

<b>7 January 2015</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing Investment and Development	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> 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 seek approval for a revised policy framework for Thurrock Council's Housing Repairs	

## **Executive Summary**

This report considers a number of proposals for the revision to Thurrock Council's Housing Repairs Policy. These proposals have been developed from the outcomes of a consultation process with residents, a benchmarking exercise of comparable local authorities, and analysis of historical repairs demand.

The proposals are derived from four principles

- The provision of an enhanced and differentiated offer for repairs & maintenance service vulnerable residents both in terms of scope of prioritisation of delivery;
- The Council as a statutory landlord retaining responsibility for all repairs necessary to maintain the fabric of homes and to support the health and wellbeing of residents.
- Reframing shared responsibility between tenants and the Council as a Landlord; and
- Ensuring the scope and delivery of responsive repairs and maintenance service is as efficient as possible

## **1 Recommendations**

**1.1 That the introduction of an enhanced service provision for vulnerable residents as outlined in Appendix A be noted.**

**1.2 That a reframing of shared responsibility for maintenance of internal property elements post-Transforming Homes, and for other elements specified, be noted.**

- 1.3 That the shift of non-urgent repairs as specified in Appendix A from responsive to planned programme thus increasing the council ability to deliver an efficient responsive service, be noted.**

## **2 Introduction and Background**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 The provision of a repairs & maintenance service takes as its basis from right to repair legislation which sets out landlord responsibilities. Thurrock Council have always provided, and will maintain with a revised policy framework, a service that goes significantly above and beyond these minimum requirements, offering residents a significant degree of additional provision.
- 2.2 The report follows a period of consultation with stakeholders, and analysis of historical repairs provision and demand, in order to develop an improved policy that contributes to:
- 2.3 The development of a strategic approach which strengthens the Council's relationship with its residents – both in terms of a principle of improving provision for those most in need, as well as better defining the shared responsibilities for maintenance of residents properties.
- 2.4 The revised policy will help facilitate the delivery of a high quality, appropriate and efficient repairs & maintenance service in the context of the finite resources available through Housing Revenue Account. Within this finite resource, consideration has to be made of the prioritisation of repairs beyond the minimum requirements – including how these are delivered and to what residents.

### **Repairs Demand**

- 2.5 The Council Housing Repairs & Maintenance service data shows demand which is significantly higher than the national average with annual repairs demand at 3.7 repairs per property of compared to a national average of 2.5. This equates to a total repairs demand of c38, 000 repairs for a stock of c10, 197 properties.
- 2.6 Analysis of repairs demand shows significant disparity across tenants, demonstrating that there are particular resident groups (e.g. those with 5+ repairs per annum, as in the below table) that are particularly heavy users of the service. This likely results from either or both of two factors:
- Particular issues with the property, which may include more extensive repairs – to be addressed through a combination of capital works & batched repairs programmes;
  - An approach by the resident which may need to be addressed through emphasising shared responsibility for property maintenance.

Repairs per annum	No Properties
2 or less	5450
3-4 repairs	2072
5 or more	2793
<b>Total</b>	<b>10315</b>

- 2.7 In order to understand the variation in demand between Thurrock and the national average, benchmarking and data analysis exercise has been undertaken. At present the council undertakes on behalf of its tenants very low level repairs that do not require particular skill or expertise to undertake them examples of these are changing of light bulbs, replacing washers in taps, unblocking sinks.
- 2.8 This policy seeks to address these and transfer responsibility for repairs of this nature to non-vulnerable households, once the first factor of property condition has been addressed through the Council's Transforming Home's programme.
- 2.9 The recommendations in this report will support further improvements and efficiencies the Council is seeking to deliver in partnership with its new repairs and maintenance service provider. A key focus of this service will be to continue to do a broad spectrum of repairs and maintenance but with a focus on efficient delivery, with particular reference to shifting provision to planned programme provision where appropriate.
- 2.10 The new repairs service will require an approach to identifying and delivering such batched repairs programmes. Mears demonstrated valuable insight and experience in the refocusing of provision through data analysis and programme development.
- 2.11 Proposals included here as underlying a revised Repairs Policy complement and are coherent with this service provision approach. Establishing coherent principals at the policy level is essential to developing a wider strategy and approach that is recognised by all stakeholders.
- 2.12 Two factors therefore frame this review:
- 2.1.1 Ensuring the Council as a Landlord is able to deliver on the desire of residents for a differentiated and improved service provision for vulnerable residents;
  - 2.1.2 The provision of an effective and efficient repairs service.
- 2.13 The Council is delivering a range of programmes which will in the next few years address the disparity in performance against national average. Notably this includes the significant Transforming Homes capital programme being undertaken, which seeks to address the material condition of properties – investing to bring properties to a standard which, through appropriate repairs

and maintenance, can be maintained to the Thurrock standard while achieving performance comparable to national average.

