

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 24TH APRIL 2013

REPORT BY: HEAD OF HOUSING

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 This report will update members on the progress of the repairs and maintenance service performance improvement work streams.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Asset Management Team have been progressing a number of service improvement work streams to improve the quality of services delivered to tenants and provide the foundations for improved and sustained performance.

The work areas currently being progressed are:

- Implementation of revised staffing structure
- Staff Development
- Review of Vehicle Fleet and Trackers
- Implementation of mobile working
- Extend hours of repairs service
- Improve reputation and performance of repairs service
- Establishment of an in house adaptations team
- Delivery of Capital works scheme
- Further development of the stores service
- New Schedule of Rates

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Implement revised staffing structure

Job Evaluation results were received in December for all posts within the Housing Asset Management Service. Following a review of the results by the management team a number of appeals were submitted on the basis that the team felt certain posts had not been fully understood and therefore not evaluated correctly. The appeal results were returned in mid February and the management team felt that these results better reflected the posts and associated duties.

All Housing Asset Management staff members have been informed, team by team, of the results of the job evaluation process together with the proposed next steps. Trade Union colleagues have also been kept informed throughout and have supported staff in relevant meetings. Following a comprehensive recruitment process, the permanent positions of Housing Asset Manager, Operations Manager (x2), Capital Works Manager and Business Performance Manager have all been filled.

Work has also been on-going in terms of desktop assimilation from previous posts to new posts within the structure and also a number of cases for individuals where there is no suitable job match have also been progressed on the grounds of EVR.

The next phase for implementation will be the assimilation or recruitment to the Team Leader/Officer level and alongside this, any new posts within the structure being advertised. The final date for full implementation is expected to be 30th June 2013.

3.02 Staff Development

3.02.1 Technical Certificate in Multi Skilling

Housing Services pays an enhanced rate for its trades staff to perform additional skills to their main trade. Some staff are meeting this requirement fully but a significant number of staff do not yet fully meet this standard. A training programme has been developed in partnership with Deeside College Construction Department, to provide all trades staff with the required skills to become fully competent in a range of tasks that will allow them to attain a Level 2 NVQ in Multi Skilling. Attainment of this qualification will assist the trade operative to:

- a) improve the quality of their work
- b) complete more work in one visit
- c) improve productivity
- d) assist in the delivery of the repairs by appointment process

This will also have a positive impact for tenants and on customer satisfaction as it will provide the platform for a higher rate of jobs being

completed on the first visit.

Following initial feedback and evaluation on the multi skilling programme some issues were uncovered with the delivery model and a negative impact on operational output. A review of the model has taken place between management, training, Trade Unions and Deeside College to amend the model and improve the outcomes and benefits for both trades staff, and the Asset Management service as a whole. The new model involves Deeside College developing a training calendar to offer short burst training in each multi-skilling area. Each course will be 1 day a week for 4 weeks. Trades staff who are competent in their own area will not need to attend and will be signposted direct to an assessment for that area of work.

The new model commences in June and will have no impact for the candidates already undertaking the framework but will ensure that future cohorts have reduced operational downtime and avoid any duplication of attending learning sessions involving their primary trade.

Now all operatives will be completing some modules from the start of the new programme rather than one group starting and fully finishing the qualification whilst others wait for up to two years before commencing. This will help to create a culture of continuous improvement throughout the workforce. Each operative will still complete the full Level 2 Technical Certificate in Multi Skilling by the end of the programme, which is expected to be in 2016.

3.02.2 Further Training

All Housing Asset Management staff are scheduled to attend training for dealing with complaints and using the outcomes to improve services and customer experience for the future. This training course has been tailored to the needs of the Housing Service and will enable staff to deal with complaints effectively.

Following the full implementation of the permanent staffing structure the management team are working closely with the training section to deliver a Site Managers Supervisors Training Scheme for all Team Leaders and Contract Surveyors. This course specifically covers all aspects of Health and Safety for teams carrying out jobs on-site with the aim to enhance knowledge on key areas such as working at heights and to reinforce the importance of effective site management. Work is also on-going to develop training for elements of the workforce and staff on green deal and renewable energy solutions.

