

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday 25 November 2021 at 2 pm in the Guildhall

Present

Councillor Cal Corkery (in the Chair)
Stuart Brown

Maria Cole, Residents' Consortium
Felicity Goodyear, Residents' Consortium

1. Apologies (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lee Hunt, Gemma New and Linda Symes.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Corkery declared that he was a Portsmouth City Council (PCC) tenant, which would only be an interest if his particular tenancy was involved. There were no other declarations of interests.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2020 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

4. Review into repairs and maintenance (AI 4)

Councillor Corkery explained the Panel was meeting to agree its scoping document into a review into repairs and maintenance and outlined progress to date. The original topic "Procedures and performance of housing associations in relation to repairs and maintenance" had been expanded to include local authority (PCC) housing. The review would focus on day-to-day (response) repairs, for example, a leaky tap rather than planned maintenance, for example, repainting communal areas in blocks. Councillor Corkery outlined the proposed timeline for the review. In view of the time left in the remainder of the municipal year the survey was more of a "temperature check" and basic data gathering exercise but it is hoped it can reach out to residents. The draft survey and information on PCC's repairs performance and that of the main housing associations (HA) in Portsmouth had already been circulated to members.

The proposed timeline is:

- January - meeting with residents (possibly from Residents' Consortium, repair group, HA tenants, survey respondents) to get their views
- February - meeting with relevant PCC officers and HA representatives to respond to findings
- Early/mid-March - agree findings of the review

With regard to the survey, Councillor Brown asked that as HAs used percentages to measure satisfaction if the survey should use this. On the other hand, stars or a scale of 1 to 5 is more accessible. Councillor Corkery explained that Corporate Communications had advised that in view of the cost, capacity and limited time available paper copies were not feasible. The design and detailed analysis of a more in-depth survey could take three to four months. Once the survey is online members could go out and engage with residents without access to the internet or smart devices and feed back their responses. Ideally the survey would be more comprehensive but it could gauge broad themes and feelings.

Councillor Brown suggested the wording could ask respondents to help neighbours they know have not got IT to respond. Felicity Gordon suggested letting respondents reply by text as most people have mobile phones. Emojis (sad, neutral, happy etc) could be used as this is simpler than numbering. Councillor Corkery confirmed the survey would be anonymous but with the option for respondents to say if they wanted to attend a meeting to discuss their experiences further, in which case they would have to give contact details. The survey could also be disseminated via the Residents' Consortium.

Meredydd Hughes (Assistant Director of Buildings) and Steve Groves (Head of Buildings Maintenance) presented the briefing report on PCC's response repairs service. PCC receives an average of over 1,500 requests for repairs per week. The key variation between PCC and HAs is that PCC understands that what is important is the time the repair can be done for the resident and getting the operative there at the right time - "the right repair at the right time." PCC uses a range of measures to assess performance and seek improvements rather than targets. Officers are currently working on how residents contact PCC and are experimenting with options. Covid-19 has changed how residents contact PCC. Appointments that are moved are a source of frustration. Recruitment and retention in key trades is an issue; there are shortages of staff and supply issues with materials. Prices have risen in the last six months which is an added pressure on budgets.

In response to questions from members, officers explained

The information on HA repairs is about a year out of date but the principles of how HAs measure satisfaction are the same and the figures are likely to be very similar.

When operatives go to a property to do a repair they should ask if there are any other repairs that need doing; these can either be done at the same time or a time arranged for them. This is because getting into properties is the hardest part of carrying out repairs. As far as officers know, this practice is unique to PCC, which has been operating this way since 2007. In that time officers have visited other local authorities and HAs and re-tendered the repairs service twice but are not aware of other organisations doing the same.

The figure of 61.1% for repairs completed on a first visit refers to repairs done in one visit, not subsequent repairs. It is not always possible to do subsequent

repairs in one visit, for example, a newly hung door would not be painted the same day. It is about understanding the different types of repair.

PCC receives roughly just over one complaint a week that goes to the first formal stage. Complaints are reviewed as a team to see if there are any trends. The team is aware there are complaints about missed or re-booked appointments and are currently working to improve matters. Customer satisfaction surveys conducted by the team have open ended questions so respondents can say what could have been better. Members congratulated the team on the low level of complaints.

Maria Cole said that residents can get straight through to repairs as there is now a repairs option when they phone and this is much better as they do not have to repeat themselves to the switchboard and then the repairs team. Officers said the automated choice had been instigated in response to customer satisfaction feedback. Although there is the option to report a repair on PCC's website very few people use it. Officers are looking at why repairs are not reported that way; they want lots of different channels of communication, possibly including apps, as they recognise residents have different preferences. Councillor Corkery said that when he emails PCC someone phones back but if someone emails that implies they want to be contacted by email.

Maria Cole said that in her block repairs could be reported to the scheme manager who then reports them to PCC. Scheme managers are there all day.

Summing up, Councillor Corkery said there are always lessons to be learnt. Feedback and proposals from the review could be highlighted to relevant services.

RESOLVED to proceed with a review into "Procedures and performance of PCC and housing associations in relation to response repairs and maintenance."

The meeting concluded at 14.40 pm.

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Councillor Cal Corkery
Chair