



ISLINGTON

Responsive Repairs

REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**London Borough of Islington
July 2016**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responsive Repairs

Overall aim: To consider resident experiences of the Responsive Repairs service.

Objectives:

- To identify the different types of responsive repairs carried out
- To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used
- To consider how works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents
- To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers
- To confirm that the services are designed to deliver customer focused outcomes
- To identify any areas for improvement

Evidence

The review ran from January to May 2016 and evidence was received from a variety of sources:

1. Witness evidence including:
 - Matt West, Head of Repairs and Maintenance
 - Paul Lightfoot, Group Leader for Direct Works
 - The views of tenants and leaseholders from the repairs Reference Group
 - Susan Richmond, Kwest Research – presentation regarding how impartial data is collected
 - Lorenzo Heanue, Productivity and Compliance Group Leader – details of call centre customer excellence accreditation
 - Michelle Reynolds, Group Commercial Director at Affinity Sutton and John Bell, Managing Director of CBS – presentation on Affinity Sutton’s repairs service
 - Kim Wells, Head of Repairs at LB Camden – presentation on the organisation’s repairs service
2. Documentary evidence
 - Introductory report
 - Details of call centre accreditation
 - Extract of new ICT system specification
 - Details of repairs apprentice scheme
 - Details of Kwest resident satisfaction survey and sample responses
 - Housing Direct key performance indicators

Main Findings

The council's responsive repairs service was brought back in-house in August 2014. The service carries out approximately 55,000 repairs each year and employs 105 trade staff, supported by contractors as demand requires. Since the service was brought back-in house performance levels have not been as high as expected; with monthly overall satisfaction ratings of around 70%. Councillors have also frequently received casework arising from the repairs service. For this reason the Committee sought to review resident experiences of the repairs service and identify areas for improvement.

The service has three categories of repair relating to severity and the expected wait from the time the repair is raised; 'emergency work' requires attendance within two hours; 'urgent work' requires attendance within 24 hours; and 'non-urgent work' is carried out within 20 calendar days. Approximately one third of repairs are categorised as urgent, however the service was working to reduce this number as it was thought that some repairs were misdiagnosed and a more accurate diagnosis would lead to a more effective use of resources.

Members gave examples of performance issues reported through case work. Evidence was also received from local residents, including members of the Repairs Reference Group, a resident panel appointed to provide detailed feedback on the council's repairs service. This indicated that experiences of the service varied considerably, which was consistent with the feedback reported to the service. Frequently arising complaints included repairs not being completed on the first visit; waiting too long to get through to Housing Direct; the wrong tradesperson being sent to complete the repair; repairs having to be chased up; residents not knowing when operatives will attend or operatives attending unannounced.

Whilst officers acknowledged that performance had not been satisfactory in all cases, constructive feedback was welcomed and a plan had been developed to improve the service. It was thought that service satisfaction and efficiency could be significantly improved by focusing on the number of repairs completed first time – the 'first time fix rate'. Evidence received from residents, officers and representatives of other repairs services indicated that fixing repairs first time was one of the biggest drivers of service satisfaction. This was not only convenient to residents, but was cost effective to the service by reducing the time spent on any one repair.

One significant piece of work to increase the first time fix rate was multi-skilling operatives. It was noted that many operatives were specialists in a particular trades, whereas a service prioritising completing repairs first time required a greater number of operatives sufficiently skilled in multiple trades to complete all aspects of a repair. Another key aspect of improving the first time fix rate would be reducing the time spent by operatives travelling to collect parts. It was noted that some repair services had a parts delivery service and the Committee suggested that this be explored further.

The Committee recommended that the service prioritise increasing the number of "first time fixes" in order to improve efficiency and tenant satisfaction. To achieve this it is suggested that officers further investigate the feasibility of a "ring and bring" service, to enable parts to be delivered to a repair without the operative leaving the property, and continue to invest in the multi-skilling of staff. The council should aspire for all operatives to be skilled in multiple trades as part of a "first time fix culture".

Service satisfaction is independently monitored by Kwest, a housing research company commissioned to interview around 400 Islington residents receiving repairs per month. The Committee noted the headline satisfaction statistics obtained from Kwest and decided to investigate surveying methods and satisfaction levels further, as the feedback councillors received on repairs suggested that satisfaction may not be as high as reported.

Reported satisfaction levels had increased since the survey questions were revised in December 2015. This is because the council had asked Kwest to survey satisfaction with the repair received '*on this occasion*' as opposed to '*overall satisfaction with the way Islington Council deals with repairs and maintenance*', which tended to yield lower results as residents included wider factors in their response. Data for the first part of 2015/16 indicated an '*overall satisfaction*' rating of around 70%, whereas service satisfaction '*on this occasion*' was higher at around 88% from December 2015 to the end of February 2016. Kwest emphasised that due to the change in interview questions it was not possible to provide a direct comparison to historic satisfaction data.

It was thought that the specific questions asked of respondents could be a factor in the discrepancy between the surveyed levels of satisfaction and that reported directly to councillors. Another factor may be differences in the sample of residents asked to respond to the survey. Kwest only surveyed residents once their repair had been resolved, whereas casework was more likely to relate to incomplete repairs. The survey also excluded those who had received multiple repairs to their property in order to link each interview to a single repair and Kwest did not survey those already interviewed in the last three months to avoid survey fatigue; the reasoning for these restrictions is clear, however one consequence of this could be that particularly complex cases are excluded from the survey, yet these are the cases which are more likely to generate councillor casework. Whilst it is welcomed that the survey data indicates that many residents are satisfied with the repairs to their property, it is important to view this data within the context of the survey's limits.

