



October 2024

Final report

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1. Who are the Tenant Challenge Panel?

The Tenant Challenge Panel known as the 'TCP' are a group of tenants who meet on a monthly basis to scrutinise areas of the housing service.

The group choose an area of the housing service they would like to scrutinise. The group work with the Housing Strategy and Engagement team to invite managers to present to the group and discuss areas of their service and identify recommendations for improvements that they would like to make. A tenant scrutiny review takes approximately six months to complete, culminating in the production of a final report and action plan with recommendations for consideration by the housing service.

As always, we would like to recognise and thank all the members of the TCP for the time and commitment given to review the standard repairs service within Chesterfield Borough Council.

TCP membership: Rita Stanley, Karen Francis, Tony Hedley, Phil Simpson, Marion Gerrard, Jayne Peploe, Dave Hardy.

2. Methodology

For the Housing Property Services standard repairs tenant scrutiny review the monthly TCP meetings covered:

- Presentations from and discussions with relevant managers / staff
- Reviewing performance data and information
- Looking at complaints' information
- Reviewing levels of satisfaction by tenants who have received the service
- Gaining an understanding of current legislation and tenant rights and responsibilities

Previous scrutiny reviews have considered value for money, however as the housing property service is currently being reviewed prior to restructure this did not feature within the remit of this review. Value for money will be included as a recommendation in the action plan.

3. Meeting summaries

3.1 Meeting 1: March 2024 Housing Property Services – scoping / overview / performance and complaints meeting

The group was provided with a background of the 30-day repairs service. This initial overview identified several areas of interest for the group:

- A discussion about the repairs calling cards which are left by the workforce when they had not been able to contact the tenant were felt to be of a 'sharp tone' and group members felt the repairs calling cards could benefit from being reviewed by the tenant communication and accessibility group.
- Further discussions were had about communication in general and group members wanted to understand more about how the service worked to meet individual tenant needs when providing the service.
- Through these discussions it became apparent that the subject of communication was one which is important for tenants and an area where the TCP members felt improvements could be explored, which would improve the tenant experience when going through the repairs process.

The group produced a list of questions that they would like to discuss with the managers of the Housing Property Service at the next session.

Appendix 4: List of questions to Housing Property Services

3.1.1 Complaints

The housing officer for policy and service development shared complaint statistics and information received in relation to the housing property service (period April 2023 – January 2024).

Housing Property Services received 340 stage 1 complaints in this period against a workload of approximately three thousand repairs per month. Twenty-seven of these complaints were escalated to a stage 2 complaint. Complaints relating to the housing repairs service make up over 85% of complaints received for the service as whole.

The complaint handling performance is below the standard set out in the complaints policy. The policy has a target of ten working days to respond. Currently the service responds to only 4 in 10 complaints within the timescale and 6 in 10 are not.

Prior to the restructure of the Housing Property Service two customer complaints officers are being recruited in the summer, this is to help the service to be more proactive with communication with tenants and others around repairs where needed and to try to reduce the number of complaints received.

TCP members enquired what the difference is between a complaint being partially upheld and fully upheld. TCP members expressed concern about whether tenants understand the complaints process and responses received particularly where terms like partially upheld are used.

Partially upheld means there may be more than one part to the complaint, and Housing Property Services may be at fault for part of this but not everything within the complaint.

Data demonstrates there is concern about damp and mould from tenants. Damp and mould are more of an issue recently due to insulation and air not being able to get out. Members discussed concerns that tenants can feel that they are viewed as though they 'are the problem' when it comes to instances of damp and mould.

Appendix 1: Complaints performance data

Appendix 2: Complaints damp and mould

3.1.2 Repairs and performance data

The insights and performance officer prepared reports and infographic sheets for TCP members. This information shared details of the repairs and types of repairs completed during the period Apr 2023 – Jan 2024. In this period, Housing Property Services completed 64.7% of standard repairs within the timescale.

On average the number of standard repairs completed per month this year (23/24) had fallen to 1250 compared to 1700 during (22/23).

