



# Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance

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## The agenda

“Housing repairs and maintenance is a multi-billion pound industry and is consistently rated by tenants and residents as the most important indicator of their landlord’s commitment to them and their neighbourhood. However, satisfaction levels are variable and service standards are often not clearly defined or delivered. For example, there are often huge disparities in the volume and value of repairs and maintenance services received by tenants of the same landlord which raises important questions of fairness. In addition, there is an ever increasing challenge to evidence and deliver demonstrable value for money and to get repairs and maintenance delivering more for the asset.

This Learning Report is the culmination of a year of collaborative work supported and facilitated by the Chartered Institute of Housing’s consultancy team. It has involved ten landlords that are committed to challenging received wisdom about what a good repairs and maintenance service should comprise and creating a new agenda for identifying and promoting the next best practice for the sector. If you’d like to know more about **Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance**, or join a future **Working together** project, please get in touch.”

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“there is an ever increasing challenge to evidence and deliver demonstrable value for money.”

“there are often huge disparities in the volume and value of repairs and maintenance services received by tenants of the same landlord which raises important questions of fairness.”

### CIH Repairs Model Practice

In addition to this Learning Report, we are now bringing the insight, lessons and learning from the **Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance** project to benefit social housing organisations more widely. **CIH Repairs Model Practice** is a package of resources and support designed to transform the effectiveness and impact of the repairs service and enable you to secure substantial and recurring efficiency savings. For further details please contact CIH consultancy at [info@cih.org](mailto:info@cih.org).



## Introduction

CIH consultancy's **Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance** has developed a fresh, new agenda for repairs and maintenance service delivery for the housing industry that reflects the changing values of the sector. Through the development of new insight into the key priorities for social landlords this Learning Report puts out a call to action for social landlords to:

- Recognise that the golden age of ready funding for social housing is over and that value for money considerations now prevail, meaning that repairs and maintenance must deliver as stock investment as well as in its role as a service to tenants
- Adopt a framework for repairs and maintenance services that encourages and supports tenants to look after their home as part of a rights and responsibilities agenda in landlord and tenant relations
- Recognise that a sustainable organisational culture and smart and efficient business processes are the foundation for promoting excellent two way communication with residents, rapid and effective problem solving and for delivering high levels of productivity and customer satisfaction

The target audience for this Learning Report is decision makers and opinion formers in housing repairs and asset management as well as senior managers and leaders working across the housing sector.

The fresh, new agenda that has emerged from the project is a product of the collaboration and sharing of insight between the ten members of the **Working together** repairs group, all of whom hold a special commitment to the importance of repairs and maintenance. A key message for the sector is that information and experience shared during collaborative discussions is an effective tool for evaluating processes and uncovering what works best.

**Working together** is an established delivery model from CIH consultancy. It involves sharing thinking, experiences and developing approaches with peers from across the sector. Participants attend a series of collective action learning sessions which form a 'critical path'. A fusion of CIH's own thinking, the thinking of participants and contributions from external contributors all create the ideal platform to debate and scope out the key ingredients that combine to inform new insight and 'next best practice' models.

Find out more about working together:  
<http://www.cih.org/workingtogether>



## The project collaborators

The project members or 'collaborators' are an exceptional group of repairs leaders with the common characteristic of having their own in-house team, something which they feel underlines the importance of repairs and maintenance to their organisation. The principal qualification for maximising both the contribution to and the gain from the project was a passion for learning, innovation and good practice, coupled with a recognition that this can flow from open collaboration.

Project members also displayed a healthy scepticism and sense of curiosity, a feature of successful managers, and some dissatisfaction with the traditional market offers in terms of volatility, the minefield of procurement and the absence of reliable market intelligence: there is no Trip Advisor to guide you in choosing a repairs contractor to help you make your choices and decisions.

The project members share a commitment to better value solutions and recognise that value for money is the top priority for the regulator. To the extent that the project has identified next best practice and set out an agenda for the future this has been a collaborative achievement by all those involved.

The hope of CIH consultancy and the project members is that this Learning Report will encourage people to think differently about the issues we face and that it will act as a catalyst for housing leaders to seize the initiative and drive the changes needed to truly optimise the repairs and maintenance spend.





# The agenda: pooling our thoughts, developing our thinking

## Early Directions

From the outset, as lead practitioners from CIH consultancy, we had our own thoughts and opinions on what the emerging and new big ideas might be:

- the use of IT and mobile to improve two way communications between customer and landlord
- the delivery of an 'Amazon style' transformation of the repairs customer experience
- price per property contract procurement and management
- the rigorous application of lean systems thinking approaches to eliminate waste and duplication.