The Committee considered internal processes and the improvements in progress to the council's systems. Officers stressed that internal processes would be improved considerably following the implementation of a new ICT system in Autumn 2016. The new system was to feature an improved diagnostic script developed with trade staff, this was to ensure that operatives had all of the information they needed to carry out the repair and increased accuracy would also assist with prioritisation. The new system would ensure that appointments are made at a time when the required resources are available and automatically allocate repairs to trade staff based on their skill set, this would improve the number of appointments being kept, remove the need to manually allocate jobs, and ensure that the right staff attend the repair with the right resources. Following implementation of the new system trade staff would be issued with one job at a time through the use of mobile technology to ensure complete focus on each repair, and staff would be able order materials and book follow-up appointments as required with tenants while in their home. Remote tracking would also be available through the new system, and this would enable the service to provide time estimates for when staff would attend each property. These are thought to be considerable service improvements and members are keen for the new technology to be used to its full capacity. The Committee suggested that handled technology could also be used to provide checklists for operatives when completing repairs.

The Committee welcomes the improvements expected through service's new ICT system, to be implemented in Autumn 2016. The system is intended to lead to a number of service improvements including improved diagnostic processes, automated repair allocations to staff, greater use of handheld technology, the ability to track operative progress remotely and improved communication with residents via the use of text messaging. It is hoped that the implementation of the system will lead to a corresponding increases in efficiency and satisfaction, and it is suggested that performance be reviewed after the new system has bedded-in to ensure that the improvements have been achieved. The Committee is keen to see the new technology fully utilised and supporting all aspects of the service, and in particular suggests that electronic checklists or scripts be introduced as an aide-memoire for operatives to check that all aspects of a repair are completed in line with service standards.

Some residents highlighted communications issues, particularly around missed appointments and communal repairs, and the Committee identified this as an area for improvement. The new ICT system will allow the use of text messaging and residents were particularly keen for this to be

utilised; advising when operatives were on route to a property, their estimated time of arrival, and if they were going to be late. The Committee agreed that the use of text messaging was a positive development, however noted that not all residents may want to be contacted in this way and suggested the service should always use the resident's preferred method of communication.

The Committee heard from residents that communication is key to a positive customer experience. The Committee recognises the work already underway to improve this aspect of the service, however notes that residents should be made aware as soon as possible if the operative is running late, if their appointment has been rescheduled, or if a communal repair has been completed. It is recommended that the service makes use of the resident's preferred communications channel; this may be telephone, text message, email, or for a message to be delivered through estates staff in the case of vulnerable residents.

The Committee also considered communication between services. It was confirmed that the responsive repairs service had positive working relationships with the capital programming team, the gas team and the estate maintenance team. When repairs occurred frequently due to failing components then referrals were made to the capital works programme. However, some of the residents interviewed were not aware of this referral process and it was thought that clearer communication surrounding this would be helpful.

The Committee notes the positive working relationship between responsive repairs and capital programming teams and how defects identified through the responsive repairs service are fed into the capital programme. To reassure residents that such defects will be rectified, it is recommended that clear escalation policies are established and residents are advised when defects are referred to the capital programming team.

The Committee received evidence on the repair services of Affinity Sutton and the London Borough of Camden to compare the council's service to that of others and identify any areas of best practice. Affinity Sutton and Camden had sought to improve service efficiency and tenant satisfaction by focusing on similar areas to Islington's repairs service – the first time fix rate and the multi-skilling of operatives. Both organisations had also made improvements by empowering operatives to take decisions at the front line. Operatives are responsible for deciding how repairs are to be carried out, for example whether to fix or replace a component. The evidence received suggested that this increased accountability, increased the speed of repairs, and resulted in efficiency savings through decreased levels of supervision.

Following the best practice of other in-house repairs services, the Committee recommends that operatives be empowered and supported to take decisions at the front-line in order to increase the speed of repairs, drive efficiencies and improve accountability. Operatives should be supported in identifying and completing any additional repairs required while at the property, as part of the "first time fix culture".

It was found that other repair services also placed a great importance on the quality of performance data. The London Borough of Camden used 'Clickview', software which allowed satisfaction and performance to be analysed daily on a team, trade and operative basis, and the Committee suggested that this would be a useful tool for Islington. The Committee also suggested that operatives could play a crucial role in collecting property asset data by taking photographs on their handheld devices. This could identify the particular arrangement of fixtures and fittings in properties to contribute towards the effective management of future repairs and capital improvements, and also assist with complaint resolution.

The Committee recommended that **the service should seek to improve the quality of its data through investment in detailed performance reporting software and the use of photography. The Committee would support the implementation of software such as Clickview, which enables repairs satisfaction and other metrics to be analysed in depth. The use of such**

technology would assist in the identification of areas for further improvement. Operatives could assist the service in further developing its asset data by taking photographs of the repair and other fixtures and fittings while at the property. Analysis of the most frequently requested repairs could contribute to effective asset management.

