

Report to: Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 14th November 2002. Executive Board 2nd December 2002. Council 9th December 2002.

HOUSING REPAIRS POLICY - TENANTS RESPONSIBILITY.

Report of: <i>Business Manager, Oxford Building Solutions.</i>	WARDS AFFECTED ALL
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Lead Member Responsible: <i>Councillor Val Smith</i> <i>Housing Portfolio Member</i>	
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility: <i>Housing Scrutiny Committee</i>	
Key Decision: <i>No</i>	

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is to seek approval for proposed changes to the Council's Housing Repairs Policy with regard to tenants responsibility. The need for a change has been brought about by the pressure which the current policy has placed on the day to day repairs budget.

Members are requested to :-

- (a) Note the pressures on the Housing Revenue Account brought about, in part, by the current policy.
- (b) Indicate which, if any, changes to the current policy they wish to make.
- (c) Determine whether all tenants should be recharged for reglazing (irrespective of cause and personal circumstances).
- (d) Indicate whether any groups of tenants should be exempt from the policy changes due to age, medical condition, disability etc. and note the financial and administrative consequences.
- (e) Indicate how the tenant consultation process should be undertaken.
- (f) Approve a budget of £3,000 to publicise the changes to the policy.
- (g) Note that there may be staffing implications to the changes which will need to be evaluated when the final proposals have been determined.
- (h) Agree that any changes should be implemented from 1st April 2003.

1. The Council provides a responsive repairs service based on policy decisions made in the past regarding those repairs that the Council, as the landlord, is responsible for undertaking and those repairs which are the responsibility of the tenants. Appendix 'A' is an extract from the Tenants' Repairs Book which details the current arrangements.
2. Over the past few years this demand led service has resulted in the cost of of the day to day repairs exceeding the budget each year with the overspend approaching £1.0 million per annum and without a change in policy, it will not be possible to help contain expenditure. This has now put severe pressure on the Housing Revenue Account.
3. In order to evaluate how the Council's policy of responsibility for repairs compares with that of others, a comparative exercise has been undertaken. The spreadsheet attached as Appendix 'B' shows the existing situation with regard to Oxford City Council tenant responsibility, when compared to some other social housing landlords. The organisations chosen for comparison are three of the other CWOIL partners (the fourth is currently going through the same exercise and is therefore not included), two housing repairs "Beacon" authorities and a local housing association. The "Yes" comment against the repairs element shown on the spreadsheet indicates that these items are tenant responsibilities.
4. A review of what the comparitors are doing indicates that this Council's current repairs policy appears generous and there tend to be fewer tenant responsibilities than in a number of other organisations.
5. In order to help contain expenditure on the day to day repairs budget, it is considered that a number of repairs elements should be reviewed and proposals made to re-categorise these as tenant responsibilities. There are listed in 7 below, together with estimates of the appropriate annual savings which will be achieved for each re-categorised element. Inevitably there are some potential negative aspects to these changes and these are also highlighted. It should also be noted that some aspects, particularly the negative ones, are difficult to quantify in terms of cost and take up.
6. The repairs elements which should be considered for re-categorisation to tenant responsibility are :-
 - a) Internal timberwork ie. skirting boards, picture rails, internal doors, architraves, threshold strips and window sills.

The prospective savings from this change would be £57,554 per annum.

- b) Bath panels (unless damaged by the Council whilst carrying out repairs). It is proposed that in the event of a bath panel repair request, the panel is inspected to check on likely asbestos content. If there is asbestos the Council will remove in accordance with procedures. If not, the tenant will be responsible for the replacement.

The prospective savings from this change would be £6,126 per annum.

c) Blocked sink, bath and wash hand basin waste pipes.

The prospective savings from this change would be £8,250 per annum.

d) Fencing. There are fence lines that the Council will be legally responsible for eg. under RTB sales, adjoining private property or footpaths/drives. The Council may also wish to maintain front fences (in front of the building line) in order to promote a better appearance to the street/estate. Inevitable problems will occur in rear gardens with children and pets roaming.