But there were also some surprises in the priorities that project members identified:

- the importance placed on organisational culture and leadership for shaping successful repairs and maintenance services
- the importance of fairness in the provision of repairs and maintenance services to customers
- the need to replace appraisal with coaching and personal development

The aim of the project has been to identify and provide insight into the new, emerging trends in repairs and maintenance service delivery, with an emphasis on seeking to help inform, shape and define 'next best practice'.

- the need to develop collaboration with internal partners to improve performance and deliver brilliant basics
- the importance of candour and honesty: overcoming the legacy of inspection which had 'taught' organisations to embellish their performance record.

## Developing the thinking

The project members therefore quickly arrived at a set of contemporary drivers, including:

- the need for a cultural change in the sector which prioritises genuine stock investment above the failure demand of many reactive repairs which too often just seeks to drive a dependency culture amongst those tenants who are the heaviest users of repairs services
- the business case for reducing demand for responsive repairs by setting clear expectations for future tenants and meeting maintenance needs more scientifically through more intelligent investment and lifecycle planning
- increasing the role and impact of cyclical and planned maintenance
- the business case for providing support and guidance for all tenants to look after their own homes through rewards and sanctions that seek to change tenant expectations and behaviour
- the need for better IT that offers integrated access to, and application of, data and supports modern low cost self-service transactions and feedback
- the case for preventing properties becoming void and reducing re-servicing costs and timescales.



## The new agenda: facing the challenges, seizing the opportunities

In setting out the new agenda, the project members have explored the principal challenges facing the sector and the solutions that can emerge through rethinking the approach to how repairs and maintenance services are delivered.

This new agenda has been distilled into nine key action points:

- 1. Providing the right leadership and culture**  
The imperative for a well-motivated team with a 'can do' ethos.
- 2. Trusting the market or employing direct**  
The use of effective planning to produce an effective 21st century workforce.
- 3. Choices and responsibilities**  
The importance of fairness in provision; tenants looking after their home.
- 4. Investing in the asset**  
Adding value to the asset through repairs; value for money: repairs and 'intelligent' asset management.
- 5. Value for money**  
The challenge of optimising and securing true value.
- 6. Business process transformation**  
Acting on legitimate repairs demand; future customer service: designing a low cost, high value self-service repairs and maintenance platform.
- 7. Repairs futures**  
Changing expectations around how services are accessed and how customers are kept informed.
- 8. Data, information, knowledge and maximising the impact of IT**  
From data mountains to usable insight; IT and Repairs: lack of integration is compromising investment.
- 9. Measuring and managing performance**  
Creating ownership and facilitating a high productivity environment.

"We've all got the same problems, face the same challenges and want to achieve the same goal – yet all too often we just do our own thing. **Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance** has got us actively engaging with others to deliver shared goals and has given us confidence that we're going in the right direction."

**Karen Baildon, Halton Housing Trust**





# 1. Providing the right leadership and culture

## The problem: attitude issues and silo working

Having the right organisational culture is as critical in repairs and maintenance as anywhere else. But has the housing sector diminished the career appeal of the profession through ever narrower specialisation? Is working in housing at its best when it's a rich and varied experience providing a joined up customer experience?



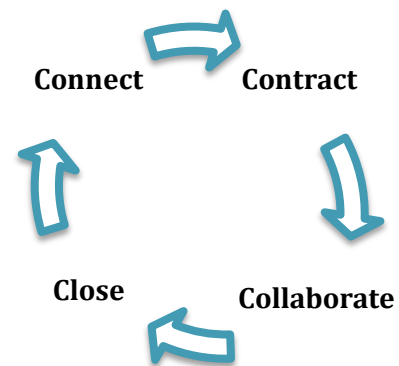
The trend for rigid team boundaries within landlord organisations and departmental chauvinism seems to have inhibited the focus on value and quality. The failure to commit to joined up working is costing time and resources and, left to their own devices, teams tend not to work together.

There is frequently insufficient integration of repairs and maintenance with wider asset and housing management and, as a consequence, short term advantage is preferred to the long view and lifecycle planning. This undermines achievement of key objectives.

## The solution: a 'can do' attitude and culture as the foundation

Considerable added value can be generated by much better alignment and coordination of repairs and maintenance with housing management, housing options, resident involvement, asset management and so on.

