

21 July 2016	Item: 6
Housing Overview and Scrutiny	
Housing Repairs and Maintenance Working Group	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Sue Cardozo, Housing Asset Investment and Delivery Manager	
Accountable Head of Service: Richard Parkin, Head of Housing and Environment	
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

In response to a number of queries raised regarding the progress with the Housing Repairs Service, and in the interest of continuous improvement the previous portfolio holder for Housing, Councillor Lynn Worrall suggested a cross party member working group be formed to review the current service provision. This group undertook a schedule of meetings in March 2015 that focussed on the quality of service that is currently provided and recommend any improvements that might be made. The ultimate aim of the group was to make recommendations that would further improve tenant satisfaction.

This report provides an overview for Housing Overview and Scrutiny of the programme of work undertaken by this Member Working Group and update on the subsequent recommendations arising.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Housing Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the recommendations made by the working group and note progress made in terms of implementation.

- Implementation of quality pledge ID Cards for Mears operatives that provide the name, photo and Trade that each operative is qualified in.
- Inviting the company undertaking the customer surveys, KWest, to present feedback to Housing Overview and Scrutiny annually.

- Consider providing new tenants with photographs of void properties before the work was completed so there is an understanding of the work that has to be undertaken.
- Review of tenants rating the service as “fair” in satisfaction surveys and not just poor or terrible.
- Providing information / communication or training on the repairs process for Councilors to ensure they know where to direct tenants to for general enquiries / concerns
- Add an additional question to customer surveys to see if tenants are happy with the way their call was handled by the contact centre

1.2 That Housing Overview and Scrutiny are also asked to note the update on the changes made to the Responsive Repairs Contract and to ask for an update regarding the Damp and Mould working group to come back later in the year.

2.0. Introduction and Background

Background

- 2.1 The Council currently manages a housing stock of just over 10,000 properties. The provision of responsive repairs to ensure the properties are maintained is a key service that affects many of the current tenants every year.
- 2.2 In 2015 Housing successfully completed the procurement and implementation of a new responsive repairs and maintenance contract and entered into a partnership contract with Mears. The new contract focuses on improved efficiency in asset management and includes substantial commitments for a range of offers for local economic and community initiatives through apprenticeships, training and supply chain programmes.
- 2.3 In tandem with the implementation of this new repairs & maintenance contract, a new Repairs Policy was developed and implemented to provide a policy framework to support the key objectives of the new service.
- 2.4 The new partnership contract with Mears was demonstrated to be scoring highly on resident satisfaction with more than 86% of tenants reporting that they found the service Good or Excellent. However in the interest of continuous improvement the portfolio holder for Housing, Councillor Lynn Worrall suggested a cross party member working group be undertaken via a schedule of meetings that would focus on the quality of service that is currently provided and recommend any improvements that might be made. The ultimate aim of the group would be to make recommendations that would improve tenant satisfaction further to take it to over 90%.
- 2.5 The scope of the working group review was agreed as follows:
- A detailed discussion on the repairs contract and the governance arrangements in Thurrock
 - Onsite visits to refurbished properties

- A detailed discussion of the budget and finances of the contract
- A visit to Manchester to witness the independent customer survey process in action
- A visit to Mears depot in Thurrock to see how the operational delivery of the service is managed.

2.6 Nominations were requested for two Councillors from each party to attend the working group meetings.

Representatives were nominated as follows: Cllr C Baker, Cllr Gamester, Cllr J Redsell, Cllr T Ojetola, Cllr L Worrall, Cllr C Kent.

Detailed of the different meetings and outcomes can be found in Appendix 1.

3.0 Recommendations from Working Group

3.1 The working group concluded with a number of suggested recommendations to be taken forward by the service. These were as follows:

- Implementation of quality pledge ID Cards for Mears operatives that provide the name, photo and Trade that each operative is qualified in.
- Inviting the company undertaking the customer surveys, KWest, to present feedback to Housing Overview and Scrutiny annually.
- Consider providing new tenants with photographs of void properties before the work was completed so there is an understanding of the work that has to be undertaken.
- Review of tenants rating the service as “fair” in satisfaction surveys and not just poor or terrible.
- Providing information / communication or training on the repairs process for Councilors to ensure they know where to direct tenants to for general enquiries / concerns
- Add an additional question to customer surveys to see if tenants are happy with the way there call was handled by the contact centre

4.0 Repairs update

4.1 Following on from the working group earlier this year there are a number of changes that have taken place within the Responsive Repairs service for which the committee should be updated:

- Gas B&R - Over winter 2015/16 there was a high level of discontent with the Gas Breakdown and Repairs service that Mears were providing. Mears had brought this service in quickly as Thurrock did not currently have an R&M contractor for Heating and Hot Water Services. There were continued problems with the service provided and a high level of complaints. Due to this Thurrock worked with Liberty Gas to transfer the repairs and maintenance function over to them. Liberty Gas already

completes boiler servicing on behalf of Thurrock and were able to offer a “3 Star Service”, including R&M on a price per property basis. The new contract should improve customer satisfaction and save Thurrock around £200,000 per year. The contract started on 8th June 2016.

