Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

GROWTH AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 15th December 2025

Present:	Councillor Zarina Amin (Chair) Councillor Timothy Bamford Councillor Donna Bellamy Councillor Harry McCarthy Councillor Alison Munro
Co-optees	
In attendance:	
Observers:	
Apologies:	Chris Friend (Co-Optee)

25 Membership of the Panel

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Chris Friend.

26 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 3 November 2025 be approved as a correct record.

27 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

28 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

29 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

30 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

31 Asset Disposals Update Report 2025

Councillor Graham Turner introduced the agenda item, advising that it was a straightforward asset report and that officers would provide further detail.

Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director Development, informed the Panel that the asset disposal update report is part of a regular series of reports to the panel and would provide an update on the progress on assets against the target for disposal.

In reference to the report, the Panel was advised that progress remains on track to achieve the £6 million target, and that current projections indicate this figure is likely to be exceeded within the financial year. The primary focus of the report is to ensure the Council has a clear understanding of those assets that are essential to service delivery. Wherever appropriate, the Council will seek to dispose of assets that are not of strategic importance or do not serve a core operational function. This approach will facilitate potential development opportunities on those sites and contribute to reducing the Council's revenue costs associated with maintaining those buildings or parcels of land

The Panel was informed that over successive reporting cycles, the approach has been to provide a focused, transparent account of the costs associated with asset disposals and the capital receipts generated from previous disposals. The report includes several tables which outline progress in relation to asset disposals and also details a number of assets previously declared surplus that have been awaiting disposal for some time.

The Panel was advised that there is a comprehensive programme of disposals underway, with the auction method being used in most cases. This approach ensures full transparency, allowing any interested party to bid providing openness in the prices achieved. On occasions, disposals are made directly to interested parties, particularly where they adjoin the asset in question, and that some transactions have proceeded via a 'best and final offer' process, including one due to conclude this week.

In response to the information presented, the Panel asked a number of questions and made comments including some of the following:

- How can the Panel be assured that the Council exhausts all other means of raising capital before it resorts to disposal of its assets often against the wishes of the community and council taxpayers?

- How is the target set?

- The report identifies that some assets are allocated as miscellaneous or pipeline.
  What are the main reasons that they have been put into that category and

what are the main issues that have been identified as to why they are struggling to get disposed of?

- Occasionally a sites goes in for auction and then it is withdrawn. Does withdrawing it from auction have a cost implication to the Council?

- Are there any opportunities for the Council to incorporate some of these sites into its own housing stock and where the Council owns the land and could support developers access funds, are potential opportunities being missed?

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and officers be thanked for presenting the Asset Disposals Update Report 2025.

32 Community Asset Transfer Update

Councillor Graham Turner introduced the agenda item, advising that this was the latest report on the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process, which outlines current activity within Kirklees. The report presents a positive update and demonstrates the success of the programme to date.

Alistair Kimpton, Strategic Partnership Lead, informed the Panel that Kirklees is regarded as an example of good practice in the management of Community Asset Transfers. This recognition included being invited to present at the Local Government Association Conference a few years ago. The strength of the Kirklees approach lies in working with communities in a community-led, rather than asset-led, approach when progressing CAT proposals.

The Panel was reminded that:

Community Asset Transfer: (CAT)

- the transfer of ownership and management of public land and buildings from the Council to a community organisation.
- assets are transferred at less than market value for local social, economic or environmental benefit.

The primary purpose of CATs in Kirklees:

- invest in our communities
- help our communities achieve their aspirations
- ensure assets and services remain available for the community

The Panel was informed that the current policy was updated in 2020, and in total there have been 27 asset transfers in addition to a variety of other assets. The policy was developed to support the council's corporate vision, and to reflect current best practice and the lessons learned. It was developed in consultation with a

variety of stakeholders including locality, nationally recognised bodies who help to develop community capacity.

The policy sets out a framework for the process, the whys, the whats and the hows. It is designed to be transparent to guide interested groups through the process and to make the process equal for all interested parties.

Transfers are by a long leasehold, and this is one of the examples of where there has been learning from previous practice and a move away from a freehold model to a leasehold model. The presumption is that all assets will be transferred by the grant of a leasehold for up to 125 years. This enables any future CAT leaseholders to have more detailed and better conversations with funders when they are applying for funding for revenue costs.

A key advantage of granting a long leasehold is that it establishes and maintains an ongoing relationship between the community group and the Council. Experience has shown that, where a freehold is transferred, the Council may lose an element of control; for example, if the CAT arrangement fails, the asset could potentially be sold on the open market. By contrast, a leasehold arrangement enables the Council to retain a degree of oversight and safeguard its long-term interests

Covenants are included in the lease to ensure that the asset is predominantly restricted to community use. There is a 70/30 model to restrict the commercial use of that building to 30% of the ongoing revenue, which means that they have the ability to raise revenue from commercial entities, however, the asset remains community focused. The Council reserves the right to use the asset for libraries or polling stations. The terms of the asset transfer do require a full repairing obligation to the people taking it on.

Referring to the presentation slides, the Panel was shown information which set out the indicative timescales associated with the Community Asset Transfer process. It was emphasised that these timescales are indicative only, as the Council works closely with groups taking on assets to ensure they have sufficient time to undertake their deliberations. Many of the stages are dependent on the capacity of the community group to engage in discussions and agree the heads of terms."

