

Repairs and Maintenance Policy

STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Repairs and Maintenance Policy 2023

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SERVICES

ENABLING AND PROJECTS TEAM

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1. Purpose

The Repairs and Maintenance Policy sets out how Stoke-on-Trent City Council (the council) will deliver the responsive repairs and maintenance service to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties and communal areas, and its approach to delivering planned investment works. Other repair related activities are covered by complementary policies referenced in Section 9 below.

HRA properties consist of: -

- Residential leasehold properties acquired under Part V of the Housing Act 1985 (the Right to Buy) and
- properties let by way of a residential tenancy agreement in accordance with Part IV of the Housing Act 1985 and Part V of the Housing Act 1996
- Individual garages and lock ups sites- covered by section 5.8 of this Policy

In this Policy the reference to “tenants/tenant” means persons who occupy their property under the provisions of the council’s periodic weekly tenancy agreement provided under the provisions of Part IV of the Housing Act 1985 and Part V of the Housing Act 1996 and shall include the following: -

Secure tenants, non-secure tenants, introductory tenants, demoted tenants (and persons housed as a result of the council’s duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (homelessness)).

The reference to “leaseholders” means persons who occupy their property under a registered leasehold estate and who acquired the property under the provisions of Part V of the Housing Act 1985(the Right to Buy provisions).

The reference to “customers” in this Policy refers to both tenants and leaseholders.

2. Key Principles and Service Standards

Our principal aims are:

- To make sure we provide an effective, modern repairs service that tenants and leaseholders can rely on, responding quickly when the need arises
- To have in place well designed repair and maintenance systems that ensure homes are safe, kept in repair and brought up to, or continue to meet, agreed standards
- To ensure we repair and maintain the housing stock and communal areas in a way that optimises the use of financial, staffing and other resources and achieves value for money
- To comply with relevant statutory and regulatory obligations
- To respect and protect our planet through our working practices
- To deliver a repairs service which provides an effective balance between reactive and planned works

To achieve the above, we have agreed the following core objectives. We will:

- Seek feedback from and listen to our customers, in order to help shape service delivery and continually improve the customer experience
- Clearly define our repair responsibilities
- Continually strive for the highest quality of performance and customer satisfaction, in line with agreed performance targets
- Provide a service that is accessible and convenient for customers
- Undertake repairs in the most efficient manner with a 'right first time' ethos.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy, and the way in which the council's repairs and maintenance service is delivered is underpinned by the council's tenancy agreement, the leases arising as a result of the Right to Buy provisions and the following legislation where applicable:

- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994/133
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Electrical Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002/2665
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Equality Act 2010
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Housing Acts 1985, 1988, 1996, 1998 & 2004
- Health and Safety Legislation including Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 and the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (Amendment) Regulations 2022.

In order to respond to best practice and regulation, the policy also has a strong reference to the existing Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England, and relevant themes within the Social Housing Regulation Bill 2022, by specifically addressing the following expectations:

- To provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas, that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants and leaseholders, offers value for money and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements 'right first time'.
- To meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes

- To provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about how they can access services, the standards of housing services they can expect, how the council is performing against those standards, the service choices available to tenants, including any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices, progress of any repairs work, how tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback, the responsibilities of the tenant and provider and arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny
- To ensure a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas, demonstrating an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs, and value for money.

The policy aligns strongly with the council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy and HRA Business Plan.

4. Equality Statement

The council recognises that it provides housing for communities which include wide social diversity and it is committed to providing equal access to services.

This policy aims to treat all customers fairly, with respect and professionalism. In line with the duty placed on the local authority under the Equalities Act 2010 specific consideration of the impact of this policy has been given to people with protected characteristics, including gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status. The approach adopted within this policy focuses on understanding individual circumstances in order to provide appropriate advice and support; this includes understanding the needs of tenants who have protected characteristics. Consideration will therefore be given to language barriers, accessibility and cultural issues which may affect a tenant's ability to manage their tenancy or seek advice on problems, and resolutions which take account of the individual's beliefs and abilities.

The council will enable all its tenants and leaseholders to have clear information and equal access to available services and information in a range of appropriate languages and formats will be provided when requested. This policy has been designed to be fully inclusive regardless of the ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious belief, or disability of service users or residents. The Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed as part of reviewing the policy document in order to inform any changes that may be required.

