



ISLINGTON

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 April 2019

SECOND DESPATCH

Please find enclosed the following items:

Item 2 Further Development of the Responsive Repairs Service - Final Report 1 - 14

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Further Development of the Responsive Repairs Service

FINAL REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

London Borough of Islington
23 April 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responsive Repairs

1. **Overall aim:** To evaluate how the performance of the Responsive Repairs service can be maximised, and to identify opportunities for further development and improvement in service delivery.
2. **Objectives of the review:**
 - To evaluate the performance of Islington Council's responsive repairs service, and to hold decision-makers, staff, contractors and suppliers to account as required.
 - To evaluate resident satisfaction and perceptions of the repairs service, and to assess the accuracy of satisfaction surveys.
 - To review examples of gaps and failures in service provision, identifying what went wrong, and how such issues could have been prevented.
 - To review the service's target of 85% of repairs being fixed first time, considering if and how the first time fix rate could be increased.
 - To consider if the systems and processes supporting repairs operatives are optimal, and if there is scope for further improvement.
 - To evaluate how the responsive repairs service communicates with residents, and to identify opportunities for further development and improvement.

3. Evidence

The review ran from September 2018 to April 2019 and evidence was received from a variety of sources:

Witness evidence included:

Presentation from Matt West, Head of Repairs and Maintenance

- Repairs and Maintenance Presentation
- IT Repairs Presentation
- Gas Repairs Presentation
- Comparative information from a neighbouring council -Hackney
- Visit to the call centre and repairs service
- Dashboard viewing and analysis
- Evidence from a leaseholder

4. Key Evidence

- 4.1 **At its meeting on 11 September 2018, members received a presentation by the Housing Director, Housing Property Services and the following points were noted.**
- 4.2 Members were advised that Responsive Repairs involves emergency repairs to council housing and communal works to roof spaces, communal electrics and drainages. It also includes trades and cyclical testing programmes and although the service carries out adaptations in council homes and offer handy person service to residents it does not include Gas and safety checks, estate works, repairs to the road and capital works are not included in responsive repairs.
- 4.3 Members were advised that with a repairs budget of £30 million and 110 operatives covering over 21,000 directly managed properties, the team carries out over 75,000 repairs annually,

7,500 of which are completed within 2hrs, 15,000 in 24 hours and the rest is completed within 20 working days.

- 4.4 Members heard evidence of the repairs process, which commences immediately from the moment a repair is logged either by telephone, online system or referral from councillors. Repairs are then prioritised, then the scheduling system allocates the work to the operatives by PDA. Operatives attend and completes work taking photographs before and after the works and records notes on system.
- 4.5 With regards to quality of work, random sampling is regularly carried out immediately after jobs are completed however where there are concerns of works carried out by a particular contractor, further sampling will be undertaken.
- 4.6 Members were informed that performance of the service is monitored through customer satisfaction surveys, number of first time fixes, jobs completed on time and appointments made and kept. Customer satisfaction is the primary driver and the survey is carried out independently of the Council.
- 4.7 The Service currently receives about 1% complaints however this should be looked at in context of the 75,000 repairs undertaken yearly.
- 4.8 Challenges experienced by the service include the number of complaints, diversity of the workforce, recruitment, IT development, unstable market and the scale of the operations
- 4.9 With regards to diversity in the work place, the Assistant Director acknowledged that although an industry wide issue, more needs to be done in terms of gender and ethnic background of staff as there is a recognition that the responsive team needs to reflect the society it serves. This is being addressed through its outreach and apprentice programme.
- 4.10 IT issues still remain especially with regards to the rollout and the capability of the dashboard which monitors performance across teams and wards. Members were advised that by December 2018 the system should be fully operational.
- 4.11 In light of the concerns about the recent high prices in the building industry, the service has positioned itself into carrying out 85% of the repairs in house as compared to using contractors. Also the Council continues to work with neighbouring boroughs such as Hackney and Haringey on possible savings and sharing of services especially in terms of procurement.
- 4.12 The Assistant Director highlighted a number of developments and work in progress to improve the service such as the soft launch of the Dashboard in winter of 2018; improvements to online services and appointments; offering its services to leaseholders at competitive rates; also commencing direct works on void properties and recently signed up 6 more young people on apprenticeship schemes.
- 4.13 With regard to online repairs, public take up is presently low however further developments would be introduced to increase its functionality by the end of the year.
- 4.14 The Service plans to provide DIY videos to assist residents with repairs that are not currently carried out by the Council. Members welcomed the multi skilling programme involving operatives which was currently being implemented and recognises that this would result in the improvement of first time fixes.
- 4.15 Members noted the Ring and Bring service which is currently being trialled and welcomed the use of texts to update residents about appointments in conjunction with making better use of

