

## **Area Panels: September 2015**

### **Briefing Paper: Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel on Responsive Repairs**

#### **Background:**

The Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel was set up in April 2013. The scrutiny review on Responsive Repairs is the panel's third scrutiny panel and was selected after analysing responses to tenant surveys submitted to the panel, with over half of the responses suggesting this as an area for scrutiny.

The scope of the panel was to:

- Focus on the repairs pathway for tenants when reporting a fault, right up to completion and for the feedback process afterwards.
- Visit the Mears Repairs Helpdesk to listen into telephone calls and find out how the service operated; how are jobs prioritised?
- Carry out visits with operatives to see how well the repair is fixed and how the tenant found the experience.
- See if the responsive repairs service were meeting the needs of its residents by looking at tenant satisfaction data. To see how tenant satisfaction was received, recorded and used to improve the service. The panel also wanted to find out whether the council was carrying out sufficient monitoring itself of the repairs service
- Identify if there were any improvements that the service could make.

#### **Key findings:**

The full review is attached and commends the council and Mears on its partnership working, it notes that staff are working to high standards and working hard to achieve tough targets. The panel was very impressed with much of what they saw and makes three recommendations:

1. Repairs office staff shadow operatives as part of their training and induction – This is agreed and commences in October. The relationship between good identification of the repairs and completing a repair right first time is really important and this change will support improvements in the service.

2. Resident Assessors are implemented fully to assess repairs – This is agreed in part and has progressed well over last six months through joint working with residents. The scheme will re-launch shortly and the Resident Inspectors (new title) will meet six times a year to plan their activities and focus on providing a resident perspective on the quality of the service. However, the recommendations around Resident Inspectors visiting in person and choosing which properties to visit present specific risk management concerns and it is not recommended that this is implemented.
3. Rate Your Estate scheme for estate inspections is reintroduced – The council operates a regular estate inspection programme throughout the city which residents can and do attend, therefore this recommendation is not agreed. Residents on the Neighbourhood & Community Service Improvement Group are continuing to look at ways to maximise the involvement of residents in addressing issues on their estates, including using new technology to highlight issues such as fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, and anti-social behaviour quickly so that the council can respond in a timely way.

**Next steps:**

- The report will go to Housing & New Homes Committee in November
- Progress against the agreed recommendations will be tracked by the Repairs Partnership Core Group.

Contact:

Glyn Huelin, Partnering Business Manager, Brighton & Hove City Council,  
[glyn.huelin@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:glyn.huelin@brighton-hove.gov.uk), 01273 293306

|                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Area Panel Report</b> | <b>Agenda Item</b>           |
|                          | Brighton & Hove City Council |

|                          |   |   |                          |
|--------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Subject:</b>          | <b>Response to the Tenant &amp; Resident Scrutiny Panel on responsive repairs</b> |   |                          |
| <b>Date of Meeting:</b>  |   |   |                          |
| <b>Report of:</b>        | <b>Executive Director, Environment, Development and Housing</b>                   |   |                          |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>  | <b>Name:</b>  | <b>Glyn Huelin</b>                      | <b>Tel: 01273 293306</b> |
|                          | <b>Email:</b>   | <b>Glyn.huelin@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b> |                          |
| <b>Ward(s) affected:</b> | <b>All</b>  |   |                          |

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report sets out the Housing response to the recommendations of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel in their report on responsive repairs. That report can be found at Appendix 1.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee notes the evidence, findings and recommendations of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel relating to the responsive repairs service.
- 2.2 That the committee agrees the actions proposed in this report in response to the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.

### 3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel was set up in April 2013. The scrutiny review on Responsive Repairs is the panel's third scrutiny panel and was selected after analysing responses to tenant surveys submitted to the panel, with over half of the responses suggesting this as an area for scrutiny.
- 3.2 The scope of the panel was to:
- Focus on the repairs pathway for tenants when reporting a fault, right up to completion and for the feedback process afterwards.
  - Visit the Mears Repairs Helpdesk to listen into telephone calls and find out how the service operated; how are jobs prioritised?
  - Carry out visits with operatives to see how well the repair is fixed and how the tenant found the experience.
  - See if the responsive repairs service were meeting the needs of its residents by looking at tenant satisfaction data. To see how tenant satisfaction was received, recorded and used to improve the service. The panel also wanted to find out whether the council was carrying out sufficient monitoring itself of the repairs service
  - Identify if there were any improvements that the service could make.

