

<b>30 January 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Update on Responsive Repairs Policy Consultation</b>		
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor Val Morris-Cook – Portfolio Holder for Housing		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing Investment and Development		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To provide an update on the consultation and benchmarking of the responsive repairs policy.		

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

An updated repairs policy is intended to provide clarity on the Councils' and tenants' responsibilities for repairs. The policy will operate within the legislative framework that defines the Council's role as a landlord and, therefore, the Council's responsibilities for maintaining the property. This policy is an important document in each of our Tenancy Agreements that defines the responsibilities of the Council and the individual responsibilities of the tenant.

This report provides an update as to the scope and nature of the consultation that has and continues to be undertaken on a new responsive repairs policy for Council managed housing, and the outcome of the benchmarking exercise that was undertaken against the repair policies of other local authorities to establish opportunities for value for money or service enhancements that could be adopted.

Our principal drivers remain the achievement of measurable improvements in service quality and value for money, with the full support of all our key stakeholders. Our intention is to have a new Responsive Repairs Policy agreed and endorsed by members in April 2014, prior to the commencement of the new responsive repairs and maintenance contract.

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **1.1 That the contents of the report be noted.**

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1 The Council is currently re-procuring a service provider to assist in the delivery of an effective and efficient responsive repairs service. An integral part of this will be the policy that governs the parameters – the extent, scope and timeframes associated with delivery of the service. Consultation to date on the repairs service has received widespread support from both members and residents for the Council to review in detail its current repairs policy and to explore opportunities to differentiate service provision based on vulnerability.
- 2.2 The repairs policy consultation has been informed by the Council's Community Engagement Toolkit and involves the following:
- a. All Council tenants and leaseholders will receive by post a repairs survey, to complete and return.
  - b. There will be an alternative to the postal survey with an online option.
  - c. Telephone surveys will be undertaken with a sample group of tenants from across the borough.
  - d. A public meeting has been convened in January to discuss the new repairs policy. The meeting has been advertised in the Enquirer newspaper to increase the opportunity for participation.
  - e. Repairs surgeries will be made available to residents to receive comments and to answer questions on the priorities for the repairs service.
  - f. Specific meetings will be arranged for residents of sheltered housing schemes
- 2.3 The consultation methodology does not extend a greater level of importance in respect of any of the options described. The objective will be to ensure that the opportunities to obtain a wide range of resident views are maximised.

2.4 The key elements of our consultation are detailed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Scope of Consultation Activities**

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	CONSULTATION
Members	2 Member briefings on 25 <sup>th</sup> and 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2013. 8 Councillors participated. Housing Overview and Scrutiny 6 <sup>th</sup> February 2014 Member briefings 16 <sup>th</sup> January Member approval planned for April cabinet
Residents	Online survey and feedback by residents on new Repairs Policy during January and February 2014 via Objective. Letter drop and postal survey to all 10,000 residents in January 2014 concerning proposed changes to Repairs Policy and encouraging residents to participate in survey during January and February 2014. Telephone surveys with residents via call centre. Repairs surgeries including specific sessions within sheltered housing complexes Resident consultation meeting planned in January 2014.
Staff	Regular internal staff sessions including staff from our strategic partner during July to December 2013. There have also been additional internal formal and informal sessions on particular aspects of the Repairs and Maintenance procurement such as performance measures and contractual terms.

### **Preliminary Consultation**

2.5 In shaping the areas of the policy that would be broadly consulted an initial series of meetings with Members and residents took place. This initial consultation exercise identified some very consistent themes that have informed the scope, term and characteristics of the new Housing Responsive Repairs and Maintenance contract and, more importantly for this report, an emerging steer to review existing Repairs Policy and identify opportunities to bring this in line with other local authorities, explore value for money and service improvement opportunities.

2.6 The feedback obtained was utilised to frame the broad areas that the Council is more widely consulting on as outlined above. The initial feedback can be summarised as follows:

- a. Members supported the review of Council's Repairs Policy to bring it in line with other authorities, drive value for money and tailor the repairs service to better meet the differing needs and abilities of tenants.
- b. The Council should explore the potential to reward good "model" tenants where possible.
- c. Residents felt the Council should review their Repairs' Policy and consider placing more responsibility on residents that are able to accept additional responsibility and cost e.g. replacement of batteries in smoke alarms.