Half of the standard repairs were completed in 10 days or less between April – December 2023.

Data shared regarding the percentage of appointments 'being kept' and this averages around 85% over the previous three quarters. Appointment 'being kept' refers to Chesterfield Borough Council keeping the appointment which includes if the tenant is not in.

It was explained to TCP members that housing property services use working days, and this <u>does not</u> include weekends and bank holidays.

Appendix 3: Repairs performance information

3.2 Meeting 2: April 2024 - TCP meeting with Housing Property Services managers

Dave Poole (DP) (Responsive Repairs Manager) and Nichola Ayres (NA) (Senior Technical Officer Responsive Repairs) attended the TCP group on the 16th of April 2024. Prior to the TCP meeting, the managers of Housing Property Services were provided with the list of questions which had arisen through discussions so far so responses could be obtained for the face-to-face meeting.

The questions and the responses are attached as **Appendix 4**:

DP and NA talked TCP members through how the repairs service currently operates. The Housing Property Service has a backlog of repairs. The backlog caused during the Covid disruption is still impacting on completing more recently reported repairs within target times.

The Housing Property Service currently works across two ICT (Information technology) systems and due to the set-up of the systems, information is not shared across these two systems which leads to increasing complications when trying to deliver the service to over 8740 properties which the service is responsible for maintaining.

Following a review of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) in 2018, the 30 (calendar) day standard repairs known as R30's were introduced.

The Housing Property Service receive approximately 46,000 repairs per year for all repairs.

There are currently 1,158 R30's. The R30's have booked appointments via the IT system. When a tenant rings in the call handlers will book the next available appointment. This can currently fall outside of the 30-day repairs timeframe.

Both the manager and the senior technical officer acknowledged that there are areas where the service can be improved including reducing the duplication of jobs. These are now being filtered through so there are fewer repeat jobs for the same repair. A lot of work is being completed to make improvements including through the restructure of the Housing Property Service.

3.2.1 Process of a repair

TCP members wanted to understand the process which is completed when a tenant calls in with a repair.



Where a job cannot be completed following an initial appointment this is communicated back to Nichola's team and re-raised on the system locally - not going back to the call centre to arrange.

3.2.2 Role of a repairs inspector

Before Christmas 2023 the Housing Property Service only had one repairs inspector (formerly known as technical officers) in post. This contributed to a backlog of jobs

which required inspection. The service has now appointed an additional two inspectors for a team of three. The increased capacity is reducing the backlog of jobs which require an inspection.

The group advised that different repairs inspectors may have different views on the repair needed. Example shared of more than one inspector visiting a job and having differing views on the course of action needed. Members feel it would be helpful for tenants to have a summary of what the inspectors identified and were ordering so tenants know what is needed.

DP explained it is difficult to do this at present as we have a limited number of inspectors and that there are weekly meetings with the inspectors to improve communication, knowledge, and consistency of the repair's workforce.

3.2.3 Repair finder tool

The call centre can use a repair finder tool when speaking with tenants to try and assist with identifying a repair and getting more information. Tenants also have access to the repair finder tool online. Some TCP members were aware of this, and others were not, therefore further exploration of this was requested and the TCP extended an invitation to the managers of the contact centre.

3.2.4 Booking repairs online

The online system is there to report repairs and to understand what the repair is and when the tenant is available. Housing Property Service would like this to be able to provide more information to tenants, but this is not possible online at present.

TCP members feel it would be beneficial for information about what the repair entails to be included on the repairs letter sent out to tenants.

3.2.5 Housing Property Services workforce

The repairs workforce is made up of thirty-eight members of staff who are responsible for completing all day-to-day repairs for Chesterfield Borough Council properties, this does not include void properties or improvement works. TCP members expressed surprise at this as they believed the team would be bigger. TCP felt tenants may not be aware of the fact there is a 'small team,' and that we could be communicating this more effectively.

3.2.6 Housing Property Services and communication with tenants

The contact centre will appoint a date and time for a repairs' appointment and then a work person will be appointed to that job. If appointments are not kept it is usually that the work person is off sick or on annual leave and due to size of the workforce there is not excess within the workforce resource.

