

Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 3 February 2026

PRESENT

Committee Members: Councillor Jacolyn Daly (Chair), Councillor Asif Siddique, Councillor Sally Taylor, Councillor Laura Janes and Councillor Adronie Alford

Cabinet Members:

Councillor Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)
Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

Officers:

Richard Shwe (Director of Housing)
Sukvinder Kalsi (Executive Director – Finance and Corporate Services)
Daniel Rochford (Head of Finance – Housing)
Liam Oliff (Committee Coordinator)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th November 2025 were agreed to be accurate.

4. **2026/27 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) introduced the item and presented the Corporate Budget Overview to the Committee. He explained that the 2026/27 budget needed to be taken in the context of the

recent Autumn Statement from the Government, as well as a changing Demographic with Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F). He added that the Fair Funding Review was now a three-year settlement and that there was expected to be budgetary pressures due to this from 2027/28. Sukvinder Kalsi (Executive Director – Finance and Corporate Services) introduced the directorate specific presentation. He highlighted that demand for homelessness services had continued to rise amid a shortage of available social and affordable housing, compounded by the ongoing cost-of-living pressures, inflation, increased interest rates, and the resulting strain on household incomes. He mentioned that homelessness approaches had peaked at 3,600 in 2023/24, with a projected 2,900 in 2025/26. The budget stood at £51.3 million, including £30.5 million for temporary accommodation procurement, £4.5 million for housing solutions staffing, £7 million for corporate support charges, and £3.6 million for supported housing, set against an income of £29.9 million. Key financial changes included £1 million attributed to inflation, £1.2 million in savings requirements, and £4.8 million arising from depreciation and support charges.

Councillor Adronie Alford referred to the corporate overview presentation and specifically the savings proposal of reducing arrears. She asked how this was going to be achieved. Councillor Rowan Ree explained that the aim was to increase Council Tax collection rates to 98% by identifying more people that should be paying Council Tax, that currently weren't. He added that some residents were not aware that they were no longer eligible for discounts on their Council Tax, so the Council would support those residents, and others, with their ethical debt collection policy.

Councillor Adronie Alford raised concerns regarding the Housing Company and wanted to ensure that the properties within the company were not too expensive. She questioned the management of the Housing Company and asked whether leases would be moving from Council leases to Housing Company leases on an SLA? Sukvinder Kalsi confirmed that the current team would be assigning leases to the Housing Company. He explained that the Housing Company was a general fund company for the Council and therefore H&F could claim more local housing allowances. Councillor Adronie Alford sought clarification that this change was to allow H&F to work around caps on the funding brought in from the Government and if this was the case, whether the Government were likely to allow this. Sukvinder Kalsi confirmed that this was the case and that other Local Authorities (LAs) had already been doing this.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked how large families currently placed in bed and breakfast accommodation would be housed in the longer term. Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) explained that the service was actively exploring options, including commercial opportunities and partnerships with hotel businesses. In response to a further query from Councillor Alford, he

confirmed that some hotels could be reprovisioned as flats and that whole blocks could be developed for this purpose.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly (Chair) asked for further information about the Fair Funding Review and the challenges it posed. Councillor Rowan Ree outlined how the Government allocated funding between councils, noting that the formula used took many metrics into account but had not fully reflected levels of deprivation. He added that this meant some of the challenges faced locally were not appropriately represented. Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked whether issues arising from the 2021 Census had contributed to discrepancies, and Councillor Rowan Ree confirmed that the Census had been conducted during the pandemic, affecting where people were living at the time, including people staying temporarily with relatives outside London.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked whether there was scope for a discretionary fund to be allocated. Councillor Rowan Ree advised that the council was pursuing this and that there would be a meeting with the Secretary of State to raise the issue. Councillor Adronie Alford asked how receptive the Government had been to Hammersmith and Fulham's position, and Councillor Rowan Ree stated that the Secretary of State, being a former London council leader, understood the challenges faced by London boroughs.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly sought further information regarding the £1.2m saving associated with the Homelessness Reduction Strategy. Councillor Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness) explained that this reflected the work of the teams within both the Housing General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account, and that efforts were being made to identify efficiencies. She noted that the council continued to consider ways to mediate with landlords. Richard Shwe added that the service had reduced from two heads of service to one, enabling a more integrated approach to prevent homelessness. Teams were now better placed to work together and provide coordinated support, asking more targeted questions to understand residents' needs. He explained that housing standards sat within the broader housing function and that a combined operation enabled closer engagement with the private rented sector and more proactive work.

Councillor Laura Janes asked for further detail on private-sector business opportunities. Richard Shwe advised that the council was lobbying the Government internally to access new grants and was also developing work with the private rented sector in relation to homelessness. Councillor Janes requested that the committee return to this topic at a later meeting.

Councillor Janes requested that the presentation slides be circulated and attached to the minutes, and Councillor Alford confirmed her agreement.

Councillor Janes then asked what circumstances might lead the council to revert to placing families in bed and breakfast accommodation. Richard Shwe confirmed that the council was maintaining its standards by seeking

appropriate temporary accommodation for families, as opposed to bed and breakfast.

