

Meeting of the Executive Member for Housing 27th January 2009 and Adult Social Services and Advisory Panel

Report of the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services

Outcomes of the Responsive Repairs Review

Summary

1. This report presents the recent Responsive Repairs Review carried out within Housing Services and Neighbourhood Services and the recommendations arising from it affecting the levels of service to be offered to customers.

Background

2. The responsive repairs service currently undertakes over 30,000 individual repairs per year across a wide variety of departmental customer groups with an annual cost in excess of £4m. Most of this work is carried out under the Housing Repairs Partnership which was established in May 2005 as a partnership between Housing Services and Neighbourhood Services for the delivery of this service.
3. Whilst improvements can be seen year on year from the published indicators the service continues to overspend by approximately £300k. In order to address efficiencies within the system and strive to make the next levels of service improvements to customers the Repairs Partnership Board (steering group made up of senior officers from each department) agreed that a full review of the current processes and service levels be undertaken.
4. This review – aided by the Process Improvement Team – was undertaken using end to end systems thinking principles. This refers to the concept of investigating the entire repairs process from the first customer contact right through all potential actions and issues to the final payment of the contractor. Using this concept the review was able to be systematically undertaken to:-
5. Evaluate the service as a system (CHECK)
 - What is the purpose of the service
 - What is the service capable of achieving?
 - System conditions – why does the service behave this way?

6. Identify levers for change by asking (PLAN)
 - What needs changing to improve performance?
 - What action could be taken and what would we predict will be the consequences?
 - Against what measures should action be taken?
7. Take direct action on the service by (DO)
 - Introduce in a planned manner improvement actions by means of a pilot including monitoring the consequences
8. Through this process a number of recommendations were presented to the Partnership Board which were agreed should form part of a Pilot in order to trial and thus measure their impact. A number of these were back office steps to enable a more focussed approach to delivering repairs with key requirements being clarity of diagnosis of repair, removal of process duplication and ensuring appointments with customers were met. These back office steps were piloted to make the service more stable and reliable whilst also accepting the need to retain flexibility to respond to emergency situations.
9. A number of the piloted changes however also directly affected the levels of service offered to customers predominantly in terms of expected response times allocated to repairs once they have been reported. The new repair priorities were:
 - **04** – Repairs to be completed within 4 hours of been reported;
 - **24** – Repairs to be completed within 24 hours of been reported; &
 - **General** – All other repairs which would be appointed and completed in a maximum of 20 days.
10. The pilot period began on September 3rd 2008 and affected customers living in the Acomb management area representing some 39% of the total customer base. All customers were written to explaining the pilot process and were informed of the new telephone number to call for repairs from this date (part of the back office changes required a separate telephone number to the non-pilot area). This was run as an experimental learning pilot period and thus once implemented the changes were monitored weekly by officers involved in the daily management of the service to ensure the new back office steps were running smoothly and if required minor amendments made to ensure this.
11. A review of this short pilot process was presented to the Repairs Partnership Board on the 16th of December. Whilst there was only 3 months to evaluate the presentation was complimentary of the whole review and pilot exercise. The back office steps are delegated to chief officers within the Authorities change management procedures whilst the customer facing issues are presented to the Executive Member within this report.

12. It must be noted that it is predominantly the back office steps taken that allowed for the new priorities to be implemented and the success suggested in the Analysis section of the report, back office steps that will form part of a continuous improvement cycle within normal business processes delegated to officers. From data recorded it suggests the average time to complete a repair in this financial year prior to the pilot was 7.05 days whilst during the pilot had reduced to 4.81 days at the time of writing this report depicting the levels of improvement.
13. These back office steps have in the Pilot period already reaped immediate rewards in terms of closer working arrangements leading to a more affective team output, less duplication and unnecessary internal communications and a strengthening of personal skills and experiences.
14. The repairs pilot has shown that the combination of a 4 hour priority and a 24 hour priority is not ideal from a work ordering / planning perspective resulting in disproportionate number of repairs being ordered as 04's. Following the analysis of the pilot it is proposed to change the 24 hour priority to a Same Day priority. Details of this are set out in the analysis section of the report.

