



Leicester  
City Council

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**11 FEBRUARY 2010**

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**Report of the Adults & Housing Scrutiny Task Group**

**Final Report - "Housing Repairs Review"**

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Report of Councillor Potter, Task Group Leader

**1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board with the findings of the Adults & Housing Task Groups review into the Housing Repairs Service in Leicester. This review was undertaken to explore specific areas for improvement within the current service.
- 1.2 Members regularly receive complaints and concerns in relation to the housing repairs and maintenance service. Therefore, this review will benefit members to have a better understanding of how the service is operated and can be improved.
- 1.3 This report sets out the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Adults & Housing Task Group.

**2. Recommendations**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is asked to endorse the following recommendations of the Housing Repairs Task Group.

- 2.1. That the Housing Improvement and Repairs Service Mission Statement, adopted by Cabinet in July 2007, be noted and supported as still relevant, see Appendix A.
- 2.2. That the new Housing Repairs Mobile Working Scheme be fully supported and further developed to improve the overall service.
- 2.3. That annual monitoring takes place of the complaints received by the Cabinet Lead for Housing relating to the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service.
- 2.4. That the members receive updates on the structure, key contacts and roles of lead staff within the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service.
- 2.5. That the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service develop further links with Ward Community meetings, Patchwalks and Neighbourhood events.

- 2.6. That the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service improve the publicity of outreach work in the community e.g. information caravan roadshows.
- 2.7. That the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service improve the joint-working relationship with Neighbourhood Housing Officers to offer a seamless and unified service to customers.
- 2.8. That Leicester City Council, as a corporate parent, invest in the creation of more apprentice type posts within the housing service to provide opportunities for young people in the city.
- 2.9. That Leicester City Council, as the landlord, ensures that regular monitoring takes place to ensure that all tenants are maintaining property to a certain standard.
- 2.10. That the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service hold regular 'Information Sharing Events'.
- 2.11. That the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service develops, where appropriate, a system of keeping tenants and leaseholders informed throughout the cycle of their repairs work.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 At its meeting in March 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board agreed for the Adults & Housing Task Group to undertake a review of Housing Repairs Service in Leicester.
- 3.2 The Task Group met on 3 occasions. In addition to these meetings the Task Group have attended workshop sessions and carried out a site visit to the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Depot in Blackbird Road for the purpose of gathering evidence.
- 3.3. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board have received regular progress reports on the work of the Task Group.

### **4. Membership of the Task Group**

- 4.1 The members involved in the Task Group were: Councillors Potter (chair), Newcombe, Glover, Lloyd-Harris, Thomas, Joshi, Marriott, Mayat, Allen and Naylor
- 4.2 The officers from the Housing Department involved in this review were Dave Pate, Service Director and Ian Craig, Head of Direct Services

### **5. Acknowledgements**

- 5.1 The Task Group wishes to thank the lead officers involved in this review plus the Heads of service within the housing repairs and maintenance division.

## 6. Aim of the Review

- 6.1 The Housing Repairs Scrutiny Task Group was set up to investigate how the Housing Repairs Service is operated with a view to further explore specific areas for improvement.

## 7. Method of investigation

- 7.1 To carry out this review we have used a range of methods:
- Site visit to the operational side of the service
  - Information day and workshops to raise awareness and address issues
  - Presentations from service lead officers
  - Table top review of council documents

## 8. KEY FINDINGS

Leicester City Council currently has 22356 dwellings across the City, and as landlord, the Authority has a duty to repair and maintain the homes of council tenants.

The service deals with on average 137,700 requests for repairs a year, as follows:

- Emergency Out of Hour Repairs (3 hour)	26,017
- Emergency and 24 hour Repairs	21,860
- Day to Day repairs (10 day)	27,506
- Programmed work (9 week)	24,245
- Work on Void Property	1,498
- Gas Servicing	19,227
- Gas Emergency and 48 hour repair service	17,348

Of the above, over three quarters of all repairs are done under our appointment system, at a time and date to suit the tenant.

The net Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service budget for 2009/10 is £26.550m. The Housing Repairs budget, as a percentage of the Council's total budget, is 5.33%.

The housing repairs and maintenance service has received a number of awards over recent years:

- 2001 - Beacon Status award for Improving Housing Maintenance (the first service to win this prestigious award).
- 2002 – 3 star rating with excellent prospects for improvement under the Government's Housing Inspection regime (the first service to achieve this rating for housing maintenance in the Country).

