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| Subject: | Update on Repairs & Maintenance to Council Housing Stock | | |
| Date of Meeting: | 16 September 2020 | | |
| Report of: | Interim Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities | | |
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| Ward(s) affected: | All | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

1.1 This report updates Committee on the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service following the insourcing of the service which took place on the 1st April 2020. This was in line with the following recommendations approved, following extensive consultation, at a special Housing & New Homes Committee meeting held on 28 September 2018 and Policy, Resources & Growth Committee on 11 October 2018 that, following expiry of the contract with Mears:

- Customer service and quality assurance services are brought in-house;
- Responsive repairs and empty property refurbishment works to council housing stock are brought in-house.

1.2 This report updates on how the service has been operating during the pandemic and outlines the ongoing work which the programme will be carrying out over the next year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Committee notes the progress with the programme and the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service as outlined in the body of this report.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATIONProgramme updates

3.1 Following the insourcing there are a number of ongoing and new projects which are being delivered by the programme team.

3.2 Planned maintenance and improvement works will be delivered by 3-7 contractors. The works have been split into seven lots and contracts are to be awarded for a five year period with the option for the council to extend by up to a further two years. The lots are as follows:

- Lot 1: Kitchens and bathrooms
- Lot 2: Internal and external decorations and repairs
- Lot 3: Windows
- Lot 4: Roofs
- Lot 5: Doors – flats and street property doors (including fired doors)
- Lot 6: Doors – main entrance doors
- Lot 7: Communal and domestic rewiring

Due to a lack of quality bids, lot 6 was discontinued following the Selection Questionnaire (SQ) stage. Any planned works required for main entrance doors will be tendered on an individual project basis.

3.3 Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Planned Works procurement was paused on the 18th March 2020. Following consultation with the bidders, the process was able to commence again on 15th June 2020. The procurement is due to be completed in November 2020.

3.4 The first stage of the tender process, the SQ (Selection Questionnaire), attracted bids from 46 bidders. The evaluation process was conducted by a wide range of council officers and resulted in 18 bidders being progressed through to the next stage of the tender.

3.5 The next stage, the ITT (Invitation to Tender), involved bidders submitting their pricing and written statements for 10 quality related questions. These questions covered areas such as resourcing and mobilisation, performance management, project management, quality assurance, risk, sustainability and social value.

3.6 For the social value question, two members of the resident task and finish group were part of the evaluation team. More residents were originally planned to take part in the evaluation process, but the numbers had to be limited due to the restrictions and technology required due to social distancing measures.

3.7 The next stage of the procurement is to consult with leaseholders on the council's proposals to enter into the long term agreements with the winning bidders. As part of the consultation, leaseholders are invited to make written observations in relation to the proposal within a 30 day period. Further consultation will be carried out for any works where the expected cost to leaseholders is over £250, as part of the consultation requirements in section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

3.8 Other key projects following the insourcing include:

- Out of hours call centre provision
- Procurement of a new fleet
- The harmonisation of terms and conditions
- Procuring contracts for major capital works via a multi-contractor framework

- Business process mapping of approximately 100 processes
 - Materials and contractor supply chains
 - Procurement of an IT works management system
- 3.9 As reported to March Housing Committee, a number of issues were raised whilst work progressed on setting up a new external provider for out of hours call handling. Moving to a new provider would have resulted in a less robust lone working procedure for operatives due to a lack of integration between IT systems.
- 3.10 Work is now underway on a business case to assess the options for out of hours call handling, including procuring a new supplier, and also how the service could be delivered directly by the council.
- 3.11 A business case is also being developed for the procurement of a new fleet of vehicles for the Repairs & Maintenance service. Research is currently being conducted on the types of vehicles required to deliver the service and the technology available on the market which aligns with the council's corporate objectives.
- 3.12 The procurement of a multi-contractor framework for major capital works has been impacted by the need to focus resources on the planned works procurement, along with a delay due to Covid-19. Resources are being reviewed to understand where these can be increased so that the framework is in place for April 2021.
- 3.13 As reported to Housing Committee in January and March, in order to bring the services in-house the council purchased some discrete products from Mears, including a works management system, materials supply chain, and the processing of contractor orders and payments. Work is now underway to scope out the requirements for a new works management system, with the materials supply chain and contractor portal to follow.
- 3.14 Prior to the transfer of the Repairs & Maintenance service, the GMB had lodged a dispute with Mears as part of the 2020 pay review process. This claim related to the request for an increased 8% pay rise and the standardisation of annual leave and sick pay for all staff. A 2% pay increase was applied by Mears in January 2020 but the dispute was not resolved which led to a ballot in favour of industrial action including potential strike dates and action short of a strike.
- 3.15 Following the insourcing, this dispute transferred to the council and since April 2020 the council has been engaged in discussions with GMB to seek to resolve the dispute.
- 3.16 The terms and conditions of staff have been reviewed as part of a harmonisation process, which would offer staff the choice of moving to Brighton & Hove City Council terms and conditions or to remain on their existing terms and conditions. As a result of the review we anticipate approximately 88% of front line colleagues will be better off on council pay rates and some will see a significant improvement in their pay. Any staff who choose to move to council terms and conditions will receive full back pay to 1 April 2020. No staff will be worse off as all staff will have the option to stay on their existing contract with their current pay

rates. The council has undertaken to complete a formal job evaluation exercise to make an offer of harmonisation by 31 December 2020. This offer has not been accepted and strike action has been called for 5 days from the 7th September 2020. The council remains open to continued discussions with the GMB.