3.03 Review of the vehicle fleet and trackers

3.03.1 Fleet

Consultation has been on-going for a significant period regarding the removal of vehicles from certain posts within the service. The Joint Trade Unions submitted a grievance in relation to this proposal. This grievance was not up-held and it has been agreed that vehicles will be removed in conjunction with the implementation of the structure. This will ensure that individuals retain the vehicle until the point that they are either assimilated or appointed into the new positions on the structure. At this point the vehicles will be removed achieving the £80k efficiencies from lease, repairs, servicing and running costs.

3.03.2 Tracker Investigations

A number of investigations relating to vehicles and tracker information have been ongoing and have now been concluded. There were various outcomes as a result of these investigations and there were also a number of improvements that were determined as part of the process that would aid the service moving forwards. A number of measures have already been taken including refining the tracker system and its use and benefits as a management tool, revisiting management procedures on call out and overtime and re-training on HR systems and policies.

The Housing Asset Management Team are also working closely with the Trade Unions on improving policies, practices and inconsistencies discovered throughout the investigation process. The Investigating Officer and Senior HR Advisor also compiled a summary report following the investigations which covered all recommendations established throughout the process in order to ensure service improvements were realised for the future. All actions are on target for implementation.

3.04 Implementation of mobile working

Extensive work has been on-going by the IT team to resolve the issues hampering the full implementation of mobile working. A new code server has been built by the IT department to support the open mobile system and comprehensive testing of this new server has been in progress. To date the server that was used to support open mobile, also supported other IBS systems and this resulted in limited capacity within the server. The new server is dedicated purely to open mobile and will provide significantly increased capacity for handling high levels of data transfer. The new server is seen as a very positive move forwards in terms of contributing to the improvement of mobile working system issues and improving the communications when transferring data. Capita are supporting the development of this dedicated server and are working with the IT team to configure the new system. Following final

testing and configuration the new server will be migrated into the live system. This is to be completed by mid April.

Alongside the server development, FCC have continued to work closely with the relevant companies to resolve other outstanding issues. The software supplier committed to provide a single upgrade file (CAB11) to address numerous software issues that had been experienced. This was provided and installed in the test environment and will be integrated into the live open mobile system at the same time as the migration of the new code server. The anticipated go live date for the new version of the software is the end May.

Support provided by the software supplier to resolve software issues and prioritise helpdesk calls etc has improved following the detailed discussions that have been held over recent months. Additional staff capacity has been employed. Account meetings will continue to ensure that this level of service and priority is maintained until all issues are resolved.

3.05 Introduction of an extended service hours

Extensive work has been on-going to introduce an extended hours service. Following a comprehensive review of the previous pilots and lengthy discussions and negotiations with Trade Union colleagues a revised proposal with two separate work patterns was agreed. This proposal ensures that each working day and in particular the days of peak demand for Responsive Repairs remain adequately resourced whilst also providing an extended working day for customers. Expressions of interest were sought from the trades staff and 25 applications were received. This included a variety of trades for each working pattern. The working group, including trade union representatives and Human Resources colleagues are now finalising operational and contractual details. Once agreed the new extended hours service of 8am till 6pm will be implemented and this is anticipated to be 1st June 2013.

Alongside the work to introduce an extended working day, consultation has taken place with trades staff regarding the reduction of a 38 hour working week to a 37 hour working week. Historically trades staff have worked an extra hour per week in return for an additional 6 days annual leave per annum. The Housing Asset Management team have consulted with Trade Union colleagues and staff and new contracts have been issued to take effect from 1st April 2013. This agreement will bring consistency with other services in the Authority. The new negotiated arrangement has significant benefits to the service as this equates to an equivalent of 2-3 additional full-time trades staff available throughout the year.

In addition to the revised contracts being issued, management guidance will also be issued which will cover call out procedures, vehicle

management and travel time. This will cover some of the recommendations found as part of the tracker investigations in terms of issuing clear guidelines to staff to achieve a consistent approach across the service.

3.06 **Improve reputation and performance of repairs service**

The team is continuously looking to improve the performance and reputation of the service and provide a first class service to tenants.

Housing Asset Management has made significant progress over the previous two quarters in all categories of performance. Most noticeably is the improvement in the average days taken to complete a non-urgent repair.

