



# **Overview Scrutiny Committee**

## **Housing Repairs (Part 2) Topic Review**

**Report – February 2017**

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## Foreword

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Following on from the previous Housing Repairs Topic review in April 2016, the Overview Scrutiny Committee wanted to expand their research into this area and chose to undertake a further review into Housing repairs, to focus on the cyclical repairs and maintenance plan and capital improvement works. There is a need to ensure that the council is using the finite resources it has available in the best way possible to ensure that the tenants are receiving a good service within these budget constraints.

This topic review has identified further potential improvements that can be made to the overall repairs and maintenance service for both the tenant and the council, building on the improvements that have already been made by officers.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers involved in the review for their time and assistance in providing comprehensive information which has enabled Members to discuss, debate and identify potential improvements for consideration.

Cllr Sue Howes

Chair of the Sub-group

# 1. Introduction and Summary of Recommendations

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- 1.1 In June 2016, the Overview Scrutiny Committee selected the subject of Housing Repairs for a further topic review. The terms of reference for the review focused on:
- A review of the total amount spent on repairs and maintenance and the capital improvement works to the council's housing stock
  - A review of the cyclical programmes that the council has in place with regards to roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, etc, to establish whether the council is replacing these items more frequently than is necessary, or more frequently relative to others.
- 1.2 Throughout the review, Members of the sub-group have been provided with a significant amount of information to review and analyse, which prompted in-depth discussion on specific technical areas and also led to identifying some opportunity for improvements in areas not initially considered within the scope of the review.

## Summary of Recommendations

- 1.3 In summary, the Scrutiny Topic review of Housing Repairs has identified six recommendations for Cabinet consideration:

RECOMMENDATION	Report page
<p>1. Continue to identify areas of repairs and maintenance work that can be carried out in house and increase staffing levels where appropriate to deliver this objective.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Areas of work to be carried out in-house identified</i> - 6 months</li><li>• <i>Staffing levels increased and teams developed</i> - 18 months</li></ul>	- 6 -
<p>2. Provide a further update of repairs and maintenance improvements to the Overview Scrutiny Committee within 12 months in response to the topic review recommendations.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Progress update report</i> - 6 months</li></ul>	- 7 -

	RECOMMENDATION	Report page
3.	<p>Ensure regular liaison between the internal Repairs team and the Housing team to ensure that a good client/contractor relationship is maintained and that information is shared and acted upon.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regular liaison meetings involving Directors and operational managers from repairs and housing</i></li> <li>- <i>Already in place</i></li> </ul>	- 7 -
4.	<p>Provide further training to Housing Officers to enable them to provide more comprehensive advice to tenants regarding tenant responsibilities and the council's responsibilities in terms of repairs and maintenance issues.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>6 months</i></li> </ul>	- 7 -
5.	<p>Review 'repeat offenders' who have the same or similar repair job carried out a number of times and work with housing management to address this issue and to recover repair costs from the tenant where appropriate.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>6 months</i></li> </ul>	- 8 -
6.	<p>Ensure regular monitoring of all planned work programmes is undertaken in order to identify ongoing savings.</p> <p><i>Timeframe for actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Monthly monitoring meetings</i></li> <li>- <i>Already in place</i></li> </ul>	- 10 -

1.4 Further information to support these recommendations is contained within the body of the report.

## 2. Review Findings

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### Workstream One – Spend on repairs and maintenance and the capital programme

