

# Thanet District Council

## **Tenant and Leaseholder Services Performance report Q2 2021**

October 2021/V1/Sally O'Sullivan

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several overlapping, curved bands in various shades of blue, creating a sense of movement and depth.

## Introduction

Monitoring period: Quarter 2 2021

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### 1.1 Summary

This report provides an overview of the performance of the Tenant and Leaseholder Services (TLS) during quarter 2.

As we approach the anniversary of the transition, we have seen many easy fix improvements have been executed and have made a noticeable difference to the service. For example, improvements in the performance of the planned maintenance team and the income team. We know we have areas where we still need to make significant improvement, most notably in void performance.

Our service improvement plan is being executed and longer term improvements currently undertaken are team restructure - making sure we have the right resources in the right place and deep dive review into our procedures and housing management system.

Other projects seek to improve communication with our customers through our website and the condition of our estates.

## 2. Housing Performance Report: Asset Management

### 2.1 Gas servicing and heating repairs (Gas Call)

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Total number of appointments made by Phone or letter that were kept	99.30%	98%	98.66
Volume of repairs completed within timescale	98%	98%	98.41
Total planned installations completed in accordance with programme	100%	100%	100

The performance provided by Gas Call continues to be steady and where there are issues Gas Call is reactive. Regardless, we continue to strive for improvements in the service and their recent restructure has given us a more dedicated service, including a co-located Resident Liaison Officer (RLO). The introduction of the RLO has made a noticeable difference to the communication and thus improved service

There will be an increase in demand for heating repairs as the winter approaches and therefore our Senior Repairs Surveyor has been working with Gas Call to ensure an adequate winter plan is in place

The boiler replacement programme is on track and voids performance is satisfactory.

## 2.2 Day-to-day responsive repairs (Mears)

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Customer Satisfaction	79	80.67	?
Emergency jobs completed on time	98	99.47	100%
Urgent Jobs Completed on Time	98	92.2	94.98%
All jobs completed on time	98	95.6	93.59%
Average days to complete non-urgent works	16	29.42	32.34
Appointments made and kept	97.73	94.64	97.13%
Work completed in one visit	82.03	82.65	87.08%

The Mears service is improving overall but this has not been realised yet through the KPI's and there is still more work to do.

Mears organisation structure was developed for a large contract for the four councils, with a single contract manager and sub teams for each workstream (i.e. voids, compliance, day to day repairs). Following transition, this structure has not given us the personalised service or the reactivity we wanted for our customers. From 1 October 2021, Mears's restructure will formally be in place that will give us our own dedicated team and we have already noticed an improvement in communication and responsiveness.

The Senior Repairs Surveyor has a Service Improvement Plan in place for Mears that is designed to improve all aspects of the customer journey. The team is working toward implementation and monitoring progress regularly.

Analysis on the Q2 statistics show a steady improvement on emergency jobs being completed on time and a 2.49% improvement on appointments made and kept. This is reflective of improved performance by the Mears officer that plans and allocates all the repairs jobs to their operatives.

The poor performance on urgent jobs completed on time and average number of days to complete non urgent work during Q2 is due to a backlog of jobs. A knock on effect of lack of trades operatives and materials in Q4 20/21 and Q1. Mears are now getting ahead of the backlog and we expect to see improvements in this KPI during Q3.

## 2.3 Day to day repairs - Post Inspections

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
% post inspections carried out	8.14%	10.30%	9.33%

The reduction of the amount of post inspections carried out, is reflective of reduced staff during July and August due to holidays and one officer leaving.

The inspections report a good quality of workmanship from Mears.

The TLS restructure will have a positive impact on this team by increasing the Maintenance Inspectors by one officer, in response to our customers telling us they want our officers to be more visible. This gives the resource to carry out more post inspections and health and safety checks.

## 2.4 Capital Programme

Performance Indicator	Q1	Q2
Percentage of capital programme spent (NB revised budget from 01 Oct)	6.59%	39.11%

The capital programme is progressing as planned, the highlights of the quarter are:

- Lifts refurbishments progressing as expected with new lifts cars in 3 x tower blocks due for completion by the end of October.
- The full surveys of the towerblocks are completed, meaning we can move to the next stage of specifying the works, including replacement of the EWS.
- Kitchen and bathroom replacements are on track with our contractor receiving some lovely feedback from customers.
- Installation of new fire alarms is progressing well.

The Major works at Royal Crescent are progressing but there has been a 4 week slippage in the timetable due to a delay in the preparation of the full specification for tender.

In Q3 we expect the arrival of our Project Surveyor (fire) who will progress many of the major works identified through fire risk assessments.

