

20 February 2018		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Repairs Policy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Sue Murray, Housing Asset and Investment Delivery Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: John Knight, Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

As part of the current housing review the Council's repairs function as a social landlord has been re-assessed in terms of both practice and policy. This report summarises this work and sets out some proposed changes to the published policy and accompanying documents.

There have been a number of positive developments in recent months reflected in higher performance by our main repairs contractor and reduced levels of complaints (both received and upheld). Data from the independent stock condition survey and other intelligence is being used to achieve a shift away from responsive repairs to a more systematic and focussed programme of planned maintenance.

As well as pursuing higher levels of efficiency and customer satisfaction we have focussed on seeking to empower tenants wherever possible. This is reflected in our aspiration to produce and publicise a clear and comprehensive written policy, and related communication tools including website content and a dedicated 'Frequently Asked Questions' document.

We have also sought to give greater autonomy to our tenants to carry out repairs and improvements in their own homes whilst ensuring appropriate safeguards and quality mechanisms are in place for safety and to protect the physical integrity of what remains the Council's asset as a social landlord.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the report and the current operation of the repairs function.**

1.2 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the proposed changes to the published repairs policy and the other proposals for improvement which are set out in the report.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In December 2014 Cabinet agreed a new policy and contractual framework for the delivery of responsive repairs and maintenance to council homes. The policy was designed around a number of principles, including the provision of an enhanced service for vulnerable residents, alongside reframing shared responsibility between tenants and the council once major capital investment through the Transforming Homes refurbishment programme had been completed.
- 2.2 The policy was implemented in February 2015. A report was submitted to the Committee in September 2015 which demonstrated progress on the implementation of the policy and made recommendations for improvements. The recommendations included transparent key performance indicators informed by resident feedback, alongside providing a service that provides both overall value for money for the Council and its tenants and added value through social value commitments set out as part of the contract.
- 2.3 As part of the larger housing review it was decided that a comprehensive review of the repairs policy be undertaken to ensure we have a robust, fit for purpose policy and to make additional improvements to the policy and associated communication with tenants and their representatives.
- 2.4 The review was undertaken principally by the Assistant Director for Housing, the Technical Services Delivery Manager, and the Housing Asset Investment and Delivery Manager with the lead responsibility for repairs contract management. In accordance with the overall approach to the housing review analysis and challenge was also provided by a member of the Business Improvement Team, which has no operational responsibility for this part of the service.
- 2.5 The views and experiences of our main contractor Mears Ltd. were also sought. Other stakeholders such as the Tenants Excellence Panel, and the growing number of functioning Tenants and Residents Associations, will be involved in the next stages of seeking feedback on the proposed new policy and raising awareness of its contents.
- 2.6 The overarching aim of the review was *‘to ensure the policy remains fit for purpose; that it address all current statutory requirements; that it enables the delivery of a value for money service for our tenants; and that it seeks to empower tenants wherever possible through access to information and the ability to be involved in the maintenance of their homes’*
- 2.7 Following the review we are proposing a number of improvements and amendments which were identified and are highlighted within the report.

2.8 Some of the main Performance Indicators for the Mears contract are set out below with year-to-date performance levels as at December 2015 and December 2017.

Performance Indicator	December 2015	December 2017
% of repairs completed within target	95.5%	97.35%
Average number of working days to complete a repair	15	4.5
Average number of days to hand back a void property	12.8	9
% of appointments kept	83%	97%
Satisfaction with repairs service	85.8% (93.5%)	91.9% (98.6%)
% of calls answered	87.5%	98.7%
Average call waiting time	1 min 12 s.	16 s

2.9 A number of other changes have been made to the partnership to improve the responsiveness and quality of repairs, including the introduction the specialist Damp & Mould team to provide comprehensive inspections and full housekeeping advice and support to tenants reporting damp and mould issues.

2.10 Further initiatives to improve further on the above performance and service we provide to our tenants are being developed by interrogating and analysing data we have received through the independent stock condition survey recently undertaken, as well as greater invigilation of our own data from the Northgate database, such as pinpointing the number of `repairs episodes` relating to a single reported defect/issue, as distinct from the `gross` number of repairs reported which includes multiple jobs raised to resolve one issue.

2.11 We are also aiming to implement more planned programme works and refurbishment programmes to reduce the need for reactive repairs. In this context we will seek to prioritise, where this can be supported by the data, those elements which are of the greatest current concern to tenants, members and other stakeholders. These in our view are damp & mould issues, replacing the remaining single glazed windows, and the programme for the installation of new boilers. This prioritisation will set alongside the necessary emphasis suggested by the survey on electrical works in particular, to achieve the right balance between compliance works and improvements.

2.12 We would also like to focus on encouraging tenants to undertake their own minor repairs and improvements to their homes. This can be achieved by assisting with offering tailored accreditation through the Mears Trades School. Mears have offered as part of their social value commitments to offer training courses on minor repairs, such as plumbing, carpentry and minor electrical works. This is to enable our tenants to make improvements where appropriate and supporting them in doing so.

