

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 7 February 2022	Meeting Name: Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Update on the internal repairs service and the repairs improvement plan	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Asset Management/Head of Repairs and Maintenance	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission notes the report on the internal repairs service and progress of the Repairs Improvement Plan which was agreed by cabinet in April 2020

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The contract for repairs within tenants' homes in the south of the borough was brought in house in October 2018, initially for one year. That decision was made permanent upon review by cabinet in 2019 and the repairs service was given the task of developing an improvement plan. The plan was agreed by cabinet in April 2020. Progress was to be reported regularly to the cabinet member and residents and the next update will be reported to cabinet in March.
3. In April 2020 cabinet noted the decision to transfer Southwark Building Services from Environment and Leisure to the Housing and Modernisation Department with the intention to dissolve the 'client/contract split' and to develop a wholly integrated and seamless repairs service.
4. In February 2020 the Southwark Housing Scrutiny Commission published its report into housing repairs that included a number of recommendations which were subsequently agreed by cabinet in December 2020. These are being integrated into the repairs improvement plan as it evolves.
5. Southwark Building Services moved to repairs with effect from 1 April 2020 shortly after the first lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although work began on the improvement plan, progress was slower than anticipated as the priority was on maintaining an essential repairs service in extraordinary circumstances. Staff responded well and continued to provide front-line services, we are grateful for the patient response from

residents over this period as we focused emergency and essential works only. Satisfaction surveys which determine the key performance indicators were suspended as the customer experience staff undertaking them were assigned to other front-facing duties. Surveys restarted in November but data is flawed due to an IT issue which they are trying to resolve.

6. The service has fully reopened for new works and there has been significant progress in clearing the backlog of follow on and larger works that had been reported during lockdown, however demand on the service is high. We are still operating to strict COVID risk assessments and standard operating procedures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents and staff alike. This, among other factors has meant that performance is not where it needs to be.
7. The internal repairs service covers plumbing, carpentry, electrical and wet trades repairs within general needs and temporary accommodation homes whether occupied or vacant. It does not cover heating/hot water, doors and windows, roofs nor the external fabric and common parts. The current operating model is that tenants report repairs to the corporate call centre who log and book appointments which are then attended by either a repairs operative or contractors depending on availability.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

8. Annually the service undertakes about 60,000 responsive repairs. The tables below show the situation pre-pandemic to date.
9. Repairs raised between 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

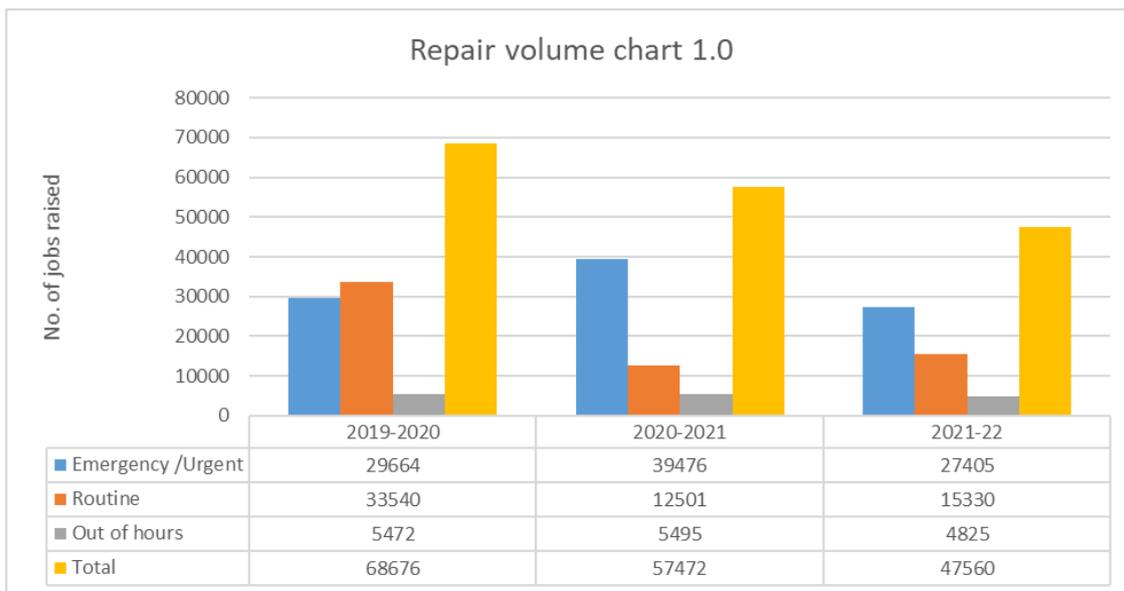
Repair type	Total jobs raised
Emergency/Urgent	29664
Routine	33540
Out of hours	5472
Total	68676