Period	Emergency	Target	Urgent	Target	Non urgent	Target
Q1 2012/13	0.55	0.5	8.87	8.5	82.16	35
Q2 2012/2013	0.56	0.5	8.08	8.5	43.63	35
Q3 2012/2013	0.45	0.5	7.99	8.5	24.22	35

This is the first time that this category has achieved the target and is a huge success. The reasons for this include operational improvements; ensured correct classification of the repairs; and continuing to increase the number of repairs being carried out by appointment.

There are still a small number of jobs that are out-of-target but as we are completing the majority of repairs within target - and many in just a few days, the average is significantly improved. There are many factors that will influence the average and the team would like to make members aware that this average may fluctuate. The Christmas period and the recent adverse weather may impact on performance in all categories in Q4 and Q1 2013-14 as the workforce will have been redeployed from completing non-urgent repairs to carry out essential emergency and urgent work.

Urgent repairs also demonstrate a positive improvement in quarter 3 from 8.08 to 7.99 days. This improvement is partly down to improved control measures being implemented and partly due again to ensuring that any additional works are not completed on the same works instruction.

Housing Asset Management are also predicting to complete over 46,000 jobs this financial year which is over 2000 more than last financial year.

3.07 In-house Disabled Adaptations Team

Provision of disabled adaptations is a statutory duty placed upon Council's and housing providers. On 1st February 2012 a proposal was presented to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the establishment a dedicated team for the delivery of adaptations within Council properties. This was a move away from the existing system of tendering the work to a pool of local subcontractors.

The Committee supported this proposal subsequently agreed by Cabinet to pilot the team for a period of 12 months. This would allow the Service to evaluate the timeliness and cost effectiveness of the team, against the previous arrangements. It would also identify whether there are further benefits to closer integrated working.

Council house adaptations are funded via the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and £1m per annum is allocated for this purpose. However, as the Service is in Year 2 of a six year asset management strategy to bring its properties towards the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, the more cost effective the provision of disabled adaptations is; the more money that can be made available for WHQS works.

➤ Evaluation

It was envisaged that the in house team would provide: -

- Improved timescales
- A more cost effective service
- A more efficient service through improved communication and opportunities for adding value.

➤ Improved Timescales

In order to evaluate the impact of the in-house team on the delivery of major adaptations, a direct comparison of the 6 months before and after the pilot has been carried out. The following are the average timescales by most popular work type.

Work Type	Average Timescale Before	Average Timescale After
Level Access Shower	128 Days	52 Days
Shower over Bath	58 Days	25 Days
Mixed work combinations	152 Days	43 Days

Stairlifts have been excluded from the above figures, as they are provided under a framework agreement which contains target timescales.

As can be seen from the figures to date, adaptations are being delivered much more quickly by the in house team than through the existing subcontractor arrangements. This is due to the effectiveness of the team, who have worked with Travis Perkins on a standard stock of

items. It is also due to the removal of the need to tender each job on an individual basis.

➤ **Cost effective Service**

In order to make a comparison between the cost per job, information has been considered over two six month periods. The two data sets are under the old subcontractor system and a second six month period under the new in house system. The in house team has completed 33 major disabled adaptations over the last 6 months. These jobs have been costed with an average value of £4646.18. This compares favourably with the subcontractor rate previously, where an average job was valued at £5,238.08. Therefore, the saving on an average major adaptation is £591.90 under the new arrangements. These figures are robust on the basis that the majority of major adaptations fall in to the three work types identified above.

This lower figure is largely as a result of stripping out the subcontractor profit element and the cost of materials was below the 35% originally anticipated, due to all materials (with the exception of stairlifts) being accessed through the Travis Perkins Stores Facility, under the favourable terms of the Council's contract.

➤ **Added value**

There have been a number of additional benefits to bringing the Service in house, in addition to improved timescales and reduced cost. The Disabled Adaptations Team reports to the same Operations Manager as the Void Team. This has provided collaborative opportunities for both teams. The result is that where properties have become void and there is an identified disabled tenant, adaptations can now be carried out at void stage. As well as improving timescales for adaptations, this also assists with property letting times and the 7 day housing management target. Previously adaptation work would have taken place after the property had been made available for letting.

