



WEAR
VALLEY
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Annex 6

WEAR VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Major Repair and Improvement Policy

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This policy covers planned major capital repair and improvement works carried out to Wear Valley District Council's housing.

1. OVERALL OBJECTIVES

To provide a professional housing service that achieves decent homes standards by the year 2010 and is:-

- Sensitive to the needs of the individual, putting the customer first.
- Efficient and providing excellence in service delivery and management.
- Responsive and flexible, matching supply and demand.
- Accountable, targeting investment in sustainable communities.
- Fair and embracing change and continuous improvement.

The Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department Capital Programme aim is to provide a planned major repair and improvement service for tenants that

- Meets the high standards expected by our customers
- Ensures properties remain in a good state of repair and are viable in the future
- That maximises the opportunity for regeneration
- Improves properties to meet the Decent Homes Standard
- Encourages resident participation and customer choice with active tenant inclusion in service design, delivery and review
- Allows customers to remain living in their homes when work is carried out wherever this is possible
- Is cost effective and ensures a well developed procurement and efficiency savings practices.
- Protects the environment
- Ensures safety is not compromised

To achieve this, we will

- Arrange appointments with customers to carry out surveys, the work and inspection
- Consult customers when planning major repairs and improvements to their homes
- Arrange programmes of work to support wider regeneration goals
- Set high standards for materials, workmanship and contractors service delivery
- Advise customers of opportunities for involvement in monitoring service delivery performance
- Explain options for customer choice in the work being undertaken
- Listen to any problems that customers have about the work and try to resolve them
- Control and manage expenditure within the budgets agreed by the Council
- Consider the environmental impact of work carried out and the materials we specify
- Make sure that our contractors carry out their work safely and in accordance with relevant health and safety legislation and guidelines
- Consider crime and disorder implications in the design and undertaking of the works.

2. REPAIR OBLIGATIONS

The maintenance and repair duties of Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department are covered by a number of Acts and regulations including:-

- Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- The Housing Act 1985
- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations
- The Defective Premises Act 1972
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Electricity and Work Regulations 1989 and BS 7671 (IEE Wiring Regulations)
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Building Regulations, Fire Precautions act 1971
- Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002

3. PLANNED MAINTENANCE STRATEGY

Wear Valley District Council's Capital Works Programme has adopted a 'just in time' maintenance strategy. This is where the replacement of a building component (such as the roof coverings or a central heating boiler etc.) is planned to take place just ahead of when the item is expected to fail. This approach seeks to get the maximum useful life out of a component and contrasts with alternate approaches such as the replacement of an item when its 'standard' life is about to expire, or a fully responsive strategy, which waits for a component to fail before replacement.

The 'just in time' planned maintenance strategy is underpinned by stock condition information: stock condition information collected in the field and held as records of work done. Building on an initial sample stock condition survey, Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department will routinely collect and update building component information and use this information when developing long and short-term planned maintenance programmes.

3.1 Improvements to Empty Properties

Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department recognises the advantages of undertaking disruptive major works whilst a property is empty awaiting a new tenancy and seeks to balance these benefits with customer preferences that empty properties should not be improved ahead of the neighbouring occupied properties.

We will carry out improvement works when a property is empty if:

- The property had been scheduled for improvement and the previous tenant declined the work at that time – where possible within existing budgets
- The property is scheduled for the improvement work during the current financial year
- The property is scheduled for improvement in the following financial year and the funding for the work is available now

4. SERVICE STANDARDS

This section sets out our standards for the delivery of the planned major repair and improvement service.

4.1 Major Repair and Improvement Programme Information

Our goal is to provide customers with timely and useful information on our plans. To achieve this, Wear Valley District Council's Housing Department will publish its:

- Longer-term plans for programmes of key customer interest, such as window and door , kitchen and bathroom modernisation and central heating provision
- Planned maintenance investment plans for the current financial year; and
- Plans for the next financial year, once budgets have been approved by the Council

4.2 Management of the Planned Major Repair and Improvement Programme

We will always endeavour to carry out works in the years we have programmed, subject to available finances. Progress in achieving the works planned for the year will be reported to the Customer Panel Committee and Wear Valley Housing Matters. Where this is not possible, we will consult with the Customer Panel and Housing Services Committee:-

- The reasons for the work not being undertaken
- Plans for revised programmes of work

4.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with major repair and improvement works will be continually monitored using customer satisfaction questionnaire responses to ensure the high standard expected by our customers is delivered. When major works are ordered to an individual dwelling, a pre-paid customer satisfaction survey form will be provided.

