

## **National Housing Maintenance Forum**

### **The M3NHF Model Procurement and Contract Documentation Version 8 and Guidance Paper– Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance**

During the closing session of the Service Provider Forum meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024, a question was raised by Connaire McGreevey Chief Executive Officer of CTS Projects Ltd, one of Northern Ireland's leading maintenance contractors as to whether the NHF Form of Contract and the Schedule of Rates documentation would be redrafted to take account of the recently released Guidance Paper - Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance.

A subsequent exchange of emails elicited that Connaire was unaware that Version 8 of the Schedule of Rates and the NHF Form of Contract 2023 and its attendant documentation had been made available to the Social Housing Sector of the UK, and his reference was to Version 7.2 of the Schedule of Rates and The Form of Contract 2016.

Concerns that NHMF sponsored Schedule of Rates documentation including the Form of Contract may be deficient in meeting the requirements of both the Regulator for Social Housing and the recommendations of the Better Social Housing Review and the Guidance on Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance could lead to Social Landlords seeking alternative sources of procurement and contract management procedures, processes and payment mechanisms and either not subscribing to the Schedule of Rates as a new user or if an existing user to licencing the Schedule of Rates with a resultant reduction in the NHMF's income stream which is based on a percentage of the purchase and licence income.

Both the Better Social Housing Review and the CIH Guidance Paper – Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance relate primary to Housing Associations in England, the NHMF is a body that also represents the interests of Local Authorities, ALMO's, Housing Associations in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Charities with Housing Stock, Private Landlords, and the Married Quarter Estate of the Ministry of Defence.

To safe guard the NHMF and to promote the Schedule of Rates as the best documentation available to procure, pay for and contract manage repairs and maintenance it is suggested that the following actions be undertaken:

1. Working group including representatives of the NHMF, the Service Provider Forum, Rand Associates Consultancy Services and Anthony Collins Solicitors review the Version 8 Schedule of Rates and Form of Contract 2023 documentation to establish any aspect that already meets or betters (i.e. demonstration of best practice) the recommendations or requirements of:
  - The Better Social Housing Review;
  - The Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards for repairs, maintenance and planned improvements; and
  - The CIH/NHF Guidance Paper - Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance – 6 Themes and 12 Principles
  - The CIG/NHF Good Practice Guidance – 10 Principles

And how this existing best practice can be disseminated to the Sector.

2. Working group including representatives of the NHMF, the Service Provider Forum , Rand Associates Consultancy Services and Anthony Collins Solicitors review the Version 8 Schedule of Rates and Form of Contract 2023 documentation to establish any aspect that does not meet the recommendations or requirements of:
  - The Better Social Housing Review;
  - The Regulator of Social Housing’s consumer standards for repairs, maintenance and planned improvements; and
  - The CIH/NHF Guidance Paper - Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance – 6 Themes and 12 Principles
  - The CIG/NHF Good Practice Guidance – 10 Principles

And how these in conjunction with any amendments in respect of the Procurement Act 2023 can be addressed in the next revision to the Schedule of Rates and Form of Contract 2023 documentation that is due to be issued early in 2025.

3. Working Group including representatives of NHMF, Service Provider Forum, the Direct Works Forum and Rand Associates Consultancy Services to undertake research into the feasibility and viability leading to the creation of a business case for the development of a NHMF Benchmarking Service to meet the recommendations of Guidance Paper Theme 5: Understanding your performance Principles 9 and 10.

Note: Hammar South West, the Direct Works Forum and the NHMF have previously given support to a benchmarking service – M3Checkmate, which provided a benchmarking and reporting service to Social Landlord’s in respect of both their Client side costs and performance and the operational cost and performance of their Direct Labour Organisations but ceased operation in 2015.

4. Working Group including representatives of NHMF, the Service Provider’s Forum, the Direct Works Forum and M3 Housing to review the 12 Principles of the Guidance Paper – Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance and the 10 Good Practice Principles to establish other areas that can be addressed and developed in making specific recommendations as to how the repairs and maintenance services in the UK can be improved by the training and certification of operatives, supervisory staff, contact centre staff, housing management staff in the procurement, inspection, repairs ordering and contract management functions of the repairs and maintenance services outwith the proposal for developing E-learning training in the use of Schedule of Rates and in contract management.
5. The NHMF is requested to consider this Paper and to provide financial support to the four Working Groups and any secretariat services that they may require.

