

Repairs Service Tenant Scrutiny Report 2024



West of
Scotland
Housing
Association

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Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by the Tenant Scrutiny Group of West of Scotland Housing Association. We would like to thank those tenants and staff who have helped us by completing surveys, answering questions, and providing advice and support throughout the process.

1. Introduction

The Tenant Scrutiny Group aims to review the performance of West of Scotland Housing Association in particular service areas and make recommendations as to how services can be improved based on our findings.

We have been working hard to undertake a review of the day to day repairs service delivered to tenants of West of Scotland Housing Association.

This has been the most challenging exercise undertaken to date, such is the breadth of the service. We have looked at many different parts of the service and have identified areas where we think that the Association may want to consider some minor changes to deliver better outcomes to tenants.

2. Tenant Scrutiny – background

Tenant Scrutiny aims to give tenants more power in holding their landlord to account for their decisions, performance and conduct. Changes to regulation in Scotland following the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the independent Scottish Housing Regulator, require landlords to be more proactive in self-regulation and to involve tenants in the scrutiny process.

There is now increased focus on housing organisations carrying out self assessment, and reviewing their housing services to evaluate how well they are doing, and to plan improvements.

At West of Scotland Housing Association we think we make better decisions when we make them with tenants and are fully supportive of the focus on tenant scrutiny.

3. Tenant Scrutiny at West of Scotland Housing Association

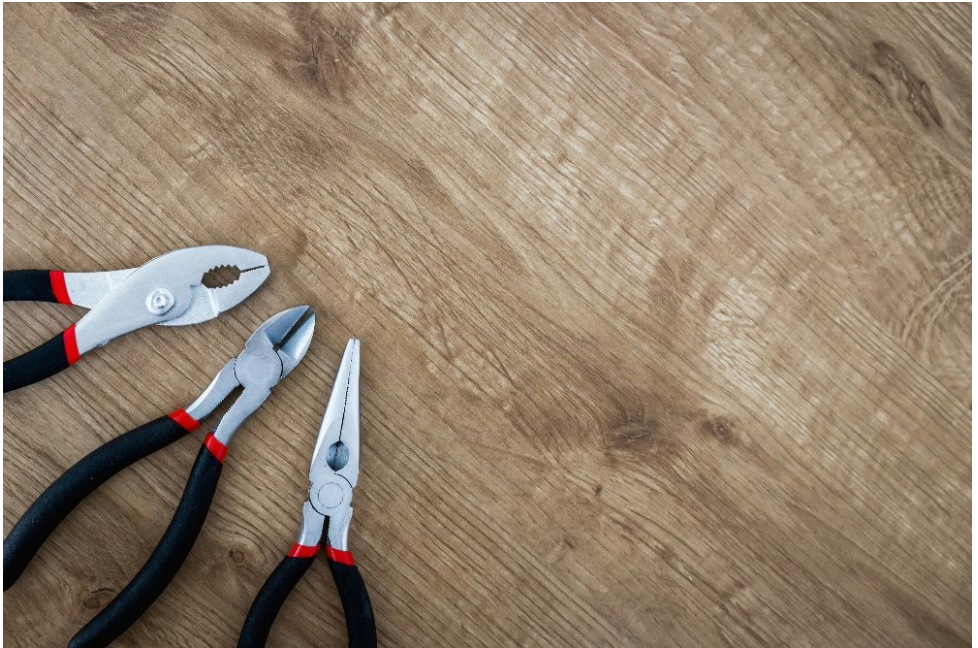
Tenant Scrutiny is now well established at West of Scotland Housing Association and a number of scrutiny activities have taken place, with areas of good practice identified in several service areas. As a Group we have also made recommendations where we think services could be delivered more effectively for tenants.

4. Repairs Service

The repairs service is the service area that most tenants of West of Scotland interact with throughout the year. It is responsible for delivering day to day repairs both emergency and non-emergency.

We identified this as an area we wanted to explore given the performance of the service had continued throughout 2023 to be below targets in terms of timescales for completing jobs, and in terms of customer satisfaction. A number of group members (though not all) had also had poor experiences with the service over the last 12 months.

