

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 June 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 the report is to:-

- ◆ request approval to implement a revised Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the updated policy for Repairs and Maintenance Service be endorsed and implemented on 1 October 2010.
- (2) that the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy be referred to the Executive Committee for formal approval.

3. Background

3.1. As part of the Council's commitment to improving services and systematically reviewing all policies and procedures, the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service Policy has recently been reviewed.

3.2. The review involved full consultation with a range of stakeholders including the Central Liaison Group.

4. Policy Review

4.1. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the repairs service is delivered in a consistent manner that demonstrates good practice and makes the most efficient use of resources available. The review considered arrangements for:-

- ◆ accessing the service
- ◆ repair responsibilities
- ◆ repair categories
- ◆ budgets
- ◆ performance and benchmarking
- ◆ information and advice to tenants
- ◆ comments and compliments

4.2. Following due consideration of all issues in delivering the repairs service, a draft policy was developed, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 1 of this report. The policy covers the following areas:-

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Policy Objectives
- ◆ Access to the service
- ◆ Repair responsibilities
- ◆ Service standards
- ◆ Comments and complements
- ◆ Monitoring and review
- ◆ Equal Opportunities

5. Consultation

5.1. To ensure that the service meets the aspirations of tenants there was full consultation throughout the review with the Central Liaison Sub-group. Based on the remit of the review, they worked with the Council, meeting regularly from September 2007. The South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project (which provides independent tenant advice) also worked with tenants on the review and advised on policy and practice in other local authority areas.

5.2. In June 2009, following extensive work with the tenants sub group to develop a draft repairs policy, it was issued to a wide range of consultees including:-

- ◆ South Lanarkshire Council elected members
- ◆ 6 neighbouring authorities
- ◆ All Registered Tenants Organisations
- ◆ All Non-registered Tenants Organisations
- ◆ Tenants Central Liaison Group members
- ◆ Tenants Information Service and Tenants Participation Advisory Service
- ◆ Individual tenants were also asked to participate and comment on the policy development (articles were provided in the Housing News on its development and content)

5.3. The consultation concluded in December 2009 and feedback from the process was positive with tenants, tenant's groups/forums and elected members expressing their overall support for the draft policy.

5.4. From the consultation on the draft policy the main areas of comment were in relation to the:-

- ◆ operating procedures and monitoring arrangements that need to be in place to ensure that the service is delivered in line with the policy
- ◆ information and advice provided to tenants on the repairs service

6. Proposals

6.1. The new policy aims to deliver a high quality, efficient and comprehensive service that meets the needs of the Council in respect of its duties as a landlord to maintain the housing stock in a safe, wind and watertight condition and that also meets the aspirations of tenants.

6.2. The policy reflects tenants' views that the Council's current policy and practice including the types of repair work carried out, responsibilities, categorisation and associated timescales were generally good and should continue in the revised policy.

- 6.3. Repair work carried out through this service will include general repairs with any items being replaced on a like for like basis. It is intended that upgrading/improvement of the housing stock will be delivered through the Councils Housing Investment programme.
- 6.4. The policy reflects the Council's need to ensure that some elements of the repair service move to a more planned than responsive basis to ensure that investment made to bring the housing stock up to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard can be maintained in the long term. Examples of the types of works which would be carried out through planned maintenance include gutter cleaning and repairs and also common area joiner-work and painting.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1. It is intended to implement the revised Policy on 1 October 2010 subject to Committee approval.
- 7.2. As part of the implementation process, new information on the service and service standards will be made available to all tenants. A new performance monitoring and review framework is under development in consultation with tenant's representatives.
- 7.3. In response to the consultation feedback the sub-group will continue to meet to identify and implement improvements to the processes and procedures in place to deliver this service and also to the range of information and advice provided to tenants on the service.

8. Employee Implications

- 8.1. There are no employee implications arising as a result of the policy review.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. The cost of providing the Housing Repairs and Maintenance service will remain in line with current budget provision.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1. There are no implications for sustainability or risk in terms of the information contained within this report.

11. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 11.1. There has been extensive consultation and a full impact assessment has been carried out for the new policy.

