



How to...

*carry out repairs - on time,
first time*



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carry out repairs - on time, first time

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Recent changes to the regulatory framework and reduced performance reporting requirements mean landlords now enjoy greater freedoms and flexibility to deliver repairs services that are tailored to their own tenants' needs and priorities. With increased government emphasis on local accountability, the way services are delivered in the future is far more likely to be influenced by tenants and value for money drivers, than the target-driven reporting requirements of old. Already we are seeing changes in the nature and manner of repairs services being delivered, for example, the emergence of 'same day' services, and the re-categorisation of timescales for completing repairs. However, irrespective of the delivery model used, the completion of repairs at the first visit (commonly referred to as 'right first time') underpins the delivery of an effective, efficient, and customer-focused repairs service.

This 'How to...' is the third in a series of briefings designed to compliment the [Repairs: CIH charter for housing](#). It encourages the delivery of repairs services to tenants that are right first time and follows our earlier publications [How to... deliver value for money repairs services](#) and [How to... build skills and capacity in repairs services](#).

Watch out for future briefings covering the effective use of IT and procurement.

The regulatory framework

The new [Regulatory Framework for Social Housing](#) came into force April 2012. Applicable to the delivery of repairs services are the 'Home', 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment', and 'Value for Money' Standards. The Home Standard makes particular reference to delivering repairs right first time:

'Registered providers shall provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants, and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time'

Don't get hung up on definitions!

In the past the interpretation of repairs right first time, as a means to measure repairs performance has been one of the most widely and hotly debated issues between landlords. In part driven by previous reporting requirements and by different interpretations of the term by landlords, contractors and tenants.

The CIH repairs charter, developed in collaboration with the National Housing Federation, HouseMark, Direct Works Forum and the National Housing and Maintenance Forum (amongst others) contains a simple description of right first time. Though not intended to be prescriptive, the description provides landlords with a starting point with which they can engage tenants to shape future service delivery.

'Right first time: We ensure that the repair is done in one visit where feasible, to the required quality and to the overall satisfaction of the tenant'

A right first time approach to repairs offers considerable benefits to landlords in terms of delivering value for money and improving customer satisfaction. The description of right first time used in the CIH repairs charter is based on three key elements:

- completing the repair to a consistent standard and quality (materials and standard of work)
- completing the repair at the first visit, without the need for multiple visits and inspections
- completing the repair to the satisfaction of the tenant.

Learning from others

In response to changing customer expectations and in a move away from priority timescales which were target-driven rather than customer-driven, **Your Housing Group** has reclassified repairs categories to address two key priorities. Firstly all repairs are completed at a time/appointment that suits the customer (two hourly appointment slot) and secondly that repairs are completed at the first visit where possible. This approach replaces the need to measure the service against target timescales and instead concentrates on providing a service that customers want, at a time that is convenient to them. The introduction of repair scheduling software and hand-held technology supports a comprehensive mobile working solution. PDAs can also be used to track start and finish times of jobs, and geographical location of tradespeople.

Your Housing Group is a newly formed organisation and this information relates to Ex Harvest Housing Group. Full transition to Your Housing Group will be in place in 2013.

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Achieving a consistent quality

Consistency in the quality of repairs materials and standard of work is essential to achieving value for money. Where the expected quality standard fails to be delivered this can result in:

- higher costs to landlords due to repeat calls
- higher volume of re-calls to call handlers
- increased numbers of complaints
- increased inconvenience to tenants, leading to lower levels of satisfaction.

Things to consider:

- ensure value for money when buying parts and materials by taking account of consistency and quality
- develop effective fault and warranty management systems and processes so that you don't incur costs for repairing or replacing parts which are covered by warranty
- have skilled tradespeople with the right skills, materials and tools to complete the work to an agreed standard of work
- implement effective quality assurance systems
- act on the analysis of 'failures' by identifying and remedying poor performance in relation to parts, materials and standard of work
- maximise opportunities to obtain feedback about the repairs service and ensure all feedback and complaints are used intelligently to continuously review and improve the service
- maintain robust contract management processes to address poor performance or product failure.