3.3 The Housing team would like to thank members of the panel for their hard work reviewing the service. All officers and Mears staff found the input of the panel a valuable challenge and welcome the opportunity to share how the service operates with residents.

#### 4. RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 4.1 Recommendation one

4.2 ***The panel recommends that as part of their training and induction, the Repairs Helpdesk staff should spend time with repairs operatives so that they can get a better understanding what is involved in the various repairs jobs and the average time taken. Both new and existing helpdesk staff should shadow plumbers, carpenters and electricians, and any other staff who may be regularly involved.***

4.3 This recommendation is agreed in full and work is underway to implement it commencing in October 2015.

4.4 As the panel has identified the relationship between diagnosis (carried out by Repairs Helpdesk staff) and carrying out repairs is critical to delivering a right first time service to residents.

4.5 This recommendation will support the development of Repairs Helpdesk staff as the main contact point for residents with repairs enquiries. The recommendation has been fully agreed by Mears and will be monitored by the partnership Core Group.

##### 4.6 Recommendation two

4.7 ***The panel recommend that resident assessors are used to assess a percentage of the completed repairs, to get a fuller assessment of these repairs. The panel believes that by having another tenant visiting in person, it would lead to a more open discussion about the standard of the repair and increase the feedback for BHCC and Mears. The panel would expect that the assessors are able to choose for themselves the homes they visit to assess completed repairs and the number of assessments carried out.***

4.8 ***It might be necessary to increase the capacity of the resident assessor scheme to enable more assessments to take place. It would be sensible to use the existing expertise of tenants and leaseholders, e.g. for ex-builders to assess repairs.***

4.9 This recommendation is agreed in part and the council has been working with Resident Inspectors (previously Resident Assessors) to develop this initiative across the repairs service, however the recommendations around Resident Inspectors visiting in person and choosing which properties to visit present specific risk management concerns and it is not recommended that this is implemented.

- 4.10 The detail of the report from this scrutiny panel indicates that improvements can be made to how the service engages with residents and uses feedback to improve. The partnership has successfully integrated learning from complaints to change processes and improve customer service over the last few years. The council is developing the Resident Inspector programme and recognises that this programme should be effectively integrated into the responsive repairs service and also needs to operate with the existing Home Service Improvement Group.
- 4.11 Over the last six months existing Resident Inspectors, members of the Home Service Improvement Group and officers have been working to improve the Resident Inspectors project, increase the opportunities for residents to get involved and identify recommendations for where the service can improve.
- 4.12 Resident Inspectors meet together six times a year to identify what inspections they wish to carry out and to feedback to the Home Service Improvement Group. The inspectors are looking at a sample of empty properties before re-letting, reviewing sheltered scheme projects from a resident perspective, and contacting residents who have recently had a repair completed to get feedback on the service.
- 4.13 An article will be published in the autumn edition of Homing In to ask for more residents to join the Resident Inspector project and this will also be publicised through resident associations and online.
- 4.14 The recommendation includes details about visiting residents in their homes which has implications around health and safety, data protection, management of the clients of concern register and safeguarding. It would not be appropriate for resident inspectors to have access to repairs details for other residents and to select which properties to visit and further the council has specific controls and processes around safeguarding residents and staff which could not operate effectively under this model. An alternative way of enabling resident to resident discussion about the service may be to arrange a session with a number of residents that have had recent repairs to identify what went well and what could be improved.
- 4.15 Recommendation three**
- 4.16 *Panel members are aware that there are no current estate inspections such as Rate Your Estate. This scheme was a useful way of recording residents' concerns against a set of maintenance and appearance standards that were shared across the city. The panel recommends that this scheme is reintroduced with sufficient resources in order to enable residents to raise concerns about their estate. This will help to identify hotspots where there are problems such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles etc.***
- 4.17 The council operates a regular estate inspection programme throughout the city which residents can and do attend, therefore this recommendation is not agreed.
- 4.18 Residents on the Neighbourhood & Community Service Improvement Group are continuing to look at ways to maximise the involvement of residents in addressing issues on their estates, including using new technology to highlight

issues such as fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, and anti-social behaviour quickly so that the council can respond in a timely way.

