

<b>Housing and Anti-Poverty Overview and Scrutiny</b>	<b>DATE</b> 25/11/2021	<b>ITEM NO</b> 6
<b>TITLE</b> Housing Repairs During COVID-19 Pandemic	<b>WARD (S)</b> All	
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b> Director of Housing and Safer Communities	<b>CABINET MEMBER</b> Cllr Okereke, Cabinet Member for Housing	
<b>DECISION CLASSIFICATION</b> Information only	<b>IS THE FINAL DECISION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT TO BE MADE AT THIS MEETING?</b> NA	

1. **Decision required**

This report makes the following recommendations to the decision-maker:

- 1.1 To note the update on Royal Borough of Greenwich's Housing Repairs Service and its recovery after multiple lockdowns during the pandemic period.

2. **Links to the Royal Greenwich high level objectives**

- 2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed high-level objectives as follows:

- A strong, vibrant, well run borough.

3. **Purpose of report and Executive Summary**

- 3.1 This report was requested by Housing Anti-Poverty Overview and Scrutiny for the purposes of good governance.

## 4. **Introduction and Background**

4.1 The Repairs and Investment (R&I) service has overall responsibility within the Housing and Safer Communities Directorate for maintaining and improving the Council's 25,679 housing stock (20,876 Council tenants and 4,803 Council leaseholders).

4.2 The service is typically responsible for:

- Keeping residents safe - ensuring that RBG meets its statutory obligations as a landlord, across all areas of compliance (fire, asbestos, gas, electric, lifts, water, play areas on estates etc.), and delivering an 'over and above' approach to safety.
- Bringing genuinely affordable homes back into use at a good standard – ensuring we maximise the supply of available social and temporary housing, managing the process of bringing homes back into use timely and efficiently, with satisfied customers.
- Delivering responsive repairs – carrying out day to day repairs to Council tenanted properties, and to communal areas.

### During the Pandemic and Lockdowns

4.3 As an essential service, R&I were unable to work from home at the start of the pandemic in March 2020. A key challenge was how to maintain an efficient service whilst following the government's guidelines for Constructors sectors. To comply with the guidelines the service was reduced to urgent and emergencies repairs only.

4.4 Eight trade staff were redeployed to the COVID-19 recovery services to assist with the delivery of essential items (food and medical supplies). This reduced the workforce further, notwithstanding the 25 staff who were following the government's' guidelines and self-isolating due to underlying health issues.

4.5 The telephony system prevented the front-line service, namely the Repairs Planners and Technical Administrators to work from home and, as such they were required to attend Birchmere daily. To ensure staff were working in a Covid safe environment a Standard Operating Procedure was developed for both office-based and trade staff working in Birchmere and across the borough's housing stock.

- 4.6 Trade staff visiting resident's homes were issued with full PPE and the Contact Centre was briefed to ask COVID-related questions before Trade staff entered residents' homes. When a repair was needed at a sheltered accommodation, enhanced PPE was used to protect vulnerable residents and those with disabilities.
- 4.7 In July 2020, the government announced the easing of the lockdown, and a full service was resumed. Residents were able to telephone and email repairs through to the Contact Centre and appointments were booked for routine repairs. Work also commenced on the backlog of repairs accumulated during the lockdown.
- 4.8 In September 2020, R&I experienced an outbreak of COVID, and this led to over 90 staff having to self-isolate over a three-week period, although, this mostly impacted the gas service, we reviewed the Standard Operating Procedure alongside colleagues in Public Health. They concluded that the COVID safety measures in place were adequate and there was nothing more Senior Management Team could have done to prevent the outbreak.
- 4.9 In October 2020, R&I experienced a further outbreak of COVID, which led to 50 staff in self-isolating. This had an impact on the responsive repairs service and severely impacted the ability to undertake repairs both in occupied and in void properties for over a month.
- 4.10 In November 2020, the government announced that Greater London was in Tier 3 which affected the construction sector and so R&I reverted to urgent and emergency repairs only. The government then announced the third lockdown in December 2020.
- 4.11 In December 2020, a new telephony system was introduced, which allowed some frontline staff to take calls from home. Not all staff were issued with laptops so many of the staff continued to work from Birchmere adhering to the Standard Operating Procedure.

4.12 In April 2021, A letter was sent to residents advising that the phone lines for routine repairs would reopen in June 2021. Messaging was also placed on the website and in Talk Housing.

#### Recovery after Lockdowns

4.13 In July 2021, following a review of the service and the Standard Operating Procedure, R&I were able to open to offer a full repairs service for residents. A strategy was devised where residents who has a pre-existing repair (pre- and post-lockdown) did not have to arrange a further appointment. These would be honoured in the date order and year that they were received.