When a response is returned showing any dissatisfaction, we will contact the customer and ensure that:

- The dissatisfaction is investigated
- The cause is remedied wherever possible
- Customers are advised of the action taken

Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department will monitor and report on:

- The rate of return of satisfaction questionnaires and what action it will take if responses fall below 30%
- Levels of satisfaction by different projects

4.4 Complaints and Dissatisfaction

We have a comprehensive complaints and complaint appeal system which covers:

- The quality and performance of our planned maintenance service; and
- The staff and contractors carrying out this service

Customers can make complaints in person, by letter or telephone, through our website, by text message or email. The Complaints process is covered by the separate Complaints Procedure.

4.5 Home Visits

When visiting customers' homes in connection with major repairs and improvements, Wear Valley District Council's Housing staff and its contractors will carry and show on request formal identification. If the person calling does not have identification, customers will be entitled to refuse access. For customers who are visually impaired, Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department and its contractors will, when requested, agree and use a code word when visiting. A translation service is available if required to all our customers.

4.6 Customer Choice

Housing Services Department is committed to offering customers choice in repair and improvement works to their homes where it can.

Some planned major repairs and improvement work offer many opportunities for either individual or collective customer choice. Where a collective consultation is undertaken, we will consult all the customers in the block and the majority decision will prevail.

If during consultation, a customer or customers do not wish to make a choice, a decision will be made on their behalf by the authority.

For certain planned major repairs, for example roof covering replacement, there may be little or no choice. This may be due to significantly different material costs, the need to match-in with neighbouring properties, planning constraints or other restrictions beyond the control of the Council.

When choices can be made by the customer, Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department or its contractors will consult the customer and record their choices prior to work starting. Once a choice has been made and the contractor has been instructed to do the work, there will not be any opportunity for the customer to alter their choice without good reason. This is due to the delays this could cause to the work programme, the effect this would have on other customers waiting in the programme and the costs involved in returning ordered items.

The Housing Services Department recognises that some customers may prefer not to have some improvement or major repair works carried out to their homes. We respect this preference and will not force customers to have improvement work carried out in their homes provided statutory minimum standards are met.

Access for Essential Works:

Customers will not normally be able to 'opt-out' of planned major repairs and replacements where these works are needed to ensure the continued viability of the building and compliance with the landlord's obligations for repair.

Where a customer refuses essential planned major repairs and replacements, for example when structural repairs are needed, the Housing Services Department will take the following action:-

- Write to the customer explaining the reasons for the work and the date the works are to commence

- Visit the property with the Area Housing Officer
-
- Contact any support organisation working with the customer and seek their support for the work to progress

If a customer still refuses access for the work to commence, a court order seeking access will be considered by Wear Valley District Council.

4.7 Consultation

Wear Valley District Council has a detailed Tenant Compact and Tenant Participation Policy that cover major repairs and improvements. Wear Valley District Council's Housing Department will consult over the

- Longer-term plans for programmes of key customer interest, such as window and doors, kitchen and bathroom modernisation and central heating provision
- Planned maintenance investment plans for the current financial year; and
- Plans for the next financial year, before the budgets have been approved by the Council

Wear Valley District Council will consult with customers on

- Quality standards for products and contractors
- Services standards for contractors
- Selection of contractors via the Customer Panel

Wear Valley District Council will consult individual households over any programmes of work affecting them including:

- Any choices available
- The timetable for the planned commencement of works
- Appointments for the work
- The quality of work
- The quality of products fitted
- Overall satisfaction of the works

Where emergency major works are required, Wear Valley District Council will inform the customers affected but our normal commitments on consultation will be relaxed due to the urgent nature of the works.

4.8 Keeping Our Customers Informed

We will write to customers whose homes are included in the plans for the year or contact them by telephone to advise them when we or our contractors are going to commence surveys. This will usually be two or three weeks before the survey starts.

During the survey, the surveyor will normally outline the work that is proposed to the customer and advise when we would anticipate the works is likely to be issued to the contractor. This timescale may vary, as it will depend on the nature and type of work and whether or not quotations or tenders will have to be obtained.

