

West Kent Housing Association

Scrutiny panel

**Repairs satisfaction and responsibility
review**

24 September 2022

1. Overview

The scrutiny panel met to discuss their second review in January 2022 and decided to review the repairs service.

The purpose of this review is to identify how West Kent's contractors are performing and where there might be gaps in their service provision, overall satisfaction, and repairs responsibility.

Five members of the scrutiny panel contributed to the review

- Carolina de Andrade
- Nicholas Quinn
- Fen Stanley
- Jason Purtell
- Linda Lee

Members of the property and asset management team, Scott Phillips, Head of Property Services and Kelly Webb, Senior Contract Manager, were involved in the process throughout.

The findings detailed in this report reflect the findings in the Star survey in terms of dissatisfaction with the repairs experience. They also offer an explanation of the disparity between the results of the Star survey (perception) and Rant and Rave surveys (transactional) by highlighting that dissatisfaction is often caused by ineffective systems, processes and communication rather than dissatisfaction with the quality of individual repairs conducted in people's homes.

2. Methodology

This review was conducted over a period of six months. Data from a variety of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, was collected and analysed to inform the review and recommendations.

In the initial meeting, the panel received monthly dashboard of performance information, 2021's-year end dashboard, complaints data and trends, Rant & Rave responses and an overview of the recent Star (Survey of tenants and residents) survey.

The Star survey, conducted at the end of 2021, asked a number of questions on services across the business to measure how satisfied residents are with West Kent. The Star survey measures people's perception of West Kent – how they feel about West Kent as a landlord and whether they'd recommend us to a friend. Whereas Rant & Rave surveys are 'transactional' and are sent to residents just after their repair appointment. The Star survey highlighted residents' dissatisfaction with repairs, in particularly follow up repairs, timescales and quality of work. A trend that we weren't seeing from the transactional surveys.

A meeting was set up with members of the property team to get an overview of the service, ask further questions, discuss the history and changes as well as the impact

of the pandemic. This meeting was followed up by requests for additional information from the property team, who manage the repairs service, as well as additional data.

The panel, with the support of the resident involvement team, developed questions for residents and organised focus groups to discuss their personal experiences. 14 residents attended three focus groups, facilitated by panel members, to share their views. They also wanted to better understand the contractor experience. In order to do this, they developed an online survey to send to operatives to complete. They received an online induction with a senior customer service representative where they were shown how a repair is logged when a resident calls, emails or logs a repair on the tenant portal.

In addition to this the panel conducted their own desktop research by looking at the West Kent website and comparing West Kent with other housing providers.

3. Findings

The findings were unsurprising considering the recent Star survey responses indicating clear areas of improvement for the repairs process such as communication, consistency and clarity. However, other themes and details emerged throughout the process that supported the development of more specific, actionable recommendations

3.1 Repairs responsibility

The document 'Maintaining your home' is a comprehensive list that covers the majority of repairs that a resident may need to report or have knowledge of. However, the document doesn't specify who is responsible for communal spaces and WiFi for example and therefore requires amendment.

The document is long, and the format could be improved. Its current format may cause residents to miss what they're looking for or get frustrated and contact customer services anyway. Some thought to the presentation of the information could enhance the resident experience. This should be reviewed with residents to improve contents and formatting.

3.2 Website research

A desktop research exercise was conducted to review West Kent's website. It was found that although the information presented is accurate and useful it is only accurate and useful for some residents. As an example, the boiler reset video shows one type of boiler, which doesn't apply to everyone. West Kent should know what type of boiler is in each of their homes and provide relevant videos to support residents and reduce the number of calls to customer services.

While it is great that the user is able to find out the answer to their repairs queries using the web tool, there isn't a way to go back a step and therefore you have to start again. This causes frustration and potentially counters the purpose of the tool.

The search function needs to be updated to include synonyms for 'repair' such as 'fix' so that it will still take you to the correct area of the website – this would enhance

the user experience as they'd be able to find what they're looking for with the language they would use.

