

Report of: Executive Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 27 June 2024

Ward(s): All

Subject: Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. This report sets out the proposed policy for the council in the delivery of Housing Repairs and Maintenance. The policy has been developed on advice of the Housing Regulator to ensure our approach to delivery is documented, transparent and meeting legislative requirements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the attached policy for Housing Repairs and Maintenance for Council tenants be agreed and published.
- 2.2. That the current Housing Repairs guide is continued to be published and revised to ensure it aligns with our policy.

3. Background

- 3.1. The council is a landlord to around 36,000 council tenants and leaseholders living in homes located across the borough. The repairs service currently employs a total of 140 repairs operatives from various building trades that deliver in the region of 130,000 maintenance jobs per annum and has a
- 3.2. The Housing Repairs service has an incredibly highly skilled workforce that attempts to ensure repairs are carried out during first visits where possible. The

service area has also upskilled the entire workforce to ensure they have multi skills to maximise fixing as many repairs first time. For example, a plumber attending to repair a leak under a bath will also be able to repair tiles and a damaged bath panel if required.

- 3.3. Housing Property services also carried out a further 1500 joinery work orders a year and manufacturers bespoke items such a front entrance doors and glazing items to our council tenant properties.
- 3.4. In addition to the bespoke items that are manufactured within the Borough, the service also supports training courses that take place for its residents giving them tips and tricks in bespoke DIY taster sessions.
- 3.5. Furthermore, the repairs service also provides apprenticeship opportunities to local residents, also offering work experience opportunities.
- 3.6. Housing Property Services did not have an existing policy in place and offered a Repairs Guide as an alternative.
- 3.7. The regulator of social housing and the housing ombudsman recommended that Islington Council have a Housing Repairs and Maintenance policy.
- 3.8. The Policy has been developed following several rounds of consultation with relevant stakeholders including senior council officers, the resident engagement team and the council's communication teams.
- 3.9. A copy of the policy was also distributed to a 'critical friend' within the Housing Quality Network for feedback.
- 3.10. Work has been undertaken to ensure the policy reads across other policies due for publication and a section specifically to the vulnerabilities policy in particular has been added to the Housing repairs and maintenance policy.
- 3.11. Whenever one of the three policies is due to be reviewed colleagues across the different policies will ensure any amendments that effect the others are accordingly adjusted for consistency.
- 3.12. HQN informed within their feedback that the policy read well and was very informative in particular, the damp and mould section.
- 3.13. Following feedback from both the Housing Quality Network and resident engagement, recommendations were made for the continuation of the housing repairs guide.

- 3.14. The current housing repairs guide was published in 2017 and is an easy to navigate document, straightforward for users.
- 3.15. When the Policy is published the housing repairs guide will be removed from publication and will be developed to ensure it aligns with the policy, becomes more intuitive and improves the user experience and ensure the guide is a reliable and resource for everyone.
- 3.16. Amendments with the housing repairs guide will take place with residents at the heart of this and resident engagement panels will be created to ensure this takes place.
- 3.17. A section within the repairs guide will relate to 'Repairs Stories' which will also be published on the website. Repairs stories have been designed to give residents more detail around the service's more complicated repairs and includes information residents should expect when these situations occur. The 'Repairs stories' will also be published on the website.
- 3.18. The language used within the policy has been developed in conjunction with internal communications advice on producing written communications for residents as well as following writing style guidelines.
- 3.19. Housing property services is continually making changes to improve resident experience. 'Localz' is software used by the service to deliver direct operative communication and live ETA tracking on the day of the service appointment for residents. By allowing 'on my way' communications between our residents and operatives, as well as enabling their location to be mapped and a live ETA provided.
- 3.20. Additional steps are being taken to modernize our contact centre as well as developing the services digital offer to ensure residents have the best possible experience with the service. The policy will be continually reviewed through local governance to ensure updated embedded within the service are added to the overall document.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. The proposal recommends that the Council adopt a formal Repairs and Maintenance Policy in line with guidance from the Social Housing Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman. The Policy formalises the existing Council "Repairs Guide" document.

- 4.1.2. There should be no changes to existing custom and practice and, as such, there should be no direct financial impact resulting from this Policy.
- 4.1.3. Repairs and Maintenance budgets are set annually through the Housing Revenue Account budget setting and Business Planning process. These budgets are considered high profile areas due to their value, complexity and potential volatility. As such, they are subject to an enhanced level of financial scrutiny from officers. This helps to highlight pressures at as early a stage as possible, allowing officers to take mitigating action where possible and to report to Members accordingly.

4.2. **Legal Implications**

- 4.2.1. The policy demonstrates how the council will meet its statutory and contractual obligations to keep its housing stock well-maintained and in good repair.
- 4.2.2. The document fulfils the recommendations of the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman to implement a policy setting out the council's approach to housing repairs and maintenance.

4.3. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 4.3.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 4.3.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, because an EIA screening was carried out. The screening identified positive impacts for disabled and older residents. No negative impacts on any groups were identified.

4.4. **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

- 4.4.1 The 'Housing Repair and Maintenance Policy' covers the operation of the service and the positive and negative environmental implications of a range of interventions that have a necessary social benefit i.e. repairs to residents' homes.
- 4.4.2 The negative implications are primarily linked to the materials and resources used, the transportation of materials and staff, with some energy use in operational buildings i.e. electricity and heating. Some of these will be mitigated by the shift to Electric Vehicles, with the expectation that capital will be identified to replace or

retrofit housing vehicles from 2026 onwards. Once the council's core operational fleet is electrified as by the existing fleet procurement strategy, the Vision 2030 climate strategy and the MTF5. This work is well advanced.

4.4.3 The positive implications are primarily linked to the repairs that improve the energy efficiency of resident's homes esp. repairs to windows and doors, and any insulation measures previously installed at the property. The policy also addresses the needs of residents who are having difficulty with keeping their homes warm, and the referral to Islington council's pioneering SHINE and Energy Doctor services. Who can help them with a range of advice and small measures to keep heating costs down and their home feeling warmer and reduce carbon emissions.

4.4.4 There are additional opportunities within the 'Housing Repair and Maintenance Policy' to identify easy wins that have positive environmental implication. These may further reduce energy use, improving the thermal comfort, or make residents home more resilient to the increased temperatures and impacts of climate change. The ambition is to explore these potential operations as a joint piece of work between the repairs and climate action team in 24/25. To then integrate this thinking within the Business-as-Usual operations of the repair teams and the 'Housing Repair and Maintenance Policy' from 25/26 on.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1. Having a formalised Repairs and Maintenance policy for council tenants will allow the council to be more transparent to tenants about what the repairs service is responsible for repairing and should also prevent any challenges on the basis that our policy is not clear or consistent.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Repairs and Maintenance Policy

Final report clearance:

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