



**Report to:**

Northwards Housing Board  
16<sup>th</sup> May 2006

**Item No:**

**8d**

|  |   |                   |                      |
|--|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Title:</b>                                | Gas Servicing Improvements and Efficiency |                   |                      |
| <b>Date:</b>                                 | 16 <sup>th</sup> May 2006                 |                   |                      |
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| <b>Confidential:</b>                         | No  |                   |                      |
| <b>For:</b><br>(Please tick action required) | <b>NOTING</b>                             | <b>DISCUSSION</b> | <b>APPROVAL</b><br>√ |

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To improve the service and efficiency of gas servicing at Northwards Housing.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Board approve:  
 a) The improvements to the current service.  
 b) The efficiency savings within this report.

**IMPLICATIONS**

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Equality &amp; Diversity:</b> | <b>Good service affects all sections of our communities</b>                             |
| <b>Financial:</b>                | <b>There is an efficiency saving which can be used elsewhere</b>                        |
| <b>Staffing:</b>                 | <b>Will allow staff to work on other things if no access arrangements are effective</b> |
| <b>Decency Target:</b>           | <b>No direct Implication</b>  |
| <b>Governance:</b>               | <b>Test of organisational competence</b>  |

**Equality & Diversity Implications (Please tick where relevant):**

|            |                          |                                  |                          |
|------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| BME        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Elderly    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Single Parents                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Young      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Domestic Violence                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> | Alcohol / Drug Mis-users         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Consultation/Consideration:

|                          | <b>Yes, No or N/A:</b> | <b>Name:</b>                | <b>Date:</b>                |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Sub-Committee:</b>    | Yes                    | Procurement & Property      | 19 <sup>th</sup> April 2006 |
| <b>Area Panel:</b>       | Yes                    | Wilton, Riverways, Fourways | March 2006                  |
| <b>Ward Councillors:</b> | N/A                    |                             |                             |

## **GAS SERVICING IMPROVEMENTS AND EFFICIENCY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 As part of Northwards Housing's ongoing commitment to improve our service provision, it was noted that there were opportunities for improvement in gas servicing. We carried out a quick review of the service and a number of opportunities for improvement have been identified.
- 1.2 The present contract for the above service is with Manchester City Council Direct Works, it is administered by Northwards Housing. This work will form part of the framework contract in the near future.
- 1.3 At the last Inspection in 2003, the Audit Commission Housing Inspectors looked at the City Council procedures for gas servicing and described them as robust. However, that doesn't mean that they can't be improved.

### **2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- 2.1 The present gas servicing procedure does not reflect the change to Northwards Housing.
- 2.2 As part of our examination of the processes we have found a number of opportunities for changes which improve the service efficiency and tenant focus. These are:-
  - a) There is no initial appointment system and up to 12 cold calls unless our tenants respond to a no access card.
  - b) There are no facilities for weekend or evening appointments for those tenants working normal office hours.
  - c) There are no published key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor the performance of the service.
  - d) The contract does not have a structured no access escalation procedure with timescales.
  - e) It failed to communicate effectively for those whom English is not their first language.
  - f) Any letters are impersonal (i.e. Dear Tenant).
- 2.3 We are achieving a 98.92% success rate on the gas servicing. This is in part due to the efforts of our and the city's staff. However, the contract does not require our contractor to have a structured no access procedure; only that they cold called, card and record the set number (up to 12) of no access visits.

- 2.4 We have a limited number of ways of dealing with tenants who fail to make appointments and these need to be expanded in conjunction with our contractor and with Local Services staff.
- 2.5 The involvement of the Local Services Staff in sending out letter 5, advising the tenant that a Section 54 notice is to be served if access is not forthcoming, introduces an unnecessary link into the process.
- 2.6 We can make better use of the service engineer's time while on site. For example by getting them to fit a smoke detector where there isn't one.

