

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 13 SEPTEMBER 2000

REVIEW OF THE REPAIRS SERVICE – RESULTS

Report by the Director of Homes and Technical Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of the report is to inform members of the outcomes and results of the review of the Repairs Service, of the outcomes of the PMP Audit, to make interim recommendations, and proposals for further consultation on the matters which affect tenants, and to refer elements of the report to the Best Value Officer Implementation Group.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** As part of the council's commitment to Best Value the Repairs Services was identified as one of three council services which would be subject to a Best Value Review during the year 2000. This was in conjunction with the Performance Management and Planning (PMP) Audit, the Building and Works Business Plan and the EFQM Audit, all of which have been concluded.
- 2.2** A report to this Committee on 17 November 1999 outlined the proposal and the general principles of the Repairs Review. That was followed by further reports on 26 January 2000 and 18 April 2000 which outlined the Review process, defined rules, committed the process to a timetable and reported on interim findings. Members are reminded that it was always intended that the review would not be confined to the performance of the contractor but would be a thorough and in-depth analysis of the entire Repairs Service including the repairs to the council's non-housing stock, as set out in the report of 17 November 1999.
- 2.3** The information gathering process and the analysis of results has recently been completed, with performance and perceptions data being fed into the process. A key element of the Review was to capture the perceptions of our customers, of contractors, of Elected Members and of staff and to incorporate their requirements and views into an improved service that is more responsive to the needs of our customers. It is also intended that such a service would be delivered in a more cost-effective manner.
- 2.4** The scope of the review was to include both housing repairs from the Housing Revenue Account and Property repairs which are funded from the Central Repairs Account. Given that the department is responsible for both capital and revenue spend on the housing stock, but is only responsible for revenue spend on the council's other property, there are different outcomes and recommendations as a result of that.
- 2.5** The approach and processes used in the review are set out within the report, and will be the subject of oversight by the Best Value Officer Implementation Group, to whom, in accordance with the council's normal procedures, this matter will be referred.

- 2.6** In accordance with the Best Value regime it is imperative that all of the information upon which judgements are made is confirmed as being robust, measurable and relevant to stakeholders. It is the role of the Officer Working Group to ensure that the review is based upon information and opinion that is founded upon these principles.
- 2.7** The Repairs Service was identified as one of three council service units to be subject to external **Performance and Management Planning Audit (PMP)**, which was required to confirm the council's commitment to Best Value in practice. This took the form of addressing how the Department delivers its service against measurable criteria covering nine specific areas common to all PMP Audits. The audit is, of course, conducted by the Accounts Commission, now Audit Scotland. The department's submission was made during February 2000 with a focus on future improvements via this Best Value Service Review process. The auditor's report was received during April 2000 and broadly accepted the council's proposals, stating "The Service's PMP submission demonstrates that the identification of service improvements is a continuing process" and commented in its findings "the consultation process currently in use includes several key best value features that were found to be largely in place". Audit Scotland awaits the outcome of the Repairs Review which will be audited further for effectiveness and appropriateness. There is a separate report on the agenda which sets out in detail the findings of the PMP Audit.

3. AIMS OF THE REVIEW

- 3.1** The aim of the review was to effect significant improvements to the entire repairs service, including improved service performance by Building and Works, in terms of both financial and operational performance. However the review also addresses issues of how the service is perceived and experienced by its customers, of how orders are generated, of what work is done, and will also make suggestions and recommendations to the council in relation to how the service might be modified in order to obtain better value for money.
- 3.2** The review was also intended to consider alternative arrangements for the delivery of the service both in terms of operational systems and organisational structures.

4. ASSUMPTIONS

- 4.1** A number of assumptions were then made during the review process.
- 4.1.1** It was assumed that the current contracts with both internal and external service providers would be allowed to continue until the end of the contract term, when the application of the normal extension options will be considered for appropriateness.
- 4.1.2** It was assumed that the current value for money (private sector equivalent) arrangements in place with Building and Works would also continue in line with the formal private contract terms and conditions.
- 4.1.3** It was assumed for the purposes of future planning only that there would be stable budgetary provision.

5. FORMAT OF THE REPORT

5.1 This report includes separate sections for each of the consultation exercises and the other subjects covered in the review. Within each section the findings are given. The overall conclusions and recommendations are set out at the end of the report together with an action plan for implementation.

6. RESULTS

6.1 The General Areas Addressed

6.1.1 The following processes were identified as being crucial to the success of the review.

- Consultation of stakeholders
- Performance Comparisons (Internal & External)
- Identification of Gaps and Overlaps
- EFQM Assessment
- Appraisal of Options for Change
- Financial Implications of Proposed Changes
- Recommendations for Change

6.1.2 In addition and given that the suggested changes to the repairs service are likely to have a major impact on the customers of that service and in particular upon tenants, it will be proposed that members should adopt these recommendations, in principle, but that a further round of consultation should be carried out with tenants setting out the proposed arrangements for change.

