

Customer Scrutiny

Repairs Priorities and Demand report



Background:

- 50% of repairs are currently classed as urgent or an emergency.
- This means **half** of the repairs Thirteen carry out are **unplanned**.
- The national average number of repairs per property is **3 per year**. Despite an extensive investment programme, **Thirteen properties average 5 repairs per year**.
- Some of this appears to be down to Thirteen being **too responsive**, as well as **duplicated demand** following **misdiagnosis** at the initial reporting stage.

We sought to answer 4 overall questions as part of this review...

1. Would moving from the 4 repair categories to Emergency and Next Available Appointment (NAA) only, improve customer satisfaction with repairs and reduce emergency demand?
2. How can we empower customers to self-help, thus reducing demand?
3. Are the tenant and landlord responsibilities right?
4. How can we improve diagnosis of repairs at the initial reporting stage?

Repair Priorities

We currently have 4 repair priority levels:

- Emergency (within 24 hours)
- Urgent (within 3 working days)
- Routine (within 28 days)
- Planned non urgent (within 60 days)

The new IT system for repairs has 3 priorities:

- Emergency
- Next available appointment
- Planned

We liked the new simple proposals, and noted that other organisations using these priorities have high satisfaction and lowered their average days to repair. However, we feel the following terms are more customer friendly:

- Emergency **make safe**
- Next **convenient** appointment
- Planned

We want the 'make safe' aspect stressed to customers, because we heard from trades team members that an "emergency repair" often led to failed expectations. Customers had expected their emergency would be fully repaired in the first visit, when it can often only be made safe, and then follow up work is completed at a later date.

The next convenient appointment is not always as soon as possible in the customers eyes. Sometimes, the most convenient appointments are when customers can book a day off work, or arrange for an adult to be in the house.

Self-help

There are many requests for a repair which the tenant is responsible for - such as blocked toilets, repairing small faults in walls etc. However, when the tenant is told this, we have nothing to signpost them to, and this can lead to difficult phone calls with our tenants. It can also create unnecessary demand.

You can find videos such as how to plumb in a washing machine, change a fuse, resetting your consumer unit, changing complex lightbulbs and many more. We have included some below. These videos allow customers to follow along for a few seconds, pause at key moments, and restart the tutorial when they are ready.

Self-help Video examples:

Dealing with damp and mould: <https://youtu.be/MJh6nR7hYU0>

Power cuts: <https://youtu.be/5uaNwVJ9KgY>

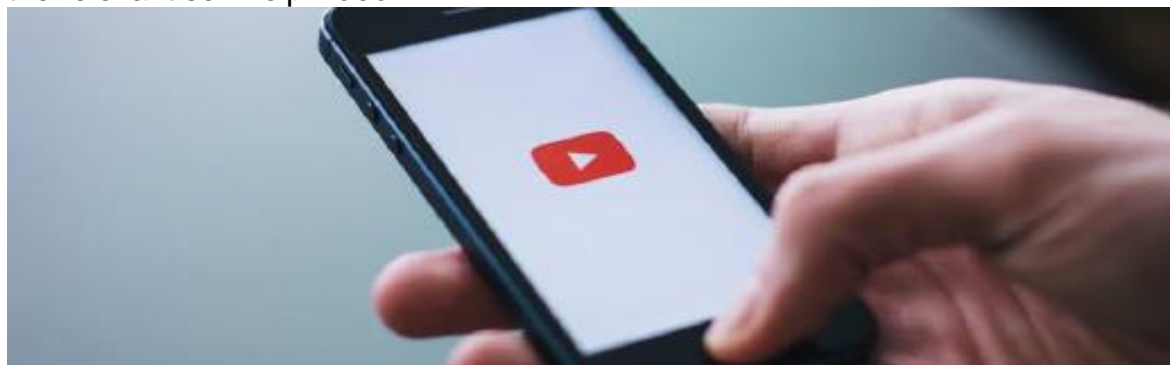
Unblocking a toilet: <https://youtu.be/fV56YkzoBHK>

Minor wall repairs: <https://youtu.be/AvAbxY8TWF4>

Replacing a broken toilet seat: <https://youtu.be/WXZs5x0ZLGw>

So - how can we promote self-help? Many organisations from product manufacturers, utility suppliers, and other housing providers are signposting customers to the internet for self-help.