Consultation

15. A consultation event was held for a group of tenants in January 2008 to present key findings from the check process of the review. Discussions took place regarding the proposed changes to the repairs service, in particular the inflexibility of the appointment system; rationalisation of priorities, appointments for all repairs and changes to pre-inspection criteria. Customers agreed with all the changes, recognising that they should be piloted to improve the current repairs service .
16. Two consultation events were planned to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot in late October, an afternoon and an early evening event. With virtually no customers showing interest in an early evening event it was decided to hold just a single day time session to gauge findings.
17. A consultation event was therefore organised for the 27th of October 2008 for Acomb area tenants who had recently received a repair under the new format. 15 tenants had agreed to attend however despite all receiving courtesy calls in the days before only 3 tenants did turn up. Whilst results cannot in anyway be classified as representative all 3 customers did report they felt more confident the operative would turn up when expected during the pilot period.
18. Postal satisfaction surveys are carried out on the repairs service to gauge customers views, unfortunately due to their timetable they will not be available until early February. A short telephone satisfaction survey however was carried out with a number of customers who had recently received repairs in the Acomb area to gauge any changes in satisfaction.
19. The results of these surveys cannot be directly compared with the results of the Annual Housing Monitor (reported elsewhere on the EMAP agenda) due to their

disparities in response numbers there are definite trends. Responding customers did show their high levels of satisfaction for the service overall with special regard for the delivery of the service, every customer agreed the work was done at a convenient time with the majority reporting the work had been completed in the first visit.

Options

20. Option 1 – retain the existing repairs priorities.
21. Option 2 – accept the new repairs priorities for customers arising from the review process.

Analysis

22. In order to ensure the most urgent repairs are carried out in a shorter response time to less urgent repairs there is a process of categorising the repair. If this did not happen there would be a simple queuing system with a first come first served allocation of workload that did not take into account the potential damage caused and even health and safety risk of not repairing emergency or very urgent repairs.

Option 1 – Retain the existing repairs priorities

23. The current priorities are shown below and would be retained if Option 1 was chosen. The back office steps would still be implemented by officers so the service would expect to see some improvement in performance but not in the level of response times offered to customers.

Priority	Response target
Emergency	24 hours
P1	3 working days
P2	25 working days

Option 2 - accept the new repairs priorities for customers arising from the review process.

24. From the review process the suggested priorities of response times are shown below:-

Priority	Response target
04	4 hours
SD	Same Day
General	20 working days

25. Details of which jobs are to be carried out within each code will be determined by officers in accordance with government timescales as set out in the Right to Repair legislation and best practice..

26. Housing Services commitment to its customers is not just to provide a good service but to provide excellent services and to be 'best in class'. In order to ensure that we are 'best in class' we need to make a step change in service delivery to customers. The introduction of an 04 priority is an acceptance that there are a small percentage of repairs that require an extremely quick response time that the traditional 24 hour – "by this time tomorrow" – emergency priority can offer. These would be for such repairs as a burst water pipe that could not be isolated by the stop cock. Such a short and responsive priority is widely accepted by many Local Authorities and the Audit Commission as excellent customer service. These repairs would also receive a 4 hour priority status if reported out of office hours via the emergency repairs telephone number.
27. The Same Day priority seeks to also provide a responsive service for the majority of genuine urgent repairs and depicts tasks that whilst require carrying out swiftly do not carry an immediate health and safety risk or potential to cause significant damage e.g. a central heating repair or a blocked sink or basin. Should a customer report a repair within normal office hours it shall be responded to that same day, albeit this may involve the early evening should the customer report the repair in the late afternoon. Should a customer report a Same Day priority repair to the out of office emergency repairs number it would not be responded to immediately but carried out during the next calendar day.
28. The Pilot exercise used a 24 hour priority repair (as noted in the table below) however from observing how these repairs are carried out in the system it is recommended this be amended to Same Day if a repair is ordered within normal office opening hours, this will remove the need to push repairs to the 04 category to ensure that they are responded to the same day.
29. All other repairs will fall under the general category and shall be appointed and completed within a 20 working day timescale some 5 days less than the existing service. The appointment will be made in conjunction with the customer. During the pilot over 90% of these general repairs were completed within 10 working days and over 99% were completed within the 20 days.
30. A breakdown of performance information is shown below in comparison to pilot and non-pilot statistics over Sept, Oct and Nov.