Lindsay Freeland

Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

1 June 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives and Values

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

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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South Lanarkshire Council
Draft Housing Repairs Policy

30 June 2010

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1 Introduction

1.1 This policy document sets out our approach to dealing with repairs to Council houses. It confirms:-

- the objectives of the Repairs Policy
- access arrangements
- repair responsibilities
- service standards
- comments and compliments
- performance monitoring

1.2 This policy covers the responsive and planned repairs service we provide for council house tenants. This includes:-

- repairs that are reported directly by tenants,
- those picked up through estate visits; and
- planned programmes of maintenance, including communal and external areas that the Council is jointly responsible for with owners.

It excludes improvement work carried out through the Housing Investment Programme.

1.3 The policy is supplemented by more detailed information for service users contained in various publications including the Tenants Guide to Repairs. This guide includes a diagnostic 'fault finder' section to assist tenants identify the appropriate repair work.

1.4 We have a statutory duty to provide a repair service to maintain our housing stock in a safe, wind and watertight condition. In addition, to complement and safeguard work carried out to improve the housing stock to the South Lanarkshire and Scottish Housing Quality Standards through the Housing Investment Programme, the repairs and maintenance service plays a key role in ensuring that our stock is brought up to and maintained to a high standard.

By 2015 our housing stock needs to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard which will ensure all of our houses are:

- compliant with the basic Tolerable Standard
- free from serious disrepair
- energy efficient
- fitted with modern facilities and services
- healthy, safe and secure

1.5 The policy is effective from 1st October 2010 and replaces all previous

2. Policy Objectives

2.1 Our aim is provide tenants with a high quality, efficient and comprehensive repairs service

2.2 Our Policy Objectives are to:-

- provide a prompt, efficient and effective response repairs service for all tenants
- maximise the useful life of our housing stock
- ensure our homes are warm, comfortable and in a good and safe repair condition and meet the requirements of the South Lanarkshire and Scottish Housing Quality Standards
- maximise planned and cyclical maintenance programmes
- consult and seek feedback from service users to ensure that the services provided are appropriate and effective
- achieve high standards of customer care

- monitor and continuously improve the performance of staff and contractors, taking into account tenant feedback
- comply with legal duties, implement examples of best practice and ensure value for money
- ensure ease and equality of access to the service

2.3 To help achieve these, we will:-

- provide an emergency repair service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for emergencies (we aim to complete these within 24 hours and will generally respond within three to six hours to make safe or carry out a full repair if it is possible).
- ensure that all service users are provided with clear information on repair responsibilities and what the Council will do when repairs are our responsibility
- tell you when you make a request whether we need to inspect it before the work is carried out and make an appointment if we do.
- carry out repairs within our published service standards and complete repairs with minimum disruption and at the first visit where possible
- carry out post inspection of a range of repairs to ensure that they are completed to the agreed standard
- reclaim costs from tenants who wilfully, or through neglect, damage their homes.

2.4 Section 5 of this policy sets out our service standards and the arrangements for monitoring progress with the service and achieving our objectives.

3. Access to the Service

3.1 We are committed to making the repairs service as open and accessible as possible to all service users. We have a number of ways to report repairs, which are designed to make this as accessible as possible.

3.2 Repairs can be reported:-

- by calling our Repairs Centre.
- in person at a Q&A office, area housing offices or local community flat.
- on-line through the Council's website at www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk
- by e-mailing housing.repairs@southlanarkshire.gov.uk
- in writing to the Repairs Centre.
- by fax to the Repairs Centre
- through Minicom

Outwith office hours, emergency repairs can be reported to the Out Of Hours emergency service.

3.3 The addresses and telephone numbers are contained in all leaflets, handbooks and office locations and are publicised on the Council's website.

3.4 To provide easy access to information about the repairs service, we will provide a range of good quality information to tenants on the service. This includes the Tenant's Guide to Repairs which was prepared following detailed consultation with tenants and includes details on:-

- what repairs we are responsible for
- what tenants are responsible for
- how to report a repair
- how we'll respond to repair requests
- carrying out the work
- complaints and compliments
- "Fault finder" which can be used by tenants to assist them in reporting the repair needed

The information provided on the Service will be updated to reflect any changes in policy or practice periodically.

