



ADUR & WORTHING COUNCILS

Scrutiny review of the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance service

Report by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 'Adur Homes' is the Council team responsible for Adur District Council's social housing stock. This report from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Working Group has reviewed the performance and areas of work of the Repairs and Maintenance service of 'Adur Homes' following concerns about the performance of the service.
- 1.2 This report sets out the findings and recommendations from the JOSC Working Group which was established as part of the JOSC Work Programme in 2019 to review the performance of the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance service.
- 1.3 The Working Group report proposes a number of recommendations to be put to the Adur Executive/Adur Executive Member for Customer Services to improve the Repairs and Maintenance service and the processes.

2.0 Background and context to the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance service

- 2.1 Adur District Council, under the team name 'Adur Homes', is responsible for managing the Adur District Council social housing stock which contains the following:-
 - 2509 tenanted properties
 - 518 leasehold properties
 - 288 sheltered housing properties
 - 1077 garages
- 2.2 The Repairs and Maintenance service of 'Adur Homes' has been undergoing some change over a number of years. Details of the most recent changes to improve the service are set out later in this report. To assist in the delivery of the service a new Responsive Repairs Policy has also been drafted and is

currently subject to consultation for approval in Autumn 2020. A repair guide was due to be produced as well as a new Fire Safety policy being in place and a Gas servicing policy being provided. It was recognised, however, that there was still some way to go before the desired performance level and standards could be achieved.

2.3 The number of repairs and maintenance jobs undertaken by the Service between July 2019 and May 2020 (22,289) had almost doubled compared with July 2018 and June 2019 (11,933) and further analysis was needed to understand how many repair requests this related to and the impact on the service. More than half of all the repairs reported between June 2019 and May 2020 were reported through the Council Customer Contact centre. Repairs being reported via the new digital repairs portal had increased in 2019/20 by 10%.

2.4 Previously, in February 2019, the findings from an Internal Audit report into the

Housing Repairs service and the internal control processes and procedures relating to this service had been released. The Audit had been requested by the former Head of Housing following concerns in respect of repairs processes and the nil assurance Audit report which had been received in respect of void properties. The audit report findings gave only limited assurance and commented that there are weaknesses in the system of internal controls which are such to put the Council objectives at risk and a level of non compliance which also put the Council objectives at risk.

2.5 In March 2019 a scrutiny request was made to the JOSC asking for it to investigate and review the Adur Homes repairs and maintenance service in more detail following claims from Tenants and Councillors who were concerned about response times and the difficulty of communicating with housing staff on repairs/maintenance issues. It was considered that there was a need to establish better lines of communication with tenants and review whether staffing levels are adequate or not. The scrutiny request also wanted an improved service to tenants with greater tenant satisfaction.

3.0 Background to the JOSC Review

3.1 As part of the JOSC Work Programme for 2019/20, JOSC agreed to set up a Working Group to review the Repairs and Maintenance service and to consider ways that the service could be improved. Councillors Catherine Arnold, Kevin Boram, Stephen Chipp, Paul Mansfield, Andy McGregor and Lavinia O'Connor were originally appointed to the Working Group and Councillor Deb Stainforth was appointed as a co-opted Member. Due to membership changes of the main JOSC Councillors McGregor and O'Connor stepped down from the Working Group in 2020/21 and Councillor Stainforth became a full member of the Working Group.

3.2 The Working Group has held a number of meetings to gather evidence and formulate findings and recommendations in June, July and September 2019 and February and July 2020. In October 2019 the Working Group also visited the Council Contact Centre, to listen to tenants calls about repairs and maintenance issues and the Repairs and Maintenance Depot at Commerce Way to speak with the Team.

3.3 The Working Group discussed and agreed the following Terms of Reference and project objectives for the review:-

1. To review the performance of the Adur Homes repairs and maintenance service, including the value for money, and to understand the reasons for that performance;

2. To review the recommendations/proposed action plan from the recent Audit of the repairs and maintenance service and the work being undertaken by Adur Homes to mitigate the risks identified in the Audit;

3. To question the Adur Executive Member for Customer Services and Senior Council Officers on the level of the Adur Homes repairs and maintenance service and the response times for the service and communications provided to the tenants on this service;

4. To consider if there is a need for any recommendations to be put to the Adur Executive/Executive Member for Customer Services to improve the service and the processes.

Outcomes expected - A better understanding of the Adur Homes repairs and maintenance service and confidence that a satisfactory service will be provided within a reasonable timescale.