### **3. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO SERVICE**

- 3.1 A revised no access procedure has been produced in which the mechanical surveyor will have responsibility for instigating Section 54 enforcement action. At present this is instigated by the Neighbourhood Services Manager.
- 3.2 Northwards Housing has produced a revised contract document so that the contract provides the following:-
  - a) Gas servicing will be offered on an appointment system to the tenants. This should reduce the no access rate.
  - b) All letters will be addressed to the tenant
  - c) An option for Saturday morning or Wednesday evening service (for those who work normal office hours) will be offered.
  - d) A service standard has been put in place.
  - e) Structured no access escalation procedure has been produced which will speed up the no access procedure.
  - f) A revised no access card in nine community languages has been produced. Again this should improve access rates.
- 3.3 The percentage of servicing will be improved by:-
  - 3.3.1 Developing closer cooperation between the mechanical surveyor and our servicing contractor in resolving access problems. We have produced a revised procedure to make this happen.
  - 3.3.2 Providing all tenants names and phone numbers will enable our servicing contractor to use these in contacting tenants and in addressing access letters.
  - 3.3.3 We will work with our contractor to provide tenants with a text messaging and email facility for servicing appointments
  - 3.3.4 Our servicing contractor will provide additional administrative staff to take calls in normal office hours and a dedicated answer phone facility for out of hours only.
  - 3.3.5 Any tenants who had no access problems in the past will be targeted for the first visit so that can get through the no access procedure whilst the contractor is still in their area.

- 3.3.6 Currently, any tenant who contacts the On Call for any reason whilst their gas service is over-due, will flag up the outstanding gas servicing. We talk to them about that appointment before we talk to them about other matters and will continue to use this facility.
- 3.3.7 For tenants where a Section 54 action is carried out, a boiler temperature limiter will be activated or installed. This will activate an auditable signal and message after 11 months inviting the Tenant to make an appointment to have their gas servicing done. This will be followed by temperature limiting after 12 months of last service. The limiters will not be activated for those tenants who give access each year.
- 3.3.8 The contract will include for the checking of the smoke detector and the replacement of the battery or the unit, if required. Where a smoke detector is not fitted then, in line with Northwards policy, the contractor will fit one.

#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 These proposals have already been consulted upon at the three Area Panels in March 2006. Most of the above measures have been implemented from April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006.
- 4.2 The current system is that we service gas appliances on a 10 monthly basis to ensure that we remain within the 12 month legal requirement. These new processes will allow us to switch to an 11 month cycle from October 2006. This period allows us to bed down these new procedures and to allow our contractor to start and settle on site. Based on 13,300 properties this saves 1451 services on a full year basis; which is some £61,000 per annum.

We intend to spend this money on enhancing work done during electrical servicing to carry out lower category work in order to reduce the call on response maintenance and the need for replacement.

- 4.3 In view of the Home Inspection Report requirements in 2007, a central record system will be set up to hold all certification with respect to gas servicing, etc. This will enable Northwards Housing to speedily retrieve and supply the required documentation should our Tenants exercise their right to buy.
- 4.4 A fully up-dated asset register will be compiled with Radio Frequency (RF) tags so that all the service history will be contained in the tag for retrieval using the service engineer's Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) device. The intention is that the information will be downloaded into a format consistent with our new computer system.
- 4.5 We will further improve the service to our tenants by inviting our service provider to offer to service tenants own gas cookers on a pre-paid basis, during the works visit they do for Northwards Housing.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 A detailed action plan containing these future proposals is in course of being drawn up.

- 5.2 Implementation will be reviewed in 3 months time and thereafter at such frequencies as may be necessary in the light of changes to legislation or other circumstances, but not greater than two years.
- 5.3 There is both service improvement and efficiency.
- 5.4 Gas servicing performance will be monitored as each month as part of the Performance Management Framework and we have put forward a target of 99.5% servicing for this financial year. We are looking to achieve that from October onwards.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 That the Board approve:-
  - a) The improvements to the current service.
  - b) The efficiency savings within this report.

**LARRY PATRICK**  
**DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY SERVICES**