



Housing Select Committee

Lewisham Homes Repairs Service Update

Date: 17 November 2022

Key decision:

Class:

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

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Margaret Dodwell, Chief Executive Officer – Lewisham Homes

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to provide Housing Select Committee with an overview of the performance and improvements planned within Lewisham Homes' Repairs Service

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- Lewisham Homes Annual Performance Outturn Report 2020/21
- Housing Select Committee 20th January 2022 - overview of Lewisham Homes' Repairs Service performance in the year to date provided

1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper gives an overview of Lewisham Homes' repairs service and action being taken to improve the service to our residents.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Housing Select Committee note this report.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1 Lewisham Homes' repairs service is delivered in accordance with the Repairs Policy (October 2021), which supports the delivery of the Lewisham Homes Corporate Plan, 2019-2023, which was developed in collaboration with London Borough of Lewisham (LBL).
- 3.2 The Repairs Policy also supports the aims and objectives of LBL and aligns with key priorities in Lewisham's Corporate Strategy, notably on tackling the housing crisis and providing quality homes.

4. Background

- 4.1 Housing Select Committee requested a further update on the Lewisham Homes' repairs service following a report in January 2022.
- 4.2 Repairs is generally the most important service provided to our residents and a service that had been identified as needing modernisation and improvement. Immediately prior to the pandemic, Lewisham Homes launched significant changes to the way Repairs Operatives were remunerated and this coupled with the pandemic, created a very challenging operating environment. Across the sector, the last two years have seen an increase in residents' expectations from maintenance services and a change in the volume and nature of the demand for repairs; our experience mirrors the national trend, which includes increasing numbers of complaints and disrepair cases. This has coincided with the media spotlight on property condition.
- 4.3 The stock condition survey undertaken in 2019 and 2020, brought into sharp focus the condition of many of the ageing properties in Lewisham, which required significant investment.
- 4.4 The Lewisham Homes major works programme will increasingly focus on investing in fabric of our homes, this will help to control costs through our repairs and maintenance function, however we still face the challenges associated with over-crowding leading to increased risk of mould growth in our residents' homes. This is likely to be exacerbated this winter with the rising fuel costs and cost of living crisis.
- 4.5 Damp and mould is high on the agenda of our Housing Ombudsman and a sector-wide issue in both social and private rental properties, the introduction of the Fitness for Human Habitation Act in 2018 is a clear example of the need to protect residents who live in homes that have suffered years of under investment.
- 4.6 In June 2022, Lewisham Homes introduced a dedicated Director of Repairs underlining our commitment to delivering a Repairs Service, which is a blend of proactive and reactive repairs and one that is highly valued by our residents, which our staff are proud to be part of. We have subsequently appointed a permanent Head of Operations, who will oversee both the in-house repairs service and be responsible for the contract management of subcontractors.
- 4.7 This report sets our current performance, the key elements of our improvement plan and expands on some of the areas that are being tackled.

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5. Repairs Performance

- 5.1 In June 2022, a first engagement session was held with all our operatives. Culture was a key theme of this session, reminding everyone that we are a provider of social housing, not a contractor. Our roles being to better the lives of residents by improving the quality of homes, not just attending repairs appointments. This session was well received, and the outputs have been incorporated into the Repairs Improvement Plan
- 5.2 The report presented to Housing Select Committee in January detailed three KPI areas:
 - First Time Fix
 - Appointments Made and Kept
 - Satisfaction with the last repair
- 5.3 First time fix is still below target and sat at 82% in September against a target of 90%. Work is underway to review our van stock to ensure the operatives have the necessary parts readily available for the majority of jobs. Further training has also been given to contact centre staff to improve diagnostics when raising repairs.
- 5.4 Appointments made and kept remains on target at 95% and has increased by 5% since the last report to Housing Select Committee.
- 5.5 Satisfaction with the last repair is now being only 1% behind target in month at 86%, 13% higher than the start of the calendar year. This is a transactional survey measure, and we know that increasing customer satisfaction through perception measures takes longer and this is a priority.