Values and purpose need to be advocated consistently across the organisation and internal collaboration between teams needs to be sponsored and encouraged, for example as part of setting performance objectives. Everyone should be able to express the organisation's values through how they shape their job.



The aim: A well-motivated team that delivers 'brilliant basics and magic touches'.

## Top tips:

- ✓ Use the access provided at gas safety check and intelligence from repairs visits for monitoring how the property is being looked after, to identify safeguarding issues and help tackle anti-social behaviour.
- ✓ Significant efficiency gains can arise from much stronger internal collaboration e.g. on voids management, call handling and estate inspections.
- ✓ Develop an integrated approach to asset management and estate sustainability. Move to a more generic concept of the housing manager role, supported by functionally integrated IT, with a richer mix of skills and experience to make the job more attractive again to bright and talented people considering a career in housing.



## Case study: Gentoo Sunderland, investing in skills

### **The Gentoo vision: improve the art of living beyond imagination**

The Gentoo values:

- nothing is impossible
- re-imagine the future
- cultivate a learning curiosity
- live authentic relationships
- give us all you've got

The Gentoo talent management programme expresses Gentoo's vision, mission and values. Many older operatives have extensive knowledge of the stock, component parts and of effective working methods and it is important that this can be passed on to the next generation. Feedback revealed there were few management experience opportunities for tradespeople and the new one year talent management scheme aimed to fill this gap.

A lot of the would-be managers tend to be operationally focused rather than understanding what leadership entails. The programme shifts thinking through:

- shadowing one day a week over four months – time spent with managers really opened their eyes to what the manager role entailed
- coaching sessions – time to reflect on what they were learning and to understand more about how the customer feels; application of psychometrics to develop a profile of strengths and needs
- taught sessions – covered the essentials of HR, grievance and disciplinary matters, customer experience
- work delivery – stepping up to the supervisory role and taking responsibility.

The outcomes achieved include: a more seamless graduation from the tools to management; reduced risk in placing new responsibilities on less experienced staff and demonstration of a viable career pathway.

### **Multiskilling**

Gentoo has developed multiskilling on a new responsive repairs and voids contract that covers a quite dispersed stock. They have sought to modernise working practice through IT based work planning, mobile working and a step change in the working culture. Multiskilling is a central part of these wider changes. Participation is optional for operatives and there is trade union support. It comprises:

- work shadowing and practice to acquire new skills
- provision of tools and equipment needed to work as a multi-skilled operative
- sharing of knowledge and skills between colleagues
- no additional payments for multiskilling – the reward was intrinsic to the skill acquired.

As operatives have acquired new skills the momentum has grown and others have joined. The benefits to Gentoo are:

- optimisation of labour resources
- reduced travel time and fuel costs
- created flexibility of resources
- no additional cost.

Benefits to the client, Dale and Valley, are:

- quicker repairs and more 'right first time' completions
- better quality repairs and a finished job in a single visit
- faster voids turnaround – a two person team can complete all the building work
- higher service standards.

Operatives have gained a wider skill base, variation in their work, a team approach and made better a contribution to securing the future of the business.



## 2. Trusting the market or employing direct

### **The problem: lack of planning across the sector to establish a productive 21st century workforce.**

There are many competing claims and merits when it comes to trusting the delivery of your repairs service to the open market or developing an in-house solution. There is some evidence of a swing back towards direct services, perhaps because of the difficulties some clients have encountered in trusting the market. But the real solution lies in effective planning when putting the arrangements in place, coupled with either effective operational or contract management.

The merits and disadvantages of market led and direct delivery are recognised as:

- The potential pitfalls arising from competitive tendering. Although tender evaluation combines quality and price criteria into an integrated model, the reality has been that unsustainably low price thresholds have become commonplace but at the expense of service quality and sustainability
- The impact of strategies that some contractors may employ to offset low tender prices, including placing substantial pressure on the supply chain to reduce price. This can result in deficiencies in service provision which tenants and residents have to suffer
- The recent market volatility following some high profile liquidations, bankruptcies and takeovers which has increased the risk attached to tendering
- The perceived imbalance in power relations between landlords and the major contractors that hold a dominant position in the sector and are able to shape market provision

- The perceived tendency across too many landlords to under invest in asset management, client and contract management expertise and capacity. This fails to deploy the active and intelligent clienting approach which a successful partnering approach demands

A number of major housing associations are now investing in establishing their own direct repairs teams to give them the control they feel they need and to contribute to wider organisational objectives. The main advantages are felt to include:

- Flexibility: having full discretion over service direction, budgets and policy decisions and not being hemmed in or constrained by contractual obligations
- A long term investment in people and the local community: ability to recruit and develop a skilled and local workforce that is connected to tenants and residents, shares the organisation's values and can become partners in the business
- A more effective vehicle for local employment and training and for developing mutually productive relationships with residents around shared responsibilities to look after their homes
- The potential tax efficiencies of direct employment for registered providers and the ability to generate an income stream

However, a key risk is the difficulty of attracting and retaining a sufficiently experienced, enterprising and commercial management team that is motivated and empowered to realise the potential gains from an in house service.

