

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

GROWTH AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 9th March 2026

Present: Councillor Zarina Amin (Chair)
Councillor Timothy Bamford
Councillor Donna Bellamy
Councillor Harry McCarthy
Councillor Alison Munro

Co-optees Chris Friend

In attendance: Cllr Moses Crook, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Transport and Housing
Cllr Graham Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and
Regeneration
Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director Development
Phil Jones, Service Director for Homes and
Neighbourhoods
Johanna Scrutton, Group Leader, Planning Policy and
Strategy
Liz Jefferson, Acting Head of Housing Growth
Mathias Franklin, Head of Planning and Development
David Shepherd, Executive Director for Place

Observers: Cllr John Taylor
Cllr Mohan Sokhal

44 Membership of the Panel

No apologies were received.

45 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th January 2026, be approved as a correct record.

46 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

47 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

48 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

49 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

50 Internal Assessment of Compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards

Councillor Moses Crook introduced the agenda item informing the Panel that the report provides an update on compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards. In summary the Panel was informed that the report forms part of the Council's internal assessment and validation processes in preparation for any future inspection by the Regulator. All registered providers, including the Council as a landlord, are subject to such inspections.

The Panel was advised that, similar to other public sector inspection frameworks, the Council has no control over when an inspection takes place. As a result, it is important to maintain continuous assurance activity to ensure ongoing readiness and compliance with the Consumer Standards. The Council's priority remains the delivery of high-quality services for tenants, with compliance and, where possible, exceeding the required standards being fundamental to this objective.

External validation of the Council's internal assessment has been commissioned from the David Tolson Partnership to provide additional assurance that the assessments are rigorous and that any areas requiring improvement are clearly identified.

The Panel was informed that the Homes and Neighbourhoods Service has undergone significant transformation over the past two years, effectively addressing service deficits in areas such as damp, mould and condensation, fire safety, and water testing. The service has also taken steps to become more tenant-focused, ensuring that the tenant voice is embedded throughout service design and delivery.

A key element of the service's improvement work is the ongoing stock condition survey, which will provide up-to-date information on the condition of all Council homes and support the achievement and maintenance of high standards. This area of compliance, particularly in relation to the safety and quality standard, remains a continued focus for further improvement.

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The Panel was advised that the service has taken action to address areas where standards had not been met. Successful social landlords continually seek opportunities to improve and to enhance the services provided to tenants. The Homes and Neighbourhoods Service exists solely to serve tenants, and the internal assessment will support further refinement of service delivery in line with this overarching purpose.

Cllr Crook informed the Panel that both his aspiration and that of the service is to achieve the highest C1 rating and to be among the top 11% of council housing providers. The report sets out an assessment of the service's current position against each of the Consumer Standards.

Phil Jones, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods, informed the Panel that the assessment is measured against four areas of the Consumer Standards. Three of these areas are currently assessed as C2, which is positive, and one is assessed as C3. He highlighted that, while overall performance is strong across all standards, some ongoing issues within the Safety and Quality Standard may result in an overall C3 rating.

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

- Referring to section 2.3.1 of the submitted report where it states that three of the four consumer standards are C2, however gaps remain in safety and quality. What are the challenges and what is hindering progress on this?
- Regarding the appendix on page 23 of the submitted report, the report is in black and white but there is information in red, amber and green actions which is not possible to see progress on those. In addition, there is information showing circles and squares and it is not possible to determine what the circles and squares mean. Would it be possible for coloured copies of this information be circulated to the Panel?
- Regarding safety and quality information, it was mentioned that it would take a while for the survey to complete. Is that likely to be completed in time for a C2 level at the next inspection, and also what are the main challenges to conducting that stock condition survey?
- Despite the intention to avoid situations where tenants need to be decanted from their homes, have there been instances where this has been necessary and if so, what are the main challenges including the typical duration of such decant periods, and the proportion of properties affected?

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and officers be thanked for providing an update on the Internal Assessment of Compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards.

51

Housing Growth Update

Cllr Graham Turner, introduced the agenda item informing the Panel that the report contains a number of positive developments, with progress being made across several challenging sites. He explained that although the Council remains short of its overall housing target, the team continues to work towards closing this gap, and a forthcoming update on the Local Plan is expected to support further progress.

Liz Jefferson, Acting Head of Housing Growth, informed the Panel that the update being presented, would include the work of the Housing Growth Team over the past 12 months, the strategic context in which the team operates, progress made on strategic sites, town centre living, specialist and affordable housing, and market housing. The presentation to the Panel would also highlight key learning, the challenges encountered, and the priorities for the year ahead.