From time to time the council may ask tenants to provide details of their gender, age, religion, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation in line with the protected characteristics identified within the Equalities Act 2010 to help the council to deliver more effective, appropriate and inclusive policies and practices. All data collected is kept securely, used only for monitoring purposes and is de-personalised at the point of analysis to protect individual's privacy.

5. Policy Detail

5.1 Responsibility for Repairs

The extent of the council's repairing obligation differs dependent upon whether the property is held under a tenancy or a leasehold interest. With regard to leaseholders, the extent of the council's obligations is determined by the lease and statute. In respect of tenants, the council's repairing obligation are governed by statute and the current tenancy agreement in place at the time.

Responsive repairs is a service provided to tenants but also covers the communal areas of a block of flats occupied by leaseholders

The council, and contractors employed by the council, will aim to ensure that responsive repairs are completed correctly at the first visit and that disruption to the tenant and their home is minimised. When this is not possible, we will ensure that this is communicated with the customer and they understand what will happen next, and when it will happen.

Responsive repairs will normally replace fixtures and fittings supplied by the council on a like for like or improved basis or, where this is not possible we will aim to provide the tenant with choices in relation to the replacement.

All tenants (and leaseholders where relevant, for example repairs required to communal areas) are required to report any repairs which are the responsibility of the council promptly. The tenant (and leaseholder if applicable) must also allow the council and its appointed contractors, reasonable access to undertake the required repairs and any necessary surveys or inspections.

5.1.1 The Council's Responsibilities

Leaseholders

In connection with leasehold properties which have been sold under the Right to Buy provisions and which form part of a building, the council is required to keep in repair, the main structural parts of the building including the roof and foundations (but not the glass of the leasehold flat) and the pipes, drains and cables and the fire doors to the building. This obligation is subject to the payment of a service charge as provided within the provisions of the lease.

Tenants

In connection with tenancies, the council is responsible to its tenants for carrying out the following repairs and maintenance service:

- Repairs to the structure and exterior of the property (including drains, gutters and external pipes) and the maintenance of fixtures and fittings supplied by the council.
- Maintaining communal areas, including lighting to these areas.
- Maintaining external paintwork.
- Keep in repair and proper working order the installations for the supply of water, gas and electricity; this includes the carrying out of gas, electrical and solid fuel certified checks, in line with current legislation.
- Keeping in repair and proper working order the installations for space heating and heating water; in other words, the heating equipment within the property (if heating provision is beyond economic repair the council will consider replacement with an alternative form. The council does not provide a secondary source of heating as standard. Secondary sources of heating will only be provided on a discretionary case by case basis).
- Keep in repair and proper working order installations for the supply of water and sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and toilets).

Wherever possible the council may repair or make safe any fencing which it has installed, but if the fencing cannot be repaired or made safe it may be removed or replaced.

Any decision to provide new or replacement fencing will be based on issues around:

- Health and safety.
- Privacy.
- Amenity.

The council is not responsible for repairing or replacing shared fencing/walls where this has been provided by the tenant as a Tenant Improvement.

Any replacement of fencing installed by the council, which is the beyond repair will be included in programmes of planned works to council homes and estates going forward.

Under the terms of the council's tenancy agreement, there are certain matters which are the tenant's responsibility; these are:

- Work needed as a result of wilful damage or neglect.
- Tenant's own fittings, including fridges, cookers, washing machines, showers, blinds and floor coverings.
- Toilet seats.
- Plugs and chains to sinks, wash basins and baths.
- Easing of internal doors after installation of carpets or other floor finishes.
- Damaged or missing internal door handles caused by the tenant or anyone living with the tenant or their visitors.
- Replacement of door locks as a result of lost keys.
- Internal decoration, including decoration required following repairs.

- Clothes lines, posts or rotary dryers to houses and bungalows.
- Broken glass to windows and doors arising as a result of wilful damage and neglect on the part of the tenant or a member of their household.
- Curtain, picture and dado rails.
- Locks, latches and bolts to gates, garages, lock-ups, sheds and outhouses
- TV aerials (unless provided by the council as part of the communal TV system)
- Replacement bulbs to interior and exterior lights (including low level security lights).
- Boundary fencing undertaken by the tenant as a Tenant Improvement.
- The repair or replacement of any fitting, structure or finish that has been undertaken as a Tenant Improvement.
- Hairline cracks and small areas of damaged plaster which could be easily repaired with filler.