### Decent Homes

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Percentage of properties that meet decent homes standard	92.78%	93.97%	94.17%

We have seen a steady increase in 'decent homes' over the past 3 quarters as we continue to improve data and inspect properties showing as decent homes failures. Currently we have 163 failures, reduced from 188 in quarter 1.

15 properties are reporting category 1 hazard issues, down from 19 in Q1:

- 3 x reported as damp and mould (2 x no access, 1 x works complete)
- 3 x issues with Balconies (the Senior Surveyor is dealing with this)

To continue to improve in this area we are undertaking the following:

- Maintenance Inspectors visit all decent homes failures
- Training on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is booked for October, meaning that our officers will be able to carry out HHSRS checks and verify decent homes and improve our data integrity
- Exercise of data cleansing before migrating from current asset management system into Northgate

## 2.5 Aids and Adaptations

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Adaptations completed Minor		14	36
Adaptations completed Major		12	13

The estimated value of works presented through Q1 & Q2 is now £285,000. Mears have completed approx £100,000 to date.

National building material shortages have partially eased but a backlog of affected work remains - mainly external concrete dependent works.

As Thanet awakens from the effects of the pandemic there has been an upsurge in the numbers of OT recommendations for both Minor and Major adaptations. Mears continue to try to recruit the specialist skills required to fulfill install requests but currently remain under-resourced to achieve a full budget spend by end of year. Install times however remain predominantly within accepted parameters.

Works to construct a ground floor extension in Osborne Terrace, Margate. For the benefit of a family with a disabled child are currently progressing through the planning stage. It is hoped to mobilise through Q3 and Q4 - This is currently budgeted at £50,000

## 3. Housing Performance Report: Housing Operations

### 3.1 Voids and re-lets

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Average days to re-let all properties excluding major works	15.82	9.88	35.90
Average days to re-let all properties including major works	40.25	65.72	47.12

Our performance for voids and re-lets continues to be poor. Our worst performing property this quarter took 112 days to re-let.

The reason for the poor performance in this area remains the condition that properties are received in, meaning major works are nearly always required. This puts pressure on the Mears voids team and thus creates a backlog.

During Q1, we had approximately 40 live voids per month. Mears have taken on extra resources to address the backlog thus reducing our live voids to 20 by the end of September. A positive trend that is continuing into Q3 where we expect to see an improvement in our KPI.

The average cost of voids has also reduced, from £8,148 in Q1 to £6,241 in Q2.

The delays are not attributed to the allocations and lettings process but there is concern that the length of time to carry out major works is masking delays.

We have taken the following action to address the performance issues:

- Passed management of asbestos in void properties to Mears, reducing stakeholders and experience of delays in receiving asbestos surveys from the current contractor.
- Restructure in Q3 to introduce a stand alone Voids Team. The aim is to improve efficiency by reducing the number of stakeholders, improving communication and giving accountability of the process to a single team.

### 3.3 Income Management

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Current tenant arrears as a % of the projected annual rental income	5.89%	6.01%	5.89%
Garage arrears as a % of the projected annual rental income	0.04%	0.09%	0.18%
% of rent arrears due to Universal Credit	11.18%	10.53%	10.06%
Former tenant arrears	£546,654	£443,543	£409,047.

Arrears performance continues positively, during what has been a difficult time. The legislation preventing bailiff enforcement actions expired in Q1, although the team have not used this yet, with more control over their own legal work they will begin to use this tool in Q3.

How the team have continued to make a positive impact on the arrears figure:

- Universal Credit (UC) campaign in Q1 has had a positive impact, with the % of arrears due to UC reducing by 1.12%.
- Campaign to bring all accounts into 1 period in advance, as per the tenancy agreement.
- Pay back overpayments.
- New tenancy financial assessment and assistance to apply for benefits.

#### Garage arrears

Garage arrears have increased due to the non-payment of 2 x accounts. Both licences are due to be terminated.

During Q2, the team has been working on a project to prepare garages for re-let with the first batch ready for letting at the end of Q2. This means an increase in income for the HRA but we may also experience greater arrears, due to managing more accounts.

### Former tenant arrears (FTA)

The reduction seen in the level of FTA from Q1 to Q2 is due to appropriately writing off debt and data cleansing.

### Challenges for Q3

- From 6 October, the additional £20 added to UC to support those on a low income during the pandemic will be withdrawn.
- Increase in gas prices.
- Expectation that rent will be de-prioritised by tenants over Christmas.