notice boards and Area Teams in order to address and improve communication.

- 4.16 The Assistant Director acknowledged the long waiting time experienced by tenants logging a repair during peak times and advised that the online repair service would result in improvements. A suggestion on the possibility of incorporating a traffic light system on the Council website as a guide for tenants denoting peak and quiet times was noted.
- 4.17 On concerns about allocation of work, the meeting was advised that the scheduling system would allocate work to the nearest and available operative to the work.
- 4.18 Members noted the discrepancies regarding the customer satisfaction levels especially when compared to councillor's experiences. The Assistant Director informed the meeting that the survey is carried out by independent company, and Officers will consider look at further analysing where the level of dissatisfaction lies.
- 4.19 A suggestion that with the introduction of the Ring and Bring service, on whether there is scope for repair operatives who presently work out of transit vans to switch to the use of electric assisted bicycles especially for minor works was noted.
- 4.20 Members heard evidence that photographs are taken before and after carrying out repair works by operatives. This is positively received by the operatives and beneficial as it allows the service to monitor the quality of the works undertaken by the operatives and importantly help to improve customer satisfaction.
- 4.21 A suggestion on the possibility of tenant's being able to assess their repair history was noted.
- 4.22 The Committee noted that it was important that the dashboard system seamlessly integrate with the two IT housing system especially as in some cases tenants are involved with other services of the council such as social services, or if the tenant has a support worker ie mental health.
- 4.23 Members were informed of the difficulty of operatives in accessing a leaseholder's flat and advised that although not much could be done in the short term, in the future with regards to new blocks of flats being built, officers are liaising with the new build team on issues of the siting and location of communal cables and pipes so as to avoid access issues that repair operatives currently experience.
- 4.24 Members welcomed the multiskilling of operatives as a positive initiative for the operatives and importantly for the residents as this will reduce the number of multi visits due to the need to carry out works which are ancillary and increase the number of first time fixes. A concern was raised that the programme could result in low morale amongst operatives as main skills acquired over the year was being diluted and concerns in the future that this initiative could be abandoned as it is evident in the private sector.
- 4.25 On the issue of the impact of cyclical repairs on responsive repairs, the Chair stated that although not part of this review, the Committee would be interested in the relationship between cyclical improvements and responsive repairs in the future.
- 4.26 A suggestion to involve the Disability Housing Panel very early on during the design of any IT systems and to be invited when Members visit Brewery Road to view the demonstration of the dashboard was noted.

