

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY, 8  
MARCH 2023



<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>REPAIRS SCOPING</b>	
<b>Presented by</b>	Karen Connell Head of Housing (Interim)	
<b>Background Papers</b>	<a href="#">Repairs pages on the Council's website</a>  <a href="#">COVID Support Contract for Housing Improvements</a>	<b>Public Report:</b> Yes
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this review. However, the review, and any subsequent recommendations, should seek to optimise the level of value for money to tenants from the Housing Revenue Account repairs service budget.	
	<b>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Legal Implications</b>	No direct legal implications arising from the report	
	<b>Signed off by the Deputy Monitoring Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Staffing and Corporate Implications</b>	Staffing issues regarding resourcing are being addressed through the normal management of the service.	
	<b>Signed off by the Head of Paid Service:</b> Yes	
<b>Reason Agenda Item Submitted to Scrutiny Committee</b>	At the request of Scrutiny Committee members.	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>THE COMMITTEE IS ASKED TO:</b>  <b>1) NOTE AND COMMENT ON THE REPORT</b>  <b>2) ADD TO THE FUTURE WORKPLAN AN UPDATE REPORT ONCE THE WORK UNDERTAKEN IN PARA 3.7 HAS CONCLUDED</b>	

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report is in response to a scoping request from Cllr Sean Sheahan. The reason for requesting the report from that form is:

*“Set against the known issues in resources (human in particular) to deliver against our housing plans, and the impacts that this is having on medium/long term delivery there is a need for members to understand the performance/delivery of housing*

*repairs and maintenance and how this will be managed to the benefit of our tenants over the coming period. “*

- 1.2 To address this topic this report will consider the background and context of the repairs service, consider historical performance data, review current activity, consider challenges and approach at the current time, and conclude with the actions being taken at this stage in the process.

## **2. Background & Context of Housing Repairs**

- 2.1 The Council's repairs teams look after Council social housing stock, which is circa 4100 homes spread across the district. Tenants report repair requests through either phone, email, online, or councillor referral. Three broad types of repairs category are used:

- High Priority (right to repair) – classified as those which could cause risk to tenant or the property and covered by the right to repair scheme. This means they are life threatening, will cause injury or impede the tenant's welfare, is a major threat to tenant security and/or will cause more than minor damage to the property. Depending on the issue these should be actioned in one to three days and may require follow up visits to address non-priority elements of work (e.g. boxing a pipe back in after a leak is fixed).
- Tenants' Choice – these are repairs which are not high priority but need to be completed relatively quickly. Tenants have a choice of dates and times to get this work completed and the completion time is dictated by the appointment made.
- Scheduled Works - are those which fall outside of the High Priority and Tenants' Choice categories. Generally, these are larger scale repairs or replacements which are sometimes grouped together to create more economic programmes of work and may require an inspection to scope up materials to order, arrange for scaffolding or skips, and possibly involve multiple operatives. These are planned in advance and scheduled. The Council's small number of leaseholders would be also involved in the process of these works.

- 2.2 It is important to recognise the diverse nature of the above when considering the work of the repairs service. In addition to the above, sometimes inspections are required before the work can commence to fully diagnose the issue. This may influence which of the above categories that the work is scheduled to and the time before any repairs query fully enters the queue for work.

- 2.3 There are, therefore, two main origins of works to Council homes – asset management (where properties are managed to comply with regulations and law), and tenant reporting. This report is focused on the latter and those that the in-house repairs team cover.

- 2.4 In terms of staff resource, the Council's repairs team is made up of:

Establishment	Establishment 10/2/23	% Against FULL establishment
Permanent	40	62
Permanent Vacancy	13	20
Agency	6	9
Apprentice	3	5
Apprentice Vacancy	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100 (rounded)</b>

- 2.5 As can be seen from the above the service is currently carrying around 25% vacancy rate, which whilst is being supplemented by specialist/external contractors is leading to a significant challenge for the service. Agency staff also feature, and always have as they assist with peak demands for certain skills and allow flexibility in service delivery.
- 2.6 In addition to the in-house team set out above, the Council also has a key third party contract running alongside. This is contracted to UKGas as set out in the cabinet report referred to in background papers and was procured to provide additional capacity for 'catch up' work post the impact of Covid. Due to procurement delays and then mobilisation delays this contract has only been delivering since the turn of this calendar year.
- 2.7 In terms of service performance, the key challenges, how these are being managed now and how it is proposed to address these longer-term, these issues are expanded below:

### 3. Performance, Key Challenges & Response

- 3.1 Annex A to this report sets out a selection of performance information regarding the repairs function. In summary this shows that:
- When considering the number of components replaced and the capital expenditure of these, progress over the past years has significantly increased since pre pandemic (19/20) and following a peak year in 21/22 (and the use of external support to achieve this).
  - The current years' component<sup>1</sup> versus expenditure is showing a drop back from 21/22 – this shows the impacts of reduced resources (see 3.3 below) and the impact on planned works as they have been diverted to more urgent work.
  - On delivery performance – urgent works requiring a one-day response (RTR1 in the Annex) remain consistent over time with a marginal increase in latter years. The seasonal variation is evident.
  - Repairs on a three-day response time (RTR3 in the Annex) are broadly performing to target each quarter and also show seasonal variation. The impacts of COVID lock downs are clear. There are significant swings from mid 2022 each month – this is a combination of the impacts of reduced staff resource and also some misaligned reporting timelines in the new housing system which have now been addressed.

<sup>1</sup> Components are what we call the individual parts of a home that are replaced when they are at the end of their life, eg windows, entire kitchens, and bathroom etc

- Tenant choice work and Scheduled Works (TC & SW in the Annex) performance has decreased significantly since April 2022. This shows the effect of staff resources and prioritising works to the first two categories above. Clear evidence of COVID lock down impacts can also be seen.
- In the round, the data presented is showing is that:
  - the in-house team has a fairly static capacity to deliver (circa 800-900 components a year when fully staffed). This is a broad requirement of the Council's stock upkeep annually. A programme larger than this needs additional resource – e.g. the impacts of COVID and need to 'catch up'.
  - Due to resourcing difficulties (see below) there has been a marked reduction in planned works due to diverting resources from planned to more urgent works.
  - Urgent works have performed well over this period, however, this is at the cost of planned works.

3.2 In considering the above, it is important to consider the current challenges that are facing the repairs teams. These are summarised below in no order. The last section of this report sets out what the Housing Service is doing to help address these going forward.

- COVID impact – during the pandemic period, for long sections of time, work (and particularly that indoors) was suspended to comply with government guidance at that time. This impacted tenant work and planned works. Adding these periods together it is conservatively estimated that there was a loss of circa 12-18months' working time. Whilst emergency work in the priority category continued, this was emergency in nature and in some cases fixed the immediate issue but not always the underlying cause. Post COVID restrictions, there was (especially in the early period after restrictions were lifted) a resistance by tenants to allow operatives into their homes to do work, effectively elongating the cessation of works. As set out above, a contractor is now in place to help support this 'catch up' work, but it has taken longer than hoped to operationalise, work is, however, now progressing.
- Recruitment/Staffing – recruitment for the in-house team has always been challenging. The Council is trying to recruit some trades in particular in a highly contested market place which post COVID appears to have changed with a number of people leaving the industry, in turn making them harder to recruit. This is a recognised national and cross sector issue affecting most providers from house building companies through to private and social landlords alike and is not unique to the Council. It is also impacting on contractors. There may also be impacts of leaving the European Union and tightened restrictions on labour but it is unclear if this is the case. The Council is often also looking for a particular type of person to work with the Council teams, including the concept of being multiskilled and work to arguably higher standards in customer service than may be experienced elsewhere. There are currently 16 vacancies across the team, mostly in operatives. In addition to this, the Council is experiencing a number of sickness issues meaning resource is depleted further. These are not confined to Council operatives, with management roles within housing repairs also impacted. This has a knock on impact on ensuring the smooth flow of work and the overall management of the teams. Taken together this probably means a circa 25% staffing impact.

- Procurement/Supply/inflation issues – post Brexit and post Covid there are areas of work that are suffering from supply and inflation issues. Notability roofing tiles, boilers, some sanitaryware, some plaster products etc. This has an impact on what work can be planned or actioned, particularly when the supply of the above is at best spasmodic. The Council is working closely with its suppliers to minimise these impacts. Costs are also increasing in some areas, as are significant reductions in available stock for some items. Combined, these issues add a new variability factor into planning work which has not been present before.
- Availability of robust data – some key data (for example asbestos surveys) are required to ensure the smooth planning of non-urgent works. Until recently the Council has suffered a lack of resources in the Asset Management team to address this. A restructure in this area is now in hand, but this does mean that earlier this financial year there was a lag in available data meaning that programming of the planned maintenance element of the works was impacted. Due to the specialised nature of this team, they are also impacted by the same, if not worse, recruitment issues set out above.
- Mould and Damp – following the national cases regarding the importance of addressing these issues there has been an increase in reporting and complaints of mould and damp. This is to be welcomed as these issues can be serious for tenants and campaigns to promote reporting have been undertaken and also being developed as set out in the Housing Regulators 21 Point action plan on this issue. This activity has led to an increase in reported cases and demand for the repairs service. The Council is in the process of inspecting all homes where mould and damp has been reported by tenants and external contractors are being deployed to ensure corrective actions are in place as soon as possible.