- 4.18 The Rate Your Estate scheme was trialled as part of the Turning the Tide pilot in 2011 alongside the Housing and Estates Forum. Evaluation of the Rate Your Estate scheme identified that whilst the approach was popular with some resident representatives in the pilot area, there was a lack of response and poor engagement with local residents and resident representatives in other parts of the city, despite a proactive recruitment and training campaign. The scheme was not accessible to all communities/residents and was also a very resource-intensive model.
- 4.19 The Housing and Estates Forum brought together service providers at a neighbourhood level which residents found useful. The Council are currently looking at neighbourhood models as part of the Co-operative Council agenda and will use previous learning to determine future models.
- 4.20 The council is consulting on development of a new Asset Management Strategy which will be taken through a future committee and will include consideration of repairs and maintenance to communal areas and how this can link into the existing estate inspection programme.

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The panel sought resident input into this scrutiny through a survey and through meetings with residents at the Home Service Improvement Group.
- 5.2 The scrutiny panel findings will be presented to the four Area Panel meetings in September 2015 before going to Housing & New Homes Committee.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 This report sets out the actions proposed by Housing alongside the recommendations in the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel's report on the responsive repairs service.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### 7.1 Financial Implications:

To follow

*Finance Officer Consulted:*

*Date:*

### 7.2 Legal Implications:

To follow

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Date:*

7.3 Equalities Implications:

There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

7.4 Sustainability Implications:

There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report.

7.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:

There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

There are significant risks around residents visiting other residents independently in their homes which are detailed in 4.14 and below and as result this element of the recommendation from the scrutiny panel is not recommended for implementation.

In particular the council operates a range of controls around resident information to comply with data protection responsibilities and it would not be appropriate to share information on clients of concern, recent repairs, tenure and address with other residents. In addition the council has a duty of care to ensure the safety of both staff and residents which is supported by detailed processes, risk management controls and working arrangements. A client of concern register is in operation to manage safety and access to this register could not be given to residents. Independent resident visits into the home to inspect repairs would not be covered by these controls and would present significant risk to residents involved.

7.7 Public Health Implications:

There are no direct public health implications arising from this report.

7.8 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

There are no direct Corporate or Citywide implications arising from this report.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel Report

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

### **Background Documents**

None



**May 2015**

## **Responsive Repairs**

**Panel Members:**

**Dave Murtagh (Chair)**

**Philip Bradick**

**Lesley Cope**

Chief John Blackbear was also a member of the panel but resigned in March 2015.



## **Chair's Foreword**

I have found the experience of chairing this Responsive Repairs panel a privilege. I have learned so much about the processes and planning that goes on to deliver the Responsive Repairs Service.

As part of the panel's work we visited the Mears Repairs Helpdesk at the Housing Centre in Moulsecoomb. We saw how the team worked in a pressurised environment in a professional manner; the team had good staff morale and were very well managed.

We noted that the Helpdesk staff had altered how they ran the service following tenant feedback. We think that the changes made were positive ones, which have improved the service that is offered. We welcome the changes, including the helpdesk actively contacting tenants after repairs to get feedback.

We were also able to go out with different repairs staff to see how they carried out their day to day work; between us we spent time with plumbers, electricians and carpenters. We would like to thank Mears for arranging these sessions for us, for the operatives for making us feel so welcome, and to the residents that we visited for allowing us to come to their homes.

Overall, we came away with a very positive view of the service that is provided by everyone we spoke to, and in particular, the Repairs Helpdesk.

Our main recommendation is around the lack of tenant involvement in assessing repairs after they have been carried out – we strongly support the tenant assessor scheme that is in place already and feel that it should be used more widely to improve honest feedback from tenants.

We would also like to see the re-introduction of the Rate your Estate scheme as a key part of the responsive repairs service. This will increase tenant involvement in services. The repairs service is a service paid for by the tenants and should have tenant involvement at its heart. We hope that this is something that can be taken forward to improve services for tenants across the city.

I would like to add my personal thanks to Chief John Blackbear and to others for their part in this panel and other work that we have done together. This panel was originally chaired by Chief, but he had to leave before it could be completed, as did Andreas. I and the other panel members are grateful for their input and wish them well for the future.