In summary, the Panel was advised that, since coming to power in July 2024, the government placed a significant emphasis on building new homes and has made a commitment to deliver 1.5 million new homes in the next five years. This will be supported by the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets, reform of the planning system, and plans for a number of new towns.

The national commitment to increasing housing delivery is also reflected regionally, with one of the Mayoral pledges being the delivery of 5,000 affordable homes by 2028. In Kirklees, the current Strategic Housing Market Assessment identifies a need for 1,873 new homes per year across the district. The housing waiting list now exceeds 19,000 households, highlighting the significant level of local housing need, and in response, the Council is progressing a comprehensive programme of work.

The Panel was also informed that, over the past 12 months, an updated Housing Strategy for the period 2026-2031 has been developed. The draft Housing Strategy sets out a vision to ensure every resident has access to a suitable, safe and affordable home. A key focus of the strategy is enabling people to secure appropriate accommodation and prevent homelessness. The strategy addresses this through three core themes: housing need, housing quality, and housing growth and delivery.

The strategy has been developed against a backdrop of rising housing need, an ageing population, increasing cost-of-living pressures and widening inequalities. It provides a coordinated, long-term framework for responding to the housing challenges facing Kirklees.

With regard to strategic sites, the Panel was informed that Dewsbury Riverside, is the largest housing allocation in the current local plan and over the last 12 months, progress continues working closely with Homes England. Preliminary market engagement took place with master developers in the summer of last year.

Another focus has been the resolution of issues with neighbouring strategic landowners with whom dialogue and negotiation is ongoing. Unfortunately, it is not possible to progress to the procurement of a master developer until these issues have been resolved. Recent positive conversations have been held with the relevant landowners, and it is anticipated that there will be further progress over the summer.

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In conjunction with that, procurement documents have been prepared in readiness to be issued as soon as the landowner issues are resolved.

Bradley Park, is a council owned strategic housing allocation that will deliver approximately 2000 homes. As reported at a previous scrutiny panel meeting, strategic acquisitions relating to access needed to be resolved before commencing procurement. One strategic property purchase has been completed and another two have been well advanced. The properties will be used as temporary accommodation for those in housing need until such time as they are demolished. As with the Dewsbury Riverside development, procurement documents are ready to be issued once the strategic property issues relating to access are resolved. Those property acquisitions are required to give certainty to prospective bidders around access.

The Panel was informed that in respect of town centre living, that an important part of the blueprint visions for town centres in Huddersfield and Dewsbury is to increase the number of people living in the town centres. This helps to increase footfall and supports and sustains other uses such as retail and leisure.

In Huddersfield, estate buildings has been identified as a council asset that can deliver housing and help to create a new housing offer, which would appeal to a new and different market from those currently living in the town centre, particularly graduates from the university who wish to remain in the area.

The Panel was informed that the Housing Growth Team successfully secured £1.25 million of One Public Estate Brownfield Land Release Funding in 2024. This funding has supported enabling works on surplus land and buildings identified for future housing development, with those works completed in 2025. A Cabinet report setting out the proposed delivery route for housing on these sites was considered in June last year.

The Panel was provided with information relating to the progress which is being continued across a number of key housing growth projects.

- Procurement activity has advanced, and in Dewsbury the primary focus remains on the Daisy Hill area, where previous acquisitions and earlier residential developments, such as the Station Apartments, have supported the emerging delivery approach within the Dewsbury Long-Term Plan. One key property was taken to market in 2025, and detailed proposals are now under consideration.
- Work is ongoing to deliver specialist housing at Kenmore Drive, Cleckheaton, an 80-unit extra-care scheme with Housing 21 has progressed well and is expected to complete in late summer.
- In Mirfield, partnership work with Connect Housing will deliver 13 homes for adults with social care needs, with legal matters close to resolution and a start on site anticipated mid-year. Alongside this, the service continues to address the significant demand for temporary accommodation, having identified and modelled a range of options, with further detailed work underway in collaboration with finance, legal and government partners.

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- Work to support the delivery of affordable and mixed-tenure housing also continues. While three RP cluster sites were found to be unviable following detailed investigations, progress is expected on two sites in Cleckheaton during 2026, delivering 97 affordable and intermediate homes.
- The service's specialist team secured 73 affordable homes through the planning process in 2024–25, with further work ongoing. Mixed-tenure developments are also advancing, including the major Soothill scheme, which will deliver 319 homes (43% affordable), with completion expected by December.
- At Fenny Lane, Almondbury, legal and planning work with the appointed development partner has progressed, and the Ash View site has recently completed the delivery of 98 market homes and 21 affordable units.