Members commented that the repairs services of both Islington and Camden faced many of the same challenges in terms of asset management, procurement and logistics. **The Committee notes the similarities between the in-house repairs services of Islington and Camden and recommends that the scope for joint working opportunities be explored in order to generate efficiencies and share best practice.**

One objective of the review was to confirm that the service is designed to deliver customer focused outcomes. Although the evidence received confirmed that there were some known performance issues, there was no suggestion that the service was not designed with customer service in mind.

One service improvement already implemented is the online repairs reporting system. This was well received by the residents interviewed, however some improvements were suggested. **The Committee welcomes the recent implementation of online repairs reporting and is keen to see this develop in usage and effectiveness. It is recommended that detailed resident feedback on this is sought in order to improve the customer experience.**

The residents interviewed commented that estates staff were very knowledgeable of their local area and felt they should play a role in the repairs service. **The Committee recognises that estate services co-ordinators and caretakers have a wealth of knowledge about their area and suggests that their relationship with the repairs service be developed further, as these staff may be able to assist in the diagnosis of communal repairs, assist with communication, and champion resident needs in partnership with Resident Liaison Officers.**

The Committee was pleased that the repairs service had implemented an apprenticeship scheme since coming back in-house and was providing local employment. The Committee concluded that **the repairs service should have a diverse workforce which reflects the residents of the borough. The Committee is encouraged by the service's introduction of an apprenticeship scheme and would like to see this expand over time as the service has the potential to provide quality employment and training to local people. It is hoped that, following the successful implementation of service improvements, the service will be able to seek commercial opportunities in order to generate income and expand the service.**

Conclusions

The Committee concluded that resident experiences of the repairs service varied and that further work was required to develop the service, particularly in regard to completing repairs first time and communications. The Committee was satisfied that officers have a plan to achieve service improvements and hope that the changes proposed will lead to a corresponding increase in resident satisfaction.

In carrying out the review, the Committee met with officers, members of the public and others to gain a balanced view. The Committee would like to thank witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the scrutiny. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The service prioritise increasing the number of “first time fixes” in order to improve efficiency and tenant satisfaction. To achieve this it is suggested that officers further investigate the feasibility of a “ring and bring” service, to enable parts to be delivered to a repair without the operative leaving the property, and continue to invest in the multi-skilling of staff. The council should aspire for all operatives to be skilled in multiple trades as part of a “first time fix culture”.
2. The Committee welcomes the improvements expected through service’s new ICT system, to be implemented in Autumn 2016. The system is intended to lead to a number of service improvements including improved diagnostic processes, automated repair allocations to staff, greater use of handheld technology, the ability to track operative progress remotely and improved communication with residents via the use of text messaging. It is hoped that the implementation of the system will lead to a corresponding increases in efficiency and satisfaction, and it is suggested that performance be reviewed after the new system has bedded-in to ensure that the improvements have been achieved. The Committee is keen to see the new technology fully utilised and supporting all aspects of the service, and in particular suggests that electronic checklists or scripts be introduced as an aide-memoire for operatives to check that all aspects of a repair are completed in line with service standards.
3. The Committee heard from residents that communication is key to a positive customer experience. The Committee recognises the work already underway to improve this aspect of the service, however notes that residents should be made aware as soon as possible if the operative is running late, if their appointment has been rescheduled, or if a communal repair has been completed. It is recommended that the service makes use of the resident’s preferred communications channel; this may be telephone, text message, email, or for a message to be delivered through estates staff in the case of vulnerable residents.
4. Following the best practice of other in-house repairs services, the Committee recommends that operatives be empowered and supported to take decisions at the front-line in order to increase the speed of repairs, drive efficiencies and improve accountability. Operatives should be supported in identifying and completing any additional repairs required while at the property, as part of the “first time fix culture”.
5. The Committee notes the positive working relationship between responsive repairs and capital programming teams and how defects identified through the responsive repairs service are fed into the capital programme. To reassure residents that such defects will be rectified, it is recommended that clear escalation policies are established and residents are advised when defects are referred to the capital programming team.
6. The Committee recognises that estate services co-ordinators and caretakers have a wealth of knowledge about their area and suggests that their relationship with the repairs service be developed further, as these staff may be able to assist in the diagnosis of communal repairs, assist with communication, and champion resident needs in partnership with Resident Liaison Officers

7. The service should seek to improve the quality of its data through investment in detailed performance reporting software and the use of photography. The Committee would support the implementation of software such as Clickview, which enables repairs satisfaction and other metrics to be analysed in depth. The use of such technology would assist in the identification of areas for further improvement. Operatives could assist the service in further developing its asset data by taking photographs of the repair and other fixtures and fittings while at the property. Analysis of the most frequently requested repairs could contribute to effective asset management.
8. The repairs service should have a diverse workforce which reflects the residents of the borough. The Committee is encouraged by the service's introduction of an apprenticeship scheme and would like to see this expand over time as the service has the potential to provide quality employment and training to local people. It is hoped that, following the successful implementation of service improvements, the service will be able to seek commercial opportunities in order to generate income and expand the service.
9. The Committee notes the similarities between the in-house repairs services of Islington and Camden and recommends that the scope for joint working opportunities be explored in order to generate efficiencies and share best practice.
10. The Committee welcomes the recent implementation of online repairs reporting and is keen to see this develop in usage and effectiveness. It is recommended that detailed resident feedback on this is sought in order to improve the customer experience.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2015/16

