



Responsive Repairs Investigation

July 2022

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*These appendices are available upon request from Theresa Mayers, Business Assurance Officer, RBK Council

INTRODUCTION

The Kingston Residents Scrutiny Panel, KRiSP is an autonomous Panel of council tenants and leaseholders set up by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council (RBK) in conjunction with the Kingston Federation of Residents Associations. The role of KRiSP is to investigate and review the Council's housing services and to propose improvements that will be of benefit to all residents. KRiSP is central to the Council's 'Resident Involvement Framework' and has a commitment to co-regulation. It was formed in October 2013 and is currently composed of 7 tenants and leaseholders. This is expected to be its final investigation and in future scrutiny, and engagement more widely, will be carried through other mechanisms to be consulted upon with residents.

The role of KRiSP is to carry out service investigations and report on them to the Council. This is KRiSP's thirteenth investigation. KRiSP last reviewed the responsive service in 2016. The objectives then were:

1. Resident Communication
2. Diagnosis of Repair
3. Appointment process
4. Website/on-line reporting

The previous investigation found there was no repairs policy in place, no sharing of the new Leaseholders Handbook with existing leaseholders and no ability to monitor AXIS's performance. 15 recommendations were made.

More recently responsibility for handling responsive repairs enquiries has moved from the RBK Call Centre to Axis (one of the areas commented upon in the earlier review). Jane Ball, Lead for Landlord Services, raised responsive repairs as a possible topic for review and KRiSP agreed.

The KRiSP Investigation Panel was led by Siân Smith, supported by David Miller and comprised Geof Yates, Jackie Paddon, and Gill Wilson.

The Panel was supported by Theresa Mayers from the Council along with mentoring support from Phil Morgan. The KRiSP Investigation Panel would like to thank all the members of staff, residents and others who gave up their time freely to support this investigation.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It was illuminating for the KRiSP panel to revisit the topic. It has been over five years. Since then, some of the recommendations made at the time have been implemented, but not all. The evidence collected shows significant shortcomings in the level of service being delivered. Residents are, to say the least, very largely displeased. Urgent action is required to improve.

Communication is key. Residents, by and large, are not kept informed of progress or changes to appointments. The contractor and RBK staff do not seem to be working closely. An online request for a repair seems to be disconnected from the work order and scheduling system. Managers at the contractor do not seem to be taking the same approach as each other. Caretakers and Resident Service Officers seem to be mainly left out of the loop.

There seems to be no valid reason why dramatically improved communication cannot be implemented straight away.



METHODOLOGY

The Panel agreed the following four objectives:

1. Reporting of Repairs
2. Resident awareness of service standards¹ and repair responsibilities
3. Resident experience of service delivery
4. Performance

The Panel carried out the following tasks:

Desk Top Review which considered the following documents

- Presentation by Daniel Greenwood and Rob Bush
- Responsive Repairs pre-briefing by Phil Morgan, KRiSP Mentor
- KRiSP Responsive Repairs Report December 2016 including survey and RBK update December 2021
- Repairs Policy 2017
- Axis Service Level Requirements
- Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures consultation December 2021
- STAR Survey Executive Summary 2021
- Savills Stock Condition Survey 2021
- Draft Internal Audit Report 2016
- Repairs and Voids Service Standard 2007
- RBK Website
 - Repairs information
 - On-line booking
- Leaseholders Handbook 2020
- DIY Handbook
- KPIs

Staff Interviews:

- Daniel Greenwood, Strategic Asset Lead
- John Meacock, Senior Estate Service Officer
- Bandele Oredein, Resident Services Officer
- Robert Bush, Lead Officer for Responsive Repairs and Voids
- Anthonia Shodiya, Resident Services Officer

Axis Interviews

- Keith Dadswell, Divisional Manager

¹ Setting a customer standard was a recommendation of the 2016 review



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- Adrian Ruddick, Axis Contract Manager for Gas
- John Basey, Axis Contract Manager for Repairs