Note last external inspection was by Housing Inspectorate and service received 3 stars

Over the last 18 months the service has shown significant improvements in many areas and these are acknowledged by the Task Group.

## 8.1 Service Improvements

8.1.1 During the initial meetings of this review the task group recognised that the Housing Repairs service had already started to address the core issues in relation to service improvements. They were informed of the recent improvements made to the Housing Improvement and Repairs Service:

- An audit of the Council's current stock of houses.
- Seven surveys had been undertaken or were currently occurring which would be used to build up a better idea of issues of the houses.
- The Council were now able to repair or replace the tenant's own fittings.
- The remuneration method for the workforce was currently being reviewed.
- A full survey of all tenants had been undertaken.
- A full survey of all Elected Members had been undertaken
- An annual Conference for tenants had been established where service failings could be highlighted and addressed.

8.1.2 The task group raised concerns that some Council properties were not insulated correctly and as a result of this the heating and gas bills would be higher. The service responded by saying that Leicester's SAP rating was 82.4 overall the highest in the Country. In addition, that when the audit of council properties took place, it would be checked if there was a minimum of 6 inches of insulation installed in the property, if not it would be brought up to this level.

## 8.2 How is the Housing Repairs Service Monitored

8.2.1 For local authorities, the average time taken on urgent housing repairs is monitored through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework. Where appropriate and as part of a risk assessment of overall performance, the data may be used to trigger further investigations of performance by the Audit Commission.

### 8.2.2 Tenants Services Authority

The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 set up the Tenants Services Authority, a new regulator of social housing which will have powers to set standards and monitor performance for the management of social housing, including on maintenance and repairs. The TSA was set up to put tenants at the heart of regulation, and address their concerns with the housing management service.

8.2.3 The Housing repairs service carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys for their repairs service. The task group were presented with the recently conducted tenants survey, a summary of the results was explained to the task group. A copy of the Action Plan agreed as a result of the survey is attached at Appendix B.

### 8.3 Decent Homes Standard

- 8.3.1 A decent home is one that meets modern standards of fitness, structure, energy efficiency and facilities. All Housing Executive and registered housing association homes must meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

#### Strategy Statement for Housing Improvement and Repairs Service

The Housing service has an overarching aim of 'A decent home within the reach of every citizen in Leicester'. This aim is linked to the Council's overall Corporate Objectives and clearly fits in with the Government's stated aim of a Decent Home for all tenants by 2010. Within this overall aim the Housing Repairs Services has developed a Mission Statement that informs and directs the work of this section, at APPENDIX A. This Mission Statement was approved by Cabinet in July 2007.

### 8.4 Information / Workshop Event

- 8.4.1 The task group members attended a housing repairs information day on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008, at this event the members:

- a) Participated in a workshop session with repairs staff to discuss common complaints and issues. The main themes coming out of the workshop session are listed at APPENDIX B.
- b) Met team leaders from different parts of the housing repairs service.
- c) Received a guided tour of the repairs and maintenance depot at the Ian Marlow Centre.
- d) Viewed the Gas Training Centre and were surprised by the number of apprentice female trainees. The council runs the apprenticeship scheme for craft trades, which covers plastering, carpentry, decorating, bricklaying, plumbing, electrics and gas servicing and maintenance. The course lasts 5 years and there are normally between 10 and 15 vacancies each year. The task group were informed that 2 out of 15 Housing Operative Apprentice Posts were offered to young people in care. The task group felt that Leicester City Council, as a corporate parent, has a responsibility to create as many opportunities as possible for young people in the city.
- e) Received an In-depth demonstration of how the Housing Repairs Call Centre system handled incoming calls. Task Group observed that 606 calls were received by 2pm on the day they were present.
- f) Viewed the CCTV Control room where security officers were able to monitor different parts of the city re: housing stock areas.

Task Group members welcomed the site tour and information sharing day, they found it very interesting and helped them to have a better understanding of the service. The task group agreed that it would be beneficial to hold Information Sharing Day events on a regular basis.

8.4.2 It was acknowledged that some tenants would like small jobs done by the council that are currently the tenants' responsibility, for example changing tap washers. The repairs service needs to ensure that tenants are fully aware of what services are actually provided.

8.4.3 It was recognised that some people who are elderly or have a disability, may find it difficult to do small jobs themselves.

