

Report

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Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	2 March 2010
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Repairs and Maintenance Service – Policy Review
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:-

- ◆ set out the progress made to date in the Repairs and Maintenance Service Policy Review and advises on the next steps to conclude this work.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) That progress on reviewing the Repairs and Maintenance service provision and in the development and finalisation of the updated policy be noted.

3. Background

3.1 With reference to the progress report submitted in June 2009, the repairs service has been the subject of a number of reviews and service improvements including a full Best Value review in 1998. As part of an ongoing commitment to improve the service and systematically review all of the Resource's housing policies, a Policy review schedule has previously been approved by Committee. As part of this process, and linked to the requirement to involve and consult with tenants about areas of policy development, agreement was reached with the Central Liaison Group in May 2007 to review and develop a new Repairs Policy. As well as considering the policy, arrangements for improving existing service delivery were also considered by the tenants.

3.2 Based on this remit, the Central liaison sub group, working with the Council through the review, have met regularly since September 2007. The South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project (which provides independent tenant advice) have been working with the tenants on the review and advising on different practices in other local authority areas.

3.3 As part of the review, tenants were provided with detailed information and fully considered arrangements for:-

- ◆ access to the service
- ◆ repair responsibilities
- ◆ repair categories
- ◆ budgets
- ◆ performance and benchmarking
- ◆ information and advice to tenants

- ◆ comments and compliments

Tenants representatives also undertook a review and comparison of the repairs policies and the service delivered by other authorities and Registered Social Landlords, including visits to other local authorities.

- 3.4 To assist with their understanding of the overall process, visits to the Repairs Centre in Cambuslang Gate and Building Services depot in Pollock Avenue, Hamilton were also arranged. A number of local housing forums have also taken the opportunity through the review to visit the Repairs Centre and gain a picture of how repairs are received and handled through to completion.
- 3.5 At the outset of the review, it was anticipated that it would be completed over a nine month period taking account of further consultation with all tenants. As the review progressed however, tenants requested that the timescale for completion was extended to ensure that sufficient time was allocated to fully review the service and develop the amended policy whilst consulting with other tenants throughout this process.

4. The Consultation process

- 4.1 In June 2009 a draft policy had been developed and was issued to tenants' groups/forums, elected members and other local authorities for comment. The consultation period was open until the end of October 2009 and copies of the document were sent to:

- ◆ 67 South Lanarkshire Council elected members
- ◆ 6 neighbouring authorities
- ◆ 36 Registered Tenants Organisations
- ◆ 4 Non-registered Tenants Organisations
- ◆ Tenants Central Liaison Group members
- ◆ Tenants Information Service and Tenants Participation Advisory Service

As part of this process individual tenants were also invited to participate and comment on the Policy. The draft Policy reflected tenants' views that the current Policy and in particular the type of repair work carried out, categorisation and associated timescales are good and should continue in the updated Policy. As a result of this it is expected that the cost of providing this service will remain at a similar level as it is currently.

- 4.2 Although scheduled to conclude in October 2009, the consultation exercise was not finalised until December 2009 because some local forums required additional time to consider the Policy. Generally feedback from the process has been positive and tenants, tenant's groups/forums and elected members have expressed their overall approval of the draft Policy.
- 4.3 As part of the feedback, comments were received about operating procedures to ensure that the service is delivered in line with the Policy; information and advice currently provided to tenants on the repairs service. It is intended to incorporate this along with any Policy revisions into the updated Tenants Guide to Repairs document which is expected to be available to issue to all tenants in summer 2010 following approval of the revised policy.
- 4.4 With consultation now concluded, the finalised Policy will now be subject of a report to the Housing and Technical Resources Committee in June 2010 seeking approval for implementation.

4.5 The remainder of this report focuses on the next steps and on the service improvements and related savings made over recent years to the repairs service, reflecting the Resource's commitment to continuous improvement and best value.