**The solution: grow your own or find a faithful and committed long term partner that shares your values and objectives.**



### 3. Choices and responsibilities

#### The problem: a major imbalance in service usage

A minority of service users are responsible for most responsive repairs and for high cost voids with an estimated 75% of resources going into supporting high impact or dependent tenants. Yet many others look after their home entirely themselves calling only sparingly, if at all, on the repairs service. This creates an unfair distribution of landlord resources to heavy users of the repairs service. As it is usually the same households that absorb other landlord services this calls for a coordinated response. The problem needs to be recognised and challenged in the organisation's culture and the paradigm moved away from responsive and into planned maintenance.



#### The solution: promoting choices and responsibilities

There should be a clear expectation that all tenants should look after their home - and that this should begin even before a tenancy starts by setting out responsibilities clearly as part of the housing application process.

#### Top tips:

- ✓ Identify and visit heavy users of the repairs service to ascertain the underlying problem and address this. Whether it is a tenancy issue, a behaviour matter or a building issue, the important thing is for the root of the problem to be tackled.
- ✓ The 'rule breakers' and those not looking after their home must not be seen to prosper. Try targeted publicity around cases where tenants have been held accountable. Rewards for doing the right thing and celebration of outstanding contribution are important complementary principles and apply to residents and staff.
- ✓ Put property induction visits and support mechanisms in place for new households to explain their new home and how to look after it: location of the stop tap; operation of radiator and heating controls; controlling humidity etc.

There needs to be a clear expectation that all tenants look after their home - this should begin even before a tenancy starts by setting out responsibilities clearly as part of the housing application process.



## 4. Investing in the asset

### The problem: responsive repairs are not adding value

Responsive repairs are still very much seen as a service for tenants rather than as an investment in the property asset. Yet they comprise a substantial proportion of total expenditure. Surely these reactive repairs must be made to add far more value? Standards and regulation now drive towards the asset, yet too many housing and repairs services still seem prefaced on delivering ever higher levels of customer excellence, regardless of cost. This misalignment with the economic imperative means there is a need for the values of the sector to be recalibrated. This entails a discussion about what an appropriate level of customer service should be and fresh thinking about the next generation of social housing tenants and how best to manage their expectations.

By their very nature, responsive or 'reactive' repairs are driven by service user demand and not by property needs. This means resources can be wasted by undertaking the wrong repairs that may not extend the life of the property or its facilities.

In some ways, housing associations seem to have 'sleepwalked' into their problems with their value for money statements and have not recognised that the agenda has changed post tenant services authority and audit commission; the government's perception is that they are expensive.

Some responsive repairs are a product of behaviour that conflicts with the tenancy agreement and could be avoidable if this was to be enforced consistently. Other repairs could be categorised as failure demand because they would not be necessary if an 'intelligent' preventative maintenance regime was in place. Only planned and cyclical maintenance that systematically works from sound stock condition data can properly address the needs of the physical asset.

### Reactive maintenance impact





### The solution: redirect resources and focus on the asset

There are several drivers behind a pendulum swing away from a focus on the customer towards the focus being on adding value for the asset:

- an era of austerity in which expenditure restraint is essential, bringing an imperative for money to be invested in a way that produces a longer term benefit for the business
- a developing view that the customer in social housing cannot exercise unqualified sovereignty in a free market sense but instead has both rights and responsibilities which should be in balance
- public sentiment and regulatory direction is now more nuanced and circumspect about over-customising the service.

Therefore, adopting a systematic approach to driving down reactive repairs demand is essential. A mature discussion with residents about the right balance between reactive repairs and genuine investment is an important starting point. When presented with objective information most tenants will reach very prudent judgements on the use of resources.