The Panel was informed that in terms of key learning and challenges over the past year, the service has faced several challenges, particularly the continued pressure of a significant housing waiting list and the acute need for social rent homes. There has however, been a positive shift in the types of proposals being brought forward by developers, influenced in part by Homes England's new funding programme, which has led to an increase in schemes including social rent units.

The team has also encountered difficulties associated with developing infill sites, where Kirklees' hilly geography, high drainage costs and legacy issues from industrial and mining activity have rendered some sites unviable. Despite this, the service continues to explore innovative approaches, new partnerships and funding opportunities to overcome these barriers.

Looking ahead to the coming year, the focus will be on progressing strategic housing sites, increasing residential development within town centres, and supporting colleagues in Housing Solutions to expand the provision of temporary accommodation. The service will also work closely with Local Plan colleagues to support development and delivery as the new Local Plan moves forward.

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

- In respect of the current figure of 19,000 individuals and families on the housing waiting list is this up to date, or has it increased recently, and for how long has the number been at this level?
- In terms of clarity on the RP programme, it says that some of the sites were unviable and they are being considered for disposal. Does that mean they have not already been disposed of and the ones that are not viable potentially could remain within council ownership, or some alternative options could be found, and they won't necessarily transfer the ownership of that registered provider, is that right?
- On the five-year housing supply how far behind is it looking and is the outlook positive or is it looking negative?

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and officers be thanked for providing a Housing Growth update.

52 Updates on national planning reforms

Cllr Graham Turner, introduced the agenda item advising the Panel that this remains a rapidly evolving area, with frequent changes to national guidance and policy. Despite the pace of change, the small team are doing a very good job interpreting and responding to extensive and complex information. The team is undertaking work as preparations progress towards the future Local Plan, including adjusting elements of the current plan to avoid unnecessary duplication pending updated policy guidance.

In summary, Johanna Scrutton, Group Leader, Planning Policy and Strategy advised the Panel that there has been a great deal of planning reforms over the past 18 months to two years, and this work is still ongoing. These reforms have resulted in substantial policy revisions and have introduced new legislation, particularly through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, some of which the plan elements only came into commencement last week and the Planning and Infrastructure Act.

The scale and pace of recent planning reforms are considerable, representing the most substantial changes since the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012. The Government is seeking to provide greater certainty in the operation of the planning system, encompassing both the preparation of local plans and the timely determination of planning applications, together with the effective delivery of development sites arising from those applications.”

The government aims to move towards a more rule-based national planning system, with clear and consistent standards for applicants and developers. The Panel was informed that the information being presented will focus on the current reforms, ongoing consultations, and emerging proposals. This represents only a snapshot in time, as further guidance and additional reforms are expected.

The Panel was advised that one of the key reforms has been the overview of the National Planning Policy framework. A revised draught was published in December 2025, for consultation and the consultation date closes on the 10th March 2026. The consultation comprises of 225 questions on the proposed structure, format, policies and content. The planning services have worked across the council, engaging with our other council services who use our plan and not just in the delivery of their own developments, but also in the delivery of council plan objectives.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has undergone substantial restructuring. The document now adopts a format more closely aligned with a Local Plan and, for the first time, includes a comprehensive set of 133 policies. These policies are divided into two categories: plan-making policies and decision-making policies.

The Government's intention, is to make planning policy more accessible. It is to provide a comprehensive suite of national policies which must be used by all local

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authorities across the country. The intention is to avoid unnecessary duplication within local plans and to limit divergence from national planning policy. This approach is designed to streamline plan preparation and prevent the creation of varying local standards, which can add complexity to the development process.

The Panel received an update on Chapter 2 of the draft framework, which confirms the government's continued commitment to a plan-led planning system and its intention to secure universal coverage of Local Plans across all local authorities as soon as possible. The chapter sets out a revised hierarchy of plans, including the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies, representing the re-establishment of a sub-regional planning tier. These strategies will define a strategic vision for growth and change across the region, covering housing, employment, and infrastructure. Spatial Development Strategies are now formally recognised within both the NPPF and the Planning and Infrastructure Act,

The Panel was advised that secondary legislation is still awaited to clarify the detailed requirements for their preparation. For Kirklees, this will require close collaboration with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, which will lead the preparation of the regional strategy, as well as with neighbouring authorities, to ensure that local circumstances, priorities, and ambitions are properly reflected.

