



EALING HOMES REPAIR WORKS SPECIALIST SCRUTINY PANEL 2007/8

Final Report
April 2008

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“Our judgement

- Three stars will be hard to achieve
- A lot will depend on repairs...”

Extract from the Housing Quality Network presentation to Ealing Homes on the results of the mock inspection undertaken in December 2007

PANEL FOREWORD



Councillor Kate Crawford

In September 2008, the council's housing management services will be inspected by the Audit Commission for a second time since Ealing Homes was established. The first inspection in 2005 resulted in the Council and Ealing Homes being awarded 2 stars with promising prospects but the inspection identified the Responsive Repairs Service as an area of weakness.

The responsive repairs service is one of the most visible services that the council provides to its tenants. Tenants want quality repairs completed on time according to appointments made and kept. Meanwhile, some of the national and local targets are challenging. For example, the Right to Repair legislation requires the completion of emergency and urgent responsive repairs within prescribed timescales of 1, 3 or 7 working days depending on the nature of the fault; and this is backed up by a local target of 98% completion of urgent repairs within timescales. And the Audit Commission has set a 60%:40% target for the balance of expenditure on planned vs. responsive repairs in order to maximise the efficiencies gained through planning repair and maintenance work rather than dealing with problems as they arise.

Ealing Homes has made great strides in improving service delivery since its inception and the panel was mindful of the level of past under-investment in council properties. A massive amount of catch-up work has been needed on the stock for which Ealing Homes was given delegated responsibility. The council's stock is now being improved by huge capital investment through the Decent Homes programme. With a further 5,000 non-decent properties being brought up to standard during 2007/8, the number of non-decent homes will have fallen to 3570, 27% of total council stock.

Bringing properties up to the Decent Homes standard should, over time, make it possible to reduce current levels of expenditure on responsive repairs and shift the balance more strongly towards planned and cyclical works. Also, the Estates Strategy now being developed by the council, once implemented, should enable Ealing Homes to plan more effectively for the longer term and underpin stability in the organisation.

Unusually, this Specialist Panel had only six months and a limited time-frame within which to complete its work. This made certain difficulties in obtaining desirable information all the more apparent. Council officers sometimes had to chase Ealing Homes for information and Ealing Homes was sometimes reluctant to release information because of perceived confidentialities, eg commercial sensitivities and the need to check documents for accuracy before release. Although the Council owns

Ealing Homes, it is an arm's length organization, with its own independent management board that holds governance responsibilities distinct from those of the council. These issues raised awareness of the importance of clarifying the information-sharing arrangements in the management agreement between the two parties.

The complex nature of having to request reports from council officers and information from Ealing Homes, the need to wait for the outcome and publication of reviews that had been commissioned by Ealing Homes and the provision of over one hundred documents for the panel to analyze, made this panel a considerable challenge to all involved.

Ealing Homes officers must be congratulated for their active participation and general openness through attending meetings, delivering information, setting up a day of presentations as a training exercise for **all** councillors and organising visits for the panel to meet with staff, contractors and resident participation groups. All this support was given when they were responding to the requests of other review bodies for information in addition to the ongoing monitoring and management requirements. My particular thanks go to Graham Jones and Jim Whoriskey.

I would also like to thank council officers Mark Brayford and Gill Tennet for their support throughout, including Gill's early guidance when the panel was established.

Thanks to a flexible and creative approach - with panel members attending residents consultation meetings and visiting Ealing Homes and their contractors in addition to the formal, and lengthy committee meetings that were supported by an excellent scrutiny officer, Nigel Spalding - the target was met and I thank the panel for their considerable hard work.

To understand the issues that result in cost-efficient and good quality service delivery, it is important to really get behind the statistics and reports and meet with the people who receive the service. As a panel we met with many tenants and leaseholders and on behalf of the panel, I would like to express my thanks for the time you set aside to meet with us. The information gained from you has impacted greatly on this review.

Councillor Kate Crawford
Chairman
Ealing Homes Specialist Scrutiny Panel

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Panel establishment and brief

The Ealing Homes Repair Works Specialist Scrutiny Panel was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 19th April 2007. Council appointed 9 members to the panel on 15th May 2007 – 5 Conservatives, 3 Labour and 1 Liberal Democrat. Council also appointed a Labour (minority party) member as the Chairman and a Conservative as the Vice-chairman.

The OSC meeting on 22 May agreed the following brief for the Panel:

“to undertake an audit of repair works to Ealing Homes properties, in terms of customer satisfaction, quality of workmanship and value for money for tenants and leaseholders.”

The panel membership, including the three non-voting advisory members appointed by the panel, is listed in section 4 of this report.

It is understood that this topic was chosen for a Specialist Scrutiny Panel because of concern amongst a range of Members about the number and nature of enquiries being received from constituents on the work of the Ealing Homes Repairs Service.

1.2 The Conservative Party manifesto 2006

The Conservative Party 2006 manifesto said:

“Providing decent homes to people in need is important. Ealing’s housing stock has suffered years of under investment and that is why we wholeheartedly supported the establishment of Ealing Homes, the arms length management organisation that now manages the 19,000 council homes in Ealing. Ealing Homes can raise capital to invest in improving our homes and a Conservative administration will give its full support to Ealing Homes in bringing Ealing’s housing stock up to the decent homes standard.”

1.3 The Corporate Plan

Theme 1 of the Corporate Plan covers the environment, housing and culture. The Plan Plan states

“Our strategic goal for this theme is to make Ealing a better place to live. In order to achieve this, the Council and its partners on the LSP have agreed long-term objectives. These are to:

- improve the quality of our...housing estates...
- improve the quality of residents’ homes across all tenures... “

1.4 Key facts about the Repairs and Maintenance service

When Ealing Homes became operational in 2004, the council gave it delegated responsibility for the management of the repairs and maintenance contracts along with a delegated budget and a management fee for the delivery of the service.

In 2007/8, the budget for all forms of repairs and maintenance (responsive, planned cyclical

and voids) is £14.06m. This figure takes into account an efficiency saving of £784k to the budget made at the start of the year plus a further £1m reduction, which was made mid-year. Further details on the budget and the reasons for this £1m reduction are contained in section 2.10.9.

The repairs and maintenance budget is, and can only be, funded out of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is, in effect, the landlord account for the council's housing stock. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 places a legal duty on the council to ring-fence this account and ensure that it does not show a deficit over the year. Therefore, any reduction in income (which is derived mainly from rents and the government's HRA subsidy) must be matched with a commensurate reduction in expenditure, which includes repairs and maintenance.

Financially, there is a clear distinction between the Repairs and Maintenance service, which is revenue-funded out of the HRA, and the capital-funded Decent Homes programme.

The relationship between the council and Ealing Homes is set out in a Management Agreement developed in 2004. Ealing Homes prepares an annual Business & Delivery Plan for agreement by the council and provides monthly monitoring reports to a performance management meeting with council officers.

There is no doubt that the Repairs and Maintenance service has been transformed since Ealing Homes was first established. Details of numerous changes, implemented in order to improve the service, were reported to the panel. Examples include:

- Centralising all R&M services and closing 4 local offices improving value for money and service delivery to customers
- Implementing the Open Housing Management System (OHMS) integrated housing software from April 2004 and other IT technologies including telephone call monitoring, web based Repair Finder and remote management systems for lifts and communal heating systems.
- Restructuring the team in April 2006 into 4 inter-related R&M teams (Voids & Disrepair, Repair Link Call Centre, Mechanical & Electrical and Responsive Repairs), to provide greater customer focus
- Setting up a new Out of Office Hours (OOH) Emergency Call Centre for emergency and life threatening repairs, creating clear procedures for the reporting of "emergency" and non-emergency" issues and introducing an OOH surveyor/manager rota to support the OOH procedures

An illustration of the degree of change in the service is that recorded customer satisfaction rates have risen from 88% in 2004/5 to above 95% in recent months. Further information on customer satisfaction is contained in section 2.3.

The Repairs and Maintenance Team now works in five sections from Westgate House:

- Responsive Repairs West
- Responsive Repairs East
- Voids and Disrepairs
- Mechanical and Engineering (eg heating and lifts)
- Repairs Centre

As at September 2007, there were 18,126 properties in management including 4,946 leaseholder units. In 2006/7, completed around 45,000 repairs. Repair Link (the call centre for repairs) receives around 5,000 calls per month. This is the context in which the number of Members' enquiries and residents' complaints should be viewed.

1.5 Developments before and during the panel's operation

Shortly before the Panel started work, a new Interim Managing Director and a new Interim Housing Management Director were appointed within Ealing Homes. A new Director of Housing within the council was also appointed. At the same time, the panel was told that the council would be taking a stronger role in performance managing Ealing Homes.

The changing nature of the relationship between the two bodies resulted in the panel being informed that all reports to the panel would be authored and presented by council officers and not by Ealing Homes officers as might have otherwise been assumed. Also, around the time that the panel started work, a re-structuring of the housing department was initiated. Of particular significance was the creation of a new post of Head of Strategic Client Management and Performance.

In a separate development, a new 'Protocol between LBE and Ealing Homes for dealing with Complaints & Member Enquiries' was implemented on 31st July 2007 shortly before the panel started work.

At its first meeting, the panel was informed of two major pieces of work being undertaken by Ealing Homes that would add considerably to the panel's pool of available information.

Firstly, the panel learnt that Ealing Homes had commissioned the Housing Quality Network (HQN) to undertake a mock inspection in preparation for the Audit Commission inspection in 2008. This mock inspection was carried out in November 2007. This had both a positive and a negative impact on the panel and Ealing Homes as follows.

On the positive side this meant that the panel had the opportunity to consider the mock inspection results at its penultimate meeting. Relevant comments and assessments from the mock inspection have been woven into this report but it should be noted that Ealing Homes believe the mock inspection was more critical than the full inspection in 2008 is expected to be. It should also be noted that HQN themselves observed that some of the members of the focus groups (the comments of which are also included in this report) appeared to be overly-negative in their approach.

On the negative side it meant that Ealing Homes was being subjected to two simultaneous reviews and demands for information. The timescale also meant that panel members did not have the opportunity to receive and consider Ealing Homes' follow-up action plan (as will be contained in the 2008/9 Business and Delivery Plan to be agreed with the council).

Secondly, the panel was informed, at its first meeting, that Ealing Homes had engaged Collaborative Working Consultants (CWC) to undertake a value for money review of the repairs and maintenance contracts and that a report on the findings would be provided to the council by mid-November 2007. After continued pressure from the panel and

council officers, Ealing Homes stated that this report would be made available to the panel in early February. However, the report never materialised. Instead the panel was informed, at its last meeting, that the report remains in draft form because it contains information that is commercially sensitive to the responsive repairs contractors and provided to CWC on that basis. There is no agreement for its release at present to the Council. Questions were asked as to why the report had not been neither shared on a confidential basis with the panel chairman and scrutiny officer nor presented to a confidential part of the panel meeting.

Overall, the panel was seriously challenged by the volume and complexity of the information that it had to consider within its six months' of operation (which was shorter than normal for a Specialist Scrutiny Panel).

1.6 How the Panel went about its work

The panel met four times. The first meeting was used to plan the panel's work and gain an initial understanding of the service and the relationship between Ealing Homes and the council. The final meeting concentrated on the content of the panel's report and recommendations. The middle two meetings were supplemented by a lot of work being undertaken outside of panel meetings.

As well as asking for detailed information on a number of issues for circulation to panel members, the panel also initiated and/or participated a series of meetings and other activities. Included in this work:

- letters were sent to all residents associations inviting their views and participation, eg by nominating potential co-optees
- five panel members participated in a consultation meeting on the revision of the Repairs Handbook, organised by Ealing Homes,
- five panel members met with Ealing Homes' surveyors to seek answers to a series of prepared questions
- seven panel members (and 6 other council members) participated in an open day on the repairs service at the Ealing Homes offices in Westgate House, including a viewing of the Repair Link Call Centre in operation
- three panel members visited the local offices of the two main contractors, Mears and Kier
- one member met with the Service Improvement Manager at Ealing Homes to discuss the handling of members' enquiries
- one member undertook a door-to-door survey of residents who had utilised the repairs service in the last two years
- three members sought views at a meeting of the Ealing Homes' Residents Council
- an article publicising the work of the Panel was included in December edition of 'Around Ealing'.

1.7 Acknowledging diversity

The Panel was mindful that a significant proportion of council tenants experience disadvantage and vulnerability because of poverty, physical and mental ill-health, physical disability or frailty, literacy difficulties and language barriers. A simple visual comparison of the relevant maps of Ealing suggests a strong correlation between the

location of the council's housing estates and the areas of higher levels of deprivation identified by the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation. Central to the Panel's work, therefore, was an examination of ways in which the repairs service takes account of, and responds to, the needs of vulnerable people.

2. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members' concerns and enquiries

2.1.1 Survey of members

Prior to the start of the panel, all 69 Ealing Members were invited to provide information about their casework experience on the Ealing Homes' repairs. This was done in order to gain a better understanding of the concerns that had driven the choice of this topic for scrutiny (as reported in 1.1 above).

