

Date: November 2008

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REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE & IMPROVEMENTS

1.0 Key Objective

To achieve a cost effective, high quality repairs and maintenance service that meets the high standards expected by our customers, safeguards the condition and value of the housing stock and protects the environment.

2.0 Strategic Links

- South Lakeland Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2027
- South Lakeland Corporate Plan
- Cumbria Housing Strategy 2006/11
- SLH Procurement Strategy

3.0 Key Policy Standards

3.1 Principles

- Maintain SLH's properties in good condition and to an up-to-date standard.
- Respond to requests for repairs promptly in accordance with published time response standards.
- Carry out repairs efficiently and to a high standard.
- Instigate a programme of improvements to bring all properties up to the Decency Standard and provide tenants with choice, wherever possible.
- Embrace fair competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services and in order to demonstrate value for money.
- Use competitive procurement as a fundamental tool for service improvement.
- Comply with all statutory and contractual obligations to tenants and leaseholders.
- Extend the useful life of all properties and reduce long-term maintenance costs.
- Provide a flexible, convenient and customer oriented service that gives priority to the safety, comfort and convenience of occupants.
- Take into account the views of tenants in the preparation of its programmes for improvement and repair and minimise inconvenience to them when work carried out.
- Provide advice and guidance to tenants wishing to carry out alterations themselves.
- Grant tenants a right to repair in accordance with statutory requirements

3.2 Environmental Impact

SLH will have regard to the impact of its housing on the environment by:-

- embracing the principle of sustainability;
- monitoring the energy efficiency of the housing stock;
- improving the energy efficiency of the housing stock through cost effective use of the repair and improvement programme in order to improve comfort for tenants, lower energy costs and reduce CO₂ emissions;
- choosing, whenever practical, low maintenance and energy efficient materials;

- assessing the visual or other environmental impact of its programmes;
- giving sensitive consideration to the needs of elderly tenants and those with a disability or special needs.

3.3 Best Value and Egan Compliance

SLH will introduce policies and supporting procedures designed to comply with the key principles of the Egan Construction Taskforce - Rethinking Construction and the principles of Best Value.

3.4 Decent Homes and Procurement

SLH is working together with Bramall Construction to implement the South Lakeland Decent Homes Programme under an agreed Partnership Charter as follows :-

- Put the Customer First
 - respond to tenants' needs and circumstances
 - minimise disruption
 - leave tenants satisfied with the process and the finished product
- Support the Community
 - create opportunities for training and development
 - act in an open and trusting manner
 - promote mutual support and shared problem-solving
- Make the Best Use of Our Resources
 - improve predictability and quality
 - reduce time, costs and defects
 - encourage innovation
 - promote a safe and healthy work environment

Procurement Aims

The company's Procurement Strategy aims to:-

- Inform the company's approach to Corporate Procurement.
- Prescribe policies and actions necessary to adhere to the Procurement Strategy requirements.
- Inform the mechanisms by which SLH will procure its services
- Establish policy for securing Best Value and enhancement in procured services
- Establish diversity, sustainability, local employment issues in procurement
- Link to SLH Business Plan & Value for Money Plan.
- Provide continual improvement in Procurement & contracts.

How South Lakes Housing will achieve these aims is set out in detail in the SLH Procurement Strategy.

3.5 Responsibilities of SLH

SLH has a duty of care over our homes and the people who occupy them. The buildings are insured and we are liable for events that occur as a result of our fixtures, fittings and repairs. For this reason we would not normally upgrade using materials, fixtures or fittings supplied directly by the tenant.

SLH is responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of items in the following categories:-

- roofs, walls and floors of the dwelling
- window frames and external doors (except broken glass but see also section '3.8.13 Responding to Crime'), gutters, drain pipes, waste pipes and drains, chimneys and flues (but not sweeping chimneys other than gas flues), water pipes, gas pipes and electrical wiring;

- taps, sinks, basins, baths and wc's, where faults arise from fair wear and tear (but not replacement of plugs and chains);
- kitchen fittings;
- heating equipment and water heating equipment;
- external decorations;
- paths, steps, boundary walls and certain fencing;
- garages.

