

Improving homes together

Placing residents at the heart of the service by Dartford Borough Council



DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Part of Breyer Group Plc

1. What is innovative about the service provided?

The maintenance partnership between Dartford Borough Council and Breyer Group places residents at the forefront of decision making and has innovation stamped throughout. Too often resident's voices become lost in the machinery of delivery. Here resident's voices were firmly rooted even from the outset as they took part in formulating the initial tender. The views and needs of residents have been sowed into the very fabric of the partnership, ensuring their voices are enshrined for the duration of the contract.

In April 2010 the planned maintenance and responsive repairs contract was awarded to Breyer B Line, a division of the Breyer Group. This 7 year £6m contract is to provide maintenance and repairs to Dartford Borough Council's stock of 4,400 homes, 370 leasehold homes and 1,300 garages. Breyer and Dartford were keen to adopt a gradualist approach, giving the relationship time to develop. This stepped way of working is different to many traditional 'partnerships' where requirements are agreed and fixed at the beginning, restricting future innovation. This organic approach allows momentum to build, ideas to be tried, and lessons learned. It also makes sure residents continue to stay at the heart of the decision making process.

A Partner Board Group has been created to steer the contract through an Action Plan. Residents play a key role within the Partner Board Group, keeping the Action Plan relevant to their day-to-day needs as well as providing a strategic framework for longer term initiatives. A group of KPIs has been drawn up to measure and monitor the effectiveness of the plan over the long term.

Innovation is necessary as this is a long term contract – for at least 7 years with the option to extend a further 3 – and as priorities change, so the service needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet these changing requirements. The contract encourages innovation by minimising rigid structures that inhibit ideas. This means the service can respond quickly to residents needs. Flexibility is at the heart of thinking with a 'try it and see' approach. Specific goals are set, ideas trialled, adapted and made permanent if successful.

One example of an idea currently being trialled is the introduction of fixed prices to Void Refurbishments. This idea was agreed at a recent Action Plan meeting after price rises in the average cost per property in the early months the contract. Since the introduction of fixed prices, costs have reduced and stabilised, a climate of certainty has been developed, and efficiencies created through refined administration procedures.

The collaboration and involvement from all parties is what makes this scheme innovative, establishing a structure that has allowed this contract to flourish and shape the service. The important point is not being afraid to try, and taking a collaborative approach to risk taking. This partnership fosters a shared risk/reward ethos and seeks to minimise a blame culture, cultivating a positive environment for new ideas.

Effective delivery is ensured through smooth communication and data flows, minimising duplication of effort, creating a robust supply chain, managing costs and promoting the service through a network of local community initiatives.

Responsive repairs are carried out by 11 highly trained Operatives dealing with up to 50 jobs per day. All tradesmen are fully equipped with smart uniforms and new dual branded vans.



2. What are the benefits to client, contractor, residents and neighbourhood?

There is a common interest to all stakeholders in carrying out the service efficiently and effectively. Many of the innovations described below benefit not just the residents but also the contractor, client and local community.

Integrated IT

Dartford Borough Council and Breyer have embraced the idea of 'cloud' technology by establishing common servers for data storage so that access to records and information is available to both client and contractor. The Optime calendar system allows for call centre staff to schedule work directly into operatives PDA systems creating a smooth flow of work scheduling between partners. Appointments can therefore be confirmed whilst still on the phone to residents. Appointments are then re-confirmed by text, by telephone the day before, and also by the Operatives on the day. The benefits to integration are felt by client and contractor yet most importantly to residents through improved communications and management of expectations.

Resident participation

Resident's views feed into every aspect of the service. As well as playing a key role in the creation

and on-going meetings of the Partner Board Group, resident voices are heard through customer satisfaction surveys, quality management and community initiatives including Apprentice training and local community events.

