



Housing Select Committee

Report title: Lewisham Homes Repairs Service Update

Date: 09 March 2023

Key decision:

Class:

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

Fenella Beckman, Director of Housing Services – London Borough of Lewisham

Sarah Willcox-Jones, Director of Repairs – Lewisham Homes

Margaret Dodwell, Chief Executive Officer – Lewisham Homes

Outline and recommendations

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

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- Housing Select Committee 17 November 2022 – Lewisham Homes Repairs Service update

1. Summary

- 1.1. This paper gives an overview of Lewisham Homes' repairs service and an update on action being taken, since November 2022, to improve the service to residents.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Housing Select Committee are asked to note the contents of 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. Representatives from Lewisham Homes attended Housing Select Committee in November 2022. At that meeting, the Committee noted the concerns they still had with repairs performance and requested a further report be presented to the March 2023 meeting.
- 4.2. Repairs and maintenance in the social housing sector continues to be a challenge. Staff shortages, surging costs and mounting repairs backlogs remain problematic, alongside ageing stock, fire safety priorities and stretched budgets.
- 4.3. Social housing remains in the media spotlight for both the quality of homes and the quality of services provided to residents. This theme will continue into 2023 and beyond, with the launch of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and new Social Housing Regulation Bill will introduce measures to give tenants greater powers.
- 4.4. In November 2022, a coroner concluded that two-year-old Awaab Ishak died as a result of damp and mould in his home, which was managed by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. In February 2023, the Housing Secretary committed to bringing in Awaab's Law as an amendment to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. The details are yet to be confirmed, however it calls for landlords to investigate damp and mould within 14 days and make repairs within seven days.
- 4.5. Responsive repairs go alongside the cyclical programme, largely focussed on compliance and a capital programme, to ensure homes are well maintained. The Council has c£325m over a five-year period and Lewisham Homes and Lewisham Council are working closely to determine an appropriate programme that can be delivered within this financial envelope.
- 4.6. This report sets out Lewisham Homes' current performance, the key elements of the improvement plan and expands on some of the key areas of focus. It is important to detail some of the challenges experienced since the previous report in November 2022. In December there was significant turnover in the management structure in repairs, 70% of the supervisory team departed and Lewisham Homes struggled to recruit two of the four operational manager roles and the Head of Service, who also left in November. December was therefore a particularly challenging period for the repairs service.
- 4.7. The loss of such a high number of staff within a short period put additional work on existing staff in the repairs service, who really stepped up. This shortfall coincided with the additional external requirements for detailed information required by the Regulator of Social Housing on damp and mould.
- 4.8. In January, Lewisham Homes launched a recruitment campaign for 41 new repairs staff, including 25 operative roles. 16 offers have been made and Lewisham Homes will be onboarding those staff throughout February and March. A further update on progress will be provided at the meeting.

5. Repairs Performance

- 5.1. In addition to the number of days to complete repairs, this report details three KPI areas:
 - 5.1.1. First Time Fix
 - 5.1.2. Appointments Made and Kept
 - 5.1.3. Satisfaction with the last repair
- 5.2.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

No	Indicator	Polarity	Nov	Dec	Jan
Repairs					
6	Tenant satisfaction with last repair	High is best	72%	69%	73%
7	Repair completed at first visit (First Time Fix)	High is best	82%	83%	87%
8	Appointments made and kept	High is best	93%	93%	93%
9	Average number of calendar days to complete responsive repairs	Low is best	27	23	26

