

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

**Date:** 25/07/2023

**Subject:** Housing Repairs Improvement Plan

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## SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive overview of our Repairs Improvement Plan, initiated to address identified shortfalls in our repair services and complaints management. Confronting the accumulated repair backlog, we've integrated strategies such as enlisting additional contractors and implementing a proactive work in progress reduction plan.

Our complaints procedure has undergone significant enhancements, aimed at addressing residents' concerns more effectively and promptly. Central to this endeavour is the Housing Hub, a single, unified approach/team designed to handle repairs, complaints, and other wider housing issues. This hub seeks to improve our overall operational efficiency and service delivery by creating a more streamlined process for our team.

The Repairs Improvement Plan is also introducing an enhanced feature known as "Home MOT". This aims to provide a suite of additional home services, ensuring the inhabitant's dwelling remains fully functional and fit for purpose. This offer specifically caters to those who have previously raised a legitimate complaint and this initiative is dedicated to cultivating a culture of prompt and effective problem resolution, ensuring residents feel valued and their concerns are attended to swiftly.

Above all, the report underscores our ongoing commitment to better serve our residents by continuously refining our service. The strategies outlined in this report are not short-term solutions but part of an overarching effort to establish a sustainable model for our service. Our aim is to ensure long-term improvements in the quality and efficiency of our housing service, centred around the needs and experiences of our residents.

Over the last three months, we have appointed a dedicated Head of Repairs, Steven Holmes and in addition, we have also recruited a new Assistant Director of Repairs; John Hayden, who has recently joined us at the beginning of July.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Committee to note this report.

## **1. Introduction**

In response to the challenges we've faced in our repair services and complaints management, we have started a comprehensive journey to improve our service and have developed a Repairs Improvement Plan (**Appendix A**). This plan presents our commitment to rectify previous shortcomings and improve the resident experience.

This plan includes how we are tackling the repair backlog head-on with our proactive works in progress (WIP) reduction strategy and by onboarding additional contractors. It also notes how we are enhancing our complaints process, and how we've introduced a Home MOT offer, which provides additional services, fostering a culture where residents feel valued and their concerns addressed promptly and effectively.

At the heart of our Housing Repairs Improvement plan is the establishment of the Housing Hub, which streamlines repairs, complaints handling, and broader housing issues under one umbrella. The hub creates an integrated and more efficient approach to delivering resident-centred service.

This report outlines our ongoing improvement efforts setting out, our commitment to providing an excellent housing service and provides an overview of the Repairs Improvement Plan.

## **2. Background**

Understanding the past difficulties of our housing repairs service provides a critical foundation in developing our comprehensive improvement plan. A key area of concern has been the repairs backlog. Several external factors have contributed to this such as the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns and the unexpected departure of key contractors, which have fuelled an excessive number of repair requests.

## **3. Strategy for Repairs and Improvements in Housing Services**

Our strategy is wide ranging and includes significant investment, strengthening leadership and staffing, effective contractor management, improvements in operations and culture, continued stringent safety compliance, and rigorous corporate oversight and performance management. It includes six key interventions designed to make immediate and long-term service improvements including:

### **a. Significant Investment and Resourcing**

We have made a significant financial commitment to improve residents' homes, with £600 million being invested over the next ten years for repairing and enhancing homes. This financial provision aims not merely to tackle existing repair requests in a timely manner but also to inhibit the creation of new backlogs.

### **b. Strengthened Leadership, Enhanced Staffing and Active Recruitment**

Our housing leadership team has been augmented with new senior housing specialists, including roles specifically added to the Repairs team. There's a dedicated Assistant Director for Residents and Building Safety, new Direct Labour

Organisation (DLO) operatives and additional contractors and surveyors; to help promptly address repairs including leaks and plumbing. All housing leadership and frontline teams are participating in a cultural development programme to deliver a resident-centric approach with better complaints handling.

#### c. Rigorous Contractor Management and Backlog Reduction

We have thoroughly revised our contractor management approach, ensuring accountability from our contractors, Morgan Sindall and Mears, for below par workmanship. There are weekly head of service meetings, monthly Director meetings and regular direct communication with the Managing Directors of both companies. We have developed a robust strategy to reduce our housing repairs WIP and backlog.

#### d. Operational, Cultural, and Policy Enhancements

We are improving our housing service culture, processes and systems to deliver prompt and effective repair services, underpinned by exceptional customer service. This is informed by valuable resident feedback via our Fire Building Safety and Repairs Working Group and Housing Representatives Forum to refine our policies and procedures. Moreover, we have instigated a Proactive Emergency Management system and a Complaint Reduction Strategy to streamline our response to emergencies and complaints, ensuring immediate and effective action.