## 8.5 Mobile Working

8.5.1 The task group held a special meeting at the Ian Marlow Centre (the hub) with lead officers, where they were taken through the processes and procedures of the Mobile Working Scheme, including the supporting I.T. systems and PDA hand held equipment used.

8.5.2 Following the demonstration of the scheme, the task group members could see the potential benefits to the repairs and maintenance service. The overall service should become more efficient and more effective with improved performance levels. The key benefits identified by the task group:

- a) Better control for management.
- b) A more flexible way of working.
- c) Reduced travel times for the operative and improvements in the performance of the housing repairs service.
- d) Allowed the council to match the operatives skills with the jobs that had to be undertaken.
- e) Allowed the staff to have a better work life balance.
- f) Allowed better forward planning capability when distributing work to operatives
- g) An increased ability to reschedule work where staff were off sick.
- h) Operatives would be allowed to complete other work on a repair visit if it could be accommodated.

8.5.3 The task group queried how a date would be arranged for a tenant who was working during the day. Housing Repairs responded that a suitable date would be agreed with the tenant, ideally late appointments should be only set up as an emergency or under the Til 8 service.

8.5.4 The task group queried that there were incidents where elderly or disabled tenants needed more time to answer the door. Housing Repairs responded that with the new system the operative would send a text or phone the tenant before arriving at the property. This would also address the concern relating to incidents where the buzzers in flats did not work.

8.5.5 The task group commented that there had been occasions where operatives had not completed the jobs. Housing Repairs responded that the new system would identify operatives who did not turn up to jobs. Also, after the operative had carried out the work, there would be a customer satisfaction survey sent out to the tenant.

- 8.5.6 The task group queried when the new system would be rolled out to include all services. The service responded that the aim was to put all repair services in the system by the end of March and add all the workforce on the day-to-day repairs system by the end of summer.
- 8.5.7 The task group praised the Housing Repairs service for introducing the new mobile working system, especially because the pilot scheme had shown it to be a success.

## 8.6 Communication

- 8.6.1 The task group discussed members' casework relating to housing repairs complaints and issues. They highlighted that they received numerous enquiries, some of which were difficult to deal with due to not always knowing who to contact. In order to save time, it would be helpful if all councillors were provided with:
- a) A list of key contacts and telephone numbers in relation to housing repairs common complaints.
  - b) A structure chart of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance division with team leaders, their responsibilities and contact details. Members expressed the view that a structure chart of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance division with relevant contact names and numbers would be beneficial to be included in the Members Handbook.
- 8.6.2 The task group agreed that improved systems should be developed to keep tenants and leaseholders informed of what is happening throughout the cycle of their repair.
- 8.6.3 The task group agreed that communication between different housing offices and the housing repairs and maintenance service should be improved to provide a consistent approach to customers.
- 8.6.4 The task group discussed customer satisfaction feedback processes. It was suggested that these should be monitored to capture the standard and quality of work received.
- 8.6.5 The housing repairs service informed members that it promotes services via various methods e.g. website, leaflets, handbook to tenants, information sharing events and through Leicester Link.

## 8.7 Housing Repairs Service – Improvement Plan

- 8.7.1 It was recognised by the task group that the housing repairs service is making improvements to be a more centralised and focussed service. The Service Director, Housing Improvements and Repairs informed the task group of some of the future plans of the Housing Repairs service, as follows:
- a) Planning to hold a Tenants Information Day, which would be an annual event that discussed issues that needed addressing.

- b) Planning to introduce events that held discussions with the contractors, members, the workforce, managers and leaseholders.
- c) To introduce a feedback system to deal with complaints received about the service.
- d) A handbook would be sent to tenants, which would help them to identify problems in their houses.
- e) There would be extended working hours for operatives, which would mean working until 8pm on weekdays and some weekend working as well.
- f) Housing tenants would now be required to sign off jobs including future work.
- g) A Clerk of Works post has been created to ensure that quality in the work of the repairs is maintained.
- h) A Procurement Officer post has been created to make sure procurement issues were being dealt with in the correct way.
- i) There was now a dedicated team introduced to deal with vulnerable people in Sheltered Housing and Hostel property and to respond to leaseholder's properties.
- j) There was now a monitoring form introduced to look at the complaints procedure, which the supervisor would have to complete.
- k) Priorities for the service would be shaped by the responses to the residents survey that had been conducted.
- l) The residents survey would also be used to look at the length of time it took for repairs to be carried out.
- m) Introduction of a Management Performance framework to allow better monitoring of individual performance, from operatives up to Management Level, including a monthly appraisal with front line staff to give both positive and Constructive feedback

8.7.2 The task group were informed that tenders for services were evaluated on quality and their ability to deliver as well as price. However, the price would not always be the highest factor. The contractors were scored on measurable key performance indicators. The workforce was measured on Customer Care, quality and performance with supervisors and managers also being accountable. A spreadsheet was presented which displayed the feedback from tenants on the quality of finished jobs.

