

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: REVIEW OF EMERGENCY REPAIRS IN COUNCIL HOUSES
Meeting: HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE
Date: 30 March 2010
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This report provides Members with policy options for a review of repair categories for the Housing Maintenance Service with the introduction of a new repair category and a reduction in emergency repairs.

1.2 The categories and timescales currently used are as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Timescales</u>	<u>% of all jobs issued</u>
Daytime Emergency	Attend within 3 hours and complete within 24 hours	32
Outwith Hours Emergency	Attend within 3 hours and complete within 24 hours	8
Urgent	Complete within 5 working days	16
Non-Urgent	Complete within 10 working days	5
Routine	Complete within 20 working days	37
Non-Routine	Greater than 20 working days and to be negotiated	2

1.3 Members will recall the Inspection Report from The Scottish Housing Regulator in February 2008 which noted that although significant progress had been made on some of the commitments and objectives for Property Asset Management not all had been met. One area raised in this report was that the Council's target of 5 days for urgent repairs is longer than the national target median of 3 days.

1.4 In addition the Best Value Service Review of the housing maintenance service carried out in 2009 identified that one of the areas still to be reviewed is the reduction in the level of emergency repairs, including aspects of cost reduction.

1.5 The Council's definition of an emergency repair is; any repair that is hazardous to life and limb, is necessary to prevent further serious damage to the house or is causing gross inconvenience as outlined in Section 3 of the report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The volume of emergency repairs has steadily increased over the past 6/7 years and in the financial year 2008/09 accounted for 39% of all response repairs issued. The number of emergencies completed in that year was 25,012 which equates to 1.52 emergencies per dwelling.

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total jobs completed	64,851	61,345	62,561	64,340	65,775	65,644	63,535
Total daytime and outwith hours emergencies raised	20438	20340	20856	21,846	22,718	23,973	25,012
% raised as a daytime or outwith hours emergency	32%	33%	33%	34%	35%	37%	39%

- 2.2 The Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN) issued comparative information for 2008/09 in relation to various categories of repairs carried out by all Councils. This information highlighted that when taking emergency repairs as a % of all repairs Falkirk Council are 5th highest out of the 26 Councils who provide details to the SHBVN.

- 2.3 The volume of emergency repairs and their associated costs are influenced by a number of factors and can impact on other works. Accordingly, the following should be noted:

- Emergency repairs disrupt work schedules which can often lead to planned work having to be re-programmed, thus inconveniencing tenants and impacting on the Service Provider's efficiency.
- Emergency repairs require a speedy response and as such attract enhanced rates for the work as it is much more expensive to provide this service than planned work. Therefore when a high volume of emergency repairs is carried out it can have a major impact on the funds available for the other repair categories and / or programmes.
- In addition to emergencies arising due to fair wear and tear, they can also be attributed to tenant misuse and abuse, vandalism, over-categorisation and lack of definition as to what constitutes a true emergency repair.
- The current response time for an emergency repair is to attend within 3 hours and complete where possible. If the work cannot be completed at that time it should be made safe and then followed up to completion within 24 hours of the time reported. The next available category for a repair after an emergency is the "Urgent" and this has a response time of 5 working days. It is recognised that in view of the time difference between them there is, on occasion, a tendency for tenants to amplify the severity of the problem as they are not prepared to wait 5 working days for repairs.

3. DEFINITION OF AN EMERGENCY REPAIR

- 3.1 There is no agreed definition for Local Authorities of what constitutes an emergency repair other than those defined by Right to Repair regulations as outlined in Section 4 and specified in Appendix 2 of this report. Each Local Authority has the powers to determine their own policy.
- 3.2 The current policy has been in place for over 20 years and as noted previously is summarised as follows:
- Any repair which is hazardous to life and limb.
 - Any repair which is necessary to prevent further serious damage to the house.
 - Any repair causing gross inconvenience.
- 3.3 Around the same time guidelines were issued to staff to assist in the standardisation of approach in dealing with emergency repairs. The guidelines were not exhaustive and not meant to cover every eventuality and discretion can be exercised, particularly in the area where “social implications” need to be considered. Staff were asked to take into consideration the ability of the tenant to cope, e.g. elderly person, infirmity and the proximity of the next available category. The guidance is summarised in Appendix 1.