6.2 Consultation with Stakeholders

6.2.1 A key plank of the review was the capture of our stakeholders perceptions of the service. Stakeholder consultations were therefore identified for the following groups.

- Tenants (with 600 doorstep face to face surveys)
- Contractors (with 3 principal contractors internal and external)
- Internal Customers (all Council property keepers)
- Elected Members
- Staff

6.2.2 It should be noted that one key group of staff was omitted from the detailed consultations and that it is proposed, provided members agree to the general recommendations contained in the report, to incorporate their views during the ongoing consultation process. The group of staff that was omitted was operatives within the Building and Works Division. While the contractors managerial staff were consulted as part of the review process the opportunity should now be taken to consult with operatives.

7. TENANT CONSULTATION

7.1 Approach

7.1.1 *Market Research Scotland* was commissioned to carry out a consultation exercise on behalf of the council and surveyed 600 tenants sampled council-wide. The interviews were conducted on a face to face basis. The sample took cognisance of the areas maintained by the private sector i.e. by CBC and Gibson Wight and in-house by Building and Works. The size of the sample ensured an industry accepted standard of +/- 4% sampling error. The format of the consultation was a 52 question multi-choice questionnaire with sections for open responses.

7.2 Findings

7.2.1 The findings from the exercise are reported below on the basis of three separate headings. First of all they are reported under the provision of information and repairs reporting. Secondly they are reported under experience of the repairs service and thirdly under performance and tenant priorities. In addition the conclusions developed by *Market Research Scotland* and their recommendations are also set out for members. These conclusions and recommendations have been taken into account in drawing up the overall recommendations which are set before members at the end of the report.

7.3 Provision of Information and Repairs Reporting

- Whilst only 41% of tenants were aware of the various response categories for effecting repairs, nearly two-thirds thought they “made sense” when explained to them.
- There was some confusion over the respective responsibilities for certain types of repair, with 44% responding that they did not have enough information about the service, raising the issue of content and format of information provided. Only 20% had received a copy of the “Repair Handbook” with only a third referring to it prior to requesting a repair. However 89% said they would definitely/probably use a more comprehensive technical handbook should it be made available.
- Almost two-thirds of tenants have reported a repair during the last year, with 56% of those saying that their last repair was an emergency.
- 40% of tenants do not think they are kept well enough informed about their request for a repair, particularly in respect of information about delays.
- Approximately two-thirds of tenants prefer to lodge request by telephone with the remainder preferring to visit local offices personally.

7.4 Experience of Repairs Service

- Just under a quarter of tenants who reported a routine repair were offered an appointment. Of those given an appointment the vast majority found that workers turned up on time and the right workers attended.
- 64% of tenants think that Building and Works “do a good job” with 77% expressing the same opinion about private contractors.
- Nearly one third of tenants have experienced repairs not being carried out as they had hoped for.
- Just over half declared that the time taken from request to someone turning up was “longer than expected”.
- Whilst only 14% have experienced inconvenience or disruption when a repair is done, 8% said they had lodged a claim against the council.
- Whilst 90% found it easy to report repairs, only 54% are satisfied with the service. The 30% who said they were dissatisfied with the service represents a higher than normal return in comparison to other surveys carried out by *Market Research Scotland*

7.5 Performance and Tenant Priorities

- Whilst just over half thought the council should concentrate on Responsive Repairs a sizeable 29% thought that we should concentrate on Planned Improvement Repairs.
- Tenants identified the following aspects of the repairs service as the most important to be addressed:-
 - Raising awareness on target timescales
 - Informing tenants of plans for the future
 - Repairs being carried out within response times
 - Quality of repairs
 - Being kept informed of progress
 - Post completion inspections
 - Appointment system
- Tenants want more information and consultation on planned maintenance. However, there is some confusion over what work falls under “planned maintenance” and “improvements/upgrading”.

- The main priorities identified for future improvements to tenants homes are as follows:-
 - Kitchen upgrade/replacement
 - Double glazing/window replacement
 - Bathroom upgrades/replacement
 - Roof repairs/replacement

It should be noted that in general while tenants perceptions of the service are not good, perceptions improve when tenants actually have experience of the service.

7.6 Conclusions and Recommendations of Tenant Consultation

7.6.1 The conclusions that *Market Research Scotland* reached and their recommendations are as follows.

- (a) Draw up comprehensive action plan to respond to survey findings
- (b) Need to improve information, particularly in relation to priority system repairing obligations and responsibilities.
- (c) Review appointment system.
- (d) Introducing “quality control” method of updating tenants on progressing key aspects of repairs (e.g. when delays occur).
- (e) Reviewing the style and content of information with tenants input, in particular, information relating to repairs response times, planned maintenance and major improvements.
- (f) Ensure information/consultation relating to planned maintenance proposals.
- (g) Take account of key priorities identified by tenants in the survey.

