

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 19 July 2022

Report Title

Tenant Scrutiny Review – Satisfaction with Repairs & Maintenance Service

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (the Panel), which is facilitated and supported by Rotherham Federation (Rotherfed) has undertaken a review of tenant satisfaction in relation to the repairs and maintenance service provided to Council housing in Rotherham.

The Panel, which forms part of the Council's wider Tenant Engagement Framework, works with the Council to constructively challenge landlord services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

Following completion of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the report and recommendations were discussed with the Housing Service and an action plan agreed to address the issues raised.

This report provides the Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and progress about the completion of the associated action plan.

Recommendations

1. That Improving Places Select Commission receive and note the Tenant Scrutiny Panel Report and recommendations, attached at Appendix 1.
2. That Improving Places Select Commission note the progress made to date in delivering the action plan, attached at Appendix 2.

3. That Improving Places Select Commission request a further update report in 12 months' time.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Tenant Scrutiny - R&M Tenant Satisfaction Report

Appendix 2 Tenant Scrutiny Review Action Plan

Appendix 3 Emissions Impact Assessment.

Background Papers

None, however, an IPSC workshop 'Housing Repairs and Maintenance', was held on 27th August 2020. The outcomes of the workshop were reported to Improving Places Select Commission on 8th September 2020, Minute 92 refers.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Tenant Scrutiny Review – Satisfaction with Repairs & Maintenance Service

Tenant Scrutiny Review – Satisfaction with Repairs & Maintenance Service

1. Background

- 1.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was approached by the Council to undertake a review of tenant satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service. The aim of the review was to understand the issues that impact customer satisfaction and to work with the Council on formulating recommendations to improve tenant satisfaction with the service. The review was undertaken independently of the Council and the repairs and maintenance contract partners, although appropriate support was provided to the Panel throughout the process.
- 1.2 The review was undertaken in the context of the establishment and commencement of new repairs and maintenance contracts with Mears and Engie (now operating as Equans). The Council, working with its contract partners, was keen to ensure that the repairs and maintenance service was delivered to optimum levels of service performance and delivering the highest possible degree of customer satisfaction.
- 1.3 In addition, the Charter for Social Housing White Paper which set out proposals for regulatory changes under 7 key Chapters, of which the following were pertinent to the review:

- Chapter 1 – To be safe in your home (which includes fire safety and gas/electrical safety)
- Chapter 2 – To know how your landlord is performing This proposed that the regulator introduce a set of tenant satisfaction measures, particularly on the things that matter most to tenants, including repairs, complaints handling and safety.
- Chapter 3 – Effective handling of complaints with complaints being handled promptly and fairly.
- Chapter 5 – To have your voice heard by your landlord, ensuring that landlord's listen to their customers views and take notice of them.
- Chapter 6 – To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.

Following the publication of the White Paper, The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill was laid before Parliament on 8th June 2022. It aims to deliver the proposals set out in the White Paper by introducing measures to give tenants greater powers, improve access to redress and strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing's powers. The Bill enshrines key objectives of safety, transparency and accountability to tenants, as articulated in the White Paper and under three main themes reminiscent of the previous Chapters: 'To be safe in your home'; 'To know how your landlord is performing' and 'To be treated fairly and with respect, backed by strong consumer regulation'.

1.4 A Terms of Reference, detailed in Section 3 of Appendix 1, was agreed for the review and a review Panel established, consisting of customer representatives from various Tenant and Resident Associations and a ward member. The Panel was supported by Council officers and staff from Rotherfed.

1.5 The Panel considered a range of information and data, including a 3-month snapshot of customer feedback following completion of repairs, which was analysed and discussed with Council officers, in addition to undertaking an individual telephone survey of 12 members of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. The Panel also revisited the outcomes of a previous tenant scrutiny review of repairs and maintenance, which was provided under the previous contract, undertaken in 2017/18.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The Panel were asked to consider the review undertaken in 2017/18 which identified that the most important influences in terms of customer satisfaction were:

- The repair should be easy to report.
- The repair work should be of a good quality.
- Repair operatives should arrive at the agreed time.
- Repair operatives having to come back, as the repair cannot be completed on the first visit.
- Not having to wait too long between reporting the repair and it being completed.

2.2

The majority (67%) of Panel members surveyed as part of the current review agreed that these issues were still a priority, although there were different opinions as to how they should be ranked in order of importance. Additional comments raised included:

- The importance of communication, where a job is not completed on the first visit, ensuring that customers do not have to keep chasing updates on progress.
- The quality of the service delivered by the Customer Contact Centre should be included.
- Ensuring that customers receive updates when an appointment time changes.
- Customers with disabilities should be prioritised.

2.3

The latest review highlighted that the following reasons tended to influence the degree of satisfaction felt by customers with the service. These resonate with the previous findings:

- The quality and timeliness of communication, from reporting the issue through to resolution.
- The quality and timeliness of the repair.
- Meeting agreed appointment times and providing customers with a choice of appointment times.
- The conduct of staff.
- Resolving the issue and getting it 'right first time'.

2.4

Regarding how customer satisfaction with the service is captured, the Panel reviewed the current text messaging-based survey used by Mears and Engie (Equans). This uses 2 to 3 questions that reflect Housemark questions used to assess customer satisfaction. Previously, tenant satisfaction had been captured by repairs operatives on a handheld device, using standardised questions, at the point the repair was completed. In addition to the sharing of a handheld device not being suitable due to Covid-19, some tenants had been unhappy with this approach and the text-based approach had been introduced at the beginning of the current contract as an alternative. It was noted by the Panel that the Council was currently looking at how a range of survey approaches could be used to capture customer satisfaction and to give tenants a choice in the way they respond, in the future.