Discussion about tenants being contacted when an appointment is cancelled, the contact centre is asked to let tenants know. The TCP expressed a mixed experience of whether they had been informed when an appointment had been cancelled / work person had not attended.

TCP members shared their experience of repairs letters being received after the appointment date had passed. The appointment letters are sent second class business and once it leaves the office, the service have no control over when the letter arrives.

DP and NA explained the service are looking at whether tenants can be emailed or sent text messages instead as this is felt to be more beneficial for all and may lead to fewer missed appointments and better communication between tenants and the housing property service.

There is a system in place which should mean that tenants should be receiving text messages the day before an appointment, the TCP reported in their experience this is not happening. NA agreed to look into this further with the IT team within the Council. There is also the issue of whether the tenants' contact details are up to date on the system.

A suggestion was made of the work person calling the tenant when they are on their way to the repair job. The PDA equipment used by the workforce can be used to do this, and this is being explored further as part of the restructure of housing property services.

Discussion about the wording on the repairs calling cards left for tenants and how the wording may benefit from being updated.

3.3 Meeting 3: May 2024 Repairs reporting and the Customer contact centre

Robert Spencer (RS) (Contact Centre Delivery Team Leader) and Carl Rawson (CR) (Delivery Team Leader) attended the meeting.

RS shared details of how the contact centre operates.

The contact centre staff work both from home and in the office. The contact centre is open from 8:30am – 5pm (Monday – Friday). Outside of these times the calls will go through to the Careline team who provide the out of hours service.

TCP members asked how the team respond to repeat callers. RS explained the team will share the information so all are aware of the situation and what steps to take should that person continue to call.

A question was asked regarding tenants who may be vulnerable and how this is managed. RS explained the information would be passed onto the Neighbourhoods team to follow up. When a repairs job is raised there would be a VT (vulnerable tenant) flag added to the system. TCP present feel there is a lack of consistency with staff and '*depends who you get on the phone*' as to how listened to you feel.

3.3.1 Reporting repairs online and via MyChesterfield

Robert shared a demonstration of 'MyChesterfield' and talked TCP members through how to report a standard repair via the website and how to use the repair finder guide.

Reporting a repair can be found under the Housing section of My Chesterfield. Like the website this will take people into the repair finder guide to indicate the type of repair requested. When reporting repairs online and via MyChesterfield people can add additional notes and include details of days, they are available. This repair request comes to the contact centre team as an email.

TCP members expressed how easy to use the system appeared and the repair finder tool and some members were keen to try this out. A suggestion was made for videos and how to guides to show tenants how to use this and how to sign up to MyChesterfield.

Members asked how tenants get a response when they have submitted a repair request online / via MyChesterfield. RS explained that acknowledgement emails can be sent to tenants who have requested a repair online / via MyChesterfield. This is sent via a Do not reply email address. There are templates used by the staff within the contact centre for email replies to tenants, which can include the date and time of the appointment booked. Only a small proportion of TCP members had completed repair requests online but for those who had, they had not received a response and it is something they feel would be extremely beneficial.

The Chesterfield Borough Council website features DIY videos, showing how tenants can complete certain repairs which fall under their responsibility.

A question was asked about if a tenant is in significant rent arrears would the repairs still be done. Robert explained that the service would always complete their repair obligations as stated in the tenancy agreement regardless of arrears on an account.

3.3.2 The customer contact centre and complaints

Carl introduced himself and explained he is responsible for the face-to-face element of the contact centre, and for complaints received via the contact centre.

Carl explained the two-stage complaint procedure and how this is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman at present. People can submit complaints in different ways and the team will look at whether they are receiving a service request or a complaint.

The service has dealt with approximately 1,500 complaints since November 2022, and the team will liaise with the relevant service area which the complaint relates to.

People may be unhappy with the response to their stage one complaint and can ask for this to be reconsidered by a senior member of staff.

If people are still unhappy, they can then look to contact the Housing Ombudsman.

