

# HOUSING REPAIRS REVIEW

Report of the Scrutiny Support Sub-Committee A

December 2009



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Situation in Southwark</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Tenants Views</b>	<b>2 - 4</b>
<b>Officer's Perspective</b>	<b>4 - 6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	

## **1 Introduction**

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee prioritized this topic for review as members were aware that the Housing Review was due in 2009. The sub-committee met on the 14.10.2009, 30.11.2009 & 10.02.2010 to hear from officers and then from tenant representatives with regards to Housing repairs.

The new housing repairs and maintenance contract commenced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009, to provide day to day emergency and out of hours repairs and maintenance. The contract is for 7 years with options to extend for a further 3 years. It has been let via 4 packages on a geographical basis (north, east, central and south), plus temporary accommodation.

Southwark Building Services provide services for the north of the borough which covers Borough/Bankside and Walworth and east Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. Morrison provides services for central Camberwell and Peckham, south Dulwich and Nunhead/Peckham Rye and temporary accommodation.

## **2. The Situation in Southwark**

The main points of the contract are highlighted below:-

- Ordering Process, appointments and scheme of authorisation
- Monitoring
- Complaints
- Mobile Working
- Improvement plans

Members acknowledged that the call centre performance had improved but there were still concerns with contractors. There were still reported incidents of appointments not being kept and contractors arriving at the job with no tools. The sub-committee was informed that if a contractor could not deal with a specific job another contractor would be given the job. Members were informed that a list of approved contractors were with George Amery (Contracts Monitoring Officer).

## **3. Tenants Views**

The sub-committee heard from tenant representatives of the Bonamy-Bramcote Tenants Association and expressed that they were not happy with some housing repair jobs that had been undertaken on their estate.

One of the examples given were that of a young mother of three children all under 8 years old, the young family had no lighting in the property for 6 weeks, the mother was having to bath the children by candle light, which raised health and safety issues. A call to the centre had been made but the job took 6 weeks to complete the and to make matters worse the scaffolding was put up on the wrong side of the building.

One of the points that concerned the tenant representative was that as a street leader for her estate she seemed to be able to get jobs done more so than the housing officer. Her point being that she undertook the role of street leader on a voluntary basis and it would seem to be taking on more responsibilities. The housing officer is paid a salary and she did not know what the officer's responsibilities were? The tenant representative felt that she got repair jobs done a lot faster than housing officers.

The sub-committee were also informed that repairs are getting worse, tenants were having to put up with poor flooring, holes in walls, boiler and radiators hanging off walls and standards were not getting any better.

It was also reported that tenants had a deep sense of apathy and indeed were now ageing, these people are now fed up with the council poor performance of repairs. These same tenants remember when they first moved into their homes, the flats were decorated well, radiators and boilers were fixed to walls and in good working order.

Recently the tenant representative had visited a vacant flat on her estate, 3 or 4 people had viewed the property there was no radiator in the bathroom, the toilet needed to be replaced, pipes were hanging from the wall, the taps were dirty and not working and the kitchen was in a appalling state. How can the council be letting these properties in such poor conditions, the flat had been empty for 2 to 3 months. Housing officers now say to tenants that they should take it as it is, the council has changed a lot and it is not for the better the role of the housing officer is diminishing as time goes on.

A member of the sub-committee reported that she had dealt with a case of a couple (brother and sister) who had lived in a property without lights for 4 weeks, the sister was wheelchair bound and the brother suffered a heart attack, the couple received compensation of £100.

It was reported to the sub-committee that the tenancy agreement included lighting as a high priority, the call centre needs to understand the terms tenancy agreement.

**The tenant representatives pointed out that contacting the call centre was not a problem, but the people receiving the calls generally do not have a feel for the jobs being requested, yet they do raise job numbers. The second point of contention was that workmen who turn up to do the job do not come prepared i.e. tools needed to do the job, they then leave and do not return to the job. It can take 6-8 weeks to complete a job by another workman. The third point was some workmen do not seek to find the source of the problem i.e. leaking pipes from other flats. The last point that concerned the representatives was that repairs appointments were often not kept and tenants often had to take time off work for these appointments.**

The sub-committee were informed of the window seals needing to be replaced in many of the flats on the estate this would include the seals around the french doors, the windows seals were all replaced but the workmen did not complete the job on the doors which in turn delayed the decorating of the rooms concerned. In one particular case the plastic window frames required repair, a carpenter was sent to do the job, this job took 7 months to complete.

The tenant representatives reported that the council should return back to the old system, where housing officers were responsible for repairs and contractors should be available for estate inspections. This would mean the housing officer sending repair request to call centre and the jobs being filtered down to the contractor.

The sub-committee asked the tenant representatives if they agreed with the target and overall performance percentages contained in the August key performance indicators, both representatives stated that they thought the percentage figure were far too high.