David Miller

Rand Associates and M3 Housing

## **BACKGROUND**

The M3NHF Model Procurement and Contract Documentation Version 8 consists of a number of interlinked documents drafted by Rand Associates Consultancy Services Ltd and Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP:

- Model Invitation to Tender
- Model KPI Framework
- Model Price Framework Rules and Price Document
- Schedule of Rates – various Modules – Version 8
- Technical Specification – various Modules – Version 8
- NHF Form of Contract 2023 – Articles and Contract Conditions
- NHF Form of Contract 2023 – Contract Conditions
- NHF Form of Contract 2023 – Preliminaries

The Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) was commissioned in 2022 by the Chartered Institute of Housing (“CIH”) and the National Housing Federation (“NHF”) to examine issues relating to the quality of social housing and undertaken by an independent panel of diverse experts, it set out seven recommendations to the social housing sector to improve the quality and decency of homes and the culture and responsiveness of social landlords

The recommendations were:

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.
2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.
3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like.
4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional “housing officer” role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.
5. Housing associations should work with all tenants to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles.
6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.
7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review’s

Recommendation 3 focused on repairs and maintenance

The Guidance Paper– Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance is the result of a project set up by the CIH to support the social housing sector to improve its repairs and maintenance practices in response to the Better Social Housing Review.

The participants in the Project were:

- 9 Representatives of Housing Associations

- A Representative from the National Federation of ALMOs
- A Representative from the Housing Quality Network
- A Representative from TPAS
- A Representative from National Housing Federation
- A Representative from the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH)
- A Representative from South East Consortium (Procurement Organisation)
- Mike Turner - Cardo Group (Sole Representative of the Contracting Sector)

The Project was chaired by a Director of the CIH, and the CIH acted as the secretariat to the Project.

The aims of the Project were:

***To collectively rethink and redefine how to design an excellent repairs and maintenance service in partnership with residents, contractors and frontline staff, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for black and minority ethnic residents and residents that may be considered marginalized, disadvantaged or vulnerable.***

***To develop and encourage the sector -wide adoption of new standard and metrics that will drive improved repairs and maintenance performance and better support board and resident scrutiny of performance at the landlord level.***

***To share learning and best practice across the social housing sector and to key stakeholders to enable the sector to implement positive and impactful changes in how it approaches its repairs and maintenance processes.***

Whilst the Project had representation from the umbrella organisations for Local Authorities and ALMO's, no practitioners from either the Local Authority, ALMO or Non-registered Social Landlord's participated in the Project, even though they represent 25 to 30% of the Social Landlord's in the United Kingdom, nor did the Project have representation from the Registered Providers in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Separately, the Project also investigated **how social landlords could work more collaboratively with their contractors, service providers, and inhouse repairs and maintenance teams to improve service delivery**. The CIH have consequently produced good practice guidance and case studies to help Social Landlord's work more effectively with these parties to obtain better outcomes for your residents.

While the Project was being finalised, **the Regulator for Social Housing** in April 2024 introduced a number of consumer standards in respect of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements.

- Registered Providers must enable repairs and maintenance issues to be reported easily;
- Registered Providers must set timescales for the completion of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements, clearly communicate them to tenants and take appropriate steps to deliver to them.

- Registered Providers must keep tenants informed about repairs, maintenance and planned improvements to their homes with clear and timely communication.
- Registered Provider must understand and fulfill their maintenance responsibilities in respect of communal areas.
- Registered providers must ensure that the delivery of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements to homes and communal areas is informed by the needs of tenants and provides value for money.
- Registered Providers must take the views of residents into account in their decision making about how their services are delivered.
- Registered Providers must take action to deliver fair access to, and equitable outcomes of their services for all residents.
- Registered Providers must take steps to ensure that residents have the information they need to scrutinize and hold their Provider to account.
- Registered Providers must accept that the introduction of Awaab's law will place minimum requirements and timescales of Providers for investigating and responding to health hazards inside their homes.
- Registered Providers must adhere to the requirements of the Competence and Conduct Standard and the outcomes -focused standard which will apply to all their staff involved in the provision of housing management services.