- 2.14 The policy revisions proposed extend to scope of the repairs policy, tenant responsibilities and the mode of delivery. What is not included is any further consideration of detailed prioritisation within each proposed delivery mode. I.e. the detailed prioritisation of which of the responsive repairs category (emergency, urgent and routine categories).
- 2.15 This provides for flexibility of service, within the principles agreed. It is however important to note one key change to be introduced to prioritisation within responsive repairs as a result of improved service provision, this will see the increased in prioritisation of repairs for general needs residents where total loss of heating and hot water occurs during the winter months.

### **Consultation**

- 2.16 In developing the proposed revised repairs and maintenance, extensive consultation was undertaken. A series of consultation events took place in the early period of 2014. This included a range of methodologies, derived from the Council's engagement toolkit, to ensure the widest scope of engagement.
- 2.17 Additionally, as a means of providing further context to the provision of repairs and maintenance services by the Council, a benchmarking exercise was also undertaken. This involved the review of repairs policies of comparative local authorities, and the repairs services and offers made to residents.
- 2.18 Section 5 below, and Appendix B, provides an overview of this consultation, which included a number of approaches:
- Repairs survey, mail and online;
  - Phone surveys with a sample group of residents;
  - Public meetings, as well as specific meeting for residents of sheltered housing;
  - Repairs surgery events.
- 2.19 Analysing these data sources together, an approach has been developed which identifies a number of options for improvements to the Repairs Policy. This approach provides evidence-driven improvements, ensuring that provision to general needs residents is in line with equivalent local authorities, whilst offering vulnerable residents improved services. This approach also provides the opportunity for the Council to revise provision to general needs residents to ensure that the Council can bring service demand closer to the national average.

## **3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.13 In developing this repairs policy, outcomes of consultation, benchmarking and data analysis was evaluated.

3.14 In the course of collating the feedback provided by residents and other stakeholders, the following issues have provided a framework for evaluation:

- Differentiated service provision for vulnerable residents;
- Maintaining the fabric of the property – tenant responsibility for repairs, and repairs following Transforming Homes capital works;
- Efficiency of service provision – higher than national average repairs demand & costs and batched repairs services.

3.15 The proposals across these areas result in the following responsibilities and mode of delivery – either clarification or amendments from previous policy.

	<b>Previous Responsibility</b>	<b>Proposed Responsibility</b>	<b>Nature of Proposal</b>
Minor plasterwork repairs to walls & ceiling	Council (responsive)	Council (batched)	Responsive to Planned
Fencing - boundary/perimeter	Council (responsive)	Council (batched)	Responsive to Planned at let or first install thereafter responsibility of Tenant
Gates - boundary	Council (responsive)	Council (batched)	Responsive to Planned
Smoke alarm batteries	Council (responsive)	Council (batched)	Responsive to Planned
Bath Panels	Council	Tenant (Post-Transforming Homes)	Council will no longer undertake bath replacement responsively where required to be done by Transforming homes thereafter transfer of responsibility to general needs tenant.
Kitchen cupboards and drawers, catches/handles, worktops	Council	Tenant (Post-Transforming Homes)	Council will no longer undertake as responsive repair will retain responsibility for programmed replacements
Fencing - dividing	Council	Tenant	Council will no longer undertake transfer of responsibility to general needs tenants
Glazing - 1 repair per annum	Council	Tenant	Council will no longer undertake responsively part of Transforming Homes programme
Internal cills / window timber	Council	Tenant	Council will no longer undertake responsively part of Transforming Homes programme
Shelves - general	Council	Tenant	Council will no longer undertake transfer responsibility to tenant

- 3.16 Detailed breakdown of the feedback can be found in Appendix B, the following provides an overview of options analysis across these three areas:

### **Enhanced service for vulnerable residents**

- 3.17 The Council has options in the provision of a repairs service to vulnerable residents:
- Maintaining standard services across all residents; or,
  - Provide a differentiated repairs service with additional provision for vulnerable residents.
- 3.18 For the purposes of the provision of a differentiated service for vulnerable residents, Thurrock Council defines vulnerable residents 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".
- 3.19 Consultation with stakeholders included the subject of service provision to vulnerable residents, and specifically the views of consulted stakeholders on the provision of a differentiated service for these residents:
- 79% of survey respondents agree with the principle of the Council providing additional support in repairs service provision to vulnerable residents
  - 84% agree that the specified repairs should be provided to vulnerable residents
- 3.20 Other consultation exercises also support the principle of differentiated service provision, as noted in Appendices A and B.
- 3.21 The specifics of the differentiated service to be offered to vulnerable residents can be set out in two categories:
- New provision for a wider scope of vulnerable residents;
  - Reframed provision for general needs residents.
- 3.22 The latter is considered fully in the following sections, with vulnerable residents receiving responsive repairs provision where general needs residents will receive batched programmes or will become responsible for carrying out the repair.

- 3.23 The former includes an additional proposal with regard to vulnerable residents: that vulnerable residents outside sheltered housing complexes will also benefit from the 'handy man' service. This proposal offers potentially significant positive impacts on the lives of vulnerable residents, offering support for tasks such as fitting shelving, additional sockets, repairs to fencing etc.
- 3.24 This offer to vulnerable residents is provided as a counterpart to the proposed principle of shared responsibility for general needs residents.

### **Maintaining the fabric of the property**

- 3.25 Through Transforming Homes, properties will be refurbished externally and internally, with residents benefitting from a range of internal improvements including new kitchens and bathrooms, and rewiring and boilers where required. It is expected that following refurbishment of these elements, the associated repairs demand will reduce considerably.
- 3.26 The Transforming Homes programme has been developed with a number of key aims:
- To go above and beyond the national standard for Decent Homes
  - As an MOT of existing housing stock
  - To develop a targeted coherent programme over a 5 year period to bring all homes to a high standard.
  - Reduce the need for residents to have responsive repairs
  - Increase the quality of voids and how quickly properties are available for re-letting
  - Complete aids and adaptations works to homes as required
  - Improve the thermal Efficiency of your homes
  - Address Damp and associated Mould
  - Future proofing existing housing stock
- 3.27 Transforming Homes therefore improves substantially the standard of accommodation for residents, exceeding the Government standard of decency, and in the context of the requirement to review repairs demand provides options for the Council to reframe responsibility for maintaining improvements made:
- Maintain current provision for all properties including those where refurbishments have been made; or,
  - Reframe provision, developing a culture of shared responsibility for tenants whose homes have benefited from refurbishments.
- 3.28 Within this principle of shared responsibility, homes which have been refurbished would not ordinarily receive further responsive repairs to refurbished elements except where

- The Council has a statutory obligation; or,
- The resident is defined as vulnerable (assuming outcomes of 1.2 above).

- 3.29 Where consultation with stakeholders included the discussion of the principle of shared responsibility, as Appendices A and B note, there was a general agreement on the principle of tenant responsibility for maintenance where appropriate.
- 3.30 Regarding specific repairs which become the responsibility of the resident following Transforming Homes works, Appendices A and B note specific property elements which have been considered in the course of consultation and benchmarking.
- 3.31 Evidence suggests that while survey respondents consider these a mid-level repair preference, when asked specifically about responsibility post-Transforming Homes they consider it to be a matter of tenant responsibility for maintenance. Also, of those local authorities benchmarked, where the repair is specifically described, it is stated to be tenant responsibility.
- 3.32 In addition to the principle of shared responsibility following from Transforming Homes improvements, there are further areas of repairs provision included in consultation, benchmarking and data analysis which substantiate this principle. Included here are a range of minor repairs which were either previously undertaken by the Council or where responsibility should be clarified. As Appendix A notes, there is a range of evidence across consultation and benchmarking which suggests there is a basis for the transfer of responsibility for these specific repairs.
- 3.33 The following provides an overview of the potential benefit, in terms of repairs per property, of the inclusion of the option noted here in a revised Repairs Policy. The reduction in demand relates to general needs tenants, with the continued demand from vulnerable residents taken into account, other assumptions are detailed in Appendix A:

	<b>Number of Repairs (Aug-13-July-14)</b>	<b>Potential Reduction in Repairs Outturn*</b>	<b>Potential Repairs per property Reduction</b>
<b>Post-Transforming Homes Repairs</b>	837	736	1.70%
Bath Panels	205	180	0.41%
Kitchen cupboards and drawers, catches/handles, worktops	632	556	1.28%
<b>Tenant responsibility</b>	1666	1466	3.38%
Fencing - dividing	861	757	1.75%
Glazing - 1 repair per annum	466	410	0.95%
Internal cills / window timber	141	124	0.29%
Shelves - general	54	48	0.11%
Skirting boards & picture rails	144	127	0.29%



<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3126</b>	<b>2202</b>	<b>5.07%</b>
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### Efficiency of service provision

3.34 Currently batched repairs are undertaken where “a repair cannot be done and a whole replacement is needed” (‘Urgent, non-urgent & batched repairs’ webpage). This policy was in place prior to the development of the Transforming Homes programme. Under the new policy it is proposed that smaller planned programmes are developed on repairs are low priority such as minor plasterwork repairs, and where greatest cost savings can be realised by shifting from individual to batched provision.

3.35 With regard to the proposed repairs to be included in batched programmes, as Appendices A and B note, there is a basis for the general principle of batched programmes, as well as evidence that comparable authorities often frame these repairs as either batched repairs or tenant responsibility.

3.36 The following provides an overview of the potential benefit, in terms of repairs per property, of the inclusion of the batched repair programme option in a revised Repairs Policy. This should be understood as a positive impact on responsive repairs provision, although provision would be required elsewhere through batched repairs programmes. Data shows outturn assuming vulnerable residents continue to receive repairs as a responsive service, other assumptions are detailed in Appendix A:

	<b>Number of Repairs (Aug-13-July-14)</b>	<b>Potential Reduction in Repairs Outturn</b>	<b>Potential Repairs per property Reduction</b>
<b>Batch Repairs</b>	<b>2054</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>4.17%</b>
Minor plasterwork repairs to walls & ceiling	156	137	0.32%
Fencing - boundary/perimeter	623	548	1.26%
Gates - boundary	1035	911	2.10%
Smoke alarm batteries	240	211	0.49%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2054</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>4.17%</b>

## 4 Reasons for Recommendation

4.13 The proposals have been substantiated by reference to a range of data sources including consultation, benchmarking and repairs data analysis. The proposals contribute to a Repairs Policy which provides:

- An improved service provision for vulnerable residents;
- A reframing of shared responsibility for tenants maintenance of internal elements of properties;
- Improved efficiency of service provision through reprioritisation and batch programmes.

4.14 Across these three areas, the proposed revisions to the Repairs Policy contribute to the wider aim to develop a repairs and maintenance service which is better aligned with national averages in performance with regard to repairs cost and volumes per property. Taking the proposals together, analysis of potential Repairs per Property implications for the service going forward can be projected as demonstrated below (with consideration of above notes and assumptions):

	<b>Number of Repairs (Aug-13-July-14)</b>	<b>Potential Reduction in Repairs Outturn</b>	<b>Potential Repairs per property Reduction</b>
Batch Repairs Programmes	2054*	1808*	4.17%*
Post-Transforming Homes Repairs	837	736	1.70%
Tenant responsibility	2289	1466	3.38%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5180</b>	<b>4010</b>	<b>9.24%</b>

4.15 In assessing the potential cost impact of these projected reductions in repairs demand, methodology is limited due to the required negotiation of reduced per annum RPP cost. Using an assumed cost impact equivalent to the percentage impact on RPP, the following outlines a projection for future reduction in price per property responsive repairs & maintenance.

	<b>Assumed Saving Per Annum</b>
<b>Per Annum Price per Property Contract</b>	<b>£239,833</b>

4.16 Additional savings would be realised through efficiencies associated with batch service provision of the remaining 4.17% reduction in responsive repairs provision.

4.17 In implementing a revised policy which includes these proposals, the Council will further the key objectives to deliver a cost efficient and value for money repairs and maintenance service which reduces the revenue spend per home. This contributes to the establishment of a more sustainable repairs and maintenance service provision, and one which is focused on the most appropriate and efficient mode of delivery.

4.18 Including these proposals in a revised Repairs Policy provides an opportunity for the Council to shape, and more clearly define the separate responsibilities which exist for the Council and residents. In taking forward these proposals, the Council strengthens its relationship with its residents – both in terms of a principle of improving provision for those most in need through the offer of additional provision for vulnerable residents, and also in terms of better defining the shared responsibilities for maintenance of residents properties for those who are able to undertake minor repairs in their homes.