8.7.3 95% of the respondents from the residents survey had stated that the workers who received the calls were very polite, however it was important to identify the individuals that were 'letting' the team down.

## 8.8 Housing Finance

8.8.1 The Head of Finance provided the task group with a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account, and outlined the approved Housing Revenue Account budget income and expenditure figures for the period 2008/09.

8.8.2 The budget is used to meet the Council's day-to-day repair responsibilities,



carry out the annual gas servicing and MOT checks; bring void properties back up to an acceptable (legal) standard before reletting; undertake planned programmed work on estates and carry out electrical checks to properties.

8.8.3 The Mobile Working System, although in its early days, has already cut the length of time that a tenant has to wait for a repair e.g. in the case of Plumbing from 6 weeks to three days and reduced the number of operatives required to meet the day-to-day demand for repairs, again for Plumbing from 16 to 13.

## 8.9 Conclusion

8.9.1 Task Group members praised the service for recognising that there is a need for change and the information day programme proved that improvement measures are in place with new processes, procedures and new ways of working for the future.

8.9.2 The duration of this task group was extended because the task group members felt it was beneficial to follow the new mobile working scheme from the pilot scheme stage in December 2008, through to the city-wide rollout stage. This allowed the task group to monitor the progress of the scheme before concluding this review.

## 9. **Lessons learned for future reviews**

The Task Group wish to highlight best practice experienced for future reviews:

- a) In the hands-on approach adopted through participating in workshops, conducting site visits, meeting team leaders and demonstrations on how the service is operated.
- b) The experience of conducting a review from the development stage through to the implementation stage of a modernised new system which in this case has greatly improved the service.

## 10. **Financial Implications**

None identified.

## 11. **Legal Implications**

None identified.

## **12. Departmental Response**

- 12.1 Senior staff in the Division welcomes the work done by Members on the Task Group and the acknowledgement that officers understood the issues and had an action plan in place to address them.
- 12.2 A lot of the initiatives underway will take time to deliver the full benefits envisaged but officers are confident that given time, the service will improve, complaints will reduce and costs will come down.
- 12.3 The key to driving through the change programme is to take our customers with us and work with all our stakeholders on what the priorities should be and what order they should be tackled in. That is why the tenant conferences and Member and tenant surveys are so important in helping to shape the service and establish its direction of travel.
- 12.4 The four corner stones of this change programme are the introduction of mobile working, the launching of the MOT (now called the Annual Home Check), the move to salaries for the workforce and the introduction of a comprehensive performance management culture throughout the Division.
- 12.5 These four strands will deliver the change necessary, reduce unit costs and improve performance and quality in the future.

## **13. CONTACT**

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## **14. APPENDICES:**

APPENDIX A – Overall Strategy Statement for Housing Improvement & Repairs Service.  
APPENDIX B - Action Plan linked to Tenants Survey

**OVERALL STRATEGY STATEMENT FOR HOUSING IMPROVEMENT AND REPAIRS SERVICE**

The Housing Service has an overarching aim of 'A decent home within the reach of every citizen in Leicester'. This aim is linked to the Council's overall Corporate Objectives and clearly fits in with the Government's stated aim of a Decent Home for all tenants by 2010. Within this overall aim the Housing Improvement and Repairs Services has developed a Mission Statement that informs and directs the work of the Section.

This Mission Statement is a clear set of objectives that the Branch aims to achieve, short and long-term. It is intended to help focus staffs minds on why we are here and what our priorities are. These priorities have been discussed with and agreed by all stakeholders involved in the service.

The objectives have been developed around the Council's business planning, risk management, options appraisal and procurement considerations.