When customers phone to report a non landlord repair, by having access to a suite of short, professional tutorials, staff could email or message the customer a link to the relevant self-help video.



Recharges:

"The amount of lock changes we get when people say they have lost their keys is unreal. When we tell the customer there is a cost, 9 times out of 10 they suddenly find them, or ring someone who has a spare" - Staff member

Requiring up front deposit payments for rechargeable repairs will help reduce demand. When customers understand the real cost of a repair, they are more likely to refrain from wasting resources. However, this should act as a deterrent to disingenuous requests. It should not leave customers in genuine need without access to a repair.

Nudging customers to self-help will....

- Improve demand
- Make sure tenants with genuine repairs receive timely appointments
- Provide tenants with clear choices

Tenant Responsibilities

The scrutiny panel have revisited tenant/landlord responsibilities and made some minor revisions. These are related to blocked toilets, drains and pipes. Blockages only occur inside the house because a household member has put something in the toilet or waste pipe. Blockages to drains outside of the home, should be recharged, if an inspection identifies it was caused by the tenants.

Tenants responsibilities: <https://youtu.be/vJwpW6wNr6A>

We liked Midland Hearts' very clear and easy to navigate repair responsibility tool on their website:

<http://www.midlandheart.org.uk/my-home/repairs/repair-responsibility-tool/>

Diagnosis

- Repairs are reported through the following channels:
- Phone
- Email
- Post
- Facebook/Twitter
- Self Service Portal
- Operations staff - New Homes Team/Neighbourhoods/Customer Involvement - these are normally identified on home visits or estate inspections.

The panel saw clear evidence of mis-diagnosis when some repairs were reported. However, there doesn't appear to be a comprehensive method of gathering feedback from trade operatives when they identify a mis-diagnosed repair.

This means colleagues taking the initial report of the repair are not always given the opportunity to learn from mistakes.

Because there are no clear methods of recording mis-diagnosed repairs, we are unable to quantify the volumes of mis-diagnosis, financial impact, or impact on customer satisfaction.

However, we were able to review detailed analysis of emergency repairs. We have reviewed data gathered over a 6 week period (March/April 2017) that analysed the accuracy of repairs categorised as P1 (to be responded to within 24 hours) and P2 (to be responded to within 3 days).

The panel noted the error rate for P1s was 19% and 12% for P2s. On some days the error rate was as high as 43% (Monday 10 April). On average 14.6 P1s per day, and 10.6 P2s per day are errors.

This means we are responding to approx. 26 urgent call outs on a daily basis which are not emergencies, and some should not have been responded to at all.

Some repairs seemed to require further questioning such as asking "who caused the damage?"

"Radiator hanging off the wall"

"Toilet has come off the wall"

"Front door has a hole in it"

We also noted that some of these call outs were not landlord responsibilities:

"Letter box flap not secure rattles when wind blows"

"Shower is full of limescale and wont turn on"

"Hot tap in kitchen dripping"

We also observed the contact team in action. The team have a really positive spirit despite working in a very demanding environment.

Some members of staff are reliant on more experienced team members when making decisions about emergency call outs. This is normal practice in a contact environment, especially when people are new to the job. However, one panel member observed a contact team member handling phone calls whilst fielding other queries from colleagues with customers on the phone at the same time.

Trade colleagues rated the accuracy of information they are provided about a repair as 4.4 out of 10.

The scheduling team rated the accuracy of information they are provided with about a repair as 5.9 out of 10.

The contact team told us that they appreciated the support of the schedulers and trade teams, but suggested it should be available more often.

