

# Prospect Scrutiny Group

## Report on Scrutiny of Prospect Community Housing's Routine Repairs Service

September 2019



### 1. Prospect Scrutiny Group

Our aims are:

*"To collaborate with Prospect for the success of Prospect Community Housing to help ensure it provides services of the highest standard which meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter.*

*To develop greater tenant influence in decision making on services."*

We see ourselves as a "critical friend" to Prospect.

For our fourth scrutiny topic, we met in May 2019 and looked at the recommendations from the 2016 Prospect Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the Tenant Satisfaction Survey Action plan. We chose

Routine Repairs approach because:

- It would be useful and interesting to Prospect tenants and Prospect Community Housing for us to identify ways to improve satisfaction,
- This service affects all tenants and we wanted to make sure that everyone is receiving a good service,
- We wanted to make sure that everyone is getting value for money in this area,
- This is one of the most important parts of the service Prospect offers. Prospect's management of Routine repairs needs to meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter Standard 5: *tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.*

### 2 Scrutinising Prospect's Routine Repairs Process

We carried out the following work:

- We began by looking at the Asset Management and Maintenance policy and procedures.
- We looked at the time it takes to carry out repairs and the costs.

- We compared Prospect’s repairs performance to other associations using Housemark data and the Scottish Housing Regulator Arc data. We also looked at Prospect’s performance information (Key Performance Indicator Reports).
- We looked at the tenant satisfaction survey outcomes to assess the quality of the work by looking at the time taken and the cost of the repairs.
- We spent time with Sandra Gray (Senior Admin Officer) who explained to us how the process works and the relationship with Prospect’s contractors.
- We shadowed the Admin Officers team who take the calls and assess the urgency of the calls Nikki Ritchie, Sharon McClelland, Julie Bernard and Sandra when recording repairs. All information was kept confidential as we were aware of the need to comply with data protection laws.
- A challenge for this project was to get an understanding of the process without looking at individual tenants cases as we respect that Prospect needs to keep tenant information confidential. To resolve this issue, Cheryl agreed for us to visit her home for a repairs inspection.
- We spent time with Alan as he carried out a repairs inspection as a case study to see what his role in the process is. We visited Cheryl’s property to inspect a window repair request.
- We spent time with Erin Mullen (Finance Officer) looking at the management accounts, specifically at the routine repairs budgets.
- Reviewed the complaints received by Prospect and the reasons for the complaints.

We would like to thank the members of the Prospect staff for spending time with us and answering our questions so fully.

### 3 Findings and Recommendations

Based on the work we undertook; we would like to share our findings and make the following recommendations:

<b>Routine Repairs</b>
<p><b>Findings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on Housemark and Scottish Housing Regulator information, Prospect was one of the best performing organisations in terms of timescales to complete repairs. We found that higher performing landlords (in terms of satisfaction and timescales) had higher costs. We were happy with the balance.</li> <li>• The Target Maintenance Response times in Appendix 2 of the Asset Management and Maintenance Police need updated as it refers to repairs that Prospect no longer carries out.</li> <li>• We found out from our time spent with the reception staff that they take immediate action. Staff tried to help tenants to resolve the repair in the first instance and then logged repair requests as required. We thought the communications between staff and tenants was good. We didn’t hear of any negative feedback from tenants about this service.</li> <li>• It was interesting to see how the repairs process all works, how repairs are reported, logged and right through until the satisfaction surveys are issued. By shadowing staff, we got a better understanding of the process.</li> <li>• Emergency repairs are attended to within 6 hours. It is not always necessary for the Maintenance Officer to attend as the contractor attends the repair.</li> </ul>

- The support from the Maintenance Officer is good to avoid extra cost to the association as he is an expert and can identify what repairs are required. Looking at Cheryl's window was a good example as whilst you might have thought the window needed replaced, Alan was able to advise that it only needed some repairs. Therefore, his role is important in terms of cost savings.
- We talked about preventative work that Prospect takes to reduce costs, such as painting windows. This makes sure the windows last longer before they need replaced. We recognised the importance of the planned and preventative works Prospect carries out to reduce the cost of the routine repairs.
- We talked and recognised the importance of the relationship between the planned improvement works and routine repairs.
- Prospect used to find out about tenants' satisfaction by sending out letters, but we found out that the response levels were not great. Now, texts are sent instead which we think is an improvement as it is easier to respond, and tenants may feel more connected to Prospect by using this method. Then tenants are more likely to respond rather than ignoring a letter.
- We talked also about contractors using an iPad/portal/handheld device for the tenants to respond to the satisfaction levels at the time. Although we understand that this might incur an extra cost for Prospect.
- It's good that tenants can report their repairs online and use a Prospect account.
- It is good to have a variety of ways to report repairs, i.e. by phone, online, in person.
- Invoices are not always received each month from contractors. Staff can find out what has been ordered even though the invoices have not necessarily come in yet. There's a process to follow this up to make sure that Prospect don't get behind or miss invoice payments. We thought this process was tidy and neat.
- We looked at the management accounts and found out that everything is going to plan and the financial spend is on track. We found that the budgets were reasonable and the spend was in line with the anticipated budget so there were no surprises or concerns.
- We found that around 4% of repairs resulted in a complaint to the organisation. We felt this was a reasonable amount. The majority of complaints were about contractor issues, the second highest category was poor standard of repair however, compared to the total number of repairs, this was a very small number (1%), this links to our finding that Prospect provide a quality repairs service.

**Recommendations:**

1. When people move into their properties they should be shown where the main water valve is in case of emergency.
2. Update the Policy in Appendix 2 of the policy around Target Maintenance Response times as this was out of date.
3. Prospect should continue to offer a range of ways for tenants to report repairs.
4. Prospect should aim to reduce the use of paper communications where possible to reduce costs, consider the environment and because it will be a more effective approach than a letter for many tenants.

#### **4 Next Steps**

We have not made any significant recommendations, which we think is fine as we are happy with the routine repairs process and the way it is managed by Prospect. We found that the

process met with the requirements of the Charter and our expectations. We found that the repairs staff were on the ball and we would want this good service to continue.

We look forward to hearing from Prospect's Management Committee what they think of our report. We would like to work with Prospect staff to agree an action plan to deliver the approved recommendations of this report.

We would also like to invite Management Committee to make any recommendations for a future scrutiny topic which we will take into consideration when deciding our next exercise.

Eunice Main, Cheryl Mabon, Isaac Adejumo, Sylwia Bogusz

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