

# **HALTON HOUSING TRUST**

## **REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS POLICY**

*Date due for Review:*

### **Introduction**

Halton Housing Trust (the Trust) believes that the quality of its repairs, maintenance and improvements service is of great importance not only to ensure the satisfaction of tenants but also to protect the value of its housing stock and other properties.

The Trust will deliver a high quality responsive repair service along with planned programmes of cyclical maintenance, and will provide a catch-up repairs programme. It will also be committed to undertaking a major improvements programme as outlined in its offer to tenants and as contained in its Business Plan.

The Trust will look not only to have achieved the Government's Decent Homes Standard for its properties by 2010, but has aspirations to have exceeded it by meeting the locally agreed 'Halton Standard'.

In providing its repairs service, the Trust will have due regard to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code - in particular, Section 3.4

The Trust will also ensure that its repairs service meets all the necessary legal requirements for repairs, as contained in Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the Housing Acts 1985 and 1988, the Occupiers Liability Acts of 1957 and 1984, and the Defective Premises Act 1972.

In order to comply with these requirements, the Trust will:-

- keep in repair the structure and exterior of all dwellings and common areas;
- keep in repair and proper working order installations for the supply of water, gas, electricity, sanitation, space and water heating;
- keep in repair and working order lifts and communal lighting;
- ensure all properties are fit for human habitation;
- ensure that all fire fighting equipment supplied is adequate, regularly inspected and serviced.

### **Policy Statement**

The Trust is committed to achieving high standards for its tenants and leaseholders and to obtaining the best value for its investment.

The Trust believes that its tenants have a right to expect high standards in relation to repairs and maintenance and will take steps to ensure that the service that is delivered meets those expectations. It is committed to investing in the environment as well as in its stock to create safe and attractive areas in which to live.

The Trust recognises that it has an important role to play in maintaining the properties it lets in a safe condition. In order to maintain good Health and Safety standards, the following will be incorporated into each home:-

- hard-wired smoke detectors;
- carbon Monoxide detectors where there are gas installations;
- cut-off valves for Carbon Monoxide depletion.

In addition, properties in sheltered housing schemes will be fitted with water misting systems for fire suppression. Properties linked to the Lifeline service will all be fitted with smoke detectors that are monitored by the service.

The Trust will also look to safeguard the interests of its leaseholders by holding any payments made by them for future repairs or improvements in trust, until such time as they need to be included on improvement schemes which will benefit their properties.

The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code makes clear the standards that housing associations are expected to achieve. The Trust will ensure that the organisation and delivery of its repairs and maintenance service will be properly resourced to deliver these standards as a minimum.

The Trust will prioritise all day-to-day repairs and set targets and timescales for achieving them that will be understood and acceptable to its tenants and will ensure that resources are provided to deliver them. It will provide access to a 24 hour emergency repair service.

The Trust will ensure that through its target setting for repairs it will comply with its legal obligations and its statutory duties. It will also ensure that it meets the requirements of the Housing Corporation's policy on the Right to Repair and the Right to Compensation for Improvements contained in their circular R3-33/94.

The Trust will ensure that its tenants are fully aware of its legal and statutory obligations regarding repairs through information contained in its Tenants' Handbook and Tenancy Agreement.

The Trust will regularly carry out surveys of its dwellings and maintain appropriate records about their condition so that planned and cyclical maintenance programmes can be undertaken effectively.

The Trust's day-to-day repairs will mainly be undertaken by its own housing maintenance service. Great emphasis will be placed on ensuring that the

housing maintenance service is highly trained and will have the necessary skills to deliver the range of repairs that its tenants require. Any other contractors that the Trust may employ to supplement its repair service will also be of similarly high standard and will have to comply with its Customer Care Policy and Equality and Diversity Policies.

The Trust is committed to providing a high standard of customer care especially when working within people's homes. Its Customer Care Policy emphasises the need to respect people's homes and to take care when working within them. Feedback from tenants will be sought to ensure that this commitment is being met.

The Trust will use the appropriate standard of materials in all of its repair, maintenance and improvement programmes to ensure lasting results and value for money. These will confirm BSI standards as a minimum.

The Trust is committed to a policy of continuous service improvement under a Best Value regime which will provide regular reviews of its repairs and maintenance service through a process of challenge, comparisons with the best, consultation and open competition.

### **Implementation of Day to Day Repairs**

The Trust believes that reporting and progressing day to day repairs should be made as simple and accessible as possible for its tenants. The following services will be offered to ensure that this aim is achieved by reporting repairs:-

- in person at any of the Trust's local housing offices;
- via a Freephone direct repairs reporting service;
- in writing;
- at any of Halton Borough Council's Direct Link offices;
- via the Trust's web-site.

For each repair reported the Trust will provide a receipt which details the nature of the complaint, awards the appropriate priority for the repair work and shows a target date for completion. The receipt will include a section for tenants to offer feedback upon completion of the repair. The Trust will be particularly interested to hear comments about quality of work, timeliness, attitude of employees and care taken. Levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction will be monitored and appropriate action will be taken to improve the service.

Repairs will be prioritised according to the following criteria :-

- Emergency Repairs – will be attended to within 2 hours of the report being made. The situation will be made safe and a full repair will be ordered on the next working day;
- Urgent Repairs – will be attended to and work completed within 2 days of the report being made;
-

- Non Urgent Routine Repairs – will be attended to and work completed within 10 days of the report being made;
- Routine Repairs – a target of 95% of reported repairs will be completed on a 6 week cycle, subject to any ongoing replacement or renewal programme.

Details of the type of repairs covered in each category will be set out in the Tenants' Handbook.

