

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

**Date**                    **11 July 2024**

**Report of:**            **Director of Housing**

**Subject:**              **Fareham Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy**

#### **SUMMARY**

This report provides the Panel with an overview of the Draft Fareham Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy, and the need to update current information in line with the changes introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) by way of 'Awaab's law' and new Consumer Standards.

The report further invites the Panel to put forward any observations or comments on the document.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Panel consider the report and the attached Draft Fareham Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy included in Appendix A. The Panel is invited to make comments in advance of the document being presented to Executive for approval.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. There are a significant number of statutory obligations on all social landlords regarding the repair and maintenance of their properties. All social housing tenants also have the 'right to repair' and for these repairs to be carried out within a specific timeframe.
2. Following the tragedies at Grenfell and the death of Awaab Ishak, the legislation was strengthened in several areas, particularly by the extending of powers to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the introduction of what has become known as 'Awaab's Law'.
3. While the full details of the measures to be introduced through 'Awaab's law' are yet to be published, the new Consumer Standards introduced by the RSH have already added further requirements around repairs, maintenance, and planned improvements, aimed at raising standards and response times.
4. The Consumer Standards also impose a number of new obligations on providers regarding the information available to tenants and the content and accessibility of that information.
5. A great deal of work has already been undertaken by Officers to meet these new obligations and, in many cases, Fareham Borough Council and Fareham Housing already meet, if not exceed, both the standards already imposed and those expected.
6. The proposed Repairs & Maintenance policy is, therefore, primarily a consolidating rather than amending document and ensures that the information is compliant with existing regulatory standards. The main points of the policy are covered on our website although minor revisions may be needed in some places, and these are already taking place as part of another project.

## **OBJECTIVE**

7. The primary aim of the policy is to enable and ensure the maintenance of good quality accommodation which meets the needs of our tenants and follows the requirements of all relevant legislation and statutory guidance.
8. The policy provides information on how to report repairs, the different types of repairs, how they will be prioritised and the timescales involved, and highlights a number of associated services to tenants.
9. At Fareham Borough Council, we pride ourselves on a high level of customer service, and that expectation is set out in the Code of Conduct. This applies to both our own operatives and external contractors and is also detailed in the Policy.
10. The policy will be published on our website and serve as a central reference point for Officers and tenants alike on all aspects of the repairs service. The links to a more simplified version of the information on our website will remain, and an FAQ has been developed to support the policy.

## **THE POLICY**

11. The policy covers all tenants of Fareham Housing, whether in general purpose or sheltered accommodation, and includes those living in temporary accommodation that is owned by the Council.

12. It also covers those aspects of leaseholder and some shared ownership agreements, such as homes delivered through Homes England's Affordable Housing Programme 2021-2026 (due to the funding requirements), and for which the Council retains responsibility.
13. The Policy acknowledges that both the Council and our tenants have a responsibility to keep their property in a safe condition. The Policy lists the expectations for each party and includes reporting repairs, emergency repairs and gaining access.
14. The Policy is also intended to support the work of other teams such as Tenant Services and Streetscene, and existing policies and procedures. It is also intended to work with those currently in development, such as a 'shared spaces' policy.

### **THE REPAIRS SERVICE**

15. Tenants can report repairs in several ways, from online to visiting the Civic Offices in person. There is also an out of hours service for emergency repairs that are needed outside of normal office hours.
16. When tenants call the repairs service, they will be immediately assessed by a repairs advisor and their repair request will be given one of four priorities. The priorities and timescales for repairs are set out in the table below:

<b>Repair Category</b>	<b>Completion Time</b>	<b>Example request:</b>
<b>Emergency</b>	24 hours	Total or significant loss of power, water or heating; w/c failure; stairlift failure
<b>Priority</b>	7 calendar days	Severe damp or mould; partial loss of water; extractor fans not working.
<b>Routine</b>	28 calendar days	Minor cases of damp or mould, damaged fencing, replacement boiler
<b>Planned routine</b>	6 months	Plastering repairs or internal decoration; replacing roof and windows.

17. In some cases, the cause of the fault may not be known and so the repairs service will also carry out complex repairs investigations. Examples would include underpinning or settlement causing structural damage or water ingress from the highway. In these cases, the aim is to complete the repair upon successful diagnosis of the fault.

### **PLANNED MAINTENANCE**

18. In addition to responsive repairs, the Repairs Service also carry out a programme of planned and cyclical maintenance.
19. These are programmes that cover any major works such as kitchen and bathroom modernisation and is the programme through which Fareham Borough Council ensures that it complies with the Decent Homes Standard.
20. Unlike responsive repairs, cyclical and planned maintenance is normally carried out as part of a rolling programme of work, usually between every 1 and 10 years.

### **VOIDS**

21. In addition to this work, the Repairs Service also carry out a full voids service each time a property becomes empty and available for relet. All properties will have a gas and an electrical safety check before any new tenant moves in, and an EPC will be commissioned, where applicable.

22. They will also carry out work to reduce the levels of damp and mould in the property, by installing a number of proactive insulation enhancements to improve ventilation.

### **ADAPTIONS FOR TENANTS WITH DISABILITIES**

23. Fareham Housing is committed to providing accessible homes to our tenants who have a disability, and full details of the work undertaken to meet this objective can be found in our Social and Affordable Housing Adaptation policy.

24. While the primary route for adaptations is via our partners at Hampshire County Council's Occupational Therapy Service, the Repairs Service can and does carry out a number of minor adaptations, such as installing grab rails, shower seats or lever taps, taking advice from an Occupation Therapist where appropriate.

25. The Repairs Service is also responsible for two further schemes to assist those tenants with disabilities, through the Garden Maintenance Scheme and also by providing assistance with internal decorations.

26. Under these services, qualifying tenants can obtain assistance with cutting their grass or trimming hedges, and have a room decorated every two years.

### **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

27. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been commissioned for the draft Policy. This is included as Appendix B. The EIA has not identified any detrimental equality impacts as a result of the proposed policy.

### **NEXT STEPS**

28. It is proposed that the draft Policy will go before the Executive with any comments or observations from the Panel. Approval will also be sought for a public consultation and carried out in accordance with the Tenant Engagement Strategy.

29. Once the consultation period has concluded, any necessary adjustments will be made to the Policy ahead of it returning to the Executive for adoption.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

30. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

### **CONCLUSION**

31. The policy brings together existing procedures and brings information up to date and in line with current legislation and the Consumer Standards. It will be published on our website and is designed to ensure transparency, and act as a central reference point for tenants and Officers alike.

32. The Panel is invited to make any observations and/or comments in advance of the document being presented to Executive for approval.

**Appendices:**

A - Draft Fareham Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy

B – Equalities Impact Assessment

**Background Papers:**

Closed Consultation: Awaab's Law: Consultation on timescales for repairs in the social rented sector.

**Reference Papers:**

Building Services Responsive Repairs Policy document 2011

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Jon Goddard 01329 824375