3.6 Right to Repair

Tenants have a right to expect repairs to be completed within certain timescales. SLH is committed to ensure that its staff and contractors perform to published standards.

If a qualifying repair cannot be completed within an agreed timescale the tenant has the right to request SLH to instruct a second contractor to complete the work. Where the second contractor also fails to complete the work within the agreed time SLH will pay compensation to the tenant.

Qualifying Repairs

Repair	Period to Complete (working days)
Total loss of electrical power	1
Partial loss of electrical power	3
Unsafe power	1
Total loss of water supply	1
Partial loss of water supply	3
Blocked flue to open fire or boiler	1
Total or partial loss of space or water heating between 31 October and 1 May	1
Ditto between 30 April and 1 November	3
Blocked or leaking foul drain or soil stack	1
Toilet not flushing (if no other working toilet)	1
Blocked sink bath or basin	3
Tap which cannot be turned	3
Leaking from water or heating pipe	1
Leaking roof	7
Insecure external window, door or lock	1
Loose or detached banister or handrail	3

Note: work costing over £250 is excluded

Compensation

If the second contractor fails then £10 will be paid. For every extra day of delay a further £2 will be paid up to a maximum of £50.

Limitations

Compensation is not payable if:-

- a satisfactory temporary repair can be effected;
- temporary heating is provided due to heating failure between 31 October and 1 May;
- the tenant fails to allow access;
- SLH cannot effect repairs as the result of the failure of a supply;
- the failure is due to non-payment by the tenant of a supply charge.

3.7 Responsibility of the Tenant

These responsibilities are defined within the tenancy agreement and are subject to periodic review.

In general terms, the tenant is responsible for the maintenance, repair or replacement of the categories set out in the tenancy agreement, except where it arises from fair wear and tear.

The tenant will also be responsible for the repair or replacement of any item in a property damaged due to neglect, carelessness or deliberate action on the part of the tenant and/or their family and/or any individual knowingly allowed into the property, other than fair wear and tear.

SLH reserves the right to carry out the above work itself and may recharge the tenant.

The tenant must tell SLH when a repair needs to be done and allow access in order to qualify for the compensation scheme.

3.8 Response Maintenance

3.8.1 General

SLH will provide a service, which is centred on repairs by appointment. Within the approved priority categories the aim will be to minimise the time between a request for a repair and its completion, unless the repair can be more cost effectively carried out as part of a programme of planned or cyclical works.

3.8.2 Timescales

SLH will operate a system of repairs by appointment. Normally an appointment will be made when the repair is requested. If for any reason this is not possible eg an inspection is needed, the repair will be given a timescale.

South Lakes Housing has many customers who are vulnerable and is committed to providing services that meet their needs. In deciding the timescales for carrying out repairs we will take into account the circumstances and needs of the individual household. In special circumstances we will undertake some repairs more quickly, where:

- The customer's sense of security is affected
- The home would be left without heating in the winter
- The customer's mobility is affected
- The health and safety of young children is affected

The timescales are as follows:-

EMERGENCY PRIORITY ①

Visited and made safe within 2 hours, and completed within 2 days.

Where there is danger to persons and/or property, risk or serious damage to the property or the integrity of the building affected, for example:-

- major bursts;
- loss of electrical power;
- blocked or overflowing sewers;
- escape of gas;
- electrical faults;
- storm or flood damage;
- repairs required to ensure buildings are secure and structurally sound;
- defects to sanitary appliances where only one exists in a dwelling;
- complete loss of heating or water systems.

URGENT PRIORITY ②

Completed within one week (7 days) from the date the works order issued. Urgent repairs are those which, if not repaired, will cause substantial discomfort to the customer or potential damage to the property. For example:-

- repairs to supplementary heating;

- replacement of sanitary fittings;
- repairs to roof (where there is no actual leak);
- replacement of rotten timber sections.

ROUTINE PRIORITY ③

Response within three weeks (21 days) from date of issue of works order. Routine repairs are those which cause only minor inconvenience and have little effect on the property if a repair is not undertaken in the short term.

