

SCRUTINY REPORT

REPAIRS SERVICE REVIEW 2011

Prepared by: Resident Scrutiny Team

Review Date: March 2011

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to record a current review of the responsive repairs service provided by Derwent Living to all of its customers, regardless of type of tenancy held.

2. Scope

- Derwent Living's Business Plan 2009-11 states:

“Customers said they wanted us to focus on improving our service delivery, so the core of the business plan is to deliver excellent services and **in particular to prioritise improvements on maintenance.**”

- Within this timeframe, Derwent Living has seen Connaught, their repair partner contracted to carry out work to a standard agreed with them, be taken over by Lovells. Although the company name has changed, the majority of operatives remain the same. A temporary arrangement is in place with Lovells Respond and the new Head of Asset Management, Andy Nickels is working to find a long term partner to deliver the repairs and gas servicing contracts with the aim to improve services to residents and also reduce costs. Derwent Living has taken steps to heed its business plan and has recently moved its repairs call centre into its head office building.
- Derwent Living deals with over 11,000 properties, therefore on average 1500 repairs are carried out each month. More recently, this has been expanded by a further 1,100 properties taken on by Derwent Living from The Home Group.
- It is the policy of Derwent Living to offer appointments to customers for all pre-inspections and where access is required for all internal, external and communal repair work.
- When a customer reports a repair, an appointment date will usually be given by the member of staff taking the call.

- Repairs targets mean Derwent Living will aim to complete emergency repairs within 24 hours, urgent repairs within 7 days and routine repairs within 28 days.
- Appointments are scheduled on the QL system by Derwent Living and Maxell by Lovells, where they will be allocated to the operative who can undertake that type of repair. The interface to marry the two systems together will not be available until the end of the March 2011.
- For responsive repairs, the appointments are available in 4 or 5 hour windows classed as morning 8.00- 12.00 or afternoon 12.00- 17.00. Operatives may attend outside of these hours for emergency repairs.
- Operatives should telephone ahead to the customer on the appointed day to inform them of their intended time of arrival.

3. Input/Resources

The scrutiny was conducted by:

- Undertaking a detailed desktop review of evidence presented by Derwent Living
- Visiting Derwent Living Call Centre, once in its old venue and again after it had transferred to Head Office, listening in via headsets on the customers reporting faults
- Shadowing a supervisor for Lovells; visiting customers' properties who were having or had just had work completed by operatives
- Studying the Control complaints logging system QLx on two separate occasions with the help of Karen Mullock with specific regards to responsive repairs
- Holding a telephone survey of customers who had called to report a repair needed between January and March 2011. Customers were randomly selected from an extensive list provided by Diane Hudson, and then the calls were made by three different members of the team over several days

- Talking directly with customers via door knocking on several different Derwent Living schemes

4. Opinion of the Scrutiny team

- The team acknowledges that Derwent Living demonstrated self awareness that the repairs service is a concern and has taken steps to address concerns prior to this piece of scrutiny. The approach was acknowledged by the Audit Commission during their Short Notice Inspection Assessment in August 2009, stating “strengths and weaknesses are in balance” for both Responsive repairs and repairs to Voids.
- Further to this, following the move of the Complaints reporting system on 01/09/10 from Comtrad to QLx, where all repair complaints are now passed directly to Derwent Living instead of through to the contractors as the first point of call, the number of complaints has increased substantially. Derwent Living is investigating current trends and working with contractors, customer service staff and scrutiny to make improvements.
- It is acknowledged that this is a transitional period for Derwent Living following a period of Head office restructuring; a temporary arrangement with Lovells; and ongoing negotiations to find a new long term provider of repairs services. Trends may be affected in the short term due to a particularly difficult winter, which led to an increase of repair calls; calls not being answered within the time required; a lack of available parts due to both an increase in demand and delivery limitations due to the extreme weather; an increase in the use of subcontractors to keep the repairs service operational; also cancellation or rescheduling of priority 2 and priority 3 appointments in order to deal with the emergencies, leading to a knock-on effect of these into the New year.

5. Summary of main findings

Performance

Happy with the repairs service overall	Was the property left clean and	Was operative on time?	Happy with amount of visits needed to	Customer phoned before operative arrived?	Was a satisfaction card left?	Did operative make or receive private
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?	tidy?		complete the job?			calls?
80% Yes	94% Yes	84% Yes	79% Yes	47% Yes	50% Yes	25% Yes

Table results from 100 customers via telephone survey and estate visits.