Table 1 - Latest Performance Details

- 5.3. In November's report, Lewisham Homes highlighted the backlog in repairs. Work to eliminate the backlog has resulted in the timescales to complete repairs increasing to an average turnaround of 23 days in December and 26 days in January.
- 5.4. First time fix has increased by 1% since the previous report but is still below target, at 83% in September against a target of 90%.
- 5.5. Appointments made and kept has dipped just below target and was 93% in December and January against a target of 95%. The lack of internal resource meant any unplanned absence for operatives resulted in work had to be re-booked for a new date.
- 5.6. Satisfaction with the last repair has declined. This was anticipated due to the satisfaction surveys being carried out on previously outstanding jobs, so residents would have had a delay in getting their repairs completed. Satisfaction dropped to 69% in December and was 73% in January.
- 5.7. On 23 February Lewisham Homes launched the Localz App; which is being used to request satisfaction feedback and identify when work is not completed satisfactorily. This enables Lewisham Homes to work with individual operatives to improve their own performance to ensure that repairs meet the satisfaction of residents.
- 5.8. As well as an increase in operatives, United Living are being onboarded to assist in reducing the work in progress. This support will go-live in early April 2023 for approximately 10 weeks. It is hoped the lead time for repairs will be reduced during this time. As outstanding work in progress is completed, there may be a further decline in customer satisfaction (particularly around the time taken to complete a repair). However, this may be somewhat mitigated following an increased focus on customer service delivery through the introduction of the Localz software solution.
- 5.9. 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:
 - 5.9.1. Satisfaction with the repairs service
 - 5.9.2. Percentage of repairs completed on time
 - 5.9.3. Tenant satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair
 - 5.9.4. Tenant satisfaction with our actions to keep communal areas clean and maintained
 - 5.9.5. Tenant satisfaction that the home is well maintained
 - 5.9.6. Tenant satisfaction that the home is safe.

6. Repairs Improvement Plan

- 6.1. Lewisham Homes set out the objectives of the Repairs Improvement Plan in the

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

November 2022 report.

6.2. The aims of the Repairs Improvement Plan are:

6.2.1. Improving the Customer Journey through:

- 6.2.1.1. Answering calls within target timescales.
- 6.2.1.2. Accurate diagnosis of a repair leading to an increased likelihood of first-time fix.
- 6.2.1.3. Offering residents an appointment at a time and date convenient to them and within target timescales.
- 6.2.1.4. Ensuring that residents always know what is happening next if operatives have been unable to complete the repair at the first visit.
- 6.2.1.5. Turning up when we say we are going to turn up.
- 6.2.1.6. Using the Localz satisfaction feedback to identify and work with operatives in improving their customer service skills and also celebrate success with those who are performing well.
- 6.2.1.7. Using the new Localz satisfaction feedback to inform corrective actions and continuous improvement.
- 6.2.1.8. Deliver exceptional standards of both customer service and workmanship through engendering a sense of contribution and pride.

6.2.2. Improving efficiency and effectiveness through:

- 6.2.2.1. Increased productivity.
- 6.2.2.2. Reduced sickness absence.
- 6.2.2.3. Improved retention of skills and experience.
- 6.2.2.4. Training and developing staff through individual development plans.
- 6.2.2.5. Ensuring consistent processes and approach across the teams.
- 6.2.2.6. Develop a team who celebrate success and are impatient with failure.
- 6.2.2.7. Developing and embedding a 'One-Team' culture where everybody understands their role and how it fits into the customer journey.
- 6.2.2.8. Increased self-delivery and reduced use of subcontractors.

6.3. Lewisham Homes have provided updates on the Plan to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness monthly. However, staff shortages in December 2022 and January 2023 meant the Repairs Improvement Plan was paused for two months. Any tasks that were in progress continued and there have been improvements in two key areas, operative productivity, and failure calls into the repairs service.

6.4. Prior to the launch of the Repairs Improvement Plan, operative productivity was 2.1 jobs completed on average per operative, per day. In January this was 4.5. This has been helped through better scheduling, improved management information and increased staff engagement.

6.5. Calls about an existing repair was at 50% of call volume prior to the Repairs Improvement Plan, and reduced to 35% in January. The implementation of Localz will help reduce this further, as residents can alert through the App if they would like to be re-contacted. This will create capacity in the contact centre enabling other calls to be answered more quickly

6.6. The majority of actions completed under the Plan relate to better management of staff through re-setting objectives and ease of access to management information. There are also actions around culture and engagement

6.7. The Localz App will enable satisfaction feedback to be used to identify and work with

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

operatives to improve their customer service skills and celebrate success with those who are performing well.

- 6.8. Lewisham Homes have created new posts within the Repairs Team to increase management of staff and have more ownership in areas impacting residents, such as property condition and complaints. This will improve communication with residents and increase capacity to manage escalations when situations do not go as planned.
- 6.9. Lewisham Homes have employed a contact centre specialist as the Customer Experience Manager. The Manager oversees the running of the contract centre, review systems and processes and produce individual agent performance information, used to drive performance through staff. They have also re-designed the staff induction to be more detailed and robust. This has helped with engagement of new starters and improved staff retention. (See section 7 for a more detailed update on progress in this area.)
- 6.10. Lewisham Homes have also restructured the management of operatives by trade rather than location, to ensure better support and resource management. This again has improved productivity, but also operative engagement as they feel supported by technical staff from the same skillset as them.
- 6.11. Lewisham Homes have launched a staff engagement group of field-based operatives. This includes Union Representatives and is used to form new ways of working. This has improved communication and engagement. This group has worked on initiatives that have benefitted delivery such as the inclusion of additional hours at the end of the standard working day to pick up on emergency work. This has, for example, reduced work being passed to the Out of Hours Contractors.