NON URGENT PRIORITY ④

Where works are routine and where material delivery and/or supply may be longer than 28 days but not more than 12 weeks (84 days) from the issue of the works order.

BATCHED REPAIRS ⑤

In order to minimise travelling between jobs, maximise efficiency and improve the service, SLH will build up a rolling programme for minor repairs. Tenants will be requested to report various minor repairs and will be informed in due course about the date when those repairs will be carried out. Repairs will be done at a time that suits the tenant wherever possible. Batched repairs will be completed within 12 weeks.

3.8.3 Pre-work Inspections

For emergency repairs, no pre-work inspections will be carried out except where:-

- the customer is unable to fully explain the problem
- the emergency repair requested is structural

For all other repairs requested, pre-work inspections will be carried out where:-

- the customer is unable to fully explain the problem
- the repair might be the customer's responsibility
- surveying measurements, schedules, specifications, etc., are required prior to ordering the work
- investigations to identify the problem are required
- a previous repair has not resolved the problem
- the customer has a history of wrongly reporting or abusing the property

3.8.4 Post-work Inspections

Quality control checks of repairs will be carried out at random on no less than 10% of all repairs carried out. These quality control checks will be for different repair types, property types and in all areas of the district. Post-work inspections will also be carried out when a customer is dissatisfied because:-

- the repair carried out has not rectified the problem
- the quality of workmanship was not acceptable

Some of the above post-work inspections will be carried out in conjunction with representatives from the Tenants Committee on a quarterly basis.

3.8.5 Appointments

SLH will offer and arrange morning or afternoon appointments for those customers who want them or early evening or Saturday morning appointments on request for:

- pre-work inspections
- the work being carried out
- post-work inspections

Where we cannot meet the customer's preferred appointment within the target timescales, we will offer the customer the choice of a later mutually convenient appointment or the inspection or work being carried out without an appointment.

SLH and its contractors will attend appointments agreed with the customer. Should we fail to meet an appointment the customer will be offered an alternative to suit them. In special circumstances this appointment might be out of office hours.

Should a customer fail to keep an appointment, we will offer a second appointment. If the second appointment is not kept the repair request will normally be cancelled.

3.8.6 Ordering Repairs

Tenants may report repairs by any of the following means:-

- 24 hour 'repairs hotline' telephone service;
- in person;
- in writing;
- e-mail;
- text to repairs line (07972 593487)
- fax
- via the South Lakes Housing website;
- via the Community Alarm service
- via staff, Members or tenant representatives
- via any other agencies

Details of contact points and telephone numbers will be supplied to individual tenants and included in the Tenants' Handbook.

A receipt will be sent to tenants to confirm their repair requests. All tenants will be left a customer satisfaction survey to comment on the services provided. All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the Complaints Procedures.

3.8.7 Home Visits

When visiting customers' homes in connection with repairs SLH staff and its contractors will carry and show on request formal identification. If the person calling does not have identification, customers will be entitled to refuse access. For customers who are visually impaired SLH will, when requested, agree a code word when the repair is reported.

3.8.8 Customer Choice

SLH is committed to offering customers choice in repair and improvement works to their homes where it reasonably can. With responsive repairs, fixtures and fittings will normally be repaired or replaced, like for like, and unlike work undertaken through improvement, major repair or modernisation programmes, there is limited scope for customers to exercise any real choice. We will however offer customers a choice where this is possible.

3.8.9 Repairs Completed In One Visit

SLH aims to ensure that repairs are completed in one visit to the customer's home wherever possible. If the repair cannot be completed in one visit we will agree an appointment to return and complete the work.

3.8.10 Keeping Our Customers Informed of Delays

If a repair requires parts or materials that must be ordered, the repair may not be completed within the timescale. In this case SLH or its contractor will inform the customer of the likely date for repair completion.

3.8.11 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with repairs will be continually monitored using customer satisfaction questionnaire responses to ensure the high standard expected by our customers is delivered. When a repair is ordered to an individual dwelling a pre-paid customer satisfaction survey form will be sent out.