The service standard target to ensure satisfaction with the overall services of Derwent Living is 95%. During 2010 5010 surveys were completed by customers, reporting that 94% were satisfied overall. From the 100 customers contacted via telephone survey and estate visiting, current customer satisfaction with regards to the responsive repairs service is 80%.

The VFM benchmark provided by HouseMark reports that the percentage of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (General Needs only) for Derwent Living is in the Lower Quartile for both 2008/2009 and again in 2009/2010. This information is sourced from the most recent STATUS satisfaction survey data submitted.

Completing repairs on an operative's first visit is highlighted on the 2010 Service targets as an issue of declining performance where Derwent Living is not meeting its target of 95%, with a recorded figure of 89%. The HouseMark benchmark places Derwent Living at 92% for "Right first time" repairs completed 2009/10, classing it as an important measure in terms of both service efficiency and effectiveness and minimising inconvenience to tenants. This figure places Derwent Living favourably in the Middle Upper quartile.

Our findings support the decline, showing that only 79% of customers were happy with the amount of visits required to complete a job, the average being 3 visits for completion. Various reasons have been cited by customers, including not having the correct part on the van; parts having to be ordered; poor or incomplete repair first time around requiring a second operative to 'fix' repair work already undertaken; operatives being called away onto other jobs; engineer inspections being required due to dispute over who is to be charged for the work; other contractors needing to do assessments for equipment required to action the job before booking the job in.

A more tenant-focused benchmark is "Average time taken to complete a repair" but Derwent Living provided no data for this to HouseMark. Of the 42 organisations who were able to provide data, the average ranged

from 2.5 days to 14 days. This information would have been useful from a scrutiny perspective.

In terms of satisfaction, customers felt that lack of communication was one of the big issues once a repair had been reported. Less than half of customers were notified by the operative that they were on their way, some not turning up at all, despite a system in place at head office where a customer should be phoned if the operative isn't going to make the booked appointment. During Call centre visits, all of the call centre operatives were excellent at ensuring that customer contact details were up to date before the customer rang off, so lack of contact details is not the issue.

On several occasions, contractors had turned up 24 hours early, knocking on customers' doors to see if they could complete a job as they were in the area and had completed a prior job quicker than expected. Customers had seemed impressed by this as they viewed it as a cost saving exercise and meant that their repair was actioned quicker than expected

Customers reported that only 50% were left Satisfaction cards to complete, but the feeling was that they were not bothered whether they had one or not, despite the monthly £50 voucher draw incentive attached. Several customers commented that they would send one back, but if the job then took several visits to complete, they would not bother to fill it in again if given further cards. It was noted that several of the elderly tenants reported operatives offering to complete the cards on their behalf and the customers felt powerless to refuse, despite perhaps the best intentions of the operative. It is not clear whether the lack of cards is as a result of operatives not being given the cards; or having the cards with them; genuinely forgetting to hand them out or simply not bothering.

Furthermore, 25% of the operatives received or made personal calls whilst doing work in a customer's home. Customers felt that this was unacceptable and felt that their repair wasn't being given its full attention.

On a positive note, 94% of customers were pleased with how tidy their property was left following a repair and only a handful of customers had negative comments about the attitude of the operatives. Some even went on to name a few who they had felt had gone out of their way to offer outstanding service, namely Ray, Martin, Andy and Geordie Joe.

IT/Call centre

The call centre operatives were found to be experienced, calm, patient, well trained and able to offer good advice to the customer. Due to the recent move of operation, on both visits the call centre was only operating on 3 call operatives as the fourth member of staff was attending training.

Both visits also highlighted the issue with the IT system freezing whilst the call operatives were trying to complete customer enquiries, causing frustration for the operatives and a longer call for the customer. Currently, Repairs and CSA's have to log out to allow updates to QL. It is hoped that the new interface to marry the two systems together due at the end of March 2011 will eradicate this problem, improving the service.

The average call time that the customer spent talking with the call operative during visits was 3.06 mins. There was no information requested to show how long the customer waits before actually speaking to a call operative.

Derwent Living has an automated system in place where the customer gets a message to press a number to be put through to repairs, this usually occurs within the service standard target limit of 5 rings, but the customer will then wait for the call to be answered. At the times the scrutiny team visited, the Call waiting board showed an average of 34% of calls to the repairs service were abandoned. It is acknowledged that the team was one call operative short on both occasions.