Councillors:

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)
Councillor David Poyser (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Raphael Andrews
Councillor Alex Diner
Councillor Aysegul Erdogan
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE
Councillor Una O'Halloran
Councillor Flora Williamson

Co-opted members:

Rose-Marie McDonald – PFI Managed Tenants
Jim Rooke – Directly Managed Tenants

Substitutes:

Councillor Gary Heather
Councillor Olly Parker
Councillor Alice Perry
Councillor Gary Doolan
Councillor Rakhia Ismail
Councillor Jenny Kay
Councillor Angela Picknell
Councillor Nurullah Turan

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

*Matt West – Head of Repairs and Maintenance
Jonathan Moore – Senior Democratic Services Officer*

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee commenced the review in January 2016 with the overall aim of considering resident experiences of the Responsive Repairs service.

The Committee also agreed to the following objectives:

- To identify the different types of responsive repairs carried out
 - To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used
 - To consider how works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents
 - To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers
 - To confirm that the services are designed to deliver customer focused outcomes
 - To identify any areas for improvement
- 1.2 In carrying out the review the Committee met with residents, officers, and representatives of other housing providers. The Committee also considered evidence from Kwest, the council's independent surveying organisation, and performance data relating to the service.

Local context

- 1.3 The council's responsive repairs service was brought back in-house in August 2014 and carries out approximately 55,000 repairs each year. The service is primarily available to council tenants; however leaseholders are entitled to a limited range of repairs, including repairs to communal areas. The service is comprised of several teams: Housing Direct receive calls reporting repairs and make appointments with residents; the Schedule Planning Team allocate repairs to trade staff; the technical Surveying Team attend properties in order to assess more complex repairs; and works are carried out by 105 trade staff, supported by contractors as demand requires. The management of the service is supported by the Legal Disrepair Team that manage any disrepair claims alongside Legal Services; the Customer Excellence Team that deal with complaints; and the Procurement and Contract Management Team.
- 1.4 Since the service was brought back-in house performance levels have not been as high as expected; with monthly overall satisfaction ratings of around 70%. Councillors have also frequently received casework arising from the repairs service which indicates that further development of the service is required. For this reason the Committee sought to review resident experiences of the repairs service and identify areas for improvement.

2. Findings

The different types of repairs carried out

- 2.1 The service has three categories of repair relating to severity and the expected wait from the time the repair is raised; 'emergency work' such as loss of power to a property requires attendance within two hours; 'urgent work' such as repairing the front door to a property requires attendance within 24 hours; and 'non-urgent work' such as re-plastering a wall is carried out within 20 calendar days. High value works, such as renewing a boundary wall, are also carried out within a 20 calendar day period. The service also delivers a handyman service to vulnerable tenants in partnership with Adult Social Services.
- 2.2 Approximately one third of repairs are categorised as urgent, however the service was working to reduce this number as it was thought that some repairs were misdiagnosed and a more accurate

diagnosis would lead to a more effective use of resources. Some complex repairs had to be carried out by specialist contractors, however the service was working to develop the skills of its workforce and as a result the number of works contracted out had reduced over the previous year.

The satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs

- 2.3 Service satisfaction is independently monitored by Kwest, a housing research company commissioned to interview around 400 Islington residents receiving repairs per month. Performance is monitored on a daily basis, with the latest performance statistics displayed in a prominent location in the office accessible to all staff. Islington' service attained an overall satisfaction rating of around 70% for the first part of 2015/16.
- 2.4 Members gave examples of performance issues reported through case work, such as one repair which required six visits to complete. The Committee commented on the consequences of this, such as tenants having to take significant amounts of time off work for repairs to be completed. Evidence was also received from local residents, including members of the Repairs Reference Group, a resident panel appointed to provide detailed feedback on the council's repairs service. This indicated that experiences of the service varied considerably. Whilst residents emphasised that some operatives were very good, examples were given of some operatives carrying out a "quick fix" as opposed to a comprehensive repair. Examples were also given of misdiagnosis and consequential problems, such as a metal worker arriving to repair a wooden fence. Some residents provided examples of missed appointments or operatives arriving to complete repairs outside of the agreed time period; and others reported staff not being empathetic to resident concerns and difficulties in escalating complaints.
- 2.5 The evidence received from residents was consistent with the feedback reported to the service. Frequently arising complaints included repairs not being completed on the first visit; waiting too long to get through to Housing Direct; the wrong tradesperson being sent to complete the repair; repairs having to be chased up; residents not knowing when operatives will attend or operatives attending unannounced. These themes were also reflected in the feedback received through the Kwest survey, which asked residents to suggest service improvements. The service was aware of the problems identified and recognised that improvements were required. Whilst officers acknowledged that performance had not been satisfactory in all cases, constructive feedback was welcomed and a plan had been developed to improve the service.
- 2.6 Officers advised that a number of service improvements were underway. It was thought that service satisfaction and efficiency could be significantly improved by focusing on the number of repairs completed first time – the 'first time fix rate'. Evidence received from residents, officers and representatives of other repairs services indicated that fixing repairs first time was one of the biggest drivers of service satisfaction. This was not only convenient to residents, but was cost effective to the service by reducing the time spent on any one repair. During the review the council's first time fix rate was around 84%, and officers confirmed the intention that, if a repair is particularly complex and cannot be completed on the first visit, then it should certainly be completed on the second visit. It was suggested that this was not happening frequently enough in Islington's service.
- 2.7 A number of work streams were progressing in order to improve the first time fix rate. One significant aspect was multi-skilling operatives. It was noted that many of the staff inherited through TUPE arrangements were specialists in a particular trades, whereas a service prioritising completing repairs first time would have a greater number of operatives sufficiently skilled in multiple trades to complete all aspects of a repair. Operational staff were being encouraged to learn multiple trades and the Committee considered that this would be essential to having an organisational culture centred on providing a first time fix. It was also thought that the first time fix

rate would be supported through implementation of the new ICT and diagnostic system, detailed later in this report.