### Top tips:

- ✓ To sustain the life of the building asset, repairs and maintenance spend should address objective property condition - and this will differ from customer demand
- ✓ Sustaining tenancies is important to reducing void numbers and costs
- ✓ Have an emphasis on identifying and working on eliminating avoidable repairs and avoidable repairs visits. And emphasise landlord expectations about repairs that are the tenant's responsibility
- ✓ Explore a planned MOT approach to try and scientifically address stock condition - as opposed to user demand - in one visit. But beware that some landlords have abandoned this after a few years because of poor outcomes
- ✓ Examine your maintenance cost per property (there is a variation of 40% between social landlords!)

Properly resourcing the strategic client role is crucial so that landlords are fully sighted on the investment needs of their stock, understand the costs entailed and are able to work as an equal with their builder to plan their repairs and maintenance programmes.

## Case study: Yarlington Housing Group

Repairs have always been a contentious issue for any housing association. So trying to overcome the barriers to true resident engagement would need some innovative methods.

“Yarlington decided to embrace social media as a tool to reaching those who previously did not want to engage with us. We wanted to respond and inform our residents on a platform that they would engage with and accept”

**Rich Prewer, head of repairs**

Yarlington has created a Facebook forum called Yarlington Chat, which has allowed the company as a whole to engage with residents in a manner that is not confrontational and has encouraged dialogue. Yarlington staff communicate in the group, answering questions, explaining procedures and allaying fears.

More importantly, Yarlington has built relationships with its residents so they feel able to approach staff. Phone calls to chase repairs have decreased and queries get answered quickly, as the Yarlington repairs team check the site regularly and answer enquiries promptly so problems don't escalate. Rich says “It was quickly found that when residents engage with us on-site, they are less likely to berate Yarlington and instead look to us for answers, explanations and solutions”.





## 5. Value for money

### Procurement and commissioning: optimising the benefits for each party

The balance of risk in procurement is seen as lying with the client. There is a huge cost to the sector in meeting procurement requirements but with no successful movement to standardise requirements and operate on a collective basis in repairs.

“Lifecycle isn’t taken seriously by the sector and is not considered a critical component of procurement”.

**Steve Coleman, TakeParts**

With no transparent information available about past performance of contractors, in some cases clients are now asking bidders to organise references. And in too many instances, repairs procurement lets the contractor choose the materials - yet they often have no interest in the lifecycle of the component!

Many client organisations are now questioning whether the repairs market works for them, and this may be behind some of the increase in home grown solutions. The competition process tests contractors’ capability to present their brand. Markets require reliable information on performance and delivery in order to function effectively and in the interest of the client and consumer. **Do we need a repairs rating system for the sector?**

### The importance of lifecycle considerations:

- Landlords – long lifecycle, reduced maintenance, lower carbon and improved financial performance of the asset
- Residents – safety, great performance, good looks and reduced number of call outs
- Contractors – inexpensive and easy to fit? Or reliable and offering savings and predictability when taking on long term liabilities?



## Partnering – the issues

- Is the incentive of repeat business for successful partnering compromised by EU procurement?
- Is there any evidence that a sustained focus on cost reduction through partnering has led to lower costs? Or do too many contractors continue to pursue maximum returns to the detriment of long term relationships?

The competition process tests contractors' capability to present their brand. Markets require reliable information on performance and delivery in order to function effectively and in the interest of the client and consumer.

## Reinventing Partnering

Top tips:

- ✓ For repairs and maintenance, the challenge is to demonstrate real value is being added to the asset and that communication and responsiveness to perceived problems is significantly better and more focused. Greater inter-organisational and inter-personal trust is an essential part of this process, as is an awareness of the opportunities to develop mutual advantage
- ✓ Partnering is successful where it promotes a culture that supports innovation and learning through collaboration. This is best achieved through the establishment of an inclusive forum that objectively measures and assesses accountability for meeting objectives
- ✓ Partnering should also be about sharing of good practice across the sector

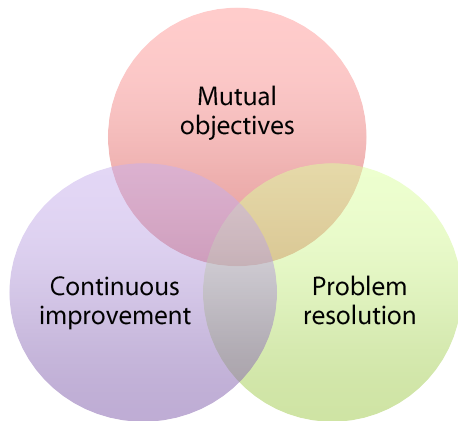


## 6. Business process transformation

### **The problem: we are running a complex business that interfaces directly with customers**

Lean systems thinking has had a huge impact on streamlining end to end business processes; it works best from a customer perspective and when it fully engages front line staff.