14 Members responded to the questionnaire, identifying their concerns as:

- the speed with which the council responds; needing to understand the divide between what the council's responsibilities and those of the tenant; the need to encourage tenants to take some ownership for where they live. One of the ways of doing this is for all sides to understand where the line is drawn so that as councillors we only pick up cases where the council has failed in its responsibilities
- excessive delays when responding to requests
- the length of time it takes to respond to the initial complaint.
- speed of repairs
- speed of work
- the time it takes to fix the problem; the work which in many instances has been carried out is not up to standard and the same thing has to be done again within 3 months
- failure to turn up; failure to finish jobs properly; failure to complete all jobs/tasks on the list
- out of hours service not responding to urgent need for repairs
- repairs to common parts left because of future regeneration plans and internal damage constantly attributed to condensation due to tenants "life-style"
- Ealing Homes not addressing issues of damp walls
- not repairing communal doors expediently
- overflowing pipes and gutters

2.1.2 Members' enquiries

In the first quarter of 2007/8, a total of 44 enquiries were received on repair works, including enquiries from MPs and a Hillingdon Member. 20 out of the Ealing's 69 Members had contacted the service. Most Members had made only one enquiry:

- 1 enquiry was received from 12 Members
- 2 enquiries from 4 Members
- 3 enquiries from 2 Members
- 5 enquiries from 1 Member

- 6 enquiries from 1 Member

The corporate standards for responding to Members' enquiries is that they should be acknowledged within 4 days and that 90% should be resolved within 10 working days.

2.1.3 Observations from Ealing Homes

Ealing Homes' officers wondered about (a) the extent to which the *current* views of Members are still shaped by their *historical* experience of performance, eg prior to 2006 and (b) the clarity of the distinction between repairs & maintenance enquiries and enquiries resulting from the Decent Homes programme. Ealing Homes also reported that new "Recall" procedures have been established to deal with "chasers".

2.1.4 When do residents contact councillors?

Panel members suspected that residents were contacting members after failing to resolve matters directly with Ealing Homes. However, when this assumption was put to the test by comparing the Members' Enquiries data with the Ealing Homes complaints data it was found that, with very few exceptions, the specific issues raised by members with Members' Enquiries had not previously been raised by the resident directly with Ealing Homes.

2.1.5 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- many residents appear to prefer contacting their councillor with repairs issues rather than Ealing Homes
- the reasons for this are unclear, but possibilities include: a lack of awareness amongst residents of the Ealing Homes complaints procedures, a lack of faith or trust in the procedures, concern about the possible consequences of raising a complaint, a belief that councillors have the power to secure more urgent action perhaps coupled with some members' desire to be seen to be exercising influence
- members are particularly concerned about a lack of feedback on the resolution of problems that they raise
- most members do not receive, as a matter of course, much information about the work of Ealing Homes and the operation of the Repairs and Maintenance service
- not all relevant Ealing Homes' officers are familiar with the role of elected Members
- some issues raised by members could be dealt with more quickly and easily by key Ealing Homes officers than through a formal members' enquiry procedure
- there is a lack of clarity about responsibilities, policies and procedures

Recommendations

To Cabinet

R1 Provide all Members with information and training on the operation of the Ealing Homes repairs service describing how members can most easily and quickly resolve issues of concern raised by the constituents, including information on how the Tenants' Support Service might be able to assist more vulnerable residents. (This information could be part of a more substantial document that gives Members advice on all aspects of housing casework).

R2 Advise Members (through the booklet) to (a) restrict their enquiries to matters where the resident has already sought, but not secured, resolution of their issue directly with the Ealing Homes Complaints Officer and (b) copy in the relevant Ealing Homes officer when reporting a members' enquiry in case the matter can be resolved easily without the need to resort to formal procedures

R3 Add an additional section in the template for Members' enquiries which records when an outcome is expected so that this can be used to track and chase progress

To Ealing Homes

R4 Organise an annual open day for all Members, providing Members with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the services provided by Ealing Homes

R5 Arrange annual tours of the minor, as well as the major estates, inviting the participation of relevant ward Members

R6 Add Members to the distribution list of Ealing Homes' newsletter 'Key Issues'

R7 Keep Members informed of the arrangements for mobile surgeries and give consideration to the possibility of joint surgeries

R8 Make arrangements to ensure that all relevant staff have an awareness of the role of elected Members

2.2 Complaints (to Ealing Homes)

2.2.1 Complaints procedure

The panel was informed that a new 'Protocol between the council and Ealing Homes for dealing with Complaints & Member Enquiries' had been implemented on 31st July 2007. Through the Protocol, the two bodies had agreed that all complainants should be directed to contact Ealing Homes and that the option of making a complaint to the council should be removed. This was backed up for a clear requirement on Ealing Homes to provide the council with access to complaints information through the Open House Management System (OHMS) and info view (business objects) reports.

All complaints should be acknowledged within 4 working days and 90% of complaints should be resolved within 10 working days – a target that Ealing Homes has been achieving during 2007/8. Where the complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days a holding letter or e-mail should be sent advising the customer of the delay, the reasons for it and, where possible, the expected timescale for completion.

2.2.2 Complaints data

Between April and September 2007, Ealing Homes' complaints officers logged 76 formal stage 1 complaints onto the Open Housing Management System (OHMS). This indicates there is a downward trend in the number of total formal complaints being made as 175 complaints were received in the full year 2006/7 - 2.4 per 1000 residents.

A further 107 contacts with the complaints officers were dealt with through the "escalation" process. This is an arrangement whereby, if a problem can be resolved within a 24-hour timescale (and the complainant is agreeable), the problem is not logged as a formal stage 1 complaint. No written data has been maintained on the reasons or outcomes of these escalation issues but Ealing Homes reported that these cases could be tracked via the Complaints Officers and the Open Housing Management System so that proper monitoring could be undertaken and monthly reports provided.

Slightly over a third of the formal complaints referred to jobs not being completed within timescales. Two thirds of the formal complaints were either wholly or partially upheld.

There was little difference in the numbers of complaints between the East and West areas of the borough (which have different repairs contractors), although it was noted that the South Acton estate generated almost a quarter of all complaints. Council officers expressed concern that no location data had been provided for 14 of the 76 complaints.

2.2.3 Contribution to service improvement

Complaints data and trends are reported to quarterly Ealing Homes' Continuous Improvement Group. This group includes six resident representatives recruited through Ealing Homes' magazine 'Key Issues'. Monthly statistics are also included in the performance indicator reports provided to the Senior Management Team, the Management Operational Team and the council.

Meetings also take place with repairs managers to discuss issues arising from complaints, the monitoring process and the Continuous Improvement Group.

A system to check customer satisfaction on complaints has only recently been established and it was expected that the first report would become available in January 2008.

2.2.4 Feedback from mini-survey

A doorstep survey of 25 Acton residents (which was not necessarily a representative sample) provided anecdotal evidence that the complaints procedure and residents' entitlements are not well known.

2.2.5 Awareness-raising

Ealing Homes' officers reported that an annual awareness campaign of the complaints procedures is undertaken through publicity in 'Key Issues', staff giving information to callers and the website. No information was provided on the impact of such campaigns.

2.2.6 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported that, of the 40 participants in the focus group run on repairs, which was not necessarily a representative sample, "none had made formal complaints and did not know how/who to/what the process was"

2.2.7 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- there is widespread lack of awareness of the complaints procedures
- the sharing of language skills within Ealing Homes' teams is helpful
- complaints form an important part of the overall feedback on the service
- a reduction in the number of complaints received (as proposed in Ealing Homes' self-assessment) is not necessarily an indicator of success
- indeed, an increased number of complaints can be expected from greater resident awareness of, and trust in, the complaints procedures; this would increase the pool of information available to managers to identify problems/opportunities and drive service improvements
- the escalation process is poorly understood and data on matters escalated was not seen by the panel
- there may be a need for vulnerable tenants to have access to people who can help them make informal and formal complaints
- there should be incentives for people who report repairs requirements in communal areas, eg recognition letters

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R9 Assess the effectiveness of previous publicity campaigns to raise awareness of the complaints procedure so that lessons can be learnt about which methods are proving most effective

R10 Develop an overall strategy to raise awareness of the complaints procedure, highlighting the value of such information for the improvement of services

R11 Provide residents and the council with regular feedback, including examples, on how complaints information is used to improve services

R12 Clarify the difference between those issues that may appropriately be dealt with through the escalation process and those issues which must be treated as formal complaints

R13 Monitor and regularly report on cases dealt with through the escalation process to key identify learning points

R14 Examine and report on ways in which more vulnerable residents can be given support to make and provide details on formal complaints, eg from the Tenants Support Team

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

2.3.1 Method of assessment

Staff at Ealing Homes send out customer satisfaction survey forms on the back of a letter that is sent to residents to acknowledge their repair request and provide details of the target timescale for completion. Telephone calls are also made to a 10% sample.

In March 2008, Ealing Homes' officers reported that they were also planning to amend the customer satisfaction procedures, by the end of April, as following:

- a prepaid calling card with the relevant customer satisfaction questions will be left for any inspections that result in a no access.
- this will also be followed up with a satisfaction survey letter if the call card is not returned.
- the Quality Officers will also be tasked to ask the satisfaction survey questions as part of the overall visit.
- in turn, results will be recorded in the OHMS system, and it is anticipated that this will lead to an increase in the satisfaction survey return rates.

2.3.2 Response rates

In Quarter 1 of 2007/8, 7105 survey forms were sent out and 996 completed forms were returned - a response rate of 14%. The response rate dropped to 13% in Quarter 2 and returned to 14% in Q3. Ealing Homes has undertaken an analysis of the responses and identified that there is a comparatively low response rate from black and minority ethnic people and a comparatively high response rate from the 65+ age group.

The panel was informed that the council has, on several occasions, asked Ealing Homes to improve the response rates from satisfaction surveys, but Ealing Homes have argued that they were working within established guidelines. Ealing Homes' officers did, however, further report in February that a range of options were being examined to improve response rates, including:

- follow-up phone surveys to non-respondents
- additional prize draws for returned surveys (currently £50 per month in east and west areas)
- publicity on changes made because of residents' comments

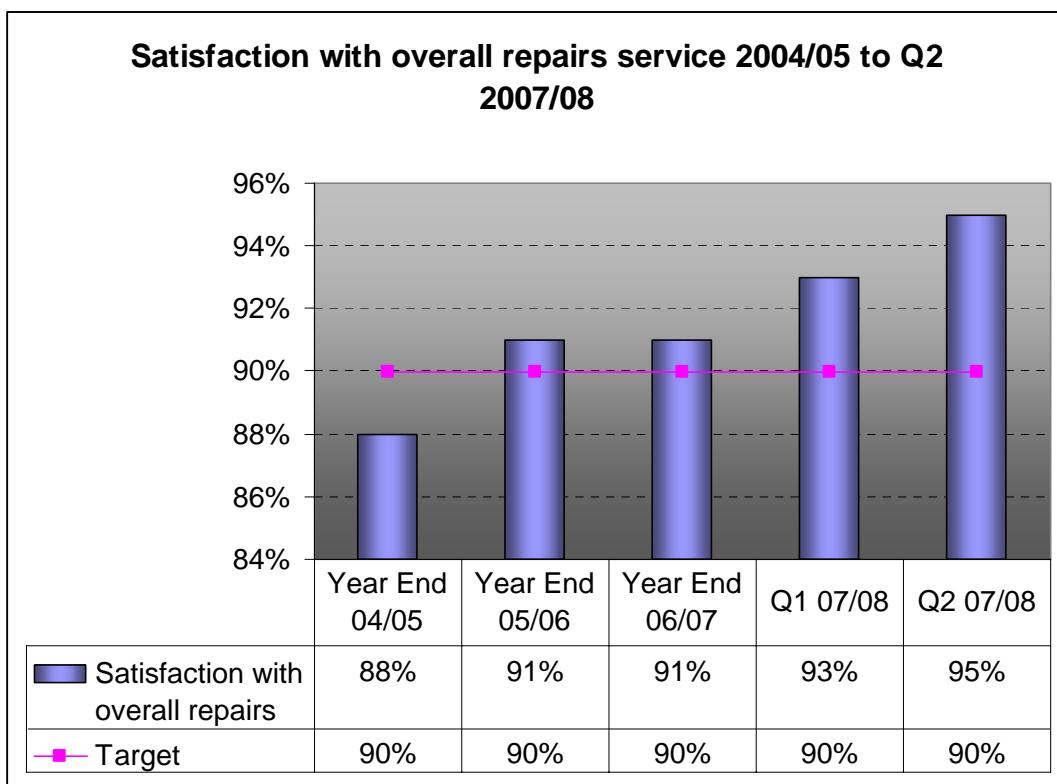
The comparative data with other areas on the next page was also provided from the benchmarking data collated by the Housing Quality Network:

Organisation	Repairs customer satisfaction postal response rate
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	%
Ealing Homes	12
Hillingdon	2-5
Hundred Housing Association	10-15
Wandsworth	9-11
Arcadia Housing Group	5-10
Hounslow	10.7

2.3.3 Satisfaction rates

Overall customer satisfaction was 93% in Q1 and 95% in Q2 of 2007/8. More specific data is also collected on appointment-keeping, opinions on the quality of work, whether ID was shown, whether operatives tidied up and repairs request handling by Ealing Homes.



