

Questions of Councillor Shaffaq Mohammed to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q.1 If a tenant was to submit a routine repair today, how long would they likely wait for resolutions?

A.1 This would be very dependent on the trade of the order (e.g. joinery/plastering etc). At present the council is completing routine orders in an average of 33 days with 60% of works being completed within the 25 day target timescale. This does reflect that we are completing and clearing a number of overdue orders – more on this below.

Q.2 How many disrepair claims have been submitted in the last six months and to what cost for the Council?

A.2 Between January 2024 and June 2024, we have received a total of 424 new letters initiating a new disrepair claims to the Council – though no court claims.

During the same period, we have spent a total of £1,553,171 defending disrepair claims made to the Council. The cost in defending claims to the Council will not correlate directly to the same time period which the Council receives the disrepair claim because the claims settled will have been received some time previously. Each case is reviewed in its own merit with regards to liability for the claim and any compensation payable.

Q.3 What is the current number of outstanding and incomplete Council home repairs?

A.3 Works in progress have reduced from 15,461 at the end of May to 14,231 at the end of June. Overdue repairs have reduced from 9765 at the end of May to 8697 at the end of June.

Works in progress and overdue repairs have been reducing throughout the year as we have begun implementation of our improvement programme. Work in progress has reduced from 24,070 works orders in January 2024 to 14,321 at the end of June 2024 – a reduction of 9749. Overdue orders have reduced from 15,028 to 8697 in the same period – a reduction of 6331. There is still much to do, and we acknowledge this – we have a clear improvement plan in place and there is a positive direction of travel now.

Q.4 How many gas safety inspections are still outstanding in Council homes and properties?

A.4 There are currently 178 properties requiring a gas safety inspection where certificates have now expired. We have attempted access on multiple occasions in accordance with our policy and procedures and now seek legal action to allow access.

Q.5 In the last six months how many Council properties have seen an improvement in their EPC rating?

A.5 Between December 2023 and June 2024 242 properties have improved from a Band D and below (i.e. E, F and G) to a Band C or above.

Q.6 What representation has the Council made to the new government about an emergency insulation programme for our city's homes?

A.6 Sheffield joined with the 19 other largest local authority landlords in writing to government this month. Our "Securing the Future of Council Housing report set out some modest and reasonable solutions for the new government,

These include the recommendation that "the next Spending Review should launch a large-scale, long term Green and Decent Homes programme, with sufficient additional capital funding from government to bring all council housing up to the new standard of safety, decency and energy efficiency by 2030 – and setting a route map for achieving net zero by 2050. At a minimum, this should allocate £12 billion to council landlords over the next five years, an average of at least £2.4bn per year."

Notwithstanding, there is presently a great deal of work being done across all tenures to improve insulation and the energy performance of homes. The Warm Homes Sheffield offer ([Warm Homes Sheffield](#)) has been created as a singular, simplified gateway through which all residents can access free energy advice, support and opportunities for grant funding. The Council has been successful in a range of Govt grant schemes to help homes improve insulation, including Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund & Homes Upgrade Grant. We will continue to be ambitious for funding bids to maximise the benefits for Sheffield. Furthermore, the Council has implemented a successful ECO 4 Flex (Energy Company Obligation) scheme that has benefited nearly 500 homes in the last year, and we continue to promote and leverage other schemes such as GBIS (Great British Insulation Scheme) and Connected 4 Warmth.

The Council also continues to lead and support a range of innovation projects such as the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) and Let Zero (a project designed to encourage and support private landlords) with the aim of further building knowledge and understanding, and promoting retrofit.

The Council is also focussed on helping to develop training and skills in the 'green sector' working with a range of organisations such as the Colleges and other construction training services to build the supply chain and improve the local economy.

Q.7 Can you explain why the Council does not have an accurate record of the condition of its 38,000 homes?

A.7 The Council has stock data on more than 50% of its stock, ranging from stock condition, energy efficiency and Housing Health Safety Rating System inspections. Routine inspections were suspended during covid as non urgent tasks resulting in a backlog. In June 2024 the Housing Policy Committee approved £4.5m of revenue funding to undertake 15,000 stock condition surveys by the end of March 2026. Once this has been completed, we will carry out ongoing stock condition surveys to ensure the data is always up to date.

Questions of Councillor Sophie Thornton to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q.1 Should my concerns around Sheffield Council housing repairs, the time taken to repair them and the quality of repairs that I raised as a resident in 2020, have been taken more seriously?

A.1 The council takes the safety of residents' homes seriously and each year we carry out around 210,000 repairs to council homes in addition to the capital investment that goes into improving properties. As already outlined the works in progress and overdue repairs have been reducing throughout the year as we have begun implementation of our improvement programme. Work in progress has reduced from 24,070 works orders to 14,321 at the end of June – a reduction of 9749. Overdue orders have reduced from 15,028 to 8697 in the same period – a reduction of 6331. There is still much to do, and we acknowledge this – we have a clear improvement plan in place and there is a positive direction of travel now.

Q.2 Where does responsibility lie for the continued failure to tackle housing repairs?

A.2 There are a number of repairs outstanding but not a continued failure to tackle them. my previous answer sets out the work that is being done to improve housing repairs. The housing policy committee will be monitoring the improvement plan referred to already and tenant satisfaction measures to ensure that it is making a difference.

Question of Councillor Will Sapwell to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q. What risk assessment has been made of the continued risk posed by corrosion and deterioration of district heating piping in Council owned homes and properties?

A. Our housing district heating systems are serviced twice a year by our Repairs Service. This service will provide a review of the condition of the system and the performance of the system and where appropriate repair work is carried out. We are also alerted to any high-risk schemes where we need to look at options to carry out investment work quickly and this is considered on a case-by-case basis. In the longer term we are working on a plan for how we will upgrade our systems as part of our future capital investment programme as they reach the end of their economic life.

