

Title of Report	HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY	
Presented by	Councillor Roger Bayliss Housing, Property & Customer Services Portfolio Holder	
Background Papers	None.	Public Report: Yes
		Key Decision: Yes
Financial Implications	Whilst these areas have no direct financial implications from adopting the policy, costs occurred by delivering the Repairs and Maintenance Service are covered by existing budgets.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	While there are changes to the repair sections of the policy, as there are no significant changes to the legal aspect of the policy, there are no change to the legal risks involved.	
	Signed off by the Deputy Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	None	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	The purpose of the report is to provide information to Cabinet for the purpose of adopting the revised Housing Repair and Maintenance Policy V4.	
Reason for Decision	To adopt the policy as a framework for the Housing Repair and Maintenance Policy V4	
Recommendations	FOR CABINET TO ADOPT THE REVISED HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY V4	

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.2 North West Leicestershire District Council Housing Service is committed to ensure tenants homes are well maintained by an efficient and effective Repairs and Maintenance Service.
- 1.3 The Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy serves to define, in broad terms, the principles that guide the repair and maintenance activities and the service standards that shall be implemented.

- 1.4 The Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy is amongst the most critical working documents. Over time the policy has been developed to meet the legislative and regulatory requirements, to respond to tenant's needs, and improve satisfaction with the homes they live in.
- 1.5 The policy currently in force was adopted in 2013. There was a review in 2017 with no significant changes arising, so no formal approval was required. It is now due for review to ensure that the content is relevant to the repair activities now being carried out, that delivery standards accord with tenants changing expectations and is consistent with the contents of other linked policies and relevant service documents.
- 1.6 The policy currently in force covers a wide breadth of asset management functions which creates some ambiguity for staff and tenants in respect of the repairs and maintenance obligations and standards. Therefore, this policy has been streamlined for the purpose of providing a clear and concise policy which guides operational decision making and delivery.

2 CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The review of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy has taken in to account feedback recently obtained from tenants during Pop-up events and the 2019 STAR Survey, specifically, in respect of the repairs and maintenance service. Although it was good to see tenants report incremental improvement with the repairs service over the last few years, outcomes of those surveys that highlighted tenants concerns with the service have been incorporated into the review of the policy. For example, the 2019 Star Survey indicated that tenants were least satisfied with the 'time taken before work started' and the 'repair being done right first time.' A repair 'taking too long' was also raised during the Community Pop-up events.
- 2.2 The Pop-up events also identified that some tenants felt our communication during the repair process was not as good as they wished it to be and there was inconsistent quality of repairs.
- 2.3 The following groups have been directly consulted, specifically in relation to the relevancy and content of the policy currently in force:
 - Landlord Services Working Group
 - In-House Repairs Team
 - Asset Management
 - Asset Management Service Support
 - Housing Management
- 2.4 The Landlords Services Working Group met on a number of occasions to provide comments and concerns regarding the existing policy. A smaller task and finish group was organised to develop and consider amendments to the concerns raised by the tenants that sit on that group and to review and refresh the landlord and tenant repair responsibilities.

- 2.5 Concerns raised by the tenant members of the Landlord Services Working Group included:
- the time it takes to start a repair from the date the repair was reported (including inspections to ascertain the work required); and
 - a lack of communication of the proposed repair date when the work had been identified.
- 2.6 Colleagues across Housing Services worked together to review the current policy. Issues that were important to them included:
- Empty Homes and the Lettable Standard were not included or referenced in the current policy.
 - Instances of 'No Access' required strengthening in the policy.
 - Providing clarity in respect of the repair responsibilities, especially for the tenant.
- 2.7 Amendments have been made to the policy to address the issues raised by tenants and staff.
- 2.8 Housing Services Senior Team Managers, including the Commercial Services Team Manager responsible for delivering the repairs service in accordance with the policy, have contributed to and agreed to the principles and contents of this revised policy.

