

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY

Appendix B: Consultation Summary

1 Overview:

- 1.1 The review of Thurrock Council's Repairs Policy has been undertaken with a strong emphasis on the engagement with repairs service stakeholders – primarily residents, but also other stakeholders such as members. In taking this approach, Thurrock Council seeks to ensure that any revisions to the Repairs Policy are those which derive from stakeholder experience of, and aspirations for, the service.
- 1.2 With this intention, a series of consultation events have been undertaken in the early period of 2014. This included a range of methodologies, derived from the Council's engagement toolkit, to ensure the widest scope of engagement.
- 1.3 Additionally, as a means of providing further context to the provision of repairs and maintenance services by Thurrock Council, a benchmarking exercise has also been undertaken. This involved the review of repairs policies of comparative local authorities, and the repairs services and offers made to residents.
- 1.4 This document sets out the methodologies employed and an overview of the results obtained. Further details regarding results and their relationship to the proposed revisions to the repairs policy can be found in Appendix A.

2 CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The repairs policy consultation has been informed by the Council's 'Community Engagement Toolkit' and involved the following:
 - All Council tenants and leaseholders received by post a repairs survey to complete and return.
 - Tenants and leaseholders were provided with the option to complete the survey online.
 - Telephone surveys were undertaken with a sample group of tenants from across the borough.
 - General public meetings held together with specific meetings with the tenants of sheltered housing schemes.
 - Repairs surgery held at the Civic Offices.
- 2.2 The consultation methodology did not extend a greater level of importance in respect of any of the methods described. There was an intended objective

to ensure that the opportunities to obtain a wide range of resident views were maximised.

2.3 There are a number of views which have been captured through consultation with members and residents during briefings and public meetings.

2.4 The feedback provided is described as follows.

2.5 Members briefing January

2.5.1 Members were invited to a briefing to obtain updates on the proposed repair policy revision. The discussion was centred on how best to deliver a differential repairs policy both in terms of needs (enhanced offer for vulnerable residents and those in sheltered accommodation) versus a core offer for general needs residents and those living in homes improved to the new Thurrock Standard.

2.5.2 The Head of Housing Investment and Development asked members to consider the following:

- Should we offer some repairs to tenants at a charge
- Should we reconsider some routine repairs currently carried out for tenants
- How do we reward those tenants who do not drive demand for repairs

2.5.3 There was support for the need to achieve improved efficiencies in the delivery of repairs by reducing the volume of repairs ordered per property.

2.5.4 It was suggested that the process for ordering a repair should be clearly signposted and the information currently provided to residents should be improved.

2.5.5 In considering the proposal that some residents should undertake minor repairs in their home, one member cautioned that they must have the knowledge to do their own repairs.

2.5.6 Members suggested the adoption of a set of priorities which should form the core of the repairs service:

- The well being of the resident.
- Maintaining the fabric of the building.
- Carrying out repairs on a programmed basis because it is too expensive to do ad hoc repairs.

2.6 Residents: Consultation January

2.6.1 In January an open invitation asking all tenants and leaseholders to attend a meeting to shape the future direction of the repairs service was advertised in the local press. The meeting was attended by 11 residents. The discussion benefited from the experienced views of tenant excellence panel members as well as residents who had not previously engaged with the Council in this way. Residents were presented with information which described how the current level of repair services delivered in Thurrock exceeded that of other comparable councils.