#### e. Quality Assurance and Rigorous Safety Compliance

To maintain the highest standards of repair and refurbishment, we have introduced an automated post-inspection form that simplifies our procedures and provides comprehensive audit reports. We diligently continue to adhere to the "Big 6" safety elements (which are Fire, Asbestos, Gas, Electrical, Legionella and Lifts) to meet or surpass mandatory safety requirements for resident buildings, ensuring our residents live in safe, secure homes. Recent internal and external audits together with further assurance by Pennington's have demonstrated that we are achieving compliance across these key areas. We are also undertaking the necessary compliance actions as a result of the Building Safety Act which requires registering all high-rise buildings with the respective regulator by September 2023.

#### f. Enhanced Corporate Oversight

We have bolstered corporate oversight of our repairs and complaints handling through the establishment of a corporate Housing Taskforce and regular reporting to the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and Cabinet Member. This is supplemented by initiating increased engagement with our residents to listen and co-produce rapid improvements in the repairs and wider housing services.

Through these multifaceted interventions our goal is to transform the quality of our repair and refurbishment services, thereby ensuring our residents enjoy safe, comfortable, and well-maintained homes.

#### **4. Complaints Management Strategy in Housing Services**

Recognising the necessity for a more efficient and robust complaints handling mechanism, we are committed to bringing about substantial changes to our existing approach. The is to boost our efficiency in dealing with issues raised by our residents. This section outlines the key strategies and initiatives we have put into motion to rectify our identified shortfalls in complaints handling.

##### **a. Single Complaints Team**

In our efforts to streamline the process of complaint resolution, we have amalgamated all housing complaints within a single, dedicated unit known as the Hub, as mentioned above. Our objective in creating this unit is to centralise complaint handling, promoting better coordination among our staff, and ensuring complaints are dealt with in a timelier manner.

In addition to The Hub, a dedicated resolution team has been established to deal with all cases that reach the Housing Ombudsman. The resolution team, comprising experienced and specially trained staff members, stands ready to engage with more complex and escalated complaints. This two-pronged approach – dedicated complaints team for general complaints and the resolution team for escalated cases – serves to enhance our capacity to resolve complaints promptly and effectively.

##### **b. Consistent Complaints Handling**

To ensure uniformity and enhance our efficiency in handling complaints, we have developed and implemented a proactive, standardised approach. This applies to both Stage 1 complaints (those initially raised) and Stage 2 complaints (those escalated due to non-resolution at Stage 1).

We believe that such an approach will accelerate the resolution process and ensure fair treatment for all residents.

##### **c. Proactive Culture**

An essential pillar of our complaints management strategy is a proactive complaint handling culture within our team. We believe that continuous training and skill development are key to building such a culture. We have launched a comprehensive training programme, designed to upskill our team members, and prepare them to handle complaints effectively.

The training includes proactive complaint handling, empathy in communication, recognising resident vulnerabilities, and understanding the regulatory landscape. We aim to equip our team members with the necessary tools to handle complaints proactively and deliver satisfactory resolutions swiftly.

#### d. Resident-Centric Approach

We are placing the residents' needs and feedback at the centre. Our approach will ensure that resident vulnerabilities are identified proactively, and services tailored appropriately. We are upgrading our record-keeping systems, ensuring every complaint is accurately logged, tracked, and analysed.

These improved records help with individual complaint tracking and help identify recurrent or systemic issues, to prevent similar future complaints. Regular in-service audits help to spotlight areas that need further improvement.

Through these initiatives, we will provide swifter, fairer resolutions to our residents' complaints.

### **5. The Housing Hub - An Integrated Approach to Service Improvement**

At the core of our strategy is the establishment of a dedicated team within the Housing Hub, tasked with analysing our complaints and repairs systems. The aim of this is to improve service delivery and resident satisfaction.

#### a. Services offered by the Housing Hub

The Hub addresses critical issues spanning across complaint management, enhancement of repair services, safeguarding measures, tackling overcrowding, and mitigating fuel poverty.

#### b. Introduction of an MOT Offer

In an effort to enhance our complaint resolution process, we will be implementing a new initiative from Autumn 2023. If a complaint is validated, the involved residents will be promptly offered a "Home MOT" service. This unique service includes a series of supplementary measures designed to ensure their homes remain up to standard. By swiftly addressing the residents' concerns, we hope to cultivate a more trusting relationship and enhance the overall satisfaction with our services.

### **6. Conclusion and Next Steps**

The housing service is prioritising significant improvements to its repairs service and complaint handling. We want to ensure timely and appropriate support is given to our residents, particularly those with vulnerabilities, so that they can enjoy a safe and secure home in Hammersmith and Fulham.