The chair stated that the process needed to be looked into as it was not possible to check every repair job undertaken.

The tenant representative reported that the estate they lived on was built 14 years ago and the following works and repairs have had to be undertaken, new pipes, cracks in walls leading to new walls, stairways repairs and subsidence. It was stated that new builds are not up to scratch, older estates on the Old Kent Road did not suffer from these problems.

The tenant representative gave an example of a problem with the tap in the kitchen, she went on to inform members that a contractor informed her that she would need a whole new system, but when a plumber came around to do the job he informed her that it was a simple job and completed the repair by replacing a switch. Her concern was who was auditing these contractors and are the proper processes in place.

A member of the sub-committee raised his concern that a number of job numbers could be raised for the same job and would expect these job numbers to be matched to one job so that the council is not making multiply payments for the same job.

Another member reported an incident with a leaking pipe and was surprised that she was charged 5 times for the same job.

The tenant representatives felt that the following points would help make a clear way forward in dealing with repairs and maintenance:-

- Housing Officers – to report repairs
- Housing Officers – responsibilities decreased in the number of properties they manage
- Caretakers on estates – required for minors works (getting rid of these people must surely cost more in the cost of repairs and maintenance to the council).
- Lighting on estates – post numbers are presently taken by TA representatives, this should be undertaken by the light team for evening/night work.

#### **4. Officer's perspective**

**The sub-committee was informed that tenant's information was included in the performance indicators and that councillor's information could be included in the contract. It was suggested that councillor's opinions should be including future due to the nature of work they undertake with tenants. The new contract had been in place from 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009 and provided day-to-day, emergency and out of hours repairs and maintenance.**

A key aspect of the contract is that there was a single first point of contact to report repairs and check progress. In the past roofing repairs proved to be lengthy jobs and this caused concern to tenants, now contractors have been given more scope and will keep tenants informed of progress they can also contact the housing department for any agreement which might be required to proceed with the job.

The outline of the ordering process, appointments and scheme of authorisation as follows:-

- a) Customer calls Customer Service Centre to report the need for a repair,

- b) Customer Service Representative (CSR) diagnoses concern and raises repair
- c) system generates Works Order during the call
- d) CSR makes appointment with customer during first call,
- e) system provides notification via text/Letter, (including two text reminders)
- f) Contractor attends job at appointed time (AM/PM/school run)
- g) Variations up to authorised limit are handled by contractor straight away,
- h) Variations over prescribed limit or any follow-on work will be scheduled by Repair Control Centre (this is a joint team of CSC, E&H and Contractor staff working at the CSC).
- i) Upon completion of repair, the Works Order is closed by Contractor staff,
- j) Within 2 hours of Works Order closure, a call back is attempted to the customer to conduct post-inspection Quality surveys,
- k) When customer responses indicate satisfaction then the data is collected and reported to Housing monthly.
- l) When the customer response indicates;
  - the job is not complete,
  - the quality is not satisfactory, or
  - the overall assessment of the end-to-end repair process is unsatisfactory, and then reports are automatically provided to the Housing Officer in the RCC the next business day for review and remedy. The Client Officer may;
    - 1) require the contractor to re-attend to complete the repair,
    - 2) speak with the resident to better understand the reason for the perception of quality, or
    - 3) review the specific area of dissatisfaction and provide input to the relevant parties for corrective action.

The contract is monitored through a number of different processes;

- Customer call backs on all repair orders raised via the CRM system (including heating/hot water jobs)
- Post inspection of 500 jobs per month by Technical Officers
- Post inspection of 20% of jobs per month by contractors (approx. 1200 each)
- Audit of orders by Quantity Surveyors (physical and desktop analysis)

Remedies available to address quality, completion and conduct issues;

- Default notice
- Credit memo
- Recovery of costs to reflect the loss incurred by the Council
- Pass work to alternative contractor
- Withdrawal of trades for continued poor work

The Quality survey call back process is intended to proactively identify where there is a breakdown in the service, and promptly take action to remedy the situation.

- This includes re-raising of Works Orders that are not completed to the Council's standards
- Also includes explaining the Council's repairs process and obligations to the resident particularly when the residents' expectations exceed the Council's obligations.

**It was also reported that 7% of tenants were not satisfied with repairs. It was also shown that during the period 01/09/2008 to 31/08/2009 there were 898 official complaints registered to the Housing Repairs service to the ombudsman of which 713 cases were upheld or partially upheld in favour of the complainant. Members expressed concern with the high number of cases upheld and would wish to bring this figure down.**

**The sub-committee felt that the CSC did respond to tenants calls but the problem was with contractors who turned up at the job sometimes without tools to do the job or did not look for the sources of the problem. Members asked for a guide of contractors responsibilities.**

## **5. Recommendations**