Tenants are responsible for any damage to the contents of their property and are encouraged to ensure they have appropriate insurance in place to cover their personal possessions.

If the tenant undertakes any of the works listed above and as a result they cause damage which could result in significant risk to the tenant, visitors to the property or local residents, then the council reserves the right to undertake any necessary resulting repairs. However, if the damage has arisen as a result of the tenant's action then the council may recharge the tenant for the cost it incurs in putting it right.

In exceptional circumstances, the council may undertake the work listed above at its discretion. This particularly relates to vulnerable tenants (Reference Section 5.11 below).

The council reserves the right to recover, via the civil courts if necessary, the cost of any repairs to the property where damage has been deliberately caused by the tenant, members of their household or visitors to the property. However, this will not apply if the damage has occurred as a result of a crime and provided the tenant has a crime reference number.

However, the council will seek to recover the cost of any associated repair works if:

- The damage was as a result of criminal activity which involved the tenant or a member of the household, except in exceptional circumstances
- The repair is required as a result of forced entry by the police if this action results in a successful conviction of the tenant or member of the household.

5.2 Customer Focus

We aim to provide a service that meets our customer's needs, focuses on the things that are important to them and builds a relationship of mutual respect. To make sure this happens we will focus on areas such as:

- Making it easy to report repairs, with a range of reporting routes.
- Effectively diagnosing repairs, and getting things right first time
- Making appointments that are convenient for customers, where an appointment is appropriate.
- Communicating effectively with customers if there are unavoidable delays.
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with our work, and using this feedback to make improvements.

In addition, staff working for the council, Unitas or, where appropriate, private contractors and partners will:

- Answer calls promptly and be polite, honest and helpful at all times.
- Introduce themselves when calling the customer by phone and will show photographic identification before entering a customer's home.
- Be polite and wear a Unitas uniform at all times (contractors excluded).
- Explain what work is going to be carried out and discuss with the customer how this might affect them.
- Take care of customers' belongings whilst working in their property, protecting them from damage and dust for example and will make sure that materials and tools do not cause danger to anyone in the customers' home.
- Make sure that when having to use the customers' electricity that they ask first but wherever possible use portable battery tools. Where this is not possible the use of electricity will be kept to a minimum.
- Keep mess and rubbish to a minimum, making sure it is all removed at the end of the working day or when the job has been completed.
- Make sure that electricity, water and gas are connected at the end of each day wherever possible.

Customers are required to treat council staff and contractors with respect whilst they are working on their property. Customers are expected to refrain from smoking whilst operatives are working in the property and, are also expected to remove animals from the areas where operatives are working.

The following need to be taken into consideration when access is required to complete a repair.

- Customers must allow authorised staff of the council or other agents/contractors into their home at all reasonable hours to inspect its condition, do any repairs needed, or improvements or to service appliances or to carry out work the council considers necessary to make sure the property and surrounding properties do not put the customer or anyone else at risk here possible.
- The council may need to gain access to homes to inspect, clean or repair a home or neighbouring dwelling, or any sewers, drains, pipes, wiring or cable serving a home or neighbouring dwelling.
- Authorised staff may need to enter a property without notice in an emergency, using reasonable force, if necessary, if Unitas feel there is a risk of personal injury or damage to property or surrounding properties.

- Customers must not cause or commit or allow anyone living with them or visitors to cause or commit any form of harassment or other anti-social behaviour, and this applies to the way in which they treat our employees, agents and contractors.

Where appropriate a customer may ask for a security code word to be used to gain access. If given this will be made available to the member of staff or representative to give added security to customers that feel especially vulnerable.

5.3 Carrying out Day to Day Repairs

The council aims to utilise its resources effectively and efficiently to provide a high quality, responsive repairs service in line with its repairing obligations, whilst at the same time ensuring that its repairs service meets the needs and expectations of tenants and leaseholders where relevant. The delivery of this objective will be balanced with the need to make sure that the day to day repair activities support a range of broader asset management objectives and securing of good value for money for the council.

