

Committee(s): Housing Management and Almshouses Sub (Community and Children's Services) Committee	Dated: 14/01/2022
Subject: Repairs and Maintenance Service – Handling Complaints	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

The purpose of this report is to give Members an overview of the complaints process with regard to the repairs and maintenance service. A case study has been identified to demonstrate this process, the outcome and the lessons learnt.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider and note the report

Main Report

Background

1. The HRA Repairs and Maintenance Service is varied and, is delivered by several contractors who specialise in particular areas of the service. These include (but not limited to) the following:

- Day-to-Day Response Repairs.
- Gas Servicing and Repairs.
- Lift Maintenance and Repairs.
- Active Fire Safety.

Current Position

2. There are various active contracts in place to deliver the repairs and maintenance service across the HRA including:

Works contract	Contractor	Start date	Contract Period
Day-to-day Response Repairs	Wates Living Space	1 April 2019	3 + 2 years
Gas Servicing and Repairs	TSG Building Services PLC	1 October 2021	3 + 2 years
Lift Maintenance	Guideline Lift Services Limited	1 July 2019	3 + 2 years
Active Fire Safety	Amalgamated Limited	1 April 2020	2 + 2 years

3. In delivering a reactive service there will inevitably be occasions where the delivery does not meet the expectation of our tenants and leaseholders. It is the handling of these failures that determines the effectiveness of the overall service.
4. This report focuses on the complaints process both formal and informal and will use a case study to demonstrate how complaints are handled and, more importantly, where, if any, lessons have been learnt and processes reviewed to ensure, where possible, similar incidents do not recur.
5. The Housing Service within the Department of Community and Children's Services operates in accordance with the Housing Complaints Policy. The latest reviewed policy was approved by Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee on 20th September 2021. Residents are also provided with a 'Making a Complaint' leaflet which provides with a summary of the policy and details the various steps of the complaints process.

Informal Stage

6. Where there has been a repairs service failure, subject to the level of failure, it will be investigated informally. An example would be where a contractor's appointment has not been kept. In this example, if the investigation results in there being a legitimate reason for the missed appointment, then a new, convenient appointment would be made and the matter closed. Should the new appointment not be kept then this could be considered as a Formal Stage One Complaint

Formal Stage

7. Formal Stage One complaints are monitored by the Quality and Performance Manager (QPM). The QPM will acknowledge receipt and provide a deadline for a response. The complaint, along with an investigation notes template, are sent to the relevant Property Services Officer (PSO) and the Property Services Team Manager (PTSM). The investigation is, invariably, carried out by the PSO on behalf

of the PSTM. The investigation will involve discussions with the complainant, the contractor and any other parties the PSO deems necessary. Depending on the nature of the complaint, a resolution may be agreed with the complainant or, in some cases, the complaint is resolved during the course of the investigation.

8. Upon completion of the investigation, a response is drafted by the PTSM. This is passed to the QPM for comment and approval before being sent to the complainant.
9. Should the complainant not be satisfied with the response or agreed actions are not fulfilled then a Formal Stage Two complaint can be made. Stage Two complaints are investigated by an Assistant Director. A review of the Stage One response will take place including any agreed actions. The outcome of the Stage Two investigation would be shared with the complainant and an agreed course of action would be provided in the formal response. In some cases, it may not be possible for both parties to agree a resolution or agreed actions may not take place. In these cases, we would provide the complainant with details on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman.

Case Study

10. A complaint has been received by a resident (R). The basis of the complaint was that 2 reported leaks were not resolved in an acceptable period of time. The leaks in question were from a sink waste and a leak, potentially, from the flat above.
11. The complaint was investigated by a PSO and it was clear that efforts had been made to resolve the leak from above. The above property is leasehold and any leaks from a leasehold property is the responsibility of the leaseholder to rectify. This is a recurring issue as it can be difficult to engage with a leaseholder to carry out the repair. In this instance, the leaseholder arranged for a plumber to attend approximately 2 weeks later. The leaseholder's plumber confirmed the leak was not from the property above. As a result, Property Services arranged for a plumber to attend who, after removing access panels, confirmed that the leak was from the leaseholder's property. The leak to the sink waste was repaired but this failed soon after. A further repair was carried out to resolve the leak
12. The investigation concluded that there was an unacceptable period of time from when the leak was identified to when it was resolved. Whilst R was updated, the investigator deemed the communications to be not frequent enough. The investigation further concluded that the repair to the sink waste requiring 3 visits to resolve was a service failure. The complaint was upheld. There were a number of lessons learnt as a result of this complaint including the need to keep residents updated on progress even if progress is delayed. Improved use of IT systems to share information. Providing photographs of repairs to enable contractors to identify the repair more accurately.
13. As a result of the complaint, the leak from the flat above was repaired and remedial works to R's flat were agreed and carried out.

14. The table below summarises the claims made by R and the responses by the investigator.

Claim	Response
<p>Failure to promptly respond to reports of repairs; I often find that I have to contact the Housing Department at least twice, sometimes more before action is taken.</p>	Repairs should be responded to within the agreed timescales. In this instance, a repair was required by the property above. There was a delay in identifying the repair and this should have been communicated to the resident
<p>Failure to follow up; Whenever a repair requires more than one visit, no follow up visit is ever arranged.</p>	A repair request was raised following the claim that it was not the responsibility of the flat. Common services were checked and no leaks were found. There was a delay in getting the repair resolved by the resident above.
<p>Failure to share information City of London staff are often unaware of previous phone calls, emails or letters indicating poor or non-existent record keeping. Contractors are often unaware of the details of the problem or have inadequate information indicating a lack of information management and sharing.</p>	All repairs are recorded on the Housing Repairs System, Orchard. CoL staff have access to these repairs which contain notes and updates. Information is passed from Orchard to our contractor's system.
<p>Failure to address root causes There is a tendency to 'patch things up' rather than investigate and address the underlying issue thus prolonging the problem. This often results in more damage to the kitchen or bathroom that the City of London then refuses to pay to be rectified.</p>	In this case, information was not passed to the operative resulting in delays and misdiagnosis. The leak to the sink waste was repaired but failed soon after. This is a service failure. Remedial works as a result of leaks are carried out by CoL and are claimed through our insurance.

Conclusion

15. The complaints process identifies service failures and complaints are a standing item in formal contract meetings. The Quality Performance Manager provides a complaints tracker and attends these meetings. Where complaint trends are identified, actions are agreed and monitored.

Appendices

None

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