The prospective savings from this change would be £64,968 per annum.

e) Wall tiling.

The prospective savings from this change would be £29,589 per annum.

f) Old age pensioner decorations (except sheltered blocks).

The prospective savings from this change would be £90,000 per annum.

Therefore the total potential savings of adopting all of these changes would be £256,487 per annum.

7. It should be noted that hand in hand with the above proposals, a stronger enforcement of the recharging procedures could be adopted. At present, certain tenants are not recharged for reglazing, ie the elderly, registered disabled or if a police crime number is obtained. In some cases, due to the cost of going through the legal process, many recharges are written off. Members may wish to recharge all tenants, without exception, but it may be costly in terms of administering this aspect of the policy.

8. In making any policy changes to tenant responsibility, officers would need clear guidelines regarding any exceptions which members would wish to make. In the past representations have been received to exempt some tenants because of their age, state of health, disability etc.

Obviously there are cost implications to these exemptions and further work would need to be undertaken to try and quantify these costs if this is an option which members wish to consider.

9. There is clearly a need to consult with tenants regarding any proposed changes and members are requested to indicate how they would wish to conduct the consultation process.

10. Any agreed changes will need to be notified to tenants and it is proposed that budgetary provision of £3,000 be agreed from balances for publicity purposes.

11. Any changes made to the current policy will have an impact on the O.B.S. workload. Agreed changes will need to be evaluated in the context of the total O.B.S. workload to determine whether there are any staffing implications to these changes.

12. In view of the need for tenant consultation and evaluation of feedback from the consultation process, it is proposed that any policy changes agreed should take effect from 1st April 2003.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY : The Housing Portfolio Member and the OBS Business Manager

RESPONSIBILITIES

Our Responsibilities

For tenants: We are responsible for repairing and maintaining the structure of the property you live in and any garage attached to it. This includes all the external parts and any internal fixtures and fittings originally provided by us but not those that are listed as your responsibility. See **Your Responsibilities**.

Our responsibilities also cover all pipes, wiring, appliances and fittings for heating, drainage, power and lighting, and smoke detection.

We maintain any fences or boundary walls owned by the Council and we maintain steps, main paths that lead to the front or back doors (but not garden paths), brick outhouses and any timber sheds originally provided by the Council but not any that were left by previous tenants.

We are also responsible for carrying out an annual gas safety check in every property with a gas supply.

We are responsible for any communal areas or facilities.

For furnished lettings: We are responsible for providing high quality items, ensuring that they are installed or fitted properly and meet current safety requirements. We are also responsible for carrying out periodic checks on these items and repairing them during the five year period they are leased.

For leaseholders: We are only responsible for the outside of the property, the main structure and any common areas and services. The exact details of other responsibilities are set out in your lease.

For tenants who have applied to buy their home: Once we have approved your application to buy your home we will only do repairs that are necessary to keep your home secure and weather tight. After you have bought your home you will be responsible for all repairs unless you have bought a flat and become a leaseholder (see above).

Your Responsibilities

You are also responsible for certain minor tasks:

- replacing plugs and chains in baths, basins and sinks
- replacing lost keys and getting in if you are locked out
- replacing ashpans and fire baskets for solid fuel fires and sweeping chimneys at least once a year
- replacing light bulbs and fluorescent tubes and starters, and fuses in appliances
- carrying out internal decoration, filling cracks in plaster (unless very large)
- taking steps to prevent water in pipes and tanks from freezing
- attempting to clear blocked sinks, baths, basins and toilets. See **22. HANDY HINTS: plumbing**
- replacing glass unless you can prove the damage was outside your control. In the case of vandalism or break-in you must get a Police Crime Report Number (not an Incident Number)
- repairing and maintaining your own fixtures and appliances including pipework to washing machines
- replacing clothes lines between posts and rotary driers (except in communal drying areas)
- replacing shelves, curtain rails and roller blinds
- maintaining garden paths
- adjusting doors for new carpets
- replacing toilet seats
- repairing or replacing handles, locks and catches on internal doors and cupboards
- testing battery-operated smoke detectors and replacing batteries.