When a response is returned showing dissatisfaction, SLH will contact the customer within 5 working days and ensure that:

- the dissatisfaction is investigated
- the cause is remedied wherever possible
- customers are advised of the action taken

3.8.12 Damage by Tenant

The tenant is responsible for any abuse or damage caused to the property and will normally be charged for the cost of the work. In the case of accidental damage, South Lakes Housing will consider the circumstances in deciding the level of charge appropriate.

3.8.13 Responding to Crime

Following illegal entry into a Council dwelling we will:-

- carry out emergency make-safe repairs if reported
- carry out all repairs as a result of the illegal entry that are the responsibility of SLH or the customer provided a crime number from the Police is provided
- increase the level of security in the dwelling in liaison with the Crime Prevention Officer through door and window locks etc.

Where illegal entry into a property results in damage etc. no repairs will be carried out that are outside of the landlord's obligations where the illegal entry was a direct result of the customer's criminal activities.

In an effort to reduce the opportunity for repeat victimisation South Lakes Housing will support the action of Cumbria Police and provide additional security in those homes affected as necessary. Where persistent unlawful damage occurs South Lakes Housing will liaise directly with the Police.

SLH will always remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours.

3.8.14 Cultural Sensitivity

SLH may be prepared to carry out culturally sensitive customer requests arising from repairs that are due. Where such adaptations can be carried out at no additional cost, we will be happy to agree to these requests. For alterations that cost over £100 the work will be rechargeable.

3.8.15 Planned Improvements and Major Repairs

SLH recognises the economic benefits to its customers of carrying out some (particularly larger scale) repairs on a planned maintenance basis rather than carrying out responsive repairs. This benefit has to be balanced with the inconveniences that delays in organising planned maintenance work may cause individual customers and

the more general view of customers that improvements should be carried out to all properties within a street at the same time.

A responsive repair may therefore be included in a larger planned or major repair programme where:-

- multiple properties require the same type of repair
- the value or volume of the work suggests a planned approach would achieve better value for money than a series of responsive repairs
- the repair involves work chargeable to leaseholder properties and consultation within the meaning of Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 is required
- the work is planned to take place within the next 12 months and the necessary funding is available

3.9 Empty Properties (Voids)

A separate Service Policy Statement has been developed to cover empty property management.

3.10 Cyclical Maintenance

SLH will implement a programme of cyclical maintenance in respect of:-

- external decorations and associated other repairs on a five year cycle,
- internal common parts decorations on a five year cycle,
- gas system and appliances annually.

In addition SLH will enter into service contracts for inspection, testing, maintenance and repair of:-

- lifts and stair lifts;
- fire alarm installations, fire detection (not battery operated smoke detectors) and fire fighting equipment;
- door entry and warden call equipment;
- communal aerial installations.

SLH will arrange for the proper maintenance and management of hard and soft landscaped areas, including grass cutting.

3.11 Planned Maintenance

Planned maintenance is work carried out on a planned basis to maintain the general condition of property and fittings provided by SLH. These include such items as external painting and annual servicing of heating systems, lifts, etc.

In addition in responding to tenants' wishes SLH will develop a programme of planned maintenance to minimise future maintenance costs and reduce the need for response repairs.

SLH will consider planned maintenance of structural items to properties on a five-year cycle. This will include carrying out an inspection of property condition and attributes to facilitate life cycle costing and future planning.

Inspections will be carried out before external painting is due to assess the condition of roofs, woodwork and windows in order that any necessary repairs or replacements can be undertaken before the painting is done.

The servicing of central heating systems and other equipment requiring similar regular maintenance will be carried out on an annual basis, or more frequently if required by manufacturer's instructions or good trade practice.

Tenants will be kept informed and consulted about planned maintenance programmes. They will also be given at least 14 days' notice of any such works that are likely to cause them significant disruption.

3.12 Aids and Adaptations

As part of its commitment to facilitating and supporting independent living, SLH will carry out alterations, aids and adaptations to meet the special needs of individuals to enhance their lifestyle and where appropriate enable them to remain in their current home. In this respect SLH will liaise with Social Services, Occupational Therapy and other appropriate agencies. Typically, aids and adaptations may include:-

- grab rails, door alterations, ramps, handrails, stairlifts etc;
- low access baths, provision of showers, lever taps, wc adjustments;
- alterations to kitchen units, raising electrical sockets and lowering switches.