One stop shop

A strategic Operations Centre has been set up right in the heart of the community at Powdermill Lane. Here a team of dedicated advisers and support staff deal with each customer request ensuring works are prioritised and that the right skills are deployed for the right job. Each job will have an individual advisor assigned to it – so customers can speak to a named individual who is knowledgeable about their requirement. There is also bespoke materials store, meeting rooms and a resident respite area.

Performance Zones

Performance zones have been created in all main contractor offices allowing the sharing of information on productivity, KPIs, and sickness. This allows much better ownership from staff and gives a focus for improvements. Since the introduction of performance zones there has been an improvement in customer satisfaction from 92% to 96.5% as all operatives have become ever more customer focused.

Buildbase partnership

Materials supplier Buildbase has a dedicated store

within Dartford's unit allowing Operatives direct access to materials improving 'first time fix' and resident satisfaction. A robust and focused supply chain has been created. The top 10 commonly used components and materials are kept in stock to optimise levels and these are reviewed by residents every month. Wherever possible standardisation and commonality have been used in Council buildings to reduce cost and enable greater purchasing power. Even garage doors are kept in stock, painted to the Council colours so they are ready for immediate installation. All the materials chosen are selected with respect to whole life costing, carbon footprint, ease of replacement and resident choice.

Community Development

Working closely with the community and actively promoting their participation is a vital aspect of the service. The partnership looks to recruit local people into an apprentice programme thereby creating further and wider positive benefits. Over 70% of those now involved in servicing the contract come from within the local community.

Apprentice programme

There are currently two apprentices working towards NVQ Level 2 qualifications and two management trainees. Ryan Jones, a 21 year old Dartford resident, has joined the apprentice scheme and he is currently studying towards an NVQ in electrical

installation by attending a day release course as well as gaining valuable expertise with his on-site work. Each apprentice is paid the national minimum wage and given an on-site mentor to help develop and train them. After completing their apprenticeships, each will be offered to join the Post-Apprentice Programme designed to give further training and long term employment opportunities.

Back to work

Further training is available through the joint 'back to work' scheme whereby local people are given the chance to gain operational and management experience within Dartford Borough Council and Breyer Group.

Dartford Tenancy Pilot

In October 2011 a 'home skills' workshop was trialled for local tenants and leaseholders. The aim is to deliver practical training and 'skill up' local residents in DIY, safety in the home, cooking on a budget, gardening and other practical skills to enable more people to help themselves. Each session held a demonstration followed by interactive mock-ups for residents to hone their new skills. The pilot has been well attended and it is envisaged to be rolled out further.

Repairs Surgery

A new service is being trialled whereby experienced

handymen will go to highly populated estates to carry out minor repair such as fixing locks, door handles etc. on a regular basis. Residents will be notified of the next visit and given the opportunity to place their request in advance. It is envisaged this will provide a more personal service and further create an environment of certainty with handymen who know and understand the needs of residents through on-site experience.

Respite 'Home from home' facility

What happens to residents when work is being carried in their home? A respite 'Home from Home' facility including a kitchen, shower and recreation area is provided for at the local office whilst remedial work takes place.

Partnership events

Regular 'Meet the Contractor' events are held - often with over 70 residents attending - to provide feedback to both Council and Breyer staff and share ideas and learning. The Partnering Group Board comprising residents, Council and contractor staff meet quarterly to review objectives, budgets and progress to the action plan.

Fixed prices

Fixed prices have been recently introduced into the Action Plan to Void refurbishments. It is anticipated that this approach will provide cost certainty, reduce

client administration, remove duplication of tasks and enhance turnaround times.

Waste Management

Waste from both reactive and planned works is recycled through a partnership established with Powerday and NCWRP (National community wood recycling project). Waste management figures are reported on site-by-site allowing accurate figures for analysis with clear goals in place to maximise recycling opportunities and minimise land fill. Recycling is around 96%.

