

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	PEO 27/17

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: People Committee

Date: 19 October 2017

Report Title: Review of the Housing Repairs Service

Report By: Director of Community Services

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on a range of actions being undertaken to improve the housing repairs service. The report also seeks approval for changes to the service structure.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to:
- i. note the overall principles and actions being taken to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and customer focus of the housing repairs service;
 - ii. agree amendments to the staffing structure to create additional management capacity by creating a new post of Principal Repairs Officer, and rationalising layers of management to deliver a more efficient, streamlined and effective service; and
 - iii. note the work taking place to develop further changes to staff roles to achieve greater integration and efficiency, subject to staff and trade union consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Housing repairs service is the highest volume and highest cost direct customer service funded from the Housing Revenue Account. In the last year we carried out 36,841 day to day repairs and repairs to 1,099 empty houses, with an annual budget of £15m. It is the housing function which brings us into direct contact with tenants and other customers most frequently, generates most complaints and which tops the list of important issues for tenants. Getting the repairs service right has a significant impact on efficiency, customer satisfaction and the reputation of the service as a whole.
- 3.2 Historically the repairs service operated on the basis of a clear client / contractor split with Building Maintenance operating a separate trading account, with income generated almost exclusively (over 95%) through charges to the Housing Revenue Account for housing repairs.
- 3.3 Changes to management arrangements for the Community Services were approved by Committee on 5 November 2015. This resulted in a single management structure for Housing and Building Maintenance from April 2016. A current structure chart is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4 Review of Repairs Service

- 4.1 A Repairs Project Board has been meeting since May 2016 to review current systems, practices and staffing arrangements in order to develop an integrated housing repairs service within Community Services.
- 4.2 The following principles have arisen from the work of the group:
- increasing in-house provision and reducing the use of sub-contractors where possible;
 - improving the management of external contractors where they are used;
 - increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of in-house provision;
 - improving quality assurance; and
 - improving budget management.
- 4.3 The main areas of work being undertaken are described below.
- 4.4 Simplify billing and payment arrangements to focus on real cost and value for money:
- 4.4.1 Current systems and processes are based on housing building maintenance being a direct labour organisation. The costs of repairs have traditionally been based on a schedule of rates for particular repairs and internal billing for work done against these rates. Building maintenance is no longer a significant trading organisation and there is no requirement to keep a separate trading account.
- 4.4.2 We have made some inroads into streamlining procedures within the current arrangements for costing, billing and payment over recent years.
- 4.4.3 We are currently planning a more fundamental change to arrangements. This will involve identifying the actual direct costs of carrying out repairs through staff costs, materials and other service overheads. These costs will be monitored against the HRA repairs and maintenance budget.
- 4.4.4 This will improve repairs budget monitoring and reporting.

- 4.5 Review and rationalise current IT systems to ensure systems support efficient service delivery:
 - 4.5.1 IT systems have been designed around the client and contractor arrangements described above, with additional systems introduced in relation to service improvements such as mobile working.
 - 4.5.2 This means that there are a number of different systems operating. Each of these is fit for purpose in relation to the specific function involved, but integration between systems could be improved and there are inevitably costs and inefficiencies involved in running a number of systems in parallel.
- 4.6 Review repairs processes from customer perspective, including arrangements for works ordering and scheduling, quality assurance and health and safety:
 - 4.6.1 The repairs service is the single most common reason for contact with tenants. We measure satisfaction through an ongoing post-repair telephone survey to a sample of tenants. The results of the last years showed an overall satisfaction rating for the repairs service of 93.5%.
 - 4.6.2 Although satisfaction rates are high given the volume of repairs being undertaken a small percentage of dissatisfaction equates to a high number of people.
 - 4.6.3 We have invested in mobile working technology for the repairs service. This has two main advantages: it allows repairs to be scheduled and therefore appointments made with tenants; and it also improves efficiency as details of work carried out and materials used are entered at the point of repair, rather than paper records being processed later.
 - 4.6.4 At present, 61 operatives across 6 trades are mobile enabled, mostly in the electrical, joinery and plumbing trades. We are committed to extending mobile technology throughout the service. This will include mobile devices for staff carrying out quality and other inspections.
 - 4.6.5 We have recently initiated a trial whereby satisfaction surveys can be completed by tenants immediately after the repair on the mobile devices. It is hoped that this will capture customer information far sooner than before and identify where improvements can be made.
- 4.7 Review staff roles and remits to focus on delivering a customer focussed repairs service:
 - 4.7.1 Staff structures in building maintenance are currently based on historic client and contractor roles. Within this structure Housing Maintenance Officers are responsible for carrying out pre- repair inspections, raising works orders with estimated costs and overall quality control. Building maintenance teams are responsible for carrying out the repairs, either directly or through sub-contractors.
 - 4.7.2 A number of specific proposals in relation to job roles are set out below.