SLH will maintain any existing aid or adaptation or fixed equipment provided by SLH that is still needed to meet the needs of the disabled household member for whom it was intended and will replace these at the end of their economic life as long as they are still required.

SLH will remove on request (for re-use elsewhere) stairlifts that are no longer needed due to bereavement or a permanent change in the household makeup.

Where a repair is needed to minor adaptations such as handrails or semi-portable equipment provided for a disabled person and that person no longer needs the adaptation, these items will be removed, unless the need for the equipment by another disabled household member is evident or confirmed by Social Services.

Non-removable adaptations such as structural alterations, concrete ramps etc. will be retained and maintained by SLH.

In meeting the above objectives SLH will provide a responsive service to tenants who are or become vulnerable or who have special needs arising through disability or infirmity.

3.13 Re-decoration

Internal decoration of homes is a tenant's responsibility. When repair works, void works or improvement works are carried out at a property, however, damage to decoration may occur (although SLH will always try and ensure any such damage is kept to an absolute minimum).

Where such damage occurs and the tenant or a household member is able to decorate, SLH will provide a decoration voucher or decoration card to enable tenants to purchase decoration materials from participating local retailers (the room by room decoration allowance is set annually).

Where such damage occurs and all household members are over 80 years of age or have disabilities that prevent them from being able to redecorate, SLH will offer to carry out decoration works as appropriate and without charge in the main living areas (living room, kitchen, main bedroom).

3.14 Complaints and Dissatisfaction

Customer dissatisfaction can be expressed through any of the methods via which repairs can be reported. All SLH customers have a right of complaint. This is detailed in the 'Complaints Policy' and the 'Complaints Remedies and Compensation Policy'.

3.15 Tenders and Contracts

All work will be carried out in accordance with Standing Orders, including Financial Regulations, and SLH Procurement Strategy.

4.0 Key Targets and Performance Indicators

- percentage of urgent repairs completed within Government prescribed time limits
- average time taken to complete non-urgent responsive repairs
- customer satisfaction with response repairs
- % of responsive repairs (excluding emergencies) where access required for which SLH both made and kept an appointment
- emergency and urgent repairs as a percentage of total repairs
- percentage of repairs within target times
- average cost of repair
- percentage of non-decent council homes
- customer satisfaction with planned maintenance
- customer satisfaction with gas servicing
- percentage of gas appliances serviced on schedule
- customer satisfaction with gas repairs
- customer satisfaction with aids and adaptations
- Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating
- comparative benchmarking on Best Value Performance Indicators on maintenance and repairs
- numbers and type of complaints from tenants

5.0 Monitoring, Review and Consultation Process

Regular reports to the Board, Response Maintenance Contract Core Group, South Lakeland District Council and Tenants' Committee reviewing performance against targets and benchmarking comparisons.

Reports to the tenant representative groups and other means of consultation with tenants and tenant representatives.

6.0 Service Development and Review Priority

Changes to the service may take place as the result of the work of relevant Service Improvement Groups with tenant representation. The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years to ensure that it is meeting the current needs of the community, and to ensure that it takes into consideration any changes to legislation at any given time.

7.0 Equality and Diversity

South Lakes Housing recognises that there is a broad range of visible and non-visible differences that characterise its tenants. Some of these qualities include race, religion, culture, nationality, ethnic background, colour, disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, literacy and income level. By understanding and respecting this diversity it is able to set a policy which ensures that all tenants are able to access services provided by South Lakes Housing in an equitable manner.

South Lakes Housing is committed to providing information and services equally and without discrimination so that they meet the needs of all sections of the community who are either housed by South Lakeland District Council, living near properties managed by South Lakes Housing or seeking access to or information on housing services in the South Lakeland area. In carrying out all housing management policies, South Lakes Housing's Equality and Diversity Policy will be adhered to.