RESOLVED That:

1. The Committee noted the update.

5. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2026/27

Danny Rochford (Head of Finance – Housing) introduced the report which outlined the 2026/27 budget for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The service faced increasing demand alongside challenges arising from the condition of the housing stock, evolving safety requirements, additional regulatory pressures and the wider climate-change agenda. Financial pressures included inflation, rising interest rates and the impact of wages and unemployment, set against the confirmation of the national rent policy for a ten-year period from 2026/27.

The Housing Revenue Account ten-year business plan was based on a tenanted stock of 11,800 homes and 5,090 leasehold properties, with planned investment of £940 million in repairs and capital works. A minimum general balance of £5 million had been maintained, supported by cumulative efficiencies of £3.9 million. For 2026/27, the budget assumed pay inflation of 2.5%, price and contract indexation of 3%, a void rent loss of 1.3%, a provision for tenant arrears of 87% and an interest rate of 4.5% on new borrowing. Rents were increasing by 4.8%.

Reserves had increased by £0.9 million over the previous two years and while £100 million was expected to be borrowed in the current year, no new borrowing was planned for the following year, contingent on development sales. The total value of the housing portfolio stood at £1.4 billion, with £347 million in outstanding debt and arrears amounting to £7.6 million.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly mentioned that she was disappointed that the HRA report was not included within the agenda pack, as Committee Members were not able to read it in advance of the meeting. She stressed the importance of having all the papers in advance.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly highlighted the difference between a 4% social rent increase and a 16% increase in the private sector. She sought clarification on the recommended approach, which aimed to minimise rent increases while protecting essential services, and asked about the £1.52 per week increase in service charges and the options available when seeking to set a balanced budget. Danny Rochford explained that the council faced significant financial challenges and had limited options. The primary available measure was to increase the Housing Revenue Account's main income stream, which was rents. He stated that the council had worked hard to keep rent increases as

low as possible but that successive years of financial pressure meant an increase was now necessary to ensure the HRA remained adequately resourced and financially sustainable.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked Richard Shwe whether he was satisfied with the rent increase level that had been set. Richard Shwe responded that it had been difficult to produce a balanced budget and that the increase was at the higher end of what the council would have preferred. He explained that service structures were being reviewed to ensure they were fit for purpose. In neighbourhood services, it had become clear that the use of temporary staff meant residents lacked continuity, and he noted that the service had moved from one housing officer per 800 homes to one per 400.

Councillor Adronie Alford referred to Appendix 3, page 172 of the 9th February 2026 H&F Cabinet agenda and asked why leaseholder contributions appeared to remain static until 2029/30 before rising sharply. Danny Rochford explained that the increase reflected the level of rising investment into the housing stock and that contributions were not recovered all in one year, which meant it took time for charges to reach the higher level. Councillor Adronie Alford noted that leaseholders' bills had risen previously and asked whether costs would be managed more stringently. Councillor Daly highlighted what appeared to be a threefold increase to leaseholders. Danny Rochford clarified that a higher level of contribution was linked to increased investment across more homes, but this did not mean leaseholders would face a three-times increase individually. Richard Shwe added that much of the stock was more than 120 years old and had not received the investment it required. Housing had now become a regulatory service, and work was under way to strengthen the leaseholder team, including enforcement officers. Councillor Frances Umeh stated that the council did everything it could to support leaseholders, including providing free fire doors.

Councillor Laura Janes sought more information about the consultation described in Appendix 8 of the HRA report in the 9th February 2026 H&F Cabinet Agenda. Danny Rochford reported that engagement had taken place with the housing representatives' forum and the sheltered housing forum. He acknowledged that residents understandably disliked rent increases but said they had a good grasp of the wider financial context, and the consultation had helped build understanding. He described the overall response as one of reluctant acceptance. Councillor Umeh emphasised that the forum discussions were detailed and thorough and commended Danny Rochford's presentation. Richard Shwe added that improvements were still needed in grounds maintenance and that the service was aware of this.

Councillor Laura Janes asked for examples of how the council proactively communicated changes through multiple channels. Richard Shwe explained that the council had undertaken work on the disability strategy and that more information would be presented at the next housing forum meeting, with the

option of bringing the material to the Policy and Accountability Committee. Councillor Umeh added that discussions were held at the forum about taking materials to resident groups.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked whether the proposed mitigations would be presented to renters at the time of the rent increase. Councillor Umeh explained that the communications team would outline the different channels through which information would be provided at the time of rent increases.

Councillor Sally Taylor asked what proportion of the housing stock was leasehold and what happened when leases expired. Danny Rochford confirmed that leasehold properties accounted for around 28% of the stock. Richard Shwe added that the council operated a bespoke programme to support leaseholders with extensions and was involved during property transfers.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked about the increasing demand for services, particularly concerning damp and mould, and whether there was data to demonstrate improvements. Richard Shwe explained that tenant satisfaction measures showed significant progress, rising from 37% three years earlier to 62.7%, with 15 out of 22 measures placing the service in the top London quartile. He confirmed that another update on tenant satisfaction measures would be provided to the Committee in November. Councillor Siddique asked whether hard-copy feedback forms were available, and Richard Shwe confirmed that they were, noting that the work was ongoing and that further statistics would be provided.

RESOLVED That:

1. The Committee noted the report.

6. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on 20th April 2026.

Meeting started: 7:01pm
Meeting ended: 8:44pm

Chair:

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