- 4.27 Members noted the benefit of the use of the dashboard system as it would result in the ability to monitor staff performances, however concerns were raised about what the situation was with Partners as Islington residents should not be subjected to a two tiered system.
- 5. At its meeting on 16 October 2018, the Committee received a presentation from officers of the Housing Direct Business Analyst on the operations, functionality and challenges of the Housing Services Repairs IT. The following were its findings.**
- 5.1 With Council's decision to bring housing services back in-house, there was a recognition that the IT repairs system would need to be upgraded to manage in house resources and improve efficiency and customer service.
- 5.2 The IT system was procured in 2015, and went live in 2017. Phase 2 of the project aims to fine tune and incorporate a number of functionalities which will be completed in the winter of 2018/19. The IT system is made of two elements to it, the One Serve and Synthesis with the latter focuses on job management while Synthesis manages customer relations.
- 5.3 The online repairs system takes calls and diagnoses repairs, is an online portal for customers to request and manage repair jobs via their smart phones or desktops; schedule works to operatives and order parts via a PDA. In addition the online system will allow invoices to be submitted and payments be made to operatives.
- 5.4 There are presently about 190 users of the mobile version of One Serve and 350 users of the desktop version, the public take up is still low, this could be as a result of the free 0800 telephone repair line. The One serve covers over 40 areas of work such as day to day repairs, planned maintenance, gas repairs and servicing, estate inspections, communal heating repairs , testing and compliance etc.
- 5.5 The Online repairs allows residents to raise repairs, easy to use and accessible to allows residents 24 hours. Also the audit trail of works is easily tracked and vulnerable tenants have more options with regards to repair works.
- 5.6 The dashboard, an interactive management tool visually tracks, analyse and measures performance and as it connects to multiple data sets and displays the data as statistical charts, it will be useful for management. Most importantly dashboard provides real time monitoring and reduces time spent analysing data.
- 5.7 Future plans by the repairs service include making further improvement to the PDA version with workflows, extending online repairs portal for customers, extending the online repairs service to leaseholders and customers in the private sector and introducing an improved SMS and web chat for customers.
- 5.8 In response to a question on how IT could specifically address the 15% dissatisfied residents with regards to first time fixes, Officer advised that the introduction of the dashboard would enable with areas of concerns to be analysed so that it can be addressed.
- 5.9 Committee was informed that with regards to uncompleted works, the system is flexible and allows a repair operative unable to complete the works to record a reason for a second visit and the ability to rebook an appointment so as to complete the works using his PDA or call into the office and speak to the scheduler.
- 5.10 The Committee heard evidence that in terms of multi skilling of operatives, this will address situations where repairs cannot be completed due to the operative not having the skills to carry out ancillary works. The Service recognises that the programme would result in an improvement

in the number of first time fixes.

- 5.11 Although Customer satisfaction surveys is undertaken by an independent company with specific questions about works carried out, the present IT system would provide management the tools to be able to manage performance at different levels.
- 5.12 In monitoring the quality of works carried out the system allows operatives to take photographs both before and after work is carried out. The IT system is set up in a way that if photographs are not taken by operatives it will be flagged up to management who will act on this shortcoming.
- 5.13 Committee was informed that in terms of being able to access needs of vulnerable residents, the Council routinely requests information on diversity and disabilities voluntarily from all its residents so that it can provide the right level of service and would expect the information provided to be accurate. In addition housing officers in general are aware of the needs and requirements of vulnerable residents.
- 5.14 In terms of repairs misdiagnosis via the online reporting, the Housing Director of Property Services acknowledged that as the Council continues to move its repair service onto an online reporting platform, there is a recognition that people would still be required to minimise errors.
- 5.15 Committee noted that in managing work flows especially during peak times, contractors and sub-contractors would still be required to undertake repairs. Works carried out by contractors would still be expected to meet the required standard and quality, which is checked by Council officers.
- 5.16 Committee heard evidence that with regards to a suggestion that carers of vulnerable or disabled residents be provided access, issues around data protection and security would need to be considered, however wherever consent is provided by the resident, this would be possible.
- 5.17 On the question of local intelligence and history of works in relation to the Council's housing stock, the Director acknowledged that although not an ideal practice for information to be limited to long serving staff especially as this would cause delays, information is now being captured online especially with the new stock of housing being built. Members were advised that where for example windows are being replaced, manufacturers details, measurements, date of installation should be captured on a database for future use.
- 5.18 Members were informed that although the Service has a skill sharing programme amongst long serving staff and new employees, the Council recognises the essence of work force development and in most cases would expect staff to learn from one another.
- 5.19 Members agreed that although most of the repairs undertaken are routine works, it is important to be clear with residents of expected timescales for each type of repairs.
- 5.20 Members were informed that although routine works can be carried out by residents, Islington Council as a responsible landlord would still continue to ensure that resident's safety is not compromised.
- 5.21 Members were advised that with regards to extending the repairs service beyond the working hours and late into the evening to cater for residents that work late shifts, the Director of Housing advised that there is no evidence of any demand for this type of service and secondly the costs would be astronomical. Residents are presently offered time slots as it is difficult to ascertain how long an operative would take to complete works.