- 2.1 Under the Housing Act 1988, the Council is responsible for a repair if it is to a fitting or appliance that has previously been installed, or if it is a repair to the structure of the building. In light of this requirement, Members reviewed the process that is currently in place for determining the works that need to be put onto the capital programme and how this takes place. A detailed flowchart was provided by officers (see appendix one) to illustrate the process that is currently in place.
- 2.2 All works required on individual properties are assessed, either before being added to programmes or before works actually commence to ascertain and confirm the extent of works required. The assessments are undertaken by surveyors/inspectors in the first instance and then followed up with a 'second opinion' by the external contractors (if being used) in order to determine the level of works required. When considering works for a planned programme, outstanding repair work and responsive repair spend over the last five years is also taken into account to ensure value for money and non-duplication of work.
- 2.3 The planned programme of works is undertaken throughout the year as required, although depending on the nature of the work, some works tend to be carried out at specific times of the year and so a programme may only operate for six months where necessary.
- 2.4 Members were made aware that a craft worker staffing review which is currently underway to ensure that where work can be accommodated in-house, it is done so competitively which also increases the likelihood of internal employment opportunities to carry out work such as kitchen and bathroom fittings. This work is currently ongoing.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**Continue to identify areas of repairs and maintenance work that can be carried out in house and increase staffing levels where appropriate to deliver this objective.**

More works should be carried out in-house to reduce overall costs and expenditure by reducing the level of spending on work completed by employing contractors. Officers should actively look at ways in which to expand the in-house operation to take on more repairs and maintenance works in-house.

- 2.5 Members recognised that the council is now being more thorough in the investigation and assessment of properties, both in terms of capital works and responsive repairs, in order to ensure that the works that are carried out are necessary and are not excessive.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

**Provide a further update of repairs and maintenance improvements to the Overview Scrutiny Committee within 12 months in response to the topic review recommendations.**

The Overview Scrutiny Committee to receive an update on the work of the council in respect of repairs and to also include details of what other local authorities are doing in terms of repairs and maintenance of housing stock to see if there are any learning points the council could adopt.

- 2.6 In addition to the improvements that have been made to date, Members felt that there was still scope to make further improvement in terms of the internal client / contractor relationship. The previous Housing Repairs topic review covered the recharging of works to tenant, however it was also felt that communication between the two internal teams could be improved to ensure that Housing Officers are able to impress on tenants the costs of the repairs that need to be undertaken in relation to any damage caused by the tenant. There is also a greater need to ensure that tenants are fully aware of their own responsibilities in terms of repairs and maintenance.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

**Ensure regular liaison between the internal Repairs team and the Housing team to ensure that a good client/contractor relationship is maintained and that information is shared and acted upon.**

Regular liaison must be undertaken between the two internal teams (Housing (client) and the Direct Services Organisation (DSO - contractor)) to ensure that Housing Officers are well enough informed to discuss costs of repairs works with tenants when required.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

**Provide further training to Housing Officers to enable them to provide more comprehensive advice to tenants regarding tenant responsibilities and the council's responsibilities in terms of repairs and maintenance issues.**

The council's Housing Officers should be aware of specific details of tenants' responsibilities in terms of repairs and maintenance so that these can be clearly communicated to tenants, but also to be fully aware of the council's responsibilities in this area as well.

- 2.7 Members also felt that it was necessary to undertake a review into 'repeat offenders', where a tenant has had the same or similar repair carried out on a number of occasions, in order to ascertain if the repair is a result of the tenant's actions or lack of reasonable care. This is a piece of work that has commenced and Members were keen for this work to continue in conjunction with Housing Management.

## RECOMMENDATION 5

**Review 'repeat offenders' who have the same or similar repair job carried out a number of times and work with housing management to address this issue and to recover repair costs from the tenant where appropriate.**

Continue to review all similar works that are undertaken for the same tenant in order to ascertain how the repairs works have come about and to ensure the tenant is recharged for any repairs works where it is applicable.

### Workstream Two – Cyclical repairs and maintenance programme

2.8 The cyclical repairs and maintenance programme is made up of five strands, all of which were explored by the sub-group:

2.8.1 *PVC-u windows and doors*

*Budget 2016-17 - £350,000*

GBC have been installing PVC-u windows and doors on a replacement programme since the late 1980's. By 2010 the majority of the doors and windows had been replaced and the programme has continued on a cyclical basis. When the programme first started in the late 1980's, the cycle was over a 20 year period, but changes in glazing standards, has meant that the life expectancy could be increased to 30 years. The changes are also more beneficial regarding heating loss and contribute towards the EPC rating assigned to the property which the Council is responsible to report. A saving of 10% (£35,000) has been achieved this year through the appointment of a new contractor which has resulted in reduced material costs.