Performance Scorecard		Lewisham Homes										
No	Indicator	Polarity	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Target
Repairs												
6	Tenant satisfaction with last repair	High is best	78%	89%	84%	73%	81%	78%	75%	83%	86%	87%
7	Repair completed at first visit (First Time Fix)	High is best	86%	78%	79%	89%	85%	73%	85%	83%	82%	90%
8	Appointments made and kept	High is best	90%	95%	94%	93%	95%	90%	95%	96%	95%	95%

- 5.6 From April 2023 Lewisham Homes will be reporting on the following KPIs which align with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures, for repairs this will focus on the following areas:
 - Satisfaction with the repairs service
 - % Of repairs completed on time
 - Tenant satisfaction with time take to complete most recent repair
 - Tenant satisfaction with our actions to keep communal areas clean and maintained
 - Tenant satisfaction that the home is well maintained
 - Tenant satisfaction that the home is safe

6. Repairs Improvement Plan

6.1 Since the creation of the dedicated role of Director of Repairs, a significant amount of work has been completed or identified as in need of improvement. To support this we appointed an Interim Repairs Improvement Lead to develop and support the implementation of a single repair's improvement plan, delivery of which is already underway; we are seeking to deliver quick wins but more importantly embed a focus on quality, value and service and ensure we design a service that returns longer term investment.

6.2 This plan has two strands:

1) Culture - ensuring residents are at the heart of our delivery model and staff have a 'can do' attitude towards the service they provide. All staff in the repairs service are being engaged as stakeholders in this plan; daily updates on performance are being sent.

2) Shaping our operations – the key elements of which are:

- **Improving our call time to answer and call abandoned rates** through ensuring that our contact centre is adequately resourced and that our colleagues are suitably trained and supported within their roles.
- **Reducing our work in progress (WIP)** will result in fewer inbound calls into our contact centre as a result of which we will see increased capacity within the contact centre teams, reduced call time to answer, fewer calls abandoned and an improved customer experience.
- **Increasing our repairs productivity** will help reduce our current work in progress position and ensure a healthy level of work in progress is maintained, through aligning our trade skills mix and volume with demand.
- **Improving our first-time fix rates** will result in increased productivity as well as providing an improved customer experience.
- **Improving our repair diagnosis** will ensure that we are getting it right first time at the very start of the repairs journey and will in turn result in increased productivity and an improved customer experience.
- **Remote workforce engagement** is essential if we are to deliver the customer service standards rightly expected by our Lewisham Homes residents. Improved engagement with the field-based teams will lead to increased productivity, reduced attrition and will help position Lewisham Homes as the regions employer of choice.
- **Avoidable contact / calls regarding an existing repair** will reduce as we focus on getting things right first time. This will result in fewer inbound calls into our contact centre as a result of which we will see increased capacity within the contact centre teams, reduced call time to answer, fewer calls abandoned and an improved customer experience.

7. Accessing the Repairs Service

7.1. Like many other organisations with a service which is predominantly accessed through a telephony-based contact centre, wait times have increased since pre-pandemic times. This has been driven by increased demand for repairs, increased call volumes as well as a struggle to recruit resource within contact centres; this has been seen across the housing sector and wider. Our staff turnover in the repairs contact centre has been 43% this financial year, and 75% since the start of 2022. We know from diagnostics that accessing our service is a key driver of resident dissatisfaction and this will be a key priority for us in the period up to Christmas.

7.2 Our previous full time post establishment in the contact centre was nine, due to sickness, holiday, and vacancies the team has been operating with an average of six full time posts this financial year. The size of the contact centre staffing team has been increased to 14

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and for the first time since pre pandemic we have no vacancies, and a new cohort of staff start training on 7 November 2022. Call wait times that have been a long-standing issue should start to fall as our new candidates complete their training. We are also targeting a reduction in call duration and as extra capacity emerges, we will use this to make more outgoing calls to residents to follow up on their repairs satisfaction.

- 7.3 We are currently working on the implementation of a customer experience application called Localz; this combines real-time location tracking with two-way customer communication to deliver a transparent, customer centric solution to our repairs service. It will allow our residents to see where our operatives are and their estimated time of arrival once the operative accepts the job. Residents will be able to communicate with them to reduce no access appointments. The technology is similar to Deliveroo or Amazon.
- 7.4 We have also chosen to invest in the customer feedback module, this will allow our residents to rate their satisfaction instantly following their appointment. Any resident who states they are not satisfied with the service they have received will receive a call back to discuss in real-time and our focus will be on resolution. This information is monitored through a dashboard and will be used to continuously improve the service our operatives deliver. Subject to successful testing we look to launch this application in January 2023.