4. RIGHT TO REPAIR REGULATIONS

- 4.1 The Scottish Secure Tenants (Right to Repair) Regulations 2002 identifies qualifying repairs which require to be completed by the Landlord within specified timescales commencing the day after the repair was reported by the tenant. A list of these is shown in Appendix 2: In effect it is a scheme for Council tenants and makes sure that certain small urgent repairs which might affect the tenant’s health, safety or security are done quickly and easily.
- 4.2 These regulations are very general in the descriptions for the qualifying repairs and do not take into account the circumstances surrounding the faults e.g. if a leak can be contained or if power is off at only one socket.
- 4.3 The majority of these repairs currently fall within the works covered by the Councils’ current policy for emergency repairs and as such are attended to earlier than the timescales in the legislation.

5. LEGAL OBLIGATION

- 5.1 There is no legal requirement to undertake repairs as emergencies, however in Schedule 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (updated in Schedule 4 of the 2001 Act) it states that the landlord will do the following:
- a) keep in repair the structure of the exterior of the house (including drains, gutters and external pipes); and*
 - b) keep in repair and proper working order the installations in the house-*
 - (i) for the supply of water, gas and electricity, and for sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and sanitary conveniences but not, except as aforesaid, fixtures, fittings and appliances for making use of the supply of water, gas or electricity), and*
 - (ii) for space heating or heating water*

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 In order to provide an emergency service for general repairs it has been necessary to pay a surcharge over and above the cost of each repair. This incurs a 40% uplift on daytime emergencies and a 90% uplift on outwith hours emergencies. At present 39% of all jobs fall within the above categories, therefore, an additional category, which is more than 24 hours and less than 5 working days, would reduce the on cost to the Service.
- 6.2 The total additional cost for the uplift in charges resulting from emergency repairs in 2008/09 was £690,000. It should be noted that these costs do not include any uplift for gas maintenance repairs as they are included in the rate for their works.

7. IMPROVEMENTS TO DATE

- 7.1 In the past year, the Service has introduced a computerised diagnostic repairs tool which assists staff identify the correct repair work and priority category for completion. While this has standardised the accuracy of the repairs being instructed and reduced the number of narrative works previously issued it has only made slight improvements to the volume of emergencies issued, however it has resulted in more accurate prioritisation of work.
- 7.2 Emergency vehicles are now fully stocked with the most common items used to minimise follow-up visits which ensures that where an emergency is reported, the repair can be carried out at the time of the initial visit.
- 7.3 Where it is appropriate and there is no danger to the household or property; appointments are now being offered to tenants when reporting an emergency. This option allows the tenant to arrange the most suitable date and timeframe to have the work done and enables the Council to re-categorise the work outwith the emergency service.

8. PROPOSED CHANGES

Introduction of a new repairs category

- 8.1 As noted in item 1.3 above concerns were raised in the Inspection report from The Scottish Housing Regulator in relation to the timescale Falkirk Council use for urgent repairs. Irrespective of whether or not any of the following options are considered appropriate it would still be beneficial to introduce a 3 working day repair category in order to assist with any reduction in the volume of emergencies and their associated additional costs. Adopting this category would allow the Service to prioritise those repairs which are not deemed an emergency but would be a major inconvenience to the tenant, if not attended to in a short timescale. This option would replace the 5 working day category and enable works currently assigned for 5 working days to be re-prioritised to either a 3 working days category or the current 10 working days category.

Emergency Repairs and Right to Repair

- 8.2 In order to reduce the number and costs of emergency repairs currently being instructed consideration should be given to the current emergency timescales and those timescales required under the Right to Repair (RTR) legislation. The majority of emergency repairs undertaken can be attributed to leaks / loss of power / door and window security etc. Under the Right to Repair legislation these are due to be attended to within the specified number of working days, following the repair being reported, as noted in Appendix 2.

- 8.3 It is proposed that all RTR repairs would be completed between 1 or 3 working days. Any emergency type repair not included under RTR but covered by the points listed in 3.2 above would then be dealt with in a similar fashion based on the severity of the fault reported and then assigned to either 1 or 3 working days. New categories would require to be developed for 1 and 3 working days. The outwith hour's emergency repairs service would remain as existing.