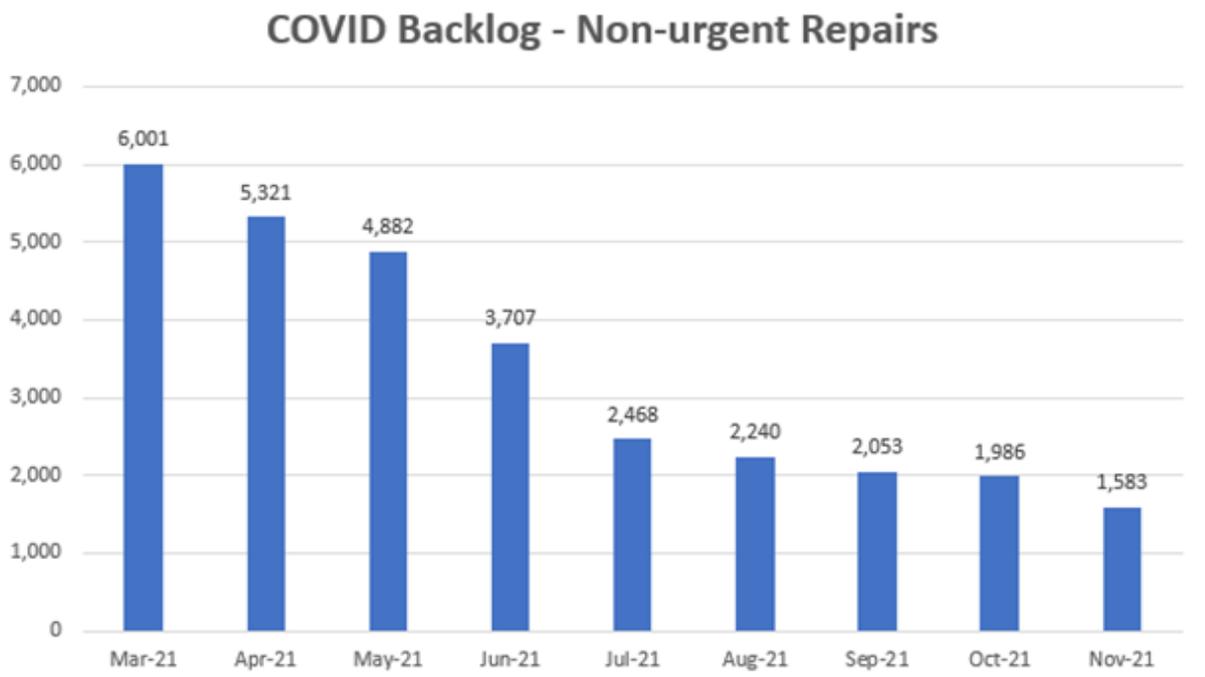
4.14 At that point, R&I had accumulated over 6000 backlog repairs during 2019/20 and 2020/21. It was clear that the in-house team would not be able to clear the backlog whilst accepting routine repairs through the Contact Centre.

4.15 It was agreed that R&I procured contractors to assist with the backlog and 1500 jobs were forwarded to three main contractors.

4.16 As frontline staff were able to work from home following the installation of the new telephony and laptops, they were able to work longer hours during the day and at weekends to support the service to reduce the backlog of repairs outstanding.

4.17 Supervisors and managers were coming into Birchmere to support the trade staff throughout the lockdown so there were no changes to that arrangement.

4.18 The below graph gives an indication of the current movement on back log repairs jobs since April 20 to date.



## 5. **Current KPIs and Service**

- 5.1 Historically, R&I have met the majority of the agreed performance targets. However, the impact of Covid in the budget years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 have prevented the service from achieving some of the key KPIs. Improvements are being made for this budget year 2021/2022 with a view to normalising in 2022/2023.
- 5.2 The clearance of the backlog of repairs has not been as efficient as anticipated. Progress meetings have been held with the contractors and they have identified the issues as (a) loss of skilled labour due to Brexit and (b) shortage of building materials.
- 5.3 Due to the lack of progress in clearing the backlog, the number of complaints, and the creditability of the service, a decision has been made to clear the remaining backlog of repairs using the in-house team.

