

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET HOUSING PANEL – 2 MARCH 21
REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITY)

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members of the Cabinet Housing Panel on the responsive repairs service.
- 1.2 Appendix A provides Q3 KPI performance and the responsive repairs by category including a comparison to last year.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members of Cabinet Housing Panel are asked to note the content of this report.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Housing Maintenance Team within Property Services (Housing) is operating in a “business as usual” capacity. We continue to review this in line with Government announcements. Access to homes continue to be tenant led.
- 3.2 The Repairs Service Centre has seen a high number of calls in Q3, with October receiving 6,390; November 5,563 and December 5,087. At the time of writing the report January 2021 showed incoming calls reduced to 4,943.
- 3.3 In addition to the extra call volume, the teams are still working through the backlog created during this year’s lockdowns. There were 500 non-urgent repairs outstanding, but this has now been reduced down to around 130.
- 3.4 During the reporting period the overall tenant satisfaction with the responsive repairs service KPI 9 is below the tolerance, currently reporting at 74.33% against a target of 92%. This KPI is based on a score of 7 or below and asks the question, “*How would you rate your overall experience of the service for this repair, from when you reported it to when the work was completed?*”
- 3.5 The team analyses the reasons why customers were dissatisfied. Customers expressed difficulty in getting through on the telephone, both to WHBC and Mears, in Q3 and this will have impacted on the service the customer was receiving. Appendix A shows the increase in jobs reported compared to last year.

We also took the decision to bring the contact centre staff back into the office as it was found that the technology for call handling works better in the office, than in officers’ homes, where they had been working due to the pandemic. We have made new IT arrangements in the office to ensure social distancing to facilitate this.

- 3.6 We have reviewed the experience for customers when calling the 0800 number for reporting a repair and it has been reported that 40% of the calls managed by the Repair Service Centre do not relate to reporting a repair -the tenant trying to contact another service such as Neighbourhood Officers or other non-housing council services This frustrates customers and impacts on the efficiency of the Repairs Service Centre, due to the wasted call handling time, whilst genuine repairs calls are waiting in the queue.
- 3.7 To alleviate this pressure we reviewed the process to see how we could improve the service and increase customer satisfaction and implemented a new process for how these calls are managed with effect from 21 January 2021.
- 3.8 When a tenant now calls the 0800 number the call is diverted to the council's main IVR* (select number for service needed). This is the same IVR accessed through the council's main contact number 01707 357000. There was some confusion for a few days whilst this new process was implemented as the customer was used to getting direct through to the repairs, now they have to go through a few options in order to get to the right team first time. However, the system has now bedded in well and the contact centre is able to operate more efficiently.
- 3.9 Mears have also reviewed their phone numbers and also introduced options that make it easier for the customer to get to the right team first time.
- 3.10 Customers also expressed dissatisfaction with the length of time they have to wait for appointments, we do have priority categories and the longest for a routine repair being 25 working days. Ideally Mears try to attend within this time period but due to the pressure on the service tenants have occasionally had to wait until the last working day. This has been exacerbated by the backlog of repairs being carried out, as explained above.
- 3.11 To help improve the customer experience and improve satisfaction, we have introduced new technology and Mears launched this new technology (MCM Live) on the 18 January 2021 to help improve contact between Mears' operatives and tenants.
- 3.12 MCM Live is a platform that will allow tenants to track their Mears operative on a live map, receive an estimated time of arrival, chat with their operative and upload photos relating to the repair.
- 3.13 In addition to providing tenants with a better experience, it is hoped the new technology will help the council reduce the number of 'no access' appointments, improving the overall efficiency of the service.
- 3.14 It will also provide added peace-of-mind for tenants who will be able to check the operative's name and photo with the ID presented on arrival.
- 3.15 Feedback has been that the system is working and sending links via SMS, Mears are unable to see if the customer has accessed the link, at this time this is not reported back due to the link being an external URL, and it is something Mears are looking to develop.
- 3.16 We have been working closely with Human Resource to utilise council furloughed staff in a range of support roles within Property Services (Housing) focussing on

resident engagement, to help sort out a complaints backlog arising largely from the service disruption caused by the pandemic.

4. Implications

4.1 Legal Implications

4.2 This report is for information only and there are no legal implications arising.

5. Financial Implication(s)

5.1 This report is for information only and there are no financial implications arising.

6. Risk Management Implications

6.1 This report is for information only and there are no risk management implications arising.

7 Communication

7.1 This report is for information only and there is no wider communication implications.

8. Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising from this report.

9. Procurement Implication(s)

9.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

11. Human Resources Implication(s)

11.1 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

12. Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

12.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

13. Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the following Council's Corporate Priorities "Our Housing" specifically to Improving Housing Need in the Borough.

14. Equalities and Diversity

14.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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Attached documents: Appendix A