

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Housing Services Cabinet Committee

Date: 22 September 2020

Reporting officer: Nicole Arthur Service Delivery Manager (Housing Repairs)

Subject: Housing Repair Policy Updates

Purpose and summary of report:

To inform the Housing Cabinet Committee of the updates to the the Repairs & Maintenance Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

Recommendations:

1. For Housing Cabinet Committee to note the contents and updates of the Repairs & Maintenance Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

1. Background

- 1.1 In February 2017, Overview Scrutiny Committee undertook a topic review of Repairs and made a number of recommendations for Cabinet consideration:
 - 1.1.1 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.
 - 1.1.2 Provide a further update of repairs and maintenance improvements to the Overview Scrutiny Committee within 12 months in response to the topic review recommendations
 - 1.1.3 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. Provide further training to Housing Officers to enable them to provide more comprehensive advice to tenant's responsibilities and the council's responsibilities in terms of repairs and maintenance issues.
 - 1.1.4 Review 'repeat offenders' who have the same or similar repair jobs 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.

- 1.2 In order to deal with item 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 two robust policies were introduced, namely Repairs & Maintenance Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy which clearly outlined both the Council's responsibility as a landlord but also the tenant's responsibility.
- 1.3 Both policies were approved and implemented in September 2017. The Repairs & Maintenance Policy has proven to be invaluable in assisting the workforce in making consistent decisions which they can also justify as well as responding to complaints and enquiries. The Rechargeable Repairs Policy also provided a clear message to tenants as to what is expected and tolerated in terms of wilful damage to our properties.

2. Current Situation

- 2.1 Whilst both policies have been reviewed on a yearly basis, it was felt that as they had been in action for the last three years and with the change in leadership within Housing it was a good opportunity to review and update more formally.
- 2.2 In order to update the policies it was necessary to have input from all of the staff within Housing, including the council's operational workforce who could feedback areas that should be included from their experience of undertaking their day to day work.
- 2.3 A review of complaints, enquiries and recharge challenges over the last three were also reviewed as part of the process to ensure the policies were reflective of the service we wished to provide.

3. Changes to Policies

- 3.1 The following changes have been made to the Repairs & Maintenance Policy:
 - Greater clarity around repairs that we will undertake to a property with a Right to Buy Application
 - A section which outlines when we may have to force entry to a property to complete repairs
 - Removal of the rule in regards to mutual exchanges and no repairs being carried out for the first year
 - Adjustment to some of the lifecycles on the planned work programmes
 - A more supportive stance on dealing with damp and mould issues which have been generated by issues within the home which could have been avoided (caused by the tenant)
- 3.2 The following changes have been made to the Rechargeable Repair Policy
 - Introduction of charges for tenants failing to comply with statutory compliancy safety checks, such as gas servicing
 - A greater explanation as to repeat offenders, who may fall in to this category and possible action which may be taken
 - An increase in the charge for wasted out of hours call to ensure we are covering our costs

- Recharging for missed appointments is now three missed appointments in a six month period across any of the services DSO Building Management provide. Previously the charge was for three missed appointments
- Charging for wasted appointments where appropriate, for example when we have attended but the appointment has been wasted for any reason such as no responsible adult being present, the area wasn't cleared in order for the work to proceed or where there is no money on the electric meter
- A section on tenant transfers has been included. Transfers will be withheld unless the tenant accepts full responsibility for any rechargeable repairs, including poor decorative condition, and makes payment in full or alternatively undertakes the necessary works within two weeks. This policy may be waived at the discretion of the Assistant Director (Housing) where the transfer involves a vulnerable person, or the tenants are moving under the incentive scheme from larger to smaller accommodation.
- An introduction of estate services recharges, we will now recharge any costs incurred for cleaning, clearance of dog-fouling, drugs paraphernalia or any damage caused by anti-social behaviour caused by tenants and / or their visitors to the estate where it can be proven.
- A more robust approach to lock changes for tenants. Nearly sixty percent of recharges raised are in relation to tenants being locked out of their property. This percentage does not include those who may be elderly, vulnerable or there is an emergency situation that we need to assist with which we would still continue to do.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

4.1 N/A

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
	Failure to implement the policy could mean that we fail to fulfill our responsibility as a Landlord, particularly in relation to health and safety issues that may put both the tenant and the structure of our property at risk
Legal	The policies are based on our legal obligations as a landlord and tenancy conditions and ensure that our obligations are clear and transparent
Finance and Value for Money	The policies enable us to manage tenants expectations in regard to what work we are prepared to carry out and will allow the council to be able to justify it's decisions in relation to repairs, maintenance and recharges.
Risk Assessment	N/A
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No, the policies ensure that an equitable service is delivered to its tenants</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. The policies ensures that an equitable service is delivered to its tenants, as well as an enhanced service in relation to fencing and decorating for tenants that are elderly or disabled</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
Corporate Plan	<p># 1 People</p> <p>Provide A Proactive, Supportive & Financially Efficient Housing Service: high quality tenant management experienced through a service making full use of its assets.</p> <p>Put Our Customers First: Implement a suite of quality and effective front line service</p>
Climate Change	Any reduction in waste appointments or work will reduce unecessry travel and fuel usage
Crime and Disorder	The policies take a robust approach to wilful damage as well charging for damage on the estates

Digital and website implications	The website will be updated to ensure there is clear information regarding tenant responsibilities
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	N/A