



Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW OF THE PROCEDURES AND PERFORMANCE OF PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL AND HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS IN RELATION TO RESPONSE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Date published: 24 March 2022

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

PREFACE

As the Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (published in 2020) states, "A home should always be more than just four walls and a roof. A home should provide safety, security and dignity." Everyone should have a decent and safe home to live in.

If residents have poor quality housing their quality of life will be severely impacted, affecting their health, wellbeing and daily life. Through their casework councillors have heard about residents having problems with their housing and additional problems in getting the problems resolved.

Therefore, the main objective of the review was to learn about residents' (council and housing association tenants) experiences of repairs and maintenance and what could be done to provide consistent and good services and improve standards.

The panel would like to thank Meredydd Hughes (Assistant Director of Buildings), Steve Groves (Head of Building Maintenance), Paul Fielding (Assistant Director of Housing), James Hill (Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services) and Kevin Beagley (Housing Enabling Officer) for providing information and arranging meetings with residents and organisations. The panel would like to thank Abri, Guinness and Sanctuary housing associations for meeting the panel and responding to their questions.

The panel would like to thank residents who participated in the review by sharing their experiences of repairs and maintenance.

I would like to thank all the panel members who have taken part: Stuart Brown, Lee Hunt, Gemma New, Robert New and Lynda Symes.

Councillor Cal Corkery
Chair, Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 24 March 2022

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel's review of the procedures and performance of Portsmouth City Council (henceforth referred to this report as "the council") and housing associations in relation to response repairs and maintenance.

Background

At its meeting on 11 November 2020 the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel (henceforth referred to in this report as "the panel") agreed on the following topic: "To review the procedures and performance of housing associations in relation to repairs and maintenance."

The Covid pandemic caused considerable disruption to scrutiny across the council and the panel's next meeting was not until 25 November 2021 when they agreed it would be more valuable to expand the topic to include the council as then its procedures and performance could be compared and contrasted with those of housing associations. The topic was therefore amended to "Procedures and performance of PCC and housing associations in relation to response repairs and maintenance."

The review was started by the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel which comprised:

Councillors Cal Corkery
Stuart Brown
Lee Hunt
Gemma New
Robert New
Linda Symes

Standing Deputies were: Councillors Matthew Atkins, Tom Coles, Lewis Gosling, Ian Holder, Scott Payter-Harris, Rob Wood.

In order that the review could be completed within the municipal year it would be fairly limited in scope and more in the nature of a "temperature check." However, it could highlight aspects that may merit more in-depth investigation. Repairs and maintenance covers the interior of homes, communal areas and the blocks themselves. There are several types of repair:

- response (reactive)
- compliance, for example, gas safety inspections
- adaptations, for example, a stairlift installed through the Disabled Facilities Grant
- planned maintenance
- voids (empty properties)
- out of hours

The review would cover the experiences of council and housing association tenants; it would not cover leaseholders of council properties or the private rented sector.

Timeline

In view of the limited timescale the panel agreed 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.

The panel agreed on the following timeline:

- January 2022 - meeting with residents (possibly from Residents' Consortium, repair group, housing association tenants, survey respondents) to get their views
- February 2022 - meeting with relevant council officers and housing association representatives to respond to findings
- Early/mid-March 2022 - agree findings of the review

The panel met formally on three occasions between 25 November 2021 and 24 March 2022. A list of meetings held by the panel and details of the written evidence received can be found in Appendix 1. The minutes of the panel's meetings are published on the council's website. The panel also met council and housing association tenants informally to learn about their experiences of repairs and maintenance.

Objectives

The main objective of the review was to learn about tenants' experiences of repairs and maintenance and, in particular, if there were any barriers. The panel was keen to engage with residents and to be led by their experiences. Findings from the review could help improve standards and share good practice amongst providers. The review could also show the advantages and disadvantages of different practices amongst housing associations or between associations and the council.

Background to repair services - Housing associations

It can be difficult to compare directly how the council and housing associations report on repairs as the council uses systems thinking methodology which looks at the end-to-end time from the resident's point of view.

Housing Associations, also referred to as registered social landlords (RSLs) and registered providers of social housing (RPSH), are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). The RSH is an executive non-departmental public body. The RSH has a strong focus on checking that housing associations are financially viable and that they deliver value for money. Housing associations produce annual reports and these are made available to residents via the association's website.

The RSH has not issued targets but provides guidance which set expectations with regard to repairs and maintenance. Documents such as the Home Standard 2015 and the Decent Homes Standard expect registered providers to provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas with an objective to complete repairs and improvements right first time, and meeting statutory requirements which provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their properties.

The sector has developed what it considers to be best practice and may have set its own targets which link to the RSH guidance. The housing association's performance is reported internally to management boards which have sub-committees reporting a specific remit, for example internal audit.

In the Portsmouth City Council boundary the three largest (in terms of stock size) housing associations are; Vivid with approximately 3000 homes, Abri (formerly Radian) with over 800 homes and Southern Housing Group with over 600 homes. Repairs and maintenance performance is reported to residents via their websites and/or their annual reports. At the time of publishing the scrutiny review the information (obtained from published material) is about 18 months to two years out of date but the general principles are likely to be very similar.

Vivid

Satisfaction with a repair - current performance 8.4/10

Average time to complete a repair - current performance 10.8 days

Percentage of emergency repairs completed within 24hrs - current performance 98%

Satisfaction with planned maintenance - current performance 5.8/10 (this is the only accessible data relating to planned maintenance).

Gas compliance 100% achieved.

Abri

The Most recent data comes from the 2018 - 2019 annual report and explains 95.4% of repairs are completed right first time

97.2% customer satisfaction with the repairs service

Gas compliance 100% achieved

Nothing relates to planned maintenance performance.