2.3.4 Contractors' surveys

The four main contractors (Mears, Kier, Quality and T Brown) also undertake their own post inspections and/or call customers for their feedback after the works are finished. Their survey questions are similar to, but not exactly the same as, those used by Ealing Homes. Arrangements are made for Ealing Homes and the contractors to survey different customers. Ealing Homes collects data on the response rates. On a visit to one of the contractors, panel members noted that the key worker passed the data on to the national office but did not appear to know how it was being utilised.

2.3.5 Results from mini-survey of residents

Twenty-five residents in one area of Ealing were interviewed on the doorstep, by a panel member, to find out their views on the repairs service. This was not a random sample, so the results cannot be viewed as being necessarily representative of the total resident population. Also, no crosscheck was made on whether Ealing Homes is responsible for all the repairs requested.

However, it remains a matter of concern that, of the twenty-five residents surveyed, six described the repairs service overall as "not satisfactory" and seven as "poor", with only four describing the service as "OK" and two as "excellent". Having to chase Ealing Homes to get their job done and experiencing delays in getting heating restored appeared to be particular drivers for the dissatisfaction expressed. More positively, 15 residents were satisfied with the conduct of the person undertaken the repairs and only 3 residents were dissatisfied.

2.3.6 New tenants satisfaction surveys

Postal surveys are also undertaken on the views of new tenants on the state of their new homes, ie on the quality of work undertaken by the voids team. Satisfaction with the state of repair was 92% in Q3 and Q2 of 2007/8, slightly down from 96% in Q1 of 2007/8 and Q4 of 2006/7. Overall satisfaction with the services of the voids team was 97% in Q2, rising to 100% in Q3. No actions were identified for managers from the data for Q2 and Q3.

In comparison to the total cohort of new tenants, Ealing Homes found that black and minority ethnic people were under-represented, the 25-44 age group were over-represented and women were under-represented in the response rates. 32% of respondents reported that they had some form of disability, long-term illness or infirmity.

2.3.7 Use in service improvement

The results of the satisfaction survey are examined by relevant service managers and actions taken as a result recorded. In addition, the information is reported to a resident-led panel (the Continuous Improvement Group), which has the power to make recommendations in response to the information to improve service delivery. These meetings are minuted and reported to Ealing Homes Management Operational Team meetings who can then make the relevant changes to procedures.

Ealing Homes' officers highlighted one example of recommendations implemented by the Continuous Improvement Group:

- In September 2006, repairs contractors were informed residents had complained about contractors not having ID on them. This was raised with contractors at monthly performance meetings and in toolbox talks. Contractor performance is monitored through the satisfaction survey.

Ealing Homes' officers also reported that new initiatives or services following adverse satisfaction surveys include:

- New Repairs Handbook 2005 outlining services available, how to access them and how to complain for failures in service. The IT Call Centre monitoring software in 2005 in order to receive, monitor and report on residents requests for repairs services.
- Recording all telephone enquiries both during the daytime and out of office hours

- One surveyor handling all LBE Insurance and Leaseholder Insurance claims following considerable dissatisfaction and complaints from all stakeholders. Both LBE's Insurance Team and the Home Ownership Service are now very satisfied with the pivotal role undertaken by the Repairs Service to progress and resolve insurance claims.
- Mobile Surgeries and Estate Inspections to provide Repairs Service for residents at the local estate level
- Appointments were introduced for the 1st time in 2004 following resident complaints. More appointments are now being made and 3 appointment slots instead of the current 2 appointment slots are planned. This will also increase the number of Tenant Satisfaction surveys and hopefully the number of completed resident satisfaction survey forms. Handyman Service to improve the speed and quality of communal repairs following dissatisfaction by tenants and leaseholders.
- Staff training on all aspects of the Repairs Service including Improving Customer Services and the landlords legal repairing obligations
- Restructuring the service (see 1.4 above)
- New Out of Hours Call Centre (see 1.4 above)

2.3.8 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported that:

- the customer satisfaction procedure was due to be reviewed in 2006 but [this] has not been undertaken
- ensure the satisfaction procedure is reviewed as a matter of some urgency
- there is little evidence that satisfaction survey responses are robustly used to shape and improve services
- ensure satisfaction surveys are uniform and used effectively across all service areas to improve delivery
- written satisfaction survey undertaken with a 11.4% response sent with repair receipt
- 91% satisfaction 2006/07
- satisfaction is not monitored against ethnicity and vulnerability though the data is gathered

2.3.9 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- the response rates are very low, even if statistically valid
- further concerns are raised by the proportion of residents expressing concerns in the panel's mini-survey
- language and literacy issues are likely to be a contributory factor to the low response rate
- there is an over-reliance on just one source of, statistical, data
- more substantive customer satisfaction feedback is needed
- Ealing Homes could improve the amount of customer satisfaction information that it receives by, for example, taking advice from the council's Research & Consultation Team on the timing, content and presentation of the questions,

examining ways in which the response rate from black and minority ethnic customers can be improved, and seeking qualitative as well as quantitative data that may be obtained from face to face interviews

- Ealing Homes' plans to improve its customer satisfaction procedures (see March 2008 update in 2.3.1 above) are welcome but timescales are needed for the completion of each step

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R15 Review if and how use is being made of **all** available customer satisfaction, complaints and commentary data to shape and improve services

R16 Complete its review (with assistance from the council's Research & Consultation Team) of ways in which the response rate for the customer satisfaction survey might be increased, targeting – in particular - the apparent under-representation of black and minority ethnic customers

R17 Develop further ways of securing qualitative information on customer satisfaction in addition to the quantitative data collected through the customer satisfaction survey

To Ealing Homes and Cabinet

R18 Work together to review whether the multiple arrangements for seeking customer feedback and undertaking quality control can be streamlined in order to focus more resources on possible service improvements

2.4 Information to residents

2.4.1 Repairs Handbook

The principal source of information to residents on the repairs service is a Repairs Handbook that was distributed to all residents by post in 2005. The Handbook is also included in the Welcome Pack given to new residents. Much of the information is also included in the 'Repair Locator' inter-active service on the Ealing Homes' website – this is covered in 2.6.1 below.

The Repairs Handbook was under review whilst the panel was in operation. The review included a focus-group style consultation meeting in November 2007 with selected, interested, residents. Five panel members attended and participated in this event.

The notes of the meeting record that participants raised the following points on the current Repairs Handbook:

- size – should remain the same (or slightly larger to accommodate a larger typeface)

- spiral spine – a proportion of Handbooks should be in the spiral format to assist older residents
- pictures describing repair components – was seen to be very helpful
- too much information in book – should be reviewed & reduced if possible
- colours are fine
- phone numbers/useful contacts need to be reviewed
- larger typeface is preferred
- ‘handy hints’ – This section was found to be useful
- more information on Right to Repair, Estate Services and ID cards requested

Comments on the repairs procedures are included in section 2.6 below.

The panel chairman and vice-chairman subsequently reviewed the proposed draft revised Handbook with a view to seeing how the points made at the consultation meeting had been taken into account. They, and Ealing Homes, were also informed of some specific issues raised by the Sheltered Housing Service that also needed to be taken into account including:

- the need to recognise that sheltered housing tenants are unable to take on the responsibilities of general tenants
- problems with the arrangements for replacement locks and keys
- and the need for Ealing Homes to undertake regular checks of all smoke detectors.

As at mid-February 2008, a final draft of the revised handbook has been prepared and the intention is to present it to the Ealing Homes Senior Management Team, the Scrutiny Panel Chairman and Vice-Chairman and the Ealing Homes Board for final approval and confirmation that adequate budgets are provided. Once approved, the handbook will be printed and posted to all tenants.

2.4.2 Other information on the repairs service

Panel members also viewed leaflets and cards that included details of the repairs service and Ealing Homes' officers reported that some material was translated on request. It was noted that a range of formats were used; panel members were concerned that some formats appeared complex and multi-coloured, which may cause difficulties for people with visual impairments.

Panel members were aware that information about the repairs service is also provided on the Ealing Homes website but this was not reviewed for its usability. Some panel members reported that information was displayed in some housing blocks.

In its self-assessment, Ealing Homes also recorded that an Ealing Homes service DVD is available in six community languages, that language request forms are attached to all surveys and key letters and that the ‘Repair Locator’ service was due to be translated into other languages.

2.4.3 Sign up pack

Copies of the sign up pack given to new tenants were made available to the panel. Panel members who reviewed the pack commented that whilst much of the

material was good its presentation, as an assembly of documents of different shapes, sizes and formats, was poor.

Ealing Homes' officers acknowledged the poor quality pack and reported that a new pack should be completed by the beginning of the 2008/9 financial year.

2.4.3 Bills to leaseholders

A specific area of concern highlighted to the panel was the process for billing leaseholders for the service charges, including repairs.

Panel members were informed that the target timetable is for leaseholders to be contacted:

- in March to advise them of the estimated charge for the financial year starting in April, enabling leaseholders to start making appropriate monthly payments
- and in September of the following year, to inform them of the final actual costs and the consequent increased payments or refund due.

In addition, as and when the need arises, leaseholders must be consulted about any proposed repairs or scheduled works that are expected to cost any lessee over £250.

For the financial year 2007/8, estimates were sent out on 2nd April 2006. However, the final account adjustment letters were not sent out in September 2007. Instead, leaseholders received a letter in October 2007 informing them that these would be delayed.

Ealing Homes' officers reported to the final meeting of the panel that leaseholders received their service charge bills on 27 February 2008, with meetings being arranged to inform residents on Islip Manor, Buckingham Avenue, South Acton and Rectory of the reasons for the differences between the estimates and final bills. These meetings were attended by managers and officers from leasehold services and a repairs manager. These estates were chosen as leaseholders on these estates experienced the largest 'increase' between the 'estimates' and the 'actuals'. As a result of requests made from residents on Race Course Estate, a meeting was being arranged for them on 17 March 2008.

Four panel members reviewed anonymised versions of the estimate and planned final account letters and discussed the current arrangements with an Ealing Homes officer. It was reported that some leaseholders were about to receive "particularly high final account adjustments" such that they "may have difficulty in paying the full amount within 28 days". Such leaseholders were to be advised to "contact this office immediately to discuss suitable payment options".

The main reasons being given for the increased costs in 2006/7 are that:

- drain surveys carried out after April 2006 showed that many drains needed to be repaired, treated and cleaned
- no allowance had been made for the 5-yearly statutory survey, and remedial actions, on electrical intake cupboards
- the additional costs for profits, overheads and preliminaries levied by repairs contractors are not included on the job order as they are paid separately and,

- when added, increased the total cost of the work
- the variable management fee was set too low at 20% when the actual costs were 26%

Panel members also learnt that leaseholders are provided with little or no opportunity to check and verify that costs are accurate and reasonable. Indeed, leaseholders do not appear to be given the opportunity to check that repairs and maintenance have actually been carried out and carried out to an acceptable standard.