Given that the majority of works are bathroom adaptations, the Disabled Adaptations Team have been in discussion with the Capital Works Team to secure additional funding to ensure that all adapted bathrooms meet WHQS. Previously, the adaptation would have been provided, e.g. a Level Access Shower installed and the remainder of the bathroom, if there were no repair issues, would not be improved. However, subject to formal agreement all bathroom adaptations will meet WHQS, further assisting the 6 Year Housing Asset Management Strategy and contributing to an earlier completion date for WHQS compliance.

Finally the team has further promoted communication between Housing Asset Management, Housing Renewal and Neighbourhood Housing Management. It allows the Housing Service to offer our tenants a

timely, cost effective and person centred service. It is our intention to introduce customer feedback for this element of the service, to ensure it continues to meet our tenant's expectations. Should the establishment of the team be supported on a permanent basis, the outcome of this work will be reported at a future Scrutiny Committee.

3.08 **Delivery of Capital Works Scheme**

The Capital Works programme for 2013/14 was intended to provide 600 Heating upgrades, 922 Kitchen replacements, 884 Smoke Alarms and 56 Bathroom replacements. The year end to date is projecting that actual delivery will be 1050 Heating upgrades, 1081 Kitchen replacements, 2,700 Smoke Alarms fitted and 102 Bathroom replacements. This is an excellent achievement and demonstrates the hard work that has gone on to manage and progress these projects.

The largest of the contracts is the Kitchen replacement programme and the new tender that started in the second half of the year was initially split 50/50 with two contractors. The second year of the contract, 2013/14, was always intended to be let on a split dependant upon performance of the previous year. Throughout January and February there were an increased number of issues in relation to one contractor. As a consequence, during the month of March, the Capital Works Team along with a number of partners completed various on site inspections to collect data on the contractor's performance. Inspections were completed to look at Health and Safety issues on site; the installation of ventilation equipment; the overall quality of workmanship and Tenant Auditors looked at the experience gained from a Tenant's perspective. All the information gathered from the above provided adequate data to reapportion the contract to the best provider.

In addition to the main work streams, the Capital Works team has re-visited all the Fire Risk Assessments and the DDA schemes and are now on site with Contractor's, helping Housing Asset Management to fulfil its legal duties. Capital Works have worked closely with the Housing Teams in managing and actioning items as highlighted in the Fire Risk Assessments and also to ensure our joint duties are dealt with correctly. Joint site visits are taking place to deal with management issues, clearance of debris and household items and to ensure that fire alarm checks and procedures are in place. The Capital team will shortly be in a position to discuss the ongoing improvement works with the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service in order to monitor our on-going progress.

Moving forwards into 2013/14, schemes and contractors are already in place for the following works; Fire Risk Assessment; DDA works; Kitchen replacements; Bathroom replacements; Heating schemes and Smoke Alarms. This is a positive improvement on previous years where contracts have started 2-3 months into the new financial year and will aid the efficient and effective delivery of the schemes. The Capital

Works team also have additional funding for other schemes such as external environmental works and contractors and schedules will be identified for these in the new financial year.

An additional budget line has been included into the 2013/14 programme for the provision of gas in areas that were originally unobtainable. The Capital team have been in discussions with Wales and West to choose the most economically viable schemes that we can progress with and provide gas in lieu of existing methods of providing heat such as Oil or Electric. The Capital Works Team will work closely with the energy team to maximise the external funding that is available, ensuring future schemes can be programmed in to other areas that require off gas solutions.

3.09 Further developments of the stores service

The managed stores service has been operational 12 months now and has proved to be a significant improvement for the service both operationally and culturally. Travis Perkins have agreed to do an end of year presentation once accounts are finalised to the Senior Management Team and Housing Cabinet Member to report on performance, improvements made and efficiencies realised.

In the financial year 2012-13, Housing Asset Management are predicted to complete over 46,000 repairs which is over 2000 more than the previous financial year. Material spend in 2011-12 was £1.79m and in 2012/13 is predicted to be circa £1.65m. These figures demonstrate a reduction in spend of around £140k on materials from the previous year with also over 2000 additional repairs being completed by the service. These spend figures also include the management and running costs of the new facility which in previous years would have been costed at around £100k. Therefore a cashable efficiency of c£240k has been achieved and 5% more repairs completed. This also demonstrates a reduction of almost £4 in the average cost per repair from £40 to £36. Further efficiencies are predicted to be made following the full implementation of managed van stocks and electronic trading.