- 2.13 Mears currently provide a Trade School for residents from aged 16-19 to participate on a 12 week course giving school leavers skills to be able to use throughout their lives and encouraging them to take pride and responsibility for the work projects they achieve whilst undertaking the course.
- 2.14 Where tenants are already skilled and/or qualified Mears can approve them through an accreditation process to carry out certain works which fall within their trade. This could be linked to the 'time banking' service coordinated through the community hubs, whereby residents offer their time and availability to each other for mutual benefit and are able to both 'deposit' and 'withdraw' time-banking units for tasks such as giving someone a lift in their car to an appointment, taking a neighbour's dog for a walk, etc.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 By reviewing the current published repairs policy we have identified a number of potential improvements which are proposed for implementation.
- 3.2 **Amend the wording within the document to make it more understandable and easier to read for our tenants** – We identified that the document was not easy to read and did not 'flow' in a logical sequence. We have edited and revised it to ensure that each section aligns and sits within its area of information being provided.
- 3.3 **To remove lease holder section** – We have made the recommendation for this section to be removed as it is not relevant to our tenants; in addition Leaseholders do not qualify for any of our repairs under our repairs policy and do not have access to the services provided through the policy. A separate document will be developed for leaseholders and for their sub-tenants.
- 3.4 **To add a specific Damp & Mould section** – The implementation of the new Damp & Mould team and other significant work in relation to the processes and support to tenants has been added to the policy.
- 3.5 **To refine the document layout** – We have made changes to the layout of the policy so that each section follows and is coordinated to the previous section. This is to make the whole document easier to read and follow and when looking for specific sections it will be easier to find.
- 3.6 **Strengthening the wording in relation to recharges and responsibilities** – This section has been amended to remove any ambiguities and reflect more clearly where a recharge is applicable.
- 3.7 **To align the repairs policy to 'Right to Repair' and have this as a separate appendix C** – We have removed the section relating to the statutory 'Right to Repair' entitlements of tenants and added this as an appendix. We have also amended the policy by improving our priorities against the right to repair priorities; each 3 day priority under the right to repair has been changed within the policy to 24 hours. In total there are 20 right to repair priorities, we

have improved on the timescale for 9 of these to ensure we meet our statutory requirements and give our tenants the best service possible.

- 3.8 **To add the tenancy agreement as a further appendix B** – The repairs policy references the Tenancy agreement throughout the document, so for easy reference for tenants we have now incorporated this as an appendix.
- 3.9 **To focus on tenants being more independent and allowing them to make improvements to their homes where appropriate.** The revised policy sets out how permission to perform some repairs can be obtained and monitored.
- 3.10 **Development of a dedicated Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQ') document.** Despite the changes above, as a comprehensive document setting out the full range of repairs and responsibilities the policy document is still relatively long and technical in nature. To complement it was developed an FAQ document to go on to the website and to be displayed in blocks etc., which provides clear and simple answers to the questions most often put to Call Centre staff, the Quality Assurance team and Tenancy Service staff in relation to repairs. This document in particular will remain under constant review and can be quickly amended to reflect any new issues as they emerge.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The draft repairs policy reflects our ambitions to
- deliver the responsive repairs service to a higher standard
 - make the published policy easier to understand by putting it into a more readable and easy to follow format for our tenants, setting out more clearly our expectations and what our tenants can expect from us as a Council and a modern social landlord
 - be more transparent and accountable through a dedicated FAQ leaflet and other awareness-raising exercises
 - continually improve the service through innovations such as Mears accreditation for tenants wanting to carry out their own repairs, and linking this permission to wider community models such as time-banking

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 No formal consultation is required but feedback will be sought from a range of partners and stakeholders (including the Committee) as set out in the main body of the report.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 No specific implications identified.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**
HRA & Development Accountant

The cost of all repairs to tenanted properties carried out by the Council is borne within the Housing Revenue Account. The impact of changes to practice in this area will need to be carefully monitored in terms of their budgetary impact. The Council has a duty to balance the HRA in each financial year.

There are no financial implications.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Chima Obichukwu**
Housing Solicitor

The Council has a legal obligation as a landlord to maintain its rented properties in an adequate state of repair. As set out in the main body of the report these proposals are intended to enhance the service's compliance in this area.

7.3 Diversity and Equality **Natalie Warren** **Community Development Manager**

Whilst there are no direct implications arising from this report, the future emphasis on empowering tenants to undertake their own repairs, and to help others, has the potential to increase community cohesion amongst tenants.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- The Right to Repair; <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/housing-repairs-and-maintenance/right-to-repairs>
- The repairs policy; <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/housing-repairs-and-maintenance/our-repair-responsibilities>

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A – Draft Repairs Policy

- Appendix B – Right to Repair
- Appendix C – Tenant’s FAQ’s Document

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