<b>KPI Name</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2021/22 Target</b>
Average in days taken to complete non-urgent repairs	9.34	22.83	25.74	15
Overall Re-Let Times (General Needs stock) - in days	76.11	136.35	118.81	56
% of non-urgent repairs completed in target time	90.68%	84.57%	75.42%	85%
% of urgent repairs completed in target time	93.98%	93.06%	95.92%	95%
% of responsive (but not emergency) repairs for which appointments made and kept	92.61%	92.59%	90.89%	92%
% of properties with gas serviced within the last 12 months (Snap Shot)	99.93%	99.62%	99.61%	100%
% of resident satisfaction with completed repairs	N/A	90.15%	90.19%	92%
% Repairs completed at first visit	88.53%	88.25%	85.69%	90%
% of rent loss due to void properties (quarterly)	1.33%	1.68%	2.13%	1.25%
Average time taken to re-let local authority housing - in days (BV212)	45.12	58.89	51.85	40
Number of void properties (snap shot) at end of reporting period	216	353	369	225
% of Fire Risk Assessments completed within last 12 months - <i>High Rise Blocks</i>	100%	100%	36.67%	100%
% of Fire Risk Assessments completed within last 12 months - <i>Other High-risk Buildings</i>	78.08%	100%	82.76%	100%

5.4 R&I's customer satisfaction remains high with over 91% of residents independently surveyed rating the services as very satisfied and fairly satisfied. Lessons learnt from the survey results are captured to ensure we continuously improve the service we are providing to residents.



5.5 Telephone performance is not where it should be, and we are aware that customers have been waiting more than an hour to get through. R&I will be undertaking a project to understand call demands and why residents are not accessing the online services. In addition, R&I have experienced a vast number of telephony outages in the past few months. This has led to customers experiencing long wait times and being cut off during conversations. This has been escalated at Director level and representatives from Avaya have provided 24-hour support whilst they identify and rectify the issues.

Item no.	Dashboard Monitor Description	Target	Previous Month	Reporting Month
<b>1</b>	<b>Repairs Customer Contact</b>			
<b>ai</b>	Contact Centre			
	Answered			4,995 <b>71.89%</b>
	Abandoned			1,953 <b>28.11%</b>
<b>aii</b>	Repairs Hotline (Birchmere)			
	Answered			4,938 <b>34.89%</b>
	Abandoned			3,215 <b>65.11%</b>
<b>b</b>	Repairs emails Received/Responded in Target Time			1,134 <b>80.95%</b>

- 5.6 The contact centre has also had a recruitment drive and has employed a further 4 customer service agents to support the telephone lines. They will commence training in November 2021.

#### Potential Impact of Future Lockdowns

- 5.7 It is not mandatory for employees in R&I to advise RBG whether they have been double vaccinated. However, informal discussions have identified that a considerable number of staff have been. It is, therefore, not envisaged that there will be a disruption to the service provided. Notwithstanding, the government's guidelines on construction work that may lead to the service only undertaking urgent and emergency repairs.
- 5.8 R&I will use the opportunity to carry out external or communal repairs on estates and work with colleagues across RBG services ensure that residents are supported.
- 5.9 R&I are now in a position where frontline staff can work from home and have access to the telephony, so the difficulties previously experienced have been eliminated.
- 5.10 There will still need to be staff at Birchmere to support the trade staff coming into the depot and as such a rota will be devised for staff to be in the office at least twice a week.
- 5.11 Stockpiled PPE and materials will help to ensure that R&I are able to maintain a service.

#### 6. **Available Options**

- 6.1 Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the contents of this report.

#### 7. **Preferred Options**

- 7.1 Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the contents of this report.

#### 8. **Reason for Recommendation**

8.1 Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the contents of this report.

## 9. **Consultation**

9.1 No formal consultations have been carried out in connection with this report.

## 10. **Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Legal</b> including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is to update the Panel in respect of the Council's Housing Repairs Service and its recovery after multiple lockdowns during the pandemic period. As such no decision are required and no legal issues arise.	<i>Azuka Onuorah</i> <i>Head of Legal Services</i> <i>12<sup>th</sup> November 2021</i>
<b>Finance</b> and other resources	The purpose of this report is to update the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in respect of the Council's Housing Repairs Service and its recovery after the lockdowns.  The financial implications of the lockdown on the Repairs and Investment budgets are covered in the HRA Expenditure Overview and Scrutiny Report. There are no further financial implications arising from this report.	Akosua Boachie  Accountancy Business Change Manager  15 <sup>th</sup> November 2021.
<b>Equalities</b>	This report is for information only so there is no impact on equalities.	<i>Richard Parkin</i> <i>03/11/2021</i>
<b>Climate change</b>	This report is for information only so there is no impact on climate change.	<i>Richard Parkin</i> <i>03/11/2021</i>

## 11. **Report Appendices**

11.1 No report appendices.

Report Author: Richard Parkin – Senior Assistant Director of Repairs and Investment (Interim)  
Tel No. 020 8921 3065  
Email. Richard.Parkin@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Reporting to:  
Chief Officer Jamie Carswell – Director of Housing & Safer Communities  
Tel No. 020 8921 8921  
Email. Jamie.Carswell@royalgreenwich.gov.uk