

## **SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **RESIDENTS MEETING ON HOUSING REPAIRS SERVICE – 13 JUNE 2022**

#### **Feedback Summary**

To inform its consideration of the Housing Repairs report on the agenda for its meeting on 14 June 2022, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee arranged a meeting for Council tenants to attend and provide their views on the service. This meeting was held online on the evening of 13 June.

The meeting was structured around two breakout sessions to ensure residents the maximum amount of time to provide their views on the Housing Repairs Service. The first session focussed on the question 'What needs to change in our housing repairs service'. This was followed by a presentation by the Council's Director of Housing, Stephen Tate, on the proposals for the new contract. A second breakout session was then held to discuss 'What are you pleased to see in these plans? What is missing or needs changing?'

What follows is a summary of the feedback provided by residents during the breakout sessions.

#### **BREAKOUT 1: What needs to change in our housing repairs service?**

From the feedback provided by residents, the following common themes have been identified: -

1. Communication with tenants is a key issue that needs to be addressed throughout the Housing Service. Residents advised that there is a lack of communication around repair requests and appointments, particularly not being notified of cancellations. There also needed to be clear ownership between the Council and contractor over repairs.
2. There is also a need for greater transparency over the performance of the Service and communication with residents over their rights and how they can help to inform the process. This should also include communication on how the Council was managing performance when it was not at the level expected.
3. Similarly, being able to contact either the contractor or the Council about repairs needed to be made easier, with long waiting times when calling and the complaints process not being clear.
4. Another key issue was the need to increase the number of repairs being completed at the first visit. At present, repairs could often take multiple visits and examples were given of staff being sent who were not trained for the repairs required.
5. The quality of the repairs was often not at the standard expected and additional work was needed to provide a quality check.

6. Contractors do not understand those buildings of non-standard construction. They also do not have plans or knowledge of the building in terms of pipes and services, which results in repairs not being completed.
7. There was a concern that the needs of those with disabilities are ignored or not prioritised appropriately.
8. Given the long history of poor performance, there was clear lack of trust in the Council, which would need significant time and effort to rebuild. It was also felt that the views of residents could often be dismissed by the contractor and Council, which added to the lack of trust.
9. How the council deals with mould is an issue. Many residents live in homes with poor or no insulation, especially those who live in homes of non-standard construction. Residents are blamed for condensation when it is the lack of insulation that is the cause.
10. The Housing Service is understaffed, particularly block caretakers. Action needed to be taken to address this as soon as possible

### **BREAKOUT 2: What are you pleased to see in these plans? What is missing or needs changing?**

From the feedback provided by residents, the following common themes have been identified: -

#### **What are you pleased to see in the proposals?**

1. The residents supported the proposal to split the contract, particularly for gas servicing. The acknowledgement that the procurement of the new contract would not stop the Council in-sourcing parts of the service in the future was also welcomed.
2. There was unanimous support for bring the contact centre in house, as it was hoped this would improve some of the issues around communication experienced by residents with the contractor.
3. The proposal to prioritise local recruitment was welcomed, with agreement that the contract should include incentives for the creation of local apprenticeships and employment.

#### **What should be included or changed in the proposal**

1. There was a need to ensure that any potential contractor had specialist teams available for work on non-standard constructions. They also needed to have the plans for the buildings.
2. It would be good to provide residents with the ability to track the status of repairs on the phones or computer.
3. Whether in or out house, must have good communication and accountability.
4. Compensation: If an appointment is broken by the contractors, especially 3 or 4 times, contractor should pay a financial penalty to pay to the tenants.

5. Repairs should always be completed within a stated timescale, which will meet a performance matrix. Compensation should be paid if the timescale is not met.
6. Repairs should be completed properly by competent staff who are appropriately trained.
7. Appointments should always be kept wherever possible. If the chosen repair staff cannot attend because of a vehicle problem or sudden sickness, residents should be notified, and the repair rearranged as soon as possible
8. A hybrid model between in-house contractors and outsourced contractors should be investigated.
9. The means of obtaining feedback from residents needs to be rethought to ensure that the response rate is as wide as possible.
10. As there is 20% frontline vacancies in the Housing Service at the moment including caretakers needs to be prioritised immediately.
11. Inspection of empty property before new tenants move in and work by axis is poor needs addressing
12. There needs to be clearer communication, so all tenants know who their housing officer is.
13. There needs to be better prioritisation of jobs to ensure urgent repairs are dealt with quickly.
14. There needs to be incentives and penalties in the contract to reward good performance and penalise where the contractor is not performing as expected.
15. Council staff need to be checking and following up complaints.
16. There needs to be a greater level of transparency with tenants throughout the housing service
17. There needs to be a greater use of technology to efficiently track and log repairs
18. The Council needs to invest in its own staff to build trust with residents. Not all the current issues were down to the contractor. Who holds the Council to account for their own performance?
19. A publicly available comms plan was needed to ensure tenants are aware how they can participate in the process.
20. There needs to be a dedicated Housing Complaints Team, which was separate from the existing Corporate Complaints Team.