

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 7 January 2021

(NOTE: This meeting was held as a remote meeting in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020).

PRESENT: Councillors Ben Curran (Chair), Tim Huggan (Deputy Chair), Sue Auckland, Penny Baker, Dawn Dale, Adam Hurst, Karen McGowan, Anne Murphy, Andrew Sangar, Richard Shaw and Angela Argenzio (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Kaltum Rivers, Councillor Angela Argenzio attended as her substitute.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

- 2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th November, 2020, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. HOUSING REPAIRS SERVICE

- 6.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director of Place detailing how the COVID Pandemic has significantly impacted on the Repairs and Maintenance Service throughout 2020 and was likely to continue to have a

significant impact into 2021.

- 6.2 Present for this item were Mark Freeth (Head of Repairs and Maintenance Service), David Marsden (Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance), Nathan Rodgers (Head of Facilities Management), and Councillor Paul Wood (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety).
- 6.3 Nathan Rodgers stated that the pandemic had had a huge impact on the Repairs and Maintenance Service, which provided a crucial service and support to tenants. He said the Team had worked long and hard to deliver emergency and essential services under huge pressures on them.
- 6.4 Mark Freeth referred to the information contained within the report, stating that the Service had 640 staff who were employed to maintain the Council's 38,900 housing stock. He said the Service had been insourced from Kier in 2017 and was in the process of implementing a new Target Operating Model following a review of its operations. However, Covid was having a significant impact on a large workload which had a significant backlog following an increase in demand of planned work and the storms of last winter. Mark Freeth stated that throughout the pandemic, the Repairs Service had followed and continued to follow the instructions and guidance of the Council's Incident Management Group (IMG) and had operated a reduced Service responding to critical activities such as emergency repairs, gas servicing and void property work to continue to provide much needed social housing for the city. He added that there had been a significant impact on gas servicing being carried out as tenants were apprehensive about wanting operatives in their home, with only 90% of properties having a current gas safety certificate. He stated that the Service had intended to offer 45 apprenticeships in November, 2020, but this had been delayed due to Covid, but it was hoped that the scheme would be rolled out in February 2021, which would mean there was a total of 95 apprentices working within the Service. The Service put a significant emphasis on health and safety of both staff and its customers. The offices at Manor Lane were made Covid secure in line with national guidelines and relevant workplace areas reduced. Risk assessments were in place which allowed front line staff to enter properties safely, using the correct PPE equipment and clear guidance given to staff to work safely. The Service has reduced staff working in the workplace as much as possible.
- 6.5 Mark Freeth stated that the objectives of the new Target Operating model was to modernise and improve the Repairs Service for tenants by restructuring the Service to remove client contractor roles and reduce operating overheads and replace reactive repairs with more planned proactive repairs by empowering staff with the skills to deliver a first-class repairs service. Work with the Corporate Contact Centre was being carried out to improve the customer offer through self-service, improved script and priority status for vulnerable tenants, diagnostics of repairs and text confirmation of appointments, and a dedicated phonenumber and email address to be put in place for Councillors to contact the Service directly with any concerns. A new repairs system has been successfully procured and was planned to be operational by August 2021. Throughout the first and second lockdown the Service saw 40,000 repairs logged compared to 64,000 repairs, historically, over the same period, and therefore, there was a future potential

demand of 24,000 repairs that could be outstanding, which could be a significant challenge for the Repairs Service, both in terms of impact on budget and resources to achieve normal levels of performance within a reasonable timescale. A business continuity plan was currently being implemented to respond to the third lockdown and work was underway to assess the potential impact in more detail and to develop plans to respond to this challenge.

6.6 Members raised concerns with regard to the content of the report as they had only received the report two days prior to the meeting and felt that there was very little information contained in it with regard to the impact Covid had had on this essential service. The Policy and Improvement Officer stated that officers had been contacted before the Christmas break requesting a report to be submitted early in the New Year and hoped that more information would become available during the meeting.

6.7 Nathan Rodgers informed Members that he was aware of the item of business on the 23rd December, 2020 but hadn't had time to discuss with Councillors the information they required and said that a more comprehensive report would be provided at a future date.

