



National Housing Maintenance Forum Awards 2014

Best Contract - East Kent Housing

The best managed external contract for maintenance



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Keeping tenants at the heart of East Kent Housing has been a fundamental driving force for us and that mantra continues to shape everything we do, including:

- Delivering 'a fresh approach for a better housing and repairs service in East Kent' which is clearly demonstrated through the management of our repairs contracts
- Tenant influenced tendering for a new gas repairs contractor with Swale Heating, which is also set to save millions of pounds and improve service delivery
- Running two repairs cluster tenant groups to oversee and push improvements into their maintenance contracts
- Setting up three cross district tenant scrutiny groups to help develop and improve services – with a particular focus on tenant repairs and estate improvements
- Introducing tenant repair inspectors in each local area to inspect local estates and communal areas
- Consulting our special interest forums including a young tenant and disability forum on repair service changes, and improvements to make sure their needs are taken into account

Managing the contract & nurturing innovation

East Kent Housing skills lie in the way they manage the repairs contracts across the four districts, which includes:

- Mears - general household repairs service
- Swale Heating - gas/heating repairs service
- Prima - PVCu windows and doors repairs service
- Town & Country - communal cleaning service

Customer satisfaction for East Kent Housing's maintenance service has remained consistently high since our launch and continues to improve. The return on investment and cost efficiency continue to deliver savings which are then re-invested in the service.

The Heating contract:

- The recent tenant led heating repairs contract is set to save over £3 million pounds
- By involving tenants from our Cluster Group, East Kent Housing have enabled ownership and direct tenant involvement in the contract's look and feel.
- A dedicated Tenant Liaison Officer employed by Swale Heating is embedded into our maintenance team and works in our local office. This has resulted in delivering 100% of the annual gas safety checks.

Where gas isn't available in rural areas, East Kent Housing has focused on finding innovative and cost effective solutions for tenants. This has included the use of ground source heat pumps in an estate, that was still using coal fires as their main heat source!



Tenants, Staff and Contractors discuss repair improvements



Staff help to launch the UK's first super ALMO in April 2011

The Mears Contract:

- The repairs service provided by Mears across the four districts has enabled cost efficiencies
- Improved and more direct customer repairs reporting through Mears
- New interfaced IT systems in each area now allow information to be shared easily and regularly to ensure miscommunication is avoided
- More trust has been placed with Mears and therefore more responsibility has been given to them to make some processes faster (variations up to £150 can be carried out by the contractor)
- Mears can invest more into their staff as efficiencies made through partnering arrangements can mean more stability, more repeat work and the support of apprentice schemes
- Workload and labour requirements can be offset as they can move between the four areas. This balances peaks and troughs of work in each area.
- Due to a standardised approach, quality has improved.
- A new Text Ahead & Text Reply service has been well received and used by tenants – especially our harder to reach tenant groups



Staff from East Kent Housing and our repairs contractors on local estates

East Kent Housing working with local tenants arranged for their Repair Contracts to provide:

- 365 days a year customer focused service, backed up by maintenance expertise
- Local employer partnerships with Job Centre Plus, getting tenants into work and employing local apprentices
- National Diploma Schemes - Mears are an active partner in the National Diploma Scheme working with the Education Business Partnership and local schools and colleges. Delivering vocational maintenance training to 14 – 16 year olds.
- Van Stock System – contractors have an automated van restock system, managed using PDAs, instructing supply chain partners to restock on time
- Resident Inspectors – East Kent Housing’s contractors have dedicated resident representatives that review complaints and the actions taken to resolve them.
- Customer Engagement - Customers are heavily involved in shaping services from start to finish – in particular, the repairs cluster group has overseen the development of a new and more focused customer satisfaction survey. Surveys are completed on PDAs, e-mail, text or by post. Increasing the number of surveys returned
- Continuous Improvement – EKH and our contractors set challenging targets for year on year improvement which is reported monthly to local tenant groups and management
- Customer Excellence - In addition to Customer Satisfaction data required by East Kent Housing, our contractors collect Customer Excellence data where customers score our work in terms of excellence, not just satisfaction

Why was the innovation necessary?