These are general conclusions offered by *Market Research Scotland* as part of their overall service, and will be taken into account in terms of the overall conclusions at the end of this report.

8. VIEWS OF MEMBERS AND STAFF

8.1 The Officer Working Group carried out a detailed consultation exercise with all Elected Members and with all client side staff who are involved in the Repairs Service, including Homes staff and Technical staff.

8.2 Eighteen questionnaires were returned by Elected Members. A number of clear points emerge from these responses.

- Elected Members satisfaction levels with the Repairs Service are very low and are unacceptable.
- Elected Members found it difficult to contact the appropriate member of staff and are unhappy with the time taken to handle queries.

- Elected Members do accept that a move toward a planned/programmed approach would be beneficial to the Council, and this move is favoured by more than three quarters of those who responded.

8.3 A series of recommendations is required to address the concerns of members including clear procedures and timetables on handling members queries, provision of detailed information to members on the Council's Policies and Procedures in relation to repairs (amended, where necessary to take account of the review outcomes), and the installation of appointment systems for tenants, already identified elsewhere in the review.

8.4 It should be noted that generally members perceptions of the service were poorer than those of tenants. This is hardly surprising since, as a rule, members will only deal with those tenants who have a problem, and will not have occasion to meet tenants whose experience is satisfactory.

8.5 A similar consultation exercise was carried out by detailed questionnaires, including open responses, with the relevant staff within the department. Again a number of clear points arise from this.

- Some staff were unaware of the response categories within the Measured Term Contracts
- Small numbers of staff were unaware of the details of Specialist Contracts other than the Measured Term Contracts.
- Many staff identified a need for training in areas such as procedure and policy, technical terms/knowledge, and costing/pricing of jobs.
- Some staff were unaware of the Council Complaints Policy, although this included staff who were unlikely to be directly involved with the public.
- Many staff confirmed that they applied a more onerous response category than needed.
- Most staff's perception of the satisfaction rates of the service was worse than those of tenants. Again this may be explained by the fact that staff rarely receive confirmation of the work that is done well or on time.

8.6 Again a detailed action plan is being drawn up to address these issues, and covering the need for detailed protocols to cover the details of contracts, appropriate training for staff, some of which has already started, additional training in customer care, again already started and improved communications.

9. INTERNAL CUSTOMER CONSULTATION

9.1 The Repairs Review was not confined to reviewing the service provided to tenants. The review also addressed the issues surrounding the Council's Property Portfolio and the Central Repairs Account. Accordingly a further detailed consultation exercise was carried out with all council departments with questionnaires being completed by property keepers responsible for requesting repairs to the council's non-housing property stock. Internal customers were involved in the drafting of the questionnaire by way of asking for the views of the three main user departments, namely Education, Social Work, and Community Services. The format of the consultation was a 40 question multi-choice questionnaire with sections for open responses.

9.2 The areas covered in the consultation can be grouped into three categories as follows:

- How good is the current service
- How appropriate is the current service
- How appropriate is a change of approach to a more planned maintenance service

9.3 The findings of the survey were that there is a very poor perception of how good the current service is. In response to the question about how appropriate is the current service, there was a widely diverging range of views. Finally the view that emerges in response to the question of the appropriateness of a change of approach to a more planned maintenance service, is that such an approach would be very welcome. A number of other issues emerged during the course of examining the results of the survey.

9.4 Conclusions in relation to the Central Repairs Account

Taking account of the results listed above and of the detailed comments made in the survey there were a number of clear areas to be considered.

- The general perception of our internal customers in relation to budgetary provision is that there are insufficient funds for the repairs service to adequately maintain the property portfolio.
- The general perception of our internal customers in relation to their satisfaction with the current service is that the service provided could be greatly improved.
- The general perception of our internal customers in relation to the appropriateness of the current service is much more diffuse and no firm conclusions can be drawn from this.
- The general perception of our internal customers in relation to our suggested change in approach to a more planned/programmed maintenance service is that they would support that very firmly, particularly if additional funds were made available.

9.5 An action plan in relation to this area will require the department to make a clear strong case, during the council's budget process, for improved budget provision, taking into account both the information now provided by customers and the technical information already held by the council's officers.

9.6 The other major area where the department needs to take a much more active role is in the provision of detailed information to property holders on the protocols and priorities set by the council in handling repairs to the non-housing stock. At the same time judgements exercised in this area must be informed by the needs of internal customers as well as by detailed technical assessments of the property itself.