Day to day repairs are those carried out when components fail and cannot wait to be undertaken under a cyclical, planned maintenance or planned improvement programme. These works, which are revenue funded, comprise of responsive repairs to items such as plumbing/sanitary equipment, door/window fittings, heating appliances and electrical installations.

The council will maintain a range of ways for repairs to be reported in order to ensure that the service is accessible to all tenants, these include:

- Via the Uitas Portal - <https://onlinerepairs.unitas.co.uk/#/>
- On-line at: www.Unitas.co.uk or www.Stoke.gov.uk
- Downloading the My Stoke App from Google Play Store or the Apple App Store
- Telephone: 01782 234100
- In writing to Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Floor 2, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 1HH
- In person at a Customer Service Centre.

The above list does not exclude any statutory and/or other methods of reporting matters set out within the tenancy agreement and/or the lease.

Repairs can be reported by council officers, support workers or carers using any of the methods above. It is the tenant's responsibility to report repairs promptly as and when they become needed, particularly if leaving the repair unattended could cause further damage or deterioration to the property or risk of injury to residents or others. Failure to report repairs may be considered neglect of the property and is a breach of the tenancy agreement.

5.4 Day to Day Repair Categories

In order to help deliver a more efficient and cost-effective value for money service, repairs will be prioritised according to the nature of the work involved. Repairs that are required as a result of component failure or breakdowns, that put tenants' health and safety or the property at risk, will be dealt with faster than those that can safely wait. Within this, all repairs will be undertaken within a reasonable timescale and, where applicable, within the timelines prescribed in the Right to Repair regulations.

There are two main categories of day to day repair and these are 'emergency' and 'routine'.

5.4.1 Emergency Repairs

Emergency repairs are carried out when there is a potential danger to health or serious risk to the safety of the occupants or third party, or a danger of serious damage to the building. Priority will be given to those repairs that arise from acts of harassment or anti-social behaviour.

We will make every effort to ensure that emergency repairs will be attended to and completed within 24 hours, and in some extreme cases we will aim to respond within 2 hours. Predominantly these include repairs in respect of:

2 Hour Response

- Gas escapes (via Cadent)
- Exposed live electrical cables or complete power failure
- Severe water leaks, likely to cause water damage
- Major drainage problems
- Insecure property

24 Hour Response

- No heating where tenants do not have a separate gas or electric fire (seasonal – 31st October to 1st May).
- No hot water, where no other source in the property (seasonal 31st October to 1st May).
- Toilet not flushing, where there is no other working toilet in the house.
- Blocked sink, basin or bath.
- Smoke/carbon monoxide alarm not working or faulty.

In some instances, it may only be practical to carry out a temporary repair to make the situation safe and secure. Once this has been done, arrangements will be made to complete at a second appointment, at a time and date agreed with the tenant.

In the event of a heating system break-down which leaves a home with no heating, temporary heaters will be provided if required by the tenant.

Out of Hours Emergencies

The council operates an out of hours service to complete emergency repairs in order to make the property safe until a full repair can be undertaken. This service is available through 01782 234100. An emergency repair is restricted to circumstances where there is a danger to life, a safety hazard, the potential for more extensive damage or is needed to ensure a home is secure. These may include:

- Exposed live electrical cables or complete power failure.
- Severe water leaks, likely to cause water damage.
- Major drainage problems.
- Insecure property.

The council will aim to attend all emergency repairs reported out of hours within 2 hours of it being reported. The tenant is responsible for ensuring access to the property in instances where emergency repairs are required. Our priority will be to make the property safe; as such follow-up visits may be required to undertake a full repair, and this will be undertaken at a convenient date and time agreed with the tenant.

5.4.2 Routine Repairs

There are two routes by which routine repairs may be undertaken:

Repairs by Appointment

Routine repairs by appointment are those repairs that need to be carried out to remedy building or component failure and that cannot reasonably wait for a programme of cyclical or planned investment works.

Customers will be advised of the priority assigned to their repair at the time of it being booked and a mutually convenient appointment will be agreed for attending and carrying out the works. Prioritisation will also reflect the vulnerabilities of the tenant and any prevailing weather conditions.

Repairs through the Area/Estate Based Approach

Routine repairs may also be undertaken through the council's area-based method to repairs and maintenance. The Council wants to work as efficiently as possible. The approach is to operate a focused planned maintenance team working in a specific area where there is a high demand for repairs services, this allows us to not only deal with routine, reported repairs but also address any issues of deterioration before a repair is needed.