7. Accessing the Repairs Service

- 7.1. Staff retention has improved in the contact centre. Since the last report, where staff turnover for 2022 was reported at 75%, Lewisham Homes have onboarded four new staff in the contact centre and have four new starters due to join in early March.
- 7.2. The new Customer Experience Manager has been working on improving areas of call handling and communication with the team, which alongside the reduction of failure calls will enable calls to be answered more quickly.
- 7.3. There have been significant improvements, starting in January, and continuing through February, with average wait times. At the end of January, the average call queue time was 33 minutes. As of 24 February, the average call queue time was 14 minutes, despite a higher volume of calls.
- 7.4. At Housing Select Committee in November, Lewisham Homes advised that IT issues were impacting the service to customers. This continues to be problematic, however, Lewisham Homes are taking a more proactive approach, ensuring they are logged and acted upon quickly. There have been several system outages or issues with internet access in Laurence House or the telephony system ceasing to work for hours on some days. Servers have now been upgraded, additional lines into the business freed up and the Wi-Fi tested. An issue with the usage of Wi-Fi bandwidth has been identified which has caused problems with telephony and is being investigated further. A verbal update will be provided on this in committee.

8. Delivering the Service

- 8.1. The recruitment campaign is now targeting local skilled labour who are currently self-employed, this is working well. Lewisham Homes and Lewisham Council have a generous pension scheme and annual leave entitlement. These elements have been a good selling factor to those who may have struggled through the pandemic once furlough was no longer available.
- 8.2. In January 2023 Lewisham Homes' Governance and People Committee agreed to

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

increase the staffing structure for the repairs service. This enabled them to introduce increased management to support operatives, as well as some key customer facing roles. Lewisham Homes now have a Customer Experience Team Leader and Property Condition Manager. The Customer Experience Team Leader has been filled by an incumbent member of Lewisham Homes. The Property Condition Manager is currently out to recruitment, as are the increased management roles.

9. Damp, Mould and Condensation Management

- 9.1. Lewisham Homes introduced the dedicated Damp and Mould Team in May 2021 to help manage mould growth in residents' homes. This assists with the management of damp and mould cases, however, cannot eradicate the challenges faced given the major investment needed to properties. Damp and Disrepair Training remains mandatory for all new starters at Lewisham Homes.
- 9.2. Lewisham Homes have introduced several initiatives since separating out the management of damp, mould and leaks from the central repairs function. These were presented recently to residents of Deptford at a Property Condition session arranged by Vicky Foxcroft MP.
- 9.3. In December 2022, an ongoing damp and mould awareness marketing campaign was implemented through the resident newsletter and MOT awareness programme. This includes providing factsheets within resident welcome packs, as well as sharing links to a video advising on condensation management.
- 9.4. Piloted estate days will continue in 2023, allowing residents to drop in and discuss their property condition concerns and allowing for the immediate mobilisation of resource to remedy the issues or undertake a property MOT.
- 9.5. Historically Lewisham Homes have offered Hygrometers to residents upon request to allow for improved self-management and avoidance of damp and mould. Lewisham Homes will proactively be providing these to 5,000 households, which have been identified as having a higher risk and propensity for damp and mould growth. Lewisham Homes had planned to send these in January 2023, however there is a national shortage, and they currently only have 1,000 of the 5,000 ordered. Lewisham Homes will continue to use MediSpray, which stops mould spores from growing for up to five years.
- 9.6. In February 2023 the Director of Repairs and Chair of the Board attended a Round Table organised by Communities and Housing Investment Consortium (CHIC) to discuss damp and mould management. Lewisham Homes have embedded a significant number of initiatives that other providers are currently launching or designing, many struggling with resources and data management. This also provided the opportunity to look at new products on the market for data logging and property condition monitoring technology, outside of the Switchee devices we have previously procured, which allow data logging for some aspects such as heat and fan usage. This will be launched from April 2023.
- 9.7. Lewisham Homes are using the Major Works Contractors, United Living and Mulalley to re-visit all properties that have previously been treated for damp and mould and had their cases closed on the damp and mould register. The re-visit is to ensure the remedial works have had the desired effect. These inspections are being carried out from January to April 2023.
- 9.8. Discussions are ongoing regarding funding an ongoing programme of damp and mould inspections and works. The costs of this could be circa £1m annually from 2023/24.
- 9.9. Lewisham Homes will be commencing a 20% validation exercise on the information gained through the initial stock condition surveys in 2019 and 2020 and prioritising those properties where operatives were unable to gain access (30%). This will ensure that the Council retains an up-to-date view of the condition of homes and is

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

something the RSH will expect to see.