10. CONTRACTOR CONSULTATION

10.1 A further key set of stakeholders within the exercise are of course the contractors, including the council's internal contractor, external contractors and any specialist contractors. The officer working group therefore carried out a consultation exercise with three main contractors who provide the service. These were Building & Works, Central Building Contractors and Gibson & Wight Ltd. The contractors were involved in the drafting of the questionnaire as well as taking part in the consultation exercise itself. The forming of the consultation was a thirty question multi-choice questionnaire with sections for open responses. The purpose of this exercise was to examine the contractors view of those elements of the repairs service which directly affected them. Accordingly therefore the questionnaire addressed three main issues. These were contract arrangements and administration, order generation, and programming of works. Taking account of the conclusions indicated by the contractors a number of issues emerged.

- The general perception of the contractors, in relation to contracts administration and arrangements are that while some elements are good or acceptable there are specific elements that they perceive as being poor.
- The general perception of the contractors in relation to order generation is that many of them are issued with an inappropriate response category and that there is a specific problem with those orders generated by the Helpline. There is also an issue with the number of orders which are generated as a result of what are in the contractors opinion misuse, abuse or neglect.
- The general perception of the contractors in relation to programming of works is that both multi-trade contractors favour a move towards a more planned / programmed approach to ordering work. Broadly speaking the contractors identify issues where if misquoted orders were classified more appropriately there would be significant financial savings for the council. This is based on the fact that emergency orders both for two hours and twenty four hour emergencies and other orders which are classified as urgent are generally charged at a higher rate. Contractors view also is that there is a substantial saving for the client in terms of orders which are issued due to tenant abuse misuse or neglect.

10.2 Detailed action to address the issues raised by the contractors will cover a number of points. First of all, subject to committee agreement in relation to the rest of this report there will be a move away from the use of urgent repairs to one which is a more long-term programmed approach. Detailed protocols are necessary to set out clearly for the client staff as well as for the contractors staff how emergency and twenty four hour response repairs are dealt with. Both contractors are also anxious to consider a move towards setting out a more detailed nature of the repair requested. This will be dealt with separately and elsewhere in the report where new tools have recently become available to the client. Contractors also hold a variety of information which might be useful in helping to formulate future policy and have expressed an indication to share all of this. Members are however reminded that the council is also about to undertake a significant council house condition survey. Contractors also see the introduction of an appointments system as advantageous. Contractors are also anxious that both tenants and property keepers are aware of the detailed nature of the service and made aware of their own obligations as well as of the time-scales for the arrival of the contractor. Finally contractors are particularly anxious to see an improvement in the use of the Helpline service which they identify as being a major cause of poor ordering.

From the client side additional information requires to be captured from the contractors on issues around tenant abuse and neglect and on the issue of inappropriate use of response categories to enable solutions to these problems to be addressed.

All of these have been taken into account in drawing up the detailed recommendations within the report.

11.0 PERFORMANCE COMPARISONS

11.1 Capturing detailed information on performance is a key element in establishing how well the service is delivered. This includes comparing the performance of the client, along with the two main contractors, and benchmarking our key results against those of our benchmarking partners and the Scottish National average, where this information is available. Much of this information is already gathered and reported to committee by way of the Key Performance Indicators, and while there have been problems with the robustness of some of that information in the past, these difficulties have now been overcome. In particular the introduction of the Orchard System and the Business Objects Tool which comes with it will now allow a much more detailed and regular examination of performance, and will give both Client and Contractor information upon which improvements can be based.

11.2 Operational Performance Compared Against Benchmarking Partners

The attached information shows our performance against our benchmark partners.

11.2.1 Ratio of HRA and CRA Emergency Orders (A&B Categories)

East Ayrshire Council	29%
Benchmarking Partners	25%

11.2.2 HRA Emergency (A&B Orders)

East Ayrshire Council	29%
Benchmarking Partners	25%

11.2.3 CRA Emergency (A&B Orders)

East Ayrshire Council	31%
Benchmarking Partners	25%

These figures clearly show, as has been drawn to members attention previously, that the council continues to issue higher levels of emergency orders than our benchmarking partners, and that that is having an effect on performance across the board. It is also the case that the council is not helping its own situation by an unnecessary division of emergency work into two categories (of 2 hours and 24 hours), and by a further unnecessary division into three categories, of non-urgent work (into categories of 3 days, 10 days and 20 days). These arrangements are not reflected in the contractual position, and it is possible therefore that the arrangements can be changed without contractual penalties. This matter will be discussed later and recommendations made.

11.3 Percentage of Repairs Completed Within Time

Category	Target	Percentage
A	2 hours	63.53%
B	24 hours	66.27%
C	3 days	45.66%
D	14 days	46.96%
E	25 days	41.04%

The above figures are those set out within the KPI Report for 1999/2000. The figures indicate, and this is confirmed by interviews with both main contractors, that contractors deliberately steer the bulk of their effort into emergency repairs, and that non-urgent work suffers as a result.