For any non-urgent routine repairs reported a week in advance of area/estate-based works commencing, these will be programmed into the area/estate-based works, and

a mutually convenient time arranged to complete the reported repair works, in addition to any other targeted works identified by site surveys and a property 'MOT' within the estate/area-based approach.

5.5 No Access

Where access cannot be gained to undertake a repair, the council will take appropriate measures to make further arrangements for works to be carried out. These measures will include:

- Leaving a card to ask the customer to rearrange a visit
- Telephoning the customer to rearrange the visit
- Writing to the customer requesting that they contact the council/Unitas to rearrange a visit
- Sending a surveyor out to inspect in instances where the tenant's original repair report suggests a potentially hazardous situation exists.

If persistent requests are made for repairs and operatives are unable to access the property a call out charge may be applied to the tenant as a recharge. Ultimately, if the customer is unreasonably preventing access to undertake the repairs this may be considered a breach of their tenancy and where relevant a breach of covenant under the lease which may result in legal action being taken. Similarly, if repeated call outs are made by operatives and it is determined no repair is required, the cost of the call out charge may be applied to the tenant as a recharge.

5.6 Planned Programmes of Work

The council aims to develop cyclical, planned maintenance and planned improvement programmes that minimise annual expenditure on responsive repairs and maintenance. Planned works often take place as routine preventative maintenance, including within the Area/Estate based approach, and, in many instances, at defined time intervals.

5.6.1 Cyclical and Planned Maintenance

Cyclical and planned maintenance works are undertaken on regular planned cycles for servicing, inspection and testing of equipment, often as required by statute or regulations and/or to maintain the generation condition of the stock, and particularly the electrical and mechanical installations within the stock. The council has separate policies (reference section 9 below) relating to most of these areas, including in relation to gas and other fuel safety, electrical safety, fire safety, asbestos management, Legionella and water safety and mechanical and engineering equipment, in terms of this policy, therefore, coverage is restricted to the redecoration of communal areas.

Redecoration of communal areas is generally based around a seven-year cycle. However, common areas may require painting at different intervals based upon the level of wear and tear. Communal areas that are subject to reduced traffic or wear and tear will not require decorating at the same frequency as other parts subject to heavier traffic. Therefore, whilst the painting and decorating programme may identify the decoration to internal stairs and common rooms, these will be inspected and assessed before any work is undertaken. Where work is not required in the area it shall be re-scheduled for a future inspection within a suitable timescale.

5.6.2 Planned Improvement Works

Planned improvement works include the replacement or renewal of building elements or components due to them reaching the end of their life, for example windows (in the case of tenants and leaseholders) and kitchens and bathrooms in the case of tenants.

The council has agreed a 30 year programme of expenditure that meets the long term investment needs of its sustainable housing stock. The range of improvement works will be developed taking account of the investment requirements identified in stock condition surveys, the ongoing suitability and 'performance' of the stock in financial and other aspects, the priorities of current and future tenants and the need to ensure that incremental and sustained improvements are made to the homes we provide.

When replacing building components or facilities, the council will aim to use high quality items that are more sustainable, offer better value for money over time and improve the environment of estates and communal areas.

Planned improvement works will depend on whether the HRA property is held by a tenant or a leaseholder and will fall into a number of different programmes. The principal areas of activity and replacement cycles are set out below:

Work programme	Frequency
Kitchen replacement applicable to tenants only	20 years
Bathroom replacement, applicable to tenants only	30 years
Boiler replacements, applicable to tenants only	20 years

Windows and doors applicable to tenants and possibly leaseholders' dependent on the terms of the lease	25 years
Electrical rewires applicable to tenants and possibly leaseholders' dependent on the terms of the lease	30 years
External rainwater goods applicable to tenants and possibly leaseholders' dependent on the terms of the lease	30 years
Soffit and fascia replacements applicable to tenants and possibly leaseholders' dependent on the terms of the lease.	30 years

5.7 Remodelling and Replacing Obsolete or Uneconomic Stock

The council's HRA Asset Management Strategy provides for remodelling or replacing obsolete or uneconomic stock with new properties, which are better designed to meet future needs and create a better-balanced stock portfolio. The intention is that, rather than spend large amounts of money trying to repair, maintain and improve stock which falls into this category, the opportunity is taken to consider all the alternative options. These options maybe to remodel or replace it with redesigned or new, high quality properties that are better suited to the future needs of tenants and are of a type which aids the development of a balanced housing stock portfolio. In the case of any buildings where properties have been sold under the Right to Buy provisions, separate negotiations would be undertaken with relevant leaseholders.