Dave Murtagh

**Chair of the Responsive Repairs Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel**

May 2015

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The panel selected this scrutiny review following suggestions from tenants, with over half of the responses suggesting this as an area for scrutiny.
- 1.2 The Responsive Repairs service is contracted to Mears Group (referred to as Mears in this report) by Brighton & Hove City Council, running from 2010 for ten years. The service provides unplanned ('responsive') repairs to the homes of council tenants (as opposed to planned maintenance repairs).
- 1.3 Members of the team spoke about the key concerns raised by tenants which were:
  - Low levels for customer feedback received after a repair job had been completed. There was also concern that 'mystery shopping' of repairs has been discontinued, adding to the lack of tenant involvement.
  - It appears that Mears are the only people who are currently collecting tenant feedback, which is seen as a conflict of interest, since Mears also provide the initial repairs service. The panel accepts that there is a role for Mears to play but the feedback that they collect should only be part of the overall picture.
  - There had been a pilot of tenant involvement in estate inspections but the most useful elements of this, such as tenants leading the process or the central reporting back on all repairs raised, had not been taken forward.
- 1.4 The Responsive Repairs service provided the panel with useful performance and benchmarking information. Senior managers and the Chair of Housing Committee emphasised the importance of having useful customer feedback to monitor and make service improvements.
- 1.5 The panel want to commend the Council and Mears on its partnership working. It found the staff were working to high standards and were working hard to achieve tough targets set by the council. In addition the panel was very impressed with much of what they saw and they would like to thank everyone who spoke to them as well as the tenants who contributed to its investigation.

In particular the panel would like to thank the operatives who took them out to demonstrate the work that they carried out. The panel felt the operatives undertake a wide range of jobs to high standards, and wanted to recognise the key role that they play in keeping tenants' homes up to standard.

## **2. List of recommendations**

- 2.1 The panel would like to make the following three recommendations based on the evidence they heard:

### ***Recommendation One:***

***The panel recommends that as part of their training and induction, the Repairs Helpdesk staff should spend time with repairs operatives so that they can get a better understanding what is involved in the various repairs jobs and the average time taken. Both new and existing helpdesk staff should shadow plumbers, carpenters and electricians, and any other staff who may be regularly involved. (to check what is feasible in relation to the contract with Mears and whether this kind of recommendation can be implemented)***

### ***Recommendation Two:***

***The panel recommends that resident assessors are used to assess a percentage of the completed repairs, to get a fuller assessment of these repairs. The panel believes that by having another tenant visiting in person, it would lead to a more open discussion about the standard of the repair and increase the feedback for BHCC and Mears. The panel would expect that the assessors are able to choose for themselves the homes they visit to assess completed repairs and the number of assessments carried out.***

***It might be necessary to increase the capacity of the resident assessor scheme to enable more assessments to take place. It would be sensible to use the existing expertise of tenants and leaseholders, e.g. for ex-builders to assess repairs.***

### ***Recommendation Three:***

***Panel members are aware that there are no current estate inspections such as Rate Your Estate. This scheme was a useful way of recording residents' concerns against a set of maintenance and appearance standards that were shared across the city. The panel recommends that this scheme is reintroduced with sufficient resources in order to enable residents to raise concerns about their estate. This will help to identify hotspots where there are problems such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles etc.***

### 3. Introduction

- 3.1 The panel selected this review after analysing the responses to their tenant surveys. Over half of the responses<sup>1</sup> received requested that the panel scrutinise responsive repairs. There were a range of issues raised, including the standard of repairs and how feedback was collected after repairs were carried out.
- 3.2 The panel's key concern was to find out whether the correct processes were in place for tenants when reporting a fault right up to completion, and for the feedback/ review process afterwards. They wanted to ensure that the current processes are the best ones for achieving tenant satisfaction.

### 4. The scope of the panel

- 4.1 The panel agreed the scope would be to:
- 1) Focus on the repairs pathway for tenants when reporting a fault, right up to completion and for the feedback process afterwards.
  - 2) Visit the Mears Repairs Helpdesk to listen into telephone calls and find out how the service operated; how are jobs prioritised?
  - 3) Carry out visits with operatives to see how well the repair is fixed and how the tenant found the experience.
  - 4) See if the responsive repairs service were meeting the needs of its residents by looking at tenant satisfaction data. To see how tenant satisfaction was received, recorded and used to improve the service. The panel also wanted to find out whether the council was carrying out sufficient monitoring itself of the repairs service
  - 5) Identify if there were any improvements that the service could make.