8. Delivering our Service

- 8.1 In the January report to Housing Select Committee we stated that around 50% of work was being subcontracted. We understand that there is a heightened risk of failure, particularly around communication when more than one company is involved in completing a repair. As such, delivering as much of our service through our directly employed team is important to us. There are still trades we are unable to deliver in-house currently, roofing and scaffolding remain fully subcontracted, as is glazing currently. There is a desire to bring glazing back into self-delivery however there is still a skills shortage in building services following Brexit.
- 8.2 We are considering bringing in house delivery of our emergency repairs service outside of business hours. Several operatives have expressed an interest in covering 'Out of Hours' working. We are looking to trial this with a ring-fenced team of core trades in plumbing, electrical and carpentry. Although this will be an emergency repairs service, operatives will be encouraged to complete repairs where practicable. We expect to see a reduction in costs and an improved customer experience.
- 8.3 Work on the replacement of the housing system has commenced; in the interim whilst we have limited system integration, we are building a suite of reports to identify where we might have a risk of ongoing failures which would require a supervisor or surveyor to intervene.

9. Damp Mould and Winter Readiness

- 9.1 Damp and Mould is a driver of dissatisfaction and complaints with property condition across both the social and private rented sector. The stock condition survey completed in 2020 identified around 2,400 homes with potential damp issues. Last year we began to use our MOT Programme to re-visit those properties and separated out the management of damp and mould from the centralised repair's function and created a damp tracker. This includes the tracking of remedial works and pro-active re-inspections. We have currently paused the MOT programme to ensure all remedial works previously identified have been fully completed, however residents can still request an MOT if they have concerns about the condition of their home.
- 9.2 'Damp Season' as it is known, is typically October to March. These are the months we actively encourage our residents to heat their homes and keep them well ventilated. This is tough for those on low incomes, but this year it will be harder for far more.
- 9.3 To support our residents through what is likely to be a difficult winter for many we are

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doing more detailed reviews to homes with low EPC ratings, triangulating this with information on residents uncharacteristically falling into rent arrears. We have also started to work with Southeast London Community Energy (SELCE) to provide energy advice to residents, including guidance on making application for financial support. Leaflets will be left with residents following repairs appointments and gas services.

- 9.4 We have recently started to pilot a new paint product called MediSpray, it is reported that the use of this spray removes the ability for mould spores to grow for up to 5 years.

10. Leaks

- 10.1 As mentioned in the background of this report, we are working in a challenging environment due to ageing homes and a need for investment in the fabric of the properties; most of our homes have pipework that is over fifty years old. We have significant issues with leaks from corroded pipework, particularly in our block of flats. We will also see more roofs requiring full replacement on both block of flats and houses, as opposed to patch repairs. We are in dialogue with the LBL on asset management.
- 10.2 In an attempt to overcome the challenges we have with ongoing leaks and blockages; we formed the leak resolution team in February 2022. This team consists of two plumbers, a multi-trade operative and two administrators. This team manage the end-to-end lifecycle of a leak job, including coordinating access with residents or taking action where access has not been granted to address the source of the issue or other impacted properties. These operatives are allocated full days to complete this work to ensure issues are resolved before leaving the property.
- 10.3 We know that even with the success seen from the introduction of the dedicated team, casework on leaks remains high. We are now carrying out a review of leak jobs raised in the six months prior to the introduction of the team to ensure these are fully rectified. This involves pro-actively contacting residents.

11. Complaints Management

- 11.1 Improving the management and resolution of our complaints has been a key focus over the past four months. In June 2022, we saw a low number of complaints completed within our ten-day target, at 31%. This showed failed opportunities to increase confidence in our service following previous failings.
- 11.2 In July 2022, we took the decision to change the structure of our Complaints handling function to increase management and ownership of individual cases and improve resident engagement. In September 2022, we responded to 99% of our Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within target.
- 11.3 Further work is being done on both lessons learnt and complaints aftercare, ensuring that we are not only responding in a timely manner, but also resolving the issues and reducing escalation. It is hoped that the introduction of immediate feedback from Localz will be a significant factor in reducing the number of complaints, as we will seek to resolve an issue before it can become a complaint.

