

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhood & Community Services Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 5 September 2013
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PART I **FOR CONSIDERATION & COMMENT**

THE ROLE OF CARETAKERS IN SUPPORTING NEIGHBOURHOODS

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on the provision of caretaking services to the Council's tenants and leaseholders and the future aims and aspirations for this service.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Panel is requested to comment on the information provided and plans for the future of this service.

3 Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

This report links with and contributes to the following priorities and cross cutting themes in the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy:

Priorities:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Housing
- Safer Communities

Cross Cutting themes:

Improving the image of the town – The appearance of the town's estates and housing stock has a significant impact on the way that residents and visitors perceive Slough. The caretaking service contributes to the cleaning and maintenance of the external environment as well as shared internal areas, ensuring that estates and blocks of flats are safe, attractive places to live and visit and give a good impression of Slough.

4 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

Not applicable.

5 Other Implications

(a) Financial

The caretaking service is paid for by residents that receive the service through service charges. A project to review the way that service charges are calculated will be commissioned when additional resource is made available through the planned restructure of the Housing Service. Options are also being explored to give residents the choice of opting out of aspects of the service by carrying out work themselves (for example cleaning of communal areas) or paying extra for more services or higher quality services.

The cost of the caretaking and building cleaning services for 2012/13 is set out in Appendix A.

(b) Risk Management

A full risk assessment will be carried out when assessing the options available to residents in relation to service charges and work that might be undertaken by residents themselves.

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal	None	None
Property	The quality of the caretaking service will be closely monitored to ensure that properties are being well maintained and offer a safe, attractive environment for residents to live and visit.	Increasing the range of services provided by caretakers will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of maintaining estates and blocks.
Human Rights	None	None
Health and Safety	There is a risk to the health and safety of residents and visitors to the borough if problems are not identified and dealt with.	The provision of a high quality caretaking service will ensure that health and safety risks are quickly identified and removed.
Employment Issues	None	None
Equalities Issues	None	None
Community Support	None	Through the nature of their role, caretakers work on the borough's estates on a day to day basis which places them in an excellent position to identify areas of concern and ensure that support is directed to resolve any issues affecting

		communities.
Communications	None	None
Community Safety	None	Caretakers are developing a good understanding of the neighbourhoods and communities they work in and are able to identify areas of concern and ensure that action is taken to address any problems.
Financial	None	None
Timetable for delivery	None	None
Project Capacity	None	None
Other	None	None

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or other legal implications in connection with this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

The completion if an EIA is not relevant to this report.

6 Supporting Information

- 6.1 The Housing Service currently employs 16 full-time caretakers, deployed across the three Area Housing Teams with responsibility for cleaning and maintaining 319 blocks of flats or 3,132 homes. This includes the provision of external cleaning services only to the borough's four tower blocks and nine de-designated (ex-sheltered) complexes. Internal cleaning of these blocks and complexes is undertaken as part of the guaranteed works specified in the Interserve contract.
- 6.2 Caretakers currently have the use of 12 vans which are stored in a secure parking area at The Centre. Caretakers are required to sign in and out of work by attending The Centre to sign in before starting work at 7:30 am and when finishing their working day at 3:30 pm. Their presence at The Centre each day enables their attendance to be monitored and communication to be shared. Recently caretakers have been supplied with Blackberry mobile phones to give them access to e-mails and therefore improve communication between them and officers responsible for managing the council's housing stock. The new phones also enable caretakers to take and submit photographs of communal repairs and issues such as fly tipping or vandalism.
- 6.3 Interserve is responsible for building (internal areas only) cleaning within the following blocks:

- Tower House
 - Ashbourne House
 - Broom House
 - Poplar House
- } Tower Blocks

- Allington Court
 - Brook House
 - Kennedy House
 - Garrick House
 - Redwood House
 - Apsley House
 - Armstrong House
 - Calstock House
 - Seymour Court
- } De-designated (ex-sheltered) complexes

6.4 The cost of these services is billed separately to the caretaking costs for each block. The cost of caretaking services to these blocks are applied to the external areas only as this service is still required. External cleaning services can include:

- Litter picking
- Clearing bin areas
- Cleaning car parking and garage areas
- Removing fly-tipped items to an agreed location for collection
- Sweeping pathways
- Clearing drying areas
- Inspecting areas to identify health and safety issues and report repairs

6.5 Interserve operatives clean the following communal facilities in the nine de-designated (ex-sheltered) complexes and the four tower blocks:

- Vacuuming corridors, communal areas and staircases
- Toilets and bathrooms
- Kitchens
- Lifts
- Guest rooms
- Emptying bins
- Glass in doors
- Mirrors
- Ironmongery
- Dusting

6.6 Within the majority of the 319 blocks the caretakers are responsible for carrying out the following activities in communal areas in blocks of flats:

- Mop floors using a wet mop and clean water
- Wipe down window ledges
- Report repairs in communal areas
- Remove minor graffiti and report extensive or offensive graffiti for removal
- Remove stains from walls and windows
- Remove cobwebs
- Litter-pick all communal areas (internal and external)
- Sweep car parking areas
- Carry out safety checks on communal areas
- Report any repairs
- Litter-pick and carry out visual safety checks in garage and play areas

- Keep all bin areas hazard free and tidy
- Clean, tidy and wash down entrance areas
- Arrange of bulk rubbish or fly-tipped items to be removed
- Make safe, where possible, any risks to residents' or visitors' health and safety
- Post-inspecting repairs to communal areas

6.7 The caretaking service is paid for by tenants and leaseholders who receive these services by way of service charges. Total service charge costs vary from £9.47 to £14.04 per week depending on the facilities and requirements of the particular block or complex:

- Communal lighting
- Internal and external cleaning
- Communal health and safety
- Communal aerials
- Maintenance of door entry systems and lifts etc
- Window cleaning
- Administration charges

6.8 Appendix A shows the current spend for 2012/13 for caretaking and Interserve's building cleaning services which show that:

- The cost to residents for the provision of caretaking services is £3.02 per week
- The cost to residents for the Interserve cleaning service is £3.95 per week

The Slough Customer Senate Review of the Caretaking Service

6.9 In 2011 the Slough Customer Senate ('the Senate') carried out a review of the caretaking service. The Senate is the resident led body responsible for co-regulating and scrutinising the Housing Service. Following their comprehensive review (detailed in a separate report to the Panel by the Community Participation Manager) the Senate presented their findings and recommendations to the Assistant Director of Regeneration, Housing and Resources in November 2011.

6.10 The Senate's report (a summary of which is attached at Appendix B) led to a restructure of the caretaking team, increasing the number of caretakers from 12 to 16, including a 'floating' caretaker to cover staff absence. In response to the Senate's recommendations, consideration was given to recruiting a manager or foreman to specifically manage the service. The practicality of appointing Senior Caretakers is being evaluated as part of the restructure of the Housing Service.

6.11 The Senate have received updates on progress on responding to their recommendations on a six monthly basis.

Phased Improvements

6.12 In response to the Senate's report the following action has been taken:

- A phased programme of improvement works has been developed to upgrade and improve communal areas to make them easier to clean and maintain. The five year programme will be piloted in August prior to full implementation in October 2013.

