



Internal Audit Service

Internal Audit Report Executive Summary
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CONFIDENTIAL

To: Head of Housing Services, Gedling Borough Council
Subject: Housing: Responsive Repairs
Report reference: IAR0607-18
Date: 2nd May 2007

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The attached report sets out the findings and recommendations from a recent review of the Housing Services Department's arrangements for carrying out responsive repairs.
- 1.2 The Council's housing stock consists of some 3,400 properties for rent and a further 283 properties, mainly blocks of flats, being homes that have been sold under the 'Right to Buy' scheme but which have common areas or structural elements for which the Council remains responsible.
- 1.3 There are five priority levels for responsive repairs as follows:
 - Emergency. to attend to within 24 hours.
 - Urgent. to attend to within 3 days.
 - Routine (higher) to attend to within 7 days.
 - Routine (Lower) to attend to within 14 days.
 - Non-essential. to attend to within 99 days or include in a programme of works.
- 1.4 Expenditure on the main categories of responsive repairs are as follows:

Actual Expenditure 2005/2006

£

Refurbishment of empty properties ('voids')	378,091
Heating	143,950
General Plumbing	94,057
Joinery	81,773
Electrical maintenance	65,260
Minor building works	56,412
Bathroom work	48,936
Total of all other categories	224,586
 Total	 1,093,065

- 1.5 The Council does not carry out these repairs itself but currently uses a number of contractors to do this work. Recently, the department has tendered for a new contract to commence in April 2007 under which most of the responsive repairs work, with an estimated value of £950,000 p.a., will be carried out in partnership with a single

contractor, however, work on gas appliances and heating systems is not included and this will be given to a separate specialist contractor in due course.

2 Objectives and scope of the audit

2.1 The audit used the Audit Commission's 'Housing Repairs and Maintenance Handbook.' as a basis and focused on operational aspects, rather than financial, and examined the adequacy and effectiveness of arrangements to ensure that:

- Tenants have good access to the repairs service.
- Repairs are prioritised appropriately.
- Repairs are assessed accurately.
- Repairs are completed within target time scales.
- Checks are carried out on work done.
- Repairs to void (empty) properties are carried out efficiently.
- Lessons learned from the responsive repairs programme inform the planned improvements programme.

2.2 The key risks associated with these objectives are detailed in the attached report.

3 Main Findings

3.1 The main findings of the audit are:

- Although the repairs service is well publicised, access to it can be difficult because of the unreliability of the phone system. Statistics on the 'availability' of the phone service indicate that only a half of all calls are answered, although the accuracy of this data is doubted.
- Repairs are prioritised appropriately, though monitoring of the cost of emergency repairs could be improved.
- 30% of jobs are pre-inspected by Council staff to diagnose the required repair before the job is allocated to a contractor. This is well in excess of the 10% recommended by the Audit Commission. The new partnership arrangements may help to reduce this by allowing the contractor more flexibility in determining the work to be carried out.
- The performance management system satisfactorily assesses whether repairs are responded to on time. However, we found some discrepancies between the statutory response times and those stated in the department's procedures and publicity.
- Post-completion checks are carried out on a sample of repairs, though there is no planned number against which to measure achievement. The current level of checking is 5.3% which we consider to be satisfactory.
- Although the recording of customer feedback has recently been improved, we believe more could be done to monitor this, and to respond to complaints.
- Repairs to void properties are carried out efficiently.
- The department is currently planning to reduce the amount spent on costly responsive repairs, such as lighting, fencing and guttering, by including more work in the planned replacement programmes.

4 Audit opinion

- 4.1 In our opinion, the Housing Services Department's arrangements for carrying out responsive repairs are satisfactory. We have identified some areas for improvement, in respect of which we have made recommendations in our report.

- 4.2 Internal Audit can provide **limited assurance** with respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of controls deployed to mitigate the risks associated with the areas reviewed.

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