various matters reserved for the Committee to determine in the articles of the company. This included agreement of the annual business plan which had occurred during the year. In addition, quarterly performance and budget monitoring reports relating to Rubicon Leisure Limited had been presented.

The Committee had welcomed a number of developments, including the introduction of enhanced food and beverage offers across a number of sites managed by the company. There remained room for improvement and the Committee would continue to work hard to monitor the performance of the company. During the year, members of the Shareholders Committee had also had an opportunity to meet informally with members of Rubicon Board. The Committee had welcomed this opportunity.

Following the presentation of the report, Members commented on the important role of Rubicon Leisure Limited in managing the Council's leisure facilities and delivering leisure and cultural activities on behalf of the Council. There was the potential for Rubicon Leisure Limited to help address health inequalities within the Borough and the suggestion was made that the Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited should be asked to approach the Public Health team at Worcestershire County Council to discuss this matter further. The Chief Executive undertook to raise this with

the Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited at a forthcoming meeting.

Reference was made to the Council's plans to recruit a bid writer to work for the authority who could apply for grant funding. The suggestion was made that this officer, once in post, could also assist Rubicon Leisure Limited in terms of submitting bids for funding. Members commented that there might be opportunities for the company to access additional funding that the Council was not eligible to receive.

Consideration was given to the work of Rubicon Leisure Limited and Members commented that this needed to correspond with the vision and priorities of the Council. It was suggested that this was something that the Shareholders Committee could monitor, including during consideration of the annual business plan for 2026/27 when this was submitted later in the municipal year.

Finally, in considering the report, Members noted that there was a typographical error in the report, which referred to the membership of the Shareholders Committee in 2024/25 having been appointed in June 2025. Members commented that this should have referred to "June 2024".

RECOMMENDED that

subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the Shareholders Committee Annual Report 2024/25 be noted.

8. APPOINTMENTS TO THE SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented a report relating to arrangements for the appointment of Members to serve on the Shareholders Committee in the 2025/26 municipal year.

Members were advised that as the Shareholders Committee was a sub-committee of the Executive Committee only Executive Committee members could be appointed to the Shareholders Committee. In line with the terms of reference for the Committee, the leader of the opposition political group at the Council would continue to be invited to attend meetings of the Shareholders Committee to participate in the debate, although as he was not a Member of the Committee he would not have the power to vote at these meetings. Other elected Members were welcome to attend meetings of the Shareholders Committee to observe proceedings but could only participate in the debate at the discretion of the Chair.

The following Members were nominated to serve on the Shareholders Committee in 2025/26:

- Councillor Juliet Barker Smith
- Councillor Bill Hartnett
- Councillor Sharon Harvey
- Councillor Jane Spilsbury
- Councillor Ian Woodall

RESOLVED that

3) The following Councillors be appointed to serve on the Shareholders Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year:

- **Councillor Juliet Barker Smith**
- **Councillor Bill Hartnett**
- **Councillor Sharon Harvey**
- **Councillor Jane Spilsbury**
- **Councillor Ian Woodall**

4) Councillor Sharon Harvey be appointed as the Chair of the Shareholders Committee in the 2025/26 municipal year; and

5) Councillor Ian Woodall be appointed as the Vice Chair of the Shareholders Committee in the 2025/26 municipal year.

9. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SELF-ASSESSMENT COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

The Strategic Housing and Business Support Manager presented the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment Complaint Handling Code for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that there was a requirement for the Council, as a social housing provider, to adopt the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. There was a further requirement for the Council to undertake a self-assessment in line with the code. Following the latest self-assessment, Officers had identified that there was a need to provide greater clarity with regard to Stage 2 complaints, particularly with regard to which would not be accepted as complaints at this stage. The report provided an opportunity to update the code and Members were being invited to consider this change.

There was a need for tenants to be informed about and to understand the Council's approach to handling complaints. Officers were anticipating that the introduction of a panel of tenants, acting as a voice for tenants, would help the Council to promote the process more effectively.

The Council had responded to 62 per cent of complaints in line with target timescales in the first part of the year. This compared to a median response rate nationally of 80 per cent. Officers recognised that there was a need for improvement in this context.

The Housing Ombudsman regarded complaints as providing an opportunity for social housing providers to learn and were keen for organisations to have a culture that was positive about learning from complaints. To address this, work would be undertaken with relevant service managers in cases where complaints occurred.

Any tenant could make a report to the Housing Ombudsman. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman could choose to investigate complaints. In the period covered by the report, the Housing Ombudsman had investigated three cases relating to tenants of houses managed by Redditch Borough Council.

Members welcomed the report and in doing so commented that complaints had been one of the lowest scoring areas for the Council in terms of tenant satisfaction measures. It was noted that the Council did make mistakes and there was a need for honesty and transparency in terms of recognising these mistakes and responding appropriately.

The Committee noted that the action required in learning lessons from complaints would vary. The suggestion was made that it would be helpful if in future the report could distinguish between complaints that were made that involved external contractors and complaints that related to Council staff, although it was recognised that it would not be appropriate to include specific details about particular cases. This information would help Members to assess whether there were greater needs for staff training or contract management issues that needed to be addressed.

The length of the complaint handling code was discussed by the Committee. Members noted that this was relatively lengthy and the suggestion was made that this could be confusing or frustrating for some tenants. Whilst recognising the need for detail, questions were raised about the potential for a shorter flow chart guide to be produced for ease of reference. The Committee was advised that Officers would aim to work with the new tenants' panel to review the code and to ensure that the content and layout met the needs of tenants.

Questions were also raised about the potential to provide copies of the code in alternative languages to tenants for whom English was not their first language. Officers confirmed that options were available to provide copies to tenants on request in alternative languages.

Reference was made to the 55 per cent of learning outcomes that were recorded between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025 where the complaints were partially or fully upheld. Members suggested that this indicated that there was a cultural issue and it was anticipated that scrutiny by a panel of tenants would help to address this in future.

RESOLVED that

- 6) the Housing Complaint Self-Assessment be approved;**
- 7) the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024-25 be approved;**
- 8) the Housing Complaints Standard be approved and;**

RESOLVED to NOTE that

- 9) the reports referred to at resolutions 1 to 3 above, would be published to the Council's website.**

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members were advised that there were no outstanding recommendations arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th May 2025.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th May 2025 be noted.

11. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

There were no referrals from either the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that:

Under S100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 of the said act, as amended.

**13. Minute Item No. 13 – Promoting Independent Living Service
PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE**

The Strategic Housing and Business Support Manager presented a report on the subject of the Promoting Independent Living (PIL) Service.

A report had been presented on the subject of this service for the consideration of the Executive Committee in July 2024. Following consideration of that report, a decision had been taken to extend the contract with the existing service provider for a further 12 months.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding was distributed through the work of the PIL service. This funding could be allocated to providing adaptations to properties designed to enable people with physical disabilities and mobility difficulties to live in their homes independently.

Members commented on the importance of DFG funding to enabling some of the most vulnerable residents to continue to live independently.

RESOLVED that

10) The report be noted;

11) Officers to work towards ensuring the continuation of the Promoting Independent Living Service.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including

the authority holding that information) and relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matters arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.)

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.52 pm