



Residents Panel Report – Repairs Scrutiny

The Residents' Panel was requested to scrutinize an element of OHALs policies and procedures. It was discussed and Orkney Housing Association Ltd, (OHALs) responsive repairs procedures. The panel was then asked to report their findings for the Management Committee of OHAL.

Over a period of a few months a number of OHAL resident panel meetings were held both at OHAL offices and warehouse buildings, Stromness. There were a couple of TPAS training sessions, led by Lesley Baird of TPAS. The panel thoroughly enjoyed the entertaining training which was accompanied with refreshments supplied by the Blide. The panel learned about the Scottish Housing Regulator, how to compare like for like housing Associations and Councils, and how they met targets (if it all) and if improvements were made year on year and whether statistics actually gave true readings, e.g. a piece of the jigsaw may be missing or not considered within a section, thus not reflecting the true outcome. With continual monitoring and changing methods of recording, this should be rectifying the issues brought up.

The Panel read through various information packs OHAL provide to tenants with regard the various definitions of repairs, - responsive, cyclical, maintenance, planned or otherwise. This was discussed and compared, e.g. leaky kitchen tap – responsive repair and replacement of kitchen - planned. We discussed timescales for repairs, emergency, urgent and routine. We compared this with OIC's procedures and discussed the difficulties two of our panel members who are council tenants had with their repairs procedures and service. It appears that they were happy with the reporting of a fault and how that was handled and the front line staff were excellent, they found fault in the system further along the line, where the staff in the repairs section, not picking up the request on the computer system and seems to get lost somewhere in 'cyberspace'. A fault in the software that may need to be rectified or updated, perhaps, or the training of staff on how to use the software. Within the information we read through and discussed was recharging of repairs and who's responsible for what repair, and how the tenant is notified of this (tenants handbook, leaflets, website).

We discussed various activities the residents' panel could do to investigate OHALs responsive repairs procedures. It was agreed that a visit by a couple of panel members so they could shadow Rachel Peace in the office environment. We discussed volunteers going round the area they live, doing a survey on responsive repairs procedures. We set up a dozen questions, got our mug shots taken for ID badges.

Kate Barrett, Jen Boem, Dawn Davidson and Kath Fennell walked round their respective schemes armed with their questionnaires. The response they got was excellent. The information was then analysed back at the office.

- 100% of those who answered positively to getting through to the right person and felt the staff member was able to deal with the query.

- 94.12% were confident the repair would be dealt with. 5.88% were not confident.
- Only 5.88% of tenants were informed by phone as to when repair was to be done, for example, contractor phoning to arrange time and date of entry. Notification by post (works order) was only 47.06% which was surprising as it was assumed ALL repairs were sent out works orders. Maybe it was how we asked the question and it wasn't clear to the tenant what we were asking. 47.06% said other and on investigating further the consensus was contractors turning up on the "off chance" as they were in the area. This was not always convenient for the tenants, or tenants may not have been at home and the contractors' card was posted through the door.
- 100% of those who answered the questionnaire were satisfied with the finished repair.
- 88.24% of those who answered are aware of the different times and priorities of repairs. 11.78% did not.
- 81.25% of those who answered understood the information provided, and what will happen and when, 6.25% did not and 12.5% made comments.
- 41.18% felt that the staff understood the tenant when reporting the repair, with 58.62% contractors had go get parts to do the job, as they found the repair was something different. Dependent on how this can be interpreted, 100% of tenants who answered felt their repair was fully understood by staff, however 58.62% found that when contractor was doing the repair, he found the fault to be something else, and thus contractor having to go to base for part or equipment and return to finish job.
- Of those who answered the questionnaire, 94.12% were satisfied with arrangements for contractor coming to carry out the repair. 5.88% were not – miscommunication or misinterpretation between tenant and contractor regarding am or pm visits, or contractor finishing previous job in area early and popping round on the off chance.
- 23.53% of tenants felt instructions left for contractors were honoured. 29.415 felt they weren't honoured, 47.06% repeated the above comments of "off chance" visits.
- 100% of those who answered were satisfied the repair was done within the right time frame.
- One tenant declined to answer the questionnaire as he was satisfied with the service provided by OHAL. Another tenant who answered the questionnaire commented that OHAL provide a better repairs service than the "council". Another tenant had mentioned within the questionnaire that his kitchen was quite dated, although he was aware that this wasn't part of the responsive repairs section.

Kate Barratt and Jen Boam agreed to research the office procedures when tenants contact the office reporting faults and/or repairs. A time and date that was convenient for Rachel, the repairs administrator to sit with Kate and Jen shadowing her. During this time, Rachel explained that she would take phone calls, asking questions appropriate to the fault or repair in order to

establish the problem and its urgency. A computerized works order with job number is then completed with description of fault/repair and the tenant's details. Relevant contractor or handyman is contacted, then works order is issued to tenant and contractor. Jen and Kate asked if the contractors charged cheaper rates to the OHAL given the quantity of work issued to them. This was unknown, but OHAL do put them on a recommended list resulting in further work.

Only one call came through for Rachel, a disabled gent's bathroom light had blown and couldn't replace it. Rachel completed a works order, contacted a contractor, classifying it as emergency {immediate effect}. On requesting feedback, the repair was satisfactorily completed on the same day.

Occasionally, however, there are problems – access to property at arranged times, works needing done and disputes over who is responsible for the charges should damage be done by tenant. If it's a case of a tenant locking themselves out and locks needing changed, this cost is then charged to the tenant.

For this exercise, we concentrated on phone contact for repairs. Within the meetings, it was reiterated that OHAL can be contacted by phone, in person at the front desk, email and website. This should allow for every eventuality. The writer, on going online and looking at OHALs website, found it easy to navigate. The writer was able to find the repairs page which had clear informative icons at the top of the page telling you the various methods of contact. The writer was able to find and download the repairs pamphlet and the right to repair pamphlets. The writer scanned both the online repairs pamphlets and the hard copy, and found a slight differentiation of layout of repairs response times. The online version separated the urgent times of 1 working day and 3 working days, whereas the hard copy had 1-3 working days. Both were understandable, however, consistency may be a suggestion. On the writer's last visit to the office, she browsed at the leaflet stands to see if there were any up to date leaflets/sheets giving information on OHALs repairs policy/procedures. There were none. The out of hours' emergency number was clearly posted on the window at the entrance.

Although the panel are aware this is an ongoing difficulty, OHAL has, the writer recommends a better way that contractors could notify tenants' time and dates for accessing property for repairs. This may be helped with a possible meeting with contractors and OHALs technical department. (This may already have been tried). Everybody singing from the same song sheet, so to speak. Easy to read leaflets on display in the reception may be a possibility, this may have been an oversight and stocks not replenished on the day.

Kate Barratt & Kath Fennell

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