The Guidance produced by the Project falls into 6 themes each with 2 guiding principles.

### **Theme 1: Improving Culture and Behaviours**

#### **Principle 1: Tackle stigma and insist upon empathy , understanding and professionalism in every action you and your operatives have with residents.**

Areas to be addressed:

- Inadequate handling of complaints;
- Push back by contact centre staff;
- Providers too quick to see complaints as criticism;
- Negative assumptions about residents lifestyles;
- Contemptuous and discriminatory treatment;
- Actively ignoring their residents; and
- Prioritising business and development over community.

#### **Principle 2: Make every contact count.**

Areas to be addressed:

- All colleagues (including maintenance operatives) who visit people at home to be trained to recognise, and have appropriate conversations with residents about potential repair issues, happiness with their home, and whether it meets their needs;

- Equip all colleague (including maintenance operatives) with a mobile phone app that can be used to photograph potential repair issues and have an initial diagnosis made via Artificial Intelligence;
- Equip all Colleagues (including maintenance operatives) with the training, confidence and reporting processes to uncover repair issues that might otherwise go unnoticed;
- Cultivate a culture of awareness and understanding with maintenance operatives and helping put this into practice within residents homes;
- Allowing extra time whilst undertaking a repair to scan the property for other issues and talking to the resident about their needs can identify and address other issues that may be present, including undertaking any additional repair identified.

## **Theme 2: Inclusivity and tackling discrimination**

### **Principle 3: Use of range of information to know your silences and inequities.**

Areas to be addressed:

Use of data smartly and efficiently and triangulating different available data sources is likely to identify those more likely to be detrimentally effected by poor service provision, and who are not inputting to resident engagement activities;

Social landlords should work more closely with their staff (including frontline teams and maintenance operatives) to improve the repairs and maintenance services;

Collection of data on the performance of the repairs and maintenance service, the quality of the housing stock and about the ethnicity, age, support needs, language barriers of residents;

Use of asset management data and property information including data derived from sensor equipment installed in the housing stock;

Satisfaction surveys or feedback from residents.

### **Principle 4: Include by design.**

Areas to be addressed:

Review the composition of any pre-existing groups, scrutiny panels or forums that inform the design and review of the repairs and maintenance service to

establish how representative they are of all the residents, do they include representatives that are more likely to experience poor service outcomes or suffering repair backlogs or living in areas of multiple deprivation, residents in supported housing and leaseholders;

Delivering bespoke engagement activities that are designed to the needs and requirements of different groups of residents for example:

- Drawing on community networks and partners to deliver bespoke engagement and outreach sessions, such as through local voluntary sector partnerships, coffee mornings for older people or local faith groups to gather feedback from residents in safe, supportive environments;
- Undertaking equality impact assessments on resident engagement frameworks to ensure they are inclusive;
- Using British Sign Language interpreters to gather feedback from residents with hearing impairment
- Holding monthly meetings in-situ in retirement and supported living to capture feedback on repairs and maintenance concerns;
- Appointing a dedicated operative for repairs and maintenance in assisted living schemes who can act as a single point of contact for residents and their carers.

Distributing surveys and questionnaires on repairs and maintenance in multiple formats;

Building accessibility tools into Social landlord's websites and other digital communications sent to residents;

Trialling shorter, snappier forms of engagement such as drop in centres or 5 minute focused interview surveys.

### **Theme 3: Structure your engagement**

**Principle 5: Give your residents the freedom to scrutinize different parts of your repairs and maintenance service and support them to do so.**

Areas to be addressed:

The delivery of an excellent repairs and maintenance service is extremely challenging as a result of:

- Skills shortage;
- Market volatility;
- Unpredictable inflation;
- Financial pressures

- Organisational challenges;
  - Unrealistic resident expectations
- Allow resident groups to review the service including providing them with the tools, data and resources they need to do so.

**Principle 6: Commit to engaging throughout the whole repairs and maintenance cycle**

Areas to be addressed:

Working with residents to improve the repairs and maintenance service should be seen as processual and cyclical, and not undertaken only once or twice throughout a contract period;

Residents should be engaged on service design and delivery throughout the whole cycle, paying particular attention to procurement periods and key milestones; Residents can influence the specification of the service and how different aspects of the tender responses should be prioritized and scored.