2.4.4 Other issues

Other issues raised within the panel:

- surprise that the caretakers' job description included responsibility for collecting leaves, as it had been assumed (by a co-optee) that this was the responsibility of the gardeners. However, Ealing Homes' officers reported that the responsibility varied according to location.
- the need to make better use of the notice boards on the estates to provide information about events (such as repairs surgeries, estate visits etc) contact numbers and residents meetings
- the significant impact of vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour on repairs and maintenance costs
- concern from Ealing Homes that the council needs to review its August 1991 agreement with NTL as a growing number of residents (e.g. on Osterley Court, Copley and Cheyne Path) are losing reception of the five terrestrial channels as a result of Virgin Media (which took over NTL) failing to carry out aerial repairs (as agreed by the council with NTL)

2.4.5 Mock inspection assessment

The Housing Quality Network (HQN) reported that the focus group on repairs had commented on “newsletters and magazines – [that it was] not clear if these are Ealing Homes or Council, [the] information [was] not clear on who to go to for what and where”

2.4.6 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

General principles

- need to make tenants and leaseholders more aware of **both** service standards and residents' responsibilities
- there is a place for penalties where repairs are requested by tenants without good reason e.g. a tenant states that it is an emergency but the work is clearly a routine repair

Welcome Pack

- the current tenants' Welcome Pack is inadequate – much of the content is good but there is much duplication and the information overall is poorly-presented
- Ealing Homes' intention to produce a new Welcome Pack is welcome
- the Council could provide information on the locality, infra-structure,

services for inclusion in the Welcome Pack; the A-Z of Council services booklet could also be included

Communications generally

- more information about repairs and maintenance could be displayed in blocks and communal areas
- better use could be made of the notice boards on the estates
- there is widespread confusion about the differing roles and responsibilities of Ealing Homes and Ealing Council
- the design, format and presentation of Ealing Homes' leaflets, booklets, cards and other publications are variable and some of the material may be difficult for those with visual impairments to read
- a more obvious corporate style/design needs to be adopted which clearly distinguishes Ealing Homes from Ealing Council
- the Repair to Your Home and Estate leaflets give contact details for repairs for both the East and West area - this may be confusing, especially for tenants new to Ealing. It may also be useful to specify contact details for fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles

Leaseholder billing

- a 5-month delay in the distribution of final account adjustment letters is unacceptable
- this delay, along with the increased costs being communicated and the lack of ongoing opportunities for leaseholders to check and verify the accuracy of bills are unlikely to convince leaseholders that they are receiving value for money
- leaseholders need to be given greater opportunity to check that repairs and maintenance works are completed and are completed to a satisfactory standard
- better records are needed on communal repairs that are requested
- the inclusion of the logos of both Ealing Homes and Ealing Council, the signature of a council officer and the direction for people with queries to call at the Home Ownership Services at Ealing Homes ("our office") presents a confused picture on organisational responsibilities

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R19 Prepare the new Welcome Pack in consultation with residents, officers and Members

R20 Develop a corporate style that is consistent for **all** Ealing Homes publications, ensuring that formats used are accessible to the widest possible audience (including those with sensory impairments) and that residents can clearly distinguish between Ealing Homes and council publications

R21 Give increased priority in future publications to making residents more aware of Ealing Homes service standards, residents rights **and** residents duties and

responsibilities

R22 Ensure that all communal blocks and estate notice boards display information about how and when to contact the Repair Link

R23 Staff be given clearer guidance on what information to collect whenever communal repairs are requested, in consultation with leaseholders

R24 Arrange for leaseholders (collectively or through appropriate representatives) are able to check that all repairs and maintenance works, for which they are to be billed, are carried out and are carried out to a satisfactory standard

To Cabinet

R25 Seek agreement with Virgin Media on the maintenance of aerials (pending the introduction of digital cabling and comprehensive maintenance agreement) and building on the August 1991 agreement with NTL (which has been taken over by Virgin Media)

To Cabinet and Ealing Homes

R26 Support the charging of residents where repairs operatives discover that residents have demanded urgent action on matters which are not genuine emergencies within the responsibility of Ealing Homes

R27 Determine which **one** organisation should send out future leaseholder estimates and final account adjustment letters

R28 Ensure that the final account adjustment letters to leaseholders are sent out in September of each year, failing which a report should be presented to the Ealing Homes Board and/or Cabinet explaining the reasons for delay

2.5 Customer/resident involvement

2.5.1 Methods

The Panel was informed about the range of methods that Ealing Homes uses to secure customer/resident involvement in the development of the repairs and maintenance service. These methods include:

- an annual programme of estate walkabouts/inspections involving tenants, *councillors*, housing officers and contractors
- the work of the Resident Inspection Teams (RITs) which were set up in 2005 – 7 Inspectors who undertake Ealing Homes' internal mystery shopping survey by phoning, personal visits & surveys. The RITs report to the Continuous Improvement Group that makes recommendations from discussions in the meeting. Notes of the September 2007 were provided to the Panel – this

- particular meeting did not make any recommendations.
- Repairs Soundboard Meetings held twice a year, where tenants are consulted on specific issues
 - the involvement of six residents in the Continuous Improvement Group recruited through advertising in 'Key Issues' and the Ealing Homes' website reviewing complaints data and performance.
 - resident participation in evaluation panels for the appointment of repairs contracts supported by training for residents reps on all aspects of the process as and when contracts are let
 - the newly-created Residents Council
 - the consideration, by the Residents Council, of the possible establishment of Tenants' Forum, dealing with operational issues, to replace the former East and West Area Boards

The panel was also informed that Ealing Homes:

- maintains a database of residents willing to be involved in service developments
- ran a series of workshops during 2007 to explain the ways in which residents could get involved in the work of Ealing Homes generally
- regularly undertakes focus group meetings
- has had difficulties recruiting residents to participate in formal structures, e.g. only 40 residents responded to the invitation to join the Residents' Council

2.5.2 Mock inspection assessment

HQN recorded the **strengths** of Ealing Homes' (overall) resident involvement arrangements as:

- There is an annual tenants conference
- Choices have been set with customer involvement
- Customers have been involved in setting the lettable standard and in the selection of some contractors
- Limited use of tenants (2) in monitoring services - generally staff did not know about them and outcomes from their work not provided

HQN reported that a **weakness** of Ealing Homes' resident involvement arrangements is that "customers are not robustly involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring in this service area"

2.5.3 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- recruiting resident participants requires considerable work
- councillors do not have information about the members, and work, of the Residents Inspection Teams
- going out to meet residents appears to be the most effective form of engagement
- there are opportunities to build on groups/activities that have been initiated for other reasons, e.g. prompted by local planning issues
- residents can be effective in mobilising other residents
- formal residents associations may work well in large estates (and are well-

supported by Ealing Homes) but smaller estates may have difficulties in attracting enough residents required to form an association.

- Ealing Homes should encourage and support the establishment of informal residents associations – once these are set up and running they may attract enough people thus progressing to a formal status

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R29 Provide Members with information on members of the Residents' Inspection Teams

To Cabinet

R30 Explore ways in which the council can create the infra-structure (eg through information, training, grants, recognition of voluntary activity) necessary to underpin the development of active citizenship amongst its tenants and leaseholders (supplementing and complementing Ealing Homes responsibility to secure resident involvement in its own work)

2.6 Requesting repairs

2.6.1 Current procedure for requests

Residents can report the need for a repair by telephone, via the website (using a picture guide of home fittings), by e-mail, on site with officers, at the Housing Area Officers, by post and through mobile surgeries run by the contractors on the major estates.

Most requests are received by telephone at the Repair Link Call Centre in Westgate House. The call centre operates from Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm, Saturday mornings 9am to 12pm and Thursday evenings to 8pm. There are separate freephone numbers for the East (Acton, Ealing and Hanwell) and West (Greenford, Northolt, Perivale and Southall) areas.

At present, there are two separate numbers for emergency repairs outside office hours, one for emergency lift repairs another for all other repairs. This service is provided by Mears on the basis of a small payment of about £2-3k pa towards the total costs. Ealing Homes only considers an out-of-hours repair to be an emergency if it is dangerous or a health risk to occupants, or if it could cause serious damage to property. Callers with any other concerns are directed to call Repair Link during office hours, as the existing IT arrangements do not permit a transfer of data by computer. If a request is found not to be a genuine emergency then Ealing Homes charges an emergency call-out fee.

There are also, at present, two further telephone numbers for heating and hot water repairs (including an out-of-hours number), making a total of seven different numbers for reporting repairs.

2.6.2 Repair Link performance

Performance Indicators	2006/7	Target 2007/8	April-Dec 2007
Number of calls to Repair Link	63684	N/A	47751
Number of calls answered by Repair Link	59136	N/A	41915
% of calls to Repair Link answered by a person	93%	90%	88%
% of calls to Repair Link answered within 15 secs	70%	N/A	63%
% of calls to Repair Link abandoned	7%	N/A	10%

The performance of Repair Link on the % of call answered by a person has fluctuated considerably over the period April to December 2007, eg it was as high as 97% in June 2007 and as low as 72% in December. Ealing Homes reported that in October/November 2007 a new phone system was being installed and that, as a result, the figures were lower than previous months.

Repair Link has no facility for calling back customers who have rung off.

2.6.3 Recent developments/plans

At the consultation meeting on the Repairs Handbook, in November 2007, participants:

- agreed that they would prefer the opening hours to be Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm and Saturday Mornings 9am to 12pm, with the late Thursday opening being cancelled due to very limited usage in the past three years.
- requested consideration of a single freephone number for use 24 hours a day for the Repair Link Call Centre and the Out of Office Hours (OOH) Call Centre.
- were happy with the voice recording and the current phone options available
- supported the suggestion that the phone options should be printed in the handbook.
- raised the possibility of having a ring back service

In January 2008, Ealing Homes reported to the Panel that it intended to establish a single 24-hour freephone number for all general repairs. As at mid-February, the arrangements are due to be finalized in tandem with the revised content of the Repairs Handbook taking into account the financial implications, which are yet to be confirmed.

2.6.4 Other issues examined

A number of other unrelated issues were reported to and/or considered by the panel, including

- panel members suggested that the caretakers could take a more active role in identifying and reporting repairs requirements, e.g. by filling in a report every 6 months. Ealing Homes' officers reported that they were working to agree a new protocol with the caretaking services for raising repairs

- Ealing Homes also reported that school run appointment slots were going to be implemented, ie adding in a time slot of 10am to 2pm
- the panel learnt that the Open House Management System (OHMS) does not record the contact details of residents who report the need for repairs to external or communal areas. Ealing Homes' officers reviewed the possibility of amending the system so that an acknowledgment could be sent to the resident raising the request and were informed that this could be achieved at a cost of approximately £3k
- the panel asked whether a call-back facility could be provided by Repair Link
- the indication, from the mini-survey of 25 residents in Acton (which was not necessarily representative) that some residents find that they have to chase sub-contractors themselves rather than rely on the chasing to be done by the main contractor or Ealing Homes

2.6.5 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported the following **strengths**:

- The repairs handbook has repair diagrams
- There are a variety of ways tenants can report repairs including freephone number, writing, via the internet and on site with officers
- Phone calls are effectively monitored at the call centre
- Appointments are arranged at point of contact for repairs and pre inspections
- Estate surgeries undertaken by repair contractors
- Flag used for a variety of issues such as gas servicing, warranties, adapted properties and investment programmes
- There is an operative code of conduct
- Handy person service for communal areas
- Handy hints section in repairs handbook
- There is flexibility in the prioritisation of repairs for elderly and vulnerable
- 'Repairs locator' in use
- Problematic contact centre calls go through an escalation process
- Repairs can be reported in a number of way including via the web site with 'interfinder'
- There is a freephone number for day time reporting
- 'Repairs locator' is used

HQN also reported the following **weaknesses**:

- Chasing calls with call centre are around 30% for repairs and our feedback from customers also indicated this was an issue for them
- Take steps to reduce the level of calls chasing repairs
- The out of hours service is not seamless to the day time number

2.6.6 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- Ealing Homes' intention to use one telephone number for in and out-of-hours services 24/7 is welcome
- the fact that residents are expected to call heating companies direct results in some residents being unclear as to who to contact if there are subsequent problems

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R31 Consider offering call-back facilities for customers hanging up before their call is answered and/or the opportunity for time prompted voice mail (on which residents can leave their contact details and a message)

R32 Give caretakers a more active role in identifying and reporting repairs (and other local problems that need addressing such as fly tipping and graffiti etc.)

R33 Examine why some residents believe that they are responsible for chasing sub-contractors for the completion of work (rather than Mears/Keir or Ealing Homes) and take any necessary remedial action

R34 Residents to be advised in the Repairs Handbook and on the Repair Link answer phone that they should contact the heating repairs contractors direct for first request and Repair Link for any subsequent problems

R35 Ensure all staff and operatives are trained to identify and pass on information, to Repair Link, about residents who are vulnerable

R36 Arrange regular, scheduled, inspections of sheltered housing schemes

R37 Ensure the establishment of one telephone number for general repairs, both during and out-of office hours, and ensure that there is a full sharing of data between the in-hours and out-of-hours services

2.7 Policy on timescales

2.7.1 Current policy on responsive repairs

The timescales for each category in the current policy are:

- Emergency – within 4 hours (but this is not shown in the Repairs Handbook)
- Emergency – within 1 day, includes repairs that are conditional to removing immediate danger to people, avoiding flooding and major damages to property.
- Urgent – within 3 or 7 days

[Urgent repair include works that are critical to overcome serious inconvenience to the tenant but without immediate health and safety risks.]

- Routine - 28 days – routine repairs do not cause immediate inconvenience or present danger to the occupants or the public, but should wait for planned maintenance.

- Major works – 7 weeks – this is for repairs that are complicated or need items to be “made up” or scaffolding put up
- Planned maintenance – this is for work to maintain the general condition of the property and work that is not essential

Under the Right to Repair Regulations 1994, tenants have a legal right to have specified types of repairs, costing less than £250, completed within a prescribed timescale of 1, 3 or 7 working days depending on the nature of the fault. For example, a total loss of electric power must be rectified within 1 working day, a partial loss of water supply within 3 working days and a leaking roof within 7 working days. If the work is not completed on time, a tenant has a right to ask for Ealing Homes to give the work to a second contractor. If the second contractor also fails to complete the work within the specified timescale, this contractor is liable to pay the tenant compensation of £10 plus £2 per day for every day the defect remains uncompleted up to a maximum of £50.

2.7.2 Mock inspection assessment

HQN commented that “repair priorities are not challenging at 24 hours for emergencies, three and seven working days for urgent and 28 working days for routine”. Ealing Homes comment that this was based on their reading of the Repairs Handbook, which does not include the additional 4-hour target for emergency repairs listed in 2.7.1.