- Residents have been consulted on colour schemes and flooring for blocks of flats and feedback has been used to inform the improvement programme. Residents are now offered a choice of pre-determined colour schemes as part of the internal decoration programme.
- Area Panels have been established in each of the Area Housing patches to offer residents the opportunity to monitor local standards and service delivery. Area Panels also give residents the opportunity to raise local concerns and issues and to work with officers to develop and monitor solutions to the issues raised.
- New caretaking vans have been procured and work is underway to equip them with modern, effective cleaning equipment and materials. The new vans will also give caretakers access to a hot water supply for cleaning. Details of the specification and design of the new caretaking vans can be found at Appendix C.
- A training programme has been developed for caretakers who have now completed training in equalities, working at height and an overview of managing Anti-Social Behaviour. Caretakers who speak English as a second language have been given access to ESOL classes.
- Discussions are being held with Interserve to offer access to their 'Toolbox Talks' to up-skill caretakers to carry out minor repairs and accurately report more complex repairs in communal areas.
- Residents are actively encouraged to participate in the programme of regular estate inspections however, to date, only 28 residents have taken up this opportunity. Resident participation in estate inspection will continue to be monitored as part of the regular review of performance information as set out in the Performance Management Framework. Caretakers routinely take part in estate inspections.
- A comprehensive review of service charges is due to be carried out, however this project is dependent on the restructure of the Housing Service and the provision of additional resources for this extensive piece of work.
- A separate project will also be commissioned to research the options for fulfilling the regulatory requirement to offer a 'Tenant Cashback Scheme' to compensate tenants who carry out their own repairs. This project is also dependent on the restructure of the service and the provision of additional resources to undertake this work.
- Area Housing Managers have reviewed the provision of notice boards in blocks of flats.

6.13 The appearance and condition of Slough's neighbourhoods has a significant impact on residents' and visitors' perceptions. Caretakers deliver front line services providing a visible presence in neighbourhoods where they are able to build a good understanding of the communities and neighbourhoods in which they work. They are therefore able to respond to residents' queries and concerns and liaise with Neighbourhood Housing Officers and other council colleagues to deliver a fast, effective response when problems occur. In order to improve communication between officers and caretakers, the caretakers have recently been supplied with Blackberry mobile phones to give them access to e-mails and offer the ability to take and submit photographic evidence of repairs or fly-tipping etc. Caretakers are also able to check that repairs have been carried out and post-inspect the quality of any repairs or remedial work taken to address issues reported to contractors or partner agencies.

- 6.14 All caretakers have attended safeguarding training and are able to raise safeguarding alerts or refer residents to the Tenancy Sustainment Service where they identify a vulnerable resident or feel that there is cause for concern.
- 6.15 A recent satisfaction survey was undertaken with all 7,000 tenants and 1,200 leaseholders invited to complete a questionnaire relating to their home and their neighbourhood. The survey elicited a 26.5% response rate revealing that 77% of residents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. 74% of tenants are satisfied or very satisfied with the maintenance of their home. However, only 59% of residents felt that their rent and service charges offered Value for Money. It is proposed to carry out a further satisfaction survey next year to understand and improve on this feedback which also revealed that the majority of residents' responding to the survey and who wished to be engaged, preferred to be consulted by completing a survey.
- 6.16 In 2012/13 the service received just four complaints about the caretaking service, one of which related to a resident slipping on a wet floor and the remaining complaints were in relation to the quality and type of the flooring and internal decoration which made it hard for caretakers to clean. A five year, phased programme for improving internal decoration and flooring in blocks has been developed in response to this feedback. Residents were consulted on paint and flooring colours and the programme will now be piloted in August prior to being fully rolled out in October 2013.

There have been no complaints about the caretaking service so far this year.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Slough Customer Senate carried out a comprehensive review of the caretaking service in 2011. A number of actions have since been taken in response to the Senate's recommendations to improve and enhance the caretaking service. In recognition of the value that this front line service can bring to supporting neighbourhoods and creating and maintaining sustainable communities, a training programme is being implemented to further develop the skills and capability of caretakers to broaden their role and make full use of this resource to increase our understanding and management of the borough's neighbourhoods and communities.
- 7.2 The cost breakdown at Appendix B shows that the provision of the caretaking service is significantly lower than the cost of delivering internal cleaning through Interserve and making an additional charge for the provision of external caretaking services. However, it is not possible at this stage, to alter the Interserve contract to bring the cleaning service in-house as this is part of the guaranteed works within the contract.
- 7.3 Whilst it is accepted that a full review of service charges should be undertaken, this is an extensive piece of work and the resources are not available within the current structure. However, the additional resources required to undertake this work will be available to undertake this work. A second resident satisfaction survey will also be undertaken next year to determine residents' satisfaction with the changes introduced to the caretaking service and satisfaction that the service delivers value for money.