3.4 Meeting 4: June 2024 - Impact of repairs changes report 2020 revisited

The TCP have previously completed work around Housing Property Services and produced a report in 2020 with twenty-four recommendations. Members of the group revisited this report to see whether there were any key issues or recommendations they had previously made which they felt were relevant to the 30-day standard repairs tenant scrutiny review.

Appendix 5: Repairs review 2020 update

3.5 Meeting 5: July 2024 – Legislation relating to repairs and maintenance (with Derbyshire Law Centre)

Derbyshire Law Centre is a charity established in 1980's offering free legal advice on certain areas of the law, including housing and disrepair cases. Regarding repair obligations, the Law Centre advise tenants to look at their tenancy agreement, to see what information this contains about who is responsible for which repairs.

Landlord responsibilities include 'structure and exterior of the dwelling and the installations of gas, water and electricity.' Covered by contractual clause in the tenancy agreement. (Landlord and tenant act 1985).

Tenant responsibilities 'has to keep the property in a tenant like manner' may include things such as decorating, and garden being kept at a satisfactory standard.

Damp and mould features in approx. 90% of cases the Law Centre have for both public and private sector accommodation.

During the meeting members of the TCP enquired about when tenants would need to claim through their own home contents insurance where damage has been caused (because of water damage etc). Staff from the Law Centre explained 'You are not obliged to claim through your own insurance and if you do, you may be able to claim it back through your landlord.'

The time limit for taking cases is six years.

This may lead to looking at communicating with tenants about what the process should be where there has been damage because of burst pipes etc.

3.5.1 Awaabs Law

The previous government introduced the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 with a secondary part of legislation due to be introduced under Awaabs Law.

This would focus on social housing providers carrying out repairs within a specific length of time. In Jan – March 2024 the previous government carried out a consultation, however with an election being called this has not yet been implemented.

The right to repair regulations 1994 means social housing providers have a duty to complete certain repairs within a set time of being made aware of the need for a repair by the tenant or someone else. The are set out in 1,3 and 7 day timescales. Repairs outside these are the standard 30-day repairs.

The Law Centre receive a lot of feedback about the length of time people can be left waiting for a repair to be completed. This could be for several reasons, but the longer the disrepair runs on the larger the compensation can be for the tenant.

Usually if there is a disagreement the social housing provider will instruct an independent surveyor to complete a report on the property. (Known as expert evidence).

The Law Centre are finding their case numbers are increasing, particularly in the private sector.

3.6 Meeting 6: August 2024 – Other recommendations

As part of the standard repairs tenant scrutiny review, other areas of possible interest were shared with members This included sharing information with TCP from <u>the KIM</u> report published by the Housing Ombudsman in May 2023.

A member of the tenant performance group had shared a copy of a water safety leaflet which Bolsover Council give to all new tenants, they thought the safety information contained within the leaflet would be beneficial for Chesterfield Borough Council tenants too and this was passed to the TCP members for consideration. The leaflet is attached as **Appendix 6**.

The Communication and Accessibility group have recently developed six tenant communication standards which they would like to see embedded across the housing service. These were shared with the TCP as part of this scrutiny review, due to the focus of discussions including effective communication. **Appendix 7.**

As well as developing six communication standards the Communication and Accessibility group have also redesigned the repairs calling cards, bringing them in line with the six communication standards and making the design more accessible for people with differing needs whilst offering value for money to housing property service as it is one multipurpose card which can be used for all missed appointments.

The revised calling cards are attached as **Appendix 8.**

4. Final word

Members of the TCP would like to thank all the staff and managers who came to speak with them and provided information to inform the tenant scrutiny review regarding housing property services. This gave a real insight into the service and the challenges which the service currently face. Additional thanks is given to staff from the Chesterfield Law Centre who visited the group.

TCP members feel this report highlights the importance of how we communicate with tenants both about their repairs they have requested but also wider information issues on such matters such as the size of the workforce, as this may help manage expectations of tenants and lead to tenants feeling more informed.