Performance of the Repairs & Maintenance service

3.17 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Repairs & Maintenance service was initially carrying out essential repairs to council housing, health and safety maintenance checks, and repairs to empty properties. A safety led approach was implemented to ensure that works were only carried out with the correct Personal Protective Equipment, risk assessments were in place, and social distancing protocols followed for the safety of residents, staff, and contractors.

3.18 From 13 July 2020 the definition of essential repairs was expanded for all trade teams, to include repairs that if left unattended in the long term would have an impact on the residents and properties, such as heating and hot water repairs, containable leaks, condensation wash downs, etc. Risk assessments were developed for all situations where work would be undertaken, and the identification of Covid-19 cases and vulnerable or extremely vulnerable occupants is undertaken by repairs desk staff asking several questions to identify the particular circumstances of the occupants before raising a repair. This enables the service to operate different risk assessment protocols and use appropriate PPE. The service is gradually returning to a complete repairs service, but due to the backlog created by the pandemic repairs are being prioritised in the following order:

- 1) Those that pose a Health & Safety risk
- 2) Repairs required that are having a significant impact on resident and/or that are causing damage to properties
- 3) All other repairs.

Operatives will not be attending to any non-essential repairs in properties where the occupants are displaying symptoms of COVID 19 or have a current confirmed case of COVID 19.

3.19 Due to the restrictions in place on what repairs the service has been able to safely carry out over this period, there is a current backlog of 3,204 repairs. Works to empty properties has also been impacted, with a current backlog of 160, although the situation with empty properties is improving with 86 being complete in the last 5 months. To clear the backlog, we are recruiting trade operatives and office based staff through the council agency to expand our capacity to complete more repairs. Recruiting the required calibre of staff, providing adequate training and staggering start dates (to accommodate supervisory training) will take some time, and therefore it is estimated that it will take up to 12 months to clear the backlog. This could potentially be impacted by another lockdown if mandated by the government, and the ability to recruit the required staff. In a normal month, the service receives approximately 3,000 repair faults.

3.20 Since April the repairs call centre has been operating a voicemail call back service, which enabled residents to report an emergency repair via a voicemail

message and the team would call the resident back to confirm details and schedule the job. This is a similar process currently used by other call centres in the council and enables staff to work remotely safely and securely within the capabilities of the available technology. Now that appropriate risk assessments and consultation have been undertaken and social distancing measures have been put in place in the Housing Centre, the Repairs Helpdesk team are returning to the office and normal phone service will resume on 14th September, for reporting both emergency and routine priority repairs.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

- 4.1 This report updates Committee on the progress of the programme and the Repairs & Maintenance service and therefore alternative options are not required

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The resident 'task and finish' group which has worked with the programme team over the last year has been unable to hold meetings due to social distancing measures. Regular updates and newsletters have been sent to the group to keep them informed and involved on progress, and plans are now being made to set up meetings held via video calls.
- 5.2 Members of the group were invited to take part in the evaluation process for the Planned Works procurement. Due to the technology required to take part and the social distancing measures, we had to limit the number of resident participants to three. Two members of the group volunteered and evaluated the bidder's responses to the social value question.
- 5.3 Feedback from the task and finish group has also been sought as part of the business case for the out of hours call handling.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report updates Committee on the Repairs & Maintenance service following the insourcing in April 2020. It has been a challenging time due to the impact of Covid-19 and the service has had to operate a reduced service whilst delivering emergency and priority works.
- 6.2 The programme team continues to support the service and the work of the insourcing with key projects on the out of hours call centre provisions, fleet procurement, and the harmonisation of term and conditions.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Full financial implications were provided in previous reports. This report is for noting and there are no direct financial implications. As referred to in the main body of the report, there are several key projects being supported by the programme team and the financial implications of these will be reflected as part of the budget monitoring (TBM) process as appropriate.
- 7.2 The service was reporting a forecast underspend of £0.300m at TBM2 due primarily to the high number of staff vacancies and operating a reduced service due to the impact of Covid-19. The TBM position will continue to be closely monitored, taking account of resources required for dealing with the backlog of jobs.
- 7.3 Any on-going financial implications of the development of the service will be considered as part of the HRA budget setting process for 2021/2.

Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley

Date: 03/09/20

Legal Implications:

- 7.4 Full legal implications were provided in previous reports. This report is for noting and there are no direct legal implications. The Council's lawyers (internal and external) continue to advise on all aspects of the programme.

Lawyer Consulted:

Alice Rowland

Date: 03/09/20

Equalities Implications:

- 7.5 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this update report.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.6 The work carried out through the council's Repairs and Maintenance service and through planned improvement works contributes significantly to the energy performance of the council owned housing stock. Sustainability has been considered as part of the evaluation process for the planned maintenance and improvement works contracts detailed in section 3.2. Providers have been assessed on their ability to deliver services in a sustainable and energy efficient manner in line with the council's HRA energy strategy.
- 7.7 As detailed in section 3.11 a business case is being developed for the procurement of a new fleet of vehicles for the Repairs & Maintenance service. The business case will consider the sustainability impact of the fleet in line with the council's corporate objectives.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Background Documents

None