**1 The Mission Statement**

1. We will review and consult on our policies, procedures and priorities to ensure they are appropriate and still meet the needs of our tenants at least once a year.
2. We will maximise value for money for our tenants by following best practice in procurement and delivery of services.
3. We will set targets and regularly monitor performance in conjunction with our stakeholders at Community Association meetings.
4. We will work towards continuous improvement in all of our services.
5. We will meet the Government's target of a Decent Home for all tenants by 2010.
6. We will endeavour to set and meet appointments in line with the needs of our tenants.
7. We will aim to complete 90% plus of all Emergency and Urgent jobs on our first visit.
8. Where ever possible we will offer tenants, staff that meet their personal circumstances in terms of ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, within normal Health and Safety requirements.
9. We will be courteous and respect tenants home and privacy. We will equally expect tenants to be courteous to and respect Council staff.
10. When we get it wrong, we will admit our mistake and take action to resolve the issue as a top priority.
11. We will ensure our services are available to support tenants in crisis 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (366 on a leap year).
12. We will ensure our policies; procedures and purchasing strategies comply with the Council's best practice and limit their impact on the environment.

These twelve aims will form a contract between the service and our stakeholders. The aim of the Mission Statement is to develop and improve services in line with the priorities and delivery timeframe agreed with our stakeholders.

## ACTION PLAN LINKED TO TENANTS SURVEY

## ADULTS AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT

## TECHNICAL SERVICES BRANCH ACTION PLAN 2007

	Planned Improvement	Proposed Action	Lead Officer	Target Date
1.	Review Response Times	Reconsider current categories and see if still appropriate. Should more be added or some removed? Should they be brought more in line with the Government's Best Value targets?	Ian Craig	28/02/07
2.	Improve on our 1 <sup>st</sup> hit levels – currently 73.5%	Set a target for 90% plus completions on 1 <sup>st</sup> hit for all Emergency and Urgent repairs.	Ian Craig	01/01/08
3.	Move to a more flexible way of working – e.g. Friday pm and Saturday am appointments	Introduce flexible working for the workforce including Evening working, Friday pm and Saturday am cover.	Ian Craig	Pilot by 01/10/07
4.	Reduce our appointment slots from 4 hours to 2 hours	Introduce reduced bandwidth for appointments from 4 hours to 2 hours.	Ian Craig	Pilot by 01/06/07
5.	Ring tenants' in advance and advise of our estimated time of arrival	Subject to having a telephone contact number, system to be brought in alongside mobile working (item 6 below).	Ian Craig	01/04/07
6.	Take advantage of new technology such as mobile communication systems (hand held devices)	Carry out a pilot project within 6 months for at least 10% of the workforce with the intention, should it prove successful, to rolling it out across the full workforce within 12 months.	Ian Craig	Pilot by 01/07/07 Full by 01/01/08
7.	<b>Take advantage of the internet and provide more direct access to booking services, checking on progress etc., on line</b>	To be developed following full introduction of the Planned Maintenance Module.	Aj Singh	01/10/07
8.	Allow operatives to complete other work on a repair visit	Pilot scheme to be developed and if successful rolled out to all operatives	Ian Craig	Pilot by 01/04/07 Full by

		within 12 months.		01/04/08
9.	Offer new tenants a 'handyperson' service on taking up residency with the first 1(?) hour free of charge and a small hourly charge thereafter	Report to be prepared for consideration by Members.	Dave Pate	01/06/07
10.	Follow up with customer satisfaction surveys 6 and/or 12 months after we have carried out major repairs/modernisations	To be introduced immediately.	John Hallett	01/04/07
11.	<b>Offer tenants a freephone repairs service for reporting repairs</b>	Full report with likely costings to be prepared for consideration by Members.	Dave Pate	01/06/07
12.	Work, longer term, to allocating operatives to specific blocks of property	A working group to be established late summer to consider the practicalities of such an approach, initially starting with WAA's.	Ian Craig	WAA's 01/04/07 Full Review 01/09/07
13.	Improved Communications	Full review of current arrangements to be undertaken including advising tenants what's happening with their outstanding work, what programmes are planned for the future, and when, and who is the named officer when there is a problem or a complaint, including giving tenants regular feedback.	Ian Craig/ Pete Stephens	01/05/07
14.	Customer Care	Develop/Refresh current training on customer care particularly around being helpful and courteous, cleaning up and remove rubbish during and after carrying out work and/or at the end of each working day, parking vehicles in a way that does not cause offence to tenants or their neighbours, Operatives/staff presenting themselves in a clean and tidy uniform with	Ian Craig/ Pete Stephens	Develop and launch a Training Programme by 01/04/07 All staff to be put through it by 01/04/08