- 2.8 The Committee considered that another key aspect of improving the first time fix rate would be reducing the time spent by operatives travelling to collect parts. The service's stores are maintained by an external contractor that provides a bespoke service to the council and officers advised that they were planning to review the stock held on vehicles to minimise parts collection. It was noted that some repairs services had a parts delivery service and the Committee suggested that this be explored further. Evidence received indicated that a "ring and bring" service had been implemented by the London Borough of Camden's repairs service with some success.
- 2.9 **The Committee recommended that the service prioritise increasing the number of "first time fixes" in order to improve efficiency and tenant satisfaction. To achieve this it is suggested that officers further investigate the feasibility of a "ring and bring" service, to enable parts to be delivered to a repair without the operative leaving the property, and continue to invest in the multi-skilling of staff. The council should aspire for all operatives to be skilled in multiple trades as part of a "first time fix culture".**
- 2.10 Other aspects of the service's performance are not directly linked to the first time fix rate, for example communication and certain internal processes, such as diagnostics and allocation. These are detailed later in this report.

The utility of surveying metrics

- 2.11 The Committee noted the headline satisfaction statistics obtained from Kwest and decided to investigate surveying methods and satisfaction levels further, as the feedback councillors received on repairs suggested that satisfaction may not be as high as reported.
- 2.12 Kwest is a housing research organisation commissioned by several housing providers, including local authorities, to independently and objectively evaluate satisfaction with services. The organisation has a long-standing relationship with the council and has surveyed Islington's repairs satisfaction since 2008. The organisation's surveying methods provide clients with daily feedback on their services; the data collected on the council's repairs service was automatically transferred to a spreadsheet which updated each night; data was available to Islington Council the following day, which allowed any complaints or other comments to be investigated as required.
- 2.13 The council's contract with the organisation was renewed in December 2015, at which point the council simplified its survey questions. It was also agreed that the organisation would increase its sample size to 15% of repairs completed. Surveys were carried out via telephone, with the interviewer filling in a response form online. If a resident was unhappy with the service received then a verbatim record of their comments was made. Interviews were carried out throughout the day and early evening Monday to Thursday, morning and afternoon on Friday, and also at the weekend. Multiple attempts were made to call residents and call-backs could be arranged for more convenient times.
- 2.14 Reported satisfaction levels had increased since the survey questions were revised in December 2015. This is because the council had asked Kwest to survey satisfaction with the repair received

'on this occasion' as opposed to *'overall satisfaction with the way Islington Council deals with repairs and maintenance'*, which tended to yield lower results as residents included wider factors in their response. Data for the first part of the 2015/16 year indicated an *'overall satisfaction'* rating of around 70%, whereas service satisfaction *'on this occasion'* was higher at around 88% of respondents either very or fairly satisfied from December 2015 to the end of February 2016. Kwest emphasised that due to the change in interview questions it was not possible to provide a direct comparison to historic satisfaction data. It was commented that, in general, organisations received a lower satisfaction score when they asked about overall satisfaction as opposed to satisfaction with a specific task.

- 2.15 It was thought that the specific questions asked of respondents could be a factor in the discrepancy between the surveyed levels of satisfaction and that reported directly to councillors. Another factor may be due to differences in the sample of residents asked to respond to the survey. Kwest only surveyed residents once their repair had been resolved, whereas casework was more likely to relate to incomplete repairs. The survey also excluded those who had received multiple repairs to their property in order to link each interview to a single repair and Kwest did not survey those already interviewed in the last three months in order to avoid survey fatigue; the reasoning for these restrictions is clear, however one consequence of this could be that particularly complex cases are excluded from the survey, yet these are the cases which are more likely to generate councillor casework.
- 2.16 Although the differences between surveyed levels of satisfaction and that reported to councillors was recognised, Kwest did anecdotally note that Islington tended to have a good level of satisfaction and Islington residents were generally happy to provide feedback, which was not true in all areas. Whilst it is welcomed that the survey data indicates that many residents are satisfied with the repairs to their property, it is important to view this data within the context of the survey's limits.