3.3 Focus group feedback and the resident experience

Most residents prefer to report their repairs by phone because when you call you receive a better service, are able to discuss your repair and negotiate appointment times. This was less likely to happen by email. However, those that do report by email do so to create an audit trail they can refer back to. The customer services team did report that they regularly have to go back to residents that report repairs by email, to ask for additional basic information such as their address which invariably makes the process a lot longer. The portal has its limitations, while potentially a great tool, it doesn't fully accommodate the need of the resident. One resident reported not being able to log in at all regardless of resetting the password. When trying to report a repair it does not give you enough options to select the most appropriate and accurate repair which impedes the transaction and experience.

Improving the email service would support the move towards digital, improve the audit trail and the overall customer experience. West Kent should consider looking into purchasing a 'bot' that could collect certain information before the repair is booked such as name, address, type of repair, comments on repair, preference of appointment. In addition to this the website could be updated to prompt residents reporting repairs to include specific information. Then the customer service advisor can reply with an email for more information and a couple of available time slots. In addition, reviewing the functionality of the portal would be beneficial as well as understanding how and why people do or don't use it.

Residents recommended optional evening appointments– while they may not be suitable for everyone it would be useful for some that could potentially lose money if they are not at work during the day. It would be a more responsive, people first approach. Where residents are given daytime appointments, time slots are very long. Contractors should call the resident when they're 30 minutes away.

Communication is a huge issue that came out during conversations with residents which is unsurprising considering the responses in the Star survey. This was especially true if the repair was not completed at the first visit. Follow up repairs and incomplete jobs frequently left residents not knowing what the next steps were and how long they'd have to wait for something to be fixed – and unfinished jobs impacted daily life. Ongoing communication should be written into the process and monitored. It would also be useful if the same operative could attend the second appointment for continuity. It would reduce frustration and contact to customer services allowing them more time to deal with other calls and emails.

Feedback from residents that joined the focus groups included:

- A better system for scheduling appointments
- West Kent needs to manage repairs better. Residents felt that they needed to be responsible for ensuring a repair was carried out through to completion as they weren't kept up to date or informed by West Kent.
- Better communication throughout the process.

- Planned repairs and replacements shouldn't mean that people don't get repairs done when they are needed
- Residents should be kept informed of any changes to planned repairs/replacements.
- Make sure that all feedback is fed back whether it is good or bad.
- Augmented Reality (AR) was trialled during lockdowns to support residents with certain repairs – this doesn't seem to happen anymore, but it was effective.

3.4 Survey of contractor operatives

Although the survey only received 13 responses the comments throughout were relatively consistent. Operatives that gave consent were contacted by phone to talk through their responses in greater detail.

Operatives reported feeling under prepared for jobs as there is sometimes not enough information given or shown in the job sheet. This does vary between contractors as iNHomes are the in-house repair team and will operate in a different way to Brenwards, an external contractor, for example. Being given a sufficient amount of information before arriving at a job allows for the correct operative to arrive with the correct equipment. It would mean diaries could get managed more effectively and reduce the number of residents receiving call backs to rebook their repair if a previous job has overrun due to it being more serious in nature than first thought.

Some operatives are given jobs in vastly different locations and therefore spend a lot of their day driving instead of fixing. Allocating smaller, more specific geographical areas, to operatives would allow for a more time efficient day and more satisfied residents.

Operatives also reported insufficient information given to them regarding the tenant. The system itself doesn't always hold up to date information. When a repair is logged, customer services should ask the resident if their information is up to date, not just for their contact information but their vulnerability information too. Additionally, to allow for easier diagnosis of issues, the type of boiler, for example, should be included in the notes about the property/tenancy.

There is an issue regarding booking follow up appointments - operatives reported that contacting the planners to rearrange an appointment may not be the most effective way to book a follow up appointment. An automated system would be preferable so long as it is compatible with tablets and other contractors' systems. If the jobs are not being recorded and booked in properly by external companies contracted by West Kent, a performance review needs to be considered. Performance based penalties and a 'get out clause' for consistently underperforming contractors is essential.

In addition to this, operatives noted that access to bin store keys can be problematic if the bin store is in Ashford and the key is in Sevenoaks.