Repairs raised between 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

Repair type	Total jobs raised
Emergency/Urgent	39476
Routine	12501
Out of hours	5495
Total	57472

Repairs raised between 1 April 2021 – 31 January 2022

Repair type	Total jobs raised
Emergency/Urgent	27405
Routine	15330
Out of hours	4825
Total	47560



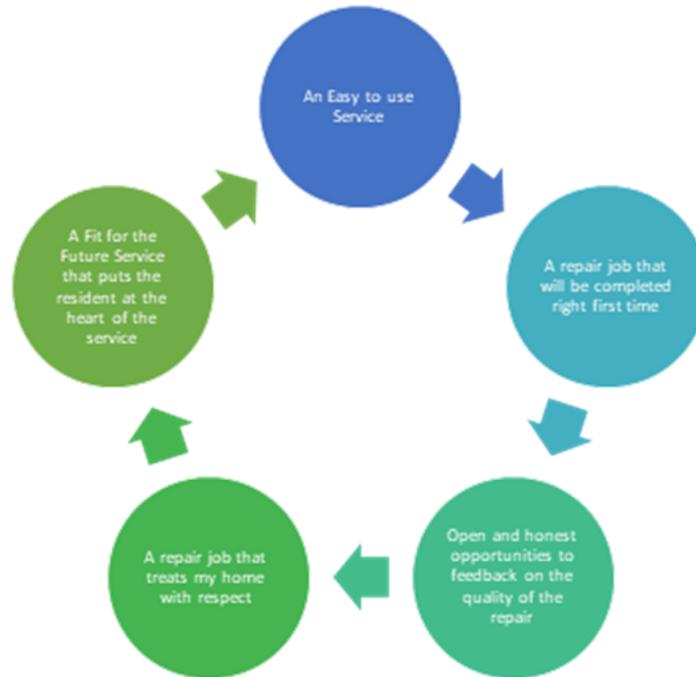
10. During the lockdowns and beyond, in accordance with our COVID -19 risk assessments, we undertook essential repairs only based on the type of works and the circumstances of individual tenants and the availability of staff. Building services has a number of staff who were more vulnerable due to age and ethnicity and a number were required to shield. Some were deployed to carry out managing and delivering of food parcels to shielding and vulnerable residents directed through the community hub set up by the council at the beginning of lockdown.
11. The effects of the pandemic and other external forces including Brexit has had a serious effect on the construction industry and we are not immune to labour and supply chain shortages. Discussions with other direct labour organisations has shown that the effects are ongoing on general performance and supply chain for both materials and labour.
12. The repairs improvement plan is an ambitious programme to deliver an excellent repairs service for our residents and is initially focused on the delivery of internal repairs.
13. Our vision is
 - To provide a good service for a fair cost
 - A fit for the future repairs service that puts residents' needs at its heart
 - To deliver the service well, so our residents will be able to say that they are:
 - Proud of their home, their block and estate
 - Living in a safe, well-maintained home and building
 - Listened to by their landlord
 - To invest in people and actively manage individual and team performance whilst ensuring that the skills required for excellence are in

place

14. Improving the customer journey:



15. The improvement plan will deliver on the five aims approved by the cabinet based on feedback from residents, namely,



16. **What does an easy to use service look like?**
- different ways to contact us to book repairs, on-line, by phone, to the member of staff who you comes to do or inspect another repair
 - able to have on-line chat with the service
 - thorough diagnosis through technology and a dedicated repairs call centre
 - an appointment for your repair at the first point of contact
 - able to track your repair from start to finish and to receive alerts in real time
 - we take responsibility for interactions once a repair has been reported until it is completed
17. **How will we complete repairs jobs right first time?**
- the best possible diagnostics at reporting stage
 - effective planning, sending the right operative with the right tools and materials
 - upskilling of staff and a multi-skilled workforce who can complete the whole job, not reliant on someone else to attend unless it is specialist
 - robust supply chain arrangements, imprest stock and deliveries to site
 - use of technology including telematics to ensure the most efficient deployment of resources
 - all appointments agreed with resident
 - video calling and early intervention

- repair MOTs

18. **How will we ensure that in undertaking repairs we treat residents and their homes with respect?**