5 Proposed Changes to structure

- 5.1 The integration of housing and building maintenance in 2016 allowed the creation of the post of Area Repairs Manager, responsible for all repairs staff. Although staff

below manager level have been working flexibly and some integration of roles has taken place the structure of the service and job descriptions have not been formally changed.

- 5.2 The management arrangements for the service and key staff employed are summarised in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.3 Staffing arrangements vary across local teams, but one common feature is the relatively low number of management posts to staff, and uneven ratios of Team Leaders to operatives.
- 5.4 It is proposed to increase management capacity by creating a new post of Principal Repairs Officer. The main function of this post would be to lead and develop local housing repairs and maintenance teams. There would be 4 posts in total: 2 in the North team and 2 in the South team. These posts would replace the existing posts of 2 Senior Maintenance Officers, which would be deleted. The Senior Maintenance Officer Job Descriptions relate to managing Maintenance Officer functions rather than Building Maintenance functions. The new Principal Repairs Officer posts will have a broader remit covering all aspects of the service. As well as increasing management capacity these posts will also be an important next step in integrating the function.
- 5.5 Within building maintenance teams we currently have 2 levels of supervisory post managing the day to day activities of in-house staff and subcontractors. These posts are Team Leader (HC7) and Assistant Team Leader (HC6). In order to simplify line management arrangements and create a flatter management structure it is proposed to delete the post of Assistant Team Leader, but to increase the number of posts of Team Leader by the equivalent number. Existing Assistant Team Leaders would therefore become Team Leaders.
- 5.6 As a second phase of work, consideration is being given to the role of Maintenance Officers. These staff have an important role in carrying out property inspections, assessing and managing planned and cyclical maintenance and in overall quality assurance. Integration of roles is likely to reduce the need for Maintenance Officer to act as internal clients and free up more time to undertake a wider asset management role in relation to housing estates. It is planned to consult more widely with staff on changes required to this role.
- 5.7 Allocation of work and management of external contractors remains a significant task. Currently over £9m a year or nearly 50% of building maintenance expenditure is through external contractors. Although one of the principles for the repairs service in future is to undertake as much work as possible in-house we will always have to use a significant volume of external contractors: for example in specialist areas of work; to cover peaks in work where we do not have in-house capacity; or in areas where we do not retain an in-house workforce.
- 5.8 It is considered that current arrangements for the allocation of work to external contractors, quality assurance, invoicing and payment do need to be strengthened.
- 5.9 The posts of Measurement Officer currently deal with assessing work content and prices and internal billing in relation to building maintenance functions. As service integration continues and changes to costing and budgeting outlined earlier in this report are implemented the nature of this function will change. The focus in future is more likely to be on the management of external contractors and on costing and planning HRA Capital Programme activity. Again it is proposed to consult more widely

on the changes required to this role.