3.5 Additional findings

There didn't appear to be a correlation between poor satisfaction, covid lockdowns and, as a result, a reduced service. Residents, that attended the focus group were content to wait and understood the change to service. Many of them said that during the pandemic, they waited to report a repair until restrictions eased. There were multiple questions about the £20 recharge for missed appointments too. There is a need for more clarity with this, particularly as charges were suspended during Covid.

A resident attending one focus group reported that an operative attended their home at 4:50pm for a 12-5pm appointment slot but because it was too close to 5pm, and the end of their working day, they didn't complete the repair. Either jobs should not be booked so close to the end of the day or there needs to be an overtime package for completing the job.

Residents need a reference number for their repair and linked additional repairs so the resident and customer services can easily track the progress of a repair more effectively, especially if a resident has multiple ongoing repairs. The idea of 'quality checking' or auditing selected repairs was suggested to monitor performance.

Recommendations

The recommendations were closely considered by the panel They are broken down into five key themes; communication, process, technology, training and consultation.

1. Information for residents

- a) Establish a large scale, multichannel, promotion of resident responsibilities
- b) Create a marketing campaign around what information residents need to give to report a repair
- c) Reiterate the importance of residents updating their personal details and life changes so repairs priorities can be prioritised
- d) Update the information videos on the website to reflect all types of boilers in homes
- e) Update the search function so that synonyms for repairs are included such as 'fix' or 'broken'
- f) Update the function of the self-help tool so that you're able to 'go back' to the previous step instead of having to start again

2. Communication to residents

- a) Operatives to contact residents by text/phone when they are 30 minutes away
- b) Operatives to contact the resident directly to ask for more information before the job to make sure they have all the information and therefore the right parts
- c) Ensure continuity of response across customer reporting channels when booking appointments
- d) Clarify who is responsible for ongoing communication with residents, and the frequency of communication. This needs to be written into the process and adhered to strictly
- e) Generate reference numbers for repairs for improved tracking
- f) Develop a shorthand to communicate accurate repairs information to contractors.
- g) Residents to be able to send pictures of repair where possible to accompany the repairs ticket

3. Communication with operatives

- a) Feedback, good and bad, needs to be fed back to operatives. Or identify why they're not seeing their compliment feedback
- b) Monthly contractor meetings should include, ongoing, repeated issues (trends) , compliments and complaints

4. Consultation

- a) Review and improve the repairs responsibility with residents to make sure it is current and easy to understand. Consider creating a separate 'Maintaining your home' for Emerald homes.
- b) Review the tenant portal

5. Process

- a) Improve the follow up or second visit process so it is clear who is responsible for further works
- b) Improve the appointment scheduling programme / process – especially for follow up appointments
- c) Extend appointment times to evenings to accommodate those that work during the day and are not able to take time off work to wait in
- d) Consider changing the time slots of repairs or offer an overtime/bonus package for operatives who stay beyond the end of their working day to complete a repair
- e) Implement a repairs audit or 'quality check'
- f) Consider reinstating £20 missed appointment charge
- g) Consider an alternate method for contractors to pick up keys for voids and for bin stores
- h) Maximise the utilisation of augmented reality (AR)
- i) Maintain up to date records of properties including boiler type, wet room etc in a centralised place such as CRM/Cx
- j) Create a formalised process map for staff when a resident reports a repair
- k) The same operative should attend the second/follow up appt where possible
- l) Incorporate expectation management into the conversation when residents report a repair to customer services.
- m) Introduce house health checks in the void process
- n) Refine procurement process
- o) Review 'Right first time' in key performance indicator measurement

6. Technology

- a) Introduce an automated booking system
- b) Better tablets for operatives that have sufficient space and ability
- c) Introduce an automated email/chat bot

7. Training

- a) Provide more training for new / more common equipment for staff in the customer service team as well as for operatives
- b) Increase training provided for operatives to deal with residents with physical ailments and mental ill health including dementia

Next steps

Places to live. Space to grow.

The report and the accompanying recommendation working documents have been shared with teams that are directly involved. The findings will be discussed, and timeframes will be allocated for actions.

The panel will conduct quarterly meetings to review progress.

Scrutiny report