Southern Housing Group

The most recent data comes from the 2019 - 2020 annual report and explains 93% of emergency repairs are completed in 24hrs

Gas compliance 100% achieved

Nothing relates to planned maintenance.

Background to repairs - Portsmouth City Council

The council manages, maintains and owns an asset portfolio of around 14,700 residential dwellings as well as managing just under 1,900 additional residential leasehold properties. Approximately 30% of the dwellings the council owns are situated in the neighbouring local authority of Havant Borough Council. The majority of the Council HRA stock is flats and maisonettes which account for nearly 70% of our dwelling assets, whilst houses and bungalows make up the remainder of our HRA stock.

The majority of residential dwellings were constructed post-war in the 1950s and 1960s. Most residential dwellings are traditionally constructed, although there are a significant number of various non-traditional construction concrete and steel frame properties.

Most residential dwellings are low to medium rise construction up to five storeys, although there are 26 blocks of flats that are high rise construction of between six and nine storeys, with a further 13 tower blocks that are 10 storeys and above.

Response repairs

The purpose of the repairs service area is 'to carry out the right repair at the right time.'

The dwelling assets are managed from seven area housing offices that are located within the local area and receive the initial customer demand. Within the city (on-island) there are housing offices at Buckland, Landport, Portsea, and Somerstown. Outside of the city (off-island) there are housing offices at Leigh Park, Paulsgrove and Wecock Farm. The housing offices at Leigh Park and Wecock Farm are located within the neighbouring local authority of Havant Borough Council.

Response repair demand is received by staff based at area housing management offices, from residents, leaseholders and from staff undertaking their role visiting the assets. The response repair demand is predominantly reported by telephone (approx.90%) or in person at an area housing office (approx.10%).

Currently the council receives an average of over 1,500 response repairs per week that generally include plumbing, gas, electrical, carpentry, roofing and decoration repairs through to new kitchens, bathrooms and boilers.



Repairs contractors

Service Providers are employed to provide the response repairs service using the NEC3 term service contract using the 'open book' option E cost reimbursable contract.

All the service providers will work together as partners to form a core group to achieve agreed objectives. The partners who are part of the core group will carry out the following:

- Act in a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation
- Share data, best practice, innovation and knowledge to enable continuous improvement and achieve value for money, no partner shall have a monopoly on best practice, initiative or solution
- Joint working on agreed initiatives between partners and their suppliers
- Implement agreed changes to systems efficiently and effectively
- Plan and invest in partners' staff development,
- Develop and maximise funding streams and trading opportunities
- Avoid conflicts or disagreements and should they arise, resolve them promptly together.

A key objective is to develop a sustainable approach to the maintenance of our assets that is designed to incorporate the needs and benefits of the local community. The Council Social Value Policy states social value is the lasting and positive impact that we create through the way in which we act to shape a resilient future, for our local and regional communities, businesses and environment. The Service Providers report social value plans as part of the annual contractor plan review.

The Service Providers currently providing the response repairs service are:

- i. Comserv (UK) Ltd - 'Off Island' (Leigh Park, Paulsgrove & Wecock Farm)



ii. Mountjoy Ltd - 'On Island' (Somersetown, Buckland, Landport & Portsea)



BUSINESS OVERVIEW

2021



OUR BUSINESS

Mountjoy provides professional construction, refurbishment and building maintenance and PM services across the South of England.

HQ in Portsmouth with 4 other local offices across the South East

Founded in 1992

Turnover of £34million

Over 300 directly employed staff

Approx. 87% of our staff live within a 10 mile postcode

UKAS certified to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO 45001

Approx. 30,000 repairs carried out per annum across all term contracts

Approx. 23,000 properties maintained per annum

Approx. 60 construction and refurbishment projects undertaken in the last 3 years



MAINTENANCE SERVICES

Our Maintenance Division is focused on managing long term contracts which cover responsive repairs, planned preventative maintenance, void repairs and minor works.

Our Responsive Repairs and Voids contract covers 8,000 residential properties across Portsmouth, from single storey buildings to high-rise blocks.

Our Corporate Assets contract covers the Council's entire corporate stock, including schools, activity centres and historical buildings such as Southern Castle.

Our Maintenance & Minor Works contract covers 100 university buildings including academic facilities and halls of residences, with additional minor projects carried out.

Other key clients include:



CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

Our Construction Division is focused on delivering projects from £100k up to £5m across the South East.

The Lantern, Mary Rose Academy (£800k)
We made alterations to a vacant building to provide suitable classrooms, offices, and WC facilities for SEN pupils.

Stamshaw Junior School (£580k)
We carried out re-conditioning works over the summer holiday to bring the school back up to standard, including replacing the roof and installing new fire doors.

Victoria Cottage Hospital (£3.8m)
We are refurbishing a vacant hospital in Emsworth to create a new, modern GP surgery for the local community in response to the growing population.

Other key current projects include:

- Construction of New Boarding House at Ryde School (£2m)
- Creation of New GP and Dental Surgery at Andover War Memorial Hospital (£5.8m)
- Pool in the Park Leisure Centre
- Phase 2 Refurbishment (£3.1m)
- Building Primary School Extension (£1.9m)
- Sports Hall Extension at Ditcham
- Park School (£900k)

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As a company with its roots in Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, we care about our local community. Some examples of our recent community initiatives are provided below.

81 monthly Integrity Awards
Many of our Portsmouth City Council staff have won prizes and have been recognised for their good deeds in our internal awards.

Supporting Local Apprenticeships
We currently employ 13 apprentices working in various roles throughout the company including 3 degree apprenticeships through the University of Portsmouth.

EBP South Partnership
We regularly support the Education Business Partnership South at their careers fairs, mock interview days and inspire recently, virtual Q&A panels.