We have deliberately not looked at the approach to cases of damp and mould as we have undertaken a previous activity in this area, and will likely revisit this in the near future.



5. Scrutinising the Service

We agreed our terms of reference, which set out the tasks we would undertake to allow us to understand the service from the Association's point of view and how customers were considered as part of this service.

The tasks to be undertaken included:

- Presentation from Repairs Team about policy approach
- Presentation from Repairs about the journey of a repair
- Discussion with member(s) of repairs team about their role
- Survey of staff who interact with the repairs service
- Visit to Everwarm offices at Barrowfield Community Centre
- Survey of tenants who have made a complaint about repairs service
- Review of performance compared with peer landlords, including customer satisfaction returns
- Review of policy as compared to other landlords
- Review the repairs expenditure and compare this to previous years, to other landlords

After agreeing to the above it was worth noting that the Group were not able to visit Everwarm offices as the staff work across different landlords, though the Everwarm Manager did attend a Scrutiny meeting to speak with us at length.



6. The Findings

As a Group we have learned a lot about the repairs service over the last 10 months. We are especially grateful to the staff who took their time to speak with us, and to complete our surveys which helped us better understand the challenges they face. We are also grateful to the tenants we spoke with as part of our review, and we benefitted greatly from seeing the results of the Annual Satisfaction Survey undertaken in September, which reinforced some of the views we were already developing.

We have grouped our findings below to make for easier reading and will provide recommendations based on our findings in section 7 of our report.

Policy and Performance

We were taken through the Repairs Policy document by the Maintenance Manager, and following further review of other landlord policies we are happy that the policy is adequate. We do think it would be beneficial to have the document summarised so that tenants better understand their responsibilities. In terms of performance we were able to see the improving trajectory in terms of repairs being completed within target times.

We were taken through the journey of a repair and able to see how tenants could report repairs, how it was managed by staff, and how tenants were updated on works to be undertaken. We were able to see how tenants are encouraged to send photographs of issues to the repairs team, reducing the need for onsite inspections before jobs completed.

Repairs Team Feedback

We spoke in person with members of the repairs team and were also grateful that a number took the time to complete a short survey we prepared. The feedback from the team mainly related to resources, the software system used, and interaction with other teams.

The repairs assistants felt that it was at times challenging to work through their designated tasks as they also had to answer calls from tenants. Several staff members felt that closing the phone lines for half a day week to allow time for training and working on administrative tasks would be beneficial.

The Technical Officers felt that they were not adequately resourced to undertake their tasks, particularly given the new homes being developed and the condition of the stock in the Charing Cross Area. They also mentioned how they have to be on hand to provide support to the Repairs Assistants, particularly newer staff members.

The Team talked about the issues with the housing management system, and particularly some functions that just didn't work. They also mentioned that at times the system worked slowly.

Other Association Staff Feedback

We received many responses to our survey from other staff at the Association. The key theme in the responses was about improving partnership working across the Association. It was apparent that some staff did not know how to find out about repairs progressing and what stage it was at. We also heard from Housing Officers that customers often contact them in a first instance and they want to be able to provide tenants with the information they need. Some Housing Officers also mentioned about the need to ensure issues that they should be aware about are escalated to them, but this was not shared by other officers who felt that repairs should be dealt with by the repairs team.

Tenants

Fundamentally the most important feedback received comes from tenants who receive the service on a day to day basis. We have spoken with a number of our neighbouring tenants, undertaken our own surveys, and assessed the results of the WSHA Annual Satisfaction Survey.

There are key themes that come from this feedback, mainly related to communication and to completing jobs to a high standard at first visit.

As part of our discussion with Everwarm we know that when jobs are passed to them they initiate contact with tenants through their Planning team. They also contact tenants on the day of a job, and text to advise when on route, something we as tenants have all experienced. We do not have any issues with this part of the service. We do note some concerns in this area in terms of tenants who do not currently have a mobile number, and also jobs undertaken by contractors other than Everwarm. (We did also receive feedback about planned works being undertaken, but this will not form any part of our findings – we will consider as a Group whether we look at the planned works in the future).

