

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 64

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Repairs & Improvements Handbook		
Date of Meeting:	19th December 2011		
Report of:	Director of Housing & Social Inclusion		
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Wards affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report presents Housing Management Consultative Committee with a proposal for a new and updated 'Repairs and Improvements Handbook'. This handbook gives details and advice to all tenants on repairs and improvements to their homes and has been designed to complement the existing tenant handbook.
- 1.2 Property & Investment team has involved residents in a number of different ways whilst developing, producing and agreeing the revised Repairs and Improvements Handbook.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Housing Management Consultative Committee welcomes the new updated version of the 'Repairs and Improvements Handbook' attached (appendix 1) and recommends that the Cabinet Member for Housing approves it for publication.
- 2.2 That Housing Management Consultative Committee notes the extensive involvement of residents and the partnership to produce this document

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The Repairs Handbook was last updated in March 2008. Following this, the ten year partnership agreement with Mears for repairs and maintenance was started in April 2010 managed by the council's new Property and Investment team. Since then, there have been changes and enhancements to the process of repairs and planned work carried out to tenant's homes. For example:

- One point of contact for all reported repairs
- Updated information on the decent homes and planned work
- New and updated information on damp and condensation
- Customer satisfaction surveys carried out at 100%
- Contractor Code of Conduct

It is now necessary to convey these changes and to all residents through a new repairs and improvements handbook.

3.2 In June 2011 a working group was set up with residents and officers to:

- Review the current version of the Repairs Handbook.
- Note and review any changes.
- Review best practise in examples of other local authority handbooks.
- Ensure the design and contents were clear and concise.

3.3 For continuity, the Repairs handbook has been designed and illustrated in a similar format to the Tenant Handbook using more pictures and colour.

The group reviewed the contents of the previous handbook and included relevant information such as gas leaks, planned works process and a customer care section.

3.4 A draft of the Repairs handbook is attached at Appendix 1, which if endorsed will be forwarded to the Housing Cabinet Member for approval. Amendments and alterations to the content were submitted via the web portal to tenants for four weeks during September 2011. The feedback was very positive and it was noted how clear and easy it was to read. They requested the category section of jobs so that tenants would see clearly what was classed as an emergency. They saw this as a crucial part of communication to tenants, this has been added. The Asset Management Panel (AMP) also gave positive feedback on the content and the diagrams, and asked if the handbook would include a clear indication of tenant and council responsibilities. A specific tick list box was added and it was then noted by tenants that this was a clear and concise method to communicate this information to tenants.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 Extensive consultation has been carried out from the very first draft of the document. At the first stage of the resident involvement it was immediately identified that it would also be useful to include and engage with individual residents that do not attend resident led groups and that their comments and suggestions could prove to be more diverse and varied Twelve tenants were selected from the resident involvement survey and the initial draft document was downloaded onto the tenant portal intranet for their edits and comments. Their suggestions proved invaluable and changes were made as follows:

- Right to repair legislation was checked and added
- One phone number as point of contact
- Examples of emergency, urgent and routine work

- Clearer bold headings for ease of reading

4.2 In October 2011 the draft was presented to other tenant groups including the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group (RMMG) where they discussed the draft document and gave positive feedback. They agreed that the inclusion of the planned work section was very informative. And they agreed the document gave clear information on the decent homes programme.

Following this the draft was presented to group Management Team (GMT) and the Partnership Core Group. They were all very positive and found the document easy to read and clear. The members made some suggested edits and changes which were incorporated and it was agreed that this edition had the following information that the previous repairs handbook did not:

- Clearer wording and more descriptive pictures
- A clear tick box method for council responsibilities and tenant responsibilities
- Planned work information
- Decent homes information
- Mears code of conduct
- The Brighton and Hove Standard
- Clear guidance on tenants responsibilities and council obligations

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 The costs related to the production of the Repairs and Improvements Handbook including design, print and distribution will be met from the HRA budget.

Finance Officer Consulted: Sue Chapman Date: 5 Dec 2011

Legal Implications:

5.2 It is not a legal requirement to produce a "Repairs and Improvements Handbook", although the council considers that it is important that residents are informed of the council's responsibilities. Those responsibilities derive from not only the tenancy agreement but also from a number of legislative sources, including the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the Secure Tenants (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994 as amended and the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1988. It is not considered that any individual's human rights are adversely affected by the issue of the Handbook.

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley Date: 5 Dec 2011

Equalities Implications:

5.3 During consultation with tenants due regard for equalities and diversity has been acknowledged and the handbook will be available in other formats such as audio and different languages. We have used feedback from residents and staff to draft the Equality Impact assessment on the Repairs and Improvements Handbook.

"Equality Impact Assessment" on the Repairs and Improvements Handbook will be tabled at the meeting.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 The group looked at other methods of producing the handbook in order to minimise the printing of hard copies. As with the Homing In magazine it can be sent in an electronic format via email. Specific sustainability advice is contained with the Tenants Handbook.

Preventative measures such as advice to minimise condensation and other suggestions to avoid repairs and property damage are also included in the handbook so that tenants are made aware of who is responsible.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The revised Repairs and Improvements Handbook will positively contribute to preventing crime and the fear of possible crime by informing tenants where to report lost or stolen door keys and advice on lock changes.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 The publication of the revised Repairs and Improvements handbook should mitigate the potential long term effects of damage to property by enabling tenants to access clear contact information for council repairs.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 The information in the handbook covers all health and safety information under section headed 'Safety in your home' including: carbon monoxide, gas, Legionella and asbestos.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The introduction of a revised Repairs and Improvements handbook will have citywide implications for tenants. This document will inform them of their rights and responsibilities as a council tenant and what repairs the council are responsible for.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 Do Nothing – This option was discussed and dismissed as the previous Handbook is now over three years old and, following the new Repairs and Maintenance contract, updated information needed to be provided to Tenants.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That Housing Management Consultative Committee should welcome the new updated version of the 'Repairs and Improvements Handbook' as it provides clear and concise information required by Residents. This will support the City's objective to focus on tenancy by communicating and improving the customer experience to an excellent standard.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Draft Repairs and Improvements Handbook

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Equality impact assessment