However, the experience of repairs practitioners is that there are limitations to the applicability of manufacturing “science” and doing ‘lean’ has left many landlords feeling sceptical and ambivalent.



Lean approaches are premised on undifferentiated customer demand where there is customer sovereignty. This is not the case in social policy or housing where demand has to be qualified and conditional; where the cost to the user is zero then demand will be infinite and this is unaffordable. This means the needs of the asset can be eclipsed.

There's a mismatch of resources between what we are spending our time and resources on and what tenants actually value in the delivery of the service.

Some would argue that the ‘lean’ juggernaut carries all before it and makes black or white judgements that leave no place for local culture and needs.

### **The solution: internal partnering and collaboration**

Working in large organisations where lines of communication can be stretched requires leadership initiative to overcome fragmentation and silo mentalities. The ‘summit’ approach can generate internal focus and can be used to apply the organisation’s overarching business values. For example:

- protect current income and generate new income
- reduce costs and drive up efficiency
- focus resources and services to deliver better outputs and outcomes.

#### Top Tips:

- ✓ Form a combined project group with members of each team engaged and sharing a common purpose
- ✓ Put in place a new clear structure for communication
- ✓ Put in place new clear processes with staff taking ownership
- ✓ Design new clear roles and responsibilities for individuals
- ✓ Repairs appointments – now only need two categories: ‘straightaway’ for urgent jobs or ‘by appointment’

## Case study: Halton Housing Trust

### Rethinking voids

"Our rethinking voids' initiative, which had begun prior to joining the **Working together** group, has been a key improvement project over the last two years. Maintaining a focus on turning properties round – the 'lifeblood' of the organisation – has enabled us to reduce overall turnaround times from 42 days to 17 days, with a consequent massive reduction in rent loss and a sustained reduction in the average cost of void repairs. Being part of 'Working together' has helped us challenge ourselves further and adopt the best practice of others."

**Karen Baidon and John Maddox, Halton Housing Trust**

Halton Housing Trust covers the towns of Widnes and Runcorn and has a stock of 6,400 homes, with around 680 properties becoming void each year.

Approaches that have driven this improvement include:

- ✓ Adopting a basic but flexible "safe, clean and clear" void standard
- ✓ Fostering a dynamic and productive working relationship between housing services, construction services and housing options – with clear ownership and a system which underpins and drives this
- ✓ Undertaking customer scrutiny and internal audit reviews – exposing the service to challenge
- ✓ Integrating the survey process – technical manager fits key safe, undertakes security risk assessment, asbestos survey, stock condition survey and tree survey, takes utilities readings, surveys equipment and contacts nearest gas plumber to cap off gas, prepares and prioritises repairs schedule and lists recyclable goods
- ✓ Eliminating routine decoration allowances – now the exception not the rule

- ✓ Making use of promissory notes for minor repairs or replacement components with a longer lead in time which can be done once the customer moves in
- ✓ Creating a dedicated voids repair team, with void works prioritised
- ✓ Revising imprest stock to more accurately reflect the nature of void works
- ✓ Implementing a micro-managed approach for customers moving to new build properties
- ✓ Increasing the focus on back to back lets with the introduction of new void V Zero category
- ✓ Increasing focus on dealing with easy properties quickly with a guaranteed in-week turnaround (V1 G category)
- ✓ Introducing a new approach to assessing the work required in major voids resulting in more realistic and accurate prediction of property return dates
- ✓ In-house cleaning in partnership with grass-roots agency that supports young people not in education, employment or training
- ✓ Changing the dual fuel provider



## 7. Repairs future

**The challenge: expectations around how services are accessed and how customers are kept informed are changing.**

Customer feedback for repairs and maintenance is generally mixed – all too often reporting works pretty well but anything out of the ordinary proves too difficult and is a disappointment.

Looking at the customer experience, the areas that need attention are:

- the overall time it takes to provide a service – expectations have grown for shorter response times
- keeping customers informed about progress, especially if not completed 'right first time'
- improving our ability to overcome any obstacles in the way of delivery
- overcoming an invisibility of repairs progress to customer and staff
- lack of ownership around complaints
- the huge amount of staff effort in servicing transactions that customers are not noticing.