5. Improvements made to date

5.1 There have been a number of changes and improvements made to the service since the previous best value review, including:-

- ◆ Reducing the numbers of Repairs Centre staff delivering the service by 17.4 fte's resulting in an annual saving to the service of £487,000.
- ◆ Improving other repair reporting channels to provide more ways for tenants to report repairs e.g. web, e-mail, and fast-track phones in Q&A's which aim to reduce face to face contact and promote repairs reporting through a less expensive reporting channel.
- ◆ Introducing repairs and inspections by appointment thereby improving the service to customers.
- ◆ Issuing a comprehensive guide to repairs and diagnostic fault finding guide to all tenants. Through tenants representatives, feedback has been received that tenants like the Guide to Repairs and that this has proved to be a good reference document particularly for clarifying repair responsibilities.
- ◆ Re-introduction of the urgent repairs category in April 2009. Works issued through this category would generally have been released previously through the emergency work category and which would therefore have attracted a premium payable to the contractor on top of the cost of the works. Introduction of the repairs category is estimated to have saved £151,000 from the cost of providing the repairs service this financial year to date.
- ◆ Provision of an Energy Performance Certificate to all new tenants moving into a property has been a legislative duty since January 2009. Following initial training Technical Officers have completed these in-house at an estimated cost of £20.00 per certificate. Procuring these through an external consultant would have been likely to cost £55.00 per certificate therefore for the 1600 certificates produced by the Technical Officers to date the estimated cost to the service would have been around £56,000 more.
- ◆ Technical Officers are also now carrying out inspections of common areas as per our legislative requirement for the management and control of asbestos. Again carrying out this work in house as opposed to through Consultants is likely to save the service an estimated £61,000.
- ◆ Improving the quality control and monitoring processes through post inspections; performance management and customer feedback.
- ◆ Reviewing inspection process and introducing post inspections. This is expected to drive improvement in the quality of completed repairs and also ensure that charges made are in accordance with the contract and instructions passed.
- ◆ Improved performance levels across all categories – over the last 3 years performance in completing repairs on time across all repairs categories has been above 96% which has resulted in South Lanarkshire Council being ranked as the 3rd best performing local authority in 2008/09.
- ◆ Carrying out routine customer surveys to provide feedback on the effectiveness of and satisfaction with the service. Results for the last four years have been consistently over 90%. In the last year, an external consultant (Craigforth) was appointed to broaden the scope of the surveys carried out to cover all categories and to follow up adverse feedback through focus groups to highlight further areas for improvement.

5.2 Based on the above evidence, it is estimated that savings achieved to date amount to over £784,000 together with improvements to the service.

6. Next steps

6.1 Submission of the final Policy for Committee approval in June 2010.

6.2 In addition, as part of the Resources commitment to continually improve the service, there are a number of other improvement areas that are currently being taken forward. These include:-

- ◆ Review of the existing Property Maintenance Contract for the repairs service which is currently delivered through Building Services and expires in March 2012. This review will include consideration of all service delivery options including the various contracting and associated tendering options as well as a review of the Schedule of Rates and delivery options.
- ◆ Reviewing arrangements for delivering property needs across the Council by more efficient use of the asset base and the creation of an integrated property team. This workstream will also consider in some detail the projected future workload for the Council's Building Services and Project Services divisions, especially in light of current market conditions, potential over capacity and the consequential impact on surpluses generated.
- ◆ Implementation of any changes identified and agreed by Council as part of the National Diagnostics project.
- ◆ Implementation of improvement actions identified through the ongoing monitoring of performance in the delivery of the repairs service including the results from customer feedback (satisfaction returns, customer focus groups and complaints) and post inspections.

7. Employee Implications

7.1 There are no employee implications arising as a result of the policy review. Any employee implications identified through service improvement actions will be addressed, communicated and reported as appropriate.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of the policy review. Any financial implications identified through service improvement actions will be addressed, communicated and reported as appropriate.

9. Other Implications

9.1 None

10 Equality Impact assessment and consultation

10.1 There has been extensive consultation and a full impact assessment will be carried out for the new policy

**Executive Director
(Housing and Technical Resources)**

1 February 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives

Improve the quality, access and availability of housing
Accountable, efficient and effective

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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