The government's intention to replace Supplementary Planning Documents with Supplementary Plans, which will have a more limited and focused scope. As part of this, existing documents such as the affordable housing supplementary guidance will need to be reviewed to determine how they align with the revised national policy framework.

The Panel was informed that Chapter 4 of the draft framework retains a strong emphasis on sustainability, with policies prioritising development within existing settlements and in locations with good access to services and sustainable transport options, including those identified under policy TR3. The intention is to support development close to key facilities, thereby reducing the need for travel and promoting more sustainable patterns of growth.

The updated NPPF also introduces several new annexes, which consolidate material previously dispersed across the NPPF and national Planning Practice Guidance. These annexes bring together the essential requirements relating to planning application validation, the revised standard method for calculating housing need, Green Belt assessment, and flood risk management. The government has not yet clarified the status or weight of the remaining Planning Practice Guidance that sits outside the NPPF; the draft framework refers only to its role in supporting implementation, and further clarification has been sought.

The Panel also received an overview of the twelve key development reforms set out in the draft NPPF (as detailed in section 2.18 of the appended report). These reforms primarily aim to promote development in sustainable locations and ensure more efficient use of land particularly brownfield land through opportunities for densification. The reforms also link to national expectations for contributing to the delivery of 1.5 million homes and to the local requirement for 1,873 homes per annum over the plan period.

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The Panel was informed that new plan-making regulations and processes have been introduced. Since the preparation of the report to Scrutiny, updated plan-making regulations were laid before Parliament on 4 March 2026 and are expected to come into force on 25 March 2026. The implementation of these regulations introduces new statutory requirements for the commencement of a Local Plan, including the submission and publication of a Notice of Intention to Commence a new Local Plan timetable, together with revised scoping consultation obligations. Cabinet will consider approval to commence work under the new plan-making system at its meeting on 24 March.

With the introduction of the new plan-making regulations it does not mean that all the work undertaken to date is redundant. The substantial evidence already compiled can continue to be used, subject to a re-scoping exercise to ensure alignment with the revised NPPF requirements. Officers will also continue to work with internal and external partners to progress site assessments, including those submitted through the call-for-sites process.

The Panel was advised that, under the new statutory requirements, the scoping and consultation stages must take place only after the publication of both the notice of intention and the revised plan timetable. As a result, some duplication of work will be unavoidable. These steps must be completed within a minimum four-month period before the authority can progress to Gateway 1, at which point an independent assessment by the Planning Inspectorate will determine whether the work undertaken to date satisfies the required standards. Subject to passing Gateway 1, the Council will then move into the prescribed 30-month plan-making period,

The government is making funding available to support the transition to the new plan-making system. Kirklees has already secured funding to assist with evidence gathering and in January has submitted an expression of interest for additional financial support. The decision was supposed to be made on the 6th of March, but that has been pushed back to the middle of March.

The Panel was informed that a further key consultation closing on the 10th March 2026, relates to the emerging Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This new guidance proposes consolidating four existing national design documents, including the National Design Guide, Design Processes and Tools, and the National Model Design Codes (Parts 1 and 2), into a single, streamlined and more accessible resource.

The proposed PPG is structured around seven elements of well-designed places, namely: liveability, climate resilience, nature, movement, built form, public space and identity. The importance of these principles in shaping homes and neighbourhoods that are durable, energy-efficient, and responsive to community needs, particularly in relation to long-term affordability and the cost of living in those homes was explained.

The Panel was informed that the guidance also clarifies how design principles should be applied through local design codes, marking a shift from the previous expectation for a district-wide design code. Local authorities will now be able to

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focus design coding on specific areas such as strategic allocations or masterplan sites. This more targeted approach is likely to be beneficial for Kirklees in the longer term.

The Panel was informed that the Planning and Infrastructure Act came into force at the end of 2025, introducing several provisions that will shape the operation of the planning service in future years. In particular, Section 53 of the Act gives the Secretary of State new powers to require mandatory training for members of planning committees and sub-committees, as well as to introduce a national scheme of delegation. These measures are intended to support more efficient and timely decision-making across planning authorities. The Council is currently awaiting the necessary regulations that will bring these provisions into effect.

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

- The report mentions a permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development; can you explain what that means?
- With regard to building homes around stations, including on greenbelt land, that seems to be changing the purpose of greenbelt.
- Through the consultation process, has further clarification been sought from the government to firm up the definition and application of the 'grey belt'?

Cllr John Taylor who was in attendance at the meeting asked a question regarding the definitions of sustainability, and connectivity and, what does good connectivity look like?

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and officers be thanked for providing an update on National Planning Reforms.