Residents should be trained to understand what procurement is and how they can be involved in the evaluation and selection of Contractors;

A "golden thread" of resident involvement in the procurement process and delivery of the contract;

Engaging residents at key milestones in service delivery;

Resident satisfaction surveys to evaluate satisfaction of the Repairs Services in two separate parts

- From ordering of repair to maintenance operative being despatched;
- From arrival to completion of the repair

Creation of Estate Service Champions to act as a conduit for collecting feedback;

Obtaining feedback from all residents when repairs undertaken in a block of flats have a communal impact;

**Theme 4: Involving colleagues**

**Principle 7: Include colleagues from all areas of the organization.**

Areas to be addressed:

Numerous people within a Social Landlord operation are involved in the end to end repairs and maintenance process and are "experts" in their particular part of the operation, and will "instinctively" understand the ways that works well or could be improved;

Social landlords should seek to include as many relevant colleagues from across the business in the



design and review of the repairs and maintenance process, this could be undertaken via a mapping exercise to understand who from across the organization should be invited to contribute to review the service;

Feedback from staff could be gathered by:

- Including a wide range of colleagues within procurement and contract negotiation processes;
- Utilising colleague engagement forums to discuss your repairs and maintenance service;
- Where applicable, using 'staff who are customers' groups to gather insight from colleagues who are also residents;
- Undertaking thematic focus groups with different teams to understand their viewpoints, e.g. with property leadership teams, operations teams, or contact centre teams;
- Setting up bespoke working groups, including as a minimum colleagues who are most acutely involved in the repairs and maintenance process or who might be particularly affected by proposed service redesign;
- 'Ask me anything' sessions with senior leadership teams and asset managers, allowing colleagues to ask questions and feed in perspectives anonymously;
- Establishing roles such as 'Employee Engagement Champion' in repairs and maintenance services.

Engagement need to be designed to enable colleagues to give their honest, untarnished view of the repairs and maintenance service.

## **Principle 8:**

### **Reflect their contributions in workload models and professional development frameworks**

Areas to be addressed:

Frontline housing staff working directly with residents are experiencing enormous pressure and demands on their time;

Challenging workloads are contributing to high rates of staff turnover and making it more difficult for residents to communicate with their landlord;

Colleagues input contributions to the design and review of the repairs and maintenance service should be sufficiently accounted for in workload models;

Colleagues should be supported to incorporate their engagement to the design and review of the repairs and maintenance service into continuing professional development (CPD frameworks);

Ensure colleagues have visibility over improvements made to the repairs and maintenance service, particularly if their feedback has led to that change in process.

## **Theme 5: Understanding your performance**

### **Principle 9: Take a hybrid approach to KPI's**

Areas to be addressed:

Benchmarkable KPI's are those KPI's that can be compared across similar Organisations or peer groups (same number of homes, similar geography, similar archetype, same type of repairs and maintenance delivery model)

Benchmarkable KPI's should be independently defined and verified with clear guidance on how data should be collected, to minimise variance in measurement, and ensure comparisons across peer groups are trustworthy and accurate and provide confidence;

Benchmarking should also offer opportunities for good practice sharing between individual providers;

The value of Benchmarkable KPI's is the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to peers and to learn from those peers to improve aspects of the repairs and maintenance service;

Collected KPI's data might not be measuring the issued that matter most to residents;

Resident-driven KPI's can be created to measure and monitor how the Landlord are delivering on the priorities of residents and give a greater understanding of the issued that residents might be reporting;

Software can be and has been developed in respect of Customer Satisfaction to give a greater understanding of resident satisfaction with different parts of the repairs journey including;

- Process of agreeing follow on appointments
- Dealing with no access
- Visibility over behaviour and standard of individual operatives;

### **Principle 10: Work with your residents to define what else they need to scrutinize repairs**

Areas to be addressed:

Working collaboratively with residents to explore and agree on what information they need to hold the repairs and maintenance performance to account in addition to metrics and KPI's including but not limited to:

- Explanation of why metrics and KPIs have not been met;
- Accurate and up to date stock condition information;
- Feedback received from residents on social media;
- Interview with colleagues and contractors to dig deeper into specific issues;
- Information about survey sample sizes, both for TSM data and any other surveys undertaken;
- Listening into phone calls between contract centre operatives and residents reporting repairs;
- Information about the content of and responses to complaints, not just how many have been received and addressed;
- 'Deep Dives' into specific repairs and maintenance cases , especially those that have taken a long time to resolve or that have resulted in particular poor experiences or outcomes for residents;
- Giving residents the opportunity to go on 'away days' with contractors, such as spending a day 'in the van' with a repairs operative or visiting warehouses;
- Supporting residents to design and deploy their own satisfaction surveys;
- Information about the qualifications, training and opportunities that landlords are offering to their staff;

## **Theme 6: Closing the loop**

### **Principle 11:**

**Make your performance and how you are improving your repairs and maintenance service transparent and visible.**

Areas to be addressed:

Dissemination of how progress that Landlord is making toward improving the repairs and maintenance service to residents and colleagues in a timely manner is vital;

Presenting data on performance to residents , colleagues and the wider sector is required in a transparent, accessible and inclusive way;

Social media, regular newsletter, event in the community and other Landlord led activities are opportunities to communicate data on performance;

## **Principle 12:**

**Allow your residents and colleagues the space to challenge and scrutinise how you are delivering change**

Areas to be addressed:

Social Landlord to work with and enable and empower residents and colleagues to undertake an annual review of progress made against the BSHR recommendations.

## **Good Practice Guidance**

The Project also in respect of **how social landlords could work more collaboratively with their contractors, service providers, and inhouse repairs and maintenance teams to improve service delivery** devised ten good practice principles to follow when Social Landlord's are designing and procuring a new repairs and maintenance service.

These principles are split into three groups:

1. Early market engagement and procurement including Culture, Value and relationships;
2. Building a sustainable relationship with good working practices; and
3. Practicing on -going and continuous improvement.

### **Early market engagement and procurement**

- 1) Give a greater emphasis in your procurement activities to communicating and aligning your core values, vision, and purpose with a service provider

Social landlords are increasingly placing greater emphasis on making sure that the operatives delivering their repairs and maintenance services (whether external Providers or in-house teams) are aligned to their core vision, values, and purpose.

- 2) Engage the market before finalising your specification when procuring

Engaging the market before finalising the tender specification is a critical step to ensuring it is realistic, costed appropriately, deliverable, and attractive to prospective bidders. Earlier research by the NHMF' (Contractor Forum - Soft Market Testing Best Practice Guide and Toolkit v2) found that Providers can and do provide feedback on elements of a draft specification that are risk, challenging to deliver, or misguided.

Pre-market engagement can lead to better specification design and the most appropriate kind of contract being utilised, it can receive more interest from service providers, not least because they are aware of it and have been involved in its development.

- 3) Ensure that residents and colleagues from across the organisation can be centrally involved in the procurement process

Involving a wide range of residents and colleagues in the procurement process from the beginning can be enormously beneficial to delivering good outcomes for residents..

When including colleagues from across the organisation, it is especially important to involve not only the teams who will be managing and facilitating the contract, but also relevant colleagues from areas of the organisation with responsibility for safeguarding; equality, diversity, and inclusion; contact centre operations, and more widely. Including a wide range of colleagues can help you ensure that the service provider(s) you appoint are sufficiently experienced to understanding safeguarding, resident needs and vulnerabilities, and other crucial aspects of delivery that are important to achieving good outcomes for all residents.

Residents should also be involved right at the start of this journey, and the most effective part of the process that residents can influence is the specification of the service and how different elements of tender responses should be prioritised and scored. Critically, residents will require training to understand what procurement is and how they can be involved.

#### 4) Build your partnership for the long-term

The establishment of long-term relationships, whether they are with an external service provider or an in-house repairs and maintenance service, offer multiple opportunities to continually improve delivery and value for money.

For Providers, a commitment to a long-term relationship encourages inward investment in areas that are a priority to the Client (e.g. safeguarding training for operatives) and encourages the germination of genuine partnerships, rather than adversarial or 'parachute' relationships, whereby providers 'drop in' and deliver a short contract with the minimum endeavour. It also provides welcome financial certainty.