5.8 Repairs to Garages / Lock Ups Sites

Demand for garages and lock up sites has reduced significantly over the last 5 years. As a result, the garage and lock up sites have undergone a wider asset review and in some cases longer term alternative uses for sites have been identified. Over the coming years repairs to garages will only be undertaken if there is a significant risk of harm or there is demonstrable demand for the garages in the area. In some cases tenants may be offered an alternative garage which is in good condition if repairs to their current garage are deemed uneconomical.

5.9 Supporting Vulnerable Tenants

In order to protect its more vulnerable tenants, the council will provide a safety password service. This service provides an agreed password between the tenant and the operative attending the repair when the repair is logged.

The council may also undertake repairs listed in Section 5 (those listed as being the tenant's responsibility) if the tenant meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Is aged over 70 years old with no other member of the household under 70
- Is in receipt of a registered care package
- Is in receipt of the medium or high rate of the care component or the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance
- Is in receipt of Attendance Allowance
- Is in receipt of War Disablement Pension
- Other cases considered as vulnerable at the discretion of Uritas's Head of Responsive Repairs and Maintenance.

The council may carry out the maintenance which would normally fall under the responsibility of the tenant either at a nominal fee or free of charge dependent upon the circumstances.

Some tenants have specialist adaptations, fixtures or fittings to their property as a result of specific needs, including physical disabilities or risks from domestic abuse. In the vast majority of cases these will have been fitted by dedicated support services and will be maintained by them for a minimum of twelve months after they have been fitted. After this time maintenance and repairs can be logged in the normal way as a routine repair. Out of hours repairs may be undertaken if there is a significant risk to the tenant if the works are not completed quickly.

5.10 Right to Repair and Compensation

Under 'The Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994' secure and introductory tenants are entitled to have certain repairs carried out within a prescribed period of time. Such tenants may be entitled to compensation of up to £50, if their repair is not completed within the prescribed time limits.

Damage to internal decorations as a result of a general responsive repair will not generally be compensated unless such damage is as a result of a programme of major repair.

5.11 Tenant Improvements

Tenant improvements are works carried out on the property by the tenant with the permission of the council. The council is not responsible for the ongoing repair and maintenance in respect of such works.

If tenant Improvements have been left in the property by a previous tenant the council will only assume responsibility for repairs if it is practical and economical to do so; in other instances, the tenant improvements will be removed and the property returned to the original state.

Tenant improvements which are considered major, including loft conversions, driveways, porches and new internal walls can only be left in-situ when a tenancy ends with the written permission of the council. Permission will be granted if the council considers that the maintenance works can be economically maintained. In all other instances the works should be removed by the tenant and the property returned to the original state.

6. Financial Implications

The costs of undertaking and managing the repairs and maintenance activities of the council are accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). As part of the financial regulations in relation to HRA, the council is obliged to ensure that there are sufficient funds available to cover the costs of repairs and maintenance to all properties. The costs of repairs will be considered as part of the annual rent review and service charge review. The annual budget for day to day and planned repairs has been accounted for within the HRA Business Plan.

The council will review and amend its HRA Business Plan from time to time to take into account any significant changes to the policy and/or operating environment. These amendments may impact on the funding available for the council's repairs and maintenance activities.

7. Consultation and Communication

The development of this policy has included views from a range of relevant stakeholders including customers, internal teams, Unitas and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment. The wider scope of the policy also allowed reflection of best practice elsewhere and incorporated the relevant statutory requirements.

8. Complaints

The council actively encourages all customer feedback about its services, and uses complaints, comments and compliments to review and improve our services.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, Unitas, its own staff, those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

If a customer is dissatisfied with a service that has been provided, they can make contact via

- the council formal Complaints Procedure. Details are available from any council office or online [Comment on a council service Stoke-on-Trent](#)
- the Unitas online feedback form www.unitas.co.uk
- Telephone – 01782 234100
- Email at – feedback@unitas.co.uk
- Message via social media – FaceBook/Twitter

Complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days with a response to the customer within 10 working days.