Did you get it right?

Post-inspection is commonly undertaken on a fixed percentage of completed jobs to physically check that a repair has been completed to the agreed quality. Consider using a risk-based approach to quality assurance and ensure that, where post inspections do take place, they add value to the service:

- identify and act on trends where a specific repair type, trade or individual tradesperson tends to generate higher than average numbers of call backs or complaints
- identify where there are higher than average recalls due to the failure of parts or materials
- include high value repairs
- include repairs where a higher risk of further damage to the property might occur if the original repair is not completed satisfactorily
- ensure analysis of post-inspection work is aligned to other forms of customer feedback and used to shape the future quality assurance strategy and drive improvement
- ensure quality assurance processes are applied fairly to all service delivery providers, including sub-contractors.

It may also be possible to replace post-inspections with quality assurance visits at the time the repair is being completed. Developments in dynamic scheduling and the use of tracking devices means it is easier for inspectors to identify when and where a 'high risk' repair is being completed and so call at the property while the tradesperson is there to undertake quality assurance checks. Benefits include:

- more convenience for the tenant, leading to increased satisfaction
- reduced cost of arranging post-inspection appointments and the risk of missed appointments
- the opportunity to identify and remedy where a tradesperson is insufficiently equipped with skills, knowledge, materials or time to complete the specified repair
- fewer call backs by tenants for poor quality repairs.

Tools of the trade

Important to both the customer's experience of the repairs service and to controlling costs is the need to ensure, where feasible, that the tradesperson has the right time, skills, tools and materials to complete the repair on the first visit. Benefits include:

- reduced travel costs and time
- increased productivity
- fewer opportunities for failed appointments or breakdown in communication with tenants
- reduced inconvenience to tenants.

Things to consider:

- the correct classification of repairs to determine priority is needed - a simplified classification system reduces the risk of error
- tradespeople need to be empowered to complete whatever work is required
- the necessary time, skills and materials to complete the work need to be accurately assessed and allocated
- effective scheduling and co-ordination of works and tradespeople is needed to maximise productivity, minimise travel time and co-ordinate complex repairs which require multi-skilled tradespeople or effective follow-on when more than one trade is needed
- fully integrated asset management information will identify which components are in properties and ensure that tradespeople carry the right stock
- ensure fully responsive supply chain management to ensure the availability of the right parts and materials.

Learning from others

In 2011 tenants of **Stevenage Homes** (now **Stevenage BC**) set out their two priorities for the repairs service. They wanted the repair done on a date and time of their choosing and the fault fixed in one visit where possible. Stevenage used systems-thinking processes to redesign the repairs service. The new service requires call handlers to establish only the trade needed and to fix an appointment slot, as defined by the tenant. The tradesperson attending is empowered to diagnose the fault and establish the time and materials needed to complete the repair on arrival. Tradespeople carry the most commonly required stock and, where extra materials are needed, these are delivered to the property by a rapid response stores vehicle, while the tradesperson starts work. Since implementation:

- the average time from the tenant reporting the repair to completion has halved
- fewer appointments are missed or broken, leading to a reduction in call volume to the call centre to chase up tradespeople or rearrange appointments
- the average job cost has reduced as tradespeople are less likely to over-specify the repairs
- productivity of tradespeople has increased and travel time reduced
- tenant satisfaction has increased.

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Learning from others

Notting Hill Housing Trust (NHHT) uses ground-based aerial photography taken by Upshot UK to conduct rooftop inspections. A camera mounted on a telescopic pole takes external images without the need to erect scaffolding. NHHT and its contractors use photographs to view parts of the building that cannot be viewed from the ground. Benefits to date include:

- more accurate stock condition information
- improved accuracy of diagnosis
- reduced numbers of cost/repair variations
- faster overall repair completion times with scaffolding not required for pre-inspection
- less disruption to tenants
- reduced safety risks
- reduced costs.

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What's wrong?