Information from other Councils and Housing Associations

- Interview with Sutton Housing Partnership
- Interview with Policy and Performance Officers, LB Wandsworth
- Interview with Strategic Repairs Manager, Clarion

Resident engagement and experience:

- Discussion Group with three residents
- Survey with 208 responses
- Three case studies

FINDINGS

CONTEXT, POLICY AND REGULATION

1. Repairs are managed by the RBK Repairs Team who work with Axis as the main contractor and sub-contractors for specialist work. The contract with Axis was extended until 2024 when a new tender will be sought. Sutton Housing Partnership brought their service in-house from Mears in 2020 and report a significant improvement in service.
2. A Stock Condition Survey has been held although KRiSP notes that this does not appear to cover Net Zero Carbon, likely to be a requirement under the proposed update of the Decent Homes Standard.
3. There is a policy, resulting from the previous KRiSP investigation, dated as 2017. This is now 5 years old and runs an increasing risk of being out of date, particularly in light of evolving regulatory and ombudsman requirements.
4. There is coverage of the separation of landlord and resident responsibilities available on the website, in the Tenant Handbook and, during sign up. This is consistent with other landlords who also share this through their website.
5. KRiSP welcomes the general awareness of the Social Housing White Paper amongst RBK and Axis staff interviewed. There has been consultation on new Tenant Satisfaction Measures which all social landlords, including RBK, will be expected to comply with. These are already being anticipated by RBK and are likely to include satisfaction with repairs during the past 12 months, satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repairs and repairs within target timescale. Other landlords are also aware and responding accordingly.
6. There is a Leaseholder Handbook dated 2020, also resulting from a previous KRiSP investigation. This had been available on the website previously but is no longer referred to. This also applies to the Tenant's Handbook.
7. KRiSP also notes the pressures impacting on the repairs service including the supply of skilled labour and materials, and the ability of contractors and sub-contractors to respond effectively. These are not peculiar to RBK or Axis, and are particularly an issue in London and the South East as shared by two other landlords.
8. There has also been a significant impact from COVID, in terms of the switch to emergency repairs only at the start of the pandemic and from residents and staff isolating. This has led to pressure to catch up with the resulting backlog.

OPERATION

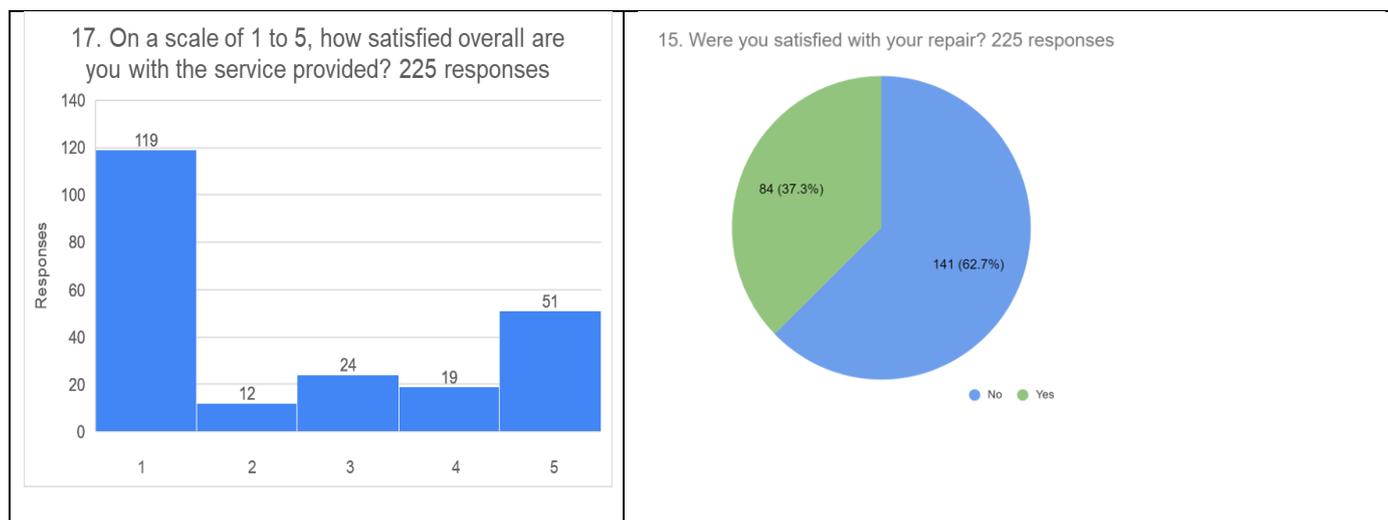
9. Axis have recently taken over calls for repairs from the RBK Contact Centre. There is on-going diagnostic training for Axis Contact Centre staff. Reports and interviews confirm that there has been an improvement on call centre waiting times. The current turn round time is 77% for under 5 minutes and 8% for over 10 minutes. There remain some resident concerns about delays.
10. Reference numbers are meant to be given for each repair. This supports effective handling of repairs and any issues with service or timing. Our survey showed that this happened in only 61% of cases and there was feedback from Resident Services Officers and Caretakers

