

Learning from Aids & Adaptations and Damp & Condensation Cases

Difficulties Experienced

The former BMO review was undertaken because the service was not effectively delivering the Aids & Adaptation or Damp & Condensation services.

The most substantial impact to the Investment function was the transferring of new services listed below as recommended when the former BMO was rebranded as the Repairs & Voids service:

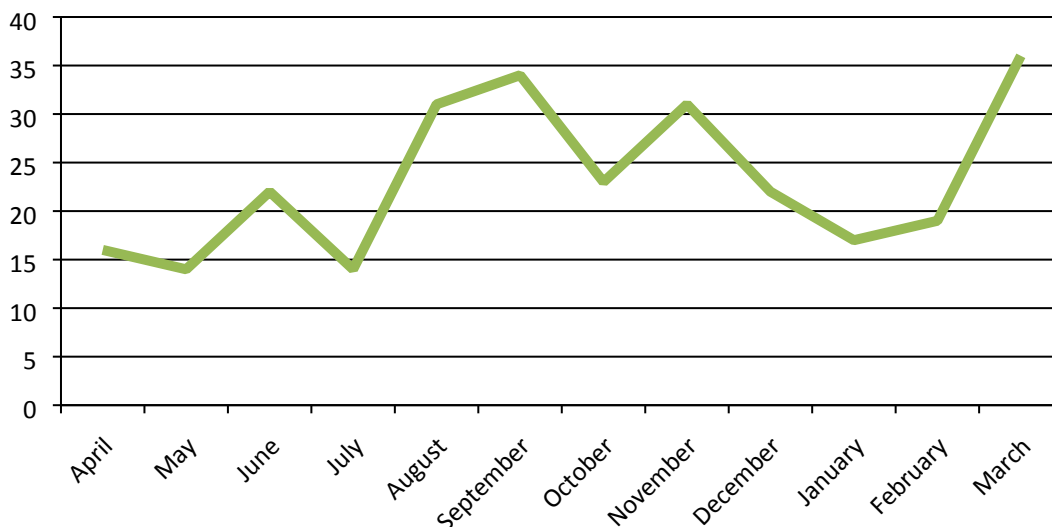
- **Damp and Condensation**
- Gas Servicing
- M&E Compliance
- **Aids and Adaptations**

The need for a specialised and specific team was identified and the Specialist Works Team was created.

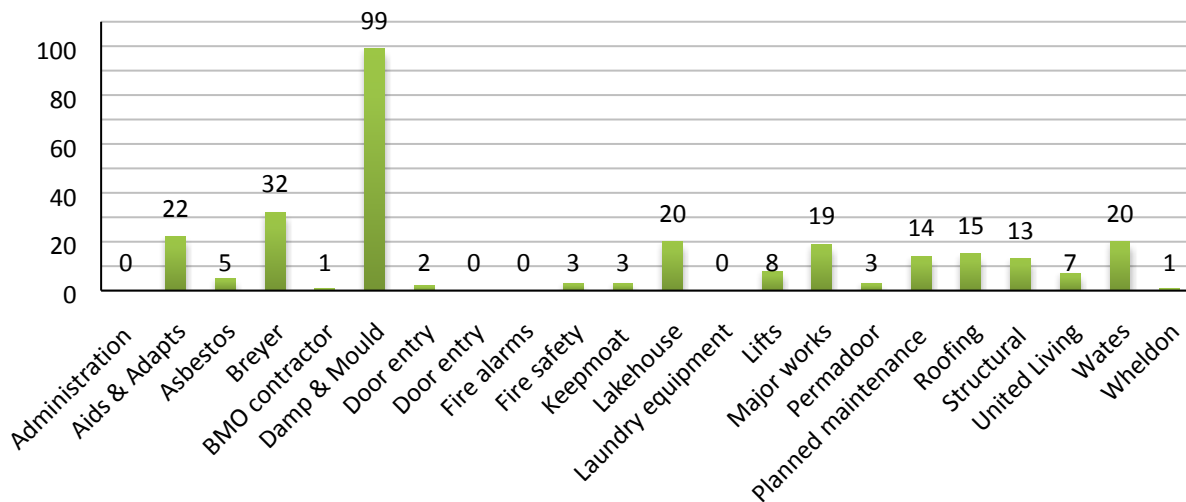
The Specialist Works Team (SWT) have been performing under very challenging circumstances attempting to establish business processes and at the same time managing a substantial backlog of works that was transferred from the BMO without considering additional resources.

The graphs below detail A. the spike in number of complaints received monthly following the transfer of works in July 2016 and B, the impact of Damp and Mould and Aids & Adaptations on the total number of cases.

A. Total Complaints & Enquiries Investment 2016/17



B. Total Case Types Investment 2016/17



Learning from Complaints

There is no denying that learning from complaints is important to track trends and to use this key information to inform improvements and drive the business forward. Along with the new services adopted from the former BMO, the Investment team have been managing the largest level of complaints they have ever received.

In the process of responding to and closing complaints, the admin team rely heavily on the project officers/surveyors to provide learning. This learning had not been prioritised by the previous line manager and therefore many cases have been closed with minimal or no learning information.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the specific issues with the service. The repetition of the same learning on the complaints would not be a practical and not add any value.