3 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE POLICY REVIEW

- 3.1 Over several years of policy iterations, the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy has evolved into a blend of; a policy document, Asset Management Strategy, a process guide and a tenant information document. The revised policy has been stripped back to broader principles to enhance clarity but in sufficient detail to still provide sufficient direction and guidance to operationally deliver the service.
- 3.2 Where relevant policies, strategies or specific documents contain more detail, these have been identified and referred to in the revised policy rather than duplicate them in a substantial part or in full.
- 3.3 To help organise repairs efficiently, respond to customer needs and fulfil our legal and regulatory repairing obligations, repairs are organised by priority groupings. The current repair priorities have changed following consultation with the Landlords Services Working Group as follows:
- 3.3.1 **High Priority** – This priority combines the previous 'Emergency Repair' priority with repairs that fall under the 'Right to Repair' scheme (a regulatory obligation). Whilst emergency work will continue to be at least made safe within 24 hrs of the request, this priority reduces the maximum time that repairs under the Right to Repair will be completed from 7 working days to 3 working days. Feedback from tenants was that the word 'emergency' could make the tenant feel unsafe. It has therefore been removed.

3.3.2 Tenants Choice – This priority replaces the previous ‘Urgent’ and ‘Routine’ priority, whereby, depending on the work required the target for completion was a maximum of 20 working days. The new priority allows the tenant to choose an available appointment date, and time slot, that is convenient for them and not be constrained by an arbitrary minimum or maximum date range.

3.3.3 Scheduled Repairs – This priority replaces the current ‘Minor Works’ priority. This priority enables more complex and similar repairs to be batched and planned. More complex or batched repairs require trades to be sequenced, ordering of plant, equipment and/or materials in advance of work starting and when some degree of specialist contractors are required. The new arrangements will mean that contact will be made with the tenant to appoint the repair within 20 working days of the repair request. This wasn’t defined in the policy currently in force. All work will be completed within 60 working days which is similar to the current ‘Minor Works’ timeframe. An inspection timeframe of no more than 10 working days, from the date that scheduled works have been identified, has been introduced; details regarding Repairs Inspections generally, have been added as a new section in the policy. All of the above have been introduced in response to tenants concerns regarding a lack of communication and lack of surety about the date a bigger or more complex repair might start.

3.4 The policy currently in force provides some detail regarding planned investment programs and Landlords Health and Safety Compliance obligations. As housing investment programs, such as cyclical and planned work are steered by the Asset Management Strategy, such work has been referenced in the revised policy but the detail has been removed. Those details will be developed and contained in the Housing Asset Management Strategy when it is reviewed during 2020. Similarly, as Landlords Health and Safety Compliance has become more onerous, these areas also need working up into separate policies under the Asset Management Strategy umbrella. These will also be developed in 2020. As such the revised Housing Repairs and Maintenance policy makes reference to the Landlords Health and Safety obligations rather than the detail.

3.5 Amendments to parts of the current policy and the adding of new sections during the review have been undertaken to ensure, as far as possible, symmetry with linked policies or published documents such as the Repairs Handbook. The sections that have been enhanced or added include:

3.5.1 Compensation

A summary of NWLDC Compensation policy in relation to the Repairs and Maintenance Service has been added into the revised policy as the information in the current policy was sparse. The revision provides guidance to tenants and operational clarity to decide the outcome of a claim in respect of failure of repairs that are our responsibility and any failures in standards of service delivery. This new section also provides managers within the service discretion to offer a payment for a failure that has affected more than one tenant without all tenants having to make individual claims.

3.5.2 Undertaking work on behalf of the tenant

This section appeared in the Repairs Handbook but had not been included in the policy currently in force. By bringing this into the new policy we are guiding staff to promote that service as part of the growth in the Housing Commercial Services activities. This new section notes that this will not be a subsidised service as all allowable charges will be made for undertaking work. This service will only be offered if there is sufficient capacity to complete the work within the agreed timeframe. We hope this supplementary service will add to tenant satisfaction and potentially lead to growth opportunities to expand that offer to other residents, private landlords or businesses.

3.5.3 Empty Homes and the Lettable Standard

This is a new section which sets the broad parameters of undertaking work when one tenancy ends and before the next one starts. Due allowance has been made of circumstances that requires some work to be delayed until after the tenant has moved in. This can occur when a tenant needs to move in quickly. The 'Lettable Standard' is not referenced in the previous policy and has been added to the revision. This is an important standard that provides a guide to staff and new tenants.

3.5.4 Recharges

A separate section on recharges has been added into the revised policy as previously recharges were interlaced into parts of the policy currently in force. Greater clarity is provided regarding the reasons why tenants may be recharged, how the recharge is costed and explains why the service may decline to undertake a rechargeable repair. Reference is made to the Rechargeable Works Policy which is due to be reviewed in 2020. Consideration of the review of that policy has been taken when drafting the new section in the revised Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

3.5.5 No Access

Whilst the policy currently in force referred to the need for a tenant to provide access in the tenant responsibilities section, it did not provide direction for staff in relation to actions required to resolve issues of repeated no access, including, where appropriate and as a last resort, the use of legal action. This new section provides clarity for operational and administrative support staff as well as outlining the responsibility placed on the tenant to provide access.