Diagnosing repairs accurately plays an important part in delivering an effective repairs service. Poorly diagnosed repairs can lead to; increased numbers of variations or cancellations, repeated visits to the property and escalating costs. The approach to diagnosis can differ widely between landlords, ranging from creating a precise description of the repair at the time it is reported through to obtaining a very general description of the repair and empowering the tradesperson to do whatever work is necessary to remedy the fault. Each method brings its own advantages and disadvantages and landlords need to determine which method works best for their organisation and meets local needs and priorities.

Things to consider:

- work with tenants to agree local arrangements and then deliver against those expectations
- invest in the training and development of call handling staff to ensure they have the appropriate skills and knowledge for the chosen diagnostic approach
- is there scope to co-locate a surveyor within the call handling team to give advice and support?
- where detailed diagnosis at point of reporting is adopted, monitor the numbers of cancelled jobs or variations for technical accuracy of diagnosis
- where a minimum diagnostic approach at reporting stage is adopted:
 - monitor and adjust the range and volume of van stock
 - monitor and fulfil the need for multi-skilled tradespeople/paired working arrangements to complete work at the first visit
 - check that sufficient time is allocated to complete the job
- ensure call handling/scheduling staff understand the range of tradespeople's skills to enable the correct trade to be assigned to complete the work
- analyse the reasons why repairs are not completed in one visit to identify trends and areas for improvement, for example:
 - do materials on vans match the most common repair types and stock attributes?
 - do tradespeople have the right skills to carry out repairs?
 - are the most appropriate tradespeople matched to jobs?

Learning from others

Old Ford Housing Association and partner Mears had struggled to achieve their 'first visit fix' performance target for over eighteen months. In a renewed focus to improve performance, both parties worked together to develop an evidence-based action plan. This involved a diagnostic analysis of first visit fix failure data, a review of the repairs process, and analysis of Mears tradesperson and Old Ford call staff performance, including diagnosis of jobs. As a result, areas where improvements have been made include van stock materials, procurement arrangements for tradespeople, communications and the scheduling of appointments. Performance has improved from 71% to 78%.

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In 2011 **Community Housing Group** modernised its responsive repairs service. This included the introduction of repair scheduling software and hand-held technology to support mobile working arrangements. The changes enabled all non-emergency work to be allocated electronically to tradespeople who are in the right geographical area and who are empowered to self-diagnose the repair on arrival. Linked to regular review of the stock carried on vehicles, Community Housing Group has seen an increase in repairs being completed at the first visit from 75% to in excess of 90%, an increase in tradesperson productivity and cost savings of £76,000.

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Keep the customer satisfied

Repairs is consistently rated as the service of greatest priority to tenants. It is also the service that is most heavily scrutinised. Satisfaction with the repairs service is closely reflected in the way tenants rate their overall satisfaction with their landlord.

Things to consider:

- consider the whole experience of the customer from start to finish. Do your processes maximise ease of customer access and minimise inconvenience?
- maximise the use of IT to enable tenants to report, track and complete customer feedback online
- are repairs carried out by appointment and at a time and date that is convenient to the tenant?
- ensure disruption to tenants is minimised by reducing the number of visits necessary to the home for pre-inspection, repair completion and quality assurance
- look to tailor the service to meet individual tenant's needs and actively use customer profile information to shape services and offer choice
- embed organisational values and culture across all staff and contractors to deliver excellent customer service (see CIH [How to... deliver excellent customer service](#) briefing)
- keep tenants informed at all stages, for example, text ahead, use appointment confirmations and tell them about delays
- deliver what you promise - ensure work is consistently completed to the agreed quality standard for both work and materials, and done at the appointed time
- manage expectations - engage residents in setting agreed repair quality and standards and ensure standards are clearly and widely communicated and understood
- maximise opportunities for customers to comment on the service, keep questions to a minimum and don't ask what you already know or won't use
- regularly analyse complaints and act on feedback received - tell tenants what you have done in response
- regularly publicise what the service does well to tenants, staff and other stakeholders and how feedback has shaped improvements.



livin & Mears Group: Delivering the Responsive Repairs Charter

Delivering the Responsive Repairs Charter has enabled livin and Mears to:

- Increase appointments made at the first point of contact by 300%
- Reduce no access by over 1200 visits per year (saving the partnership £44k per year)
- Exceed 97% of emergency repairs completed in one visit
- Increase jobs per operative per day by 26%
- Achieve over 90% first visit fix rate
- Achieve over 99% post inspection pass rate
- Save the partnership over £4m over 3 years
- Reduce the average time to complete all repairs from nearly 12 working days to 7 days (even though this wasn't a key driver)
- Achieve over 99% tenant satisfaction

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

livin, Mears and local tenants have formed a 'Towards Service Excellence' team. Following a review of the responsive repairs and gas services the teams first job was to develop an improvement plan.

We ensure that improvements are delivered by giving each team member responsibility for delivering specific actions. For example, tenant members have responsibility for communicating the work of the team to other tenants.

STREAMLINED RESPONSIVE REPAIRS SERVICE

After consulting with tenants, livin has split repairs into two categories; 'emergency repairs' and 'non emergency repairs'. Emergency repairs are attended to within 2 hours and completed within 24 hours. Non emergency repairs are responded to at a date and time that is convenient to the tenant.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

A new performance monitoring framework has been produced with measures which reflect the priorities of tenants. We know it's important to get it right first time so we measure our performance on:

- First Visit Fix
- Post inspection pass rate
- Recall rate
- Tenant satisfaction

Performance information is now used proactively to identify and implement areas for improvement.

VALUE FOR MONEY

livin and Mears have agreed a price per property arrangement from 2012. This benefits livin and their tenants by reducing costs and fixing budgets whilst empowering Mears to deliver a flexible service that truly meet the needs of tenants.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

New responsive repairs procedures have been produced which provide clarity on what tenants can expect from their repairs and maintenance services and also set out roles and responsibilities for all staff in the partnership.

CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICE

Tenants have told us what they want and we have delivered:

- A low rate repairs phone number to reduce costs from mobile phones
- If a repair cannot be completed in one visit the operative books a follow on appointment before they leave the tenants home. They leave a receipt with the tenant confirming what will happen next.
- Livin teamed up with **asert**, an organisation set up by TAROE, to employ and empower Tenants to externally assess and scrutinise services delivered by contractors. **asert** also held a series of consultation exercises to help shape and draft the new Community Plans for 2012-2015.

THE FUTURE:

This approach has been so successful that the team will now review

- voids
- planned maintenance
- capital works

"The innovative approach adopted by Mears and livin on this contract has made it one of the most progressive repairs services in the sector."

ALAN SMALL, PARTNERSHIP MANAGER, MEARS

"Our new approach to delivering responsive repairs services has reduced costs, mitigated budget risk at the same time as increasing the number of repair appointments three fold to deliver the service the way the tenants want it."

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Useful resources and information

Repairs: CIH charter for housing
www.cih.org/repairscharter

Equality and diversity: CIH charter for housing
www.cih.org/equalityanddiversitycharter

How to... build skills and capacity in repairs services
www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to._build_skills_and_capacity_in_repairs_services

How to... deliver value for money repairs services
www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to._deliver_value_for_money_repairs_services

Practice online
www.cih.org/practiceonline

Improving Repairs and Maintenance Services (2008) CIH
www.cih.org/publication/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication/data/Improving_Repairs_and_Maintenance_Services

Managing Voids: Letting Homes (2009) CIH
www.cih.org/publication/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication/data/Managing_Voids_-_Letting_Homes

Regulatory Framework for Social Housing (2012) HCA
www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/regulatory-framework

CIH in partnership with CIOB have developed a range of qualifications to support the development of skills in the sector:

- Level 2 Certificate in Housing Maintenance is aimed at customer service staff responsible for taking the initial report
- Level 3 Certificate in Housing Maintenance is aimed at surveyor/inspectors
- Level 4 Certificate and Diploma in Managing Responsive Repairs, aimed at front line managers - available from September 2012

For further information visit: www.cih.org/distancelearningcourses

For details of all CIH repairs and maintenance training courses visit:
www.cih.org/training?&topic=gqfbrw5s



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