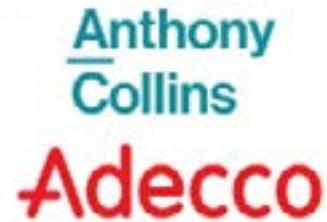


Briefing Notes



## Repairs and Maintenance



Monday 05 June 2023

### Introduction

Jenny Osbourne, Chair of Stockport Homes and Chief Executive of TPAS, led a discussion on repairs and maintenance in the social housing sector, specifically from the perspective of the tenant. Repairs and maintenance are the top priority of tenants and causes a significant amount of distress when they are not handled successfully. On the other hand, when repairs and maintenance are handled effectively, overall tenant satisfaction increases.

### Challenges within the sector

There are several historic and short-term pressures on the sector including:

- Disrepair and damp and mould claims and complaints increasing
- Labour & skills shortages across the whole sector
- Rising costs coupled with the rent cap forcing providers to cut costs
- There is still a backlog of repair claims from the Covid pandemic
- Aging stock and Decent Homes 2 coming
- Increased safety requirements

## Communication

Often, a tenant reporting a repair request is the first point of contact they have with a provider and so it is key, from a moral standpoint as well as making good business sense, to make that interaction as positive as possible. Boards should be reviewing all aspects of that interaction from the website, chat bots, call handlers to operatives who enter tenants' homes. It is fundamentally operational, but it is also strategic as the consequences on tenant satisfaction can be immense. To avoid claims falling through gaps, internal audits are crucial to identify and rectify any issues.

## In the home

The experience of the tenant when an operative comes into their home to carry out repairs is vital in terms of tenant satisfaction. Generally, tenants are understanding when timescales are extended, or second visits are needed but only when this is effectively communicated. Valuable data is often not being collected directly from tenants on their experiences e.g., tenants frequently complain of small repairs that could have been done in the same visit.

It is imperative that the organisation's culture and values are expressed in home visits. Short-term and long-term damage can be easily done, and it is often avoidable things such as not putting furniture back in place or leaving dustsheets that leaves tenants feeling undervalued.

## Stigma

Too often tenants have felt stigmatised when having repairs done. This area requires more research, but it may be a customer service training issue or a cost issue as operatives cannot spend time with tenants as they have pressure to get to the next job. Tenants can be made to feel like a nuisance and not worthy of decent service. Is there an underlying racism issue? Boards need to ensure they are scrutinising recruitment, culture and training to eliminate racism in their organisation.

## Procurement

Tenants are regularly an afterthought when it comes to procurement. Boards need to ask whether there are enough resources in procurement, whether tenants are involved in the procurement process so they can have a direct say in what is working and what is not and whether the organisation has enough data from tenants to have an overview of what is needed in terms of procurement.

## Discussion

Organisations have previously been disinterested in repairs and focused on development and growth. Often senior management is deciding what the organisation needs to do rather than asking the tenants what needs to improve. Complaints need to be dissected to identify the root of problems. Meetings with tenants are vital to learn how repairs and maintenance operate on the ground.

The idea of compensation for missed appointments may ensure that organisations become more accountable. If the penalty for a missed appointment was that the tenant moved into the CEO's home for a week then would an appointment ever be missed?

Although we can inform tenants that there is a labour shortage, that is not their problem, and it is ours to address to ensure we have the right people with the right skills. Similarly, with aging stock – it is not the tenant's fault that the organisation has not got previous levels of investment right. Preventative repairs are the model, however organisations become trapped in a loop of fixing problems as and when they arise.

Board members set the culture for the organisation and there has typically been a focus on development. Although organisations need to grow, repairs and maintenance are basic and fundamental. They cannot be a trade-off for development investment.

Tenants complained of operatives leaving before the job was completed. A provider is looking at whether they should re-introduce maintenance surveyors to attend properties after repairs have been completed to assess whether they have been done to a sufficient standard. This would cost a lot more but in the long-

term, it might pay off.

If an organisation contracts out its repairs and maintenance services, then it is vital to look at how that contractor operates and how much they value the provider e.g., if you are a small provider and the contractor is so much larger and works with bigger organisations, you will not be at the top of their priorities list. There was a reminder that the responsibility is still on the landlord even where repairs are contracted out.

Decisions that were taken 20 years ago are playing out now. Board members need to be conscious of how decisions taken today will affect the future organisation; this was seen by some as providing a legacy for future Board Members.

It would be helpful to discuss what an effective operations committee looks like. This may be a topic for a future NED discussion.

## Housing 2023

---

HACT NED Network members can obtain free tickets for Thursday at CIH Housing 2023 when there is arranged a HACT NED Network lunch for all attendees. To register your interest, please contact HACT, Events & Digital Communications Officer, Melanie Beverley-Hughes.

[REGISTER YOUR INTEREST](#)

## Register for our next session

### Maintenance and Repairs

Monday 19 June 16:00 - 17:00

Boards annually certify they comply with the regulatory framework and, in turn, assess the extent to which they are in compliance with 'all relevant law'. This session will explore recent guidance issued by Anthony Collins on how Boards can best assess their compliance when they are on notice of material damp, mould and condensation issues present in their housing stock.

Speaker: Victoria Jardine, Partner at Anthony Collins Solicitors

**REGISTER FREE**

A special thanks to our partners



Anthony  
Collins

Adecco