4.0 Method of the review

4.1 From the start of the review, the Working Group wanted to ensure that it was briefed on as much background and information relating to the Repairs and Maintenance service as possible.

4.2 The Working Group has held evidence gathering meetings with the following witnesses:-

Mary D'Arcy, Former Director for Communities, Adur & Worthing Councils
Catherine Howe, Director for Communities, Adur & Worthing Councils
(July 2020)

Akin Akinyebo, Head of Housing, Adur & Worthing Councils

Anthony Alexander, Housing Operations Manager, Adur & Worthing Councils

Councillor Carson Albury, Executive Member for Customer Services, Adur District Council

Dave Donaldson, Paula Kinsella and Pauline Jeffery, (Tenants and Members of the former Adur Consultative Forum - ACF).

- 4.3 This report has also been shared with Jill Lennon, the Chairperson of the Adur Tenants Forum.

5.0 Improvements to the delivery of the Repairs and Maintenance service

- 5.1 The Working Group has held discussions with the former Director for Communities, Mary D'Arcy, Head of Housing, Akin Akinbeyo, and Adur District

Council Executive Member for Customer Services, Councillor Carson Albury. Discussions have also been held more recently with the new Director for Communities, Catherine Howe. As part of these discussions the Working Group have been briefed on the improvements being made to improve the delivery of the maintenance and repairs service to Adur Homes residents.

- 5.2 Since July 2019 a new staffing structure had been implemented with five new roles created, three of which had been filled but at the time of writing this report, the other two had been paused due to Covid-19 lockdown issues but the recruitment process had recently restarted.

- 5.3 Since January 2020, the Housing Operations Manager had focused mainly on driving through improvements in the maintenance and repairs teams. A Repairs and Modernisation Manager had been recruited in place of the Building Services Manager who was responsible for the inhouse repair team. The officer reported direct to the Housing Operations Manager and brought a wealth of experience running in-house repairs services. Line management of the multi trade operatives was now split between an Assistant Business Support Manager and two chargehands. A Fire Safety Manager had been recruited to oversee fire safety works and a Compliance Health & Safety Officer would be recruited to assist the manager. Recruitment for a fourth maintenance officer was underway.

- 5.4 A new Repairs & Modernisation Manager had also been appointed to improve the Service. Focus had been on recruitment. There had been improvements in the online reporting system with the number of repairs reported through the repairs portal increasing by 10%. More than half of all repairs reported between June 2019 and May 2020 were through the Customer Service Centre and a third were reported by Housing staff.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

- 6.1 The Working Group would like to thank the Tenants who contributed to the evidence for this review, Senior Council Officers, the Adur District Council Executive Member for Customer Services and members of the Customer

Contact Centre and Repairs and Maintenance Teams for their support and invaluable contributions to this review.

- 6.2 Appendix A to this report includes some background information to support the thinking behind the report and its recommendations. During the Working Group's work it has become evident that Adur Homes provides a key service within the community. In addition it was noted that Adur Homes has delivered a number of successes which have made a real positive impact to the Adur community. This includes the Open Doors initiative and the implementation of an effective homeless policy both pre Covid and safeguarding the homeless during the pandemic. The Working Group has also been briefed on the changes that have been made and are being made to the delivery of the repairs and maintenance service. The Working Group recognises and accepts that the full improvement of the repairs and maintenance service is not a quick process and will take time to deliver.
- 6.3 The Working Group, however, strongly recommends that the Adur District Council Executive Member for Customer Services and senior officers put in place a transformation programme that sets out a timetable to implement the following improvements to Adur Homes core business of the provision of social housing. It is further recommended that the transformation programme is endorsed by the Joint Strategic Committee and appropriate progress reporting is implemented in order to ensure that decisions are made to support this transformation programme on a timely basis.
- 6.4 Given the significant nature of the transformation programme the Working Group recommends that JOSOC continues to closely monitor the performance of Adur Homes.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 That Adur District Council review and implement an appropriate governance structure within Adur District Council to include the appropriate senior officers responsible for delivering key Adur Homes functions.**

Reason - The Adur Homes Management Board, responsible for overseeing and setting the delivery of the strategic objectives of Adur Homes, has not met for nearly a year which the Working Group considers is unacceptable and, therefore, a revised governance structure is required in order to ensure that there is regular oversight and scrutiny of the running of the Adur Homes business.

- 7.2 That Adur District Council ensure that an effective Planned Maintenance Programme and strategy is developed and implemented to deliver a sustainable renewal, repairs and maintenance regime**

Reason - In order to improve the overall quality of the Adur Homes housing stock so that it all meets appropriate standards. Thorough tracking of day to day repairs will ensure that the Programme is informed and flexibility in the system will ensure that new urgent work does not allow the programmed work to slip. The strategy should identify the appropriate levels of maintenance and repair in addition to setting out a renewal/ replacement programme.

7.3 That Adur District Council identify and implement key performance measures that can be used to monitor the adequacy of service and signpost areas for improvement.

Reason - To ensure that performance can be monitored more closely so that all Departments have a clear idea on faults and direction of travel.

7.4 That Adur District Council continue to implement improvements to maintenance and repairs processes to ensure prompt delivery of services and value for money.

Reason - To help create a more efficient and effective service for Adur Homes residents.

7.5 That Adur District Council implement a revised strategy to improve tenants' timely engagement with Adur Homes. This should include a revised Tenants' Manual which sets out the expectations of both tenants and Adur Homes (including such things as agreed timescales for repairs) and should involve customer journey mapping and the use of the Customer Services Effortless programme to gather customer feedback to help improve the service.

Reason - To improve engagement and consultation with Adur Homes residents and to help in the overall service design process by having the active involvement of Adur Homes residents. This will help in the delivery of the service and make it work better for residents. Customer feedback is essential to help improve the service.

7.6 Continue to improve the voids process which both increases the revenues to Adur Homes but also more importantly reduces the waiting list for social housing.

Reason - To help increase revenue to the Council, reduce spend on temporary accommodation and to help free up properties for occupation by people in need of housing.

7.7 That the JOSC agrees to keep this Working Group constituted for monitoring purposes.

Reason - To ensure that there is additional ongoing oversight and scrutiny of the proposed improvements to the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance

service and to ensure that the recommendations in this report are being actioned.

**Local Government Act 1972
Background Papers:**

None

Contact Officer:

Councillor Stephen Chipp
Chairman of the JOSCS Adur Homes Repairs & Maintenance Working Group
Shoreham Centre,
Shoreham-by-Sea
stephen.chipp@adur.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group on the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance Service

Background information to support the thinking in the report and the recommendations

This appendix sets out key examples of issues identified during various site visits, including the call centre and operations centre and interviews with the Executive Member for Customer Services, senior officers and tenants. The matters identified are symptomatic of the key recommendations included in the report.

Fundamental issues:

(a) Stock Condition

We note that a number of stock condition reports have been prepared identifying the significant amount of work that needs to be undertaken on Adur Homes housing stock. The quantum of this work is significant, but we note that a strategy to deal with the backlog of repairs, maintenance and renewals has not been developed and the stock condition reports are a few years out of date now. This has led to difficulty in identifying the most appropriate maintenance programme to be delivered. The Stock Condition reports should be brought up to date with a view as to whether stock is cost effective to repair, or redevelop and prioritisation judged against Adur homes waiting list, health/ mental health issues and temporary re-housing.

(b) Tenants' Handbook

The Working Group notes that a revised draft handbook has been in preparation for some time. The timetable for its production and the method of engaging with tenants

is unclear and incomplete. We recommend that once a clear transformation and maintenance and renewal strategies are developed a consultation programme is implemented to ensure that the Handbook adequately reflects the relationship between Adur Homes and its tenants.

(c) Performance Monitoring

There are no effective Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) being monitored for this service. This makes monitoring performance and taking corrective action difficult to achieve. This would have identified that the process for handling tenants' enquiries and implementing the required maintenance and renewals programme was unduly complex and inefficient.

The Working Group considers that frontline staff should be involved in the production of these performance measures.

(d) Contract Management

Both the Working Group and Internal Audit found multiple occasions where it is evident that repairs and renewals were completed where value for money was not obtained. Whilst it is noted that certain steps have been taken to improve this matter, further steps need to ensure that optimal value for money is obtained from both the internal and external providers of this service.

(e) Service Standards

Without a Tenants' Handbook, tenants, staff and Councillors have significant difficulty in identifying whether an appropriate service is being delivered on a timely basis as expectations of the level of service is judgmental and open to interpretation. This would also increase trust between all parties. As a simple example, Councilors were promised that all of their queries would receive a response within 10 days. This has failed to occur, nor do Councillors know how many queries are being delivered in that timescale.

(f) Management of calls and enquiries

The Working Group noted that the process of managing callers enquiries is overly complex and often requires input from staff based in a different office. This increases the risk of:

1. Errors being made; and
2. The provision of an inefficient service.

The transformation programme should set out a process of identifying what and how an effective service should be provided.