4.19 While realising these benefits of the proposals, the exposure to risk remains minimal. As has been demonstrated through benchmarking, proposals only

bring policy more in line with comparative local authorities, while consultation outcomes demonstrate a general agreement on the part of stakeholders with proposed revisions.

- 4.20 Taking forward these benefits of the proposed revision to the Repairs Policy, provide a further counterpart measure through which the Council can improve the housing stock, and improve repairs provision performance. The Council has a substantial capital works investment through the Transforming Homes programme, and is currently mobilising a new Repairs & Maintenance contract. Through the introduction of these measures establishes a process through which Thurrock Council housing stock is refurbished and maintained to an improved standard while bringing repairs performance closer to the national average. Proposals included in this report are consistent and coherent with the new Repairs & Maintenance contract in the improved emphasis on efficiencies in service provision through planned works, moving away from costs associated with responsive provision.

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

- 5.13 In order to develop proposals for the revision of Repairs Policy, a number of consultation methods have been used in order to understand resident & stakeholder experience of and aspirations for the service. Consultation for proposed revisions to the Repairs Policy has been informed by the Council's 'Community Engagement Toolkit'.
- 5.14 Appendix A provides detailed procedures and outcomes of the consultation exercise, with results substantiating proposals as described in section 3 above.

### **Consultation**

- 5.15 A range of consultation methods have been used in the process of developing proposed revisions of the Repairs Policy. Across these methods the common subjects for consideration are the three key themes:
- A revised approach to the framing shared responsibility for repairs;
  - The mode of delivery of routine repairs;
  - The potential for an enhanced offer to vulnerable residents.
- 5.16 Within these themes, specific elements of service delivery were considered in each consultation process. The following provides an overview of the consultation feedback.

### *Members Briefing*

- 5.17 Members were invited to a briefing session in January regarding the development of improvements to the Repairs Policy. Feedback provided by the Members was positive to proposed changes with respect to the above issues, while emphasising the need to coordinate this with a continued focus

on the wellbeing of the resident and ensuring the maintenance of the fabric of the property.

#### *Residents Consultation*

- 5.18 Residents were invited, through publication in the local press, to a consultation session in January. Feedback provided at the session focused on the following:
- Support of the general principle of varied service for residents based on need;
  - Change in shared responsibility following Transforming Homes works to the property;
  - Support for the principle of residents having shared responsibility for the maintenance of the property.

#### *Sheltered Housing Consultation*

- 5.19 A consultation session was undertaken at one of the largest complexes, Frederick Andrews Court. Feedback from residents focused on the following:
- Continued and expanded provision of repairs such as smoke alarms and fencing, repairs which vulnerable or elderly residents may not be able to undertake independently, considered as provided through a 'handy man' service;
  - Change in shared responsibility following Transforming Homes works to the property.

#### *Repairs Survey*

- 5.20 Repairs surveys were delivered to 10,000 Council tenants in January and February, with 1500 responses received. The following provides a summary of responses received:
- Significant support for additional support for vulnerable residents;
  - Some residents were not as supportive of the proposal to decrease the level of repair priorities for those who did not meet the vulnerable person criteria.
  - Higher stated preference for continued provision of smoke alarm batteries, loose floor tiles, additional electrical sockets;
  - Lower preference for shelving, skirting board repairs and garden gates.

#### **Benchmarking**

- 5.21 The repairs policies of five local and comparable authorities were examined as part of a benchmarking exercise to identify where there were significant differences in approach. The benchmarking exercise identified that the type and nature of repairs delivered through the Council's current repairs policy exceeds that of four out of five authorities.

5.22 The results of the benchmarking supports the view that the Council should seek to create an alignment with the repairs policies of other comparable authorities and reposition its own policy to assert that tenants who are able, should undertake minor repairs around their home.

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

6.1 Not applicable.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michael Jones**  
**Management Accountant**

Financial implications of the proposed revisions to the Repairs Policy are contained in this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Assaf Chaudry**  
**Major Project Lawyer**

The proposed revisions have been framed around the extended services provided by Thurrock Council therefore has no impact on the statutory requirements of the Council.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The proposals contained in this report seek to extend Thurrock Council's offer to residents considered to have a vulnerability, thereby enhancing the Council's framework for delivery with regard to diversity and equality.

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

## **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):**

## **9. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A: Repairs Policy Revisions
- Appendix B: Consultation Summary

### **Report Author:**

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