Pre and Mid contract meetings for each individual project will be arranged as works proceed and we will write to customers inviting them to attend these meetings to discuss programme, progress, and any complaints or concerns regarding proposed or ongoing schemes.

If there is likely to be a delay in the expected time-scale of any planned major repair or improvement works, Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department or its contractors will inform the customer of the reason and the revised date for completion.

4.9 Monitoring In Partnership With Our Customers

The Housing Services Department cannot directly supervise all work whilst it is being carried out. We therefore recognise and acknowledge the key role customers can play in identifying work, that may not be correct and areas where the contractors' service can be improved. This therefore encourages its customers to participate in monitoring the service provided and to report all instances of poor quality work. We will follow up all reports of poor work or service made by its customers. Reports can be made in person, by letter or telephone, through our website or comments on the reverse of the Customer Score Card.

Where the work is still in progress, our staff will try to visit the site and investigate the report of poor work or service by the end of the next working day.

Where the work has been completed, Housing Services staff will contact the customer within 5 working days and make sure that:

- The dissatisfaction is investigated
- The cause is remedied wherever possible
- Customers are advised of the action taken

4.10 Redecoration

Occasionally, when carrying out some types of work, such as central heating, installations and kitchen and bathroom replacements, damage to decorations can occur. The Housing Services Department and its contractors will always try and make sure any such damage is kept to an absolute minimum. However a decoration allowance is payable upon completion of such works.

Where there are external works we will:

- Make good small areas of paint or coloured plaster
- or
- Discuss with the customer when the next painting cycle is due

4.11 Disruption During Works

Wear Valley District Council's Housing Services Department and its contractors are committed to keeping the disruption caused by major repairs and improvement works to the minimum. Some major repair and improvement works may involve periods of intermittent but significant disruption to the normal use of the home. In these cases, our contractor will be required to produce a timetable for the works, which will be agreed in consultation with the household. This timetable will be sensitive and flexible to the needs of individuals and follow the principles of any method statements. Works will not normally be scheduled or carried out, outside of normal working hours, except in exceptional circumstances.

For example: When upgrading a kitchen, there could be periods during the day when no cooking facilities or water supply would be available.

Individual customers will be made aware of this prior to the commencement of works so that the customer is prepared for them and therefore not unduly inconvenienced.

Our contractors will try to keep to the agreed sequence of working, but we recognise that this may not always be possible, as sometimes the work may prove to be different from that expected. If changes to the sequence become necessary, our contractors will advise and consult with customers first before making substantial changes.

The Housing Services Department and its contractors will always make sure that services, such as gas, electricity and water are available at the end of each day and throughout weekends. We will also make sure that essential facilities, such as kitchens, bathrooms and toilets and heating systems (during winter months) are also available at the end of each working day and throughout weekends, or that alternative facility provided.

4.12 Flexibility of Programme

No repair works will commence if a customer is on holiday or if a customer is ill or becomes ill. Mutually agreed arrangements will be made to complete works at a later date.

4.13 Moving Households

When demolition or scheme redevelopment is being considered, the Housing Services Department will discuss and consult in detail with those customers affected. A plan for the demolition will be agreed by the households effected. This plan will include

- Relocation proposals
- Compensation programmes of work
- Responsible officers
- Co-ordination of liaison arrangement

4.14 Previous Tenants Fixtures and Fittings

Wear Valley District Council may not be able to maintain items left by previous tenants and may remove them as an alternative to carrying major repairs and improvements. We will normally only maintain those fixtures and fittings installed by previous tenants that the Housing Services Department has a responsibility or wish to provide, such as kitchen fittings, showers over baths, fixed space or water heating etc.

4.15 Cultural and Religious Sensitivity

We may be prepared to carry out culturally or religiously sensitive customer requests, arising from planned major repair or improvement works that are due. Where such adaptations can be carried out that cost less than £500, we will be happy to agree to these requests. For alterations that cost over £500 the work will be rechargeable.

4.16 Adaptations for Disabled People

We will maintain any existing adaptation or fixed equipment provided by Wear Valley District Council that is still needed to meet the needs of the disabled household member for whom it was provided when undertaking major works.