8 **Appendices Attached**

- A - Caretaking Costs and Interserve Building Cleaning 2012/13
- B - Slough Customer Senate Estate Services Review report Summary
- C - Caretaker van specification

9 **Background Papers**

- 1 - Updates to Senate's review of the caretaking service

Caretaking and Interserve Building Cleaning Costs 2012/13

Caretaking Costs

(Internal Areas excluding Blocks listed Below and all External Areas)

Total Caretaking Cost	Total Per Unit Per Annum	Total No of Units	Total per Unit Per Week
£492,552.66	£157.34	319* Blocks - 3,132 Units	£3.02

* Plus external caretaking works to the blocks listed below.

Interserve Cleaning Costs (Internal Areas Only) 2012/13

BLOCK	COST	# of units	p/a cost per unit
Tower Blocks			
Broom House	£6,954.64	42	£165.59
Poplar House	£6,954.64	42	£165.59
Ashbourne House	£10,431.95	60	£173.87
Tower House	£10,431.95	60	£173.87
Sub-Total	£34,773.18	204	
De-Designated (ex-sheltered) Schemes			
Allington Court	£5,563.71	39	£142.66
Brook House	£6,259.17	38	£164.72
Kennedy House	£6,259.17	36	£173.87
Garrick House	£5,563.71	35	£158.96
Redwood House	£5,563.71	21	£264.94
Apsley House	£4,172.78	47	£88.78
Armstrong House	£6,954.64	29	£239.82
Calstock House	£5,563.71	35	£158.96
Seymour Court	£5,563.71	25	£222.55
Sub-Total	£51,464.31	305	
TOTAL	£86,237.49	509	Average £205.82 per year Average per Week £3.95 (+ caretaking costs for external areas)

Review

Slough Customer SENATE (SCS) for Slough Borough Council (SBC)

on

Expectations for the Future Repairs and Maintenance Service

Summary

With the current pressures on Local Authorities in relation to funding, the need more than ever to secure value for money (VFM) and the current repairs contract approaching the re-tendering phase in 2015. Slough Customer Senate (SCS) decided that the time was right to undertake a review of the current Repairs and Maintenance Service supplied at present by Interserve. Interserve has provided Slough with the current Repairs and Maintenance Service, since 2001 a long-term partnering contact totalling 15 years.

The information gathered, for this Review, is evidence that the present contract needs updating to keep it in-line with the practices in the present market. The involvement of Resident Scrutiny Panels is driving improvement, accountability and ensuring that services are accessible. Customer feedback is important and should drive improvements to the Repairs and Maintenance service, to provide a good quality housing service that meets the chosen needs of Tenants, Leaseholders and the wider community, including supporting the needs of vulnerable people. Organisations and Contractors should learn from customer complaints and use them to develop the service. The Tenant isn't the enemy. In recent years, there have been significant changes to the delivery of traditional Repairs and Maintenance services. Different contractor and partnering arrangements, advancements in new technologies and new procurement methods have all contributed to the transformation and improvement of repairs services delivered by many Landlords to their tenants.

Involving Tenants at the outset of the tendering of the new service is important to ensure that the delivery and performance of the service is fit for purpose and will deliver services that meet tenant's needs and expectations. A continuous monitoring, accountability and auditing of the new service is vital and penalties should be implemented if the new contract quality is not fulfilled. Tenants should be able to pick their own appointment date and time to suit which leads to less no-access that is beneficial to Tenant and has financial benefit to the Council/Contractor.

Keeping the Council's stock in a good state of repair enhances the mental and medical well-being of the local population. The Council and/or Contractors should take the lead to organise training exercises for Tenants to teach them how to carry out small DIY repairs and to give guidance and education so Tenants understand the connection between housing and health. Education of Tenants and the production of publications should be encouraged, to explain some simple ways to prevent and cure some of the main repair concerns: damp, condensation, ventilation, insulation and mould. There should be set guidelines to 'Who does What' between Council/ Contractor and Tenant so repairs caused by the Tenant can be re-charged.

Property Profiling is an efficient way of minimising unnecessary cyclical repairs/ decent homes – Need not Want Policy. Occupancy Profiling will highlight subletting, beds in sheds and over-occupancy alerting the authorities to potential fraud and health and welfare concerns.