3.5.6 Cancelled and Missed Appointments by the tenant

Cancelled and missed appointments were not referred to in the policy currently in force. Whilst the arrangements for, and consequences of cancelled and missed appointments are contained within the Rechargeable Works Policy this section is included in this revised policy to direct staff to recover costs when these circumstances arise.

- 3.6 The introduction and contents of the above sections aims to provide greater clarity for the staff working in the service to make operational decisions efficiently and consistently. This in turn provides greater transparency and understanding for tenants of the standards and activities the repairs and maintenance service will deliver.

- 3.7 The landlord and tenants repair responsibilities have been drafted in conjunction with the Landlord Services Working Group and Housing Services staff. For the purposes of this report the indicative list is provided to help understand the importance of clearly identifying the separate responsibilities – **Appendix B & C**
- 3.8 The ‘Lettable Standard’ has been drafted in consultation with the Landlords Services Working Group and staff involved in the process of turning around empty homes. The draft revised standard will be worked up in to an easy to read guide and checklist for staff and new tenants – **Appendix D**

4 COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The draft policy was presented to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12TH February 2020. An exact from the draft minutes of this meeting can be found in **appendix E**.
- 4.2 No changes were made to the draft policy following the committee comments.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Once this policy is adopted, some amendments will be required to existing linked policies. To avoid disrupting any existing policy review timeframes, already planned for 2020, it is expected that policies requiring amendment will be completed by the end of the year.
- 5.2 Should the policy not be approved, this could negatively impact the build of the new QL housing software system that is due to go live June 2020. A more costly and disruptive work around will be required if approval of the policy is delayed.
- 5.3 Work to incorporate the details flowing from the revised policy in to a relaunch of the Repairs Handbook will be completed once the policy has been approved.
- 5.4 Communications with staff and tenants of the revised policy will be undertaken, once approved, using a variety of media. Where hardcopies are required to be provided, to minimise costs, best use will be made of scheduled mailshots of other pieces of information or literature, such as Intouch.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local people live in high quality, affordable homes - Our communities are safe, healthy and connected
Policy Considerations:	<p>The policy was partially reviewed in 2017 but no formal changes were made. This review is based on the 2013 Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy. Consideration has been taken of the current repair and maintenance activities and any that are on the horizon prior to the next review, including potential growth. The policy review has taken into account changing tenant demands and expectations of the Repair and Maintenance Service.</p> <p>The following policies have been considered as part of the review:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rechargeable Works Policy Housing Compensation Policy Corporate Complaints Procedure Health and Safety Policy <p>The Repairs Handbook has also been considered as part of the review.</p>
Safeguarding:	No direct safeguarding impacts, as the operational processes for safeguarding are not affected by the revised policy.
Equalities/Diversity:	As part of the process an Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken. This identified no negative impacts and two positive impacts; in relation to age and disability.
Customer Impact:	Provides enhanced clarity in regards to the tenants repair responsibilities and obligations the repair and maintenance service they can expect from the Housing Commercial Services Team.
Economic and Social Impact:	No direct impacts in relation to the adoption of the revised policy. However, by providing high quality homes, this improves the tenant's social environment and promotes sustainable tenancies.
Environment and Climate Change:	No direct impacts in relation to the adoption of the revised policy. The review has been mindful of the Climate Emergency declared by this Council during this review. Whilst there is limited consequence of Climate Emergency on the contents of this policy, the operational delivery of the service actively engages with the need to reduce the use of carbon through a variety of ways including material or appliance choice, use of packaging by suppliers and the fleet required to run the service.

<p>Consultation/Community Engagement:</p>	<p>The revised policy has been developed based on feedback received through surveys in 2019 directly from tenants and staff.</p>
<p>Risks:</p>	<p>The revision has focused the policy on the Repair and Maintenance activities and legislative and regulatory obligations of providing that service. As such, risks from uncertainty or ambiguity have been reduced. Risks relating to Landlord Health and Safety Compliance have been identified and the development of specific policies to cover those areas in 2020, under the Asset Management Strategy, have been set out in this policy. The policy review has had due regard of Health and Safety during the review and no specific risks have been identified.</p>
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