We will remove on request (for re-use elsewhere), semi-portable equipment, such as stairlifts, specialist showers etc. that are no longer needed due to bereavement or a permanent change in the household makeup.

Where minor adaptations such as handrails or semi-portable equipment have been provided for a disabled person and that person no longer needs the adaptation, these items will be removed, where appropriate, during any planned major works. This will not apply if the need for the equipment by another disabled household member is evident or confirmed by Social Services.

Non-removable adaptations such as structural alterations, concrete ramps etc. will be retained and maintained by the Housing Services Department.

New adaptations to meet the needs of elderly or disabled people will only be provided in accordance with the approval and referral by Durham County Council Social Services Department. This can mean that we will take the opportunity to provide facilities that meet the essential needs of the disabled person when carrying out planned major repair and improvement works.

For example, we will be prepared to provide a shower instead of a bath where this is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of a disabled resident, as approved and recommended by Durham County Council and Social Care and Health when carrying out bathroom modernisation works.

4.17 Upgrade or Improvement

Customers can take the opportunity, when planned major repair or improvement work is scheduled, to improve on the items being replaced/installed when applicable.

For example: where possible, bow windows can be installed during the course of a window replacement contract. The bow window would be an upgrade on the standard window and the customer will pay the contractor the difference between the standard window and the bow window.

Upgrades of this nature can only occur where:

- The item is due to be provided or replaced as part of the planned work or is an item often associated with the work
- The customer pays the cost of the upgrade in advance to the contractor
- The work upgrade does not require specialised equipment or installation skills

When a customer seeks an upgrade we will:

- Discuss the matter in detail at the pre-work survey visit or by phone, the contractor will provide an estimate of the cost
- Inform the customer about whether the item will be maintained or replaced if it breaks or needs further repair. All gas appliances will be incorporated into our maintenance contract. Maintenance or like for like replacement of other fixtures and fittings will depend how far from the council specification the upgrade requested is.

4.18 A Responsible Landlord

Wear Valley District Council Housing Services Department has duties of care over our homes and the people who occupy them. They are insured and we are liable for events that occur as a result of our fixtures, fittings and repairs and improvement works. For this reason, we cannot upgrade using materials, fixtures or fittings supplied directly by the customer.

5. SURVEYS AND INSPECTIONS

5.1 Pre Work Surveys

Pre work surveys will normally be carried out to all properties scheduled for planned major repair and improvement works. Housing staff or its contractors may carry out these surveys. The surveys will be carried out to enable any or all of the following:

- The collection of detailed measurements, schedules of fixtures and fittings, the identification of existing finishes and any special needs requirements associated with the areas to be worked on
- The customer's choice of finishes, colour and other options that may be applicable to the work to be made
- The identification of suitable locations for contractor's compounds, skips and mess facilities
- The identification of relevant health and safety requirements
- The customers to ask questions and explain their preference on when the work should start and any special access arrangements that are necessary
- Works to be designed in order that estimates, quotations or tenders can be obtained.

5.2 Work In Progress Inspections

Work in progress site inspections will be carried out periodically, during major repair and improvement works to make sure that:

- The customer is satisfied with the quality and progress of the project
- The Council is satisfied with the quality and progress of the project
- The contractors are performing to the standards set out in specifications and contractual agreements for the work
- Contractors are complying with their approved method statements
- Health and safety obligations are being met

5.3 Post Work (Completion) Inspections

Post work inspections will normally be carried out to all properties that have been the subject of major repair works. The purpose of these inspections is to ensure that:

- The work is complete and that all debris and redundant materials have been removed from the site
- The customer is satisfied with the quality of the work undertaken and understands how to use any equipment installed.
- The Council is satisfied with the quality of the work and that specifications and standards have been met

Similarly to work in progress inspections, the level of post work inspections undertaken will vary according to the scale and type of work undertaken.

6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The housing services department major repairs team is committed to employ contractors and partners who subscribe to, and embrace, the Considerate Contractors' Scheme initiative.

The scheme aims to raise the standards of construction management and community relations above statutory requirements. The contractors who are involved must commit to an eight point Code of Considerate Practice that includes being:-

- Considerate
- Environmentally aware
- Clean
- A good neighbour
- Respectful
- Safe
- Responsible
- Accountable

Contact Points for Major Repair Works

Email

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