The customer has the right to challenge the response to their complaint via the appeals process. Further information on how complaints are processed can be found in the compliments, comments & complaints policy and complaints process leaflet.

The council will never unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the Complaints procedure. If a complaint is refused escalation, we will explain the clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action and also set out the customers' right to take this decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

9. Safeguarding

There is a formal framework in place for identifying, reporting and recording safeguarding issues. Staff employed by Unitas, by the council and by external contractors have all had relevant safeguarding training and this will be refreshed on an annual basis.

10. Links to Other Policies

The Repairs and Maintenance Policy is a key document of the council and sits under the council's HRA Asset Management Strategy.

The key documents with which the Policy has links are:

- HRA Asset Compliance Strategy – covering:
 - Gas and other Fuel Safety.
 - Electrical Safety.

- Fire Safety.
- Asbestos Management.
- Mechanical and Engineering Equipment Safety.
- Legionella and Water Safety.
- Tenancy and Estate Management Policy.
- Tenancy Agreement.
- Leases – Leaseholders.
- Major Adaptations Policy.
- Tenant and Leaseholder Compensation Policy.
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy.
- Void Management Policy.

11. Measuring Quality and Performance

The council is committed to ensuring that its repairs and maintenance services are delivered to a high standard and provide high levels of customer satisfaction. In order to help it do this, it will monitor and manage performance through a range of methods.

The council will measure and evaluate performance against a range of appropriate and relevant performance indicators and will benchmark itself against other social housing providers. The council may audit the quality of repair works and investigate complaints in relation to the standard of works, and will actively collect and analyse tenants' views on the repairs service provided, with feedback collected by staff acting independently of the delivery of the service.

Performance information and benchmarking data will be reported to the council, Unitas's Board and our customers through the Annual Report and our Customer Engagement Framework.

12. Delivering Value for Money

The council is committed to ensuring its repair and maintenance services offer excellent value for money and will therefore ensure that a range of mechanisms are in place to demonstrate value.

The mechanisms used will include:

- Benchmarking against peers.
- Market testing against other providers.
- Reviewing internal cost and performance data.
- Internal business reviews.

Demand information for the repairs service will be kept under review in order to identify trends in repairs within different geographies, failure of particular elements or issues with particular property types. This information will be used to inform the planned maintenance programme to deliver a more cost effective programme of works, and to identify properties where repairs are not being regularly reported to ensure that that tenant has not failed to report required repairs through vulnerability or negligence.

13. Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it is consistent with changes in legislation and regulation.

As standard, the policy will be reviewed at five yearly intervals.

Key Contacts

For comments or complaints about a service contact:

- Via the Uitas Portal - <https://onlinerepairs.uitas.co.uk/#/>
- On-line at: www.Uitas.co.uk or www.Stoke.gov.uk
- Downloading the My Stoke App from Google Play Store or the Apple App Store
- Telephone: 01782 234100
- In person at a Customer Service Centre.
- In writing to Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Floor 2, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 1HH.

For comments in relation to this policy and its development contact the Enabling and Projects team:

- Email: housing.strategy@stoke.gov.uk

For further information on how to influence policy development, contact the tenant relations team:

- Email: housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01782 235105 (office hours only)

Glossary/Definitions

Throughout this policy document, it is inevitable that words or phrases are used that are readily understood by some readers, but which are new to other readers and their meaning is not immediately apparent. The meaning of some words/phrases used in this document is given below:

Asset Management - the range of activities undertaken to ensure that the Housing Stock meets the needs and standards for the future

Decent Homes Standard - a standard set nationally which states that a Decent Home is one which meets all statutory requirements in relation to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and provides reasonable thermal comfort.

Equality Statement – Sets out the council’s commitment to ensure everyone is treated the equally.

Major Adaptations - refer to changes to the property or equipment provided in order to assist a disabled person to live more independently.

Recharge – is the cost of repairing or putting right damage or neglect to properties. The costs are charged to the tenant and reclaimed.

Unitas Stoke-on-Trent Ltd – the name of the council owned company established to deliver repairs and maintenance services to council owned properties.

Value for Money – is the overall value based on cost, efficiency and effectiveness.