The 4/5 hour windows that the customers are provided with for an operative to call within, although pre-scrutiny believed would present as an issue with the customer, was hardly commented on and was widely accepted. In fact, the review found that the length of time allowed the call operatives far greater flexibility in booking jobs that needed to coincide with other contractors attending the same site or indeed to fit in with specific requirements of residents doing school runs, for example.

There is little evidence of a policy in place to penalise customers who fail to be at their property when access is required for a repair. Failure to allow access for gas servicing, as a legal requirement, can lead to capping of the gas supply or a court order with costs being met by the resident.

No statistics were gathered for this so it is unclear as to how great a cost this presents to Derwent Living, or indeed, how many visits have to be re-booked as a result.

Several customers commented that they were ringing to chase up either calls that they had already logged or inspections that had been done. On

each occasion the customer had been advised that they would be called back by one of the Repairs team by a specific time/date with an update yet this had not happened. Reasons for this varied from information only showing on one out of the two systems; operatives not updating the system with information; supervisors not updating the system with information following inspections; to sheer volume of workload where diarised call-backs are not actioned due to time constraints.

From the small sample we listened to, it was clear that this had happened on more than one occasion to the customers calling by their comments “as usual no-one rang me back” “no surprise”. This trend was reinforced by the telephone survey and also the QLx complaints findings where communication flowing back to the residents was slow.

Complaints logging system QLx

The QLx system is designed to be a complete audit trail of when the complaint is first received to its resolution either in favour or not of the complainant. For the system to be wholly successful it relies on each stage being correctly completed as the complaints can be dealt with by a variety of different people. From the randomly selected job numbers for this scrutiny, not one of the complaints was completed on the system correctly. The QLx system currently runs independently from the reporting repairs systems. If the system were to be used to its potential, all complaints would be fully logged and the trail of what has happened would be transparent. It would make any further discrepancies much easier to contest as the information can be deemed reliable.

The cost implication of not following through quickly on chased up repairs and logged complaints needs to be noted as compensation may be awarded to a resident by Derwent Living, where:

- ✓ we have failed to respond within timescales, with no justifiable reason
- ✓ we were able to complete repairs within timescales, but failed to do so
- ✓ there is an unreasonable delay in resolving a complaint and you have not been kept informed

Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Priority
1	Once the new integrated system for reporting repairs is	

	operational, more staff should be trained up on it than are immediately necessary. When call operatives are then absent for training/annual leave/sickness etc. the service won't suffer as a result. The volume of abandoned calls will be lower, volume of answered calls will be higher and customers' calls should be answered more quickly benefitting both the customer and achieving Derwent's KPI target.	
2	Explore options for connecting the new repairs reporting system to QLx, for a quicker, more accurate flow of information, resulting in less opportunity for compensation claims.	
3	Develop a policy and procedure for penalising customers who fail to keep their repair appointments. The procedure should be publicised and be added to the new customer handbook being prepared. (Derby Homes now levy a charge).	
4	Develop a process to routinely check van stock.	
5	Explore alternative opportunities to gather customers' satisfaction data.	
6	Operatives should be restricted from use of personal phones whilst in work time, penalties to be agreed with repairs service provider.	
7	Develop a procedure for operatives to contact customers ahead of their visit on the day agreed and monitor this.	
8	Consider providing customers with text/email alerts to remind them of agreed appointment times to minimise missed appointments and improve communication.	
9	Develop a process for ensuring diarised call-backs to customers are actioned within time limits in order to improve communication.	
10	Consider providing customers with Log numbers for logged repairs to allow easier tracking of progress.	
11	Review the system for marking repairs as complete/signing off repairs.	
12	Develop a process to flag up logged repairs that are close to the 3-month limit thereafter costs cannot be charged back to the contractor.	
13	Review the workload of the Call centre operatives to ensure they have sufficient time/staffing levels to provide an effective service taking into account the various	

	incoming routes of information.	
14	Record an alternative “call waiting” recorded message for the repairs line that informs customers of the quietest times/days to call with repairs; alternative reporting methods available; explains the priority repairs system etc.	
15	Develop a process for a review of outstanding snagging of New Build properties at 10 months to prevent the repairs becoming responsive and being charged to Derwent Living after 12 months.	
16	Explore options for speeding up the process of assessments, quotations and authorisation of work involving associated contractors to improve the service to the customer.	
17	Review the procedure for contacting customers who have a repairs appointment booked, yet the operative will not be able to keep the appointment.	
18	Review and revise the recording of accurate detailed information on the QLx system.	

The Scrutiny team would like to thank all of the Derwent Living staff who have worked especially hard to enable us to complete this review and have been most helpful in providing information upon request.