- treating customers as if a valued members of our family
- listening and communicating
- do what we say we will do when we say we will do it
- respecting difference and tailoring services to needs
- explaining clearly what the job involves, how long it will take and clearing away all mess created
- taking responsibility for issues identified by customers and following up or sign posting
- you should only need to contact us to report the repair initially or change your arrangements, never to chase

19. **What do we mean by open and honest opportunities to feedback on the quality of the repair?**

- instant survey at completion of the repair
- resident to agree that the job is completed before closing
- positive intervention when things go wrong or resident is unhappy with the service. Going the extra mile to put things right.
- estate-based conversations and surgeries between residents and staff delivering repairs
- meaningful engagement with resident forums
- a repairs service that learns from its customers

20. **What does a fit for the future service that puts residents' needs at its heart require to achieve its vision?**

- modern technology that supports staff and residents alike
- spends money as if it was from our own pockets
- a diverse staff group that reflects our residents
- a bespoke repairs call centre integrated within the service
- highly trained and motivated staff who enjoy getting things done
- competent, multi-skilled and productive operatives who take pride in their work
- effective and ambitious plans backed up by can-do attitudes and working practices to tackle issues as they arise
- key performance indicators developed with residents which measure what is important to them
- flexibility in appointments to suit modern lifestyles
- career development and progression
- quality apprenticeships targeting local people
- learning from and collaborating with peers to achieve best practice including TMOs and other authorities/social housing providers
- a robust and effective supply chain

Progress to date

21. The pandemic brought its own challenges to ensure the safety of residents and staff whilst undertaking essential repairs to residents' homes and

slowed progress. It slowed down important work to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service. In essence, we focused on a period of discovery coupled with setting up and developing project governance and workstreams to tackle each of the major areas for improvement. Despite this challenge there has been some significant achievements with a long journey ahead.

22. The project has seven substantial workstreams, a brief description of progress to date follows:
23. **Digital systems** – procurement of new works management system, CONNECT, which has now been rolled out in its basic form in Leaks from Above, Walworth, Borough and Bankside, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. All areas will be rolled out by end of March 2022. The next stages will be to introduce the advanced functionality such as real time reporting and tracking of jobs, enhanced text messaging, immediate customer feedback and video inspections. The council's telephony system should soon allow on-line chat functionality which we are keen to embrace and will trial in Leaks from Above. Work has started on implementing imprest stock on vans and job costing. As the system is rolled out new PDAs with advanced functionality have enabled operatives to have improved access to council systems and health and safety information. We have been unable to switch on the telematics system fitted on vehicles and await a corporate resolution to this.
24. **Service process development** – processes are relatively simple and were developed with the input of residents some time ago. Compliance with those processes is a significant issue for the service and we are taking every opportunity to ensure that staff understand that our processes are designed with residents' needs at the forefront. All staff were recently retrained on customer service principles, practices and expectations. We are continuing to refine our approach to leaks from properties above and are working on a damp and mould strategy which will incorporate the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman's recent report.
25. **Customer access** – the front line of the repairs service is located within the generic call centre and the plan is to integrate this within the repairs service to achieve a specialist, fully integrated service for residents. Work is in its initial stages and we have, as recommended by Scrutiny, engaged with Islington who have adopted this model. Full proposals will be developed in the coming year. In the interim the video inspection and text functionality will be introduced through our new works management system, CONNECT along with improved SMS messaging and surveys.
26. **Workforce development** – the service now has all operatives on the same terms and conditions following the agreement reached between the trades unions and the council. The agreement became effective on 1 April this year and has not been without its challenges. The financial cost to the service has been re-evaluated and has increased pressure on the HRA.

There are significant issues around productivity and covering the service between its core hours of 8am and 6pm.