“Local people are given the chance to gain operational & management experience”

3. What were the financial costs and cashable benefits?

The overriding imperative for this partnership is resident satisfaction. A balanced set of performance measures have therefore been created in order to measure the service over time through a series of KPIs. These KPIs are compiled and reported on monthly and form part of the process of on-going development of the service. The KPIs are also linked to low level operative performance zones to allow the sharing of information on productivity. Between the months of April to September a 15% saving has been achieved through the following:

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction in Sept 2011, the latest month available, is 96.5%, well above the target of 95%.

Quality of defects – recalls

The number of recalls improved from July to September.

Quality of defects – inspections

The number of inspections carried out against defects never fell below 95.27% between April-Sept 2011.

Average cost of repairs per property

The average cost of repair per dwelling has fallen from a high of £26.08 per month to £24.66 per month in September.

Time voids

The number of voids in time has remained over 96% for the last 4 successive months.

Time – Emergency call out

In every month almost all emergency call-outs have been completed in time with the figure never lower than 99.62% per month.

Time – Urgent repairs

Urgent repairs have been completed in an average of 97.1% of cases between April-September 2011.

Time – Routine repairs

Over the last 6 months the number of routine repairs completed in time has remained above 90% every month.

Appointments kept – responsive repairs

The number of appointments kept has improved from 92.23% in April to 95.53% in September 2011.

First time fix

The number of first time fixes averaged 95.3% between April-Sept 2011, well above the target of 80%.

Average order values

The average change in cost has fallen from a high of £107.78 in June 11 to £107.15 in September 2011.

Emergency repairs

The number of dwellings requiring emergency repairs has fallen consistently in the last 6 months from 14.8% in April to 11.8% in September 2011.

30:70 Response/planned ration

The average ratio of response to planned works over the last 6 months has bettered the target at 27:73.

% Local employees

The average number of local employees exceeds 70%, way over the goal of 60%.

Properties with 15 or more repairs in last 12 months
The number of properties requiring 15 or more repairs has fallen dramatically from 30 to 15 between April – Sept 2011.

The service is independently audited by the clients cost consultants 4i Solutions who provide independent health checks and ideas to improve the service. These health checks are performed by way of detailed interviews and briefings with key stakeholders from all parties – including residents; desktop research of contract documentation; analysis of inspections and disputes; analysis of action logs and call centre data as well as group workshops and structured interviews with individuals.

The audit examines areas for improvement as well as suggestions for strategic improvement. Following the last report October 2011 it is likely that a Partnership Steering Group will be set up to drive improvement in service together with a set of mutually agreed long term strategic objectives.

4. How relevant is this as an example that might be followed by other organisations?

Many social landlords and contractor organisations can learn from the approach adopted by Dartford Borough Council and Breyer. The circumstances around this partnership are far from unique and relevant to many situations faced by local authorities and housing associations. This is really about committing to the service from both sides and the ethos is filtered down through everyone who works upon the contract for it to work successfully.

It is important that the partnership actively reaches out to the local community and ensures that all activities are carried out locally. That local people are encouraged to become participants in the process and demonstrate that their voices are listened to and acted upon. It is therefore important to establish a flexible framework delivery structure that can act quickly to changing developments in line with needs.

The expertise needed to make such a scheme a success stems from the inclusion of residents at all stages and that their needs remain at the heart of all decisions taken. It also emanates from a shared risk/reward ethos that ensures that the partnership is not afraid to try new ideas, to learn from experiences and not be afraid of failure. This spirit of co-operation, flexibility and commitment is essential if other service

providers wish to emulate this success.

Finally, it is important to have two key relationship managers from both client and contractor that work closely together and embrace the values of shared working and act as conduits for the dissemination of ideas, innovation and best practice found through performance management.