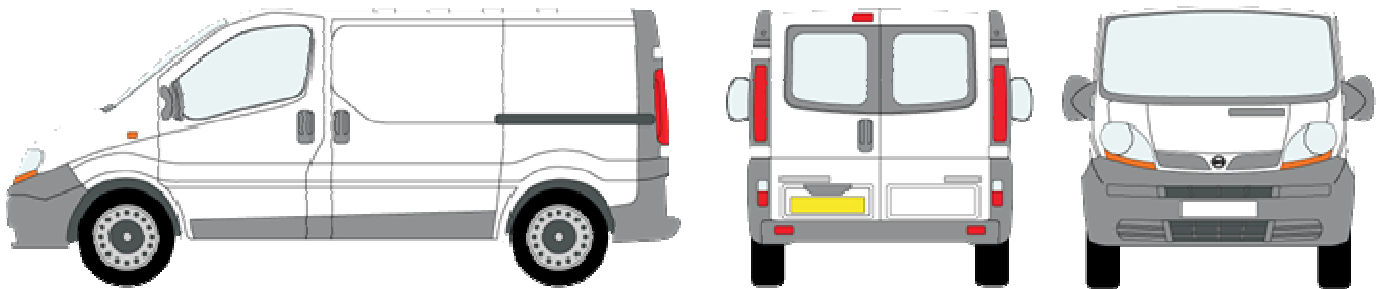
Realising how important front line staff and technicians are to the structure of a good service. Front Line Staff are the first point of contact a Tenant has with the service and it is important that key information is collected: name, address, contact details this should be automatically updated on the IT system. The Technician's role of being the eyes and ears of the community and reporting repairs and vulnerabilities is invaluable to the service and should be encouraged with appropriate training. Apprentices can be drawn from the local community in the progression of learning through structured courses, in local schools and colleges, or 'on the job' training. To encourage qualified Tradesmen/women into management roles or training.

Having efficient waste management within the Repairs and Maintenance service will put more money into the 'POT'. Waste covers a vast area :

- wasting time and expenditure
- sending letters to tenants confirming appointments
- satisfaction cards filled in by tenants at end of repair
- wrong collection of information on repair/address,
- no-access
- wrong materials
- technicians to leave job having to collect materials
- logistics – overstocking, out-of-date materials on shelves
- wasted man-management time, recycling of construction materials

To enhance all these findings the Service needs an individual IT System than doesn't cost vast amount of money with 'Add-Ons' and not be being 'Fit for Purpose'. It is important to have a system that 'talks' between Client and Contractor so all information can be transparent and accountable. The system can be tailored to all needs and information can be shared across the housing service. Every worry about transparency can be solved by a good simple IT system.

Slough Caretakers Vehicle	Base Model: Nissan	Kit Weight:	TBC	1
	Variant: Primastar	Lead Time:	TBC	
	Drawing No: TEV72713	Payload:	TBC	



Electrics in Load Area

2.5ltr Hot water system (2.5ltr of boiling water) with protective cover over the tap to stop accidental usage

This will be mounted to the locker next to the nearside loading door

Linings & Floors

9mm Non Slip Grey Wisa floor with non-slip sill strips on all entry points

3mm White Polypropylene Side Linings

Additional

Manual Fold out ramp

4no. Lashing Eyes on the floor to secure the cleaning equipment

Racking Requirements

To supply and fit racking as per CAD TEV72713

Racking to include a 1296mm high locker with shelf

Racking to fit along the vehicle bulkhead and along the offside of the vehicle

Tool board to be mounted on the offside of vehicle above the wheel arch

Label & Safety Equipment

On Board weighing system with digital read out display mounted conveniently in the cab

Note: Vehicles are required to have factory fitted bulkheads & nearside sliding door as standard.

Slough Caretakers
Vehicle

Base Model: Nissan

Variant: Primastar

Drawing No: TEV72713

Kit TBC

Weight: TBC

Lead TBC

Time: TBC

Payload: TBC

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