27. Managers have all been trained to manage performance and service delivery. A skills audit is under way and we are working with the Construction Skills Centre on some bespoke trades courses to upskill operatives as well as seeking to introduce a new apprenticeship of Property Maintenance Operative. This will ensure that we can grow our own multi-skilled workforce, including improving the skills base of and opportunities for our existing single-trade apprentices.
28. Our recruitment strategy is twofold, we have advertised for multi-skilled operatives and will bring staff into the workforce in manageable cohorts, whilst reducing the reliance on agency staff. Women are significantly under-represented in trades and we are working with resourcing on a positive action programme to encourage local women to apply for apprenticeships or vacancies. We will restructure the service in phases to ensure we can maintain services while we are improving it.
29. **Communication and engagement** – the priorities for the improvement plan were developed following independent consultation with residents, including residents who rarely engage with the service. We have attended tenants forums as part of our engagement and resident involvement are assisting with setting up a resident panel to work directly with us on initiatives within the service and to act as a sounding board. We will look to set up a resident board to scrutinise and develop the service. We have a group of staff champions from across the service who will provide an alternative route for staff to come with ideas and suggestions which can form pilots for improvement and ensure continuous development.
30. **Financial management** - This has been an area of weakness within the service and cabinet will be aware of the significant financial pressure that the in-house service has placed on the HRA. Value for money is at the forefront of our plans and instilling financial discipline and clear procedures is ongoing. We are reviewing each area for efficiency and have made savings in fleet, mail and telephony charges, amongst others. The business and finance managers consider no budget too small to escape scrutiny. The service is forecasting a deficit of £4.5m which is in line with the expectations of the HRA 2021/22 financial plan. There continues to be significant risks associated with the new terms and conditions around operative productivity and out of hour call outs. Given the current financial climate there are also other financial pressures including increases on materials, vehicle fuel and contractors labour costs.
31. **Procurement** – closely aligned with financial management and developing a fit for the future service. Back up arrangements will always be required to deal with specialisms, peaks and troughs and material

supply. Due to a backlog of work it will be necessary to extend existing contracts in order to meet service demands especially in communal repairs and voids. Contract management in these areas is subject to improvements and ensuring performance is monitored. Whilst focussing on internal repairs we will be procuring new contracts for voids and communal repairs as well as re-procuring roofing and fire contracts. The commercial team are already exploring how we can achieve our aim of increasing SME and Black, Asian and minority ethnic led businesses within this sphere of work.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

32. The housing repairs service impacts the lives of residents who live in the council's housing stock and request a responsive repair to their home. The repairs improvement plan aims to improve the service so that it is resident focused and enables residents to be proud to live in their home, block and estate and live in safe, warm and well-maintained homes. This plan is a major opportunity to improve the lives of a significant section of our community.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

33. Section 149 of the Equality Act, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.
34. The repairs improvement plan will reflect the relevant duties, especially in regard to vulnerable residents and those with protected characteristics.
35. We will target women, who are substantially under-represented, into trades through a targeted apprenticeship campaign.
36. We will increase our apprenticeships in both trades and office functions and work with local schools and colleges to demonstrate career paths and opportunities in construction.
37. We will continue our 'grow your own' ethos in developing staff from across all of our work streams and job roles.

Health impact statement

38. The repairs service has responsibility for undertaking aids and adaptations to enable residents with disabilities to live within general needs, independent properties. The service works closely with social care and hospital discharge

teams to enable residents to return to safe homes after a spell in hospital.

39. Developing our damp and mould strategy will ensure that we take account of the health effects of damp on mould on the lives of our residents and develop a holistic response within asset management to address this.

Climate change implications

40. Following council assembly in July 2021, the council has committed to considering the climate change implications of any decisions. The cabinet has committed the council to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 if possible.
41. In developing the repairs improvement plan we will look to contribute to that reduction through, amongst other things, more effective use of technology, including vehicle telematics, we will reduce the carbon footprint of our vehicles. We will work with the fleet manager on the next procurement of vehicles to the same end.

Resource implications

42. There are no specific implications arising from this update

Legal implications

43. There are no specific implications arising from this update

Financial implications

44. There are no specific implications arising from this update

Consultation

45. Throughout the development of the plan we have engaged with residents and the five priorities and aims are those that came from our resident engagement. We will continue to work with and listen to residents as we progress. In the next phase of the plan we will take our direct service deliverers out into the community to have conversations with residents on their estates to truly allow staff to embrace what a customer focused service should be and will set up a board to scrutinise and develop the service.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Head of Procurement

46. N/A

Director of Law and Governance

47. N/A

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

48. N/A

Other officers

49. N/A

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Title of document(s)	Title of department / unit Address	Name Phone number
(Insert hyperlink here)		
Title of document(s) (Insert hyperlink here)	Title of department / unit Address	Name Phone number
(Insert hyperlink here)		

APPENDICES

No.	Title

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Council Homes and Homelessness	
Lead Officer	David Hodgson, Director of Asset Management	
Report Author	Christine Bramman, Head of Repairs and Maintenance	
Version	Final	
Dated	26 January 2022	
Key Decision?	Yes/No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance	Yes/No	Yes/No

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes/No	Yes/No
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes/No	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		