12 IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS AND OVERLAPS

12.1 The purpose of the examination of this area is to seek to identify whether or not the current organisational structure of the Repairs Service required any change. The area was the subject of a careful examination by the Officer Working Group, which specifically addressed the issue of how the service could be better co-ordinated and managed. The examination was wide ranging and identified a limited number of structural issues, as well as a number of other operations issues and protocols.

- 12.2** The Working Group identified a number of areas where there was duplication of effort and some areas where gaps existed. In addition the group had available to them information from other sources such as the results of the Customer Surveys, for both HRA and CRA, the surveys of Members, as well as information from both main term contractors and specialist contractors.
- 12.3** The Groups findings covered the areas of inspection, both pre-inspection and post-inspection, and how this might be better managed, the management of the property portfolio, the role of Contract Audit, Contract Compliance and Internal Audit staff, the management of voids and other major works, the management of disputes, budgetary control and commitment accounting, order generation, asset management, the role of Housing Technical Officers, Sector Officers, Clerks of Works, and the issues around customer satisfaction.
- 12.4** The examination revealed that the bulk of these areas required no major organisational change, particularly in the light of the fact that the Council had only recently undergone a series of organisational changes. Other areas required modest clarification of roles and in some cases detailed operational protocols to be set out. That work is ongoing amongst the officers who are particularly involved in it. However three areas are worthy of particular mention. The first of these is Customer Satisfaction. The Department has a number of officers specifically charged with establishing customer satisfaction, or with a role in improving it. These range from customer satisfaction officers based in Technical Services at Lugar, and whose role is to deal with the Capital Contracts, through to Clerks of Works, Housing Technical Officers, Sector Officers, Supervisors in Building and Works, and of course Area Managers.
- 12.5** While such officers are dealing with the public on a daily basis there is no clear operational arrangement across the whole of the Repairs Service to gather regular and detailed customer satisfaction information on the Repairs Service, in particular, and on our Housing and Property Services, as a whole. It is proposed therefore to examine this area in more detail, to build upon the information available from the Tenants Survey, and if necessary to make organisational changes here. Such changes would of course have to be the subject of consultation with the staff and trade unions involved, and would then be reported to the appropriate committee of the Council.
- 12.6** The area of inspection arrangements (both pre and post-inspection) was also the subject of detailed consideration. Currently, as a general rule, very little pre-inspection is carried out in respect of many response repairs, although more major repairs, and in particular void works, are the subject of detailed inspection. However in particularly in respect of the internal contractor, there is a question to be addressed of whether that inspection should include detailed measurements, and that will be dealt with by discussion between the contractors and clients. The outcome of this will be a working protocol to be adopted by both client and contractors.
- 12.7** It is clear however that post-inspection requires to be strengthened significantly. There are currently considerable amounts of post-inspection, and a detailed inspection audit regime is in place. This is primarily aimed at identifying whether or not the correct amounts of recharge have been claimed, and whether additional work is necessary or justified. Quality Inspection Forms is only a limited amount of this work, and it is clear both from the information

available from the Tenant Survey and from the Members Survey, that this area must be strengthened. It is equally important that both client and contractor work jointly on this area, to avoid unnecessary disputes, and to identify system difficulties. Accordingly it is proposed to install, jointly with the contractor, a requirement to ensure that 15% of all response work is post-inspected by both Client and Contractor. While the detail of that inspection regime will vary from area to area, and perhaps by type of work or value, the overall requirement will remain across the Councils area, and across both HRA and CRA. It is anticipated that the client will inspect 5%, the contractor 5% and that 5% will be inspected jointly. This will be a minimum requirement, and will not of course prevent examination of particular areas or problems as they come up. Part of this is dependent upon changes to the supervision arrangements within the internal contractor.

- 12.8** Along with the management of Building and Works the Group also identified a need for changes to the supervisory arrangements within Building and Works. The organisation had previously 20 supervisors, some of whom were temporary supervisors. The need is for 13 supervisors, plus a workshop foreman, giving a ratio of 1:15 operatives approximately, broadly the standard ratio adopted across Scotland. Discussions are taking place with the Trade Unions to arrive at this figure, and also to ensure that supervisors are much more carefully tasked, particularly in terms of quality supervision, and performance improvement. Where necessary training will be provided and working partnerships with client staff established.
- 12.9** The area of planned, programmed and cyclic maintenance also formed a major part of the Groups work and this key element of the review is dealt with elsewhere in the report.