Trades, Contact and Scheduling teams feel they could work more dynamically if they were located together. Contact advisors could access more specialist colleagues for advice, and potential errors in diagnoses will be able to be addressed in real-time, rather than retrospectively when costs have been incurred. Improved diagnoses and categorisation will lead to improved customer satisfaction and more efficient deployment of repairs resources.

We note that many leading service providers have specialist teams that handle repairs or technical telephone calls, and have a separate customer service team. These include Virgin Media, Autoglass, BT, SKY, EE, Cestria, Home Response 24, Sovereign Housing.

The panel feel strongly that the staff handling repairs calls should be located together with the Scheduling and Trades teams. We have not looked at a case for separating repairs calls out to a 'repairs only' contact team, as we have not had the time to consider the impact of this on the wider business.

"We need that working relationship again" - Trades Supervisor

"Because the demand for repairs is so high we do not have enough trades per area to cope therefore repairs are left longer which means they get worse and eventually end up becoming urgent or an emergency." - Scheduling Team Member

"We need repair experts, costs us money if we can't do it right first time" - Trade Operative

"I'm still getting asked to fix toilet seats" - Trade Operative

"It's difficult as we don't have regular contact or meet the team, would have been better if we had worked in the same office or area to build up the rapport" - Contact Team Member

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"The two teams would be best working alongside one another." - Contact Team Member

Commercially Minded

We were excited about the opportunity to commercialise the repairs service, and also felt this was another reason for the staff handling repairs calls to be located with specialists from Trades and Scheduling.

Increasing 'right first time' will lead to improved customer satisfaction and financial efficiencies. This in turn will make the service more commercially appealing. The panel are supportive of opportunities to develop profit that can be reinvested into homes and services for customers.

Reporting Repairs

The process that allows customers to self-report repairs must be easy to use, but also capture the right amount of information to allow accurate diagnosis. We like pictorial repairs reporting systems that are easy to follow.

Fixflo claims to reduce the demand on inspection appointments by allowing users to upload photos. It works across platforms - PC/Phone/Android/iOS etc, and can be used by staff who are out and about to report repairs more accurately using their mobile work devices.

The panel would like to see a similar solution that provides pictorial guidance for tenants when self-reporting, and that provides clear guidance for non-expert staff when out and about. It would ideally include a facility to exchange photographs. This will make sure information coming from colleagues and customers is to a similar standard, reducing the opportunity for misdiagnosis.

Fixflo - <https://youtu.be/buWVT1bX41o>

It is excellent service for customers when staff visiting homes and estates can report repairs, but it is only excellent service if the repair is accurately reported. We saw emails consisting of only 2 lines and limited vocabulary such as "boiler not working", or "window broken". Unfortunately by the time the email is intercepted, the opportunity to get further information from the customers has passed by. Did the boiler just need resetting? Is the window glass broken, the hinge, the lock? Should we send a joiner or a glazier?

We were very impressed to see that customers will be able to select their own appointments when booking online with the new system, and that it will promote best use of resources by highlighting when a trade operative is already in the area.

Communication Methods

If you want to wow customers - adapt your communication methods.

Thirteen has different methods of communicating with tenants when it comes to repairs, but it could be better. Customers are more likely to stay in touch with companies when they use the preferred methods of customers.

Autoglass has developed customer personas, identifying customers who are more likely to use email, SMS, Messenger, WhatsApp.

Many people using smart phones also utilise calendar apps such as Outlook, Google, S Planner etc. Even eBay use this method for reminding their customers that parcels are being delivered. If Thirteen emailed calendar appointments, they would pop up with notifications on the day for the customer.

The biggest barrier to repairs demand is communication. Being able to exchange accurate, timely information between customers and the organisation will deliver efficiencies and improved satisfaction.

We would like to see the various communication methods customers use incorporated into communication channels used for repairs. However, in recognition of the gaps in

customer communication data in Orchard, we would like to see some campaigns to gather as much contact information as possible from customers.

The panel noted that a leaflet promoting repairs provides a QR code (Quick Response) for customers to find out what their responsibilities are. However, the link takes you to a

landing page for repairs. It takes a further 3 clicks for the customer to locate their responsibilities.