### Measures the team are putting into place:

- Change the focus of the Financial Wellbeing Team to provide more assistance to vulnerable tenants.
- Stop serving notices before Christmas.
- Focus the team in Q4 to recover lost income over the Christmas period.
- Work with people that we know will struggle to heat their homes over the winter period to apply for funding in advance

## 4. Housing Performance Report: Customer Service

### 4.1 Complaints

Performance Indicator	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
The total number of all complaints received		33	42	49
Percentage of all complaints closed on time		100%	88.16%	83%
No stage 1 complaints		29	30	38
No stage 2 complaints		3	12	11
No complaints upheld		21	21	17

The trend for the amount of complaints received has increased over the last 3 quarters. We believe this is because we have made it easier for customers to make a complaint, for example, the customer transactions team will take a complaint over the phone and put this through the formal complaints route. We will also make a quicker decision to put a query down a complaints route so that there is a clear response and follow up to the matter.

There is a correlation between the increased number of stage 1 complaints, due to officers actively managing escalated queries through the formal complaints process and successfully resolving the issue so that it does not escalate to stage 2. Our volume of stage 2 complaints has remained steady over the last 2 quarters.

We have received 1 Ombudsman complaint in Q2. This has been responded to and we await their outcome.

We are disappointed that our ability to close complaints within the deadline has reduced by 5.16% in quarter 2 from quarter 1. Reasons for this:

- Receiving stage 1 complaints late

On average we receive complaints with 6 days notice to respond, with 43% of all complaints received having less than 5 days which is particularly challenging to investigate and respond to fully.

- Annual leave

Many officers took leave in August, including key personnel involved in responding to complaints

Going forward, we have altered our complaints process slightly to ensure the responsibility for formulating the responses falls to all senior officers and managers rather than to one officer.

Analysis of the types of complaints received shows that most complaints received at stage 1 are repairs related or housing management issues.

As previously seen, Mears are good at closing issues at stage 1 and as the Mears service improvement plan is implemented we expect to see a reduction in stage one complaints related to the Mears service.

The housing management issues are generally regarding the handling of low level ASB. We will review these types of complaints to see if there is a better way of handling them or managing a customer's expectation.

## 4.2 Call Stats

Performance Indicator	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
The total number of calls received		2034	2599	2184
Average waiting time for a call to be answered		0.32	1.3	00:51
Call answer rate		94.30%	84.37%	79.93%
% calls abandoned		12.92%	16.42%	19.91%
Average time spent on a call		6:45	4.32	04:15

Our total number of calls received have returned to expected levels after an increase in Q1.

The Q2 performance is not where we would want it to be as the team has been 1 officer down. This is due to transfers and leavers during the last 2 quarters and equates to 25% of their resources.

The team now completes more processes with the customer on the phone, for example, completing the initial contact for ASB and arranging for diary sheets to be sent out, in comparison to previously taking a message for an ASB officer to call back. This change in process provides a



better service to our customers, means the customer receives an action for their issue on their initial call and provides more information to the ASB officers.

The team are being trained to deal with more queries on first contact (as the example above explains) and evidence that the team are becoming more proficient at this can be seen in the reduction of call handling time from Q4 2020/21 to Q2.

Our Q2 stats show that even though the average call waiting time has reduced, we are experiencing a higher call abandonment rate. This is not what we would expect as it indicates that customers are becoming less patient; we think that it could be due to a transition to a new telephony system in Q1 that may provide more accurate data. We will analyse this again in Q3 to see if any trends become clearer.

### 4.3 Disrepair

Performance Indicator	Q4	Q1	Q2
Number of disrepair claims with legal	14	12	12

We received 4 new cases and closed 2 cases in Q2. We currently have 12 open cases, many of which are historic and drawing to a close due to the increased support from our Legal Team and additional support from an external consultant.

We would expect more disrepair claims to be made in the lead up to Christmas, as is an annual trend, and the team have seen lots of adverts for tenants to easily get support to make the claims.

### Improvement Plan Update

Workstream	Progress:
1. Review of Fire Strategies	All high risk blocks now have waking watches. High risk blocks have been identified and prioritised. This project was started on 31/08/21 with a meeting with Health and Safety consultants DDS Ltd. Formal instruction was given to start the work needed and a timetable for completion was requested. A Project Surveyor (Fire) has been recruited and will start in September with an objective to lead this project.
2. Heating Solutions (Tower Blocks)	Construction consultancy Potter Raper has been commissioned to provide in depth surveys of the tower blocks, and provide suggested solutions. Works on heating will need to be carried out at the same time as retrofitting of cladding and windows. Potter Raper will present the findings of their surveys in a meeting to be held on 14 October.
3. Responsive Repairs	Extensive meetings with Mears have taken place to highlight areas of improvement required and priorities. Mears have now appointed a dedicated operations manager for Thanet, who has a good