10. Leaks

- 10.1. Properties continue to experience a high volume of inter-flat leaks. Lewisham Homes' leak resolution team have been recognised by residents as responding thoroughly and resolving issues promptly. This team addresses the symptoms and the underlying issues; however large-scale investment is needed in the fabric of the existing, mostly older, homes and this is under discussion.
- 10.2. Where issues are known, Lewisham Homes continue to use the leak resolution team proactively; this involves regular walkabouts on estates or in blocks such as Daubeney and Eddystone where leaks are a regular issue.

11. Complaints Management

- 11.1. 455 new formal complaints were received by Lewisham Homes in 2022 which equates to 0.7% of repairs completed. 393 complaints were upheld in full or in part, 62 were deemed to be dissatisfaction but not a service failure, so not upheld.
- 11.2. Lewisham Homes have now created a Customer Experience Team Leader role, to carry out further analysis and lessons learnt. The role will also be responsible for improving communication with residents throughout the complaints process. Localz will be used to enable issues to be addressed when they arise and hopefully avoid complaints. It will take time for residents to get used to using this tool.
- 11.3. One Repairs Supervisor will become wholly responsible for the delivery of works on complaint and complex repairs cases.

12. Legal Disrepair

- 12.1. Legal Disrepair continues to be a rising challenge in the housing sector since the introduction of the Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2019 and the move from previous PPI or Personal Injury claim solicitors into housing disrepair.
- 12.2. Lewisham Homes have now successfully recruited to the posts of Disrepair Supervisor, Paralegal and an additional surveyor. Lewisham Homes have also reshaped the Repairs Resident Liaison Officer role. The post holder manages the relationship with the resident through the disrepair claim and carries out early intervention visits on reports of damp and mould. Where a property is deemed to have hazardous mould on an early intervention visit, a cleaning team attends to clean the mould within five working days. The Resident Liaison Officer will also work with the Decant Manager if the property is not deemed to be habitable.
- 12.3. Early intervention visits help to manage the ongoing risk to residents. However, residents are sometimes advised by their solicitors to deny access, so this may not always be simple. An independent expert is appointed, at cost, to identify any disrepair and the required works. Lewisham Homes are currently working with solicitors, Clarke Willmott, to produce a letter to state that no access was given prior to the expert being appointed.
- 12.4. Lewisham Homes paid £199,750 in compensation to residents and £647,666 on legal fees from January to December 2022. There was a proposal in Government to implement fixed recoverable costs (FRC) for housing cases, however this was contested by several law associations and groups and will now be delayed for two years.
- 12.5. To reduce legal costs, Lewisham Homes have implemented the role of an in-house Paralegal. This role has proved to be successful. 25 legal cases are being self-managed, of these, seven cases have been closed with no action, due to the ability to challenge at pre-notification stage. Works are still being prioritised and carried out by the in-house operatives dedicated to disrepair cases, despite no legal action being

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

taken.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1. Improvement is underway. Lewisham Homes continue to work towards implementing the Repairs Improvement Plan and have invested in project and operational teams. Time has been spent re-building the teams, structures and processes to enable the right people and the right culture to ensure improvements are made.
- 13.2. Improvements will be incremental, as there are few short-term fixes. As requested by the Cabinet Member for Housing Lewisham Homes will share the most recent progress graphs at the committee meeting.
- 13.3. Joint working between Lewisham Homes and Lewisham Council through clienting remains thorough and updates to Housing Select Committee Members around progress will continue, with a view to handing over a modern and high-quality repairs service on 1 October 2023.

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 the 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.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

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.

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.

Table 2 - Report Glossary

21. Report author and contact

- 21.1. Fenella Beckman, Director of Housing Services, Fenella.Beckman@lewisham.gov.uk
- 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

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>