Question of Councillor Martin Smith to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q. How many planned and responsive Housing repairs are currently registered in Totle, and how many are overdue?

A. There are currently 284 live works orders in the S17 postcode area (rather than just Totle), of which 182 are overdue. These do not include servicing programmes.

Questions of Councillor Marianne Elliot to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q.1 When and by whom was the decision made to remove funding for the Stock Increase Programme from the Gleadless Valley Masterplan?

A.1 Members have not agreed any explicit decision to remove funding from the Gleadless Valley Masterplan.

The Stock Increase Programme has been under pressure because of well-known issues about construction cost inflation. This meant the same budget would deliver fewer new homes.

As a result, officers have been reviewing the options for building in Gleadless Valley and have considered asking Registered Social Landlords to consider building instead. RSLs could provide social housing to rent without it being subject to the right to buy. This could deliver social housing to rent without significant recourse to Stock Increase Programme funding.

Although the Capital strategy approved by full council at the budget-setting meeting on 6th March 2024 does not explicitly refer to Gleadless Valley, the priorities set out for “planned and potential” capital asks include exploring the potential for affordable housing on SCC owned land. This could include working with Registered Providers in Gleadless Valley as described above.

Members of the Housing Policy Committee have stated their desire to make sure that at least as much social rented housing becomes available in the long run in Gleadless Valley as that set out in the Masterplan.

Q.2 Please provide the relevant minute of the meeting.

A.2 As noted above, officers have not been able to identify any explicit decision to remove funding. Details of the capital strategy approved by full council on 6th March 2024 can be found at the “Housing Growth” section on page 337 of the printed Capital Strategy and Budget Book 2024-2054.

Questions of Councillor Alexi Dimond to the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee (Councillor Douglas Johnson)

Q.1 There have been a number of incidents of people attending Howden House presenting as homeless and in priority need status being told to leave Howden House and to call the OOH number - in some cases despite waiting all day.

What plans are there to improve the customer experience of people presenting at Howden House?

A.1 The Customer Experience Strategy 2024 - 2028 sets out plans to improve in-person customer experience, in particular:

- It seeks to expand our digital offer for customers to access reliable, seamless, inclusive and intuitive services, which are available 24/7. This means more people will want to use online options when interacting with us.
- The digital shift means we can focus personalised support for those who rely on speaking with us by phone or in-person. Customers will be able to access services quicker and get a better outcome via personal conversations with people who understand what they want and need.
- Enabling our workforce and inclusive places across the city to help customers in person if it is the best option.

- Provide welcoming in-person places, available across Sheffield if customers cannot access services by other routes.
- Work in partnership with communities so these places are in the most suitable and accessible locations.
- If customers face more difficult circumstances, we will work in a joined-up way to help find solutions.
- Support all staff to know how to connect customers to someone who can help.

We recognise that the wait for suitable accommodation to be sourced can be frustrating and lengthy for some customers, especially those with complex needs. Whilst the Customer Experience Strategy progresses, we have already taken steps to improve our customers' experience in First Point. In particular, due to the increase in homelessness being experienced nationally, we have seen an increase in the number of customers presenting at Howden House for advice and assistance in relation to homelessness which had led to long waiting times and in some cases, we were unable to see everyone who presented to us, especially if they attended later in the day.

To tackle this, the service has recently implemented an appointment system where people who present at Howden or contact us by phone will now have a much shorter initial assessment before being made an appointment with an appropriate officer. This has drastically reduced the waiting time to be seen in person (and on the phone lines where the same system has been implemented) and we have received positive feedback from customers, staff and partners since this was implemented. We are continuing to review this process to ensure we deal with all enquiries as quickly as possible and that nobody is turned away should they need our help whether they are in priority need or not.

Customer Services staff support Housing Solutions and look after customers whilst they wait and, in some cases, access other Council services. We have improved the Customer Experience and better support customers in the following ways:

- We now facilitate and manage the queues for the Housing Solutions team,
- We have set up a ticket system so each customer is issued a ticket and is seen in turn,
- We provide a family room with books and toys where families can sit in relative comfort with their children rather than sit in the main reception area. We check on the families and children regularly,

- We take time to help customers that are struggling mentally, fleeing domestic violence, suffering with Autism etc, by providing a quiet space and support/a “listening ear”,
- We have cubicles that enable customers to see advisors in private,
- We support customers with mental health by providing material and advice on how to deal with anxiety and stress and look their mental health, via our information board. This has proved extremely popular and we continue to replenish the booklets for customers,
- We work closely with the Sensory Impairment Team and the deaf service at CAB who have a drop-in every Wednesday at Howden House. We laminated greetings and alphabet sheets for our advisors so that we can greet any deaf customers,
- We now work in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau with their Community Access Point project. Providing a room which houses their video conferencing equipment for customers to connect for advice on various issues including homelessness. We have referred around 500 customers to this service,
- We support customers fleeing domestic violence and are advocates for preventing violence against women. We have Champions/Ambassadors for White Ribbon and talk with customers to raise awareness and provide laminated cards with contact support details for anyone suffering domestic violence.

Q.2 Is there a system in place at Howden House to prioritise urgent cases to avoid the most vulnerable people being put out on the street when the building closes?

A.2 As advised at A.1 above, we have recently implemented a new appointment system for those presenting at Howden House or contacting us via the phone lines for advice or assistance in relation to homelessness. This consists of a much shorter initial assessment and then where necessary, an appointment is made with an appropriate officer.

As part of this, urgent same day appointments are available for booking so that these cases are prioritised appropriately.

This page is intentionally left blank