

PROPERTY AND CONTRACTS SERVICES EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This report briefly summarises how the Equality Impact Assessment for Property & Contracts Services was undertaken, its scope and the key findings.

The assessment was undertaken by 5 officers from Landlord Services, a 'critical friend' (Richard Botham, Landlord Services Manager), one tenant representative (Paul Bungy) and was overseen by the council's Equality and Inclusion Consultant, Ian Barrett.

Two 2 hour training sessions were held in June 2008 for both officers and tenant representatives. The assessment took place in July 2008 and involved two meetings.

Impact Assessment

At the initial scoping meeting we discussed the different elements of the Repairs service which includes Responsive Maintenance, Cyclic & Planned Maintenance, Voids Maintenance and Disabled Adaptations. As there are no tenants in occupation during the Void period and the work is purely driven by task it was felt there was no need for impact assessment here.

Responsive Maintenance, Cyclic and Planned Maintenance, and Disabled Adaptations are carried out in occupied properties and it was considered worthwhile to look at these 3 elements separately.

Responsive Maintenance

A greater proportion of the older generation have responded to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2007, leading to the subsequent survey (2008) being weighted by age to take account of the generally higher rate of response from older people who have a traditionally higher level of satisfaction, with the aim of gaining a more accurate result. Even so satisfaction is still high and it has shown that repairs are the most important service for our tenants. The Council has embarked on surveying by telephone which allows for a random approach to acquire more representative information from all groups, rather than wait for responses from sections of the community that are generally more reluctant to respond. As Housing continues to build further information on its database, individual needs will be more effectively handled by targeting barriers in the most suitable and effective way. Such examples could be to provide information and help appropriate to someone with a visual impairment; or respond accordingly and helpfully to someone who has issues when dealing with visitors. We did not identify any negative impacts

Cyclical and Planned Maintenance

Although the driver for this part of the service is also the property rather than the tenant, many planned maintenance contracts involve consulting tenants on a one to one basis where appropriate and this allows for any individual requirements to be met. All types of property may be approached as required by the need for repair/refurbishment. However the cyclical internal decoration programme is aimed at pensioners and those tenants who, for health reasons, are unable to manage their own decorating and as such will always be discriminatory. As females reach pensionable age earlier than men as the current law stands and statutory changes are in hand, it may be prudent to review this service in its entirety shortly and this is noted in our improvement plan. Contractors for

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the work are selected from our approved list, held by Constructionline which has been developed through a public/private partnership between the DTI and Capita Business Services and is a contributor to the Government's Rethinking Construction Initiative. It is a national register of pre-qualified construction contractors and consultants designed to streamline pre-qualification procedures such equality and health & safety, which Property Services has adopted to save on resources. Again the collection of more detail from our surveys will help to refine this service. There were no negative impacts identified.

Disabled Adaptations

This part of the service is more tenant focussed and is carried out according to nationally agreed criteria and guidance. The inclusion of a full time Occupational Therapist on the section's staff structure ensures an even and fair application of the service. The service may be further publicised in Landlord Services tenant publication "on the house" and/or on the Council's website, and the Section's leaflet on Adaptations for Disability is currently being prepared for audio format. There were no negative impacts identified.

In general the Landlord Services Division is ever more learning about its customers. As at July 2008, housing application forms and therefore the main housing database, Orchard, have been developed to record the equality profile of households along with needs information to ensure service delivery is adapted as appropriate and any disparities in the quality of service delivery and service take up can be monitored.

The extent to which the data is complete for all our customers varies according to the equality strand (for example only 20% disability information for tenants compared to 100% race information for homelessness applicants).

A plan exists which has the objective of achieving equality details for 70% of our customers. (A function exists within the system for customers who decline to provide the information to prevent them being approached again).

This plan includes the following elements:

- A written survey to all tenants in July 2006.
- Face to face data collection at point of sign up of new tenancies.
- A written survey of general needs households in August 2008.
- A targeted telephone survey of general needs households by the Customer Service Centre in September 2008.
- Face to face collection of information for sheltered households through the support plan process.

Once these elements have been completed the progress made towards the 70% target will be evaluated and further measures agreed. It is, however, accepted that the collection and recording of this data will be a continual process, as customers circumstances may change.

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Findings

The team did not find any evidence to suggest that any of the customer issues/groups are negatively impacted by Property & Contracts Services procedures. The function of the Section is generally considered to have a positive impact for most customers as supported by our satisfaction surveys. Planned maintenance is offered to all tenants involved according to maintenance needs and officers are involved in both face to face consultation and on-site monitoring. It is accepted that positive benefits may result from some elements of our planned programmes but this is addressed in the improvement plan. Our responsive maintenance directly results from the tenants request for the service, the perceived need for the work, and the budget availability. The tenants' handbook, policies and procedures, and many other sources of information and advice available for our customers do promote equality.

The group concluded that a detailed assessment was not required but a number of actions would form the improvement plan.

Key Recommendations

As per the action points set out in the improvement plan. The key action points are to:

- Continue to gather evidence and 'plug the gaps' in our current information base which can then be used to inform decisions regarding Property & Contracts Services.
- Investigate any concerns identified using the current equality information
- Investigate whether our current processes of promoting equality meet the needs of local equality groups
- Ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues, know how to handle and deal with any barriers and routinely embed processes within policies and procedures.