Focusing on the establishment of a long-term partnership also allows Providers and in-house teams to develop a deep, detailed understanding of the homes and residents they are serving, enabling added value to be realised by applying their expertise and experience in certain situations (for example, being able to predict issues in certain home archetypes based on previous work).

- Cultivating relationships of partnership, trust, and transparency is critical for ensuring that good outcomes can be delivered for residents
- This is especially the case when working with external contractors and service providers. Too often, the Project's research found, these relationships can be adversarial, underpinned by 'us vs. them' attitudes on both sides.
- 'Wearing each other's hats' allows a mutual appreciation of the challenges facing Landlords, and Providers in a volatile market
- In the research undertaken, Providers reflected frequently on the difficult financial situations they and landlords were facing. They generally agreed that the main challenges (e.g. inflation, skills shortages) were common to both, and that a mutual understanding of the difficulties of delivery and the market is a good starting point for a good relationship.
- A mutual focus on longevity can improve the quality of relationships and deliver significant additional benefits for residents
- Providers emphasised the mutual benefits of approaching repairs and maintenance contracts with longevity in mind. For them, the certainty of long-term contracts provides security, and encourages security, and encourage inward investment in areas important to the landlord (e.g. safeguarding training), It also helps to cultivate trust and good working relationships, and reduces the risk of 'parachute' delivery, where service providers may deliver a short-term contract with the minimum of resources or effort.

## Good practice in procurement

- Taking forward learning from early engagement with the market into contract design often results in better service design and delivery
- The Project review encountered several examples of landlords designing tender specifications and requirements based on early market engagement, and how this enables potential risks to be identified and addressed from the very beginning of a contract. In some cases, undertaking this kind of early market engagement can also increase the number of contractors and service providers who are interested in bidding, both because they are more likely to know about it and have confidence that it has been designed appropriately.
- Clear and consistent KPIs are essential
- Providers have discussed that KPIs are essential, but must be able to be measured consistently and accurately across different providers, and not 'gamed'. They have also reflected on how the Sector might move beyond KPIs in the traditional sense, e.g. how resident feedback, focus groups, or other forms of 'qualitative' KPIs might be designed and incorporated into service performance review.

## Building a sustainable relationship with good working practices

### 5) Balance risk and reward fairly in your contract structure

Earlier [research by the NHMF](#) has investigated the underlying reasons behind the collapse of several longstanding service providers since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The NHMF noted that when procuring works and services, there are opportunities for social landlords to structure contracts in a way that spreads the risk and reward fairly between landlords and service providers. Specifically, landlords should look to practice the following when putting together a contract:

- Thinking carefully about tender validity periods, specifically how long a price must be held by bidders. The NHMF noted that fixed price contracts were a significant factor in the collapse of many service providers in recent years.
- Using collaborative contractual models that provide transparency of costs, and which offer discreet mechanisms to address difficult issues when they are encountered.
- Practicing fair risk transfer, especially avoiding legal terms that transfer risk unfairly, without liability caps and with unreasonable penalties.
- Putting in place an agreement to collaboratively monitor the market to understand any potential market conditions that might affect the delivery of the contract.

### 6) Agree the outlines of your working relationship prior to the commencement of a contract, and agree to review this on a pre-defined basis

The CIH Project's research with Providers has highlighted that many of the common issues that arise in a contract are 'baked in' from the beginning, or partly arise from inadequate planning after a tender has been awarded, but before the commencement of the contract. There are several things that social landlords can do to address this before contract commencement, in partnership with their Providers

- Agree communication protocols and practices and commit to reviewing how they are working across the duration of a contract.
- Have a plan in place for business continuity, to ensure that staff churn or key members of staff leaving their posts does not affect delivery.
- Agree a collaborative approach to how challenges and problems will be considered and addressed.
- Discuss whether there are any areas of service delivery that the contractor or service provider has specific expertise, and which could be used to positively shape delivery in the future.
- Collaboratively agree respective roles and responsibilities on data collection, analysis, and reporting.

## 7) Ensure contract managers have the right skill set

Once a procurement process has concluded, the commencement of a contract and its transition to a contract manager is critical for success.