- 2.6.2 The meeting sought to form a consensus on a set of repair priorities for Housing O & Sapproval in April 2014.
- 2.6.3 The specific areas of the repair service considered were:
- Replacement of batteries to smoke alarms and door bells
 - Repair damage to non-boundary garden fences
 - Supply and installation of additional electrical sockets and switches
 - Repair of shelves
 - Repair of skirting boards
 - Replacement of loose floor tiles to kitchen, bathroom and WC
 - Repair of doors to kitchen units or bath panels
- 2.6.4 Residents considered more specifically the services relating to batteries for smoke alarms and fence repairs.
- 2.6.5 Though the principal that the Council should not undertake every type of repairs was agreed, they were concerns raised about how the Council would maintain safety if it adopted a policy of not providing batteries to smoke alarms.
- 2.6.6 The policy of repairing garden fences generated a lengthy debate. Though it was agreed that the Council should maintain boundary fences rather than dividing fences, some residents felt that the Council may need to provide support to resolve disputes between neighbours over who held responsibility for repairing a dividing fence.
- 2.6.7 The opportunity to evaluate transferring some repairs responsibility to tenants (particularly where the impact will be minimal) was discussed.
- 2.6.8 Residents were asked to consider the following:
- Should the Council direct more of the repairs resources to vulnerable people, and reduce the level of service to those who were more able to carry out minor jobs around their home?
 - If so what should be done to mitigate possible impact?
 - If a revised repair policy reduces the scope and no longer carries out all the repairs which are important to residents should the option to pay the Council to carry out the work be offered?
 - How should the Council enable and support residents who were not vulnerable to take more responsibility for low level maintenance jobs?
- 2.6.9 Residents supported the general principle of introducing a policy designed to acknowledge the differing needs and requirements of vulnerable people. There was a generally held view that some residents had the capacity to undertake minor repair work. Some residents felt that the Council should aid capacity building by identifying opportunities for residents to be trained to do small jobs around their homes.
- 2.6.10 Following the presentation of an updated report on the Transforming Homes Programme, residents were asked to consider the following:

- Should the Council offer a reduced repairs service to homes that have successfully completed the transforming homes programme?
 - In what ways should the Council reward residents who keep their homes in a good state of repair?
- 2.6.11 There was support from residents for a policy that sought to reduce the repair volumes for properties improved through the Transforming Homes programme. There was an expectation that residents who had benefitted from the transforming homes investment should take care of their homes.
- 2.6.12 There were strongly held views on whether the Council should reward those tenants with a good record of maintaining their homes.
- 2.6.13 The comments are summarised as:
- “Fine tenants who do not keep their homes in good repair”
 - “No reward to tenants”

2.7 Sheltered Housing Residents: Consultation February

- 2.7.1 Residents of Frederick Andrews Court were invited to share their views on the proposals for the new repairs service. This location was chosen because it is one of the largest sheltered complexes in Thurrock and its residents are actively engaged with the repairs service through the current year Transforming Homes programme.
- 2.7.2 Residents were asked to comment on their priorities for repairs. In line with the public meeting held in January, the larger part of the discussion on repairs priorities centred on whether batteries should be provided for smoke alarms and responsibilities for fence repairs. It was felt that though the Council should not provide tenants with batteries for appliances such as door bells, exceptions should be made for smoke alarms. It was observed that the reasons for this view was twofold: there was a perceived risk to safety by not providing smoke alarm batteries; residents were concerned that some older people would be unable to access smoke alarm units to change batteries due to their location at ceiling height.
- 2.7.3 There was a wider discussion on the proposals to offer different levels of service to vulnerable and older people. It emerged there was large support for providing older people with access to a handyman service. There were positive experiences amongst residents of using a handyman service for minor jobs. On the subject of charges for the handyman service, residents responded that if they were to be asked to pay for the service, costs would need to be reasonable.
- 2.7.4 The residents identified the security of their homes as one of their main priorities and those who live on the ground floor with gardens, require the boundary fences to be maintained to improve their sense of security. There was a view the proposal that residents should take responsibility for repairing dividing fences, will need to recognise not all older people will have the physical capacity to carry out the task.
- 2.7.5 This formed part of a discussion on the capacity amongst older people to undertake other types of repairs such as replacing loose floor tiles. One resident commented that the Council needs to take account of older people's

changing physical health and provide appropriate support in the delivery of the repairs service.

- 2.7.6 The residents were well placed to provide views on the transforming homes programme and agreed with the proposal that properties which were improved should be offered reduced services through the responsive repairs contract.
- 2.7.7 On the subject of a whether the Council should reward those who generated little demand on the repairs service, it was suggested that this would act as an incentive for some residents to maintain their homes.

2.8 Repairs Survey

- 2.8.1 In January a repairs survey was delivered to over 10,000 Council tenants and leaseholders to complete. The questions were also simultaneously placed online via Objective.
- 2.8.2 The consultation period closed on 28 February and the Council has received over 1,500 responses to the survey.
- 2.8.3 Tables 1 & 2 illustrate a summary of the results of the postal and online survey.