- 6. At its meeting on 19 November 2018, members received a presentation on Gas management which covered gas repairs and servicing process, the current challenges and future plans for the Service.**
- 6.1 The council has a combined in house/subcontractor gas repairs service in the North of the borough and a gas contractor operating in the south of the borough. Across the borough, repairs classified as urgent are completed within 24 hrs. At present the gas team has 12 operatives and 3 apprentices and the total revenue budget is £3.8 million.
- 6.2 Islington carries out annual gas safety checks on all its properties. The checks commence 8 weeks prior to the date the property is deemed as non-compliant with letters sent out informing residents of gas servicing checks and details making arrangements to access the dwelling.
- 6.3 With regard to gas safety checks, appointments for residents being flexible, members were advised that there is no demand for the service to be provided beyond the normal core hours and importantly the issue of cost which the Service would need to be considered. Members were advised of plans to introduce an 'MOT' style servicing which aims to profile servicing over the summer months, however a longer term objective will be to utilise OneServe - online servicing system which will allow residents to book and amend bookings, thereby addressing concerns regarding booking appointments.
- 6.4 Customer satisfaction is high at 95% considering the efforts made to gain access into properties. Members were advised that the service takes each complaint seriously and lessons learnt are taken on board.
- 6.5 On the issue of forced entry into properties to carry out gas safety checks, members were reminded that this would require the Council applying to court for a warrant, however numbers are relatively low because access is usually secured prior to the property becoming non-compliant.
- 6.6 In terms of future plans, the service is considering how to improve its gas boiler installation process especially as resident's complaints tends to be around issues such as the lack of both heating and hot water for a sustained period of time.
- 6.7 Although an industry wide issue, the lack of quality, skilled and experienced engineers is being addressed by a major recruitment drive. The Service currently has in the team 3 lead engineers to help support existing operative and a full complement of very experienced gas inspectors who provide assurance around risk and safety by looking at 100% of the annual gas certificates issued to ensure compliance with the gas regulations. The service also has 3 apprentices in the team working alongside experienced staff with the hope that being a gas safety engineer will be a chosen career for the apprentice.
- 6.8 The service is looking at improving its management of van stock used by the operatives as this would ensure that the rate of first time fixes is improved and increase customer satisfaction levels.
- 6.9 With regards to when the properties managed by PFI are brought back in house, members were informed that the service is aware and it has plans as to what actions it needs to take especially in terms of boiler replacements.
- 6.10 In response to concerns that safety checks in leaseholder's flat were not being carried out in the same block of flat with council tenants, the manager acknowledged that the service is directed at tenanted properties and not home owners as there is no legislation that stipulates home owners should undertake gas checks.

6.11 In response to a question on whether operatives were aware of the personal circumstances of the residents when carrying out repairs, the meeting was informed that all tenants provide their status when signing their tenancy agreement and also information is provided by housing Support officers and the Area Housing team and that all attempts are made to ensure that data on all residents are kept up to date.

6.12 In response to a question on whether there was scope to take on more apprentices, the Manager informed members that employment of 3 apprentices in a team of 12 was a significant proportion of staff, however this could change if the team is enlarged however as resident safety was paramount it was important to have in place experienced gas engineers and operatives.

7. On 14 January 2019, a leaseholder shared his experience with the Council's responsive service. The following issues were noted;

7.1 Leaseholder had reported a water leak coming through his hall way ceiling in February 2018 from a flat occupied by a council tenant. He shared his daily interactions with numerous council officers over a long period and his frustration in getting the Council to acknowledge that the damage was from the flat above.

7.2 Leaseholder informed Committee that he had to employ the services of an independent surveyor to establish the cause of the leak and despite evidence he was being signposted to different personnel and sections of the Council, nothing was done.

7.3 Leaseholder was concerned that despite the delay, and having taken a period of 10 months to resolve the leak, he was surprised that his service charges had increased.

7.4 Housing Officer agreed that in this instance this was mistakenly diagnosed however in some properties most delays are caused by access issues. Meeting was advised that Council will be more active in gaining access to resolve leaks and that in the future when leaseholder's report a repair, officers would be looking to improve the interaction with the call centre advisers.