Contract managers need to have the right skill sets to have the technical, legal, and financial knowledge to understand and report on contract management and performance, but they also need to be able to manage relationships and develop rapport with Providers

Providing appropriate CPD opportunities and supporting contract managers to develop these skills will undoubtedly lead to the better management and delivery of repairs and maintenance contracts, improving outcomes for all parties, not least the residents.

### **Good practice in building and maintaining a working relationship**

- Agreeing on communication protocols and practices at the beginning of a partnership can pay dividends during contract delivery
- In the Project's dialogue with Providers, they learnt that communication protocols and practices are sometimes not explicitly discussed prior to the beginning of a contract. This can lead to unforeseen challenges. For example, one Provider talked about the shift to online working at the beginning of Covid-19. In their view, this had a negative impact on communication and contributed to a corresponding deterioration in the working relationship, and there was no discussion or review then or later as to whether this change in communication was working for both parties, and affecting outcomes for residents.
- Maintenance organisations have significant expertise and experience they can bring to a service, but this is sometimes underappreciated
- The Project's research found that all organisations involved in repairs and maintenance delivery – landlords, Providers, in-house repairs teams – bring different skills and forms of expertise to a relationship. In many cases, Providers, and in-house teams can offer new perspectives and solutions to problems – if they are given the opportunity to contribute. Exploring this honestly throughout a partnership can lead to continuous improvement and opportunities to improve service delivery, leading to better outcomes for residents.
- Undertaking business continuity planning is important for mitigating unforeseen circumstances, such as staff churn or senior leaders moving on



- Providers have discussed examples of contracts and relationships deteriorating or experiencing challenges because of staff turnover at both the Provider and the landlord. There was a recognition that staff churn will always be a risk on both sides, and that this highlighted the need for good and collaborative forward planning on business/contract continuity arrangements.
- When unexpected challenges arise, collective problem solving can lead to better outcomes than unilateral decision making
- The Project were told by Providers about different examples of Landlords and Providers working together to decide how to best respond to unforeseen circumstances, for example an unexpected uptick in responsive repairs requests, which was placing pressure on both. Doing this collaboratively can lead to solutions that are more realistic, more deliverable, and ultimately result in the continuation of good outcomes for residents.

### **Practicing ongoing and continuous improvement**

- 8) Give Providers the opportunity to learn from each other about how to best serve the residents

Social landlord's deliver multiple different kinds of property services. This includes repairs and maintenance, gas works and compliance, building and fire safety works, retrofit works, and more general estate maintenance and management. These services are often delivered by a mosaic of different Providers, including external contractors, smaller specialist providers, and in-house teams.

However, although they perform different services, they all work in the same communities with the same residents. Social Landlord's should therefore give your different Providers a space to share good practice and exchange information about how they can best serve your residents and communities. This can be especially valuable for new Providers working for a Social Landlord for the first time, as it enables them to learn from incumbent Providers working across different services.

- 9) Work together to understand how internal processes affect Provider performance on the frontline, and how it might affect the Social Landlord's KPIs

Processes, systems, and procedures internal to a landlord can unintentionally affect the ability of Providers to deliver efficient and accurate repairs and maintenance services in individual homes. Research has found that this can affect core KPIs, especially pivotal indicators such as first-time fix rates and instances of no access.

For example, unclear or incomplete diagnosis at call control can result in repeat visits for operatives as they discover they do not have the tools or parts to fix the exact issue once they reach the home.

Social Landlords, Providers, and in-house teams should therefore work together to review and better understand how internal processes filter through the chain to affect the delivery of repairs and maintenance services on the ground. They should then work together to devise pre-agreed mitigations and steps to ensure that;

- a) the possibility of this happening is minimised; and
- b) any instances that do happen do not detrimentally affect the key metrics the service provider is held to.

10) Work collaboratively with your residents, colleagues, and service providers to review your service performance openly

The BSHR report concluded with a call for Social Landlords to work with residents and colleagues to undertake an annual review of progress made against each of its six core recommendations. It highlighted that for the recommendations to drive meaningful change in social housing, Landlords should enable and empower residents and colleagues to examine how well they are doing in terms of implementing them, including pinpointing how any challenges or barriers can be overcome.

Providers, and in-house repairs teams should also be centrally involved in annual reviews. They bring a unique perspective, and giving them the space to speak openly about what is working well, and what is not, can support continuous improvement on an annual basis.