Table 1: Experiences of, and responses to proposed changes

Survey Responses to Questions on Current Experience of the Service											
Service satisfaction - If you have recently used the repairs service were you satisfied with the service you received?			Experience of the service - We would like you to tell us about your recent experience of the repairs service. How many repairs have you reported to the Council in the last 12 months.								
No	Yes		1 to 3 repairs			4 to 6 repairs		More than 6 repairs		None	
31.00% (523)	43.21% (729)		56.61% (955)			12.39% (209)		6.76% (114)		15.95% (269)	
Survey Responses to Questions on Proposed Changes to the Service											
The Council believes that additional support should be provided to vulnerable residents, when they need to use the repair service. Do You:			Repairs for vulnerable residents - The Council should carry out the listed repairs as part of the support it will provide to vulnerable residents. Do you:			Repairs for general needs residents - The Council should not carry out the listed repairs for residents who do not meet the vulnerable criteria. Do you:			The Council believes where residents do not keep an appointment, it is fair that they should pay the cost associated with cancelling the repair order. Do you:		
Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
79.02% (1,333)	1.54% (26)	3.32% (56)	84.23% (1,421)	2.90% (49)	4.86% (82)	25.96% 438	45.35% 765	19.09% 322	46.12% (778)	27.56% (465)	17.01% (287)

Table 2: Preferences with regards to specific repairs

Residents were asked to order a specified list of repairs by preference 1-8; lower average preference indicates the repair is more preferred.

Repairs Preferences									Average Preference
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Batteries to Smoke Alarm	68.15% (995)	9.86% (144)	3.70% (54)	3.49% (51)	2.26% (33)	2.67% (39)	1.30% (19)	8.56% (125)	2.18
Replace loose floor tiles	31.45% (457)	22.99% (334)	13.63% (198)	9.50% (138)	5.92% (86)	5.51% (80)	3.72% (54)	7.30% (106)	3.03
Intsalled Aditonal Elec Sockets	24.55% (356)	16.34% (237)	14.83% (215)	10.00% (145)	9.86% (143)	7.93% (115)	4.97% (72)	11.52% (167)	3.66
Damage to garden fence	18.1% (262)	10.4% (151)	12.4% (179)	14.0% (202)	12.0% (173)	9.9% (143)	11.0% (159)	12.3% (178)	4.26
Doors to Kitchen Units	14.30% (207)	9.53% (138)	13.47% (195)	17.82% (258)	13.33% (193)	15.06% (218)	6.22% (90)	10.29% (149)	4.28
Replace Gates to Garden	15.411% (223)	8.569% (124)	12.509% (181)	14.582% (211)	12.509% (181)	11.818% (171)	10.504% (152)	14.098% (204)	4.48
Repair Shelves	6.7% (96)	4.1% (59)	6.1% (88)	10.8% (156)	12.3% (178)	13.4% (194)	18.2% (262)	28.4% (410)	5.73
Repair Skirting Boards	7.58% (109)	3.96% (57)	6.05% (87)	7.72% (111)	11.06% (159)	15.65% (225)	17.32% (249)	30.67% (441)	5.80

- 2.8.4 There has been clear support for the delivery of a responsive repairs service that prioritises the needs of vulnerable people. Some residents were not as supportive of the proposal to decrease the level of repair priorities for those who did not meet the vulnerable person criteria. There is scope to test the proposal further by offering residents with an option to pay for repairs that they considered to be important, but which will not form part of the new repairs policy.

3 Benchmarking

- 3.1 The repairs policies of five local and comparable authorities were examined as part of a benchmarking exercise to identify where there were significant differences in approach. The authorities selected were the London Borough of Redbridge, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, London Borough of Havering, Basildon Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council.
- 3.2 The benchmarking exercise identified that the type and nature of repairs delivered through the Council's current repairs policy exceeds that of four out of five authorities.
- 3.3 The specific areas of repairs undertaken by the Council which do not form part of the policy of the authorities who were benchmarked, are described as follows:
- Replace batteries to smoke alarms and door bells
 - Repair damage to garden fences.
 - Supply and install additional electrical sockets and switches.
 - Repair shelves.
 - Repair skirting boards.
 - Replace loose floor tiles to kitchen, bathroom and WC.
 - Repair doors to kitchen units.
- 3.4 The results of the benchmarking supports the view that the Council should seek to create an alignment with the repairs policies of other comparable authorities and reposition its own policy to assert that tenants who are able, should undertake minor repairs around their home.