Pilot Area	Total Jobs	% Comp. in time	Non Pilot Area	Total Jobs	% Comp. In time
04	607	67.38	E	1150	94.78
24	152	98.03	P1	1752	86.07
General	1883	99.58	P2	2457	86.57

31. The poor performance of the 04 hour Jobs under the pilot can be explained in 2 parts. Firstly there was a rationalisation of the Schedule of Rates Codes used by the Customer Service Assistants to raise a repair onto the IT system, this worked well in improving diagnosis and certainty in the appointment system in terms of job allocation and the ability to complete the repair in the first visit.

However it did not provide sufficient clarity in terms of assessing the level of true urgency of the repair being reported and hence some 23% of repairs were raised as 04 jobs when from assessing the detail they did not all pose an immediate risk to person or property. Therefore the majority of the jobs classified as 04 should have been undertaken under the 24 hour priority of which 98.03% were carried out within the agreed timescale.

32. Thus this information has allowed the review to provide more clarity to the diagnosis so the genuine 04 priority jobs are classified as so and thus the system can be set up to achieve extremely high performance levels.
33. Secondly the current IT and recording systems are not set up to calculate performance in terms of 4 hours and hence the pilot has not been able to accurately report this. Should the recommendation be agreed then amendments to the recording systems will be made in time for the suitable go-live date.
34. The Pilot period has been an exercise to trial certain changes and observe their impact, from these impacts the necessary recommendations and/or changes are more informed and thus can be implemented across the service. As noted in para. 30 some 23% of jobs in Sept, Oct and Nov were raised using the 04 priority, to balance the service and meet Audit Commission Good Practise levels this should be under 10% of jobs. Through a balanced approach to '04' and 'Same Day' repair prioritisation with a reliable and deliverable appointment system using 'General' priority repairs this is achievable with operational targets being set to achieve this.
35. The repairs service, as all other council services will at some time in the future be subject to review as part of the wider efficiency review carried out in conjunction with the councils efficiency partner Northgate Kendrick Ash, and as such future changes to priorities will be managed via this process.

Corporate Priorities

36. The housing repairs service and this review process reflects many of the council objectives and priorities, and many of the actions related to council objectives and initiatives. Specific links can be made to the following:
37. **“Outward facing”**
 - Improve the actual and perceived condition and appearance of city's streets, housing estates and publicly accessible spaces;
 - Improve the quality and availability of decent affordable homes in the city;
 - Improve the health and lifestyles of the people who live in York, in particular among groups whose levels of health are the poorest.”
38. **“Improving our organisational effectiveness”**

- Improve our focus on the needs of customers and residents in designing and providing services

Implications

39. The direct implications arising from this report are:

- **Financial** – Whilst it is expected the back office changes will improve the efficiency of the process this report does not carry any specific financial implications arising out of the options.
- **Human Resources (HR)** - None
- **Equalities** - None
- **Legal** – The Authority will still meet and in places exceed our legal obligations to customers through the new priorities in Option 2.
- **Crime and Disorder** - None
- **Information Technology (IT)** – The IT implications can be met through the normal business practices and budgets.
- **Property** - None

Risk Management

40. In compliance with the Councils risk management strategy. There are no risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

Recommendations

41. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to consider the report and recommend Option 2 in Para 21 'accept the new repairs priorities for customers arising from the review process' with an implementation date of April 1st 2009.

Reason: To improve the levels of service offered to customers.

Contact Details

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Report Approved **Date** 7th Jan 2009

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Report Approved **Date** 12th January 2009

Specialist Implications Officer(s) *none*

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None