### **Actions to address**

- 3.3 In summary, the above means that there has been an increase in work requests overall, set against a significant backlog of long term works due to COVID impacts. In addition, there are human resource constraints that are limiting the ability to deliver, and a lack of easily available third parties to assist. Plus, supply issues for some products are impacting as well.
- 3.4 This means responses to repairs are far more reactive than normal, which is less efficient than the normal planned way of working; and it is not as good for tenants as it is less controlled. It also means that limited resources are being diverted away from more planned work into more reactive work, thus reducing further the ability to deliver more long term planned works.
- 3.5 The backlog of works is coming down through the use of third parties, and inroads are being made into particular issues such as those mentioned regarding mould and damp; however, with the above in mind it is likely that this will take some time to return to the desired high level of service. As noted above, urgent repairs and those of an urgent nature are being progressed within tolerance, however, this is at the expense of planned improvement works and longer term scheduled works.
- 3.6 Set out below are a series of immediate actions that are being taken to address the above:
  - A new permanent Head of Housing has been recruited who has a solid repairs and assets management / compliance background.

- Work is ongoing with the HR team and wider agency suppliers to help address the resource issues set out above in the short term, this includes temporary and agency staff.
- Work has been extended and widened with the Council's key contractor to take on more planned activity for a longer period – this will help address the current backlog of work.
- Work is being undertaken with other contractors – including for example specialist ones around Damp and Mould – to accelerate work in these areas in both assessment and fix to ensure tenants are looked after.
- Work is ongoing with all suppliers and contractors to see if they are able to assist with the challenges presented, however, a number of them are also experiencing the same issues especially regarding recruitment. This is a national issue.
- Starting from April this year, the planned assets work (the larger significant programmes of work) is being reinvigorated, and by using more external contractors the repairs service should return to a more formal planned programme in 2023/4 and 2024/25 for this type of activity.

3.7 In the medium term, however, to the Council needs to consider if the service is set up in the best way to address the challenges being faced, particularly if there has been a long-term shift in supply/behaviour of key types of resource, and explore if this is a medium/ long term issue not a short term issue. A planned restructure of Asset Management is already in process recognising these issues. The Council also need to further explore if it is using the best in modern practise to deliver services. To this end work has recently commenced with an external specialist to review the current approach to repairs (including longer term planning, management, resources etc) to see if there are other improvements or changes that can be made to address these issues.

3.8 This work will report over the summer and be actioned by the new Head of Housing. As set out in the recommendations of this report, it is proposed to bring a progress update back to this committee later in the year. During this time, service managers will also be working with the Audit team to ensure that its work will also tie into the planned review set out above to maximise the use of resources and tie any findings and actions together into a consolidated form.

3.9 The Council is taking all reasonable actions to address the core issues as presented in this report. As shown in this report, urgent works are not being impacted by these issues as these are being prioritised over planned works; however, this approach is only appropriate for a limited period to ensure that the overall planned works do not suffer. Third parties are being used to help address these issues at the current time, and tenants should, over the coming months, see significant inroads into the backlog of non-urgent work. Reviews are also being undertaken to ensure the repairs service is best set up for the future.

<b>Policies and other considerations, as appropriate</b>	
Council Priorities:	Insert relevant Council Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local people live in high quality, affordable homes</li> <li>- Our communities are safe, healthy and connected</li> </ul>
Policy Considerations:	None specific

Safeguarding:	None specific
Equalities/Diversity:	None specific
Customer Impact:	None at this point – but the actions of the report are aimed at improving services to tenants
Economic and Social Impact:	Improving our tenants' homes aims to increase the ability of our tenants to live in suitable surroundings
Environment and Climate Change:	None specific
Consultation/Community Engagement:	N/a
Risks:	The approaches set out in this report summarise the high level approaches to balancing the risks of delivering the service overall. There are challenges presented around services which are covered by statutory responsibilities as a landlord.
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