The whole ethos of East Kent Housing is focused around delivering improved and cost effective repair services to tenants, on behalf of their four council owners. Streamlining and improving repairs contracts continues to be achieved and allows for an innovative repairs service to develop. With the growing economic pressures on local councils, it would be easy to focus on just reducing costs in the repairs service. However, partnering has delivered savings and service improvements through working innovatively.

Closer working relationships with its repairs contractors and greater trust has led to improved communications and working relationships to such a degree that contracts have taken on more direct functions from East Kent Housing. This has freed up our staff to have time to look at new ways of doing things. This is demonstrated by recent pilots in new heating system options and more choice based contracts being provided.

How did the innovation evolve?

Initially East Kent Housing started to look at differences in the previous repairs services provided across the four areas. We identified best working practices and implemented those elsewhere to standardise processes. This ensured that tenants from across East Kent could receive the same consistent and high performing service. For example, previously three of the four areas could only report repairs by phone – now repairs can be reported online, by email, by text and by phone.

How do you expect it to grow?

- East Kent Housing has recently submitted a bid to the local councils to standardised price per property across all four districts – this will enable its maintenance inspectors to carry out more post inspections rather than pre- inspections. This is another example of how giving more trust and responsibility to the contractor will result in improved efficiencies and allow more ‘right first time’ repairs. We’re developing one central call centre – this will see savings for our repairs contractors and will be beneficial for customers and East Kent Housing.
- The development of a dedicated online repairs area and mobile phone application (APP) will enable tenants to report and track their repair service
- More tenant involvement and participation in how their service is provided.
- More community involved events to improve neighbourhoods (employment schemes and litter picking events)

How do you monitor effectiveness?

- Higher customer satisfaction results from tenants and leaseholders continue to be reported
- More trust from tenants and leaseholders has been recognised, through the outcomes of our repairs cluster groups and feedback from our four local Area Boards
- Our staff have more time for budget monitoring and collaborative working with contractors

Client benefits:

The four councils, working collaboratively as a Super ALMO have managed to achieve the following:

- Our long term partnering agreement establishes a better relationship between staff, tenants and contractors –e.g. Mears carry out some of our surveying work and provide programmes of work, help with post inspections, variations without prior authority and writing specifications jointly .
- Stability and cost certainty for the future – by having long term agreements with contractors, the councils have more cost certainty and consistency of service.
- Awareness of requirements - our contractors understand the pressure of the Councils’ requirements that we must fulfil, in order to maintain a good working relationship with all four councils.
- More standardisation and cohesive approach across all areas – our customers can be confident that the service they receive will be the same high standard regardless of where they live
- Right First Time – our repairs contractors ensure that work is carried out correctly the first time and defect free as much as possible
- Quality Management – Mears has quality processes and procedures which are accredited to ISO9001 standard
- Environmental Management – e.g. Mears has environmental management processes and procedures which are accredited to ISO14001 standard and have plans in place to recycle up to 98% of waste.



Staff from East Kent Housing & Swale Heating join local tenants to celebrate the new gas contract.

Contractor benefits:

- Long term partnering agreement establishes a better relationship between client and contractor
- Stability and cost certainty e.g. the contract’s long term budget commitments and programming for resources allows contractors to invest in their workforce, equipment and livery for the future
- One individual client saves time as communication is more streamlined and precise. Our contractors are able to establish themselves with tenants, build a relationship with them and the communities they work in – this leads to greater motivation for their workforce
- Recognition from the community for the work they do and the social responsibilities they show through their apprentice schemes



Residents:

- Tenant involvement in improving the repairs service ensures ownership and greater confidence in contributing to a service that benefits the wider community
- Standardised approach and a fairer repairs service is being received by all tenants regardless of where they live
- Trust in our ability to deliver the repairs service by being involved with all aspects, including sharing our performance information
- Our contractors listen and demonstrate that they respond to customer feedback and complaints through our 'you said and we did' campaign, our tenant scrutiny and cluster review groups. They involve local tenant groups in innovative ideas to improve the service
- From planning through to completion and aftercare services, East Kent Housing identify the needs of each householder and make sure they are fully engaged, consulted and informed at each stage of the home improvement process. Our residents know exactly when and what works will happen

Neighbourhoods:

- Safer neighbourhoods and greater community involvement through the apprentice schemes and back to work schemes provided
- Involving tenants at local and national level
- Providing clear and understandable information
- Ensuring that the needs of the different groups in the community are served and their involvement encouraged. For example, EKH and Mears develop a Serving Communities plan each year. This is carried out with ideas from customers and staff. We try to identify those projects that are most aligned to the needs of the local community and best utilize our skills.
- Helping the local community to thrive not only increases the quality of life for residents but is also rewarding especially as a huge percentage of our and our contractors staff live in the communities where we work

The benefits of our repairs contracts:

- Our tenant satisfaction has risen from an average of 81.5 per cent across the four authorities in 2009 to an average of 86 per cent under the ALMO in 2012 and to 99% across the four areas. Our latest performance figures for 2012/13 are included on page 8 & 9.
- Sharing services has also delivered an annual saving of about £1.8 million across the four councils through procurement savings, staffing reductions and improved performance. Our annual operating budget is £8 million, and our local councils have set us the task of saving a further £1.2 million over the next three years



Training our new Tenant Repairs Inspectors

- The average turnaround for empty properties in Canterbury dropped from 32.6 days in 2010/11 to 27.41 in 2012/13, while total rent arrears improved over the same period from £319,000 to £296,000.

Looking to the future:

Our future plans include one integrated IT system that can be utilised across all contracts and areas within our organisation. We are currently investigating the use of mobile phone apps that will enable our tenants to report repairs or check their rent accounts, using their smartphones via our new central IT system. We are also aiming to make more use of electronic communication such as email and mobile phone repair apps to give tenants more choice in how they communicate with us. This will ideally save time and money and provide a fresh approach to the service we provide. These ideas will provide efficiencies in time, not only for our tenants, but for staff within our organisation.

How might you do it differently if you started over again at another organisation?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing to have. Considering the huge task to bring four teams of maintenance staff together whilst continuing to improve the repairs service at the same time is an amazing achievement. However, it would have been great to have:

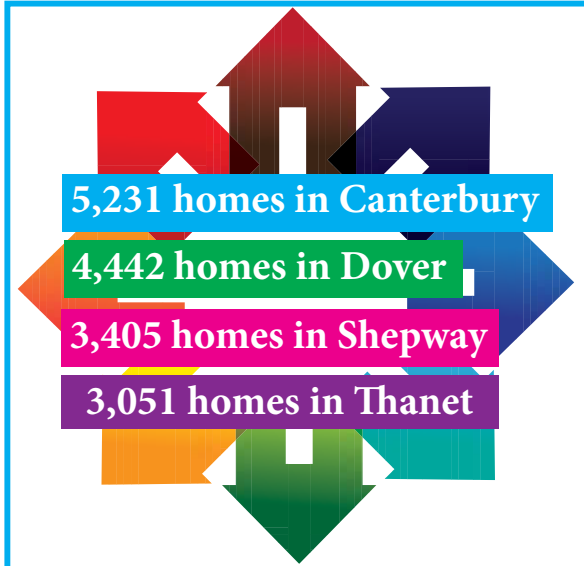
- A fully integrated single IT system from the start, this would have enabled our staff and contractors greater ease to work across the four districts
- All repairs contracts co-terminating
- Price per property in all areas
- One maintenance contract that covered all areas - as this would have seen savings and improvements at the offset

About East Kent Housing

We manage homes across Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet in Kent. Here's some key facts about what we do and the maintenance service we provide.



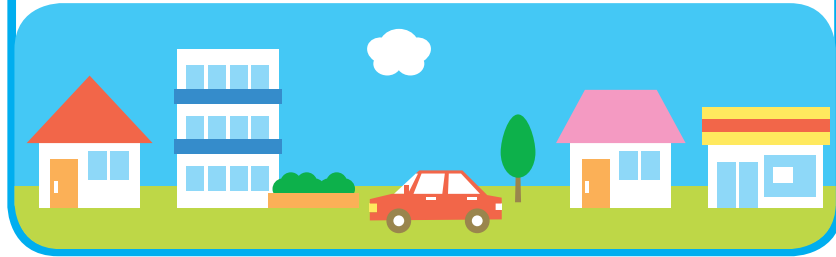
We manage* over 17,500 council homes across east Kent which includes:



*excludes leasehold properties

What we do:

- We manage over 17,500 council homes and over 3,500 garages on behalf of the four local councils in East Kent
- We have over 200 staff to help deliver our housing services to tenants
- We have over 100 tenant representatives helping us improve housing services



How we maintained our homes

Here's a summary of what we spent on improving homes across the four areas:

Planned maintenance work:

We have a maintenance budget of:
£25.5 million

98%
of tenants are satisfied with their repairs.*



Over 1000 homes fitted with new windows or doors



Over 800 adaptations to help tenants to stay in their homes



Over 800 replacement boilers fitted



Nearly 800 homes rewired



Over 700 new kitchens fitted



Over 300 homes fitted with insulation



Nearly 200 new bathrooms fitted



55 homes had their roofs replaced

*Average across the four areas

How we're improving...

21 days

That's the average time it's taken us to turn around an empty property ready for a new tenant.

We're among the best performing housing organisations in the South East for getting empty homes ready for new tenants to move into.



£152,000

That's the extra rent we collected because we made it quicker for new tenants to move into a home.

Our Repairs Service Performance

Our repairs contractors, Mears and Swale Heating carry out essential repairs to your home and help us bring empty properties up to a good standard before new tenants move in. We're among the best performers in the country when it comes to repairing and getting empty homes ready. Here's a summary of how we performed over the last year:

Percentage of repair appointments kept:



97% of appointments were kept in Canterbury

99% of appointments were kept in Dover

96% of appointments were kept in Shepway

99% of appointments were kept in Thanet

We beat our target in every area and we are among the best ALMOs for keeping our repairs appointments.



Here's Barry, our Sheltered Housing Handy Man, with Regional Director Lucas Critchley. He was presented with a customer service excellence award for his great work at 15 sheltered housing schemes. Barry was nominated by staff and local tenants for his great service!

How satisfied tenants are with our repairs:

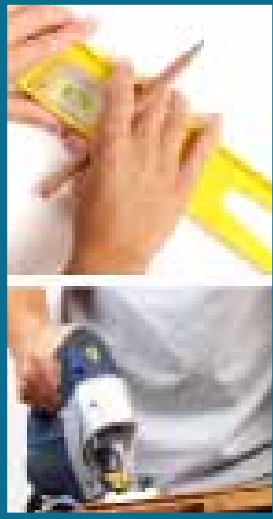
98% are satisfied in Canterbury

97% are satisfied in Dover

99% are satisfied in Shepway

97% are satisfied in Thanet

We beat our target in every area for tenant satisfaction with completed repairs.



95.3% of repairs were completed on time across East Kent

You said...

Our tenants said there were too many questions to answer in our satisfaction survey after a repair was finished.

We did...

Working with our Tenants Repairs Group we now ask two new shorter questions in our tenant repair survey.

East Kent Housing - delivering a fresh approach to housing services:

The Kelly Holmes Trust 'Get on track' project inspires young people aged between 18-25 to improve their skills, knowledge, and self-belief through support and mentoring projects, providing stepping stones into community sport, volunteering, training and employment.

The Mears team in Thanet took up the challenge to help the Trust and provided an 8 week programme which included:

- Hosting conflict awareness course
- Providing work experience
- Providing bricklaying and plastering taster sessions

What the young people had to say about Mears: *"lovely helpful staff that made us feel welcome"* and *"It was a wicked day and we learnt so much from Mark Sutherland and Dan Bestford in the short space of time"*.

Learning new skills with help from Mears!



Having a go at plastering and brick laying!

Jess joins Mears!

Jess, who took up the opportunity of a work experience placement through the Kelly Holmes Trust now works for Mears as an administrator.

Jess, said: *"The work placement and training day Mears held was good as it opened up lots of opportunities,*

not just for me but for all of the team. Being offered a job at Mears has really helped me get my confidence back and I'm really enjoying being part of the Mears team."

Mears Customer Care Manager, Louise Smith, said: *"It was an honour to have the opportunity to get involved with the Trust and to meet and work with the extremely keen youngsters who really impressed the Mears team with their enthusiasm and commitment."*