		their ID badge clearly visible. Individuals taking ownership of a job and seeing it through to completion. Operatives giving tenants enough time to answer the door before moving on. Advising tenants if appointments cannot be met or if there is going to be a delay.		
16.	Make it easier to complain	Where a problem occurs, or a repair carried out unsatisfactorily, send a different operative to put it right so tenant doesn't feel threatened.	Ian Craig	01/06/07
17.	State of Gardens for new tenants	Could gardens be brought up to an acceptable standard before a new tenant takes up occupation?	Martin Clewlow	01/06/07
18.	Provide Baby Belling Cookers to Tenants in WAAs	Survey to be undertaken and tenants given the choice of having a bench top cooker if preferred.	Pete Stephens/ Jean Denyer	01/05/07
19.	Parking facilities and Car Park Security Dudley House	Investigation to be undertaken to see whether the problems highlighted can be overcome.	Martin Clewlow/ Ron Clarke	01/04/07
20.	Call Centre	Need to improve knowledge of staff in call centre and get better/more accurate information from tenants to reduce need for pre work surveys. All information obtained by call centre staff must be passed on to operatives.	Ian Craig	01/05/07
21.	Emergency Out of Hours Service	Aim should be to complete all work during visit and not just make good.	Ian Craig	Consult by May 07 Live by Sept 07
22.	Communal Areas	All tenants in a block of flats/ maisonettes should be advised when work is being undertaken in communal areas.	Ian Craig/ Pete Stephens	Programmed Work and Appointments 01/04/07

9<sup>th</sup> February 2007

## ACTION PLAN LINKED TO TENANTS SURVEY

### ADULTS AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT Housing Improvements and Repair Service 2009 Tenants Information Day, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009

The Housing Improvements & Repair Service held their annual Tenants Conference at the Ian Marlow Centre, Blackbird Road, on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

Dave Pate, Service Director, welcomed everyone to the event and presented the results from the recently commissioned customer satisfaction survey of the services provided to Leicester tenants by the department.

Ian Craig, Head of Direct Services, provided feedback on the progress being made on the priority areas of service delivery identified by tenants at last years conference. The response to these issues were grouped in line with the key areas of service delivery where significant improvements were currently being made.

#### 1. Service delivery issues identified at last years Tenants Conference.

##### Mobile working

- Can OAP's be contacted before operatives call at the door
- Keep tenants informed of materials on order
- Operative should complete a short survey on the job
- Keep operatives working in a small area
- Named contacts for tenants when problems arise
- Why cant tenants speak to a Supervisor when they need to?
- A 'roving' inspector
- What happens if an operative is delayed?
- We need feedback on the mobile working pilot scheme

##### Action taken to date

The new mobile working procedures will use text communication technology to remind customers, including OAP's, of planned visits. Tenants will be reminded of the visit at several stages before the appointment, including the night before the actual day the appointment is for, and an hour before the planned appointment will take place.

Mobile working procedures are based on operatives taking one job at a time, and taking ownership of that job through to completion. This will ensure, along with other changes, that tenants will be kept more informed about the progress of their job. Taking a single job at a time will also allow us to advise customers more accurately on the actual arrival time should, for any reason, operatives experience delays.

Mobile working technology, using hand held PDA's, will allow tenants to confirm their satisfaction of the work carried at the time of the visit. This should help to avoid a situation

where a tenant is left unsatisfied after the work is fully completed and the operative has left the property.

Operatives will be allocated to a given area, based on the Council Wards. Each area will have its own named Supervisor, who will be fully responsible for all jobs carried out in that area. This will encourage a sense of ownership for the quality of service delivery in that area, and also for problem resolution in that area. We will also provide tenants with a named contact should any problems arise.

### **Flexible working**

- Friday afternoon – depots shut!
- Tenants wanted to have appointments between 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday
- Tenants wanted 2-hour slots appointment slots
- Tenants wanted Saturday appointments

### **Action taken to date**

Tenants are already able to use our 'till 8' service that provides appointments up to 8.00pm Monday through to Friday. This service is limited however.

Future plans are currently being worked on that will include the introduction of more flexible working patterns, including Saturday morning working, to meet the needs of our tenants.

During 2009, we will be making further improvements to our appointment system and are aiming to offer 2-hour rolling appointment slots.

### **New Repairs Handbook**

- Tenants Associations to be consulted over design of handbook
- Need to consider size of print in handbook
- Put gas servicing information in handbook
- Handbook needs to be available 'on-line'

### **Action taken to date**

The new handbook was developed in close partnership with tenants whose requirements were built in to the final version.