that this was inconsistent. Axis are aware of the problem with issuing reference numbers and are taking action to resolve this.

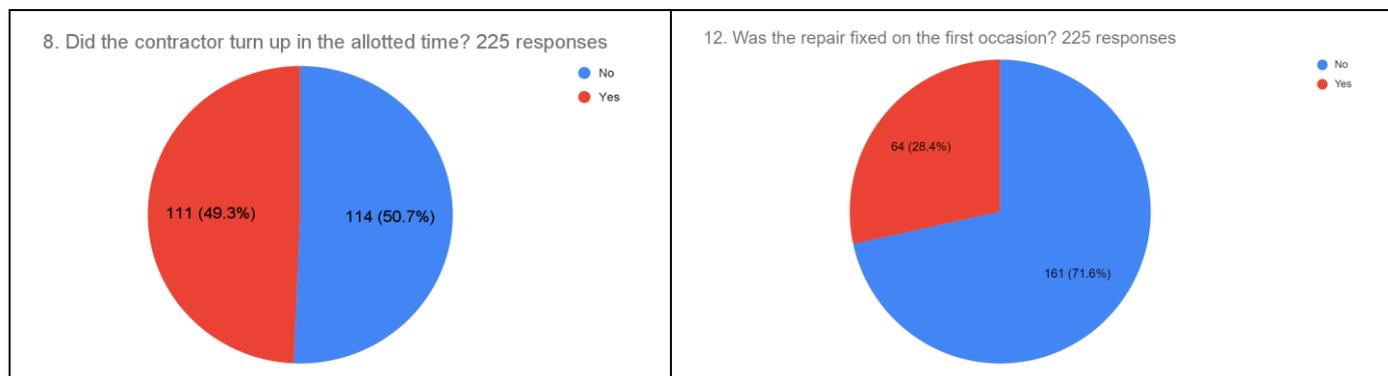
11. There appears to be some confusion about the role of Resident Services Officers. Most residents approach the Contact Centre directly. Axis are concerned that Resident Services Officers act as a go-between for residents rather than encouraging residents to call in directly. KRiSP note there are some repairs – communal or involving health and safety – where Resident Services Officers have an important role in reporting issues.

SERVICE

12. There is a range of critical feedback about the service from RBK Repairs staff and Resident Service Officers, and resident feedback in the Survey and Discussion Group. This includes:
 - a. Axis are not hitting their target at present,
 - b. seeing the service as poor,
 - c. issues with non-attendance
 - d. failure to deal with a case involving damp and mould,
 - e. and failure to respond to an emergency.
13. There is also some positive feedback about dealings with Axis, particularly on the work carried out and operatives.