How works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents

- 2.17 The Committee considered internal processes and the improvements in progress to the council's systems. The majority of repairs were reported via telephone to Housing Direct, however an online repairs reporting system had been implemented during 2015/16. Housing Direct staff worked to a diagnostic script in order to identify the repair required and jobs were then manually allocated to tradespeople. Jobs were prioritised in accordance with urgency and tradespeople could be required to complete six or seven jobs in one day, detailed on their PDA. It was suggested that these processes did not always result in a smooth service for residents; one resident reported that his repair was delayed as it was "lost" in the manual allocation system. It was also noted that appointments were made without knowing the availability of the resources needed to carry out the repair, which sometimes resulted in repairs being rescheduled, causing inconvenience to tenants.
- 2.18 Officers stressed that internal processes would be improved considerably following the implementation of a new ICT system in Autumn 2016. The new system was to feature an improved diagnostic script developed with trade staff, this was to ensure that operatives had all of the information they needed to carry out the repair and increased accuracy would also assist with prioritisation. The new system would ensure that appointments are made at a time when the required resources are available and automatically allocate repairs to trade staff based on their

skill set, this would improve the number of appointments being kept, remove the need to manually allocate jobs, and ensure that the right staff attend the repair with the right resources. Trade staff would be issued with one job at a time through the use of mobile technology to ensure complete focus on each repair, and staff would be able order materials and book follow-up appointments as required with tenants while in their home.

- 2.19 One issue highlighted by residents was that the service was not able to remotely track operatives. It was confirmed that remote tracking would be available through the new system, and this would enable the service to provide estimates for when staff would attend each property. This was thought to be a considerable service improvement. Whilst the Committee was encouraged by the various improvements due to be implemented through the new system, members were keen for the implementation of the system to be kept under review to ensure that the intended improvements are actually realised. Members were keen for the new technology to be used to its full capacity and suggested that handheld technology could be used to provide checklists for operatives when completing repairs.
- 2.20 **The Committee welcomes the improvements expected through service's new ICT system, to be implemented in Autumn 2016. The system is intended to lead to a number of service improvements including improved diagnostic processes, automated repair allocations to staff, greater use of handheld technology, the ability to track operative progress remotely and improved communication with residents via the use of text messaging. It is hoped that the implementation of the system will lead to a corresponding increases in efficiency and satisfaction, and it is suggested that performance be reviewed after the new system has bedded-in to ensure that the improvements have been achieved. The Committee is keen to see the new technology fully utilised and supporting all aspects of the service, and in particular suggests that electronic checklists or scripts be introduced as an aide-memoire for operatives to check that all aspects of a repair are completed in line with service standards.**
- 2.21 Some residents highlighted communications issues, particularly around missed appointments, and the Committee identified this as an area for improvement. One resident advised of a missed appointment due to the operative being called to an emergency repair. The resident accepted that this was sometimes necessary, however was not informed that her repair would need to be rescheduled and suggested that if the council contacted affected residents to let them know then this would minimise inconvenience and may help to reduce the number of complaints. Residents also requested greater communication surrounding repairs to communal areas. A leaseholder advised of a blocked drain in a communal area which was causing water damage to her property. As this was a communal repair, the leaseholder was not advised when the works were due to be carried out and was unable to inspect if the work had been completed due to restricted access. Improvements to communications were also requested by residents through the Kwest satisfaction survey.
- 2.22 The new ICT system will allow the use of text messaging and residents were particularly keen for this to be utilised, advising when operatives were on route to a property, their estimated time of arrival, and if they were going to be late. Affinity Sutton's repairs service made use of text messaging in this way and to confirm appointments and this was thought to be best practice. The Committee agreed that the use of text messaging was a positive development, however noted that not all residents may want to be contacted in this way and suggested the service should always use the resident's preferred method of communication.

- 2.23 **The Committee heard from residents that communication is key to a positive customer experience. The Committee recognises the work already underway to improve this aspect of the service, however notes that residents should be made aware as soon as possible if the operative is running late, if their appointment has been rescheduled, or if a communal repair has been completed. It is recommended that the service makes use of the resident's preferred communications channel; this may be telephone, text message, email, or for a message to be delivered through estates staff in the case of vulnerable residents.**
- 2.24 The Committee also considered communication between services. It was confirmed that the responsive repairs service had positive working relationships with the capital programming team, the gas team and the estate maintenance team. When repairs occurred frequently due to failing components then referrals were made to the capital works programme. However, some of the residents interviewed were not aware of this referral process and highlighted recurring issues which they felt should be addressed through the capital programme. The Committee agreed that clearer communications around the relationship between responsive repairs and the capital programme would be helpful, particularly in regards to when a repeated repair may be escalated to the capital programme.
- 2.25 **The Committee notes the positive working relationship between responsive repairs and capital programming teams and how defects identified through the responsive repairs service are fed into the capital programme. To reassure residents that such defects will be rectified, it is recommended that clear escalation policies are established and residents are advised when defects are referred to the capital programming team.**

How the service compares to that of other London Boroughs and registered providers

- 2.26 The Committee received evidence on the repair services of Affinity Sutton and the London Borough of Camden to compare the council's service to that of others and identify any areas of best practice. Affinity Sutton is a national housing association with 57,000 homes throughout England and offered an in-house repairs service carried out by two wholly owned service providers. The organisation had two categories of repair; those classified as an 'emergency' were dealt with the same day, and those which were 'non-emergency' were completed within seven days. As the organisation's housing stock was dispersed nationally, operatives worked in regional teams and were based from their own home, with details of repairs sent remotely to their PDAs and tablets.
- 2.27 The London Borough of Camden had an in-house repairs service which completed 60,000 repair orders each year. The service employed 130 trade staff and 14 apprentices. Camden's service was also based around local area teams in order to promote specialist knowledge. The organisation did not have categories of repair based on response times; instead, emergencies were dealt with as soon as possible, and all other repairs were completed at a time to suit the customer.
- 2.28 Affinity Sutton and Camden had sought to improve service efficiency and tenant satisfaction by focusing on similar areas to Islington's repairs service – the first time fix rate and the multi-skilling of operatives. Affinity Sutton had promoted multi-skilling through introducing competency based

salary bands; and had also supported first time fixes by developing its diagnostic processes. As a result all of the required information was captured in the first transaction in 90% of cases. It was noted that Camden only provided operatives with one repair at a time, as Islington would following the implementation of the new ICT system.