It was further noted that another reason Kirklees is regarded as an example of good practice is the level of support provided to community groups, which takes two main forms:

<u>Financial</u>

- Grant of up to £10,000 to cover professional fees, surveys etc, legal advice associated with the application, previously £5,000 maximum
- Applicants able to apply to the Council for a grant in order to fund urgent condition works or physical adaptations to the asset that will improve accessibility
- Match funding loan of up to £100,000, can be applied for retrospectively
- Revenue funding for building running costs (1st and 2nd year)

Additional support available to groups

- Internal support through Third Sector and Active Citizen teams
- External support commissioned through Locality, a national charity network with broad experience of asset transfers
- a critical friend for Kirklees and advice on current best practice
- support with the review of business models, capital project development, funding bids and procurement
- CAT Network meetings, workshops/bespoke training sessions for groups to develop knowledge and skills (as required)
- The overall aim is to support the delivery of successful and sustainable Community Asset Transfers within Kirklees

The overarching aim is to support delivery and to ensure that community groups are given the best possible opportunity to succeed.

Currently there are three cases with cabinet approval, and these are progressing towards completion, with the aim that all three will complete by the end of this financial year. These are Honey Village Hall, the Hudawi Centre and the DRAM centre.

Challenges

- Council's economic circumstances
- Competing priorities for assets
- Managing expectations of community organisations/Council
- Capacity within the community
- Access to and availability of external funding
- Timescales – 18/24 months process

In response to the information presented, the Panel asked a number of questions and made comments including some of the following:

- To date 27 asset transfers have gone through the process, when did it all start?

- Has the council always given a loan in terms of helping the community and if they default is that factored in, because it can be a risk especially for communities who do not have the experience and at what point would the Council intervene before it gets to that stage?

- In terms of the assets, if the community were to take over an asset and there are substantial repair works that needs to be done before they take it on, who is responsible and would the Council do that work?

- Quite a lot has changes in terms of CAT since changed from freehold to leasehold. Is financial support only available to the ones that are leasehold or is it also available to the assets that have already gone through as freehold?

- The government is currently introducing the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which sets up a communities right to buy. Some of the assets may not be Council assets and will include private assets that could be at risk of being sold off. Is there anything that the Council is doing or could do to share its expertise in dealing with this process to help community groups navigate this process?

- How many of the existing CATs are freehold and are they all held by town councils and Parish councils and have any been disposed of by communities?

RESOLVED:

That

a) the Cabinet Member and officers be thanked for proving an update on Community Asset Transfers.

b) further information be provided outlining the chronology of asset transfers to date.

33 Homes and Neighbourhoods Service Governance Review

Councillor Moses Crook presented the agenda item, advising the Panel that the report provided an update on the Homes and Neighbourhoods Service governance review, setting out the outcomes of the recent assessment of the service's governance arrangements. The report will progress to Cabinet in January 2026, and comments and input from the Scrutiny Panel are welcomed.

The Panel was informed that the update of the governance arrangements builds on the existing structures to reflect the changes in regulatory environment for social landlords, and also to reflect any response needed from the emerging risk register. There was a planned name change for the Homes and Neighbourhoods Improvement Board, which, along with an updated terms of reference for that group, will better position this body to provide the ongoing assurance required to ensure continued compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards.

Councillor Crook explained that, in order to reflect the transition from responding to the regulatory notice to achieving compliance and progressing towards becoming an inspection-ready social landlord, amendments would be required at an appropriate point. The timing of this change would be delegated, given that the final date for the removal of the Notice to Improve has not yet been confirmed.

There is continued importance placed on the tenant led panel, this bridge between service and tenant voice will remain critical during the transition, not just for regulatory compliance but also to developing a relationship of increasing trust with tenants. There is a need to move from a position of simply regulatory compliance to one of increasing tenant satisfaction where tenants are happy and secure in their safe, warm and decent homes.

There are two new officer boards and an extended scope for the Transformation Board, to reflect additional layers of governance to enhance and accelerate the improvement journey.

In response to the information presented, the Panel asked a number of questions and made comments including some of the following:

- With reference to section 2.15 of the report which refers to a 'team led panel' creating a two-way communication channel with the tenant base. How is that being undertaken?

- Surveys are sent to council tenants, what is the return rate?

- The report mentions a risk regarding data integrity management, security. How is data currently being managed within Homes and Neighbourhoods and what other specific issues have been identified as being a risk? For example, gaps and knowledge regarding stock or keeping personal information secure, and how would the new governance arrangements address that?

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and Officer be thanked for providing an update on the Homes and Neighbourhoods Service Governance Review.

34 Tenant Voice Strategy Update

Cllr Moses Crook introduced the agenda item informing the Panel that the information provides an update on progress in delivering the tenant voice strategy, including the implementation of the refreshed engagement framework introduced in September 2025. The information outlines how these updates and improvements are strengthening compliance with the consumer standards, in particular the transparency, influence and accountability standard which sits under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023.

The report describes significant changes in how tenant engagement is carried out and the importance that is placed on the tenant voice contributing to the development and improvement of the service. It describes the move to embedding engagement across all aspects of the service to ensure the tenants views and needs are reflected in, and central to every aspect of housing provision.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and Officer be thanked for providing an update on the Tenant Voice Strategy Update.