Appointments will be offered to tenants for many of the Trust's repairs. This will ensure that tenants have some certainty over the repairs completion whilst at the same time ensuring efficiency for the Trust so that abortive visits are kept to a minimum. The Trust will look to extend the range of repairs it can offer by appointment wherever possible.

The Trust believes that quality of workmanship is extremely important and will undertake inspections of at least 10% of all completed repairs. The Trust will always expect work of the highest quality to be carried out on its behalf, and will look to receive regular feedback from its tenants to ensure that this is happening. If any reports of poor quality work are received, they will be rectified in the shortest time possible.

### **Improvements and Cyclical Repair**

The Trust will undertake a regular periodic inspection and servicing of all gas installation, electrical heating systems, fire safety equipment, lifts and other communal facilities.

Examples will include:-

- gas fires and central heating systems will be serviced annually;
- stairlifts fitted in adapted properties will be serviced every 6 months;
- maintenance inspections to the communal lifts in Churchill Mansions will be carried out every 3 months.

The Trust will undertake planned and cyclical maintenance programmes arising out of surveys of its properties. These comprehensive programmes will include a five year cycle of external, pre-painting maintenance repairs and painting where necessary.

The Trust will undertake the catch-up repairs programme as identified at the time of transfer within its first 12 months.

The Trust will undertake the major improvements detailed in its offer to tenants and within its Business Plan within 5 years of the creation of the Trust.

### **Aids and Adaptations**

The Trust will make necessary provision in its Business Plan to ensure that, where possible and practicable, alterations to properties needed for people

with disabilities will continue to be carried out. It will maintain the same level of investment for the provision of aids and adaptations that has historically been provided by Halton Borough Council. It will also ensure that this level of investment will rise in line with inflation.

The Trust will also ensure that provision is made for the ongoing maintenance of any aids and adaptations already fitted in Trust properties.

More details relating to aids and adaptations are contained in a separate Services for the Elderly and Disabled and Those with Special Needs Policy.

### **Tenants Responsibilities and Rights**

The Trust has a clearly defined policy regarding repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant. Where the Trust has to carry out any necessary repairs which are the responsibility of the tenant, as identified in the Tenancy Agreement and the Tenants' Handbook, the tenants will be recharged for the cost of the work and any associated administrative costs. More details in relation to rechargeable repairs are contained in a separate Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

The Trust will allow tenants to improve their homes as provided for in its Tenancy Agreement, provided that approval is obtained in advance. The Trust will, where necessary, carry out pre-inspections in relation to the proposed improvements and offer advice to tenants. Following completion the Trust will inspect the work and if satisfied with the standard will undertake to maintain and service it (subject to expiry of any relevant guarantees or warranty). Any improvement or addition made to a property in this way will become the property of the Trust and may not be removed without permission. Tenants who undertake improvements without approval will be liable for the full cost of reinstatement should the improvement need to be rectified either during or at the end of their tenancies.

The Trust will honour the provisions of Section 122 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 in relation to compensation for improvements carried out by tenants. Details of the qualifying improvements under the Right to Compensation scheme will be contained in the Tenants' Handbook. Where improvements comply with the regulations compensation will be paid at the end of the tenancy in accordance with those regulations.

The Trust will provide an easily accessible complaints procedure for tenants to follow should they be dissatisfied with its repairs service. This complaints procedure will be publicised within the Tenants' Handbook and contained within a separate Complaints Policy.

### **Responsibility**

The Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for the day-to-day repairs service and planned and cyclical maintenance. The Deputy Chief Executive

will be responsible for monitoring performance of both the Trust's own housing maintenance service and any external contractors engaged by the Trust.

The Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Trust's Improvements and Cyclical Maintenance Programmes. This will include the monitoring of any external contractors.

The Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for all tenant services including repairs reporting mechanisms within the local Area Housing Offices and the Freephone direct repairs reporting service.

The Trust will ensure that all staff are aware of and trained in its Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements Policy and Procedures.

### **Consultation**

The Trust will publish its policy and standards on repairs and improvements within the Tenants' Handbook. The Annual Report to tenants will include details of service standards achieved. Consultations for any revisions to the Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements Policy will be carried out in accordance with the Trust's Tenant and Resident Involvement Policy. This will include reference to Halton Housing Community Voice.

Tenants and residents' groups and individual tenants (and leaseholders) will be consulted on improvement programmes generally and specifically where the improvement programme directly affects them. The views and wishes of tenants will be incorporated into improvement schemes wherever possible.

The Trust will endeavour to give tenants as much choice as possible in the selection of fixtures and fittings consistent with the need to give value for money, future maintenance and its responsibilities.

The Trust will always strongly encourage tenants to take advantage of any improvements that are offered to them.

The Trust will consult with its own housing maintenance service, external contractors and any partners in relation to the effective implementation of this policy.

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed by the Trust annually taking into consideration the views of all consulted. The review will seek to ensure that the objectives and targets are being achieved in accordance with its required standards, quality, effectiveness, achievement of target timescales and value for money.

Regular and comprehensive reports will be submitted to the Trust's Board and Halton Housing Community Voice detailing:-

- planned maintenance proposals;
- budget monitoring;
- performance monitoring;
- levels of tenant satisfaction with the repairs service;
- completion of repairs orders within timescales set;
- details of post inspections in relation to day-to-day repairs;
- completion of improvements programmes;
- levels of tenant satisfaction with regard to planned maintenance and improvement programmes.

### **Associated Documents**

Rechargeable Repairs Policy

Services for the Elderly and Disabled and Those with Special Needs Policy

Customer Care Policy

Complaints Policy

Tenant and Resident Involvement Policy

Equality and Diversity Policies

Tenancy Agreement

Tenants Handbook