

Item No. 6	Classification: Open	Date: November 2022	Meeting Name: Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Scrutiny Report – Southwark Repairs	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Darren Merrill, Council Homes and Homelessness	

1. Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission have asked for a report into the following;
 - Multiple Failures
 - Repeat Calls
 - Contractors (Issues and Co-ordination)

Background

2. Southwark repairs manage a wide range of works across the borough undertaking; internal repairs, communal repairs, roofing, fire safety repairs, surveying, major and minor adaptations, empty homes, home improvements to private homes. With specialist teams undertaking works relating to leaks from above, fire safety and damp and mould.
3. 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
4. Southwark Building Services moved to repairs with effect from 1 April 2020 shortly after the first lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The service was severely impacted by COVID-19 operationally, the service was unable to offer repairs that weren't emergency or urgent works
5. The service has fully reopened and whilst demand, especially for emergency and urgent orders remains high, the backlog of repairs we had in our systems during lockdown is now cleared.
6. The pandemic also meant that no major works were undertaken in the borough across a two-year period. This has meant that the normal investment, totaling tens of millions into our stock didn't happen
7. The service is currently undertaking a wide ranging and ambitious improvement programme looking at the service generally and the way in which services are delivered to residents

Multiple Failures

8. The service acknowledges that we don't always get things right. This can be due to the nature and scale of the works that Southwark repairs undertake. It is also sometimes due to the service itself; in these instances, we learn from the mistakes and incorporate where things have gone wrong into the repairs improvement programme
9. The service had the following number of repairs within the internal work stream raised per year:

1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019	87195
1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020	79095
1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021	62749
1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022	68858
1 April 2022 to present day	37289

10. The service have received 1200 stage one complaints since the start of this financial year. Of these 54% were upheld or partially upheld. The three areas most complained about are:
 - Damp and mould
 - Plumbing leaks (internal and external)
 - Windows
11. The service has received 537 member enquiries since the start of this financial year. These enquires are often very different to our stage one complaints. 42% of these member enquiries were a first request for service (where we haven't had notice of a repair request previously). Damp and mould was also the main driver for member enquiries
12. The Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on damp published in Nov 2021 advised that housing providers need to do better in how they manage dampness in buildings, with headlines on taking a zero tolerance approach to interventions with mould; meaning to take all reasonable measures to help resolve damp. To avoid blaming the resident, the Ombudsman felt landlords were too quick to lay the blame of the problem with resident's use of the property. Noting that it's not lifestyle, the Ombudsman case studies highlighted a number of cases had underlying issues which were not identified or addressed
13. The service has been looking at a change to our processes and have adapted our planning and approach to inspect all reports of dampness and look at the issue holistically. This replaces the former process of sending out a damp pack and asking residents to call back in 3 months if the issue persists. The service is providing hygrometers to all and dehumidifiers where necessary, have

redesigned our damp pack so it is helpful, provides meaningful advice and strikes the right tone so it doesn't make the resident feel at fault. Smart home technology has also been trialed which records temperature and humidity levels and helps assess dampness in buildings; Kingswood Estate used the Switchee system and Aylton Estate used Vericon devices

Repeated calls

14. We know as a service that repairs can sometimes take more time to complete than needed. One of the reasons for this is the way our customer journey is currently managed
15. The service has been looking at our end to end process and we have a project work stream underway to start a repairs hub. This will see all of our calls and emails going through this hub, staffed by trained repairs officers. The aim of this hub is to ensure that residents only need to call us once and don't have to chase or receive callbacks about their repairs
16. The repairs hub is currently in the planning phase. Due to the scale of this change the project is planned to have this transition completed in phases by 1 April 2024.
17. The service has also undertaken work to ensure that we have a workforce that is fit for the future and will meet our needs in the years to come. This involves training and hiring operatives who are multi skilled (are trained and capable in more than one trade). This mean when are visiting resident's homes that we can undertake repairs the first time without a need for multiple operatives and visits
18. Southwark repairs has also procured and implemented a new system for managing repairs in our back office. This system allows for much more live and in depth reporting and the management of materials. Knowing what our operatives have and will need to complete repairs in more detail will ensure that we have the materials with us when we visit a repair the first time
19. Corporately there is work underway on the telematics systems on the Southwark fleet. When work is completed on this we will be able to see the location of our operatives in real-time. This will allow us to send the nearest and best placed operatives where they need to go, improving our response and right first time across all areas

Contractors (issues and co-ordination)

20. Inevitably some repairs work will require co-ordination between internal and external contractors. This by its very nature is a risk factor in resolving an issue, for example leaks can occur from internal plumbing, external plumbing, roofing and heating systems.

The service has processes in place for these works where another contractor is required. Larger orders or works where residents or members have raised an issue are case managed by officers within the repairs team

21. Some of the work done within the repairs improvement programme has improved these working relationships and the service continue to raise issues with contractors, both internal and external where processes are followed or haven't worked on individual repairs

Update on Repairs Improvement Programme

22. The repairs improvement programme is a large scale ambitious project to bring the service to the level our residents deserve and to ensure that we continue to meet and improve those levels into the future

23. The improvement plan delivers on five aims approved by the cabinet based on feedback from residents:

- ◆ An easy to use service
- ◆ A repair job that will be completed right first time
- ◆ A repair job that treats me and my home with respect
- ◆ Open and honest feedback on the quality of the repair
- ◆ A fit for the future service that puts your needs at the heart of the service

24. Work resulting from the programme has so far included, but not limited to:

- Procurement and implementation of a new back office management system, managing 60-70k orders a year
- Customer service and management training across the whole of the service
- Repairs action days on estates and within sheltered units, bringing the service direct to residents
- The creation of a new repairs residents group to hold the service to account, starting in December 2022
- The council's first chat bot being trialed in the leaks from above team
- Video inspections being carried out in real-time with residents to improve diagnostics
- The expansion of specialist teams within Southwark repairs. For example, leaks from above, fire task team, damp and mould and a task team; managing larger, more complicated and escalated works
- The decision on the formation of a new repairs hub

25. The programme continues to have wide ranging and ambitious targets with works planned until April 2024