Another benefit of the managed stores is the standardisation of stock which is achieved through purchasing 95% of the services materials from one supplier. This has enabled the department to standardise materials used within tenants homes, link in with Capital Works specifications and align the operational activities with the Asset Management Strategy. This will also realise considerable efficiencies in the future in particular in respect of standardised parts required when attending to repairs.

Tool hire and purchase have now also been incorporated into the managed stores contract. This will achieve further efficiencies in cost but more noticeably result in considerable operational improvements such as no requirement for PAT testing in-house, full risk assessments

covered with each item of equipment and a repair and replacement agreement as part of the contract.

Work now continues to further develop the stores service with the main objectives as follows: -

- Electronic Trading – Electronic Trading allows orders and invoices to be matched electronically which will provide significant efficiencies for back office processes.
- Van Stocks – A complete review of van stocks is being undertaken with the aim to phase in over a number of months a fit for purpose van stock for each operative. This will reduce visits to stores and importantly aid the objective of completing repairs on the first visit as operatives will have the required materials on the van. This will have to be introduced in conjunction with the embedding of mobile working to enable automatic stock replenishment but will realise the most significant efficiencies for the service once introduced.
- Develop Management Information – Ongoing reviews of stock requirements and product specifications will continue to take place over the next 12 months and the development of key performance indicators and management information will aid continuous improvement throughout the contract. Benchmarking exercises on cost of materials will also be carried out annually.

3.10 **Implement a New Contact Centre system**

The new contact centre was implemented, on schedule in December 2012. This has provided a much improved service to customers and has provided a solution to the problems that were being experienced since the relocation from Canton Depot. The new system allows for a queuing facility in times of high demands, provides a call recording mechanism and facilitates messages to be relayed for times of peak demand or emergencies. The contact centre now allows for hot desking and also for desk phones to be transferred to mobiles if staff are out on site.

Further work will now be undertaken in terms of developing monitoring and performance reports. Reports will be developed to monitor number of calls, capacity within the call centre, calls answered within target and analysis of times of high and low demand. This will enable analysis of staffing levels and possible seasonal variations. The call monitoring facility will also be a useful tool for staff training and will also provide an element of security for staff handling calls.

3.11 **Schedule of Rates**

Following the selection of the new schedule of rates a great deal of work and consultation has taken place with Trade Union colleagues and a task group from the workforce. The group analysed the proposed new

schedules to identify any rates included that were not required and any areas where additional rates were required. Training has now taken place for both the trades and office staff and each will be provided with a new schedule of rates book detailing all new codes.

Work has also been underway to ensure that IT systems are prepared for the upload of the new rates and to ensure successful implementation for the new financial year. A large amount of work will be required to transfer all old jobs, logged or allocated, onto the new schedule of rates. Members should be made aware that this may have a short term impact on performance data whilst this work is undertaken.

The new schedule of rates will bring about a number of benefits for the service and will form a large part of the required culture change within Housing Asset Management. The new schedule of rates has significantly reduced codes, amended times that will only be visible in the back office systems and will encourage a culture different to the previous bonus scheme working practices. Through a reduced schedule, trades staff will be encouraged to self assess significantly more jobs and carry out the work required on the same visit rather than the current practice which encourages a large amount of inspections before work is carried out. Average times for repairs will be a performance and productivity measure assessed in the background and will therefore encourage a culture of completing jobs in the time needed without referring to set times (included in the former schedule of rates).

3.12 **Next Steps**

Delivery of service improvement work streams will continue and will be reported regularly to this committee.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Members are asked to note the positive progress being made to improve performance and to deliver the service improvement work streams.

4.02 Members support the permanent establishment of the in-house disabled adaptations team.

5.00 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 None as a direct result of this report

6.00 **ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 None as a direct result of this report, though works to maintain and improve the stock and repair and maintenance services provide a direct benefit to the lives and living conditions for some of the poorest Flintshire residents.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None as a direct result of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None as a direct result of this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 There are a number of items which will require continuing negotiation and discussion with trade unions over the coming months.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Consultation will be required as detailed above.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation with trade unions is ongoing, regular meetings are held with Trade Union representatives to discuss all strands of the service.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Contact Officer: Nik Evans
Telephone: 01352 701658
Email: Nikki.Evans@flintshire.gov.uk