You are also responsible for:

- telling us promptly when a repair is needed
- letting us into your property to carry out repair work
- contacting us promptly if a repair worker calls while you were out and leaves a card
- looking after any furnishings provided by the Council.

Telephone the OBS
Repairs Line



0800 227676

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2 CONTACTING US

3 RESPONSIBILITIES

4 ORDERING A REPAIR

5 REPAIRS STANDARDS

6 BATHS-BASINS-SINKS

7 DOORS-FRAMES

8 DOOR LOCKS

9 DRAINS-WASTES

10 ELECTRICS

11 FLOORS-STAIRS

12 GARAGES-SHEDS

13 GARDEN AREA

APPENDIX 'A'

TENANTS REPAIRS RESPONSIBILITY

Repair Element	Oxford	Council CWOIL 1	Council CWOIL 2	Council CWOIL 3	Council Beacon 1	Council Beacon 2	H. Assoc.
Window glazing	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Gully grids		Yes*			Yes		
More than first drain blockage if pipework not faulty					Yes		
Gaining entry to property by breaking in	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Internal timber, UPVC or tile window sills					Yes		
Skirting boards and picture rails					Yes		
Internal doors, and threshold strips		Yes			Yes		
Minor repairs to plasterwork, such as cracks and small holes	Yes				Yes		Yes
Loose floor coverings and fitted carpets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Artex ceiling, where tenant wants the whole ceiling done instead of a patch					Yes		
Sweeping chimneys	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bath panels (unless damaged by the Housing Department while carrying out repairs)					Yes		
Wooden airing cupboard panels, frames, door and shelving					Yes		
Internal pipework boxing, but only if originally fitted by the City Council					Yes		
Cupboard drawers					Yes		
Cupboard door catches, handles and hinges	Yes				Yes		
Hat and coat rails					Yes		
Independent battery-operated smoke alarms	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Electric meter and supply of electricity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blocked sink, bath and hand basin waste pipes			Yes		Yes		1st attempt
Toilet seats	Yes	Yes*	Yes		Yes		Yes
Plugs and chains	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Bleeding to radiators					Yes		Yes
Supply of gas and gas meter	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Disconnection and reconnection of cookers, unless owned by the City Council	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Internal decoration	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes incl. wall tiles	
Extra door or window locks	Yes*				Yes		
Security door chains and spyholes					Yes		
Washers on taps							Yes
Provide & maintain fencing - adjoining residential properties							Yes

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APPENDIX B

TENANTS REPAIRS RESPONSIBILITY

Repair Element	Oxford	Council CWOIL 1	Council CWOIL 2	Council CWOIL 3	Council Beacon 1	Council Beacon 2	H. Assoc.
					Yes		
Draught-proofing to windows					Yes		
Draught-proofing to external doors					Yes		
Separate hot-water cylinder jackets (after the first one has been supplied by the Council)					Yes		
Replacing fuses, plugs and light bulbs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Repairing any item that you fitted yourself or was fitted by a past tenant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Shelves	Yes	Yes					
Cleaning waste-water gulleys outside your kitchen		Yes*					
Repairing tiles around fire surroundings		Yes*					
Replacing gate fittings		Yes					
Repairs to back garden path	Yes	Yes					
Renewing shower curtains (first installed by Council)			Yes				
Renewing curtain rails	Yes	Yes*					
Replacing lost keys and getting in if you are locked out	Yes						Yes
Taking steps to prevent water in pipes and tanks from freezing	Yes		Yes				
Adjusting doors for new carpets	Yes		Yes				
Washing machine plumbing	Yes						
Taking action to prevent/control condensation							Yes
* Council will do if old or disabled and no one else who can help.							

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