

Executive Member Response to Review of Housing Repairs

Date Recommendations agreed by Community Select Committee:

Considered at Community Select Committee, Monday 8 January 2024
(circulated Thursday 11 January 2024, following agreement by the Committee at its meeting on Monday 8 January 2024, of the draft report and recommendations, with no changes made at the Committee meeting to the report and recommendations)

Date responses should be made by:

Executive responses on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holders for:
Deputy Leader, Housing and Housing Development should be received by Friday 8 March 2024

Recommendations:

Executive Response:

RECOMMENDATION 1 - Development of a suite of Policies and Procedures for Housing Property Services:

That the Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services be recommended to develop a suite of policies, procedures and processes so that issues like quantifying the level of a repair into an agreed standard can be established which should help the authority manage repairs in a more planned way.

Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.

Agreed – the improvement plans for the Repairs service includes the development of relevant policies, procedures and processes and service standards to which customers can hold SBC accountable as

<p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p>their landlord.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 2 - Improved Communication both internal and external:</u></p> <p>That (i) the Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services be recommended to improve communication both internal and external, ensuring that all team members communicate effectively with tenants and with colleagues to get repairs resolved quickly and efficiently; and (ii) the repairs service improve communications with tenants via direct engagement, social media and newsletters so that tenants are aware of the implications of missing appointments. When there are repeated failures to keep appointments there should be a charge made against the tenants rent account.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Agreed – communications is another key theme within the Repairs improvement plans (internal and with customers). We will engage with customers more effectively when dealing with repair requests, keeping them updated on progress and provide opportunities to help shape services including consultation on relevant policies and standards. We will improve communications and collaboration between teams to ensure that customers receive a seamless repairs service. (ii) As part of the review of the Responsive Repairs policy we can look at implementation of charges for missed appointments by customers where appropriate and raise awareness using a range of communication methods.
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 3 - Make better use of technology:</u></p> <p>That officers make a better use of technology to enhance the service this could include (i) encouraging tenants to send in digital photos and videos of the repair; (ii) using data on in year repairs against previous years to see trends and to profile the type of work that would be expected in different age/style housing stock; (iii) consider as a future development using remote</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) We will enable more customers to use digital technology to report repairs, including submission of photos and/or video

diagnostic tools that are available in the housing sector or the development of an in-house housing App that tenants could use to report on repairs and general stock condition.

Action:

evidence to help improve the % of repairs which can be diagnosed accurately at first point of contact which in turn should improve first time fix rates and maximise productivity.

- (ii) Improving data quality and making better use of data to understand trends, inform service improvements and investment needs of the stock is a key workstream within the Repairs improvement plans.
- (iii) We currently make use of remote diagnostic tools such as Aico devices in a targeted way in a small number of properties, for example to monitor environmental conditions and exposure to risk of condensation and mould. We will explore the expansion of their use in more of our housing stock subject to a business case being agreed and being affordable within the HRA Business Plan.
- (iv) We are planning to reintroduce an on-line 'repairs finder' tool to help customers when reporting their repairs and the CSC will also be able to use this when speaking with customers reporting repairs by telephone to help accurately diagnose repairs at first point of contact. We will also work closely with the CSC to update the Knowledge Base which will help maximise the number of calls about repairs that can be dealt with at first point of contact. We can also explore what other tools may be available on the market which could help improve the customer experience when reporting and keeping track of their repairs. We will also look to enhance on-line housing accounts to enable updates to be provided on the status of reported repairs to enable customers to self-serve at a time that suits them.

<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 4 – Work with the Customer Service Centre regarding training:</u></p> <p>That the Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services (i) be invited to work with the Customer Services Centre (CSC) to improve training to help them clearly identify if the work is a repair or planned investment and (ii) develop a checklist of questions for use with CSC Officers to ask the tenants to ascertain as much information to accompany the original request.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services & Head of Customer Services</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services, the Head of Customer Services and the Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p><i>Agreed – as set out above we will be reintroducing ‘Repairs Finder’ and also working with the CSC to ensure that the Knowledge Base is up to date and sufficiently comprehensive to enable:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>(i) customer enquiries about repairs (and/or investment) to be dealt with appropriately at first point of contact and,</i> <i>(ii) accurate repairs diagnosis enabling the right Operative or contractor to be assigned to carry out the work improving first time fix rates and customer satisfaction.</i>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 5 - Review of the booking system:</u></p> <p>That the scheduling system (DRS) be reviewed by the repairs team after the original booking and prior to sending out repairs operatives to ensure everything is in place to avoid the need for a future visit.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>We will review the workflow process to include a checking mechanism to ensure the right resource is allocated to a job based on the information available. However, we are reliant on information provided by customers and even with the utilisation of tools such as Repairs Finder this risk cannot be fully eliminated as given the high volume of repairs reported each year these cannot all be checked prior to attending site.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 6 – Streamline working between Investment and Repairs:</u></p> <p>Notwithstanding that the Investment and Repairs teams are now within the same business unit, there is still a need for the</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p>

<p>investment and repairs teams to have closer collaboration between them with a standardised process whereby the repair's team are not relied upon to attend a job only to discover it is an investment team consideration not a repair. When this is the case, communication to be provided to the tenant to avoid the case appearing to fall into a 'black hole'. If a case is passed from repairs to investment - repairs closes the case which when reported causes confusion and frustration.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p>Agreed – the Repairs improvement plan provides for actions around improving communication and ways of working together across teams to ensure a seamless service for customers and promoting a customer care culture. This will be supported by development of policies, processes and procedures to ensure clarity on and consistent ways of working.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 7 - Development of an audit trail via a tracker for each repair/enquiry:</u></p> <p>That the process and journey of each tenant's request for a repair (whether it be defined as a repair or housing investment) be able to be traced and the initial request is the start of the timeline for the resident.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>Agreed that we need to have a single source of information/timeline on repairs reported by customers which forms a history which can be accessed by staff across Housing Property Services and the wider Housing service to enable queries raised by customers to be dealt with by any relevant member of staff. This requires making better use of existing systems to enable the data to be held by and/or accessible within NEC, for example via the integrated scheduling software (DRS).</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 8 - Development of Customer Self-serve App:</u></p> <p>That the booking hub that is currently under development be brought back to Community Select Committee Members to view to establish the efficacy of the booking system. While there are</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>Agreed – the launch date for Booking Hub has yet to be confirmed as it</p>

<p>improvements in use of technology, it will remain the case that there will be residents who cannot access it and officers will need to resume a client facing approach.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p>needs to be further tested before it can go live but it is anticipated that this will be in Q1 of 2024/25. Based on that timeline we would suggest reporting back to the CSC in Q3 on the efficacy of the booking system. Whilst promoting reporting repairs on-line we will continue to offer other methods to ensure the service is accessible to all customers.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 9 - Collecting feedback from all stakeholders</u></p> <p>To collect feedback on performance from all stakeholders.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>Agreed – we will collect and respond to feedback from all relevant stakeholders including customers, staff and elected members on how the service is performing. This will be reflected in service specific and corporate KPI's and reported to the Executive Housing Working Group.</p>