The final report and recommendations are felt to not only be good for tenants but also good for the service as has the potential to lead to improved use of resources and achieve better value for money.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations below were agreed by the TCP members following the completion of the tenant scrutiny review of the 30-day standard repairs service provided by the Housing Property Service.

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
1.	Meeting 1: March 2024	That the TSM's and satisfaction surveys continue to be monitored by the Performance group. TSM results	The sharing of TSM result with engagement groups took place in July 2024.	Completed July 2024	Completed
		to be shared with engaged groups as soon as they are ready.	Housing Strategy and Engagement team will ensure that TSM results and feedback will be passed to engaged tenants each year.	Ongoing annual requirement.	
2.	Meeting 1: March 2024	TCP would like to know whether the performance regarding complaints is improving as part of the six-month update.	Six monthly updates on progress of the 30 day repair action plan will include repairs performance information for TCP to track.	Kim will provide the information requested as part of the 6 month update.	
3.	Meeting 1: March 2024	TCP would like to know how the newly structured repairs service is achieving value for money once the service is up and running.	Time to develop the restructured service and see the effect. Look at these 12 months after reshape completion. There are three parts to the reshape.	Working with Consultants and completing a consultation with staff regarding the restructure.	
4.	Meeting 2: April 2024	TCP would like repairs to set out clearer requirements of operatives before they are allowed to record an	IT Service mobile system will be able to pick a lot of this up. This is	Coins system to be replaced. New system will have	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
		appointment as missed. This should include ensuring that the appointment was notified to the tenant, it was made at a time they could attend, checking that any contact requests were adhered to, guidance on what level of contact (e.g., Two door knocks, calling the resident) etc. This requires the service to review how we are currently capturing information, ensuring we are asking about particular needs / access for a repairs appointment and for this to be logged and passed on with the job.	a brand new system which will be available within one year. Integration of all current systems and this will flag up key info. Team brief to be developed by Nichola and shared with Operatives. Ensure links to damp and mould policy.	the technology to inform and update tenants about appointments, but this has to be created. Also work with call centre to ensure correct information is taken by contact centre. Explore demonstration of new system with TCP if possible at the April 2025 six monthly update.	
5.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That the repairs service should ring or text a tenant a day before attending their property to reduce the risk of missing an appointment. They also believe a text/call when the repairs person is on the way to the property should be considered.	Tenants should receive a text to remind them about their standard repairs' appointment the day before. They only get this if their contact number is a mobile number (beginning 07) and if it has been stored on NEC in the TELEPHONE field. I don't	As above. Will explore technology for whether can be used for landline numbers once have the technology.	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
			think this is widely communicated to staff as there are a few different fields for numbers to be stored against. Would need to be informing contact centre, allocations and rents of this information to ensure is captured in the correct field.		
			Sending texts feels achievable the day before.		
6.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That a system is adopted where tenants can track that a works person is on the way to their repair / know what number job they are. This would help tenants have a clearer idea of when someone is coming.	Hope the new technology will allow us to do this.	As above.	
7.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That any Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) worker or contractor wear suitable clothing and ID when attending a repair. Staff should also be able to evidence they are there on behalf of CBC.	Reference in briefing which Nichola is creating. Managers to reinforce this with staff. Trying to widen selection of clothing for staff. Encourage tenants to ask to see ID via letters etc.	Team briefing Monday 21/10/2024. All staff issued with new ID badges. Contractors have	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
				an ID badge which has reference to CBC. Also states on letters sent out.	
8.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That costs for a rechargeable repair should be made clear to tenants. Consideration of this being included in the repair's handbook.	Nichola and Dave to look into this further. Will tell tenants before we go out. There is a recharge form and policy. Copy to be shared with Communication and accessibility group for review.	Recharge policy being developed. Comms group reviewed the info in the tenant repairs handbook	In progress Completed
9.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That the trade buttons (on blocks of flats) time be extended to working times of repairs appointments.	Not sure where this originates from. Balance of whether all tenants would want this or not.	To be explored further as to what is possible. Would need to be a consultation with all affected. Would be useful to tag onto a consultation which is already happening. HSET to explore.	
10.	Meeting 2: April 2024	That once an inspection has been completed, the inspector sends a letter out confirming what work is	At present a brief line of what we will do which is included in appointment letter. Current		