Tenants also said that at times the communication from contractors/ WSHA was not as effective when jobs were not completed at the first visit. We heard from repairs staff and the contractor about how when different trades are required it can result in different timescales for attending, and this may be part of the issue.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings above and following discussions as a Group, we are putting forward the following recommendations to the Board at WSHA.

Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>We think that the Association should increase the number of post inspections carried out to assist in identifying trends in works not completed to standard. The findings of these inspections should be reported to Management on a monthly basis, and ideally to the Scrutiny Group on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>The performance of the Association in completing repairs right first time remains below peer landlords, and it was identified by tenants as an issue.</p> <p>We think that one way to better understand why the above is the case is to increase the volume of post inspections.</p>	<p>Only 3% of our repairs are recalls due to a repair not being completed correctly. Post inspections generally identify issues with the quality of a completed repair, rather than works not complete.</p> <p>We will undertake a review of our Pre and Post Inspection Process to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the inspections, how these are targeted, actioned and monitored. We will look to develop KPI's for Pre & Post Inspection Targets and monitor at quarterly performance meetings.</p> <p>In addition, we will benchmark performance with other RSLs on their pre and post inspection processes.</p>

Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>The Association needs to consider its wider communication approach about the repairs service so that tenants better understand what can and can not be delivered.</p> <p>The Association also needs to consider how tenants are kept informed when a job has been partly completed. We think the Association should be proactively contacting tenants where a job has not been completed at first visit to update on next steps.</p> <p>The Association needs to consider how it contacts customers who do not have mobile numbers.</p>	<p>The performance of the Association in completing repairs right first time remains below peer landlords, and it was identified by tenants as an issue.</p> <p>We think that one way to better understand why the above is the case is to increase the volume of post inspections.</p> <p>As a Group we do not know how best the recommendation can be achieved and appreciate it may be challenging.</p>	<p>A key Business Objective for 2025/26 is to develop and implement a communication protocol to ensure we are clear about timescales for repairs and keeping tenants informed. Part of this will be having more info available online.</p> <p>We will be looking to see how we can better communicate to tenants who report a repair and send updates on jobs still not completed.</p> <p>We will pilot sending text to landline phones for updates when a tenant does not have a mobile.</p>

Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>Members of the repairs team felt that the phone lines should be closed off on a weekly basis – we have explained below why we do not think this will provide benefits.</p> <p>With that said we do think Management should consider whether over and above team meetings on a monthly basis, the team are allowed appropriate time for training and development of ½ day a month. Ideally the calls should be transferred to an external contractor as if handled internally it will lead to a backlog of emails requesting action.</p>	<p>We received feedback from staff that they would benefit from ongoing training. Staff also feed back that it would be useful to have the opportunity to discuss complex cases, and learn lessons from complaints. This would be best done with proper time allocated rather than ad hoc discussions. We feel that closing the lines for half a day a month would not be detrimental to service delivery for tenants and may lead to service improvements.</p>	<p>We are closed a half day every month, every two months we hold organisational wide and training and development sessions and the other two months the repairs staff can use this time to provide training, discuss complexed issues and hold lessons learned sessions.</p>
<p>Repairs staff pointed out that they are currently involved in the Mutual Exchange Process. We think that there is a role for the technical side of the repairs team, but arranging electrical and gas checks should sit with the compliance side in the Asset Team.</p>	<p>It would make more sense for the team that has the contractual arrangement with compliance contractors to oversee this, and would allow the repairs team to get on with their day to day tasks</p>	<p>The Mutual Exchange Process should be treated the same as a void house. This involves carrying out compliance checks and would provide a consistent approach.</p>

Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>The repairs and development team should ensure that they are understanding of the Defect Procedure to ensure tenants are having defects completed as soon as possible.</p>	<p>We noted some concerns from repairs team members about the Management of defects in new build homes and they were unclear about where responsibility lay. We are aware that since we spoke with staff a new defect policy has been approved but want management to ensure staff are working to the correct policy.</p>	<p>A review of the Defect Management Policy was carried out with Senior members for the Repairs Team. The Development Team attended the Repairs Team Meeting to raise awareness of the policy and highlight job raised that were not a defect and explained why.</p>
<p>The Association needs to review the process for handling invoices for the repairs service with a particular focus on reducing any paper usage.</p>	<p>This was identified as a very time consuming and manual staff which seemed to involve printing of documents for viewing purposes only. Time staff spend doing this means time not spent supporting customers.</p>	<p>The CX financial interface has been tested and now works. The approval process has still to be mapped out but once this is complete, the interface will remove the manual processing and free up staffs time to support our customers.</p>



Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>We think that the Association should provide an overview of the repairs service to all staff as part of their induction, but also ensure this includes information about how to check the progress of any repairs underway, or completed.</p>	<p>Repairs staff are often contacted by other staff members looking for updates on work. This creates additional work for the repairs team, but also delays for the customers. If staff are able to confirm basic information about jobs logged on the system then ultimately the tenant benefits.</p> <p>We also heard that some staff don't hear back from the repairs team following emails – this would mean they could identify if work has been logged themselves.</p>	<p>Basic training on the CX system to be added to staff induction.</p> <p>All staff with access to CX should be able to input any simple repairs on CX and check the status of a repair for tenants out in the community or in the office.</p>



Recommendation	Why are we making this recommendation?	Management Response
<p>Technical Officers – consideration needs to be given to whether the Association currently has enough Technical Officers to undertake the tasks they are allocated. We are aware the Association has a resource review process and if this has not been completed for the technical officers it should be. If it has been completed, the results of this should again be communicated to the officers so they understand why no additional resource is required.</p>	<p>Feedback from staff was that they felt they did not have enough resources to undertake the job effectively, and that the resource had not increased with additional homes being managed. As a Group we are also keen that there is more capacity to support the team to get repairs details correct when a tenant initially reports a repair, and we want to see more post inspections undertaken (more below).</p>	<p>We are exploring development new AI process to assist with tenants reporting a repair online to get more accurate diagnosis. This will also be a 25/26 Corporate Business Plan action.</p> <p>The new Director will be carrying out one to ones with all the repairs staff including the Technical Officers to gauge workload, inefficiencies and understand key issues. We will look to find an IT solution to any inefficient practices, where possible.</p> <p>A resource review of the repairs team will be undertaken early in 2025.</p>

We would not normally include a section on where we have not taken forward suggestions based on our findings, but given that staff have taken time to provide us with feedback we thought worth covering why we are not supportive. Management may wish to discuss these areas further with the teams concerned.

Suggestion	Why we don't support
<p>Closing office phone lines to allow time for staff training, and undertaking administrative tasks on a weekly basis.</p>	<p>We don't believe this will work as staff suspect, as in our view the Association would still receive the same volume of calls just within a condensed period.</p> <p>We think instead the team should explore whether having individual staff members of the phones at any one time would be more beneficial to allowing focus on administrative tasks.</p>
<p>Introducing a new IT system that is easier to use.</p>	<p>We were given a demonstration of how a repair should be logged on the system. At the time the 'M3' system did not work. We are aware this is now fixed.</p> <p>We did not think the process was overly complex but further, from other activities we are aware of the significant cost investments into the system, and are not convinced that other alternative systems would be much better. We would encourage management to discuss this further with the team on an ongoing basis so that any issues can be rectified.</p>
<p>Other WSHA staff either logging their own repairs, or phoning in to the repairs team rather than emailing the repairs team.</p>	<p>We are aware that some other teams do log repairs when contacted by tenants. We do not feel that other staff should be asked to log repairs, especially those who are out in communities doing other jobs. We feel that email is the easiest form of communication, and stops other staff speaking to the repairs team when tenants calls are waiting. (Do though see our recommendation above about repairs training and visibility for other teams).</p>

8. Next Steps

As part of our Scrutiny agreement with WSHA we will expect acknowledgement that they will implement our recommendations and provide timescales for when this will happen. If the recommendations are not to be implemented we expect detailed reasons why not.



How to get in touch

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