- Damp and Mould – Thurrock Housing is looking to change the way that it tackles Damp and Mould. Currently the service is very “traditional” and involves a simple investigation and most issues being tackled with a simple “wash down”. Issues keep reoccurring however. Satisfaction surveys were completed, three months after the initial job was carried out and the results showed that only 44.7% of respondents rated the service as Good or Excellent and that only 33% of residents said that the work undertaken fully resolved the issue. It is apparent that more needs to be done with regards to tackling damp and mould, including improved repairs services but also tackling lifestyle issues with tenants. A working group has been set to look at actions to improve this service.
- Senior Management Changes – There have been two important changes within the management of the repairs contracts. Gary Luscombe, previous Repairs Manager for Thurrock Council has now moved across to Mears and is their Partnership Manager for Thurrock. Susan Murray who was previously the Area Contracts Manager for Thurrock is now the Repairs and Planned Maintenance Manager for Thurrock. These moves now give us very strong leadership on both the Client and Contractor side of the Mears/Thurrock relationship.
- Repairs Satisfaction – it should be noted that Repairs Satisfaction continues to be high with 86.4% of tenant last year rating the service as good or excellent. This is 2,988 tenants out of 3,458 interviewed. A further 264 tenants (7.6%) described the service as fair and 206 (5.9%) marked the service as poor or terrible. Thurrock completed over 30,000 responsive repairs jobs per year. Work has now been completed on a “deep dive” into satisfaction and some key themes have been identified for improvements. These are: Appointments, Repairs Not Completed, Quality of Repairs, Time Taken to Complete a Repair, Communication Issues. An action plan is being created for these specific items to help improve satisfaction.

5. Implications

5.1 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

The improvement of the Council’s assets is linked to key corporate priorities:

- Creating a great place for learning and opportunity
- Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity
- Building pride, responsibility and respect
- Improve health and well-being

The delivery of the Repairs and Maintenance service continues to support strategic and local opportunities through investment in the continued integrity

of the Councils assets which in turn contributes to the wellbeing of the tenants living in the properties. Also through the provision of new opportunities for our residents through the social value delivered as part of the contract.

5.2 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Management Accountant Social Care & Commissioning

There are no financial implications arising from this report

5.3 Legal

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

There are no Legal implications arising from this report

5.4 Diversity and Equality

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

The Housing Responsive Repairs Service was the subject of a full community equality impact assessment prior to its implementation. Feedback from the Member Working Group has now led to a number of changes that will help to improve resident satisfaction through the delivery of the service in partnership with Mears.

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

None

6. Background papers used in preparing the report

Report Author:

Sue Cardozo – Housing Asset Investment and Delivery Manager

Richard Parkin – Head of Housing and Environment

Appendix 1

Session 1 - A Discussion on the Repairs Contract and Associated Governance Arrangements **Wednesday 2nd March 2016 6-8pm**

Attendees:

Cllr Worrall, Cllr Redsell, Cllr Kent, Cllr Baker, Cllr Gamester, and officers Richard Parkin, Susan Cardozo, Gary Luscombe, Chris Seman, Caroline Perkins

This session provided attendees with an overview of the new Repairs Contract, and the associated value and terms. At this session the following aspects of the service were discussed:

- Governance arrangements
- Roles and responsibilities of key personnel
- The work streams covered by the contract including exclusions and batched programmes
- The repairs appointment structure
- The repairs delivery priorities and associated timeframes
- The customer journey
- Key performance indicators used to assess ongoing performance
- Social value delivered as part of the contract arrangements
- Repairs to void properties

The presentation from this meeting is attached as Appendix 1.

A summary of the key points raised and discussed by members during this session is as follows:

Clarity around how the service monitors repairs through to completion to makes they are fully resolved.

At what point the Council will make a decision that something in the property is beyond repair for example a kitchen. Details were provided about the management of multiple repairs and the trigger points for review. The Contract Manager for the service confirmed that several repairs to the same aspect of the property would prompt an inspection.