7.5 Members were disappointed with the level of service received by the leaseholder and requested a breakdown of the Council's cost, in particular the cost involved in restoring the property and to the leaseholder especially having to carry out an independent survey to identify the leak.

8. The Committee received a presentation from officers of Hackney's Building Maintenance and Estate Environment and noted the following points.

8.1 In comparison to Islington, Hackney's Housing Services directly manages 31,000 properties of which 9,000 are leaseholders and in 2017/18, the service carried out 85,000 responsive repairs which included cyclical works.

8.2 Hackney Council operates an in-house Repairs Call Centre along with an on line offer with future plans to expand the on line offer to communal repairs.

8.3 Hackney's responsive repairs are delivered by Building Maintenance along with a number of cyclical work streams. The Building Maintenance group is split between the Repairs Team (Client) and the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO). The repairs 'client' side is undergoing a restructure and the new structure will include the surveying and disrepair teams, customer service including complex casework and the call centre aligned with the DLO planners.

8.4 Hackney's DLO staff are primarily Hackney's internal workforce; 220 employees of which 173 operatives are involved in carpentry, electrical, plumbing, multi trade, plastering, roofing and

glazing.

- 8.5 During the 2017/18 Municipal year, DLO undertook £17m of repairs and all surplus income generated was invested back into the Housing Revenue Account. The Council has an established apprentice scheme and promotes new initiatives such as the Improvers Scheme specifically for people within the 20-30 age group who have qualifications such as City and Guild and keen on being tradespeople.
- 8.6 Although Hackney's Repairs Team is currently supplemented by temporary staff, 40 are full time employees. Hackney aims to reduce the use of agency staff and increase the number of fulltime employees with specialist skills. In addition as part of the Council's ongoing restructuring, there are plans to introduce changes in the areas of commercial and contract management, area surveying and customer service team.
- 8.7 Hackney plans to offer gas safety checks to its leaseholders and the possibility of offering similar repair services that the team presently carries out for council tenants at competitive rates.
- 8.8 New accommodation for the responsive services was presently being sought as its present site is deemed not fit for purpose. Meeting was also informed that senior management from neighbouring authorities regularly meet to share ideas and experiences.
- 8.9 With regard to Hackney's decision to create four surveying areas and any noticeable impact on performance, the Head of Building Maintenance and Estate Environment that the restructuring of the surveying team had not been fully implemented as recruitment of surveyors was ongoing, however he offered to share the outcome with the Committee in the following year.
- 8.10 As a result of the lease arrangement between the Council and residents, and for health and safety concerns, there is no issue about accessing properties to carry out essential works or repairs. In addition, Hackney Council has an out of hours service to carry out essential and urgent work if required.
- 8.11 Complex water leaks in properties are handled by the Leaks Hub Team which may be reported in a number of ways but it is then coordinated separately so as not to be held up in the system.
- 8.12 Members heard evidence about Hackney's Improvers Scheme of which the Manager agreed to share details of the scheme with his counterpart in Islington and the Committee.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the recommendations from the previous review that were being implemented and trailed, concerns still remain with the 15% of jobs that are not completed first time and still required multiple visits to address. The Committee agreed that the focus of the repairs service should be about analysing the root causes of service failures of the population repairs and hope that this will result in an improvement in the rate of first time fixes.

In carrying out the review, the Committee met with housing officers, experiences collated from their caseload and a neighbouring authority 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