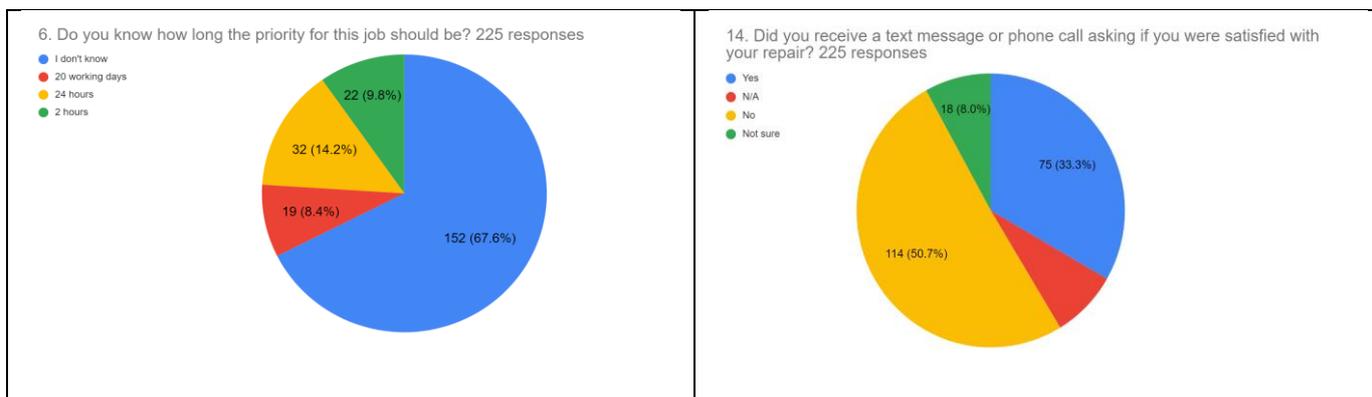
14. The resident feedback from the survey includes:
 - a. 38% satisfaction with repairs
 - b. Only 50% of appointments on time
 - c. Of the 50% of appointments not on time 20% were late and 78% with no attendance at all
 - d. 53% of residents scoring their experience as 1/5
 - e. 15% of residents receiving no response
 - f. 30% first time fix



- 15. The Case Studies also show issues with no appointments set, failure to complete first time fix and disagreements over who was responsible.
- 16. These represent a range of service concerns with the service. The comparison with the 2016 survey (albeit with a much smaller sample) shows a much lower level of satisfaction this time.
- 17. The individual case involving damp and mould is concerning given the potential health impact, the risk of reputational damage to RBK and the prospect of significant financial claims against the Council.
- 18. The level of non-attendance is particularly worrying. This is likely to be a major driver of delay and dissatisfaction with the service. There may also be issues with access to some homes.
- 19. More widely the satisfaction with the service reported is concerning.

SERVICE STANDARDS AND MONITORING

- 20. RBK Repairs Team monitor the KPIs and Complaints. These KPIs were included in the contract extension and include turnaround times, customer satisfaction, first time fix and appointments kept.
- 21. Texts seeking feedback are sent within 5 days of completion seeking Yes/No responses. Return rate is currently 17%. Residents in the case studies found these difficult to answer in cases where the time taken was unsatisfactory but the service was good.
- 22. The satisfaction target was set at 87%, with the lowest rating at 84%. Axis are not hitting target at present.
- 23. There is preparation in hand to share KPIs with residents. 68% of residents in the survey say they were unaware of the standard for their repair.



24. There is a monthly review with Axis of jobs which have been reported as unsatisfactory. The RBK Internal Audit Team review conduct a 10% random sample of repairs. RBK advertise complaints to residents. It would be helpful to highlight compliments, which were identified during this investigation, as well as learning from complaints.
25. Other landlords report on the importance of the close relationship with the contractor, use of a benchmarking scorecard, post inspection reviews, monthly transactional and annual perceptual surveys. Service standards and performance reports are shared on other landlords' websites.

ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

26. The backlog and issues raised by resident about appointments highlight the importance of accurate and timely communication with residents about their repair and appointments made.
27. Whilst welcome progress has been made with call answering times there is neither confirmation where a caller is in the queue, nor a facility for a call back, for residents in the queue.
28. There were resident concerns about the timing of their appointment with 37% of residents saying they did not have a convenient appointment
29. There are consistent themes around improving how residents access the service, both currently and in the future.
30. The survey shows that majority of repairs (64%) are reported by phone, with a minority (25%) reported on line. This is consistent with experience with other landlords. They, in turn, are looking to increase their digital offer and expect the proportion of on-line reporting to increase over time. There are issues with reporting on-line shared by RBK staff and residents. This is alongside an expectation that repairs will be done on-line more in future.
31. There is resident frustration with a range of communication and accessibility issues. These include:
 - a. Wanting more specific time slots
 - b. Operative turning up without appointment
 - c. 49% of residents not receiving a text confirming their appointment
32. The best use of IT for booking on-line and resident tracking of repairs was consistently highlighted by RBK and Axis staff. It was also identified by other landlords.



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33. It is unclear how best these can be resolved both within the current AXIS contract and for any new tender starting in 2024. However, these should be explored now and included as part of the tender process.

ENGAGEMENT

34. The previous Repairs Group last met towards the end of 2019 and hasn't been reconvened since. There is an intention to review this as part of the wider review of Resident Engagement proposed by RBK.

35. There are always going to be risks of any Repairs Group being unduly dominated by individual cases. Any future Group would have to ensure that such cases were dealt with separately.

36. Other landlords have a range of mechanisms that allow resident access and scrutiny of repairs performance:

- a. Repairs Focus Groups of tenants and landlords receiving monthly performance data
- b. Focus Groups and Area Housing Panels
- c. Residents involved in setting up on-line reporting
- d. Property engagement (advocate) group

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is the complete list of recommendations which have been made following the Panel's investigation. The reasons for these recommendations and findings behind these are detailed in the *Findings* section of this report.

#	Findings	Area	Recommendation
1	1, 5, 34	Context Policy and Regulation	That there be planned resident input into the tender exercise for the contractor in 2024
2	3, 5, 34	Context Policy and Regulation	That the Repairs Policy is updated, preferably with resident input.
3	6	Context Policy and Regulation	That the Leaseholder Handbook is made available on, and downloadable from, the RBK website.
4	10	Operation	That all repair requests are given a single consistent reference number.
5	11	Operation	That the role of Resident Services Officers are made clear for all concerned including themselves, residents and Axis.
6	17, 5, 34	Service	That there is a Damp and Mould Policy in place as a matter of urgency, preferably with resident input.
7	12, 14, 18, 22	Service	That the Repairs Team review with Axis the level of non and late attendance, identify and address the causes and share the outcomes with residents.
8	12, 14, 15, 22	Service	That the Repairs Team continue to monitor and discuss with Axis their level of performance through the monthly review of jobs reported as unsatisfactory and share the outcomes with residents.
9	22, 23, 25, 5, 34	Monitoring	That the KPIs and performance be shared openly with residents including on the website.
10	28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 5, 34	Communication and Accessibility	That there is a review of the current arrangements to see what immediate improvements can be made to support accessibility for residents. That



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#	Findings	Area	Recommendation
			this review supports the preparation of the tender for 2024 to see what improvements can be made.
11	28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34	Communication and Accessibility	That the communication with residents is reviewed to ensure that this is effective and supporting best use of operatives.
12	1, 5, 34, 35, 36	Engagement	That consultation takes place with residents on how best they can be engaged on repairs, including monitoring of performance, task and finish groups, tendering of the repairs contract and review of policies.

LEARNING

Given this is the second review of Responsive Repairs carried out by KRiSP, it reinforces the point about the importance of RBK implementing the recommendations agreed by the Council in this and other KRiSP reports.

Respondents of the survey initially showed interest in assisting KRiSP further, but update of the Focus Group was limited. Offering an incentive such as shopping vouchers, may increase uptake.