Charging

- 8.4 In light of the anticipated reduction in emergencies this would provide greater flexibility to BMD to plan workloads more effectively. It is therefore proposed with effect from 1 April 2011 to reduce the day time surcharge from 40% to 30%. This will realise savings of £30,000 per annum to the HRA.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The volume of emergency repairs experienced for some years has continued to increase and it is suggested that steps are required to reduce them and their associated additional costs.
- 9.2 Any reduction in the numbers of emergency repairs will enable the Service to plan their workloads more effectively, which should ensure that a more equitable level of service is available to our tenants.
- 9.3 It is anticipated that with the introduction of a 3 day repair category there will be scope to defer some works currently carried out as an emergency (Excluding Right to Repair) and this could provide savings of £150-200K per annum. In addition the reduction in surcharge for day time emergencies would realise further savings of c£30,000 per annum. Repairs currently carried out within the 5 day cycle would be carried out within the 3 day cycle or the 10 day cycle.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to consider the policy options for the revision of repair categories and are requested to:

- 10.1 **Approve the introduction of a 3 working day category of repairs to replace the 5 working day category as noted in 8.1 above.**
- 10.2 **Approve the changes proposed for the provision of the emergency repairs service and qualifying repairs within the Right to Repair legislation as noted in 8.2 and 8.3 above.**
- 10.3 **Note the financial savings that will accrue to the HRA from the proposed changes and the reduction in surcharge for daytime emergencies.**
- 10.4 **Authorise Officers to refer this report to the Policy & Resources Committee on 6th April 2010.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 19 March 2010

Ref: AAL0310

Contact Officer: George Kelman / Kenny Gillespie

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Housing & Social services Committee dated 2 September 2008
2. The Scottish Secure Tenant (Right to Repair) Regulations 2002
3. Scottish Housing Benchmarking Club Data for 2008/09

Appendix 1

GUIDANCE PREVIOUSLY ISSUED FOR STAFF TO ASSIST IN DEALING WITH EMERGENCY REPAIRS

(The guidelines were not exhaustive and not meant to cover every eventuality and discretion, particularly in the area where “social implications” need to be considered. Staff were asked to take into consideration the ability of the tenant to cope, e.g. elderly person, infirmity and the proximity of the next available category.)

1. Where personal or public danger could be involved.

e.g. gas leak/ spillage of flue gases / structures in dangerous condition or components loose / earth leakage / check electrics after fire / water damage.

2. Where action requires to be taken to prevent or lessen the occurrences of severe damage to the fabric of the property.

e.g. severe water penetration to compartments / severe soil / water penetration to compartments / flood prevention measures

3. Where restoration of an essential facility is required.

e.g. no electricity / no lights working / no cooking facilities / no water supply / lack of essential sanitation (wc / sink) / no heating / no hot water causing hardship.

4. Where any defect is causing serious nuisance to residents.

e.g. taps running full bore / discharge from overflow / no close or stair lighting / choked drain causing flooding / broken window pane / lift faulty.

5. Where measures require to be taken to secure premises to gain access.

e.g. board up void properties / board up after fire or flood damage / gaining access to unoccupied properties to effect repairs and making lock fast / repair of faulty door to provide access for tenant.

6. Any leaks which can be contained but may cause damage to internal finishes or fabric of property.

e.g. leak at: water supply pipe / storage tank or cylinder / boiler / radiator / fittings or joints / soil, waste or R.W. pipe / roof.

RIGHT TO REPAIR
DEFECTS, REPAIRS OF WHICH ARE QUALIFYING
REPAIRS AND MAXIMUM TIME FOR COMPLETION

Defect	Maximum time in working days from date immediately following the date of notification of qualifying repair or inspection
Blocked flue to open fire or boiler	1
Blocked or leaking foul drains, soil stacks, or toilet pans where there is no other toilet in the house	1
Blocked sink, bath or basin	1
Electric power :-	
loss of electric power;	1
partial loss of electric power	3
Unsafe access path or step	1
Insecure external window, door or lock	1
Significant leaks or flooding from water or heating pipes, tanks, cisterns	1
Loss or partial loss of gas supply	1
Loss or partial loss of space or water heating where no alternative heating is available	1
Toilet not flushing where there is no other toilet in the house	1
Unsafe power or lighting socket, or electrical fitting	1
Water supply :-	
loss of water supply	1
partial loss of water supply	3
Loose or detached banister or hand rail	3
Unsafe timber flooring or stair treads	3
Mechanical extractor fan in internal kitchen or bathroom not working	7*

* This timescale would be changed to 3 days if the changes in the report are accepted