13 EFQM ASSESSMENT

- 13.1** This Review has been, or will be, the subject of three separate examinations and validations. In addition to seeking to contact the review as thorough and rigorous a way as possible, the Review has also been examined by Audit Scotland as part of their Performance and Management Planning Audit, will be separately examined by the Best Value Officer Implementation Group, and has been the subject of an EFQM Assessment. This section summarises the outcome of the EFQM Assessment.
- 13.2** The EFQM submission concentrated on the Repairs Service as carried out since April 1999, when the new Department was initiated. The submission covered the work of all three divisions where they are involved in the Repairs Service. This submission also drew on the extensive information which was becoming available as part of the Review process.
- 13.3** The findings of the EFQM Assessment are generally favourable. The EFQM approach examines the Review under nine separate headings. These are Leadership, Policy and Strategy, People, Partnerships and Resources, Processes, Customer Results, People Results, Society Results, and Key Performance Results.
- 13.4** The Assessment sets out in detail the strengths and weaknesses of the Service, and the Review, under each of these headings. Wherever appropriate these strengths and weaknesses have been taken into account in drawing up

the recommendations for the Committees' consideration, together with all of the other information which is available to the Review Working Group and which also informed their judgements.

13.5 There are a small number of areas where the weaknesses specifically identified in the EFQM Assessment cannot be addressed by the recommendations of this review. This is only the case where issues flagged up can only be resolved at a Corporate or National level. For example, in areas for improvement under criterion three, People, the assessment indicated that there is little evidence of recognition or rewarding people beyond the corporate conditions of service, or little evidence of the review of the effectiveness and awareness of these corporate conditions. While these matters are undoubtedly important they can only be tackled at a corporate level and are not issues for this Service Review specifically.

13.6 There are also a number of other areas for improvement identified as part of the assessment. In the main these cover issues such as the improvement of IT Systems for both client and contractor and the structure and roll out of training arrangements, all of which were either already being tackled or have been identified in any event by the Review process itself.

14.0 IMPROVING RESPONSE MAINTENANCE: BETTER INFORMATION

14.1 The Tenant Consultation Exercise referred to earlier in this report, highlighted the need to improve information to tenants on landlord and tenant repair responsibilities, response categories and timescales, and progress on individual repairs. It is proposed to address these issues in several ways.

14.2 Firstly, it is intended to introduce a new Repairs Booklet for tenants which will clearly set out information on a range of items including;

- How to report a repair
- Repairs by appointment
- Repair responsibilities
- Response categories and timescales

Moreover, the booklet will include easy to follow diagrams of building components to help tenants clearly understand and describe the exact fault which requires repair. This handbook will be backed up by an electronic repair diagnostic system which will interface with Orchard in Housing and Local Offices. Put simply, this means that tenants will be looking at the same information as the staff who will then process the repair order. These tools are in use elsewhere and have proven to be effective in raising customer understanding and improving service performance.

14.3 It is proposed to examine ways of tracking progress on individual jobs via Orchard and introduce a new internal procedures to feed back information to tenants when delays occur, and to monitor and act on customer complaints whenever the service fails to satisfy.

14.4 The performance comparisons highlighted earlier clearly indicate a higher level of emergency jobs being issues by the Council compared to its benchmarking partners. This has an effect on repairs spending since it costs more to carry out repairs as emergency work. It also affects general repairs performance since there is less opportunity to maximise the best use of client budgets and contractors resources through carrying out work on a planned and programmed basis. Finally, concentrating resources on emergency repairs has a detrimental on other tenants who suffer delays on having non-emergency repair works carried out as contractors resources are stretched to keep up with the number of emergency job orders. It is considered that emergencies must be controlled better than at present. It is intended to redefine emergency repairs, in consultation with tenants, and to tighten up internal reporting and ordering procedures to minimise both over categorisation of work and potential tenant misuse. This exercise will extend to include job ordering via local offices and the Helpline service. Helpline is managed by Social Work as a corporate resource with considerable funding support from the Housing Revenue Account. Figures confirm however that between April and June 2000, 93% (3,333) of all calls to the Helpline were HATS related with the overwhelming majority of calls linked to repairs. Out of hours repair costs are significant and the cost effect on this of operating this service using generic call handlers, whose primary aim is to deal with Community Alarm calls, supported by advice protocols issued by Departments requires to be reviewed. Members support for this particular proposal is critical, as is members assistance in supporting new guidelines and advice protocols.

15.0 IMPROVING RESPONSE MAINTENANCE : PRIORITISING REPAIRS AND AN APPOINTMENT SYSTEM

15.1 It is also proposed to approach local tenants groups at an early date to discuss a revised list of repair responsibilities and response categories. This will clarify the respective repair responsibilities of the council and tenants and will confirm those circumstances where a tenant may be charged for work carried out to remedy misuse or abuse.