6.8 Members of the Committee made various comments and asked a number of questions to which responses were given as follows:-

- The aim for the Repairs and Maintenance Service would be for 100% of properties to have a gas safety certificate, however this was not always possible due to premises not being accessible. Following several failed attempts to gain access to a property, obtaining access to the property then goes into a legal process and through the Courts and this had been exacerbated due to the Courts being closed for 20 weeks at the start of the pandemic.
- Customer feedback and satisfaction has remained stable, albeit tenants have waited a considerable time longer for repairs to be carried out. One thought was that perhaps the public in general have become more patient throughout the pandemic. A report outlining customer satisfaction would be prepared and submitted to a future meeting.
- Reports on repairs were taken to meetings with Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) and every tenant has been written to informing them of what was happening within the Repairs Service. The Service has access to 25,000 email addresses of its tenants. It was felt that there was a need to create better forums and a Performance Manager had been employed to involve tenants and their representatives in the reshaping of the Service.
- A meeting was to be arranged between the Service and Senior Managers in the Contact Centre. The pandemic has created significant challenges for the Contact Centre and both Services are working collaboratively to improve the end-to-end service. Operatives could work in the Contact Centre to redirect work to the correct area.

- In relation to apprenticeships, the Council's Lifelong Learning Team recruit young people onto traineeships. Following a successful traineeship, the trainees are then offered an Apprenticeship. Clarification is required on the recruitment of NEETS. Several care leavers, BME and female apprentices have been recruited.
- Gas servicing of properties was a legal requirement, and the Service was looking at best practice to improve performance in this area. Some local authorities cap off the gas supply, and some local authorities forcibly enter premises to carry out services using Environmental Protection powers. It had been found that those in fuel poverty who did not have the money to pay for their supply, would refuse entry into their premises. A more detailed report on this would be brought back to the Committee.
- It was planned to improve performance regarding Void premises as, at present, there were 45 days between "key to key" and this needed to be improved upon and done quicker. A project team has been established to review and improve the end-to-end Void process with Housing Services.
- There have been problems throughout the pandemic in getting stock, the supply chain had been significantly impacted upon, and the Service had not been able to procure enough equipment and supplies.
- Improvements to develop staff in all areas was underway. It was intended to hold annual personal development reviews (PDRs) and hold regular one to ones with all operatives to ensure that everyone was aware of the priorities and what the Service hopes to achieve in the way it delivers its services.
- Any complaint received regarding how an operative has carried out their job will be taken seriously and dealt with, as the behaviour and image of the Service was very important. A strong customer focus was a priority for the Service and a key service plan objective. A training framework was to be developed to empower operatives. There are some really good members of staff who have worked extremely hard and often long hours during this difficult period, but it was recognised that there was a need to modernise.
- A Working at Heights Repairs Team respond to repairs that require more comprehensive safe systems of work to be in place to complete the task. The aim of the Service was to review the safe systems of work to complete more repairs on the first visit without compromising safety.
- Throughout the first and second lockdown the Service saw 40,000 repairs logged, and potentially the demand of 24,000 repairs could be outstanding, although it was thought that some tenants, with time on their hands throughout the pandemic, may have carried out some DIY repairs themselves. Until tenants have been contacted, it was difficult to know how many repairs were still required and possibly some DIY could have created repairs.

- At present, a tenant can order a repair through the Contact Centre, the operator then diagnoses the problem using a script and then passes it to the operatives, which involves two systems. The intended new system will offer real time appointments, minimising human intervention. Performance data can then be obtained to find out if the appointment was kept, on time, and carried out satisfactorily.
- With regard to the Repairs and Maintenance Service being in a position to carry out aids and adaptation works to Council housing stock, unfortunately the pandemic had affected plans for this. It had been hoped that within two years, the Service would have been able to employ enough staff to carry out these types of works inhouse, but the lockdowns had pushed this timeline on, but it was still hoped that it would be achievable. At present, there was a need to get on top of repairs, voids, gas servicing and acquisitions, before being able to bring this work inhouse. A progress report on this would be brought back to this Committee next year.

6.9 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Mark Freeth, David Marsden, Nathan Rodgers and Councillor Paul Wood for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report now submitted and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests that a report on how the Service intends to deal with the backlog of repairs be brought to a meeting to be held within the next three to four months.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer, attaching the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2020/21. She informed Members that there were only two meetings left for this Municipal Year and items to be considered were the Annual Review of Sheffield Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership and Homelessness.

7.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) approves the contents of the Work Programme;
- (b) requests that the item on Homelessness be brought to the February meeting of the Committee and the Annual Review of Sheffield Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership be taken to the meeting to be held in March; and
- (c) further requests that an additional meeting be held in April, to enable it to receive an update on the Housing Repairs Service.

8. ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO THE MEETING HELD ON 26TH NOVEMBER 2020

- 8.1 The Committee received and noted a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer setting out the written responses to the public questions raised at its meeting held on 26th November, 2020.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday, 25th February, 2021, at 5.00 p.m.