**Image is nothing**  
**Experience is everything**

**Future solutions: are you prepared?**

- Primary channel will be online and personalised – can log in to an account that is specific to each resident; similar to internet banking and accessible via smartphone and apps
- Interactions: simple, seamless and a rich customer experience; self-serve enabled and paperless
- Telephone – there for the foreseeable future but will be eroded by online service requests; contact centre – should also handle outbound traffic
- Email and text – don't want two way conversations through this – difficult to administer
- Digital and social media – difficult to predict what that will be – fast changing; questionable what the true advantages are
- Post – will die out but face to face will remain on a needs basis

Top tips:

- ✓ Make sure yours is a business that uses customer insight to drive decisions
- ✓ Embrace multiskilling – having the skills and materials needed to complete a wider range of repairs and to advise tenants on how they can and should be looking after their home
- ✓ Explore the potential for different service offerings according to behaviour.

## Case study: Affinity Sutton

### Customer strategy

The customer base is changing and many now use smart phones for all their communications. What does this mean for our repairs customers? Affinity Sutton has identified its three groups of customers and how their numbers are changing:

- Digital natives (grew up with mobile communication and are growing rapidly in number)
- Digital converts (have adapted to new technology, are rapidly growing in number and now outnumber traditionalists)
- Traditionalists (use 'old fashioned' communication methods and are decreasing in number)

**The issue: 'digital' customers are taking over from 'traditional' consumers.**

### Who are our customers?

Affinity Sutton has identified that 70-75% of resources goes into serving the following two groups:

- High impact - highest contacts/repairs/complaints; highest arrears; relatively high frequency of moves; tend to be spread across younger and middle life stages
- Supported on benefits - 100% housing benefit (36% of all HB tenants); second highest arrears (average balance -£79; 45% were in arrears over 12 months); second highest on calls; spread across younger/middle life stages(18-55), mainly singles/some families

Therefore, training and briefings for staff have been introduced to identify these groups.



### **Customer journey mapping**

There are '13 moments that matter' – either positive or negative – and four or five of these are about repairs communications.

Repair reporting tends to go well but anything out of the ordinary gets difficult. Communication issues include visibility and ownership, complaints, follow on jobs, timing of appointments and keeping residents informed.

### **Customer channels**

Interaction with customers – 64% of inbound contact is 'noise' or failure demand – the need to address a significant proportion of this, e.g. by selecting appointments online.

### **Customer strategy**

- ✓ Digital by choice, mobile by default
- ✓ Keep interactions simple to create a seamless and rich customer experience
- ✓ Self-serve enabled and paperless
- ✓ Proactive, transparent, value added conversations
- ✓ Tailored needs based service delivery
- ✓ Being a business that uses customer insight to drive decisions



## 8. Data, information and knowledge: Maximising the impact of IT

### The problem: data rich but information poor

Social landlords generate a huge amount of data on repairs and maintenance of the stock but do not always understand or use it effectively, often struggling to convert it into usable information. Rather than using fewer, carefully designed performance indicators, we generally have too many indicators and measures and these can generate conflicting information.

Performance measures don't always test value to the service user or the building asset and housing compares poorly with other industries in effectively using informative business and trend analysis. There is little development of predictive modelling for properties or building components designed to optimise the role of planned and cyclical maintenance. More proactive asset management requires real time and accurate data to identify under-performing assets.

### The solution: turn the data into something usable

Housing systems and CRM, asset management and delivery systems need to be properly connected. They need to interact with each other without the need for human intervention so there is joined up, wider integration across all modules.

Performance measures don't always test value to the service user or the building asset and housing compares poorly with other industries in effectively using informative business and trend analysis.

Simpler end to end processes and improved data quality are important: data should only be held in one place and not duplicated.

Top tips:

- ✓ Establish three high level performance measures for repairs and maintenance - one each for Economy (Cost), Efficiency (Performance) and Effectiveness (Quality)
- ✓ Mobility for customer channels and staff needs a sustainable solution for the whole business.





## Maximising the impact of IT

### The problem: repairs IT is fragmented and not delivering solutions

Many landlords are operating over 30 separate systems yet they do not interact to share data and provide a rounded view of issues. Jobbing repairs systems need scheduling and mobile add-ons but are often not integrated with housing and asset management systems.

Many clients struggle on with interfaces that do not operate in real time and provide only limited visibility of the repair order on the system. As a consequence, the sort of order tracking and delivery information that we expect with internet shopping is not widely available for tenants. CRM is just another layer on top of these systems but is no solution.

First generation repairs self-service channels and apps have foundered on this fragmentation.

## Changing behaviour: From policy to practice

### The solution: procuring for integration and defining and refining data needs

The **Working together** project has heard from a number of experienced housing IT practitioners who all advocate simplifying data needs.