Since the transfer of the new services into Investment, there have been common themes in the complaints received as the graph below shows:

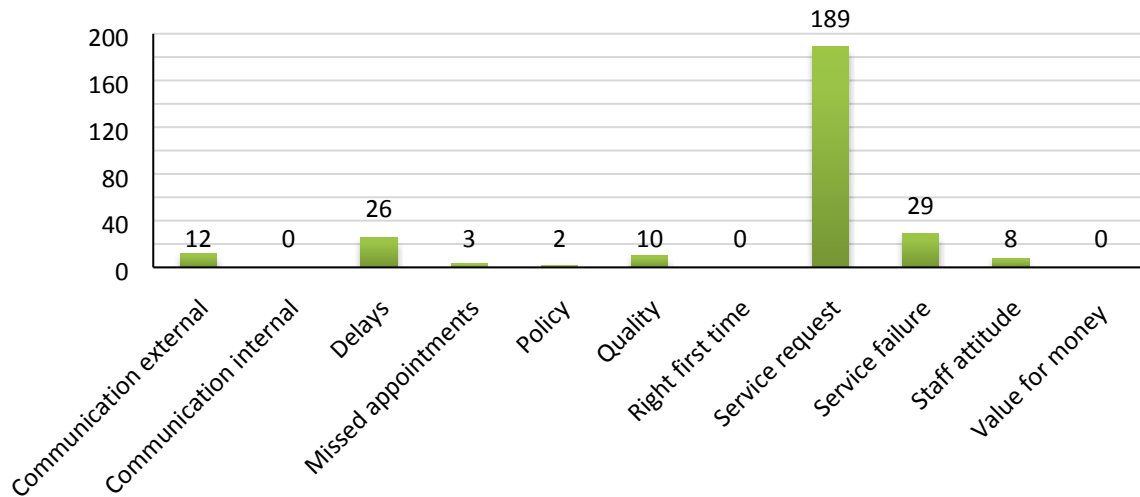
A&A

- Delays in having the work completed following inspection/recommendation
- Lack of communication from SBC following inspection/recommendation
- No call backs following numerous calls from customer

D&C

- Delays in having the work completed following inspection
- Poor communication with the tenant following inspection
- No call backs following numerous calls from customer

Total Complaints & Enquiries Investment 2016/17



What has been done?

Aids & Adaptations

The service has undergone a comprehensive review of the Aids & Adaptations service by an external consultancy. The review has highlighted 6 key areas to improve:

- 1 Implement a comprehensive management system
- 2 Improve communication process with customers
- 3 Improve communication processes between Stevenage Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
- 4 Improve communication processes between departments within Stevenage Borough Council
- 5 Develop use of external contractors
- 6 Revise A&A policy and review and revise procedure

We have reviewed all of the electronic information stored on the shared systems and archived any historical information. We have implemented a new property file library to collate all future electronic documentation. We have revised the interim tracker spreadsheet to only include the current case load.

We have commenced the internal process review and held a workshop with colleagues in August. The redesign of Northgate will commence 5&6 September with a fit for purpose process planned to be available late September.

Damp & Condensation

The Community Select Committee has overseen the production of a new “Damp and Condensation Strategy”. The strategy was informed by witness testimony, officer experience and the experience of elected committee members. The scrutiny was thorough and led to a

frank exchange of ideas. Officers worked with the committee to draw up a new process to deal with issues relating to damp and condensation. The strategy is now being enacted and includes:

- Recommendations on resources
 - Established structure of the Specialist Works Team
 - Recruitment of a full time Technical Support Officer - Joined the team August 2017
- Improved customer communications
 - Worked with Repairs & Voids to put relevant D&C information in the Repairs Handbook, which has been sent to all 8200 tenants.
 - Emphasise to Specialist Works Team the service agreement of returning customer calls within 48hrs.
- Better diagnosis when a resident reports a problem
 - Clearer script for CSC to follow and triage routes
 - Eform on Website due to be released which allows tenants to specify location and concern in the home and to attach photographs.
- Improving the quality of technical apparatus and technical skills
 - Increased use of data loggers and protimeters (Damp Meters) to provide scientific evidence of conditions inside the property over a period of time.
 - Purchase of thermal imaging cameras
- Resolving defects or installing new equipment to help tenants manage condensation problems
 - Taking a holistic approach when surveying properties.
 - Installing extractors and resolving building defects that are identified as the source of water penetration.
- Strictly not citing “lifestyle” as a factor until we fully understand the cause of a problem
 - We know that in many cases, condensation is one of the main causes for the mouldy conditions. The use of the data loggers will provide scientific evidence of the conditions in the property to minimise surveyors ‘estimations’ of tenant’s lifestyle.
 - We know there is a borough wide problem within flat blocks with damp and condensation. Many of these issues will be addressed with the works planned in the Major Refurbishment Contract to upgrade the flat blocks.

What is left to do?

Short Term

Aids & Adaptations

- A&A policy being reviewed and updated

- Business process being renewed, where the use of Northgate is fundamental
- Building relationships with HCC Occupational Therapists and key teams in the council i.e. Lettings, Environmental Health, Repairs & Voids.

Damp & Condensation

- New D&C policy being developed
- Improve information on SBC website
- Improve 'How to manage condensation in your home' leaflet to be given out during all visits
- Training for the wider team, including Members, Housing staff, CSC staff and Repairs staff
- Provision of accredited, advanced training courses for the Specialist Works Team surveyors
- Closer working with the manufacturers of mould treatment materials and Repairs & Voids Team
- Create 'how to' videos and upload to website/You Tube
- Develop annual Open Day to promote damp and condensation service and prevention

Long Term

- Monitor the effectiveness of the new procedures and information
- Record learning outcomes routinely and use these to drive service improvements
- The MRC (Major Refurbishment Contract) will reduce many of the issues in the ground floor of low rise flat blocks