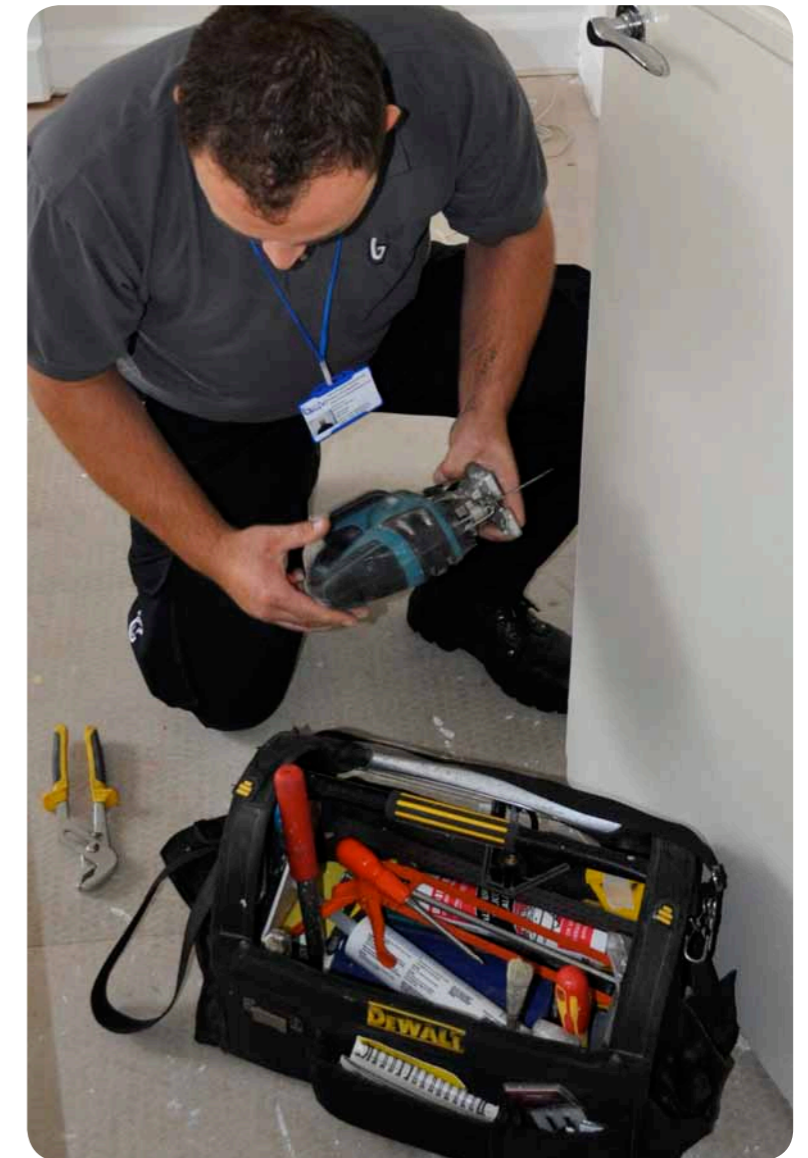
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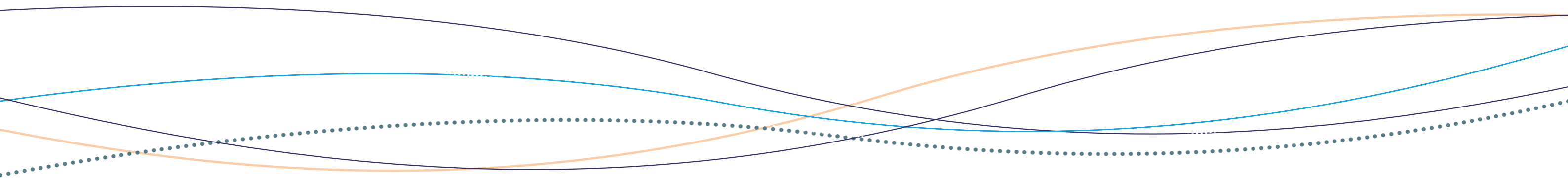
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Both Neil and Paul warmly welcome approaches from any organisation wishing to learn more about the Dartford experience.





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