

Notes of Site Visit to Housing Repairs Team on Tuesday 29 August 2023

Present:

Cllrs: Chair Sarah Mead: Conor McGrath; Julie Ashley-Wren; Mason Humberstone and Forhad Chowdhury.

Officers: Dean Stevens Service Delivery Manager, Housing Repairs and Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer

Members met all of the Repairs Team and spoke to them about their work. Members were shown by Housing Repairs Team Officers how the online repairs booking system worked looking at live cases as they were received from the Customer Service Centre or directly via email, telephone or text messages from Tenants.

Issues that were established during the site visit included:

- Demand on repairs was in a large part driven by past decisions regarding the level of planned routine maintenance
- Two Councillors, Cllr Forhad Chowdhury and Cllr Julie Ashley-Wren accompanied repairs team members as they undertook a repair visit to a tenant and will report back on these visits to the Committee
- There was a policy discussion regarding whether or not the authority should continue to offer replacement fences following storm damage as this costs the authority circa £2M or whether there could be a form of insurance cover to provide a fund for tenants to replace at cost.
- There continued to be pressure on the repairs team and with contractors regarding their recruitment and retention of staff

Questions and data requests from Members following the site visit:

- How much does the Council receive in re-charging tenants if they are liable for vandalism etc?
- Re satisfaction surveys via text messages to tenants following completed repairs, please can you share the data you have re responses received, and do you have numbers regarding wrong numbers recorded/not updated by the tenants where it's not possible to get a post repair text response?
- Can the repairs team please provide a brief overview of the schedule of rates for repairs to share with Members?
- Can the repairs team provide some anonymised top 20 bottom 20 examples you were referring to?
- Members were keen to hear about the improved access to repair parts with the Gibbs and Dandy SBC depot in Stevenage, however previously Members were told that the siting of a depot for the previous contact with Travis Perkins at Cavendish was an improvement on what had gone before. What should give Member's confidence that the current arrangement with Gibbs and Dandy will be more of a success than the last iteration?
- When can the annual gas safety visits incorporate a stock condition survey, as was previously recommended and agreed upon?
- Can the repairs team share any procedures you have for abandoned houses?

- Please can the repairs team arrange a further site visit with one of the repair team operatives when they go out on a repair for Cllr Mason Humberstone and Cllr Conor McGrath?

Feedback from Councillor Julie Asley-Wren site visit with repairs team electrician

Property 1

The job code was for an extractor fan.

The property was already under the mould and damp team. The tenant had been waiting for 6 months for this visit. She was very welcoming and the operative was very respectful during the visit.

Unfortunately, the job was not as simple as replacing an extractor fan. The bathroom had a concrete air brick that on further inspection it was clear that this did actually connect to the outside.

The tenant informed us that the job was logged as an electrician and a bricklayer attending. But the electrician informed her that the only bricklayer in the team was on holiday.

There seem to be a number of issues with this job;

1. The work previously identified was not accurately communicated either to the repair team or within the team.
2. If the job required a bricklayer the timetabling of the work did not take into account the availability of appropriate staff.
3. This lack of clarity meant that it has failed to be completed and another appointment with the tenant will need to be made.
4. General inspections would have shown up this issue, from outside it is clear that this property is the only one in the neighbourhood that does not have an outside vent adjacent to the bathroom window.

Property 2

The code for this job was for an outside light and an internal light fitting. This appeared to a fairly simple job that would not require much time.

Once again, the operative was very pleasant and respectful of the tenant. Following a discussion, the tenant explained that the work was required to support a child with specific visual needs. This work would be paid for from a different budget related to the child accessibility needs. The specific issues were;

- 1) The job required an additional light to be fitted to the exterior wall rather than replacing an existing light. This meant that it would take longer as cables would need to be fitted and taken to the junction box.
- 2) As this work is to meet this child's needs, I wonder if expert knowledge about the best position for the light would have ensured that it best addresses their needs.
- 3) The other light fitting was due to be fitted within a porch (that would have previously been simply a covered area). There was not a light fitting in this area so once again additional cabling would be required. Unfortunately, this was not factored in to planning the job. The ceiling in this area had recently been newly plastered, this should surely have been done after the light was installed.

4) Due to the fact that the job was not as expected the electrician had to call the office to explain that he would need to be at the property for longer than expected. This would have a knock-on affect to other job that were already allocated to him.

This is why some level of time needs to be blocked out for such unexpected developments.

The electrician went to collect the required fittings and planned to return that afternoon.

I do not believe that my experiences are typical and that many if not most jobs are completed according to timetabling. Unfortunately, these two cases do throw up some of the challenges that still need to be addressed by the team.

Thank you for this opportunity to accompany the electrician and visit the office to meet the team to get an insight into the planning and computer system for repairs.

Feedback from Councillor Forhad Chowdhury site visit with repairs team plumber

I have a couple of notes from the two site visits.

Property 1

Whilst visiting a flat in Symonds Green, which had a job description stating that the resident's basin had come out of the wall. However, upon myself and Mark's visit to their flat, it was clear that the tenants only had a problem with blockage. Fortunately, Mark had a plunger with him in the car, so he managed to deal with it straight away. These residents had previously had a problem with their bath and basin and had a negative experience whilst sorting their bathroom issues, Mark is also aware of their situation. They had been waiting a long time to deal with this and were not happy with the amount of time that the council took to repair all their bathroom's issues. I made note of this job as it shows one of the problems that can occur in a situation like this. Perhaps there is a delay or miscommunication happening between the housing officers and the repair teams. I mention this as the resident told me that she passed her issue onto a housing officer.

Property 2

My next visit was to Ripon Road dealing with an ongoing pump issue with the resident's shower. Mark advised the resident that it needs a multi skilled plumber who has electrical knowledge. Mark was telling me that this shower system would have been installed by a contractor, which only lasted for just over a year and then it started causing problems, and this problem has been ongoing for a while which doesn't seem to have a permanent solution. Despite this, this resident was very happy as she was receiving help from the council and was pleased with the fact that the repair team can not only take her issue down but send someone to her property. Overall, this resident was most pleased with the responsiveness of the system and how it works.