- The Service needs to focus on a detailed analysis of the root causes of service failures within the population of repair jobs not completed first time to identify the reasons for failure and put in place measures such as systems approach thinking to correct these failures.
- Following the last scrutiny update from 2016 the Panel are aware that the service has trailed Ring and Bring. The Scrutiny Panel Recommend that the pilot is expanded to other sections of the repairs business.
- The Service should expand and develop its use of customer electronic notice boards and text systems to improve communications particularly with regard to communal repairs.
- Promotion of online repairs should be increased particularly highlighting its use during peak times. The Service should seek to develop a traffic light system on the webpage showing how busy the phone service is at any given time.
- The Service should look to implement a skills sharing programme where adults who have experience or partial qualifications can be brought on as apprentices to finish their qualifications and potentially become operatives. This will not only address employment needs within the borough for previously unassisted groups but also allow skill sharing with older operatives to prevent the loss of knowledge and expertise that has been acquired over a long period.
- A review should consider the process of handling leaks. A process should be in place to ensure leaks are resolved quickly and efficiently and any damage caused is rectified in a smooth process. This will minimise upset to residents, risk of legal challenge and insurance costs. The Leak Hub model in Hackney should be looked at along with other options and consideration given to a dedicated team. The use of dashboards to highlight when leaks have run for over 24 hours should be developed and implemented as swiftly as possible.
- The Service should push on with the development of dashboards and ensure that the investment in these is linked to service improvements. The dashboard will be used to improve management of the repairs service, including the performance management of all staff at all levels of the service. The service should also continue to develop online options for residents. Officers to provide quarterly updates about the performance of the dashboard to the Housing Scrutiny Committee.
- With regard to future building projects, planned maintenance projects and capital programmes, the Responsive Repairs Service should be consulted and their suggestions taken on board.
- The Service should explore the use of a diagnostic system which would identify faults remotely for new gas boilers.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2018/19

Councillors:

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)
Councillor Sue Lukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Theresa Debono
Councillor Troy Gallagher
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE
Councillor Gary Heather
Councillor Roulin Khondoker
Councillor Ben Mackmurdie
Councillor Caroline Russell

Co-opted members:

Rose-Marie McDonald – Resident Observer
Dean Donaghey – Resident Observer

Substitutes:

Councillor Jilani Chowdhury
Councillor Tricia Clarke
Councillor Vivian Cutler
Councillor Osh Gantly
Councillor Satnam Gill OBE
Councillor Matt Nathan
Councillor Angela Picknell
Councillor Marian Spall

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
Ola Adeoye – Senior Democratic Services Officer*

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)

Review: Further Development of the Responsive Repairs Service

Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Director leading the review: Simon Kwong, Director of Property Services

Lead Officers: Matt West, Assistant Director, Housing Property Services

Overall aim:

To evaluate how the performance of the Responsive Repairs service can be maximised; and to identify opportunities for further development and improvement in service delivery.

Objectives of the review:

- To evaluate the performance of Islington Council's responsive repairs service, and to hold decision-makers, staff, contractors and suppliers to account as required.
- To evaluate resident satisfaction and perceptions of the repairs service, and to assess the accuracy of satisfaction surveys.
- To review examples of gaps and failures in service provision, identifying what went wrong, and how such issues could have been prevented.
- To review the service's target of 85% of repairs being fixed first time, considering if and how the first time fix rate could be increased.
- To consider if the systems and processes supporting repairs operatives are optimal, and if there is scope for further improvement.
- To evaluate how the responsive repairs service communicates with residents, and to identify opportunities for further development and improvement.

How is the review to be carried out:

Scope of the review

The review will focus on:

- The population of repairs not fixed first time
- Performance indicators and the accuracy of performance reporting tools
- Levels of resident satisfaction, the accuracy of satisfaction surveys, other reported perceptions of the repairs service.
- Examples of gaps and failures in service provision, and how these can be prevented.
- Service targets, the rationale behind the service's targets, and if alternative service targets might assist in developing or improving services.
- Potential system and process improvements
- Written, verbal and online communication

Types of evidence:

- Evidence from officers, especially front-line staff
- Performance and satisfaction data
- Examples of councillor casework

- Comparative information from a nearby council
- Visit to the repairs service
- Data held by the Council and how it is used especially focussing on the database structure especially files, records and fields
- Walk through of the repairs service procedures
- Evidence from Council residents
- To benchmark the responsive repairs service against other in-house repairs services.

Additional Information:

In carrying out the review the committee will consider equalities implications and resident impacts identified by witnesses. The Executive is required to have due regard to these, and any other relevant implications, when responding to the review recommendations.

Programme

Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	11 September 2018
2. Draft Recommendations	19 March 2019
3. Final Report	23 April 2019

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