Community Projects

- Our Building Projects team along with select subcontractors sourced materials and helped create a pond at Stamshaw Junior School for the local community.
- Some of our Directors and Leadership Team helped pupils at The Lantern built planters to assist in school enrichment activities.
- Two of our Portsmouth City Council Operatives sourced and built two sheds for a family centre in the city.



iii. Liberty Gas - All Areas

Local Impact - Portsmouth

175
Average number of customer calls each day

80
strong workforce

£7m
Havant office turnover

88.5%
of employees live within 10 miles of the office

4
clients serviced from the Havant office

100%
of employees live in a PO postcode

15,696
domestic properties (gas)

5
local supply partner locations

Havant Office Team Structure

Chris Gilmore
Operations Director

HAVANT GAS

Charlotte Kinnaird
Contract Manager

HAVANT ECO WORKS

Ryan Kennedy
Contract Manager

Services provided to Portsmouth City Council

Legionella testing

Gas service and maintenance

Commercial, mechanical and electrical

Corporate Social Responsibility - Portsmouth

15
operatives started their careers as apprentices

Work
experience with local schools

School Job Fairs
Volunteering in community with council projects

5%
apprentices

National Strength - Liberty Group

£84m
turnover in 18/19

Company creation of Liberty Group in 1969

£95m
turnover in 19/20

Acquisition of Booth Mechanical Services in 1989

188,000
domestic properties (gas)


ForViva acquires Liberty Group in 2016

52,000
domestic properties (R&M)

ForWorks integration in 2018

1000
strong workforce

60+
clients



Performance

The service uses six types of measure and these are further categorised as leading or lagging.

Leading measures looks forward and is predictive of future performance:

- Demand - how many repairs do we get, how many gas safety checks are due
- Capability - repair end-to-end time (first customer contact to all repairs complete)
- Capacity - how many repairs do we complete
- Quality - repair appointments kept, repairs fixed first time, services carried out first visit

Lagging measures looks back at what has happened:

- Cost - repairs expenditure per week
- Customer satisfaction - satisfaction scores

The council will use a suite of measures to enable officers to assess how specific areas of the business are performing as opposed to setting traditional targets. These measures will be derived from the work and will be used by managers, staff and contractors to make improvements. The importance of each measure will fluctuate as learning is gained and they will be a key aspect of making informed decisions and assessing outcomes.

The council uses a range of measures to assess performance and seek improvements rather than targets. Officers are currently working on how residents contact the council and are experimenting with options. Covid has changed how residents contact council. 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. Rising prices are an added pressure on budgets.

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 the council, which has been operating this way since 2007. In that time officers have visited other local authorities and housing associations and re-tendered the repairs service twice but are not aware of other organisations doing the same.

The examples of current performance measures for 2021/22 as reported at Q2 is as follows.

Measure	
Repairs Demand - The number of new repairs orders per week	1582 per week
Repairs Fixed First Time - The percentage of repairs fixed first time	82.9% of all repairs completed
Repairs Fixed First Visit - The percentage of repairs completed in one visit, not on a subsequent visit. It is not always possible to do repairs in one visit, for example, a newly hung door would not be painted the same day.	61.1% of all repairs completed

Repairs End to End - The average time elapsed in calendar days for repairs from first customer contact	27.7 days
Number of Visits - The average number of visits required to complete repair	2.29 visits for all completed repairs
Cost - The average cost of a repair	£462.40 per repair
Customer Satisfaction - The customer satisfaction of repairs	9.96 (out of 10)

The Council has received complaints from 36 residents regarding the repairs service during Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22. The complaints received are evaluated with the Service Providers to identify any areas that the service can be improved.

Examples of key areas of improvement that the service is currently working to address through various interventions include.

- i. Customer contact for repairs
- ii. Customer appointment options
- iii. Recruitment and retention of key trades
- iv. Materials supply and increased costs
- v. Budget savings

Residents' views

Portsmouth City Council tenants can join the Residents' Consortium, which usually meets monthly, and gives council tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to share their views and to be kept informed about housing issues. The Consortium elects three representatives who attend meetings of the Housing and Preventing Homelessness portfolio.

The Spring 2021 of Housetalk (the council's quarterly magazine for tenants and leaseholders) asked if residents were interested in sharing their views on the repairs service. Residents had previously been offered the opportunity to be involved with the Horatia House and Leamington House deconstruction contractor selection, Safer Buildings and Homes Customer Panel, and fire policy.

Residents' survey

An online survey ran from 2 to 23 December 2021 to learn about the experience of council and housing association tenants with repairs to gather initial information to inform the next stages of the review. The design and detailed analysis of a more in-depth survey can take three to four months. Ideally the survey would be more comprehensive but it could gauge broad themes and feelings. In view of the cost, capacity and limited time available unfortunately paper copies were not feasible. However, when it was online members offered to go out and engage with residents without access to the internet or smart devices and feedback their responses. It could also be disseminated via the Residents' Consortium. Respondents could be anonymous but with the option for to say if they wanted to attend a meeting to discuss their experiences further, in which case they would need to give contact details.

Which social housing provider is your landlord?

Abri - 10
Aster - 1
CESSA - 1
Clarion Housing Group - 1
Haig Housing - 1
Home Group - 2
Hyde Housing Association - 2
Osborne/Leaves - 1
Places for People - 2
Portsmouth Churches Housing Association - 1
SAHA - 1
Sanctuary Housing - 2
Southern Housing Group - 8
The Guinness Partnership - 6
Vivid Housing - 23
Sub-Total - 62

Portsmouth City Council - 75 responses
Total - 137

Not all respondents completed all the fields. Some responses were one word whereas others gave more details. There were some blank entries and eight from the private sector which have been discounted.

Issues raised

Here is a summary of the issues raised in the closed questions and the open-ended comment section: Have there been any particular experiences of, or issues with, your landlord's repair service that you would like to share?

Plumbing inc taps, toilets, leaks	43
Windows	30
Heating / boiler	27
Garden / Outside	27
Electrics	22
Doors (internal)	18
Damp / mould	12
Bath / shower (excl. leaks)	12
Kitchen (excl. leaks)	10
Mice	6
Ceiling (excl. leaks)	4
Roof	4
Flooring	3
Fire / smoke alarms	2

Some responses were one word - electrics, plumbing, windows, door - or mentioned several issues - toilets, fridge, boiler - without specifying the problem, whereas others gave details of the problem, for example, radiator hanging off wall. Some respondents did not mention any particular problem whereas others had several. Matters raised were similar across the council and housing associations so it was not a case of one provider, for example, having a problem specifically with windows.

Kitchen and bathroom exclude leaks so are matters like replacing a bath or where the problem was not specified.

Ceiling excludes leaks so applies to structural matters like cracks or where the problem was not specified. Therefore, if a respondent mentioned "leaky ceiling" this is included under leaks.

Garden / outside includes fences, gates, porch, external or back doors, balconies, external parts of building. Apart from mentions of damage to communal areas, neglected outdoor paintwork and fence panels that keep blowing over as they not fixed properly, issues were not usually specified.

Electric includes any form of lighting. Where a respondent mentioned that a balcony light was the problem this is under Electrics as the light is a problem, not the balcony.

Leaks were the most common problem - one respondent said "leaks, leaks and more leaks" - and the word leak (including variations of it - leaks, leaky, leaking, leaked) occurs 80 times; some respondents mentioned it more than once. Sources of leaks were ceilings, taps, showers, toilets, gutters, overflows and roofs.

The main issues with doors and windows were that they were either broken or needed replacing. Other issues were window locks, drafts, door handles and doors not closing. A non-compliant fire door was mentioned.

Waiting time / delays	32
Quality of work	18
Communication	14
Behaviour	6
Problems for elderly or with disability	4
Out of hours service	1
Compliments	6

The time taken to do repairs ranged from weeks to months to years. Responses from housing association tenants were "I've had 8 different plumbers out, each appointment takes about 5 weeks to book, this has been going on for about 10 months and still not fixed," "waited five months to put a radiator back on the wall," "having to wait 6 weeks for a repair to light which would not turn off," "communal doors broken for months," "We have been waiting almost 6 years to have the ventilation unit at the top of the building repaired or replaced" and "13 months to repair 2 fence panels, 2 years to repair leaks through windows, not done yet. 8 months to repair leaks to front and rear gutters."

A council tenant had "Ongoing repairs that have yet to be done despite a senior surveyor coming to my house and promising to oversee the complete works and communicate with me regularly. It's been nearly a year already!!" Another had a "mice problem not solved for a few years."

Behaviour is complaints about contractors being rude, swearing, breaking personal property and includes one comment on contractors not wearing masks though the respondent says this has improved.

Quality of work includes poor quality repairs that have to be done again and sending contractors who are not qualified to do a particular job. Mess left behind was mentioned. The quality of materials as well as contractors was not always satisfactory. One council tenant said, "The quality of the replacement parts are very cheap and thus do not last very long."

Communication includes problems getting through to an organisation to report or discuss a problem, lack of communication within an organisation, not hearing back, having to chase, not hearing after an initial visit, sending several contractors without resolving the problem, workmen not turning up or cancelling visits. Fragmented and disconnected working practices seem to cause problems. One housing association respondent said that it "takes ages to send somebody. Then the person would take a quick look then will say they'll report what needs to be done. After several weeks of waiting, nothing. I have to follow up. Then they will schedule repairs without pre-agreement about dates. Several times I would come home and find "Sorry we missed you" card. Then I have to call reschedule and have to wait months again." Another said, "it's just so disorganised and fragmented. What happened to doing it right first time?? Any queries get lost and you end up chasing for over a year before anything gets done."

A detailed response from a housing association tenant explains the problems caused by fragmentation: "The concern comes from the inability of the customer service (frontline) teams to accurately communicate with repairs team, and then onward to trades contractors actually doing the repairs. Nothing is adequately communicated to the actual tenant and it seems to be becoming the norm that the only way to get anything more than the most basic repairs done is to initiate a complaints process, which must be taking up the HA's capacity even further. Repairs 'managers' seem to be refusing to deal directly with tenants, which seems strange as it means there is no one person or project manager a tenant can talk to."

One housing association respondent said, "For years there were constant mix-ups and delays but the service has improved a lot recently. I believe this is because they have taken administration of repairs in-house." Another thought problems were caused when their housing association had got too big.

A council tenant said, "I find it quite difficult to arrange a repair as the call handler always puts it for weeks down the line." Another tenant mentioned "lack of knowledge with office staff when repairs are booked, they had no idea how long the job would take, they said it was a day job in fact it was a week job and sent wrong repair bloke etc." Another tenant said, "Not easy to report for old people. No easy phone access too many admin people working from home." The reference to people working from home may be because of Covid. The only other mention of Covid was by a housing association tenant who thought it might explain the lack of capacity.

Causes of complaints are linked so having to chase repairs ("the number of chases to get jobs completed") leads to delays in resolving problems; likewise having to re-do poor quality work means delays. The high figure for waiting time / delays tallies with delays accounting for the highest response rate (38 for Very Dissatisfied) of all the closed questions.

Time taken to complete the repair	Total	PCC	HA
Very Satisfied	31	24	7
Satisfied	27	20	7
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	18	10	8
Dissatisfied	27	9	18
Very Dissatisfied	38	11	27

Quality of repair work	Total	PCC	HA
Very Satisfied	27	18	9
Satisfied	28	21	7
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	26	14	8
Dissatisfied	23	6	17
Very Dissatisfied	24	7	17

Professionalism of staff	Total	PCC	HA
Very Satisfied	40	28	12
Satisfied	38	22	16
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	34	12	22
Dissatisfied	8	3	5
Very Dissatisfied	19	8	11

Compliments

The numbers for compliments might be low because people may only comment when things are going wrong; if there are no problems they do not need to say anything. One respondent said that their housing association was "swamped with demand" as they had inherited problems from the previous association.

Amongst council tenants compliments were that "Mountjoy are always professional and courteous keep you informed at all stages" whereas other council tenants said Mountjoy "take forever and have unacceptable standards of repair" and "Mountjoy haven't been the best." Therefore, it seems experience of repairs can vary greatly within the same organisation. Another tenant had different experiences of Mountjoy workmen: "The guy who came to fix my back door couldn't get out quickly enough and glued something to the top and said job Done. The next guy was amazing."

Other compliments from council tenants were "received first class service," "I can't fault them and how soon they fix any repairs" and "The repairs have always been carried out quickly and with professionalism."

Meetings with residents

Two meetings were held in early February 2022 for respondents to the online survey who expressed interest in discussing their views further. One meeting was held in the day and another was offered virtually in the early evening for those who could not attend during the day. Twelve residents attended, split between council and housing association tenants. Discussions were structured around the topics asked about in the survey - time taken to complete repair, quality of work, professionalism of staff.

Time taken

Several tenants had been left without basic amenities for a long time; for example, eight weeks with no functioning toilet (so the tenant had to use a neighbour's toilet), others had been without hot water for periods of 8 weeks, 12 weeks and for months. Another had had no storage heaters. Another had had a problem with the ceiling for two years. A couple of tenants have had problems since they moved into their current properties; 14 years for a housing association tenant and nine for a council tenant. Tenants have sometimes had to find their own solutions like buying a heater or using the shower to do the washing-up.

Quality of work

A common theme was multiple visits to try to resolve a repair or items having to be frequently replaced. One council tenant had had 12 new shower units and has had constant problems with damp and leaks since moving in. Having different people come out is "repetitive and stressful." Another council tenant's wet room pump went wrong three days after being repaired and it took about four people coming out to resolve the matter when it could have been fixed properly the first time. The tenant felt there was a disconnect between the council and Mountjoy. One tenant had problems with workmen not having the right tools or leaving them in the van.

Professionalism of staff

Experiences of professionalism of staff are often closely linked to issues with communication. Several tenants had problems contacting the housing association on the phone, were kept on hold for over an hour and then cut off. This was upsetting for tenants who do not have English as a first language as well as incurring expense for tenants. Tenants said they were "fobbed off", had to make repeated calls and did not get any response.

Some tenants have had positive experiences of Mountjoy as they usually come when they say they will, are good at saying if they are running late and "crack on and do the job." One said the council do repairs properly and quickly. Another tenants said the council's telephone menu option is good as callers can get straight through to repairs so do not have to repeat themselves to the switchboard and repairs team

Tenants acknowledged the disruption caused by Covid though some felt it was used as a "get out of jail free card." A council tenant said workmen wear a mask and ask residents to social distance; they do not stay for coffee as they do not want to be in the property for longer than possible.

A bugbear is the lack of instructions of lack of instructions for appliances like showers and communal washing machines, especially for new residents who have just moved in and may be used to ones that work differently. It might be something as straightforward as waiting for the washing machine token to take effect. One tenant had to leave washing in the machine over the weekend as there was no-one around to ask for help. Instructions would be particularly useful for people in sheltered housing or where there is a high turnover of residents.

Feedback and complaints

With regard to feedback methods, tenants felt giving a score out of ten (which is used for repairs done by Mountjoy) is "a vexed point." It can be awkward for both the tenant and workman when given at the time of the repair in the workman's presence. The score may not reflect the overall experience of the repair so "you can have the nicest

person and a calamity" or the repair is good but there were problems contacting the office to report the repair. Residents said that complaining does not get results, takes a long time and is really hard work. Before Covid there were PCC residents' meetings which were good so perhaps they could be resumed.

Meeting with providers

On 4 March representatives from the council and three housing associations - Abri, Guinness Partnership, Sanctuary - met the panel to respond to issues raised by residents at the meetings in February. Representatives gave a brief introduction to their repairs and maintenance services.

Abri has 972 homes in Portsmouth, mostly in blocks in the areas covered by PCC. The last year has been the most challenging but there has been good news in the last quarter with the recruitment strategy. 2,042 repairs (72% routine) were completed in the last six months at a cost of £262,000. The average response time is 36 days which is not desirable but it is improving. About 80% repairs are done by Abri's own trades(people) and are only outsourced where there are recruitment issues. There are about 12 trades in Portsmouth, including supervisors and two gas engineers, but additional ones can be added if necessary. Brexit, fuel costs, furlough and damage caused by Storm Eunice (fences, roofs) and a high staff turnover all cause problems. However, an additional 100 resources have been recruited in the south over the last six to seven months. Abri have improved processes as to how they deal with damp and mould. They have started a stock condition survey in the Portsmouth area which in the next few months will inform the investment profile. Planned maintenance reduces the need for response repairs.

Guinness employ around 500 trades across the country and are looking at employing 20% more but it is a very tough market at the moment. They are over-recruiting because of issues with performance and cost of sub-contractors. They used to be able to state terms but rates are increasing and sub-contractors are changing jobs for higher rates.

The majority of response repairs are delivered directly and Guinness will continue to do this. They are considering giving more responsibility to service managers (who have more contact with customers) who see what can be done to reduce multiple visits. There will also be a dedicated disrepair team so disrepair is actioned quickly. Delays and decisions on which repairs to priorities during Covid have created a backlog (a "bow wave") so Guinness have been catching up over the last six to nine months and are still catching up. Recruitment of new staff is a challenge as trades are jumping from organisation to organisation so Guinness have re-aligned their rates. Key to service delivery is "boots on the ground." Rates are rising exponentially so Guinness' costs have increased. End to end times for repairs are currently 26.4 days. There are about 108 jobs outstanding. On average customer satisfaction is 82% and is expected to increase dramatically. Guinness is working on speeding up response times but it is a very challenging environment and Guinness has to move quickly so customers do not pay the price.

Sanctuary has 129 properties in Portsmouth and had similar issues to Abri and Guinness. Routine repairs are done in 23.7 days and within 24 hours (23.4 hours average in last 12 months) for emergencies. There are 62 open repairs of which 18 are overdue. A damp and mould team was established in October 2021 and has been successful so far. Satisfaction statistics for the South West show a satisfaction rate of

95.9% with staff. 91% residents felt they were treated as valued customers. Before Covid 95% repairs were done in-house but now external contractors are used more.

Portsmouth City Council does not have categories for completions but made appointments when it was convenient to residents which is a probably a unique practice in the area. It uses three contractors - one for Portsea Island, one for off-island (PCC owns properties in the Havant Borough Council area) and one for gas. Contractors use the NEC3 term service contract using the reimbursable "open book" option. The council uses a range of measures rather than Key Performance Indicators. End to end times for repairs are about 25 days. Customer satisfaction is measured by a score out of ten and the majority of scores are 9/10. The council looks at how it captures customer satisfaction and where the focus should be, including positive aspects; booking appointments is very positive. It looks at how it engages with residents and how it keeps them informed, especially when there are extensive repairs or moves into new properties.

The same service was delivered during Covid though some repairs took longer due to difficulties accessing properties. The biggest challenge is the difficulty of recruitment and retention of staff as the market is very competitive. The workforce used to be very stable but contractors are losing staff they thought they would never lose, particularly in the last six months. Officers who have worked in housing for many years and has never known the industry in the situation it is now. Pressures are Brexit, Covid, fuel prices, shortages of labour and materials and now the situation in the Ukraine.

Feedback and residents' voice

Housing associations and the council explained their procedures if residents are not happy with the speed and quality of repairs. They also explained how residents had a voice, something which has become more important since the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017.

Abri aim to resolve problems by improving the first point of contact before they reach the complaints stage. Call agents are empowered to investigate issues and prioritise repairs; they have access to the diary management system for trades. If the repair cannot be done in-house external trades will be used. If residents are still not happy then they can go through the complaints stage. There is constant dialogue with residents to minimise disruption. Abri have launched a community investment strategy around employment, empowerment and wellbeing with activities around Landport and Southsea. Teams will be developing local panels to listen better and a resident scrutiny panel will look at outcomes. Customers can also express their views via webchats. Abri is launching a new housing services strategy in mid-March.

Guinness' complaints procedure is similar to that of Abri. Guinness do a lot of transactional surveys to see if there are any outstanding issues or to see if the service provided was not as expected. The number of service managers is being increased as they have more contact with customers. The longer and more complicated repairs is where there is failure to keep customers informed. Much feedback is about communication on longer jobs so that is Guinness' focus in the next three months. Residents will get a call from an operational support or a service manager as to what could have been done better. Residents' groups are based around blocks or higher density units so there is a need to focus on more scattered units.

Sanctuary has a very similar formal complaints process to Abri and Guinness. There is frontline resolution for the housing and repairs services. If a customer is not happy Sanctuary will work with them to see what they can do to help. There is also a formal complaints service. Sanctuary has very specific teams within the repairs team who prioritise calls, for example, the Wellbeing Team ensures repairs for vulnerable customers are on track, and the Incident Team deals with matters like a broken lift in a block. There is a national residents' scrutiny panel so residents can get involved in decision making at all levels. However, arrangements will change in the light of the Social Housing White Paper.

Sanctuary said they would examine in detail the issues raised by residents at one of the informal meetings held as part of the review. They would also carry out a separate exercise looking at repairs since lockdown.

The council also hope complaints do not reach the formal stage. Officers analyse demand to see where the failure and value demand is. The highest failure demand is contractors not turning up. Customer satisfaction surveys are also used. The complaints process has two stages: stage 1 is where one of the management team investigates and stage 2 is undertaken by the Head of Building Maintenance although not many reach stage 2. After stage 2 the next stage is the Housing Ombudsman. The council tries to learn from complaints and see if there are common themes or systematic issues in order to address them. It is keen to reach as wide a range of residents as possible to get a wide range of feedback. There is the Residents' Consortium and a repairs focus group. Feedback from residents can be by phone or email and not just meetings.

Abri said repairs can be lengthy and involve repeated visits where they involve other properties, for example, a leak in a ground floor flat means accessing other flats. Feedback is very data driven and is used to identify the top 10% properties where repairs are over and above the normal rate, for instance, a boiler that keeps breaking down or an ongoing leak. Other issues might be identified such in the processes for mutual exchanges or voids. Feedback is a learning process and there are monthly meetings with the repairs team. There might be problems with components such as a particular make of boiler or tap. Guinness acknowledges the frustration caused by lengthy repairs so examines the feedback from call agents in more detail to identify the source of problems.

Guinness replaces a component or does direct replacement if a repair fails. They do not want to send people out four or five times when it is logical to invest in a replacement. In addition, repeated visits mean other customers wait longer. More control over planned budgeting gives more control over what can be spent. Service managers visit to see why a repair has not worked and can recommend a replacement.

Sanctuary is building new software, "One Property", which records all the information on one system so when an operative visits a property they can see its history so are empowered to see what is the best action for the customer. For example, if there is a history of repeated repairs to a boiler the operative can see that a replacement is better.

The council has a similar process. A member of the management team not involved in the original issue with the repair. Data is key so the council keeps a whole host of

data on visits, including for properties where residents do not ask despite needing repairs. The council carries out targeted stock surveys. The trades are technical people who ask at the time of the visit if any other repairs need doing. Even if trades are doing a routine service they have a responsibility to ask if there are other issues.

Workforce - recruitment and retention

For Abri employment and being part of the organisation is a pivotal part of their offer. A recent recruitment fair at a local hotel attracted eight new recruits. Next year Abri are investing resources locally, particularly around EV electricians and retrofitting, as they want people to have a career in housing. 47 apprentice roles are budgeted for. Abri can signpost people to other vacancies if they do not have a particular role. Recruitment costs such as a venue for a jobs event could be shared between organisations.

Guinness said if there were 100 jobs there would only be about five to ten people to fill them so it is a tough market place. Even during Covid people moved from trades based jobs. Guinness are looking at schools and colleges to "grow their own" and providing apprenticeships.

It is a similar situation with the council. It is increasingly important for contractors to provide social value. People need to be recruited at an early stage of their working life. The council "grows" its own chartered building surveyors and now has the strongest team in years. As those present have similar issues perhaps they could work together. Skillsets need to change so that they incorporate new technologies such as retrofitting.

Supply chain and costs

As well as problems with staff shortages, all providers have been experiencing difficulties with materials. Abri had recently carried out a procurement exercise because of rising costs and consolidated their suppliers into three. The benefit of leveraging costs has reduced the cost base and saved up to £1m. Social value, for example, providing apprenticeships, is enhanced as Abri is spending more money with them. A shortage of materials (currently wood because of the storms) has led to a backlog but it is easing now. Materials are more accessible but prices have increased by up to 15 to 20%. Other benefits are that if planned maintenance is done it is cheaper than frequent repairs, for example, replacing a whole window rather than keep repairing it.

Guinness said the cost increase was 15% across the board but is 9% for this year. Guinness has the same issues as other organisations but it is disappointing to have to compete for the same people. Sanctuary knew from speaking to customers that there were delays with materials.

The council is experiencing a similar situation with increases of 10 to 15% across the board with some massively more in some areas than others. It examines what the key items of stock are and where they are (warehouses or vans) and how often they are used. Managing materials is more work for the contractors. The council has regular meetings with the three contractors. Pay is one of the issues discussed as they do not want people leaving. Officers suggested the council and housing associations meet collectively to set Portsmouth levels around pay and green issues amongst others, and to share knowledge.

Conclusions

Based on the evidence and views it received during the review process the panel has come to the following conclusions:

1. Noted that having a telephone menu option where callers can speak directly to repairs is good practice as it removes unnecessary stages in communication and reduces fragmentation.
2. Noted that council tenants are generally satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service. The low level of complaints received by the Housing service is to be commended.
3. Noted that when visiting a property to carry out a repair it is good practice to ask if there are any other repairs that need doing and either do them then or arrange a time for later.
4. Noted that the shortages of labour and materials are causing significant and unprecedented problems across the housing sector.

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations:

1. To request the Leader and the Chief Executive to thank Kevin Beagley, Paul Fielding, Steve Groves, James Hill and Meredydd Hughes, all other Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services officers involved in the review and the officers that attended from the housing associations.
2. To collaborate with other local housing providers to upskill the local workforce, including in green technologies, and promote career paths in housing to address problems with recruitment and retention.
3. To meet collectively with other local housing providers to set Portsmouth levels around pay and green issues (such as retrofitting) amongst others, and to share knowledge.
4. To ensure there are instructions for appliances in individual properties and communal areas.
5. To consider feedback mechanisms where residents are not under immediate pressure to give feedback.
6. To continue the residents' meetings for council tenants that used to be held before Covid.
7. The panel noted that the council's repairs and maintenance contractors had continued to deliver as close to a normal repairs and maintenance service as safely possible throughout the pandemic. Whilst the housing associations participating conceded they were now dealing with backlogs the council's position was different and the panel requests that the Leader and Chief

Executive place on record a note of thanks for the council's repairs and maintenance contractors and the Building Services team for their efforts throughout the pandemic.

Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated impact assessment would be carried out when the Cabinet makes its decisions based on the recommendations set out in this report.

Budget and policy implications of the recommendations

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the panel:

	Recommendation	Action By	Budget & Policy Framework	Resource Implications
1	To request the Leader and the Chief Executive to thank Kevin Beagley, Paul Fielding, Steve Groves, James Hill and Meredydd Hughes, all other Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services officers involved in the review and the officers that attended from the housing associations.	Cllr Cal Corkery	Within existing framework	None
2	To collaborate with other local housing providers to upskill the local workforce, including in green technologies, and promote career paths in housing to address problems with recruitment and retention.	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services	Within existing framework	None
3	To meet collectively with other local housing providers to set Portsmouth levels around pay and green issues (such as retrofitting) amongst others, and to share knowledge.	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services	Within existing framework	None
4	To ensure there are instructions for appliances in individual properties and communal areas.	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services	Within existing framework	None
5	To consider feedback mechanisms where residents are not under immediate pressure to give feedback	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services	Within existing framework	None
6	To resume the residents' meetings for council tenants that used to be held before Covid.	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services	Within existing framework	None
7	To the Leader and Chief Executive place on record a note of thanks for the council's repairs and maintenance contractors and the Building Services team for their efforts throughout the pandemic to deliver as close to a normal repairs and maintenance service as safely possible.	Leader and Chief Executive	Within existing framework	None

Appendix 1

A list of meetings held by the panel and details of the written evidence received

Meeting Date	Witnesses
25 November 2021	Steve Groves Head of Building Maintenance, PCC Meredydd Hughes Assistant Director of Buildings, PCC
1 February 2022	Resident, a representative of the council's Residents' Consortium Steve Groves Head of Building Maintenance, PCC Meredydd Hughes Assistant Director of Buildings, PCC
4 February 2022	Six residents - council tenants, including two representatives from the Residents' Consortium Six residents - housing association tenants Steve Groves Head of Building Maintenance, PCC Meredydd Hughes Assistant Director of Buildings, PCC
4 March 2022	<u>Abri Housing Association</u> Colin Gallaughar - Commercial Director Ralph Facey - Executive Director of Operations <u>Guinness Partnership Housing Association</u> Andrew Godwin - Regional Head of Service Richard King - Regional Commercial Manager <u>Sanctuary Housing Association</u> Adele Lees, Area Manager - Housing (South West) Steve Groves Head of Building Maintenance, PCC Meredydd Hughes Assistant Director of Buildings, PCC
24 March 2022	The panel signed off the report.

Appendix 2

Portsmouth City Council - Value Steps

Repairs Service - Value Steps

Value Steps (Employer or Contractor)	Description
Access (Employer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take repair request from customer (telephone call, email or in person)• Confirm repair request falls within the <i>Employer's</i> repair responsibility and scope of service for the Affected Property• Research any previous history relating to reported repair(s)• Identify any relevant projects and liaise with <i>Employer's</i> project team as required• Establish other needs of the Affected Property such as out of date electrical or gas certificates only if they fall within the <i>Employer's</i> repair responsibility and scope of service• Identify a convenient date and time, from the customer, for someone to attend the repair<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If the customer states, they are flexible then a mutually convenient date and time should be agreed and documented as the appointment○ If it is a repair where no customer or <i>Employer</i> staff member needs to be present and there is no reason to carry the repair out immediately, e.g. health and safety, the <i>Contractor</i> can allocate the appointment in the <i>Employer's</i> repairs ICT system to help smooth operative utilisation• Identify all repairs that the customer may have within the <i>Employer's</i> repair responsibility and scope of service for the Affected Property• Identify relevant information relating to the repair(s) to enable the right skilled resource(s) to be sent with the right materials and equipment, e.g. van stock• Update the <i>Employer's</i> repairs ICT system with relevant repair and appointment detail to ensure timely information is available to all• Telephone the repair through to the <i>Contractor</i> and confirms details handed over cleanly

Value Steps (Employer or Contractor)	Description
<p>Diagnosis (Contractor)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise the work to minimise the number of separate appointments required • Resource receives one repair at a time from Contractor resource centre • Update Employer's repair and maintenance ICT system, including stock data as required, with information that relates to the purpose of the service and without hand-off after receiving information • Assign the right resource(s) to meet, convenient to customer, timed appointment(s) • Resource receives information about the repair including relevant repair history, the status of relevant projects, relevant information regarding the customer and the Employer's repair responsibility and scope of service for the Affected Property • Capable resource arrives at the Affected Property at the appointed time with a van stocked to meet the predictable demands of repairs they will attend • Diagnosis carried out by the right resource once they have gained access to the repair • Identify what actually needs fixing • Identify any additional repairs the customer may have and what needs fixing within the repair responsibility and scope of service for the Affected Property • Get prior approval from the Employer to proceed with repair(s) if work is estimated to exceed limit for the Affected Property • Employer issues 'Schedule 3 - Part 21 - Repair Authorisation Instruction' to Contractor • Assess time required to complete repair(s) and inform occupant and Contractor's resource controller • If required, arrange convenient follow-on appointments (see Access) and base on knowledge of material lead times and intervals between repair actions, e.g. reinstating electrics after water damage
<p>Repair (Contractor)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For repairs that fit within the scope of the Contractor's service with the Employer, inform the resource centre of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrival time ○ Estimated departure

Value Steps (Employer or Contractor)	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Additional part/material required and when, if not picking up ○ Additional resource required and when ● For repairs that fall outside the scope of the <i>Contractor's</i> service with the <i>Employer</i> for the Affected Property, the <i>Contractor</i> will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ assist the customer in reporting these repairs to the <i>Employer</i> or Others, as appropriate ○ assist in providing any relevant diagnosis information commensurate with their skills and experience ● Keep customer informed throughout ● Carry out repair and inform resource centre of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work carried out ○ Parts/materials used ○ Any follow-up appointments agreed with customer ● For repairs that are likely to exceed their specific authorisation level, the resource seeks further approval to proceed from the <i>Employer</i> ● <i>Employer</i> issues 'Schedule 3 - Part 21 - Repair Authorisation Instruction' to <i>Contractor</i> ● If all the occupant's repairs are complete, then the operative asks <i>Employer's</i> customer satisfaction questions and feeds back to resource centre ● Update <i>Employers</i> repairs and maintenance ICT systems with relevant information about the repair undertaken, using keywords, and stock data where appropriate

Out of Hours Service - Value Steps

Value Steps (<i>Employer or Contractor</i>)	Description
Decide (<i>Employer</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get customer details • Get location and description of demand • Check history relevant to demand • Decide service to be provided out of hours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide suitable help out of office hours ○ Right repair at the right time ○ Provide suitable homes when needed ○ Keep the local area clean and tidy ○ Provide the right accommodation, support and care when needed
Coordinate (<i>Employer</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an appointment that we can meet • Coordinate resource to attend • Right resource (<i>Employer and/or Contractor</i>) attends with right skills and materials, assessing what service to provide out of office hours and asks if there are any other problems • Resource liaises with the customer and Out of Hours Officer • Resource provides out of hours service (not just 'make safe') • Resource asks customer for satisfaction score for out of hours service and any feedback • Resource updates Out of Hours Officer • Out of Hours Officer liaises with <i>Employer</i> and <i>Contractor</i> in hours' teams