However, the panel resolved not to look into budgets or the cost of materials as tenants had been involved in the contract discussions.

### 5. How the panel collected evidence

| Dates         | Meeting  |
|---------------|--|
| 2 July 2014   | Scope of the panel   |
| 5 August 2014 | Evidence gathering private scoping meeting with Glyn Huelin (Partnering Business Manager), James Cryer (Partnering Manager- Mears) and Dave Warner |

<sup>1</sup> A total of 31 tenant survey responses had been received. 19 responses referred to repairs.

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
|                   | (Performance Manager-Mears)  |
| 2 September 2014  | Evidence gathering private meeting. Analysis of repairs information requested by the panel. Draft survey for tenants.  |
| 16 September 2014 | Private meeting. Continuation of the analysis of repairs information requested by the panel.<br><br>Approval of Tenant Scrutiny survey on repairs to be emailed to residents on the resident involvement database. |
| 7 October 2014    | Private meeting. Compilation of scrutiny questions for their next meeting. Analysis of information from Amicus Horizon.  |
| 23 October 2014   | Visit to Mears Repairs Helpdesk  |
| 11 November 2014  | Private meeting with Benjamin Okagbue (Head of Property & Investment), Glyn Huelin and James Cryer   |
| 2 December 2014   | Private meeting with the Head of Housing - Councillor Bill Randall & Member of the Housing Committee – Councillor Mary Mears   |
| 2 February 2015   | Panel meeting to discuss report findings – Councillor Gill Mitchell spoke to the panel.  |
| Early Feb 2015    | Visits with operatives   |
| March/ April 2015 | Panel meetings to discuss report findings and recommendations  |

- 5.1 In addition the panel attended several housing meetings and analysed the tenant survey responses that they had received.
- 5.2 The panel was very impressed by the written information given to them by the Mears staff; they had a presentation on the repairs pathway from the first point of call up to completion and were provided with information about how feedback was collected. The panel was also grateful for the information supplied by Amicus Horizon, a housing association.

### **Improving resident engagement & the collection of performance information**

- 5.3 Panel members were disappointed by the low level of resident responses to their email survey (with only nine responses received in total) and will continue to look at ways to improve resident engagement with the panel as part of their ongoing work programme.
- 5.4 The panel believes that the lack of resident response reflects the relatively low levels of engagement that the panel saw between council tenants and the Repairs Team; the lack of customer feedback is the biggest gap in the service provided by the Repairs Team.

- 5.5 The panel was also concerned that they did not receive the same level of information from the council about repairs, as they did from Mears. The panel regretted that projects such as mystery shopping and estate inspections had ended, because they had been used by both the council and residents to assess the performance of the repairs service. The panel would like to see both the council and residents collect more evidence about the repairs service.

## 6. The Responsive Repairs service

- 6.1 Mears hold a ten year contract for responsive repairs for Brighton and Hove City council; this began in 2010. The Mears helpdesk is the first point of contact for tenants reporting a fault or repair and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is responsible for calls from 11,000 council properties. The helpdesk has 9 call agents and a call centre supervisor. In one month (June 2014) it handled 6,500 calls. The team works to targets, with the aim to answer calls within 20 seconds; data supplied to the panel shows that they are reaching this target between 75% and 80% of the time, with their performance improving.
- 6.2 The panel was informed that one call agent carries out telephone customer satisfaction surveys every day and other call agents do so when volumes of incoming calls and emails are low. The most recent figures available for April 2015 show that Mears contacted 18% of tenants who received responsive repairs and 25% of tenants who received gas repairs. Service data shows that that 95.7% of residents rated the repair service as good/excellent<sup>2</sup>.

The responsive repairs service has targets for the time taken to carry out routine and emergency repairs. The target is for 98% of responsive repairs to be carried out within the time specified- figures for the year 2014/15 show that this was achieved in 99% of responsive repairs.