6. Feedback on consultation with tenants

- 6.1 As indicated at 4.6, we collate satisfaction information from tenants on an ongoing basis. Analysis of satisfaction surveys confirms that the main source of tenant frustration relates to communication issues, for example knowing when a follow-up repair will take place.
- 6.2 We have previously involved tenants in a review of the repairs policy. The strategic tenant groups: the Scrutiny Panel, the Communication Group and the Finance and Participation Group have recently indicated that they would like to be consulted in the coming months as to how the repair service and the customer experience can be improved.

7. Implications

- 7.1 Resource: Additional staff costs will be contained within the overall service budget through a combination of efficiency savings due to greater service integration and reduction in sub-contractor costs. One feature of the current integrated service model is that our own staff are now undertaking additional HRA Capital Programme work and servicing new heating systems, both of which are budgeted within the HRA.
- 7.2 Legal: There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 7.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): There are no implications arising from this report.
- 7.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: There are no implications arising from this report.
- 7.5 Risk: There are no implications arising from this report.
- 7.6 Gaelic: There are no implications arising from this report.

Designation: Director of Community Services

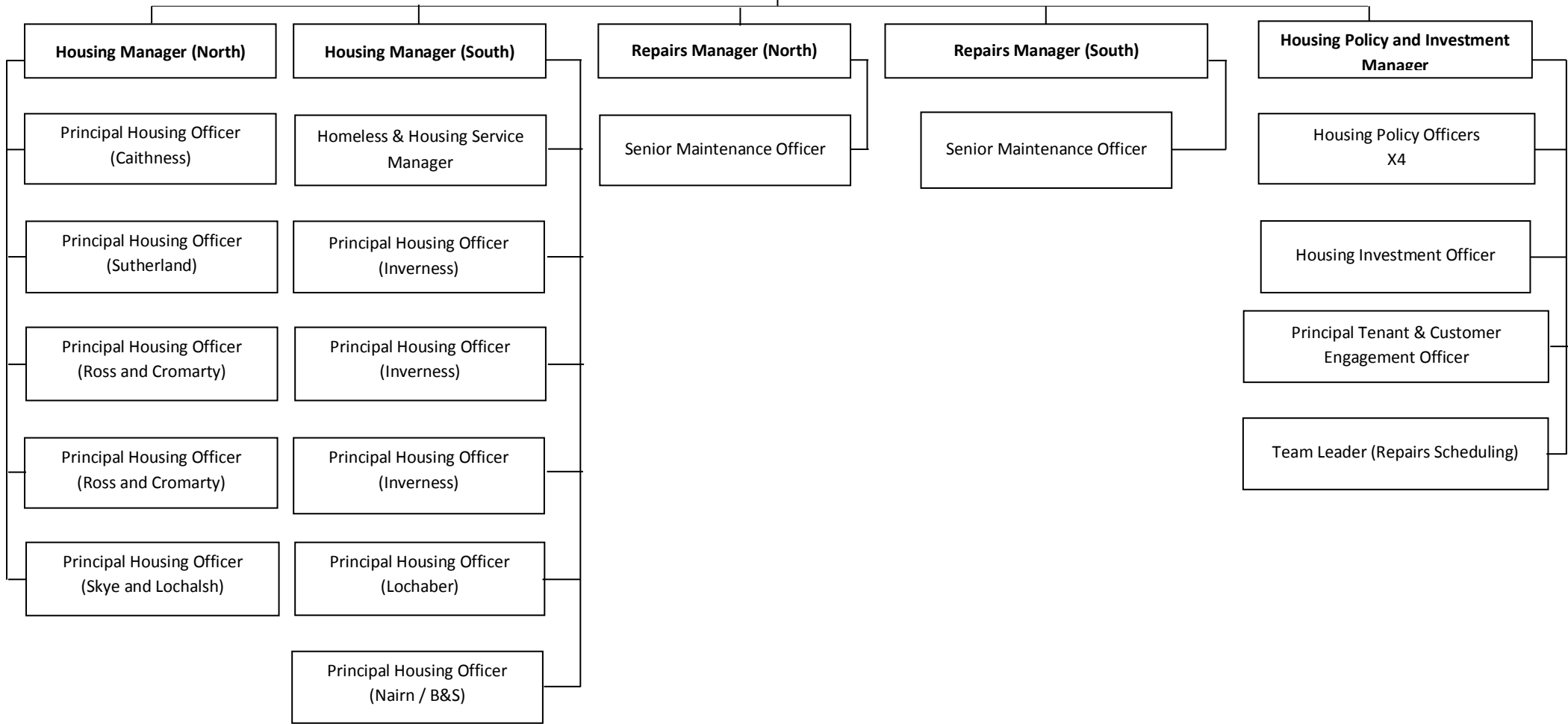
Date: 6 October 2017

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COMMUNITY SERVICES - HOUSING AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

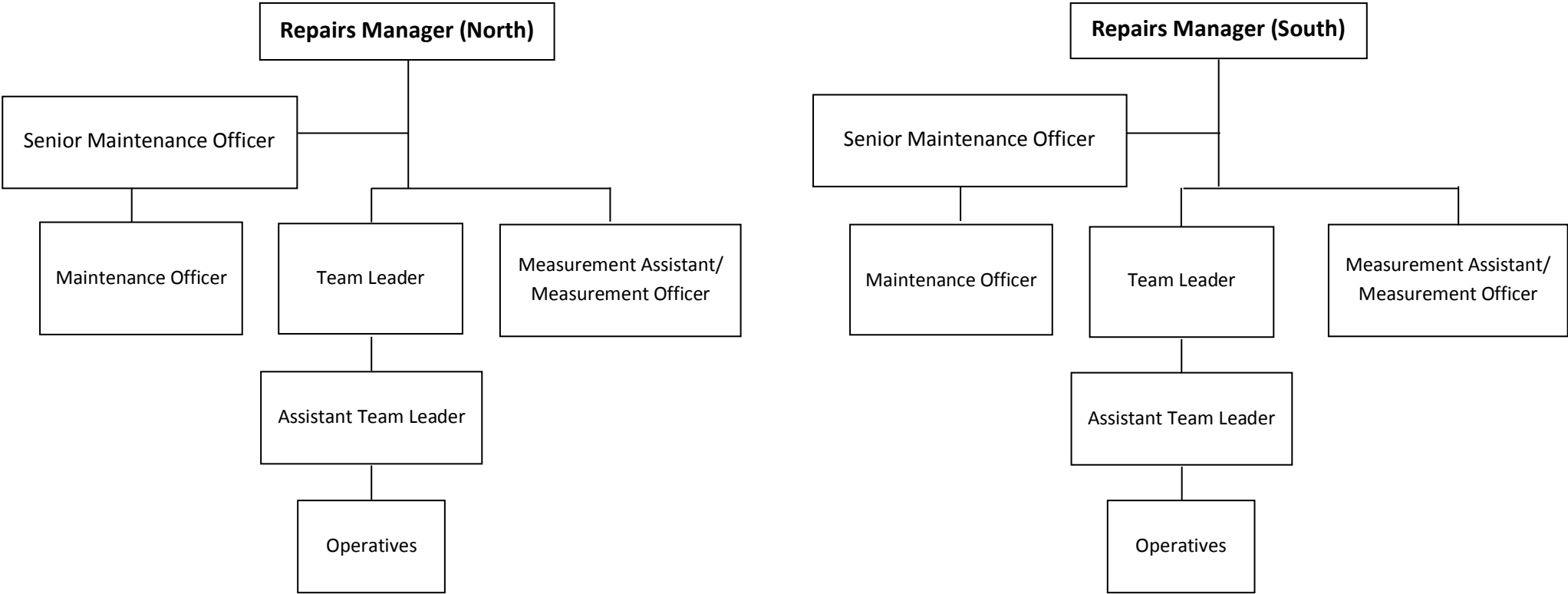
MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

HEAD OF HOUSING AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE



COMMUNITY SERVICES – REPAIRS AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

CURRENT STRUCTURE



COMMUNITY SERVICES – REPAIRS AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