The repairs handbook is now available 'on-line' at [www.leicester.gov.uk](http://www.leicester.gov.uk)

As with many of our publications, the handbook is available in alternative formats and print sizes upon request.

The handbook provides a range of information relating to the day to day upkeep of tenants homes, the reporting of repairs and a helpful tips section to enable tenants to look after their own home more effectively.



## **Gas Servicing**

- 6 weeks notification for servicing appointment is too long
- Promote servicing programme in local areas when it's due
- Why do we need to visit all electric properties ?

### **Action taken to date**

In 2008 a new computerised appointment system was introduced that enabled more effective planning of the annual gas safety check.

Tenants now receive a system generated appointment letter much closer to the planned appointment date.

Computerised appointments allows for accurate planning, ensuring that properties are visited in the same month each year and within the required 12- month period.

More accurate planning also allows us to publicise our servicing programme to tenants more accurately, and we aim to be notifying tenants in advance through Housing Management Offices when our annual gas safety checks are taking place in their area.

We visit all properties each year to carry out an annual gas safety check, including those properties where our records show no gas appliances are installed. These 'all electric' properties may contain solid fuel fireplaces that need to be checked for safety reasons each year. It is also possible that the tenant might have installed a gas meter during the intervening period and be using gas for cooking or heating needs. For this reason, it is Leicester City Council policy to visit these properties each year in line with the annual gas safety programme.

### **Repairs Call Centre**

- Web access to book appointments
- CRR staff – 'sharp! rude!' – need training
- Password for out of hours calls

### **Action taken to date**

Tenants are now able to request a repair to their home via the Leicester City Council website. On average, around 50 tenants use this service each month.

**In 2008 we invested in better call handling technology and during 2009, we are implementing a customer care training programme for all our call centre staff.**

We operate a password scheme for all tenants should they feel the need to use it. This is proving particularly popular for older tenants, who require a call outside of normal working hours.

## **Housing Management Issues**

- Information about 'tilt & slide' windows not clear
- Housing Officers need more training
- Induction pack for new tenants needs improving
- More details about burglar alarms needed for tenants
- Why pay for pest control?

### **Action taken to date**

There are limited locations that have tilt and turn windows installed. In the past we have given a fact sheet and placed a sticker explaining the operations of the handle. The sticker, which provides advice in a number of languages, is proving very popular.

Tenancy Services Officers have a planned Induction programme when they first arrive, this is supported by a continuous learning and development programme that is established at each monthly supervision meeting. Any training needs that are picked up are supported by in-house learning programmes, training by the Services specialist teams (e.g. Allocations, Income Management Team and Tenant Advice Centre), external courses and conferences, and training on a one to one basis by the Team Leader. This is finally reviewed and assessed during annual appraisals with their line managers.

The induction pack for tenants has in the last 3 months been reviewed. A revised draft template has been compiled, which includes such information as local schools/doctors surgeries etc.

An article will be trailed in City Housing News on the availability of burglar alarms for rent, at a small charge, from the Council.

Environmental Health Officers undertake the control of pest infestation. Environmental Health will charge homeowners and tenants for the control of certain pests, whilst some are free. To obtain a full list of the charges please contact Customer Services on 252 7000.

### **Other issues**

- Could we have a year round promotional vehicle
- Way lights - tenants need to be informed when it's happening
- Carrying out other work would be a benefit

### **Action taken to date**

During 2008, we introduced the Housing MOT (now renamed as the Annual Home Check). This service will provide an annual survey of the condition of your home by a team of skilled operatives and will provide us with an opportunity to carry out routine maintenance on the properties fixtures and fittings. The Annual Home Check will also provide an opportunity to identify more major works that may be required.

During 2009, we will develop this service further, increasing the amount of 'pro-active' preventative maintenance work carried out at the time of the Annual Home Check. The

aim is reduce the amount of 'reactive' breakdown work during the year. Way-light inspections will form part of the Annual Home Check service.

We are also looking at our capability to take on additional 'non council responsibility' work, in order to provide more value for money services to our tenants.

## **2. Tour of Central Repairs Reporting Call Centre.**

Paul Lowe, Contracts Manager, provided tenants with a tour of the Central Repairs Reporting Call Centre. They also had an opportunity to see the recently implemented mobile working solution, including the new work scheduling system, known as GRASP.