2.7.3 Proposed/planned policy

In the course of reviewing and revising the Repairs Handbook (around the time of the mock inspection), Ealing Homes reported an intention to revise the policy as follows:

- Emergency out of office hours for life- or property-threatening situations – within 4 hours
- Emergency during office hours – within 1 day (or 4 hours for life- or property-threatening situations)
- Urgent – within 3 days for Right to Repair works
- Urgent - within 7 days for Right to Repair works for leaking roofs, internal extractor fans where there is no window and door entryphone handsets
- Routine - 20 days
- Planned - 90 days

In accordance with the Audit Commission’s recommendation and BVPI, only Right to Repair prescribed works will be classified as emergency or urgent jobs.

For Major Works and Planned Maintenance the timescale depends on the nature of the work and whether scaffolding and/or leaseholder consultation is required.

2.7.4 Current issues

The panel also took note of the following points:

- Ealing Homes is only dealing with emergency/urgent repairs in Q4 of 2007/8 due to the impact of the £1m reduction in the budget, which occurred mid-year. It seems likely that this will have the effect of increasing the number of queries and complaints raised by residents with Ealing Homes and Members.

- however, the planned revised policy (as described above) will – if backed up by sufficient funding and put into effect – will improve some of the response times
- there appeared to be a lack of clarity as to which body is responsible for setting policy on timescales – the council or Ealing Homes?

2.7.5 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- there needs to be clarity about whether the council or Ealing Homes is responsible for setting policy on timescales
- some benchmarking of the timescales with other ALMOs is appropriate before final decisions on timescales are made
- a flexible, responsive approach needs to be taken on timescales, policies and procedures when working with residents with special needs and particular vulnerabilities

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R38 Ensure that the Handbook and all other relevant publicity makes clear what, tightly limited, repairs will be undertaken out-of-hours

R39 Develop and implement a protocol that ensures that residents with special needs and those who are particularly vulnerable receive a quality of service that is not based simply on following stated procedures and timescales but ensures that their quality of life does not suffer

To Cabinet and Ealing Homes

R40 Resolve how and by whom policy on timescales should be determined and check that what is being proposed is in keeping with best practice elsewhere.

2.8 Performance on timescales

2.8.1 Responsive repairs

The table on the next page sets out key data on the performance of the repairs in the current year.

Performance Indicator	Performance to December	Highest/lowest	End of year	2007/8 Target
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	2007	monthly data	projection	
% urgent responsive repairs completed within Government time limits*	96.3%	94.6% – 97.3%	97%	98%
Average number of calendar days taken to complete non-urgent responsive repairs*	7.8	6.2 – 8	7	7.5
Average number of days taken to re-let local authority housing*	26.42	26.38 – 27.21	26.5	26.5
% of responsive repairs where appointment was made and kept	98%	96.3% - 99.2%	98%	97.5%
% of emergency repairs completed on time	94%	94% – 96.5%	95%	97%
% of urgent repairs completed on time	93%	93% – 96.3%	94%	97%
% of routine repairs completed on time	94%	94% – 95.6%	95%	97%
% dwellings that have a gas service within the last year	95.3%	91.5% – 97.7%	99.5%	100%
* These performance indicators are identified in the Ealing Homes' Business and Delivery Plan as being CPA-critical				

The 2007/8 targets are as agreed between the council and Ealing Homes prior to the start of the year and are as documented in the Business and Delivery Plan. Ealing Homes' officers comment that the targets were set in the top quartile range (for ALMOs) but are very hard for an organisation which only started three years ago to achieve as there still many IT, staff training and contractor monitoring issues to overcome.

The above table indicates that, in its performance to December 2007, Ealing Homes was *under-performing* in relation to target on the:

- completion of urgent responsive repairs within Government time limits
- average number of calendar days taken to complete non-urgent responsive repairs
- completion of emergency repairs on time
- completion of urgent repairs on time
- completion of routine repairs on time
- making and keeping of responsive repairs appointments

Ealing Homes was *performing* better than target on the:

- average number of days taken to re-let local authority housing

- making and keeping appointments for responsive repairs.

The panel was informed that, in the six months from April to September 2006/7, 601 urgent and 354 emergency repairs were not delivered within target.

The panel was also given further data that indicated that a deterioration in performance has occurred on several of the above indicators in the latter half of 2007. Council officers reported that Ealing Homes was preparing a paper on this matter seeking to explain why this has occurred. Ealing Homes' officers reported at the end of February that there have been contractor problems due to:

- heating contracts ending on 31.1.08
- 2 new heating contracts starting on 1.2.08
- Mears undergoing a major staff restructuring and an internal procedural review
- the £1m reduction in the budget in September 2007 resulting in only health and safety or emergency and urgent orders with short completion dates being ordered and conversely a reduction occurring in routine repairs with longer timescales. The impact of this is a reduction in the contractors' operative resource levels.
- more appointments are being made to improve customer services from late 2007. It may take some time for the contractors to organise their operatives and administer the additional appointments

Additionally, a major review has been undertaken of all report criteria (eg what works are emergency and urgent), the data required for each report and the monitoring systems (eg new housekeeping and contract monitoring reports have been developed). This was due to be followed by staff training commencing in February 2008.

2.8.2 Gas safety

Performance Indicator	2007/8 Target	Performance to December 2007	Highest/lowest monthly data
% dwellings that have had a gas safety check within the last year	100%	95.3%	91.5% – 97.7%

Ealing Homes is therefore some distance short of the 100% target that is set by the legal requirement on all landlords. Difficulties in gaining access to some properties are a major contributory factor. It is Ealing Homes' policy:

- to obtain a court Order for no access and not to make forced entries
- to undertake servicing on a 10-month timescale from April to January thereby leaving February and March to concentrate on the remaining properties without a gas safety check. In those 2 months, evening and weekend visits are undertaken as these are the most cost-effective method and reduce the very high cost and time consumed by legal court action

Panel members learnt that Ealing Homes' is exploring, through the Residents Council, the possibility of providing incentives to tenants (eg through a prize draw) who ensure access for their annual gas safety check.

2.8.3 Other issues considered

Some Ealing Homes' surveyors were of the view that re-locating them on a permanent (instead of part-time, as current) basis with the two main contractors, Mears and Kier, would significantly improve the efficiency of the service, eg by eliminating time needed for data to be transferred and enabling quicker decision-making on variation orders (ie changes to original instructions).

During the visits to the main contractors, panel members noted that Mears had an equipment store on site, provided by Wolsey, whilst Kier provided its operatives with hand-held PDAs.

The panel was interested to know whether the employment, by the contractors, of handypersons had resulted in efficiency gains. This is dealt with in section 2.10.5.

Ealing Homes' officers reported on plans to send text/voicemail appointment reminders to residents. This was originally scheduled for introduction in January 2008 but is now scheduled for August 2008

2.8.4 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported that the **focus group** commented as follows:

- Minor repairs quick but anything that costs money takes a lot longer
- Surveyors never turn up – always excuses why they were late, no shows, never apologise
- Repairs appointments 8-1/1-6pm and they do turn up, workmen ok
- Main issues of inconsistency, having to chase on everything

HQN reported the following **strengths**:

- Flexible appointments made for repairs and inspections
- Appointments made and kept are 98.1% with a target of 97%
- Pre inspection repairs are measured from the date reported by the tenant
- There is a contractor code of conduct in place
- Repairs completed first visit are around 98.1% with 97% target
- Composite rates are used in the SOR process
- Estate walkabouts used to identify repairs
- Parking permits for staff and operatives
- Right to repairs are achieving 97% on time

HQN also reported the following **weaknesses**:

- There are high levels of emergency repairs at around 28.57% with emergency and urgent combined at 49.40%
- 54.44% of repairs resulted in a variation order (VO) 2006/07

2.8.5 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- the advantages and disadvantages of the co-location of Ealing Homes' surveyors with the main contractors need to be considered and a decision made on this possibility
- there is an urgent need for Ealing Homes to get its new IT systems in place and

- fully operational
- an assessment needs to be made of the extent to which Ealing Homes and the contractors effectively track work that is undertaken by sub-contractors
- a proper assessment should be made of the advantages and any disadvantages of the handypersons scheme with a view to seeking an expansion of this service if this is beneficial
- it is not clear why Ealing Homes' performance deteriorated in the latter part of 2007

Recommendations

To Cabinet and Ealing Homes

R41 Review the target timescales for 2008/9 taking into account the expectations of the Audit Commission but also (a) the level of resources that may be required to achieve small percentage gains at the top end of the scale and (b) the extent to which such work might detract from other more important priorities for residents

2.9 Performance on quality

2.9.1 Procedures

Panel members asked about the procedures for post-inspections and were informed that:

- the IT system randomly selects 10% of orders with a value less than 1k and **all** orders with a value over 1k for both communal and dwelling repairs.
- the Quality Control officers are then required to inspect and complete post inspections within 10 days and either pass or fail them. Appointments are not made for communal inspections but as far as possible for tenanted dwellings.
- should a failure occur, this is emailed immediately to the contractor and then reported through the monthly contracts meetings. All failures, along with evidence such as photos are logged electronically.
- the contractors in turn report when the remedial work is completed and this is re-inspected before release for payment or failed again.

Furthermore:

- all voids are also post-inspected.
- the Mechanical & Engineering Team have specific quality control procedures for each cyclical contract - for example: spot checks are carried out on the 12,000 per annum domestic gas servicing programme and each district heating site is visited twice per annum.

In addition to Ealing Homes' own post-inspections, all main contractors are required to carry out their own post inspections, and also, telephone surveys.

2.9.2 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported the following weaknesses:

- The levels of pre and post inspections are not effectively monitored (16.73% post inspection but arrived late)
- 54.44% of repairs resulted in a variation order (VO) in 2006/07

2.9.3 Panel conclusions

These are incorporated into the next section on Value for Money.

2.10 Value for Money

2.10.1 Benchmarking

In 2006/7, the Audit Commission's assessment of Ealing Homes, as compared with other ALMOs in London and across the country, was as follows:

Aspect	Performance in comparison to ALMOs nationally	Performance in comparison to London peer group
Responsive and voids spend	Lower middle quartile	Median point
Completion of repairs on time	Lower middle quartile	Lower middle quartile
Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance	Lower middle quartile	Upper middle quartile
Overall tenant satisfaction	Upper middle quartile	Top quartile

Utilising both the national and London data indicates that Ealing Homes' weakest area is its capacity to complete repairs on time and its strongest area is overall tenant satisfaction.

As the table on the next page demonstrates, Ealing Homes is also able to make comparison of its performance with ALMOs both nationally and with the London ALMO peer group through the Housemark benchmarking website. The London ALMO peer group consists of Hillingdon, Hounslow, Ascham Homes, Brent, Havering, Hammersmith & Fulham, Barnet, Newham, Hackney and Haringey.

Item	Quarter					Housemark Top Quartile Q3 07/08	
	Q3 2006/7	Q4 2006/7	Q1 2007/8	Q2 2007/8	Q3 2007/8	London ALMO'S	National
Urgent repairs completed in Government time limits	97%	97.2%	96.6%	94.81%	95.10%	97.96%	96.4%
Appointments Made and Kept	99%	99.2%	97.7%	96.6%	98.6%	98.04%	96.8%

2.10.2 Balance of planned v. responsive repairs

The Audit Commission set a target of achieving a 60:40 balance in expenditure on planned and responsive repairs. This target is included in Ealing Homes Business and Delivery Plan for 2007/8 and was intended to maximise the efficiencies gained from proactively planning work rather than reactively acting on problems as they arise. However, it should also be noted that the Audit Commission's August 2007 report 'The Harder Test 2007' stated that this indicator was being "Deleted due to difficulty with interpretation and usefulness in measuring performance".

In the first 9 months of 2007/8 Ealing Homes fell short of its target with a 55:45 balance in expenditure on Planned:Responsive repairs. Ealing Homes reported that this was due in part to a mid-year reduction of the Repairs and Maintenance budget by £1m. This effectively stopped new Planned works so that the remaining budget has been used for health and safety, emergency and urgent repairs only.

Another action taken by Ealing Homes has been the reduction of Planned external and communal re-decorations programme due to the Decent Homes External Envelope contracts funded from the Capital budget. In 2006/7 this amounted to £2.25m but reduced to £400k in 2007/8. This reduces the total Planned revenue spend and proportionally increases the Responsive revenue spend, unless alternative Planned works are undertaken.

The panel asked Ealing Homes what action was being taken to improve the balance. Ealing Homes reported that the main action was through improvement to the arrangements for the cyclical contracts, including:

- the introduction of a new comprehensive servicing and repair contracts for all key Mechanical & Engineering works, including domestic and district heating, door entry systems, fire detection & emergency lighting
- an overhaul of the lifts to ensure that all planned elements of work are included under the contract
- plans to tender a new Legionella water risk assessments and prevention works in 2008

Ealing Homes also reported that other repairs and maintenance specialist works were now being processed as Planned works, including asbestos removal, specialist metal working for fencing and balconies etc, and communal fencing. And in 2008, the Repairs & Maintenance team plans to investigate "Batching" other low priority repair works and seeking to place these works as Planned works.