12. Legal Disrepair

- 12.1 The January report to Housing Select Committee referenced the challenges Lewisham Homes, like many other providers, faced with the increase of Legal Disrepair Claims. We have continued to see this increase and we currently have 267 live claims. We continue to make significant investment in this area and we are actively recruiting to roles which support both the delivery of work, but also re-building trust with our residents.
- 12.2 We are currently on-boarding the posts of a Resident Liaison Officer and a Disrepair Supervisor into the Disrepair Team. We have also recently recruited to an additional Surveyor post and a Paralegal. (These are posts we have been seeking to fill for around a year). It is envisaged these roles will allow a quicker turnaround on the initial visit to the resident and give us a greater control of works, as well as increase contact with residents throughout the disrepair process.

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- 12.3 Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, cases can go on for a considerable amount of time. A full review is currently being carried out on the initial experts report to ensure any high-risk jobs have been attended and we are confident that they have been resolved.
- 12.4 We regularly receive cases that are driven by solicitors cold calling residents over the phone or in person, to encourage them to pursue a claim.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 Improvement works is underway, and we continue to work towards our plan and have fully invested project and operational teams, as such, we propose to do a further report in March 2023 to apprise the committee with actions and results over the next four months.

14. Financial implications

- 14.1 Housing Select Committee are asked to note the contents of this update report, as such there are no direct financial implications.
- 14.2 Repairs to the Council's social housing stock is chargeable to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which provides annual resources to undertake both planned and responsive repairs. However, sustained increases in repair volumes and initiating new work streams like property MOTs may not be covered by the existing resources and may have financial implications for the Housing Revenue Account.
- 14.3 Once the results of the MOT's/surveys are known, repairs and follow-up actions will be taken to resolve issues identified. This may require the allocation of additional resources which are not currently forecast within the current HRA budget allocations. Discussions are on-going with Lewisham Homes on how to fund work.

15. Legal implications

- 15.1 The report sets out how Lewisham Homes is seeking to meet the statutory, regulatory and contractual repair requirements of a social landlord on behalf of the Council.
- 15.2 There are no direct legal implications beyond this.

16. Equalities implications

- 16.1 The repairs service is delivered in line with Lewisham Homes Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy.

17. Climate change and environmental implications

- 17.1 There are considerable benefits to both residents and the environment through homes which are properly insulated, efficiently heated and free from drafts and other issues. The repairs service seek to improve the performance of properties through timely repairs and correction of issues which hinder this. As noted in this report, the housing stock is mostly older, and thus less efficient, however, outside the scope of this report, measures are being taken to apply for funding to assist Lewisham Homes with making improvements to their stock.

18. Crime and disorder implications

- 18.1 During the year there has been an increase in reports of anti-social behaviour and abusive and aggressive behaviour to staff. Some of this undoubtedly arises out of frustrations over repairs. Improving the repairs service should have a positive impact.

19. Health and wellbeing implications

- 19.1 The condition of a person's home has a major impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Ensuring residents can easily access the repairs service and that the homes are maintained in a good condition will have a positive impact on the residents' health and well-being.

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20. Glossary

20.1 The following terms are used in this report:

Term	Definition
Property MOT	A proactive pre-appointed check on the condition of a resident's home to proactively identify any repairs. The concept is based on repairs generally being completed at the time of the MOT.
KPI	'Key Performance Indicator'. A measurement taken of a specific element of business performance. A KPI usually has a target that performance can be tracked against
Works in Progress	Jobs that have been raised and are yet to be practically completed

21. Report author and contact

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- 21.2 Comments for and on behalf of the Executive Director for Corporate Resources: Tony Riordan, Principal Accountant, Tony.Riordan@lewisham.gov.uk
- 21.3 Comments for and on behalf of the Director of Law, Governance & HR [Melanie Dawson, Principal Lawyer (Place), melanie.dawson@lewisham.gov.uk

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