It was confirmed that emergency repairs would still be undertaken when a property was awaiting works under Transforming Homes but major repairs would be undertaken as part of the investment programme.

Officers were asked to confirm arrangements for contacting the Quality Assurance team with enquiries. It was confirmed that they do not have a direct

outside line and calls are directed through the Council's call centre on customer slips or the team can be contacted via email.

There was a general discussion on the work stream for exclusion repairs, i.e. repairs not covered by the price per property contract. An explanation was given around the processes being following particularly in relation to replacement of front and rear doors.

Members highlighted the need to recharging tenants for repairs arising from misuse and the enforcement of the transfer policy that should prevent tenants from moving until they have repaired any damage caused due to misuse.

Members asked about the approach being taken to repairing the old pram sheds that exist in some estates. It was confirmed that these are not prioritised for repairs and if they are in really poor condition they would be taken down.

Clarity was requested about the process regarding damp and mould surveys. Members of the groups were advised of a survey currently underway to find out if the current processes for damp and mould were proving effective.

There was a discussion around tenants being able to undertake some minor jobs themselves or having access to a handy person service. There was a discussion around the programme being run by Mears for training tenants in undertaking DIY jobs.

**Session 2 - Onsite visits to refurbished empty properties
Friday 4th March, 9.30am - 11.00am**

Attendees: Cllr Kent, Cllr Redsell, Cllr Gamester, Cllr Worrall, Richard Parkin, Susan Murray

Councillors visited a number of voids properties in progress. Examples were seen of properties that required works to both the silver and the gold standard. Photographs of properties before the voids works were available so Councillors were able to see the condition of properties at the start of the process and the level and impact of work that had been undertaken to bring the properties up to a good fit to let standard..

It was felt that in general all properties were being completed to a very good standard.

**Session 3 - A visit to Manchester to the company undertaking the customer satisfaction surveys
Friday 11th March – all day visit**

Attendees: Cllr L. Worrall, Cllr T Ojetola, Cllr C Baker, Richard Parkin, Susan Cardozo and Chris Seman

The attendees travelled to Manchester to visit the company KWest who undertake the independent customer surveys on behalf of Thurrock. The results of these surveys inform one of the key performance indicators for the management of the repairs and maintenance contract with Mears.

Kwest gave an overview of their company and its operation within the sector as a specialist in social housing research. It was noted that they are registered under the Data Protection Act and a partner in the Market Research Society. They outlined the approach they take to undertaking the surveys with multiple attempts to contact households with calls being undertaken at different times of day and early evening. It was noted that all surveys were undertaken by their inhouse team.

Kwest had been undertaking surveys for Thurrock since November 2013 and they presented survey data with comparisons to previous years. This demonstrated a significant improvement in resident satisfaction since 2013.

It was noted that emails alerts are sent to Thurrock and the contractor if the quality of work or service from the contractor is reported to be poor or terrible. These are then followed up by the contractor and trends addressed via a customer care meeting held with the contractor monthly.

It was noted that it is possible to benchmark Thurrock results with those of other boroughs using the KWest service although this would not necessarily be on a like for like survey basis as each survey is bespoke to the client.

It is noted that there was an auto programming facility that ensured residents received a call back at a time they had requested.

It was confirmed that the transfer of the data used for the surveys was covered under Data Protection and the process had been verified by Thurrock's data protection officer.

Members asked if it was possible to monitor respondent profiles and this was confirmed.

There was a general discussion on the % of surveys undertaken and response rates achieved.

It was noted that we do not currently look in detail at Fair rates responses but this was considered possible in future although Kwest noted that these respondents were generally indifferent and expressed no real view either way.

The presentations from this session are attached as Appendix 2 and 3.

Session 4 - A detailed discussion around the budget and finances of the contract

Tuesday 15th March 6pm – 7pm

Attendees: Cllr Kent, Cllr Gamester, Cllr Redsell, Cllr Ojetola, Cllr Worrall, Richard Parkin, Susan Cardozo, Julie Curtis and Gary Luscombe

This session outlined the structure and allocations for the budgets available to deliver of the Repairs and Maintenance service. Details were provided on the breakdown of the budget allocation for:

- The price per property responsive repairs workstream. It was noted that price per property covers a wide range of general day to day repairs within the scope of the repairs contract. The cost is based on 3 repairs per property and examples of these repairs include unblocking a drain, re-fixing a toilet seat or fixing a leak among various others. Within this budget 30,555 inclusion repairs can be completed.
- Budget for repairs that fell outside of this arrangement (exclusions). This represented the largest variable cost and covers the high value repairs which require approval by Thurrock staff. In 2015/16 an average of 261 exclusion jobs have been completed each month ranging from fitting new secure by design PVC front doors, mould treatments and electrical re-wires. Some batched repairs such as plastering and glazing are also accounted for from this budget.
- The operational costs for site overheads and operation of the call centre.
- The budget structure for planned maintenance workstreams including the Gas repair budget which dealt with boiler and central heating breakdowns. Also the Mould Survey Programme which is aimed to address damp and mould responsively (2421 square metres of mould treatment can be delivered within the MSP budget)

These programmes also include fencing which aims to replace broken fencing in batches to achieve efficiency savings. The high demand in this area was noted with this budget allowing repairs for only 40-50 properties.