Customers recently gave feedback about the self-service portal. Customers said the space they have to provide to provide text information about their repair is very limited, and they struggle to provide an accurate description with such a short amount of space.

Recommendations

Key recommendations:

1. Thirteen should replace existing repairs priorities, and adopt 'emergency make safe', 'planned' and 'next convenient appointment' priorities.
2. Agree on locating schedulers, staff handling repairs calls and trades teams together.

Supplementary recommendations:

3. Call quality assessments for repairs calls should focus on the measurement of call quality and diagnosis accuracy rather than transaction time.

4. The creation of an online form fill for staff to accurately report repairs on behalf of tenants, including mandatory fields and ability to upload photographs. This will prevent inadequate information being reported via internal email.
5. Introduce a simple mechanism that will allow customers to exchange photographs of problems or repairs to enable smarter diagnosis.
6. Introduce a small self-help pack for tenants moving into a Thirteen home which would include some basic DIY tools to enable customers to tackle manageable jobs.
7. Conduct a campaign to gather customer contact information such as mobile numbers and email addresses and preferred communication methods.
8. Establish and cater for preferred methods of contact rather than adopting a blanket approach limited to SMS and letters. These methods could include Messenger, WhatsApp, in app notifications, Live Chat, and calendar appointments etc.
9. Promote self-help through consistently applying, publishing and promoting recharges for tenant responsibilities.
10. Promote self-help by creating a suite of online instructional videos so that links can be emailed or texted out to customers to tackle repairs that the landlord is not responsible for. Promote self-help through consistently applying, publishing and promoting recharges for tenant responsibilities.
11. Introduce of an online repair responsibility tool with the new responsibilities such as is currently in use at Midland Heart, and promote via a simple leaflet to be included with generic mailings such as gas servicing or annual rent statement as well as online.
12. The introduction of an upfront payment for all rechargeable repairs. It should be noted this is primarily to act as a deterrent for unjustified repair requests, therefore those in genuine need or with vulnerability issues should still be accommodated.
13. Once repairs demand has improved, consider the introduction of recharging customers when they miss appointments, and recompensing customers when Thirteen fails to attend.
14. Empower the repairs specialists to reduce the need to escalate complaints and change customer perceptions when problems arise by providing access to a suite of low cost, quick compensation gifts such as branded merchandise, flowers, biscuits etc.
15. Re-chargeable repairs should not be offered to tenants who are currently in arrears and are not meeting their arrears re-payment agreements.
16. Our previous scrutiny report on Repairs included a recommendation for a handyman scheme. The panel recommend our next project will cover this topic.

Methodology

The panel have gathered evidence using a variety of methods:

- Interviews with staff from Customer Services, Trades, Scheduling
- Interviews with independent consultants
- Researching other customer service providers and landlords
- Surveys with staff
- Reviewed recent consultation with customers
- Reviewing performance information
- Reviewing emails and screenshots of repairs
- Observing and speaking with staff
- Listening to phone calls
- Desktop review of internal and external documents

We would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this scrutiny project:

Nik Turner - Head of Investment

Marilyn Wilson - Property Services Support Manager

Adele McLaren - Contact Manager

Julie Boothby - Contact Team leader

Steph Lawlor - Trades Supervisor

Joanne Brown - Scheduling Supervisor

Gary Kyte - Consultant

Michael Squires - Consultant

Matthew Trueman - Customer Involvement Co-ordinator

John Dinning - Production Control Cestria

Colleagues from Scheduling, Repairs and Customer Services who responded to our surveys.

The scrutiny panel are pleased to welcome a further 4 new members to the panel following recent recruitment, they will join us shortly. The panel are also looking for further projects. Please contact Matthew Trueman with your suggestions.

Click here to access some of the evidence we have gathered.

<http://bit.ly/scrutinyrepairsevidence>

A digital version of this report is accessed via the following link:

<https://sway.com/avj3kzXz7ZegzAhL?ref=Link>