2.8.2 *Roofs*

*Budget 2016-17 - £800,000*

GBC has been replacing the pitched, flat, and combination roofs on a planned programme since the 1980's. Limited budgets have only allowed for targeting properties that have had problems highlighted by the Repairs team. Other properties have been programmed in for new roofs and have been inspected by a Surveyor to confirm that they do actually require renewing. The inspection process is a procedure that will be consistently followed to ensure that replacement roofs are only being undertaken where necessary and to ensure that the lifespan of each roof is properly being taken into consideration in determining future roof replacement programmes.

2.8.3 *Electrical test and inspections*

*Budget 2016-17 - £650,000*

The current programme of works has been devised using the current housing stock data held and essentially, the programme is made up of properties where a NICEIC certificate, which is a Landlord's requirement, is due. The programme requires the contractor to carry out the test and inspection, smoke alarm works (renew or install as required), ventilation fans in kitchen and bathroom (renew or install as required). If the test and inspection is satisfactory no further works are required, if

unsatisfactory further works are quoted and authorised to bring the electrical installation up to current required standards. There is no separate programme for up-grades and rewires.

2.8.4 *Kitchen renewals*

*Budget 2016-17 - £350,000*

There has been no formal kitchen renewal programme in place for a number of years. The current programme has evolved over the last four years; it originally started as a responsive ad hoc programme. Responsibility for the 2016/17 programme was moved to the Contracts team and in preparation for this year's programme a substantial amount of work was undertaken to establish if there was an actual need for each kitchen renewal or repair and to ensure up to date information is held in our Asset Management system to predict future need. To ensure control is maintained over this programme, the new process requires a GBC surveyor to re-visit the property and re-evaluate the inspector's decision and the programme is updated accordingly.

2.8.5 *External decorations*

*Budget 2016-17 – No set budget*

A planned cyclical repairs and re-decoration programme has been carried out on an annual basis, originally on a 5-year cycle, now operating on an 8-year cycle with consideration being given to extending this to a 9-year cycle. The extended cycle has come about through the use of more low maintenance products such as the use of PVC-y for soffits and fascias, more durable paint and use of fire retardant paints in relevant areas. The council has an obligation to carry out these works to housing blocks / flatted developments as they have been included in some leases and costs are included in the service charges. However, the new review process will ensure that works are properly completed as necessary.

- 2.9 Through reviewing the detailed information provided by officers, Members were able to ascertain that the detailed inspection/surveying programme has resulted in a reduction in the number of kitchen and roof repair works undertaken by contractors, through better assessment of repairs and maintenance requirements. A thorough review of the council's Asset Management System has also commenced, which has identified some works which have been scheduled but have been deemed as non-essentials and as such, these have been removed from the work programmes.
- 2.10 In terms of kitchen improvements, the council has clarified its responsibilities in this area, as well as those of the tenants as this was previously unclear to tenants which had in the past resulted in works being undertaken which may not have been necessary. The council has rationalised its choice of kitchens to two types and tenants now have to sign-up for responsibility to keep the kitchen clean and in a decent state of repair over its 20-year life span, which allows the council to enforce recharges where damage or misuse is identified.

## RECOMMENDATION 6

**Ensure regular monitoring of all planned work programmes is undertaken in order to identify on-going savings.**

It is important to ensure that the planned works programmes are regularly monitored to ensure that the improvement in this area continues. As such, officers are requested to review the work plans and current specifications of work towards the end of the two-year programme in an attempt to make further reductions where it is suitable to do so.

- 2.11 Members were, overall, very supportive of the work that had been already undertaken in terms of improving the approach to completing work within the cyclical repairs and maintenance programme. Members were keen to ensure that the momentum of improvement in this area wasn't lost and encouraged officers to continue to maintain this level of improvement into the future.

## Appendices

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