- The budget applicable for works to void properties. It was noted that the void budget covers silver void delivery only. This means the property is brought to the agreed “fit to let standard” and involves a lock change, refuse clearance cleaning and general repairs.

Voids that required more major works to bring them to the Transforming Homes standard were delivered via the transforming homes programme and the costs for these came from the capital budgets

The limitations of the current budgets were noted and the likelihood that these would be reduced through work being undertaken to revise the HRA business plan in light of the implementation of the 1% rent decrease

Questions were raised around the frequency of partnership meetings with Mears and the frequency of the budget monitoring by Thurrock officers. It was noted that the contract manager met with mears at least weekly and that budget monitoring meetings took place monthly with finance.

The arrangements for quality control were discussed and the process for post inspection of high value repairs.

Councillors also raised around the ability to respond to major incidents such as following a large storm and the use of HRA financial reserves in these extreme incidents.

The improved performance of the call centre was noted

There was some discussion around the appointments systems and ensuring all operatives displayed ID it was agreed this would be further discussed at the planned visit to Mears Depot.

Councillors were invited to email officers with any further questions following this session

**Session 5 - A visit to Mears Depot in Thurrock
Friday 18th March – 9.30am - 13.00**

Attendees:, Cllr Kent, Cllr Redsell, Cllr Ojetola, Cllr Worrall, Richard Parkin, Gary Luscombe, Chris Seman

This session provided Councillors with an opportunity to visit the Mears Depot in Thurrock and observe the day to day service delivery first hand. Councillors had the opportunity to listen in to calls in progress with the contact centre and observe and talk to operatives in the different operational teams .

A presentation from Mears (appendix xxx) outlined the customer journey from the point that a repair was reported through to works completion. This also included an overview of the priorities attributed to different types of repairs and the the communication methods employed to ensure tenants were kept updated on progress.

The visit also demonstrated the back office process that support the completion of void properties to the Thurrock Silver standard.

The following questions were raised by Councillors attending:

Councillors asked how they could get updates as tenants often contacted them directly if things were not going to plan. It was explained that they could contact the Thurrock managers if they were not happy with progress.

Councillors questioned whether the contractors carrying out works were always in Mears vehicles and wearing identification. It was confirmed that

sub-contractors are not supplied with Mears vehicles all contractors would be wearing the Hi Viz jackets and carrying ID.

Councillors asked for improved information regarding the areas that planned works were going to be undertaken and this was agreed as an action for Thurrock moving forward.

Queries were raised around actions taken in response to customer feedback data from KWest, particularly in relation to any Poor and Terrible responses. It was confirmed that these cases were further investigated to identify what could have been done better. Monthly customer care meetings are held where all learning is discussed and ongoing improvements monitored.

A question was raised by Councillors regarding compensation if things do not go to plan. It was confirmed that apologies are always given but no monetary compensation offered.

It was noted that the partnership also contributed in terms of social value to the local Thurrock community. Some of the recent events were noted as follows:

- LEAF Event at the Gateway Academy
- Repairs Surgery held at Thurrock Offices
- Wills Hill Community Clean Up
- Tilbury Hub Repairs Surgery
- Apprentices employed – 2x Trade apprentices and 2 office based
- Ongoing support for local community events such as St Lukes Hospice bake sale

Mears had also committed their support to the following programmes which will have a positive impact on the local community :

- Support for the Princes Trust – Get into Construction Programme
- Repairs Surgeries at Tilbury and South Ockenden
- Volunteering opportunities
- Plans to revamp one of the community halls in a sheltered complex
- Ongoing delivery of the Trade School for 14-19 year old
- Women in Construction Programme
- DIY training for tenants
- Two social events at Wellington Road in Tilbury and the Garrison in Purfleet

During the visit Councillors took the opportunity to see the facilities on site for the delivery of the Trade School.

Councillor also reported that there were a number of older men who wanted to help the community. Mears agreed to look at possibilities of future programmes that could use this commitment.