Finally, following benchmarking with other Landlords Ealing Homes has decided to separate all works costing over £1.5k approximately and review if that work can be classified as Planned because they are beyond what could be defined as a responsive repair, both in terms of the scale and type of work involved and the final cost.

2.10.3 Average costs

The average cost of maintenance per unit in 2006/7 was £23.95. The target for 2007/8 is £25.86. The average cost per responsive repair was £98 - comparatively low as compared with other London ALMOs through Housemark.

2.10.4 Void properties

Performance on re-letting properties has been as follows:

Performance Indicator	2007/8 Target	Performance to December 2007	Highest/lowest monthly data
Average number of days taken to re-let local authority housing	26.5	26.42	26.38 – 27.21

2.10.5 Use of caretakers, handypersons and sheltered housing wardens/officers

Section 2.6 reports on the panel's consideration, and the action being taken by Ealing Homes, to get the Caretakers to take a more active role in reporting and acting upon repairs and maintenance issues.

The panel also asked about the handyperson teams and the extent to which they might save costs. Ealing Homes reported that these are provided by Kier and Mears, consist of 2 people and 1 vehicle, are not based on any particular estate, are paid for on a monthly basis and provide the following services in communal areas only:

- minor drain clearance gullies etc
- emergency glazing
- boarding up
- clearing rubbish
- general repairs excluding electrical works
- minor repairs to Sheltered Housing communal areas
- urgent repairs following estates inspections
- ad hoc requests of an urgent nature.

Ealing Homes' officers were of the view that the Handypersons Teams added quality to the service but did not secure savings.

Ealing Homes' officers expressed concern about the costs of paying contractors to undertake weekly fire alarm tests in Sheltered Housing units.

2.10.6 Gains from current contracts

Contracts at 1 st April 2007 – Revenue only		
	Contract Term Years	Notes
District heating - KBR	5	Ends Jan 08
Domestic heating - KBR	5	Ends Jan 08
Domestic heating - Quality	5	Ends Jan 08
Emergency Lighting - KBR	5	Ended 11.07
Fire Alarm - KBR	5	Ended 11.07
Lifts - Pders	5	
Door Entry Systems-ACS	3	Ended May 07
West contract - Mears	5	
East contract - Kier	5	

Contracts from 1 st April 2008 – Revenue only		
	Contract Term	Notes
District heating – T Brown	26 mths	Starts Feb 08 Ends Mar 10
Domestic heating - Quality	26 mths	Starts Feb 08 Ends Mar 10
Emergency Lighting & Fire Alarm-AJS	3 yrs	Started 11.07 Ends Oct 10
Lifts - PDERS	5 yrs	Ends 2008 Excl 2 yr ext
Door Entry Systems - ACS	3 yrs	Started June 07 Ends Mar 10
West contract - Mears	5 yrs	Started 4.04 Ends Mar 09 Excl 2 yr ext
East contract - Kier	5 yrs	Started 4.04 Ends Mar 09 Excl 2 yr ext

Three forms of contracts currently in use are:

- Trowers and Hamlin Term Partnering Contracts
- NEC Partnering Contracts
- JCT Term Maintenance Contracts

Value for money (VfM) gains in line with Gershon have been achieved over the last three years whereby those savings have been re-invested into additional Repairs and Maintenance works. Additionally, these efficiencies significantly contribute to the wider service to meet customer priorities. Options for joint working are continuously explored and taken up where they show clear VFM benefits for EH.

Further VFM financial savings and efficiencies have been obtained including:

- The Domestic Heating contract saved over £400k pa by Partnership working, improved efficiencies including better servicing and fewer repairs and negation of contract fluctuations. A further £100k pa is anticipated by moving from 2 Domestic

Heating contracts to 1 contract in 2008, and also, reducing servicing per annum by targeting the 12 month due date. These would have been impossible to do in 2004 as there was no comprehensive gas heating data base of all appliances in the stock or effective Partnering Heating contracts.

- Achieving 99.66% gas servicing results in significant savings by minimising Court and legal costs for no access, compensation payments for potential loss of life and resultant bad press arising from Coroners inquests and HSE investigations.
- Combining 2 separate contracts for Emergency Lighting and Fire Detection into 1 contract thereby reducing overhead and preliminary contract costs.
- Ending by mutual agreement the KBR contracts, which were not cost effective due to management and IT, problems and also low tender submissions that did not cover the costs of undertaking the repairs and maintenance works. These matters were identified by enforcing contract specifications (e.g. checking batteries and servicing schedules not previously done or done in frequently) and the recent financial investigations of these contracts
- A variety of major achievements have been obtained from the 2 main repairs contracts including an appointments system and actually doing the work ordered which did not happen on a regular basis before 2004.

2.10.7 Future procurement

Nearly all contracts exceed the EU threshold and must therefore be competitively tested via procedures compliant with EU Procurement Directives. Those contracts that fall below EU thresholds are competitively tendered via procedures compliant with public procurement legislation and Ealing Homes' own Contract Procedure Rules.

Open Book contracting is planned but has not yet implemented. Open Book is a technique used to ensure that the client is working with true costs. It is designed to achieve better value for money and efficiency benefits for the client whilst paying contractors their true costs and rewarding them for shared risks and outstanding performance. The technique works on the basis of:

- quarterly financial and work reviews
- ring-fencing the contractors overheads and profits (thereby preventing excessive profits)
- sharing and jointly managing risks with contractors
- working jointly seeking continuous improvement

The new District and Domestic Heating contract was procured through the London Area Procurement Network (LAPN). This is a relatively new body that describes itself on its website (<http://www.lapn.org.uk/>) as being “an alliance of London Authorities who want to collaborate to improve the efficiency and value of services to their tenants and local communities”. The website also reports that LAPN's current work is focused on:

- Procurement - selecting contractors for frameworks and consulting with residents
- Convergence - assisting LAPN members to establish similar procurement processes
- Continuous improvement - preparing the supply chain to work with us

2.10.8 Strategic Planning

Ealing Homes adopted the council's 2003/05 Maintenance Strategy at the inception of the ALMO in 2004 and subsequently reviewed this for 2005/7. The panel was informed that this strategy, critical for an assessing the relative priority to be given to various possible approaches to improvements, repairs and maintenance (through the Decent Homes programme and responsive, planned and cyclical repairs) is in the process of being revised.

The panel also appreciated that the Key Estates Strategy currently being developed by the council will have a major impact on the nature of services to be provided by Ealing Homes and therefore on the effective planning of services and the stability of the organization.

2.10.9 Efficiency and other savings

The following table sets out the annual inflation-adjusted budget, the efficiency gain required and the actual budget for Ealing Homes' repairs and maintenance programme:

	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
	Actual (£000)	Actual (£000)	Actual (£000)	Budget (£000)
Inflation-adjusted budget	18,963	18,000	18,128	15,844
Less efficiency gain	1,538	513	2,901	1,784
Actual budget	17,425	17,487	15,226	14,060*

The top row reflects the previous year's actual spend with an increase for inflation and a weighting based on the change in number of properties within each year. The middle row is the efficiency gain that is worked out on an annual basis; only savings, which do not result in any diminution in the overall service, can be included in the efficiency gain. The bottom row is the resultant actual budget that Ealing Homes receives.

However, in addition to the normal efficiency gain in 2007/8, the council also instructed Ealing Homes – in mid-year – to reduce its budget by a further £1m. This was done in order to ensure (as outlined in section 1.4 above) that the Housing Revenue Account did not go into the red. Overall, therefore, Ealing Homes has been required to manage a reduction in budget of £3.365m since 2004/5, a reduction of almost 20%.

Panel members were informed that Ealing Homes submits all payment requests to the council and does not itself pay the bills and must await the receipt of information from the council. Consequently there is a need to establish an interface between the Council's Agresso software and Ealing Homes system, Open House to enable Ealing Homes to have real-time information on income and expenditure. Ealing Homes' officers reported that improved information is essential for effective monitoring and management of the repairs and maintenance budget. This project is currently awaiting further work by the Ealing Homes IT team before it can be implemented

2.10.10 Mock inspection assessment

HQN reported the following **weaknesses** on how value for money is *measured*:

- Procurement strategy and asset management strategy are both at the end of their three year horizon (2005-2007):
- New one in draft (include this in the documentation next time)
- Have all actions been achieved?
- Capital programme has 15% overspent last year after a 1.5% overspend in the previous year – what are the underlying causes and are they being resolved?
- Mid-year (2007/08) £1m budget cut for response repairs (to balance HRA) – how has this outcome been managed for tenants?
- Rechargeable repairs are raised however £25k in 2006/07 and £7k to date (Aug 07) suggest a lack of diligence and tenacity in the process

HQN reported the following **strengths** in relation to value for money:

- Benchmarking has been undertaken across the London and three-star ALMOs
- Limited repairs batching in place
- Planned/responsive spend around 62%/38% respectively
- Spend monitored against a monthly profile
- Supply chain partnership developed for kitchens, boilers and door entry systems
- Funding from power suppliers has been recycled into insulation works
- Post contract evaluations undertaken
- The handy person service is batching communal repairs
- A rebate of £79 received on each new boiler fitted recycled into further heating improvements
- Contractor/partners are recycling waste products
- We were informed discounts gained off the SOR for voids
- Liability warranties flagged on database
- Zero defects target with escalation process

HQN reported the following **weaknesses** in relation to value for money:

- Repairs are not robustly batched and reduced costs achieved
- Partnering not well developed across the service
- There are high levels of emergency are high at around 28.57% with emergency and urgent combined at 49.40%
- 54.44% of repairs resulted in a VO 2006/07
- Variations allowed up to £250 without authorisation

2.10.11 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- the level of variation orders appears very high and suggests that, coupled with the data on chasing calls made by residents to Repair Link and the results of the mini-survey of residents, that there may be considerable potential for reducing the number of return visits made to properties
- the lessons that have been learnt from the contract, now ended, with KBR for heating services need to be recorded and taken into future contract negotiations

- pictures should be taken of voids repairs before keys are handed over
- there is scope for an increased batching of repairs
- the potential gains from working within the Local Area Procurement Network appear to be considerable
- there needs to be a greater sense of urgency on moving to open-book purchasing
- an up-to-date Asset Management Policy is urgently needed in order to shape future priorities and consequent plans
- Ealing Homes' managers need to have real-time data on income and expenditure
- decisions on the council's Estates Strategy are critical to Ealing Homes' business planning

Recommendations

To Ealing Homes

R42 Undertake a proper assessment of the potential advantages and disadvantages of co-locating Ealing Homes' surveyors with the main contractors should be undertaken before a decision on this matter is made

R43 Assess how effectively Ealing Homes tracks the work of contractors, including their sub-contractors, and make any necessary adjustments to procedures that may be necessary to ensure that (a) Ealing Homes retains overall responsibility throughout the repairs process and (b) any need for residents to chase contractors and sub-contractors direct is minimised

R44 Continue to develop the level of partnership working between contractors so that best practice is identified and, wherever possible, implemented

R45 Upgrade the technology used by the surveyors to the best available levels

R46 Review the reasons for the high volume of variation orders, identify how they might be reduced and if and how repeat visits to the same property (and call-backs from residents) can be reduced

R47 Consider whether contractors should be rewarded for the completion of work on first visit and/or whether penalties should be imposed for repeat visits that result from poor work planning

To Cabinet

R48 Review, early in the 2008/9 municipal year, how well Ealing Homes is implementing its action plan in response to the findings of the 2007 mock inspection

R49 Ensure that, in future years, there is no need to adjust the Repairs and Maintenance budget in-year in order to balance the Housing Revenue Account

To Ealing Homes and Cabinet

R50 Ealing Homes and the council to work together to develop a joint understanding of the implications for Ealing Homes' strategic and operational plans of the council's emerging estates strategy

R51 Ealing Homes and the council to develop a joint plan for repairs and maintenance in Ealing's sheltered housing provision, based on what is most likely to secure value for money

2.11 Relationship between the council and Ealing Homes

2.11.1 Control vs. independence

The relationship between the council and Ealing Homes was not part of the panel's planned scope. However, there were several issues about the relationship that proved to be of particular interest or concern to the panel.

First and foremost, the panel grappled with the implications of two different descriptions of the nature of Ealing Homes, ie that it is:

- an arm's length organisation with its own, independent, management board, and
- a company that is 100% owned by the council.

The gulf between these two, equally accurate, descriptions is indicative of an underlying theme of control vs. independence that featured in much of the panel's work. The authoring of reports by council officers, and the pressure sometime put on Ealing Homes by panel members to deliver timely information to the panel, tended to emphasise council control. On the other hand, the growing development by panel members of a direct relationship with Ealing Homes (through supplementary questions, requests for information and separate meetings) gave recognition to a degree of independence.