- 6.3 Panel members observed the helpdesk staff at work, listening in to phone calls requesting responsive repairs and observing how the staff addressed the query. Panel members reported back that they were very impressed with the way in which the helpdesk operated and how the staff handled the calls. They felt the staff were well managed and well trained, and that they were highly motivated, working hard to answer all of the calls that were received.
- 6.4 The panel were particularly impressed with the detailed questions that the helpdesk staff asked to help identify the exact repair that was needed. Call handlers have to be skilled at asking residents detailed information about the issue and fittings per specification. The more information that is collated means that the operative can have the correct tools, fittings and background to fix the fault efficiently. The team also needed to be able to calm the tenant down in a crisis situation i.e. the flooding of a room.

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<sup>2</sup> Data provided by the service

- 6.5 Overall the panel was very pleased with the way in which the helpdesk was managed and operated. The only suggestion that they had was for staff to develop their knowledge of the various repair types by shadowing operatives at work.

***Recommendation One:***

***The panel recommends that as part of their training and induction, the Repairs Helpdesk staff should spend time with repairs operatives so that they can get a better understanding what is involved in the various repairs jobs and the average time taken. Both new and existing helpdesk staff should shadow plumbers, carpenters and electricians, and any other staff who may be regularly involved.***

**Operatives**

- 6.6 Panel members were invited to join operatives to see the repairs pathway from an operative receiving the job number to completing it on-site. This was arranged with the resident's permission. The panel members accompanied electricians, plumbers and carpenters for a day each. Operatives said that they wanted office staff to spend more time shadowing them to see what their day to day work involved. Panel members agreed with the suggestion - please see above for Recommendation One which supports this.
- 6.7 Again panel members reported that they were happy with the standard of service provided by the operatives, and could not think of any ways in which this aspect of the responsive repairs service could be improved.
- 6.8 Following their visit to the helpdesk, the visits with the operatives and discussions with senior managers within Housing and within Mears, panel members agreed that they were satisfied with the way in which the service operated from the initial request for responsive repairs to the repairs that were carried out by the operatives.
- 6.9 The panel then moved on to examine how tenant satisfaction with the service was considered.

**7. Tenant satisfaction with repairs service**

- 7.1 The council carries out an annual Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR). The most recent survey was in June 2014 with a sample of 3000 Brighton & Hove City Council tenants, who were sent the survey. There was a response rate of 24%- 724 respondents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Housing Committee- 12 November 2014, Agenda Item 38

- 7.2 Two thirds of the sample had had a repair in the previous twelve month period. Satisfaction with the last completed repair had dropped since the last STAR survey; 2014 responses indicated 76% were satisfied overall with the repair, which has gone down from 81% in 2011. There were also disappointing responses with regard to the time taken before the repair work started, which had fallen from 83% to 77%; results had also fallen for satisfaction with the speed of repairs completion.
- 7.3 It should be noted that these figures differ from the satisfaction responses that Mears' own surveys have received. Mears reported that telephone surveys to 477 residents gave a 93% satisfaction response.
- 7.4 This difference in results is one of the reasons that the panel feel that Mears may not be best placed to carry out their own satisfaction surveys; tenants may not feel that they can give an honest response if they have had a less positive, or less satisfactory, service. The panel believe that resources such as mystery shoppers and resident assessors could be used to fill this gap.

It should also be noted that Housing are now asking tenants the question 'what could we do better?' and analysing and feeding back the responses received.

#### **How is satisfaction information currently collected?**

- 7.5 In the past Mears used handheld PDAs (Personal Data Assistants) to capture tenant satisfaction information immediately after every repair job. However this had ceased due to concerns from tenants<sup>4</sup>.
- 7.6 Postcard response cards were also used to assess customer satisfaction, with tenants being asked to complete and return them giving their comments on the service received. Results showed that tenants only completed the cards if their experience was very positive or very negative. This meant that there was a low response rate for jobs that had been completed to a satisfactory level.
- 7.7 Mears has now moved to a telephone based system, where a member of the Mears team calls tenants to ask for their feedback on the service they have received. This has proved successful in increasing response rates and the most recent figures indicate that in April 2015 telephone surveys were carried out relating to 18% of the responsive repair jobs and 25.5% of gas repairs jobs.<sup>5</sup> However panel members did not think that this was the best solution as tenants might not feel comfortable giving negative feedback to the service provider.