3.5 Information on the repairs service is issued to all new tenants as part of the tenancy sign-up process.

4. Repair Responsibilities

4.1 We have a legal obligation to keep the structure of homes in good repair and to keep them wind and watertight. Responsibility for repairs however is shared between us and our tenants.

4.2 We are responsible for the majority of repairs to the structure and outside of the building and to the fixtures and fittings of the house.

4.2 We also have a variety of maintenance programmes in place which are carried out on a cyclical basis, designed to ensure safe and healthy occupancy of the home. These include servicing of gas and solid fuel heating systems, wiring checks and lift maintenance etc. These programmes are carried out without the need for tenants to request the work and the main obligation on tenants is to provide access to their home if this is required to complete the works.

4.3 The main types of repairs for which the tenant is responsible are:-

- decoration including repairs to minor cracks or holes in plasterwork
- damage/breakages caused by neglect or carelessness of the tenant, their family or visitors to their home
- any floor coverings including vinyl floor covering fitted as part of the Home Happening kitchen and bathroom replacement programme
- supplying and fitting plugs and chains to sinks and basins, toilet seats
- all fixtures and fittings e.g. curtain rails, decorative light fittings
- light bulbs, fluorescent tubes or starters, plugs or fuses connected to appliances.
- batteries for battery operated smoke alarms.
- cookers, refrigerators and washing machines (including the installation of washing machines) unless we provided them as part of a tenancy.
- extra door or window locks, spy-holes or security chains
- divisional fencing and garden sheds

Whilst the above list identifies many of the types of repairs which we are not responsible for, it is not exhaustive.

4.4 Where tenants have applied to buy their home, we will continue to keep it wind and watertight. We will also be responsible for any repairs which pose a danger to health and safety. All other repairs are the tenant's responsibility. On completion of the purchase, all repairs become the owner's responsibility.

5. Service Standards

5.1 When we are contacted with a repairs request we will confirm whether the repair is our responsibility and will progress with the repair if it is. We will:

- help identify the repair needed which may include visiting the property to carry out an inspection.
- explain to the service user how long it will take to complete the repair or inspection
- offer a convenient appointment time for all inspections and internal repairs

- write to the service user to confirm details of all routine or repairs by appointment repairs.

5.2 In line with current legislation we operate the "Tenant's Right to Repair" scheme. This allows tenants to arrange for certain repairs to be carried out by an "alternative" contractor if we have not responded within the publicised timescales. Tenants are advised when they report a repair if it is a "qualifying repair" under the scheme. Compensation will be paid to tenants, where appropriate, in line with our statutory obligations.

5.3 It may be necessary for us to carry out an Inspection before work is carried out to identify what materials are needed to complete the repair. If we do, we will arrange a weekday morning or afternoon appointment time for this visit to take place within 5 working days of the fault being reported. We will then advise the service user which category the work will fall into and confirm our standard of service for that work.

5.4 Work will be prioritised and instructed based on the type of repair and the risk posed to health and safety. We have listed the repair categories with their associated timescales for completion below -:

- **Emergency repairs** – we aim to complete these within 24 hours. They will generally be attended to within three to six hours of the fault being reported. No appointments will be made for emergency repairs but we will discuss a suitable time to access tenants homes to make sure that the emergency work can be done. This category of work will generally involve making the fault safe and thereafter we will make an appointment, which is suitable to the tenant, to carry out any further work which may be required.

The types of repairs carried out through this category include burst pipes, faulty electrics, security and health and safety issues.

- **Urgent repairs** - we aim to complete these on the next working day following the report of the repair. Tenants will be advised whether we require access to their home to have this work carried out and if so we will arrange a time when they will be at home to make sure that the repair can be completed.

The type of repairs carried out through this category include clearing blocked sinks, w.c.'s, and basins.

- **Repairs by appointment** – these are provided for the majority of work where we require access to homes. We will arrange a convenient weekday morning or afternoon appointment time which is suitable to the tenant to carry out the work. We aim to carry these out within 20 working days from when requested.

The type of repairs carried out through this category include internal repairs such as doors, floorboards and plasterwork.