15.2 It is also proposed to consult on a range of measures which would allow the department to prioritise repair services to vulnerable groups but in a way that is strictly controlled thereby minimising scope for abuse of the system. In the first instance, it is proposed to provide these added value services to known users of the councils community alarm system and tenants of sheltered and other special needs housing. Services would then be rolled out, in conjunction with Social Work colleagues, to tenants known to have learning difficulties or who have recently been provided with aids and adaptations. The measures under consideration include:

- Crime Prevention Measures eg. password system for contractors
- Accompanied visits
- Extended services eg. pre-season heating check, smoke alarm maintenance etc.

15.3 It is also intended to consult on a proposal to reduce the number of repairs categories with a view to streamlining business processes and reducing confusion amongst service users as follows:

- Emergency Repairs – comprising the most urgent repairs and involving situations where the following would apply:
 - An immediate risk to Health or Safety
 - Failure of essential services
 - Property insecure
 - Property in risk of major damage

All emergency repairs, where possible, to be completed within twenty-four hours from receipt of the tenant's call.

- Priority Repairs to include those repairs which would seriously affect the comfort or convenience of the tenant or property user. All priority repairs to be completed within three working days of receipt of a repair request.
- Routine repairs to include other commonly reported repairs which would not involve major costs or which would not be carried out under planned programme of works. All routine repairs to be completed within twenty working days.
- All void repairs and new tenant work to be programmed with contractors to minimise delay in re-letting to new prospective tenants.

15.4 A key element in improving tenant satisfaction is the need for an appointment system, both for tenants, and property holders. The purchase of the new Orchard IT system for client repairs has allowed the introduction of an appointment system which is now being used to book appointments for client inspection. The tenant consultation exercise results gave a clear indication that there should be an appointment system put in place for contractors visits. This is now being discussed between client and both main term contractors, the outcome of which will be a set of working arrangements whereby tenants will be offered the opportunity of booking an appointment to have certain types of repair work done at a time which better suits their personal circumstances. Over a phased period it is intended that the vast bulk of repairs will be done by appointment.

16.0 IMPROVING RESPONSE MAINTENANCE: PLANNED REPAIRS

16.1 The evidence presented to the officer working group clearly indicated that there was a major imbalance between programmed maintenance and response repairs with a major part of the repairs budget often being spent on jobbing repairs to remedy breakdown or component failure. The group recognised the progress made by the council in improving houses through the capital programmes but recommended that these plans should be supported by a series of cyclical maintenance contracts where certain types of work would be carried out on a five year cycle. Such preventative works would prevent future breakdowns, help avoid a growth in repair backlogs, and address some of the issues raised in the tenants consultation exercise. The department has introduced a number of service and term contracts since April 1999 to help rationalise maintenance of the councils portfolio of public

buildings and increase the amount of work carried out on a planned and programmed basis. This approach has already resulted in a better understanding of the need for repair and improvement of these properties and has helped the department prioritise its spend profile to ensure compliance with health and safety legislation and other statutory provisions.

16.2 While the council will wish to consider the results of the House Condition Survey as a basis for future work programmes, it is intended to consult on proposals to introduce the following cyclic maintenance programmes:

- External painterwork
- Gutter cleaning
- Door Entry Systems maintenance
- Stair lighting maintenance
- Checks of electrical wiring

Other works to be considered either as programmed or seasonal work include external works such as paths, walls drainage and fencing.

17.0 OPTION APPRAISAL

17.1 Careful consideration has been given to the appraisal of options for change both immediately and in the longer term. Both the officers directly involved in the Review process and the most senior officers within the Department considered this matter.

17.2 While the Review was opened by making certain assumptions as set out in Section 4 of this report, these assumptions were challenged vigorously during the conduct of the Review.

17.3 It was noted that Building and Works had met and indeed exceeded the financial target set for it last year. It was also noted that following a meeting with senior Scottish Executive Officials, it was anticipated that in due course the Section 19 Notice would be lifted, subject always to the Council continuing to deliver a satisfactory financial performance from Building and Works. In addition the current contractual arrangements involving external contractors are generally working satisfactorily, and of course a range of other specialist contracts continues to be let on a single trade basis.

17.4 This mixture of public sector/private sector working, with Building and Works continuing to operate at benchmarked private sector prices, continues to give the Council value for money, as well as ensuring that private sector cartels cannot operate. Continued competition across a wide-range of building services is however essential in ensuring both value for money and improved performance.

17.5 It should be noted however that no evidence was forthcoming during the Review that there was a demand from tenants, Members, or other stakeholders for externalising the entire service or particular parts of it, or for differing contractual arrangements. Almost all authorities in Scotland continue to operate broadly similar arrangements to those in East Ayrshire, with the client commissioning and inspecting repairs, the work being carried out by contractors subject to regular competition, and a regime of audit and control.

