



COMMITTEE TITLE: Housing, Health and Community

DATE: 19th June 2023

REPORT TITLE:	Repairs contract performance
REPORT OF:	Julian Higson, Interim Director of Housing

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council entered into a long-term partnership contract with Axis Europe Limited in June 2019 for the delivery of repairs, gas servicing and maintenance and planned works services to its social housing properties.

Performance of the contract is monitored closely and most areas of performance; gas servicing and breakdowns and planned works are exceeding contractual targets, however, several issues have been identified in the repairs service around service delivery and communication which have caused concern about the performance of the repairs service delivered by Axis Europe Limited in recent months.

This report explains the identified issues and actions being taken by the Council to improve the service to our tenants and leaseholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To note that actions being taken by the Housing team to improve the repairs service.

SUPPORT ING INFORMATION

1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Performance of the repairs contract is monitored on a regular basis through various operational and strategic meetings. Generally performance is good with areas such as the gas servicing and breakdown meeting or exceeding contractual performance targets. Customer satisfaction levels for the planned works programmes have also been positive.

Nevertheless, several issues have been identified which caused the Council concern about the performance of the repairs service. There was a number of different factors which include;

- Performance of the repairs element of the contract (emergency and routine repairs, appointments kept and repairs completed first time),
- An increase in enquiries and observations raised by members about the quality of service and ability for residents to get through to the repairs call centre,
- A visible increase in the number of residents contacting Brentwood Council to raise a general enquiry about poor communication and services from Axis,
- Feedback from both residents and staff about the length of time it was taking to get through to the Repairs call centre and frustration of tenants when trying to resolve the repair issues in their home.

As a result of these concerns, in November 2022, the interim Director of Housing and interim Corporate Manager – Technical Services met with Axis senior management to discuss the issues and agree a way forward to improve the service for our residents.

Axis confirmed a number of improvements that were due to be implemented on the contract;

- 1) A new telephony system, where residents can request a 'call back' when the next agent was available rather than staying on the call until someone was available was being rolled out across all contracts and due to go live at Brentwood late November/early December 2022.
- 2) They were also introducing a new IT system at the end of November which would give Axis the ability to provide more digital enhancements in the future such as portals where residents and staff could report and track progress of reported repairs.
- 3) A new customer service process review and training programme was being undertaken by their Head of Customer Services, who has extensive experience in local government and had recently joined the company. This would be rolled out across the company in 2023.

It was also agreed the partnership would look at complaints to see if any learning could be identified and improvement to services implemented.

The interim Director of Housing acknowledged the significant impact the EU exit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine had upon the construction industry particularly in relation to the cost and availability of labour and materials.

The contract performance continued to be monitored closely by the Council to ensure there was an improvement in service delivery and outcomes. Further meetings were held with Axis in April 2023 as performance had not improved to an acceptable level. It was agreed additional resources would be brought in by Axis to help the team address some of the issues. This was implemented in late April and has assisted in catch up on enquiries and administrative tasks.

Customer satisfaction for the repairs service is currently collected through Axis. The Council has engaged the services of a company to conduct an independent

satisfaction survey which will include the repairs services. The first round of surveys will commence in July 2023.

This will assist in monitoring the quality of the service and enables us to obtain residents views and opinions of the repairs service.

In addition to this, a Customer Focus Group, facilitated by our Partnering Advisor, Echelon, will be held in July 2023 to gain feedback from residents who have used the repair service in the last 12 months. Any learning from the feedback will be developed into an action plan and implemented. This will be monitored through the Strategic Core Group, which comprises of the senior managers from the Council and Axis Europe.

As part of the new Resident Engagement Strategy, a dedicated Repairs Panel which comprises of tenants and leaseholders, has been established to review performance of the repairs contract with officers. The first meeting was held in May 2023, the group will meet on a quarterly basis.

Progress review meetings will continue with the Operations Director at Axis to ensure any areas of concern are dealt with quickly.

2.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer
Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk

There are no direct financial implications from this report. However, if performance does not meet the minimum level of acceptable performance (MLAP) the council could incur additional costs.

3.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Claire Mayhew – Joint Acting Up Director of People and Governance & Monitoring Officer
Tel & Email 01277 312741 / claire.mayhew@brentwood.gov.uk

The Council has statutory obligations within an existing legal framework for the management of its housing assets.

4.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

Resources for the delivery of the repairs service and management of the contract are met from within existing budgets.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

If performance of the repairs contract is not improved there could be an increase in the number of complaints about dissatisfaction of the repair service.

There are performance targets for the delivery of the services including repairs set out in the contract. Each key performance indicator has a target and minimum level of acceptable performance (MLAP). Performance is formally reviewed by the Council each month.

There is also an escalation process set out within the contract to resolve issues.

6.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

A number of consultation events have been arranged which include a new independent customer satisfaction survey of the repairs service, a customer focus group.

The tenants and leaseholders of the Repairs Panel will also help to monitor performance of the repairs contract

7.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health

Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk

The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on anybody with a protected characteristic and will provide more opportunities to feedback.

8.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Phil Drane, Director - Place

Tel & Email 01277 312500 / phil.drane@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk

There are no economic implications. Some climate sustainability related measures are included as performance management for the contract and should reflect the council's Environment Strategy.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Name:** Carol Burton
 Title: Corporate Manager – Technical Services (interim)
 Phone: 01277 312 533
 Email: carol.burton@brentwood.gov.uk

APPENDICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Housing Committee	19/12/2023