- d. Residents are keen to maintain higher levels of support for those residents that are more vulnerable. It is recognised by the service and by the key stakeholders during the initial consultation stages that a differentiation in support and scope for vulnerable residents. Good communications are central to a good repairs service and the contract needs to promote and monitor the effectiveness of different forms of communication.
- e. A key priority for residents is for the repair to be delivered “right first time”.
- f. It is important to recharge tenants and leaseholders appropriately e.g. vandalism and service charges.

### **Full Consultation and suggested policy revisions:**

- 2.7 Extensive consultation being undertaken in January with the intention of capturing the views and perceptions of the broadest range and representation of residents is intended to deal with their views on specific changes to the Council’s Repair Policy.
- 2.8 It is proposed that a new Repairs Policy acknowledges the differing needs and requirements of more vulnerable residents who are defined as "An adult (a person aged 18 years or more) who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness and who is or may be unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation".
- 2.9 The five-year housing capital programme, “Transforming Homes”, will refurbish all homes not meeting our investment criteria. The improvements to kitchens, bathrooms, windows and roofs will be to a standard that exceeds the Government’s housing standards. It is opportune to also test with residents through this consultation, the assertion that tenants who benefit from the Transforming Homes improvement works should accept responsibility to maintain their homes to a standard that protects the value of this investment. It is therefore proposed that the homes which have been refurbished will not ordinarily receive further repair works unless:
  - a. The Council has a statutory obligation for the repair; or
  - b. The householder is defined as a vulnerable person.
- 2.10 The consultation questions are therefore seeking views on:
  - a. The scope of service to be delivered to vulnerable people;

- b. Whether the services offered should make a distinction between vulnerable people and residents who did not meet the vulnerable people criteria.
  - c. Resident priorities for repairs;
  - d. The application of charges for appointments not kept by residents; and
  - e. Resident perception of the service based upon their experiences over the last 12 months and any other suggested changes from tenants and leaseholders as applicable.
- 2.11 The consultation with Thurrock residents will determine their appetite for change, and will identify specific repairs considered to be of most importance. Recommendations to members on a revised Repairs Policy that may change the scope of services currently offered by the Council will be informed by the views of residents. As of January 17<sup>th</sup> 1055 tenants had returned postal surveys and 20 tenants had completed the online consultation.
- 2.12 The consultation period will remain open until 28 February. The evaluation and final report will be produced in March 2014 together with the recommendations for the new Repairs Policy for Cabinet approval.
- 2.13 A draft revised housing Repairs Policy will be incorporated into the Repairs and Maintenance ITT to inform bidders' responses. A final Repairs Policy will be available prior to contract finalisation and mobilisation.

### **3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:**

#### **Benchmarking**

- 3.1 A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to compare our current repairs policy with the repairs policies of five other local and comparable authorities. The authorities selected were the London Borough of Redbridge, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, London Borough of Havering, Basildon Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council.
- 3.2 A summary of the key differences are summarised in Table 2 below. In four out of five benchmarked policies, the tenants are responsible for undertaking repairs in these authorities that currently Thurrock Council are undertaking on behalf of their tenants.
- 3.3 There is an opportunity evaluate transferring some responsibility to some tenants particularly where the impact on individual tenants will be minimal and it will provide an opportunity to provide an enhanced offer to vulnerable tenants, in addition in terms of general needs. The detailed comparison is attached at Appendix 1.