## **3. Older Persons Housing Strategy.**

Gurjit Minhas and Julie Turner, Strategy & Performance Officers, gave a presentation on the Older Persons' Housing Strategy. A question and answer session followed and tenants were given an opportunity to formally input into the development of the new strategy document.

## **4. Housing MOT. (Now renamed Annual Home Check)**

Ian Craig, Head of Direct Services, provided tenants with an overview of the recently introduced Housing MOT. This service provides an annual appointment to all council homes during which a number of routine checks are carried out in the home. These checks, adjustments and minor repairs, identified and dealt with before they become a major issue, aim to reduce the amount of breakdown calls received by the Central Repairs Reporting Call Centre during the year.

Tenants had an opportunity to give the service a new name and out of the many suggestions provided on the day, the overall choice was **Annual Home Check**. Dave Pate, Service Director, announced that this name would be used to promote the service in the future.

## **5. Future tenant engagement.**

Marie Galton, Service Improvement Team Leader, led a discussion about how tenants would like to become more engaged with the Housing Improvements & Repair Service to ensure their concerns were being addressed.

Many of those who attended wanted to establish a TARA and Marie Galton offered help to achieve this. Similar conferences to today's event were requested to be held two or three times a year to provided information and updates on the how the service is developing and improving. They want to see promises that are made delivered and to see local improvements, together with a consistent approach to undertaking estate inspections. More information was requested to be provided to tenants through City Housing News and the website.

## **6. Priorities for 2009.**

Dave Pate, Service Director, outlined the key priorities for 2009 and beyond, most of which were related to the development of new mobile working practices and the continued improvements to initiatives already in place.

### **Mobile working**

Further implementation of mobile working practices, with all operatives using PDA technology to receive work and manage jobs more effectively.

### **Grasp system**

Further implementation of the GRASP system technology to schedule, organise and track all pre-planned and responsive repair work more effectively.

### **Annual Home Check (previously referred to as the Housing MOT)**

Gradual roll out of the Annual Home Check, with further development of the service to ensure the maximum value is derived from the service.

### **Void properties**

Greater focus on the quality and performance of Voids management, including what types of work we carry out, the quality standard we carry that work out to, and the length of time it takes to get new tenants into their homes.

### **Reduce repair times**

The combined effects of mobile working, taking one job at a time, and the GRASP scheduling system are already delivering reduced repair times. As more and more of our work is delivered in this way, repair times will reduce further.

In addition, Dave Pate advised that he would be adopting the outcome of the recent Customer Satisfaction Survey on repair timescales and working towards reducing these to 12 hours for emergency repairs, 5 days for urgent repairs and 4 weeks for planned work. He hoped to have the revised targets fully in place within three years.

### **2-hour rolling appointment slots**

Meeting the changing needs of our tenants will require us to work more flexibly than we do at present.

As we become more confident in the new working practices and the technology that supports us, we will be able to offer more tenant friendly appointment times and our aim is to be able to offer appointments within a 2-hour rolling time frame.

## **Ward ownership**

We will be developing further operational areas based on council wards. Each area will have a dedicated team of operatives and Supervisors to encourage a sense of ownership within the team.

The Supervisors will develop a deeper understanding of the specific issues affecting properties in their areas. Supervisors will develop more effective relationships with their local tenants and be more accountable to tenant groups in their areas. The aim is to encourage more collaboration between the Housing Improvements and Repairs Service and local tenants in order to improve the services we deliver and to enable more effective problem resolution. To this end, Dave Pate announced that Supervisors' mobile telephone numbers would be made available to the reps from the **TARAs** and other appropriate tenant groups.

## **Final address from Dave Pate – Service Director**

Dave Pate thanked everyone for coming and for getting so involved in the days event. The day had provided the Housing Improvements and Repair Service with an opportunity to explain where they were going in terms of improving the services provided to tenants. The day had also provided tenants with an opportunity to understand more about how the services are delivered, and to influence the way the service was being developed for the future.

Those who attended the event said that they had found it both useful and interesting as well as feeling that it had been an honest and transparent exchange of information between LCC and its tenants.

Some of the comments received on the day...

'I was very impressed with the information on the day....the staff made me feel part of their team...many thanks to you all,'

'the event was a huge success and well organised'

'thanks to the friendly, approachable and openness of all council staff, it was a very interesting and informative day'

***The Housing Improvements and Repair Service will be running a workshop and will have a stand at the forthcoming Housing Management Tenants and Leaseholders Conference, being held at the Leicester Tigers Stadium on 24 June 2009.***