Monitoring

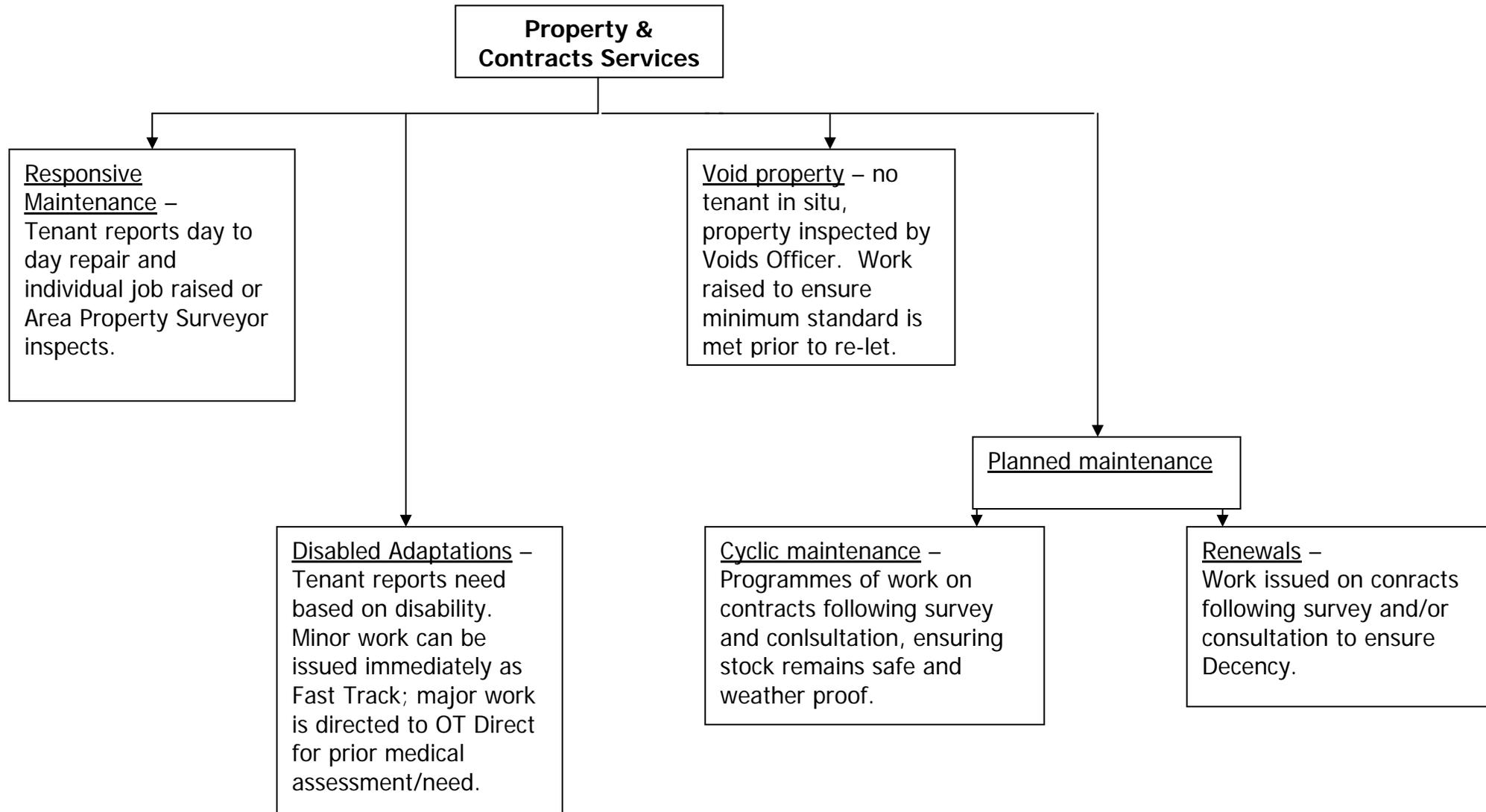
The Property & Contracts Services Improvement Plan will be monitored by the Head of Landlord Services and the Housing Equality Group. Action points have a target date for completion and will be included in Service Business Plans where appropriate.

Conclusions

Detailed Assessment - No detailed assessment is required.

Improvement Plan - Six actions were identified to address the issues that arose during the assessment. These are summarised in the table below.

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Improvement Plan for Property and Contracts Services:

Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility		Target Date	Resource Implications	Links
	Lead	Support			
1. Publish the tenant external decorations information sheet on the Council's website.	Gaynor Bromley	Communications	TBC - pending budget	Staff time: existing resources	-
2. Develop procedures using the UDC equality information currently being collected and recorded to improve the service.	Janette Palmer	None	2009/10	Staff time; existing/additional resources.	Any additional information will also be available to the Customer Service Centre
3. Further develop the check list used at pre-contract meetings to ensure all Health & Safety and equality information is provided for the awareness of all present, ie. Communication needs, etc. where it would improve services.	Gaynor Bromley	None	2009/10	Staff time; existing resources.	-
4. Ensure procedures are written up. Develop a rolling review to control how and when procedures are reviewed to ensure on-going Equality and Diversity developments are embedded within them.	Gaynor Bromley	None	On-going	Staff time: existing resources	-
5. Review the overall components of the	Gaynor	None	2008/09	Staff time; existing	-

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Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility		Target Date	Resource Implications	Links
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current OAP scheme to ensure consistency of application ie. procedure to backtrack on addresses where eligible tenants have not responded to initial approach, and to establish if there is a more equitable way of using discretionary elements.	Bromley		– no change	resources.	
6. Further publicise the Disabled Adaptations service in “on the house” and/or on the Council’s website. Our Adaptations for Disability leaflet is currently being prepared to be available in audio format.	Gaynor Bromley	Communi-cations	2009/10	Staff time: existing resources	-