#### Top tips:

- ✓ Define your business processes and business objectives, then match the IT system to these
- ✓ Fix your current IT infrastructure
- ✓ Understand and map where your data sits
- ✓ Fix the data connectors that need to work together
- ✓ Find the holes and make a plan to fill them





## 9. Measuring and managing performance

### The problem: operational challenges

- Too many performance indicators that are giving us too much, and often conflicting, information
- Questionable integrity of some data
- Performance measures that don't test value in terms of the service user and the building asset

The strategic challenges for repairs and maintenance:

- whether demand for responsive repairs can be reduced and needs met in some other way
- increasing the role and impact of cyclical and planned maintenance
- better understanding of why properties become void and whether voids can be prevented
- looking after your home: changing tenant expectations and behaviour.

Community
Operations
People
Finance
Customer

### The solution

Measuring performance so we can improve services through core business processes. Business processes need to flow seamlessly, be low cost and offer good value for money. They need a service focus on what tenants want and on adding value to the asset.

Top tips:

- ✓ Check whether tenants are satisfied and if the service is meeting the promised standards
- ✓ Test if the service is getting better and how it compares with others
- ✓ Evaluate how well you are investing in the asset and its components through repairs and maintenance and whether you can really afford to deliver the service
- ✓ Tenant feedback: collect this regularly at the point of service delivery and use and apply the learning and insight to demonstrate users are having an impact on service delivery
- ✓ Qualitative measurement: introduce precision, consistency and some form of comparison or benchmarking - performance results must be shared with service users and analysed to understand failure demand and customer re



## Case study: Magenta Living Maximising service delivery through internal partnership working

"We've learnt a lot from everyone. The project's shown us that the repairs challenge we face is like trying to fit together a jigsaw that's got lots of moving pieces. We need a cross cutting strategy that incorporates a balance between capital investment and repairs."

**Richard Woolfall, Magenta Living**

Magenta Living, Wirral, Merseyside is a 12,200 unit large scale voluntary transfer. Taking a very different approach to the delivery of its repairs and maintenance service, Magenta has developed a model based on a traditional operational structure but are delivering it in a manner that mirrors a commercial practice.

Based on a strategic principle of the "3 P's of change" Magenta Living delivers its repairs and maintenance service around the approaches of:

- Physically – structure, resources and value
- Physiologically – culture, leadership and vision
- Politically – relationships, reputation management and strategic friendships

The approach has been underpinned through the implementation of a cross departmental working group (the art of repairs project). Magenta Living has successfully adopted a commercial model to the delivery of its repairs and maintenance service, focusing on addressing the cultural and financial pressures of working in a modern commercial social housing environment. It has been successful in reducing use of resources whilst improving the volume and diversity of the work product and service delivery to tenants. Key outcomes have been improved value for money and a focus on delivering a greater understanding of the organisation's return on assets. Other outputs include the achievement of two stars in the Times Top 100 best companies to work for survey.



## CIH Repairs Model Practice

The CIH **Working together to break new ground in repairs and maintenance** project has developed a fresh, new agenda for repairs and maintenance service delivery for the housing industry that reflects the changing values of the sector. We are now bringing the insight, lessons and learning from the project to benefit social housing organisations more widely through CIH Repairs Model Practice, a new package of resources and support designed to transform the effectiveness and impact of the repairs service and enable you to secure substantial and recurring efficiency savings.

For more details please contact CIH consultancy:  
024 7685 1779  
info@cih.org

“The project has really opened our eyes to what other people are doing. It’s allowed us to look much more broadly at how repairs and maintenance links with the rest of the business’ requirements.”

**Michael Gawith, Gentoo Sunderland**

Upcoming projects:

### **Working together to maximise your impact in neighbourhoods**

Transform your organisational approach to delivering neighbourhood services. As a project member, you will have the opportunity to secure the new CIH Neighbourhoods Accreditation.

<http://www.cih.org/impactinneighbourhoods>

### **Working together to deliver transformational change**

This particular Working together project is specifically designed for chief executives and senior leaders, who will have the opportunity to collaborate with housing professionals operating at the same level, to develop their approaches to change and create resilient delivery structures using positive psychology principles.

<http://www.cih.org/transformationalchange>

### **Working together to create the next generation of sheltered housing**

Develop your sheltered housing service model to meet the pressures of budget cuts, diminishing resources and future housing needs.

<http://www.cih.org/shelteredhousing>



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