2.11.2 Implications for access to information

The panel benefited from receiving information and views from both council and Ealing Homes' officers during the course of its work. The occasional differences of perspective and emphasis between the two sets of officers encouraged panel members to compare and contrast the information they were receiving, before drawing their own conclusions.

It is relatively unusual for scrutiny reports on outside bodies to be authored by

council officers but, in general, this appeared to work. It was not, however, strain-free. Council officers sometimes had to press Ealing Homes' officers to provide timely and relevant information for both the formal reports to the panel and in response to the panel's requests for further information. Meanwhile, Ealing Homes' officers had to manage the information-demands of their mock inspection in addition to the ongoing monitoring and management requirements. Furthermore, there were occasions when Ealing Homes' officers temporarily withheld information from the panel in order to address possible inaccuracies, protect commercial confidentialities and ensure that the organisation's corporate governance arrangements were not breached (by supplying information that Ealing Homes own Board had not yet received or considered).

Interestingly, internal legal advice received during the panel's operation indicated that the scrutiny panel had no greater rights to information from Ealing Homes than applies to any other outside body (with the exception of NHS bodies). This would mean that Ealing Homes' provision of information to a scrutiny panel would be undertaken on voluntary basis, except for the fact that the reasonable provision of information to the council is written into the Management Agreement between the two bodies.

In response to the access to information issues experienced by council officers, an information-sharing protocol between the council and Ealing Homes, setting out the obligations on the two parties, is now planned.

Although the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act will give scrutiny panels greater power and authority to scrutiny external "partner" bodies, it is not yet clear if and how these powers will – in practice – increase scrutiny panels' rights to information from partner bodies.

2.11.3 Clarity on the relationship

A further point of significance to the panel was the realisation that, in practice, it is for each council and its ALMO to define for themselves where they lie on the continuum between control and independence.

However, it was not entirely clear where on the continuum the relationship between Ealing Council and Ealing Homes is placed, especially in view of the changes that had taken place just before the panel started work. If it was not clear to the panel then it may well be unclear to the council and to Ealing Homes.

The council's current review of methodologies for measuring performance, value for money and customer satisfaction within Ealing Homes should assist.

2.11.4 Council decision-making and Ealing Homes planning

Whatever degree of independence it may be deemed appropriate for Ealing Homes to exercise, there are three areas over which the council has almost total control which impact on Ealing Homes' ability to develop effective long-term plans for repairs and maintenance, ie

- the amount of money in the Housing Revenue Account – the panel questioned how and why the need to make a £1m reduction to the repairs

and maintenance was not apparent until the middle of the 2007/8 financial year; Ealing Homes questioned whether a contingency fund could be set aside for major insurance claims but council officers reported that this could only be funded out of the HRA

- the future of the key estates – decisions on this matter are eagerly awaited by Ealing Homes
- any specific arrangements made for uninsured losses
- the Management Agreement – whether this will be renewed, revised or terminated when the current Agreement ends in March 2011; the timetable and process for decision-making on this matter; and any potential impact on Ealing Homes' negotiations with repairs contractors

2.11.5 Mock inspection assessment

The Housing Quality Network (HQN) noted that there are “Eight key estates with no future plan in place”.

The panel noted that Cabinet received a report on the key estates at its meeting on 26th February and resolved that the Health, Housing and Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel be invited to comment on the further development of the council’s plans at its meeting on 6th March 2008.

2.11.6 Panel conclusions

The Panel has drawn the following conclusions from the evidence available:

- further work is needed to clarify, make more explicit, and communicate the nature of the relationship between, and the differing responsibilities of, the council and Ealing Homes
- the council needs to complete its review of methodologies for performance, value for money and customer satisfaction
- the methodologies need to be outcome-focused rather than process-focused
- plans to develop an information-sharing protocol between the council and Ealing Homes setting out each parties’ responsibilities are welcome
- the council and Ealing Homes will need to agree together what messages they are to give to residents about future plans and expectations
- some Members wish to better informed about the work on anti-social behaviour which is being undertaken by Ealing Homes in their ward
- the council and Ealing Homes need to work together to address anti-social behaviour

Recommendations

To Cabinet

R52 Take the lead in developing a short, easily-understood, statement, in consultation with Ealing Homes, on the nature of the relationship between, and the differing responsibilities of, the council and Ealing Homes

R53 Outline a procedure and timetable decision-making on the future of the council's Management Agreement with Ealing Homes

To Ealing Homes and Cabinet

R54 Make arrangements to ensure that the council and Ealing Homes give the same message to tenants and leaseholders about plans for the future of the council's housing stock

To council housing officers

R55 Officers arrange a separate line, within the Repairs and Maintenance budget, to identify uninsured losses

To Overview and Scrutiny Committee

R56 Take a view on whether scrutiny should request reports on Ealing Homes' work either (a) directly from Ealing Homes (eg as an outside body and under the new scrutiny powers laid out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2006 for "partners") or (b) via the council's housing department.

3. KEY LEARNING POINTS

Panel members identified the following points:

What worked well

- enabling Members to gain insights into the operation of Ealing Homes, e.g. through the open day at Westgate House, the visits to the contractors' offices and the training sessions on Ealing Homes' procedures etc
- contributing, alongside tenants/leaseholders and panel co-optees, to Ealing Homes' revision of the Repairs Handbook
- delving for information

What did not work well

- having to change and revise the panel's work programme because of Ealing Homes' reluctance to release information to the panel in accordance with their promised timescale

- the tight timescale for the panel prevented the Chairman from finding out about panel members' key skills and how they might best contribute
- some of the meetings were too long
- it was difficult for panel members to develop a consistent corporate/shared view of the service when so much of the work had to be done in sub-groups by whoever was available
- the timescale was too short - there should have been an additional meeting/longer timescale

Lessons to be learnt

- when working with outside bodies/partners, it is necessary to develop an understanding, before the start of the scrutiny process, on how they will provide full support and cooperation throughout
- the scrutiny process can only be effective if there is transparency and full co-operation from all sides
- an early understanding of the key issues is critical to the planning of a panel's work
- the Head of Scrutiny and the Chairman of OSC should review what other events may impact on the service proposed for scrutinized (e.g. Ealing Homes was subject to a general mock inspection at the same time as its repairs service was being scrutinised)
- some of the skills required to chair scrutiny meetings are unique to scrutiny and are not necessarily acquired from general training on chairing meetings

4. MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE

Panel Member	Maximum possible	Attendance	Apologies
Cllr Kate Crawford (Chairman)	4	4	
Cllr Rosa Popham (Vice-Chairman)	4	4	
Cllr Phil Greenhead	4	3	1
Cllr Jagdish Gupta	4	3	1
Cllr Jarnail Singh Jandu	4	4	
Cllr Seema Kumar	4	3	1
Cllr James Randall	4	3	
Cllr Harvey Rose	4	0	
Cllr Param Singh Sandhu	4	1	1
Co-optees			
Brian Andrews	3	2	1
Farid Saidi	3	3	
Renata Walus	3	2	1

5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ealing Homes Repairs Works Specialist Scrutiny Panel:

- Terms of Reference
- Work Programme
- Agendas, reports and minutes

All of the above documents are available at:

www.ealing.gov.uk/services/council/committees

The Panel also received almost 100 documents outside of Panel meetings. Amongst the most important of these documents were the:

- Management Agreement between Ealing Council and Ealing Homes 2004
- Ealing Homes Business and Delivery Plan 2007/8
- Ealing Homes Asset Management Strategy 2004
- Department and Communities and Local Government 'A Better Deal for Tenants – Your Right to Repair'

Ealing Council's Corporate Plan 2006-10:

www.ealing.gov.uk/services/council/strategies_and_policies

6. OFFICERS' COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel's final recommendations along with the comments of relevant council and Ealing Homes' service officers are detailed on the following pages. Comments on the recommendations to Cabinet have been provided by Mark Brayford, Head of Client Management and Performance, with the exception of R3 for which comments have been provided by Iris Herdman, Members' Enquiries (Housing). Comments on the recommendations to the Ealing Homes Board have been provided by Graham Jones, Repairs and Maintenance Manager, Ealing Homes.

The Panel also proposes that the following items be considered for inclusion in the 2008/9 work programme of the Health, Housing and Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel:

- a. the Collaborative Working Consultancy (CWC) report, commissioned by Ealing Homes, on the value for money of the repairs contracts
- b. the council's policy on the communal district heating scheme taking into residents' requests that heating should be available throughout the year
- c. the data on matters that are subject to Ealing Homes "escalation" procedure

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet Response
R1 Provide all Members with information and training on the operation of the Ealing Homes repairs service describing how members can most easily and quickly resolve issues of concern raised by the constituents, including information on how the Tenants' Support Service might be able to assist more vulnerable residents. (This information could be part of a more substantial booklet which gives Members advice on all aspects of housing casework).	Cabinet	The Client Management Team will take the lead in ensuring that this work is undertaken by Ealing Homes.	Accepted
R2 Advise Members (through the booklet) to (a) restrict their enquiries to matters where the resident has already sought, but not secured, resolution of their issue directly with the Ealing Homes Complaints Officer and (b) copy in the relevant Ealing Homes officer when reporting a members' enquiry in case the matter can be resolved easily without the need to resort to formal procedures	Cabinet	The Client Management Team will ensure that the booklet, and any associated information, contains this information when produced.	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet Response
R3 Add an additional section in the template for Members' enquiries which records when an outcome is expected so that this can be used to track and chase progress	Cabinet	<p>The current Icasework system being used does not have the relevant Coversheets as previously on Respond system (old one). There is a form, but it does not capture the 'Due Date'. However, all MPs and Cllrs are advised of the response date by way of an acknowledgement of their enquiry once the Members Enquiries Officer has processed the enquiry on the system. The relevant area teams are also copied into the e-mail (together with the enquiry) at the same time. The Members Enquiries Officer has started to enter the due date onto the Icasework Form, but acknowledges it is not as clear as the previous template used. Once Icasework has been developed more, then the appropriate Template will be created.</p> <p>There is now a 10-day target for response time for Members. The area teams are regularly e-mailed (once or twice per week) as a reminder or a few days before the due date.</p>	Accepted
R25 Seek agreement with Virgin Media on the maintenance of aerials (pending the introduction of digital cabling and comprehensive maintenance agreement) and building on the August 1991 agreement with NTL (which has been taken over by Virgin Media)	Cabinet	The Client Management Team will work with Ealing Homes to ensure that this issue is addressed	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet Response
R30 Explore ways in which the council can create the infra-structure (e.g. through information, training, grants, recognition of voluntary activity) necessary to underpin the development of active citizenship amongst its tenants and leaseholders (supplementing and complementing Ealing Homes responsibility to secure resident involvement in its own work)	Cabinet	This work is being taken forward through the Residents' Council which was jointly set up by Ealing Homes and Ealing Council Housing department. Ealing Homes have a delegated function to manage and review the Tenants' Compact which provides both support and funding for a range of groups to engage with council services and other issues in respect of their homes	Accepted
R48 Review, early in the 2008/9 municipal year, how well Ealing Homes is implementing its action plan in response to the findings of the 2007 mock inspection	Cabinet	This is part of the ongoing work of the Client Management Team.	Accepted
R49 Ensure that, in future years, there is no need to adjust the Repairs and Maintenance budget in-year in order to balance the Housing Revenue Account	Cabinet	The HRA is critically affected by government announcements on subsidy (around January) so some adjustment may be required in response to the outcome.	Accepted
R52 Take the lead in developing a short, easily-understood, statement, in consultation with Ealing Homes, on the nature of the relationship between, and the differing responsibilities of, the council and Ealing Homes	Cabinet	This could be communicated through existing channels, e.g. newsletters and websites	Accepted
R53 Outline a procedure and timetable decision-making on the future of the council's Management Agreement with Ealing Homes	Cabinet	This is currently planned for the Cabinet meeting in September 2008	Accepted

2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO BOTH CABINET AND EALING HOMES BOARD

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet / Ealing Homes response
R18 Work together to review whether the multiple arrangements for seeking customer feedback and undertaking quality control can be streamlined in order to focus more resources on possible service improvements	Ealing Homes and Cabinet	<p>Council: The Client Management Team plans to work with Ealing Homes on this as a part of the performance management arrangements</p> <p>Ealing Homes: Not yet available</p>	Accepted Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet / Ealing Homes response
<p>R26 Support the charging of residents where repairs operatives discover that residents have demanded urgent action on matters which are not genuine emergencies within the responsibility of Ealing Homes</p>	Cabinet and Ealing Homes	<p>Council:</p> <p>This is a complex issue which would have fully scoped out to clearly show how such a process would work and to understand any implications which may arise.</p> <p>In the first instance Ealing Homes would have to set out a draft charging policy for the Council to consider and the practical implications of this would then have to be fully explored and consulted on with tenant representatives.</p> <p>After Ealing Homes had set out this policy a Cabinet report would then have to be drafted and any recommendations agreed by Cabinet before implementation.</p> <p>Ealing Homes:</p> <p>Suggest the tenant gets a warning on the 1st such matter and told if happens in future there would be a £30 charge to cover the cost of the operative leaving a job to go to the emergency or urgent job and then return to the original job.</p>	Accepted
<p>R27 Determine which one organisation should send out future leaseholder estimates and final account adjustment letters</p>	Cabinet and Ealing Homes	<p>Council:</p> <p>Leasehold management is delegated to EH under the management agreement, so it should be EH who should send these letters</p>	