- 2.29 Both Affinity Sutton and Camden had also sought to make improvements by empowering operatives to take decisions at the front line. Staff were responsible for deciding how a repair was to be carried out, for example whether to fix or replace a component. The evidence received suggested that this increased accountability, increased the speed of repairs, and resulted in efficiency savings through decreased levels of supervision.
- 2.30 One Islington resident interviewed noted that repairs staff sometimes would not complete additional repairs while at a property, suggesting that each repair had to be logged individually with Housing Direct. The Committee considered that completing additional repairs while at a property should be supported as far as possible, as it is the most customer friendly approach and also the most efficient in the majority of cases. It is hoped that providing operatives with a greater responsibility for decision-making will give them the confidence to carry out additional repairs when required.
- 2.31 **Following the best practice of other in-house repairs services, the Committee recommends that operatives be empowered and supported to take decisions at the front-line in order to increase the speed of repairs, drive efficiencies and improve accountability. Operatives should be supported in identifying and completing any additional repairs required while at the property, as part of the “first time fix culture”.**
- 2.32 It was found that other repair services also placed a great importance on the quality of performance data. The London Borough of Camden used ‘Clickview’, software which allowed satisfaction and performance to be analysed daily on a team, trade and operative basis. Similarly, Affinity Sutton staff were personally responsible for the satisfaction associated with each individual repair and operatives had access to performance and benchmarking statistics and could evaluate their performance against others. The Committee recognised the value of quality data and suggested that something similar should be investigated for use by Islington’s repairs service. The Committee also suggested that operatives could play a crucial role in collecting property asset data by taking photographs on their handheld devices. This could identify the particular arrangement of fixtures and fittings in properties to contribute towards the effective management of future repairs and capital improvements, and also assist with complaint resolution.
- 2.33 The Committee recommended that **the service should seek to improve the quality of its data through investment in detailed performance reporting software and the use of photography. The Committee would support the implementation of software such as Clickview, which enables repairs satisfaction and other metrics to be analysed in depth. The use of such technology would assist in the identification of areas for further improvement. Operatives could assist the service in further developing its asset data by taking photographs of the repair and other fixtures and fittings while at the property. Analysis of the most frequently requested repairs could contribute to effective asset management.**

- 2.34 Members commented that the repairs services of both Islington and Camden faced many of the same challenges in terms of asset management, procurement and logistics. Officers confirmed that cross-borough discussions on best practice do take place and the Committee was keen to encourage further collaborative working. **The Committee notes the similarities between the in-house repairs services of Islington and Camden and recommends that the scope for joint working opportunities be explored in order to generate efficiencies and share best practice.**

Designing the service to customer focused outcomes

- 2.35 One objective of the review was to confirm that the service is designed to deliver customer focused outcomes. Although the evidence received confirmed that there were some known performance issues, there was no suggestion that the service was not designed with customer service in mind. One reason for bringing the service back in-house was to enable the council to exert greater control over the service for its tenants. The planned service improvements, such as the implementation of the new ICT system, were intended to increase the overall performance of the service. The service had accepted constructive criticism and had planned service improvements in response to the most frequent resident feedback; officers were able to demonstrate how each improvement would address a recurring feedback theme. The commissioning of satisfaction surveys, monitoring of performance and appointment of the repairs reference group further indicated that the service was focused on resident outcomes. There was also a focus on providing a good service to residents with additional needs; staff had recently received training on mental health issues to help them engage with vulnerable residents.
- 2.36 One service improvement already implemented is the online repairs reporting system. This was well received by the residents interviewed, however some improvements were suggested. The interface required residents to click on pictures which represented different types of repair, however residents commented that these did not always accurately represent each repair and there was a concern that this could potentially lead to misdiagnosis. It was also suggested that greater scope for written information would help to better identify repairs.
- 2.37 **The Committee welcomes the recent implementation of online repairs reporting and is keen to see this develop in usage and effectiveness. It is recommended that detailed resident feedback on this is sought in order to improve the customer experience.**
- 2.38 The Committee also considered that the Housing Direct team had received CCA Accreditation Version 6, an independent call centre customer service accreditation assessed against international service standards. Officers suggested that this was particularly positive given that the team had undergone a significant period of change since the service was brought back in-house; relocating to the Brewery Road site and experiencing an increase in calls as the service now handled calls previously managed by the contractor. Housing Direct performance indicators indicated that the average speed in which calls were answered was 26 seconds in 2015/16, with 94.55% of all calls answered.

Other areas for improvement

- 2.39 Through the evidence received the Committee identified other possible service improvements. The residents interviewed commented that estates staff were very knowledgeable of their local

area and felt they should play a role in the repairs service. The Committee agreed that close partnership arrangements between estates staff and the repairs service should be fostered, and that estates staff could contribute to the identification of repairs, particularly communal repairs, and support the work of Resident Liaison Officers.