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<sup>4</sup> Tenants did not like using the handhelds, not enough time to carry out the inspection of work and whether the problem was fixed on a long term basis and tenants did not know how the repair should be fixed and to what standard. Housing Committee, 12 November 2014

<sup>5</sup> Data provided by the service



- 7.8 The panel felt that, whilst most of the repairs service performed very well and was based around the needs of the tenant, this was one area that ought to be reviewed.
- 7.9 Amicus Horizon told the panel that they collected resident satisfaction for responsive repairs through carrying out telephone surveys of approximately 5% of residents who have had a repair completed the previous week. Amicus Horizon employs a survey team to carry out this survey and ask residents to rate their experience of their most recent repair. The panel felt that this was a more independent way of collecting repairs feedback than the contractor collating the feedback, However they were aware that there would be resource issues if employees were taken on specifically to carry out this role.
- 7.11 Panel members suggested that as an alternative, the existing role of Tenant / Resident Assessors could be expanded. These are tenants who have been trained to examine empty properties before they are let, to ensure that properties are up to a lettable standard before new tenants move in.
- 7.12 Two of the panel members are currently tenant assessors and felt that the assessor role's remit could be easily expanded to include checking the standard responsive repairs on properties that are already tenanted.
- 7.13 Panel members suggested that the Repairs Helpdesk staff advise all callers that they may be contacted by a Resident Assessor after the repair has completed, who would come and check the standard of repair. This would allow the tenant to opt out of the service if they did not wish to be contacted. The Resident Assessor could then carry out checks after the repairs had been completed and feedback any comments or issues to Mears.

Panel members thought that tenants talking to other tenants through the resident assessor scheme about their repairs could lead to more open discussions and more honest feedback. The panel feel it is essential to have proper tenant involvement throughout the repairs service, which should be tenant-led rather than officer-led.

- 7.14 Panel members felt that this could be extended to be used for a wider estates inspection service. Some of the panel members had been involved in the Rate Your Estate pilot in which residents were trained to carry out official estate inspections and report defects or concerns. The residents went on 'walkabouts' with other residents, putting together a photo-book scorecard looking at factors such as repairs, grounds maintenance, cleaning and the appearance of communal areas. One of the benefits was that there was an agreed set of standards across the city, increasing consistency.

Panel members were aware that there are no estate inspections of this nature at present, and feel that they could be re-introduced quite easily in order to increase resident involvement in estate inspections and identify problem areas.

7.15 The panel wanted to assure Mears and operatives that they were not querying the standard of repairs carried out but that they wanted to improve the feedback mechanism in order to provide another way of quality assurance.

#### **7.16 Recommendation Two**

***The panel recommend that resident assessors are used to assess a percentage of the completed repairs, to get a fuller assessment of these repairs. The panel believes that by having another tenant visiting in person, it would lead to a more open discussion about the standard of the repair and increase the feedback for BHCC and Mears. The panel would expect that the assessors are able to choose for themselves the homes they visit to assess completed repairs and the number of assessments carried out.***

***It might be necessary to increase the capacity of the resident assessor scheme to enable more assessments to take place. It would be sensible to use the existing expertise of tenants and leaseholders, e.g. for ex-builders to assess repairs.***

#### **7.17 Recommendation Three:**

***Panel members are aware that there are no current estate inspections such as Rate Your Estate. This scheme was a useful way of recording residents' concerns against a set of maintenance and appearance standards that were shared across the city. The panel recommends that this scheme is reintroduced with sufficient resources in order to enable residents to raise concerns about their estate. This will help to identify hotspots where there are problems such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles etc.***

## **8. Conclusion**

8.1 Panel members were impressed overall with the service provided by the repairs service including the very high standard of service from Repairs Helpdesk staff and by the operatives that they spent time with. They would like to see greater work shadowing between the two teams to increase knowledge and skills.

8.2 The members of the panel did feel that the service could be improved by changing the way in which post-repairs feedback was collected. They considered various ways of doing this but agreed that the most effective way of doing so would be to widen the remit of the Resident Assessor scheme so that tenants could be more involved in assessing the standards of repairs. This is in order to provide more quality assurance which will be of benefit to tenants, the council and to Mears.

8.3 The panel would like to thank everyone who spoke to them about the repairs service for their helpful and open approach.