- 17.6** Even where authorities are considering stock transfer, these arrangements continue.
- 17.7** There is however one area where changes are being explored by any number of authorities. That is in the area of partnership working, and it is intended that this area should continue to be examined on a regular basis. The Council's Building and Works Division has already entered into an arrangement like this, in the case of the Dalmellington project where the Health Trust is the major client. There are also possibilities of working with neighbouring authorities to help even out peaks and troughs in demand, where such arrangements are considered appropriate they will be brought forward to Committee for approval in the normal way.
- 17.8** Otherwise it is proposed that the existing arrangements continue, subject of course to the detailed modifications set out in this Review.

18.0 FURTHER CONSULTATION

- 18.1** This Review is a major element of work for the Department, both in terms of the Central Repairs Account, and the Housing Revenue Account. Its intention is that over a period of time it will radically transform the Council's Repairs Service from its present state to one which could be the envy of many in Scotland. In particular the intention is that the substantial sums of money now spent on the Council's stock should be focused much more carefully on work which adds value to the Councils asset and which allows us to provide a greatly improved product to our tenants and to our applicants.
- 18.2** Such a transformation cannot be achieved easily. Many tenants and property holders are used to a particular type of services. What is being proposed is one which is significantly different. It is initially important therefore that our customers understand that change and that the benefits are set out clearly for them. Most importantly, they must be allowed to contribute to it.
- 18.3** It is proposed therefore that prior to making any changes, particularly in those areas which directly affect tenants, that further consultation should take place. All tenants and residents groups should be consulted on the areas set out in sections 14, 15 and 16 of the report, and should be invited to contribute their views prior to those matters being finally determined by the Council. While these proposals have been largely influenced by the views of tenants across the Council area as set out in the Tenants Consultation Report, nonetheless the views of residents and tenants groups should be further sought.
- 18.4** One other group of stakeholders should also be the subject of further consultation. While all the contractors were consulted during the course of the review, including Building and Works, Building and Works operatives as a group were not specifically consulted. It is proposed to remedy this, during the process of further consultation with tenants.

19.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 19.1** There are no additional financial implications in respect of the Review at this stage.
- 19.2** However in relation to the Central Repairs Account the Review has confirmed the technical information already held by the Council's officers, that existing budgetary provision is insufficient. No specific proposals are made immediately. Given the considerable constraints upon the Council expenditure, this matter can only be considered properly during the Council's normal budget deliberations. Accordingly therefore this information will be fed into the Council's budget deliberations at an appropriate stage.
- 19.3** So far as the Housing Revenue Account is concerned, again it is not proposed to spend additional funds. It is proposed to redirect existing budgets, in part, away from response maintenance as set out in sections 14, 15 and 16 and towards work which will improve the tenants quality of life and comfort, and improve the value of the Council's housing stock. Subject to members agreement it is intended, over a period of years, to significantly increase the money spent on planned maintenance and improvements.

20.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to consider the terms of the report and to:

- 20.1** Approve the general proposals put forward within the body of the report to transform the repairs service, noting that many of these will be the subject of detailed working protocols and arrangements between officers, and between client and contractor.
- 20.2** Approve the development of detailed information for members themselves on the councils policies and procedures, as amended in due course by this report, and to note that improved arrangements will be put in place to handle members queries on repairs, and to provide satisfactory outcomes.
- 20.3** Note that detailed protocols and improved training will also be provide to address staff concerns, and those expressed by contractors, as part of the review.
- 20.4** Approve the organisation of additional information for property holders within the council, and note that enhanced information will be provided on budgetary provision during the budget process.
- 20.5** Note that proposals will be put forward to the Councils Personnel and Property Sub Committee , as a result of any organisational changes required to improve customer satisfaction arrangements, and that these will be subject to consultation with the trade unions in the normal way. Changes to Building and Works structures have already been the subject of a Committee Report.
- 20.6** Note that significantly strengthened inspection arrangements will also be installed within the housing service, to improve customer satisfaction with the repairs service.

- 20.7** Approve the adoption of tools to provide better information to tenants in reporting repairs, in categorising and prioritising repairs, and in reporting on their outcomes as set out in Section 14.
- 20.8** Approve, for the purpose of further consultation with tenants, the detailed amendments to landlord and tenant responsibilities, changes to the priority groups of repairs, the plan moved towards more programmed work, and differing arrangements for tenants with special needs, as set out in Sections 14, 15 and 16.
- 20.9** Note the outcome of the option appraisal exercise as set out in Section 17.
- 20.10** Refer this report to the Best Value Officers Implementation Group for their oversight in terms of the processes used during the review.
- 20.11** Note that a further report on this matter will be put before Committee following the consultation outlined in Section 18.

James Lavery
Director of Homes and Technical Services
JL/WT
28 August 2000

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Housing Committee Report of 17 November 1999 – “Review Of The Repairs Service”
2. Housing Committee Report of 26 January 2000 – “Review Of The Repairs Service”
3. Housing Committee Report of 18 April 2000 – “Repairs Review – Further Interim Report”

AGENDA