2.40 The Committee recognises that estate services co-ordinators and caretakers have a wealth of knowledge about their area and suggests that their relationship with the repairs service be developed further, as these staff may be able to assist in the diagnosis of communal repairs, assist with communication, and champion resident needs in partnership with Resident Liaison Officers.

2.41 The Committee was pleased that the repairs service had implemented an apprenticeship scheme since coming back in-house and was providing local employment. Officers advised that the service was keen to contribute towards the training of local people and hoped to develop a more diverse workforce through the apprenticeship scheme. Specifically, the service was seeking to attract more female trade staff and had arranged workshop sessions for women and pupils from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson girls' school to encourage a greater number of female applicants. Ten apprenticeship opportunities were being advertised during the review, comprised of three multi-trade apprenticeships focusing on brickwork, painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery and plastering; and seven trade specific apprenticeships including a bricklayer, electrician, joiner/wood machinist, metal worker, painter/decorating, plasterer and a plumber. The particular trades were chosen with consideration of the anticipated future demand for services and succession planning of existing operatives. The apprenticeships will last between two and four years, depending on the specialism, and were expected to be up to NVQ Level 3.

2.42 The Committee queried if the service could seek to generate income by carrying out repairs to schools, colleges and other properties. Whilst this was an aspiration of the service, officers commented that service improvements would need to bed-in before the service began to trade commercially on any significant scale. The Committee hoped that this could be explored at a later date and the income generated be reinvested back into the council's services.

2.43 The repairs service should have a diverse workforce which reflects the residents of the borough. The Committee is encouraged by the service's introduction of an apprenticeship scheme and would like to see this expand over time as the service has the potential to provide quality employment and training to local people. It is hoped that, following the successful implementation of service improvements, the service will be able to seek commercial opportunities in order to generate income and expand the service.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The Committee concluded that resident experiences of the repairs service varied and that further work was required to develop the service, particularly in regard to completing repairs first time and communications. The Committee was satisfied that officers have a plan to achieve service improvements and hope that the changes proposed will lead to a corresponding increase in resident satisfaction.

3.2 In carrying out the review, the Committee met with officers, members of the public and others to gain a balanced view. The Committee would like to thank witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the scrutiny. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Responsive Repairs
Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the review: Simon Kwong
Lead Officers: Matt West
Overall aim: To consider resident experiences of the Responsive Repairs service.
<p>Objectives of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the different types of responsive repairs carried out • To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used • To consider how works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents • To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers • To confirm that the services are designed to deliver customer focused outcomes • To identify any areas for improvement
<p>How is the review to be carried out:</p> <p>Scope of the Review</p> <p>The review will focus on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsive Repairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The types of repair carried out • Reporting and planning processes, including accessibility for those with disabilities • How responsive repairs are prioritised and methods of triage employed 2. Resident Satisfaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How resident satisfaction can be measured • Current levels of resident satisfaction • Communication with residents • How resident satisfaction can be improved, if required 3. Other considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparisons to other London Boroughs <p>Types of evidence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Documentary evidence including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual report/presentation • Service policies and strategies • Service evaluations and performance indicators

2. Witness evidence including

- Presentation from officers
- The views of tenants and leaseholders from the repairs Reference Group
- Presentation from Kwest regarding how impartial data is collected
- Presentation from external Call Centre Customer Excellence Accreditor

3. Visits

- Visit to the Brewery Road Site to see the operation in progress (*optional*)

Additional Information:

Programme

Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	13 July 2015
2. Draft Recommendations	26 May 2016
3. Final Report	11 July 2016

Housing Scrutiny Committee – Work Programme: Responsive Repairs

26 January 2016		
Who / What	Purpose	Other key information
Matt West & Paul Lightfoot – Presentation and Report	Introduction to the responsive repairs service and the scrutiny review.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the different types of responsive repairs carried out how works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents

29 February 2016		
Who / What	Purpose	Other key information
Representatives from the Resident Panel.	To hear resident views on the service, including satisfaction, communication, and how satisfaction can be improved.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used

23 March 2013		
Who / What	Purpose	Other key information
Susan Richmond, KWest	To consider evidence from the council's resident surveying contractor, including current levels of satisfaction, surveying methods and data collection, and potentially comparisons to other housing providers.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used To confirm that the services are designed to deliver customer focused outcomes
Call Centre Customer Excellence Accreditor – written evidence	To consider matters related to customer service.	

19 April 2016

Who / What	Purpose	Other key information
Kim Wells, Head of Repairs, LB Camden	To compare the service against that of another borough.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers
Michelle Reynolds, Group Commercial Director, Affinity Sutton	To compare the service against that of a registered provider.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers
Extract of the new ICT system specification	To receive detailed information on the new repairs management system planned to be implemented in late 2016.	To provide additional detail to the scrutiny review.
Details of repairs apprentice scheme	Further information on how the apprentice scheme works, how many apprentices of each trade the council employs, how apprentices are trained, how long it takes for apprentices to be trained, and so on.	To provide additional detail to the scrutiny review.
Kwest resident satisfaction survey: further information	To provide a sample of anonymised data obtained via Kwest's survey; including suggested service improvements proposed by residents	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used
Housing Direct KPIs	Following information on CCA accreditation at the March meeting, the Committee requested to review the latest KPI statistics for the service.	To cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents