

Subject:	Housing Repairs Update		
Date of Meeting:	17 November 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Martin Reid	Tel: 01273 29 6806
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Ward(s) affected:	All wards		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Housing Repairs & Maintenance staff have worked throughout the pandemic, including the lockdowns, to provide tenants with an essential repairs service. The service has managed to operate well despite these challenges, particularly in response to emergency repairs.
- 1.2 However, a backlog of routine repairs has been caused by a combination of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and staffing levels below the required level to complete the typical number of jobs raised each month. This has been subject to previous reports to Housing Committee and highlighted through our regular performance reports.
- 1.3 The last update on Housing Repairs and Maintenance performance was considered by Housing Committee on 22 September 2021, and at the preceding round of resident Area Panels. More detail on this report is provided in paragraph 3.14. There will be a further performance update report for consideration at January 2022 Housing Committee and preceding resident Area Panels.
- 1.4 In addition to quarterly performance reports there were substantive Housing Repairs & Maintenance service updates reported to Housing Committee on 16 September 2020 and 20 January 2021 which both addressed the issue of the repairs backlog.
- 1.5 This report is provided in response to member requests for a further update on progress and next steps on addressing the backlog of housing repairs.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee note progress and next steps with regard to addressing the backlog of housing repairs.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The insourcing of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service was completed on 1 April 2020 during the first national Covid lockdown. The service transferred with approximately 1500 repairs in progress. 132 Mears staff transferred to the council as part of the new Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service. This was fewer staff than anticipated would join the council.
- 3.2 In line with Government Covid-19 pandemic guidance during the first lockdown, the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service was only carrying out essential repairs to council housing, health and safety maintenance checks, and repairs to empty properties where possible until July 2020. A safety led approach was implemented to ensure that works were only carried out with the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), risk assessments were in place, and social distancing protocols followed for the safety of residents, staff, and contractors. Due to the delivery of a limited repairs and maintenance service owing to Covid-19, many staff were also furloughed.
- 3.3 During this period, repairs were still being reported and booked but due to Covid restrictions only essential works actioned. This created a backlog of routine repairs across most trades and was first reported to Housing Committee on 16 September 2020.
- 3.4 From July 2020 the definition of essential repairs was expanded for all trade teams to include repairs that, if left unattended in the long term, would have an impact on the residents and on properties. Examples were heating and hot water repairs, containable leaks, and condensation wash downs.
- 3.5 However, Covid 19 provisions continued to apply. Risk assessments were developed for all situations where work would be undertaken, and the identification of Covid-19 cases and vulnerable or extremely vulnerable occupants was undertaken by repairs desk staff asking several questions to identify the particular circumstances of the occupants before raising a repair. This enabled the service to operate different risk assessment protocols and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment.
- 3.6 Operatives were not attending to any non-essential repairs in properties where the occupants were displaying symptoms of Covid 19 or had a current confirmed case of Covid 19. In addition, some residents were reluctant to have operatives in their homes to address non-essential repairs during the pandemic.
- 3.7 The pandemic also had a significant impact on the service staffing resources with operatives and office staff being off work as a result of positive Covid tests received by them or a member of their household or shielding because they or a family member were in a Covid vulnerable category.
- 3.8 Housing Committee on 20 September 2020 was advised that to clear the backlog, the service was seeking to recruit trade operatives and office-based staff to expand capacity to complete more repairs. Committee was also advised that recruiting the required calibre of staff, providing adequate training and staggering start dates (to accommodate supervisory training) would take some

time, with an estimate of up to 12 months to clear the backlog which would be negatively impacted by another lockdown if mandated by Government.

- 3.9 There was a further report to Housing Committee on 20 January 2021 where members were advised that following the second national lockdown the repairs backlog had increased, and that guidance and legal requirements relevant to the operation of the service during the pandemic had necessarily changed several times.
- 3.10 Housing Committee was advised that the identification of Covid-19 cases and shielding of vulnerable or extremely vulnerable residents and members of staff delivering service and/or their household continued to have a negative impact on the delivery of non-essential repairs.
- 3.11 As well as the impact of the pandemic, officers identified that the service required additional resources to deliver a full service and tackle the backlog of repairs. Committee were advised that the need to identify the desired calibre of staff had caused delays in having sufficient resources to address the backlog.
- 3.12 Service delivery had also been impacted by industrial action in autumn 2020. Pending resolution of the industrial dispute it was agreed that unfilled vacancies across operative, supervisory and support staff would only be filled with agency staff.
- 3.13 Due to the buoyancy of the local construction industry, the rates offered for agency staff have not been competitive to attract staff to fill all the vacancies, leaving a deficit across all principal trades, support and supervisory roles. There has also been staff turnover during this period.

Repairs current situation

- 3.14 As outlined above, the Housing Repairs & Maintenance staff have worked throughout the pandemic, including the lockdowns, to provide tenants with an essential repairs service. Performance Report information for the service reported to Housing Committee on 22 September 2021, which covered Quarter 1 2021/22, was as follows:
 - Emergency repairs completed within 24 hours: 97.7% (3,129 of 3,204) against 99% target
 - Routine repairs completed within 28 calendar days: 69.7% (2,845 of 4,081) against 92% target
 - Average time to complete routine repairs: 36 calendar days against 15-day target
 - Appointments kept as proportion of appointments made: 97.9% (6,357 of 6,492) against 97% target
 - Tenants satisfied with standard of repair work 98% (889 of 903) against 92% target
 - Repairs completed at first visit 89.5% (6,522 of 7,285) against 92% target.
- 3.15 The backlog of routine repairs currently stands at over 8000 jobs and has been caused by a combination of the impact of Covid and a staffing level below the required level to complete the typical number of jobs raised each month.

- 3.16 With the current level of resource, the service is completing on average 2,413 jobs per month, resulting in a shortfall of approximately 950 jobs per month, or 39% of repairs reported. The current number of vacancies in the service's trade teams represent approximately 11.5% of the overall resource.
- 3.17 The service has commenced a large-scale recruitment process that will begin to address the backlog and ultimately reduce the time taken to complete routine repairs.
- 3.18 Now the council has completed the harmonisation of those Housing Repairs & Maintenance staff who wished to move to council terms and conditions and have agreed and evaluated council job roles, the service has been able to commence permanent recruitment to 51 posts. To date, the service has received a positive response and will be interviewing over the coming weeks and anticipate that this process will be complete around Christmas. At this time, the service still have around 35 vacancies still to fill.
- 3.19 In line with council commitments to encourage a diverse workforce the service has been reaching out to as many groups as we can in order to fill these roles. The service is advertising on the council website, Jobs Go Public, Indeed and other social media platforms, with the council's Communications Team helping publicise certain roles with photos and quotes. The service has reached out to Women in Construction and have also put an article in Homing In. In addition, the service has reached out to the Job Centre, local colleges and the Skills & Employment Team. Our Communications Team are designing posters which will be put in local cafes and trades shops. A link to the Housing Repairs job website will be included on our vans and provided to existing agency staff.
- 3.20 In addition to this large-scale recruitment of new permanent staff who can carry out works directly the service have increased contractor capacity. This includes recent appointment of a contractor to undertake roof repairs. They are currently mobilising and should start completing tasks by the end of November 2021. The service has also added additional senior management resource to Housing Repairs & Maintenance team to increase capacity to address the backlog.
- 3.21 Given the current progress the Housing Repairs and Maintenance service anticipate halving the current backlog within 6 months, with an estimate of 12 months to clear the backlog, based on the information available at this time. This projected timeline would be negatively impacted by another lockdown if mandated by Government.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 This report updates Committee on the progress of the Repairs and Maintenance service and therefore alternative options are not required.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Resident Area Panels are in receipt of regular updates on the performance of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report updates Housing Committee on the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service performance in relation to delivery of essential repairs and of a backlog of routine repairs that has built up over what has been a challenging time for the service, contractors and residents owing to the impact of COVID-19. The report outlines actions and anticipated progress with clearing the backlog.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There was an underspend of approximately £1.5m across the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service in 2020/21, largely due to reduced activity as a result of COVID restrictions. For 2021/22, there is a projected overspend of £1.409m forecast at TBM05 against contractor and material costs, largely due to catch-up works from last financial year, of which £0.816m is forecast to be funded from reserves set aside for this purpose.

There is also a forecast overspend of £0.760m as a result of harmonisation costs, which has been offset by an underspend of £0.373m as a result of the high level of staff vacancies. As set out in the HRA budget 21/22 report to Budget Council in February 2021, the harmonisation costs will be funded from HRA reserves and built into the budget for 2022/23.

The financial impact of clearing the backlog will continue to be closely monitored during the year and will also be reflected in the HRA budget report for 2022/23.

Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley

Date: 03/11/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no significant legal implications to report in relation to this progress and update report for noting.

Lawyer Consulted:

Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 01/11/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this update report.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The work carried out through the council's Repairs and Maintenance service contributes significantly to the energy performance of the council owned housing stock.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.5 Any implications will be kept under review using the Council's risk management framework.

Any Other Significant Implications:

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 None arising directly from this update report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 Any implications will be kept under review using the Council's risk management framework.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 None arising directly from this update report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 None arising directly from this update report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. There are none.
- 2.

Background Documents

1. There are none.
- 2.