	working knowledge of the area. Joint process mapping workshops have been arranged to take place in November.
4. Estates Strategy	A consultation has taken place with tenants who have indicated that they are willing to pay a slight increase in charges for increased staffing and visibility of Housing Officers. In light of this the TLS proposed restructure allows for an additional Housing Officer to be recruited.
5. Tenancy & Property Audits	Properties for audit have been identified. Tenants who have had minimal contact with the service, or where forced access (for gas servicing) has been necessary, will be prioritised. Housing Officers will be allocated properties to audit. Audits are expected to start in December 2021.
6. Improved information (Tenants and Leaseholders)	The service improvement team now has web author permissions for the TLS pages within the TDC website. They have identified missing information and will tackle each area, improving the accessibility of language, accuracy of information and visual appeal. The service improvement team is working closely with the TDC Digital User Experience Manager to find solutions that comply with the corporate identity whilst improving information for tenants (and staff).
7. Planned Maintenance	The Potter Raper report delivered on 31 October will be used to identify where kitchens and bathrooms need upgrading, investigate replacement boiler options and fire alarm installation.
8. Resident Involvement	The Resident Involvement strategy is currently in draft form with the final version to be completed by 31st December. Unfortunately the Customer Insight Officer (who initially worked on the report) has now left TDC. As the restructure is in progress, recruitment of a replacement will be delayed which will have an impact on the delivery of this project.
9. Service Standards	Required policies have now been identified. As far as possible, service standard documents will be used rather than policies which may restrict the flexibility to make improvements.
10. Performance Information	The annual report will be published on TLS webpages. The service improvement team is investigating ways of publishing monthly service performance statistics. These will need to fit TDC brand image and be fully accessible to our tenants. Thanet Tenant and Leaseholder Group will be consulted about the type information that they would expect to see on our pages.
11. Customer Relationships	A consultation survey has been distributed and completed. Currently working on data to ensure that qualitative data is collated

	<p>in a meaningful way. As in workstream 8, a staff vacancy will have an impact on the timeline of this project.</p>
<p>12. Digital Improvements</p>	<p>Northgate 'health checks' have been commissioned. These will start with a review of responsive repairs. Staff will be provided with updated training to ensure that all of the available features are utilised. 'Quick fix' solutions will be applied during the health check. Where more costly modules are identified, quotes and specifications will be requested.</p> <p>Unused tablets have been identified to be utilised for the use of Officers on visits. The ambition is to reduce double handling of data to ensure data is input directly into relevant systems whilst on site.</p>
<p>13. Improving Resident Data</p>	<p>A final decision about the types of information and the purpose of the data gathering is under discussion. A standalone survey is planned for January 2022. TDC officers to be asked for support with legal and GDPR advice. A decision about the type of data to be gathered, as well as staff training (to ensure there is confidence in asking for the data) will be completed by mid-December. This will facilitate the design of the survey to be delivered to residents by mid-January 2022.</p>
<p>14. Procedures and Processes</p>	<p>Workshops to map procedures and processes associated with responsive repairs (WS3) have been booked. These will take place over 3 days and include Mears personnel. Processes will be mapped in detail and improvements identified. Other areas to follow.</p>
<p>15. Customer Standards Review</p>	<p>The managers have reviewed the requirements of the consumer standards to check compliance. There are areas where more is needed to be done to achieve compliance and actions are in hand to be completed.</p>
<p>16. Policy Review</p>	<p>Required policies have been identified and distinguished from service standards. TLS managers have a full day workshop planned to draft prioritised policies. 2 x policies in draft have been reviewed by TTLG</p>
<p>17. Written Communications</p>	<p>Current leaflets provided for tenants by TLS, Mears and Gas Call have been collated. These have each been re-written to ensure that information is accurate, language is accessible and that style is consistent. Working with TDC print room staff, and with feedback from TLS staff a layout and style has been developed that will be used for all TLS leaflets. (Previously leaflets have been a variety of styles, colours and paper sizes. )</p> <p>The fire safety leaflet will be submitted to the next TTLG meeting on 27 October for comment.</p>

18. Forms	The service improvement team has identified the forms used within TLS and produced Google forms where common elements appear in the same place for consistency. It is planned to make all forms accessible via TLS web pages, to be available to complete online, print or in hard copy. Currently waiting for input from TDC legal team.
19. Keys	A large quantity of keys have now been numbered and put in order. A locked key cabinet has been installed in the store room on the 1st floor of Cecil Street. There is now an audit trail of who has borrowed keys. The next stage is to test all keys to ensure that labels are correct and identify where they are missing. This will be carried out by housing Officers.