**Table 2: Benchmarking Results**

Redbridge	Barking & Dagenham	Havering	Basildon	Southend on Sea
<p>Glazing of windows</p> <p>Dividing fencing to gardens</p> <p>Front, side and rear gates</p> <p>Lost keys</p> <p>Internal window cills</p> <p>Skirting boards and picture rails</p> <p>Minor repairs to plasterwork</p> <p>Splashback wall tiles and grouting</p> <p>Loose floor coverings and fitted carpets</p> <p>Bath panels</p> <p>Kitchen cupboards and drawers</p> <p>Kitchen worktops</p> <p>Kitchen cupboard door hinges and handles</p> <p>Kitchen tap washers</p> <p>Toilet seats</p> <p>Bleeding of radiators</p>	<p>Mastic sealing and re-grouting of baths</p> <p>Replacement glazing</p> <p>Hot water cylinder jackets</p> <p>Bleeding of radiators</p> <p>Skirting boards</p> <p>Battery operated smoke alarms</p> <p>Additional electrical sockets</p> <p>Wall tiling in kitchens and bathrooms</p> <p>Window catches</p>	<p>Hot water jackets to cylinders</p> <p>Toilet handles and pulls</p> <p>Airing cupboard shelves</p> <p>Skirting boards</p> <p>Bath panels</p> <p>Window glazing</p> <p>Blocked sinks, basins, baths, toilets and drains</p> <p>Catches and hinges to garden gates</p>	<p>No differences identified</p>	<p>Tap washers</p> <p>1st attempt blocked sinks</p>

- 3.4 The benchmarking identified a number of areas of our current repairs policy that exceeds that of other comparable councils and that could be tested further with residents. It's these areas that are being tested through the online and postal surveys and other consultation events in January and February to form a consensus and set of recommendations for member approval in April 2014. The specific areas are as follows:
- a. Replacement of batteries to smoke alarms and door bells;
  - b. Repair damage to garden fences;
  - c. Supply and installation of additional electrical sockets and switches;
  - d. Repair of shelves;
  - e. Repair of skirting boards;
  - f. Replacement of loose floor tiles to kitchen, bathroom and WC; and
  - g. Repair of doors to kitchen units.
- 3.5 The key objectives of the repairs procurement are to drive measurable improvements in service quality and value for money and to implement and operate a repairs policy that is appropriate, supported by our key stakeholders and supports these principal objectives for the repairs service.
- 3.6 The overall repairs demand is at an average of 3.9 repairs per property (November 13). That is significantly higher than the national average of 2.5. The annual cost per property for repairs is £480 compared to a national average of £330. Our capital investment programme, together with greater emphasis on planned and cyclical maintenance and the implementation of a repairs policy that is comparable to other authorities will assist in reducing this repairs demand and cost comparable with the national averages.
- 3.7 In reviewing and amending the repairs policy, the Council will be able to better control the volume of reported repairs and direct the service provider to undertake repairs that are of importance and priority for the residents. It will also ensure that the service provider is not overwhelmed by repair orders for relatively minor repairs that can justifiably be undertaken by an able tenant.
- 3.8 The proposed refocusing of the repairs policy should enable the Council to obtain better value for tenants and leaseholders as applicable and reduce the annual spend per property on responsive repairs and reduce the average number of repairs per property.
- 3.9 The consultation with Thurrock residents will determine their appetite for change, and will identify the repairs which they consider to be of most importance. Whilst recognising that the views of residents will play a part in shaping the future of the repairs service, the feedback received will need to be

considered together with a changing culture for repairs. The repairs service will in time empower residents to better manage minor repairs in their homes, with the consequential benefit of reducing demand for low-priority maintenance.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- 4.1 No specific recommendations are contained within this update report to Overview and Scrutiny.
- 4.2. Overview and Scrutiny are politely requested to note the contents of this update report.

#### **5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 This is described previously in the report.

#### **6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 There are no specific recommendations within this report that will impact on any corporate policies, priorities, performance or impacts on any specific community. In time, recommendations will be forthcoming to approve and adopt a revised housing repairs policy.

#### **7. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jo Beard**  
Telephone and email: **01375 652598**  
**Jbeard@thurrock.gov.uk**

There are no financial implications to this report.

##### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Daniel Toohey**  
Telephone and email: **01375 652049**  
**daniel.toohey@BDTlegal .org.uk**

This report asks Cabinet to note progress on the consultation and benchmarking of the responsive repairs policy. This information will enable the Council to formulate future policy. In the circumstances there are no legal implications arising from this report.



### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
Telephone and email: **01375652472**  
**Sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

There are no diversity implications arising from this report.

### 7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

There are no other implications arising from this report.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- N/A

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Appendix 1: Detailed analysis of repairs policy benchmarking against other authorities.

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