

Building Maintenance Service

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Decision

1 Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- i) Approves the Repairs & Maintenance Service Standards
- ii) Approves the Common Repairs Policy
- iii) Approves the Minimum Let Standard
- iv) Approves HRA cost recovery pest control treatments within domestic tenancies

2 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for Policies to assist operational activity, specifically in Protective Services and Building Maintenance Service, and to protect the health and wellbeing of our tenants and the structural integrity of our assets.

Date: 7th March 2023
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3 Background

3.1 The Building Maintenance Service is undergoing a significant redesign to improve effectiveness and efficiency. It is evident that new policy is required to assist cultural and operational change across the team, whilst delivering a more customer focused service. This work is iterative and continuing.

3.2 Ensuring the Council has well maintained, secure, sustainable housing is key to providing attractive, well maintained neighbourhoods that support our communities.

Repairs & Maintenance Service Standards

3.3 An established set of Repairs & Maintenance Service Standards is important for our tenants and service users, as well as our employees. They help to define what a service user can expect and to set key measurables of the challenges and obligations that our team is required to deliver.

3.4 The Repairs & Maintenance Service Standards prescribes the framework in which the Building Maintenance Service will deliver an effective service to ensure all our homes are maintained to a good standard. The service will meet the high standards expected by and agreed with our tenants, in line with the Council's Tenancy Agreement. The service will meet the requirements of good asset management by ensuring that the properties are maintained and the future of the property is safeguarded. This service will ensure Value for Money and set a high standard of workmanship for our staff and contractors.

Common Repairs Policy

3.5 A common repair is where home owners, or private tenants live in a mixed-tenure block and are jointly responsible, with the Council, for a share of the cost of the maintenance and repair of common areas or parts of the building.

3.6 The Council has the same legal obligation as other owners with regards to the management of common repairs. Any owner can take the lead on repairs.

3.7 Where the Council owns one or majority properties in a block, the Common Repairs Policy details the actions the Council will take in order to secure the agreement of owners for common repairs. Where this agreement is not achieved, the steps are detailed to ensure the properties are repaired and relevant shares are recovered to the Housing Revenue Account.

3.8 The Common Repairs Policy aims to ensure that there is a clear and consistent approach to recharge home owners for common repairs when these are undertaken by the Council. The Council will ensure good practice through the Tenement Management Scheme and understand the rights and responsibilities of the Council and homeowners.

- 3.9 The Council is committed to working with property owners to provide good quality homes to our communities.

Minimum Let Standard

- 3.10 A property must meet certain housing standards to be considered fit for human habitation. It must be free from health and safety hazards.
- 3.11 The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) was introduced by the Scottish Government in February 2004 and is the main indicator to measure housing quality in Scotland.
- 3.12 The SHQS means social landlords must ensure their tenants' homes are:
- energy efficient (now Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH)), safe and secure
 - not seriously damaged
 - have kitchens and bathrooms that are in good condition
- 3.13 The SHQS is a minimum housing standard in Scotland to ensure no property falls below this level. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors the SHQS both nationally and for individual registered social landlords (RSLs).
- 3.14 In order to minimise time that properties are void, Minimum Let Standards have been introduced on a trial basis since 16th December 2022. The Standard covers all aspects of the SHQS.
- 3.15 The introduction of the Minimum Let Standard ensures that the property conforms to the SHQS and permits a faster turn around in re-letting Council properties.
- 3.16 In January 2023, utilising the Minimum Let Standard, BMS turned around void properties on average in 16 days (30 properties) and 14.6 days (45 properties) in February.

Pest Control

- 3.17 There have been a number of cases in recent months where tenants have been unable to control pest issues within their Council property.
- 3.18 The Council's Environmental Health Service has an operational Pest Control Service that undertakes treatments on a rechargeable basis in the private domestic and non-domestic sectors and, on request, on a rechargeable basis to tenants.
- 3.19 With the health, safety and wellbeing of tenants at the core of service delivery, coupled with the safeguarding of the integrity of our properties and installations, it is proposed that tenants have access to the Council's pest control service, with charges internally recovered from the Housing Revenue Account, and as prescribed in the Council's list of fees and charges.

- 3.20 Any pest issue that extends beyond the Council's core pest control service functions will remain the responsibility of the tenant in terms of treatment and costs.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

The Service Standards and Policies are deliverable within existing staffing and budgetary resources. Resource may be required should there be an increase in pest control treatment requests but this will be balanced with an increased income and cost recovery means to cover salaries of additional technical staff. The impact will be closely monitored.

4.2 Digital

Not applicable.

4.3 Risk

Not having established service standards puts the Council at reputational and financial risk. No common repairs policy means it is difficult to repair mixed tenure properties and can have a detrimental impact on the structural integrity of our assets. Failing to implement minimum let standards results in inconsistent results, mixed standards of void properties and can lead to lengthy void periods. Failure to address pest issues within our stock impacts on our assets and the health and wellbeing of our tenants. With the cost of living crisis, tenants may be less inclined to deal with pest issues or seek unsafe alternatives without the provision of an in-house service.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities

Housing maintenance and use of the HRA for an equitable service to all our tenants are required to comply with the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Council's Financial Regulations.

4.5 Additional Report Implications

See Appendix A

4.6 Repairs & Maintenance Service Standards Common Repairs Policy Minimum Let Standard

Appendix B

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report aims to deliver best value.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Tenant consultation and participation is essential and will be addressed through future engagement workshops including right to repair.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report aims to measure progress through outcomes.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The report is based on the creation of a wellbeing economy which prioritises prevention, fairness for people, the economy and the environment.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The improvement and enhancement of our environment.