- **Routine repairs** – these are provided where the work is not urgent and we do not need access to the house. We will carry these out within 30 working days from when requested.

The types of repairs carried out through this category include roughcast, fencing, roofing, gutters and downpipes.

5.5 For repairs by appointment and routine repairs we will write to tenants to confirm details of the repair requested and any appointment date and time made.

Rechargeable repairs

- 5.6 Tenants will be asked to pay for any repairs that have occurred as a result of damage, or misuse caused by them, their family or visitors to their home. They will also be charged for:-
- gaining access into their home when they have lost their keys
 - the replacement of broken glass where the tenant, members of their family or visitors have caused it.

- 5.7 All property owners also have a responsibility to meet a share of the cost of the maintenance of common parts of buildings that the Council maintain and these will be re-charged to them in accordance with the title deeds or deeds of declaration of conditions for their home.

Planned and Cyclical Maintenance

- 5.8 In addition to responsive repairs, we also carry out cyclical maintenance works. These include the servicing of all gas and solid fuel appliances as well as lifts and fire/intruder alarms etc. For these works our Contractors will contact the service user directly to make initial arrangements for access.
- 5.9 Through the Repairs Service we also aim to undertake more work such as gutter cleaning and external painterwork on a planned programme rather than responsive basis to ensure that investment made to bring the housing stock up to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard is maintained in the long term.

Health and Safety

- 5.10 We place a high priority on gas and solid fuel safety. All reasonable efforts will be made to arrange a convenient appointment with tenants to have this work carried out, but if we are unable to do so, we may need to force entry at a date and time previously notified to the tenant. The cost of forcing entry will be recharged to the tenant.

Carrying out the Work

- 5.11 When repair work is being carried out we will treat tenant's homes with courtesy and respect and will advise:
- what work we have come to do.
 - which rooms we will need to work in.
 - whether any furniture, floor coverings (including laminate floor) require to be moved to allow access to complete the work. This is normally a tenants responsibility, however, if they need any help and assistance to move carpets, furniture, we will do our best to assist.
 - approximately how long the work will take.
- 5.12 We aim to cause as little mess and disruption as possible and when complete will remove any rubble or other materials.

Compensation

- 5.13 When we have caused damage to any fixtures and fittings in a service user's home they will be provided with a third party claim form. On completion the form will be assessed by our Risk Management Service and any compensation will be paid in accordance with the assessment.
- 5.14 Where we need to provide any electrical equipment whilst we try to remedy faults we will pay compensation based on an agreed daily rate for each day that they are needed.

6. Comments and Compliments

- 6.1 We are committed to providing high quality services to our tenants, but we know that some times we will get this wrong and when this happens we want tenants to tell us about it so we can put things right.
- 6.2 Similarly we want tenants to let us know if they are happy with the service we provide.
- 6.3 There is a range of ways that tenants can provide their views on the service including:
- in person at your local housing office or Q and A office
 - by telephoning the Repairs Centre
 - by writing to the Repairs Centre
 - by e-mail
 - by visiting our website at www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk where you can fill in a satisfaction or complaints form on line,
 - by completing and returning a satisfaction questionnaire
 - through feedback to tenants groups / local forums etc.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 To ensure that the policy is achieving the objectives set out in section 2 the policy will be subject to regular monitoring and review.
- 7.2 To ensure the effective monitoring of progress against our policy objectives a detailed performance monitoring framework will be developed to coincide with the implementation of this policy. The framework will set out in detail the key outcomes and indicators which will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the policy.
- 7.3 Regular update reports on performance and progress will be provided to a range of audiences including:-
- Housing and Technical Resources Committee
 - Corporate Management Team
 - Housing and Technical Resources, Resource Management Team
 - The Central Tenants Liaison Group
 - Local Housing Forums

8. Equal Opportunities

- 8.1 In relation to housing repairs, this policy is consistent with our Equal Opportunities Policy and aims to ensure that we act fairly and lawfully on all occasions. We will not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexuality, disability, age, religion or other belief.
- 8.2 An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out to ensure that the policy is inclusive and does not unfairly disadvantage any groups within the community.
- 8.3 We will continue to monitor the policy to ensure that it achieves all equalities objectives set.