2.4.1

In considering the current approach and a snapshot of survey results, the Panel noted that:

- The survey of 12 tenant scrutiny panel members identified that 92% were happy to answer questions by text.
- 75% thought the current questions being used by the contract partners were suitable. However, the Panel felt that questions should also be asked in relation to the appearance and conduct of the repairs

operative; satisfaction with the time taken to complete the repair and the service received from the Customer Contact Centre.

- A snapshot of monthly survey returns, for a four-month period, identified that survey response rates varied between the two contract partners, with Mears at 17-21% and Engie (Equans) 41%.
- The number of survey responses indicating very satisfied or satisfied with the service was consistently above 85%.
- The questions asked at the survey need to be the same for each partner.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The recommendations arising from the Tenant Scrutiny Review are detailed within the action plan at Appendix 2. These are broken down into nine key proposed actions as follows:

- Appointments - investigate the lack of communication around re-arranging or cancelling appointments, and then look to improve the current system.
- Complaints processes - Provide some further clarity to tenants about how to complain about a repair.
- Customer satisfaction measurement - Find additional ways of measuring tenant satisfaction with the repairs service, rather than relying only on the text service.
- 'Right First Time' measurement - To expand on the ways in which 'Right First Time' is measured.
- Text Questions - Standardise the text survey questions and the scoring method used across both contract partners.
- Response rates - Investigate the reasons for Mears customers being less likely to respond to the text survey than EQUANS customers.
- Customer satisfaction sub-group - Form a further sub-group for the Repairs and Maintenance service that considers quality and tenant satisfaction, including representatives from Rotherham Federation and contract partners.
- Publicity about the learning - Publicise the learning from tenants about improving the repairs and maintenance service.
- Actions required to generally improve staff behaviours from the first point of contact (customer service centre) through to works being completed.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.2 The action plan, associated with this report (see Appendix 2), is consulted at monthly Tenant Scrutiny meetings, which are attended by Rotherham Council Housing Services, Rotherfed, tenant representatives and the repairs and maintenance contract partners, Mears and EQUANS.

4.3 The tenant scrutiny report, and an update on progress made against the actions, was presented at the Housing Involvement Panel on 2nd March 2022. This meeting was attended by Rotherham Council Housing Services,

Rotherfed, tenant representatives and the repairs and maintenance contract partners, Mears and EQUANS.

- 4.4 The action plan (see Appendix 2) is discussed and updated at monthly customer satisfaction sub-group meetings. This sub-group focusses on recommendations made in the tenant scrutiny report. The sub-group meetings have been established as a direct action from the report and are attended by the Contracts, Investment & Compliance Service within Housing Services, Rotherfed and the repairs and maintenance contract partners, Mears and EQUANS.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Council's Head of Service for Contracts, Investment and Compliance has responsibility for implementing the findings of the review and the associated action plan.

- 5.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel receives regular updates on progress against the recommendations and actions.

- 5.3 The Housing Involvement Panel received an update on 2nd March 2022.

- 5.4 Eight of the nine actions included within the Action Plan have now been completed, with one further action at the "in progress" stage. It is expected that following a "You said, We did" publication in the next edition of Home Matters, the Action focused on publicising how the repairs and maintenance service has learned from the findings in the report, and how the service has improved as a consequence of this.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications due to the recommendations in the report. Contract partners currently undertake customer satisfaction surveys at their own cost as part of the repairs and maintenance contract.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 None.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 None, current staffing levels able to meet and complete all actions detailed within the report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 None, no safeguarding concerns raised as part of the report's findings.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Ensuring that the customer voice is heard is instrumental in how the Council

develops and delivers its services and is of paramount importance. The review supports the continued journey of improvement for the Contracts, Investment and Compliance service in delivering repairs and maintenance to our tenants. The service aims to offer a high quality and accessible service to all customers.

- 10.2 No equality issues were identified as part of the report findings with all Contracts, Investment & Compliance staff having undertaken the mandatory equality and diversity training.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Climate change poses a significant threat to environments, individuals, communities, and economies on local, national, and international scales. In recognition of this the Council has aimed to be net carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030, and for Rotherham as a whole to achieve the same position by 2040.
- 11.2 Actions associated with appointments, right first time and text questions can aid the Council and its repairs and maintenance contract partners through fewer wasted visits, fewer journeys to tenants' homes and suppliers, and by continuing to remain paperless where possible.
- 11.3 The Contractor Partners operate to the minimum Standards Charter to:
- Eliminate unnecessary waste by adopting the “reduce, reuse, recycle” philosophy.
 - Be a good neighbour, minimise negative local impacts (noise, air quality etc.)
 - Improve green areas (e.g. biodiversity, visual attractiveness etc.)
 - Reduce carbon footprint – be aware of main impacts on carbon emissions including the indirect carbon used in manufacturing processes and the direct impact of operations and logistics.
- 11.4 Please see Appendix 3 for the Carbon Impact Assessment (formerly EIA) associated with this report and action plan.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Contracts, Investment & Compliance Service will continue to work with Rotherfed, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and the repairs and maintenance contract partners towards delivering the recommendations in the action plan. Delivery of these recommendations will involve collaboration across relevant council services and with key delivery partners.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk is the failure to engage with the tenant scrutiny board in Rotherfed and inability to deliver against the recommendations in the action plan. This has been addressed through strong progress detailed within the Action Plan and will be further mitigated through ongoing monitoring,

scrutiny and evaluation of the recommendations by the Improving Places Select Commission and the Contracts, Investment & Compliance Service.

Accountable Officer(s)

George Temple, Head of Service; Contracts, Investment & Compliance

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health	05/07/22
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing - Councillor Brookes	04/07/22

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