

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY

27 FEBRUARY 2007

REVIEW OF REPAIRS POLICY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of current progress in the review of the responsive maintenance service provided across the Council's housing stock.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In July 2006 a Repairs Partnership Board was established to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's responsive maintenance service. The Partnership Board consists of staff from the Housing Services Unit (including front line staff) and the two main response maintenance contractors, Signpost Services Limited and the Council's Building and Electrical Service Team (BEST) and four tenant representatives nominated by the Tenant and Leaseholder Consultation Group.
- 2.2 To assist in this process the Board have:
- Undertaken a consultation session with a group of tenants and leaseholders to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the service and what improvements were considered the most important,
 - Employed consultants to undertake a full scoping exercise of the service to identify areas of waste, duplication and inefficiencies, particularly in the back office functions
 - Used the newly created resident auditor team to undertake a sample survey of tenants who had recently used the service to assess their overall experience and satisfaction
 - Assessed current good practice within the sector
- 2.3 Overall, the Board have concluded that the response maintenance service does provide an excellent service to our tenants who generally have a good experience whenever they have to access the service. Satisfaction rates are high and overall performance of our contractors is good. However, some areas for improvement were identified. These included:
- Need for improvement in arranging and keeping appointments
 - Improved performance in meeting target times for each category of repair

- Reduction in some back office processes that lead to duplication (for example, the issue of variation orders, large numbers of Schedule of Rate codes (SOR's) etc)
- 2.4 To enable the partnership board to continue its work, and to provide a stable environment to allow our contractors to facilitate the proposed improvements, the Executive Committee agreed at its meeting on the 23 January to extend the contract with both Signpost Services and BEST to the 31 March 2010.

3. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- 3.1 The draft Service Statement (attached as Appendix I) sets out the proposed improvements to the service currently identified by the Partnership Board. Although not exhaustive, the improvements outlined in the document do seek to address the areas of weakness identified during the review. These include:

Appointments

- 3.2 Giving tenants the choice of a morning (8-12noon) or afternoon (1pm-5pm) appointment, or if they have children a 'school run' slot between the hours of 9.30am to 2.30pm). Further work will be undertaken to try and implement a number of evening and weekend slots for tenants who are unable to be at home during the normal working day.

Response Times:

- 3.3 A reduction in response time categories from the existing ten to four will not only assist staff in terms of allocating a priority and organising the work but give tenants a clearer and easier to understand repairs system. It will also address some of the back office inefficiencies identified by Vanguard.

Reduction in Schedule of Rate items for minor repairs:

- 3.4 This improvement will not only provide more financial certainty to both the Council and its contractors, but also reduce back office inefficiencies and the use of variation orders. Essentially a number of minor repairs have been batched together under one SOR code and a flat rate payment agreed for each order issued. Whenever a minor order is raised the process will be easier to use and the requirement to vary wrongly coded or misdiagnosed repairs will no longer apply.

Geographic Areas

- 3.5 To change to areas of the city covered by each contractor to reduce the amount of travelling required from depot to job and increase overall response times.

Performance Monitoring

- 3.6 To clarify the data collected and ensure continued robust monitoring of performance. This will also ensure targets are realistic and achievable, that they

do show improvement over the next three years and that problems that arise are addressed by the partnership as a whole.

- 3.7 It is intended that over the period of the extended contracts further improvements will be identified and implemented following full consultation with our tenants and leaseholders.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The overall principle of the review process is to work in partnership with our contractors to identify savings within the existing service and recycle those savings into service improvements. However, it is accepted that the existing service does provide excellent value for money and therefore any additional savings may not fully cover the improvements proposed. In such cases each improvement will be assessed against the likely benefits to tenants and the implications to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

5. RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that Scrutiny Committee – Community supports the adoption of the draft document, Responsive Maintenance Service Standards, and that further reports be submitted as the review process continues to identify additional changes and service standards.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

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H:LP/Committee/206SCC17

14 February 2007

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling the report:

None