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet / Ealing Homes response
R28 Ensure that the final account adjustment letters to leaseholders are sent out in September of each year, failing which a report should be presented to the Ealing Homes Board and/or Cabinet explaining the reasons for delay	Cabinet and Ealing Homes	<p>Council: The Client Management Team will ensure that this procedure is followed through.</p> <p>Ealing Homes: There is a procedure for this already.</p>	Accepted Accepted
R40 Resolve how and by whom policy on timescales should be determined and check that what is being proposed is in keeping with best practice elsewhere.	Cabinet and Ealing Homes	<p>Ealing Homes: Ealing Homes is proposing new timescales in the revised Repairs Handbook which will be approved by both Ealing Homes and LBE</p> <p>Council: Under the Management Agreement with Ealing Homes, the council is responsible for setting policy.</p>	Accepted Accepted
R41 Review the target timescales for 2007/8 taking into account the expectations of the Audit Commission but also (a) the level of resources that may be required to achieve small percentage gains at the top end of the scale and (b) the extent to which such work might detract from other more important priorities for residents	Cabinet and Ealing Homes	<p>Ealing Homes: Targets are set with LBE</p> <p>Council: In progress as part of the Delivery Plan review. From 2008/9, the requirements of the new national indicator set will reduce the number of indicators that councils are required to report, enabling a more local perspective to be adopted.</p>	Accepted Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Cabinet / Ealing Homes response
R50 Ealing Homes and the council to work together to develop a joint understanding of the implications for Ealing Homes' strategic and operational plans of the council's emerging estates strategy	Ealing Homes and Cabinet	Ealing Homes: Accept Council: This is part of the ongoing work of the Client Management Team.	Accepted
R51 Ealing Homes and the council to develop a joint plan for repairs and maintenance in Ealing's sheltered housing provision, based on what is most likely to secure value for money	Ealing Homes and Cabinet	Ealing Homes: Please see comment on R33 and note a Protocol between LBE and EH regarding joint responsibilities has already been prepared. Council: This work is in progress.	Accepted Accepted

3. RECOMMENDATIONS TO EALING HOMES BOARD

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R4 Organise an annual open day for all Members, providing Members with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the services provided by Ealing Homes	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R5 Arrange annual tours the minor, as well as the major estates, inviting the participation of relevant ward Members	Ealing Homes		Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R6 Add Members to the distribution list of Ealing Homes' newsletter 'Key Issues'	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R7 Keep Members informed of the arrangements for mobile surgeries and give consideration to the possibility of joint surgeries	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R8 Make arrangements to ensure that all relevant staff have an awareness of the role of elected Members	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R9 Assess the effectiveness of previous publicity campaigns to raise awareness of the complaints procedure so that lessons can be learnt about which methods are proving most effective	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R10 Develop an overall strategy to raise awareness of the complaints procedure, highlighting the value of such information for the improvement of services	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R11 Provide residents and the council with regular feedback, including examples, on how complaints information is used improve services	Ealing Homes	Ongoing as part of KS and internet	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R12 Clarify the difference between those issues that may appropriately be dealt with through the escalation process and those issues which must be treated as formal complaints	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R13 Monitor and regularly report on cases dealt with through the escalation process to key identify learning points	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R14 Examine and report on ways in which more vulnerable residents can be given support to make and provide details on formal complaints, eg from the Tenants Support Team	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R15 Review if and how use is being made of all available customer satisfaction, complaints and commentary data to shape and improve services	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R16 Complete its review (with assistance from the council's Research & Consultation Team) of ways in which the response rate for the customer satisfaction survey might be increased, targeting – in particular - the apparent under-representation of black and minority ethnic customers	Ealing Homes		Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R17 Develop further ways of securing qualitative information on customer satisfaction in addition to the quantitative data collected through the customer satisfaction survey	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R19 Prepare the new Welcome Pack in consultation with residents, officers and Members	Ealing Homes	Financial implications for a new “bespoke” Pack are being investigated as there are separate pamphlets and booklets Working Party set up to progress this task.	Accepted
R20 Develop a corporate style that is consistent for all Ealing Homes publications, ensuring that formats used are accessible to the widest possible audience (including those with sensory impairments) and that residents can clearly distinguish between Ealing Homes and council publications	Ealing Homes	Already got	Accepted
R21 Give increased priority in future publications to making residents more aware of Ealing Homes service standards, residents rights and residents duties and responsibilities	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R22 Ensure that all communal blocks and estate notice boards display information about how and when to contact the Repair Link	Ealing Homes	Financial implications budgeted for in 2007-08 following successful Pilot at main estates and will now be extended to all blocks/estates by mid 2008	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R23 Staff be given clearer guidance on what information to collect whenever communal repairs are requested, in consultation with leaseholders	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R24 Arrange for leaseholders (collectively or through appropriate representatives) to be able to check that all repairs and maintenance works, for which they are to be billed, are carried out and are carried out to a satisfactory standard	Ealing Homes	<p>Ealing Homes plans to report to the Ealing Homes Independent Leaseholders Association on a quarterly basis all communal orders and relevant costs. Some of these will also be subject to random selection for Post inspections.</p> <p>R&M officers and HOS officers to meet monthly to discuss the communal report highlighting any anomalies and escalating these as appropriate.</p> <p>Estate Inspections will also focus on communal repairs including repair costs.</p>	Accepted
R29 Provide Members with information on members of the Residents' Inspection Teams	Ealing Homes	Ealing Homes to send information to both the Labour and Conservative Members rooms	Accepted
R31 Consider offering call-back facilities for customers hanging up before their call is answered and/or the opportunity for time prompted voice mail (on which residents can leave their contact details and a message]	Ealing Homes	Please note we achieve over 90% calls answered. Financial and telephone system implications to be investigated to allow a caller to leave their telephone number after say 6 rings and Repair Link will ring the resident back within say 1 hour	Accepted subject to feasibility and cost
R32 Give caretakers a more active role in identifying and reporting repairs (and other local problems that need addressing such as fly tipping and graffiti etc.)	Ealing Homes	Already covered and a Protocol is to be formalised between Estates Services and Repairs Service followed by publicity. Complete by August 2008	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R33 Examine why some residents believe that they are responsible for chasing sub-contractors for the completion of work (rather than Mears/Kier or Ealing Homes) and take any necessary remedial action	Ealing Homes	<p>This will be investigated as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under no circumstances should customers chase up sub contractors as the main contractor is responsible. 2. To check that all contractors have proper Out Cards [please note Kier confirmed that they already have them but all other contractors to be checked] 3. Whether the existing policy of asking tenants to call the main contractor after an order is raised to change appointments etc remains or customers are asked to call Repair Link on ALL matters. The latter will require changes to IT links with contractors. This will then be included in the new Repairs Handbook. 	Accepted
R34 Residents to be advised in the Repairs Handbook and on the Repair Link answer phone that they should contact the heating repairs contractors direct for first request and Repair Link for any subsequent problems	Ealing Homes		Accepted
R35 Ensure all staff and operatives are trained to identify and pass on information, to Repair Link, about residents who are vulnerable	Ealing Homes	Contractors' operatives to be required to report back to their offices should they have concerns over individual cases. This should also be raised with Housing Management and LBE Allocations Team that such records are entered on OHMS about age, disability and vulnerability. Repair link staff are adequately trained and would raise this type of issue and then enter it on OHMS, including contact details of relatives and carers etc.	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R36 Arrange regular, scheduled, inspections of sheltered housing schemes	Ealing Homes	<p>The Housing Management service is already undertaking a survey to review and identify service needs to sheltered schemes and then tailor services for the future</p> <p>The R&M team has already sought to improve links between the Sheltered residents and the Repairs Service. It is suggested that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Repairs Service via the existing LBE sheltered schemes “Compact Meetings” attend say each sheltered scheme twice a year. Please note repairs issues are already raised at these meetings. 2. LBE consider extending the duties of Sheltered Wardens to provide a better co-ordinating role with both the Repairs and Housing Management Services in addition to their current “supporting people” role 3. LBE are responsible for cleaning and grounds maintenance. 4. The current Sheltered Schemes Protocol between LBE and Ealing Homes be revised in line with the above matters 	Accepted
R37 Ensure the establishment of one telephone number for general repairs, both during and out-of office hours, and ensure that there is a full sharing of data between the in-hours and out-of-hours services	Ealing Homes	This is planned in the new Repairs Handbook for all repair works except heating repairs in the working day which are charged at local rates only	Accepted
R38 Ensure that the Handbook and all other relevant publicity makes clear what, tightly limited, repairs will be undertaken out-of-hours	Ealing Homes	Covered by the review of the handbook	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R39 Develop and implement a protocol that ensures that residents with special needs and those who are particularly vulnerable receive a quality of service that is not based simply on following stated procedures and timescales but ensures that their quality of life does not suffer	Ealing Homes	The Repairs Service has always given special consideration to groups, however a new repair category "Discretionary" is planned for the new financial year. This will provide the scope to raise orders that are not included in EH's normal repair responsibilities, for vulnerable groups including OAPs without an able bodied person in the household, Registered Disabled and other vulnerable residents which are recorded and maintained on OHMS. Vulnerable persons are identified via the Housing Management Team. The latter process is already undertaken and a protocol is not considered necessary. However, in view of the limited funds and the growing numbers of elderly persons it is recommended that we target the above to OAPs over 70 years old without an able bodied person in the household	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R42 A proper assessment of the potential advantages and disadvantages of co-locating Ealing Homes' surveyors with the main contractors should be undertaken before a decision on this matter is made.	Ealing Homes	<p>It is suggested that there are important advantages in co-locating surveyors with the main contractors including to resolve job order works, work problems, snagging, defects, complaints and payment issues, [and ID if there are possible data transfer issues from the IT link between the contractor and EH]</p> <p>Regarding any reward for Right 1st Time works or penalty for repeat visits these are considered to be difficult and costly to manage and administer.</p> <p>However, consideration should be given to introducing a "Contract Performance Notice" for regular or significant work or performance issues. These Notices would be minuted at both Contract and quarterly Core Group meetings.</p>	Accepted
R43 Assess how effectively Ealing Homes tracks the work of contractors, including their sub-contractors, and make any necessary adjustments to procedures that may be necessary to ensure that (a) Ealing Homes retains overall responsibility throughout the repairs process and (b) any need for residents to chase contractors and sub-contractors direct is minimised	Ealing Homes	<p>A] Ealing Homes is introducing new Contract and Housekeeping reports to better manage all aspects of each contract from February 2008 and these will be reviewed after 6 months</p> <p>B] pl see officer comments to R31</p>	Accepted
R44 Continue to develop the level of partnership working between contractors so that best practice is identified and, wherever possible, implemented	Ealing Homes	Not yet available	Accepted

Recommendation	Addressed to	Service officer comments (including any financial and legal implications)	Ealing Homes response
R45 Upgrade the technology used by the surveyors to the best available levels	Ealing Homes	Financial implications are currently being investigated by completing an existing task to report on the costs and benefits of introducing hand-held computers to manage pre and post inspections when on site.	Accepted
R46 Review the reasons for the high volume of variation orders, identify how they might be reduced and if and how repeat visits to the same property (and call-backs from residents) can be reduced	Ealing Homes	As stated in R 40 Ealing Homes is introducing new Contract and Housekeeping reports, including variations reporting, Right 1 st Time, repeat visits to the same property and call backs. Regarding repeat visits, staff are trained to check the work order history before raising a new work order.	Accepted
R47 Consider whether contractors should be rewarded for the completion of work on first visit and/or whether penalties should be imposed for repeat visits that result from poor work planning	Ealing Homes	Regarding any reward for Right 1 st Time works or penalty for repeat visits these are considered to be difficult and costly to manage and administer. However, consideration should be given to introducing a "Contract Performance Notice" for regular or significant work or performance issues. These Notices would be minuted at both Contract and quarterly Core Group meetings.	Accepted
R54 Make arrangements to ensure that the council and Ealing Homes give the same message to tenants and leaseholders about plans for the future of the council's housing stock	To Ealing Homes and Cabinet	Council: This will be part of the communications strategy for the Estates Review	Accepted

4. RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL HOUSING OFFICERS

R55 Officers arrange a separate line, within the Repairs and Maintenance budget, to identify uninsured losses	Council housing officers	Accepted at Panel meeting
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5. RECOMMENDATION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

56 Take a view on whether scrutiny should request reports on Ealing Homes' work either (a) directly from Ealing Homes (e.g. as an outside body and under the new scrutiny powers laid out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2006 for "partners") or (b) via the council's housing department	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
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