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
		being completed following an inspection.	implications regarding resources. To be explored further once the new system is implemented. Feel is a great idea.		
11.	Meeting 3: May 2024	That there should be an automatic reply/ response to the repairs email address that could act as an acknowledgement to the report of a repair. Processes also need to be established when repairs are reported by email.	To be discussed further with IT. What should the email contain?	Dave to speak to IT about this.	
12.	Meeting 3: May 2024	That TCP consider whether they wish to do a Mystery shop around the customer service offering for repairs. This could be a project completed across all our engaged tenant groups and work to assess against the tenant communication standards.	Housing Strategy and Engagement team will explore options for establishing mystery shopping across the Housing Service	Alison is exploring this as a project.	
13.	Meeting 3: May 2024	That TCP recommend further work is done to widely publicise, the different ways of reporting repairs, repair timescales, repair responsibilities, DIY videos and our website.	Included within Communication and Accessibility group work looking at the handbook.	Will have an update at the next six month action plan.	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
14.	Meeting 5: July 2024	That members are kept up to date with any developments in Awaab's law and any new Housing legislation.	Six monthly updates on progress of the 30 day repair action plan will include updates in Housing legislations and requirements for TCP. New damp and mould policy developed, and everything done refers back to the policy. Currently with Savills for comments.	New Government are introducing this which has recently been announced. Any changes in legislation will be adopted. New damp and mould policy to be shared with TCP	
				once signed off. Approx 5% (300) of our properties experiencing damp and mould. We keep a tracker where repairs identify damp and mould.	
15.	Meeting 5: July 2024	TCP would like clarification regarding when tenants need to claim through their home contents insurance due to burst pipes etc, and for the process to be shared with tenants.	Dave to speak to insurance (Anita). Where we have caused the damage, we should fix this / go through our insurance. Clear what we do (internally) and whose	Dave to update at the six month review.	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
			responsible but not written down anywhere and may be beneficial to have a policy.	Dave to speak to legal and see what their take on it is.	
			Video to be developed around importance of contents insurance due to some issues which are not our responsibility. HSET to develop this.		
16.	Meeting 6: August 2024	 Conduct wastage analysis on missed appointments. Use the insight generated by: accurate records of missed appointments to identify efficiencies and action plans, including whether a broader time range of appointments would be of benefit. 	Georgie can now provide data on missed appointments to Dave on a monthly basis. Can see how the new IT system may be able to assist with efficiencies, as will give an Operative a job with a time frame and if this takes longer will pass the next job onto another Operative so less missed appointments. Look at after six months of new system implementation.	Update progress at the six month review.	
17.	Meeting 6: August 2024	TCP would like to see the implementation of a water safety booklet (similar to the one used by Bolsover District Council) – The	Housing Strategy and Engagement Team will look at the design of leaflet for introduction in Chesterfield	In progress – draft developed based on tenant feedback and content of	

Number	Meeting reference	Recommendation	Housing service response	Updates	Action completed
		performance group members recommended this to TCP.		Bolsover one. With Comms team.	
18.	Meeting 6: August 2024	TCP would like repairs to implement the 6 communication standards across the service as set out by our Communications and Accessibility group.	Zo shared standards with Dave and Nichola, some of this will be possible with new system. Some of this applies to contact centre too.;		
19.	Meeting 6: August 2024	TCP would like the new repairs calling cards to be used by the repairs service as designed by the Communication and Accessibility group.	Calling card are designed and beginning to be issued.	Being used and tenants have reported receiving these and liking them.	Completed
20.	Meeting 6: August 2024	That the Communication and Accessibility group review the repairs appointment letters.	The Communication and Accessibility group have revised this.	Dave / Nichola to speak with Ade to check templates can be changed. Also draft a large print template.	