



National Housing
Maintenance Forum



Housing Software Services
89 Gleneagle Rd
London SW16 6AZ

Telephone: 020 8677 2253
Fax: 020 8677 2101
Email: info@hssl.co.uk
Website: www.hssl.co.uk
www.pamwin.co.uk



Rand Associates
Bell House, 107 Bell St, Reigate
Surrey RH2 7JB

Telephone: 01737 249 475
Fax: 01737 242 012
Email: rand@rand-associates.co.uk



Technology Corner - Mobile Networking

Builders and surveyors are one group for whom mobile phones very quickly became an essential tool. The ability to get in touch easily and quickly made a huge difference to their working lives. The natural development of this is the ability to access and update data while on site.

There are several systems that let you take data out on a handheld computer and send new data back to the office. We offer one such system - Pocket Locator - which not only provides access to the NHF Schedule of Rates but also lets you send completed job orders back to base by email.

These systems can work well but they are limited by the miserable data connection options currently available from the mobile phone operators. With broadband access via landlines now becoming commonplace, the high cost and the low speed and reliability of mobile data connections make for a frustrating contrast. Although we may see further speed improvements, the cost is likely to remain high.

So it is not surprising that a free and fast alternative has sparked so much recent interest. Wireless networking (known as 'Wifi') is a simple way of plugging into a network without cables. The cost of the hardware has fallen dramatically so many companies are adding wireless links to their networks and home users

are setting up networks just so that they can sit in the garden while downloading music files. Public access points are also springing up so that you no longer need to be sitting at your desk to drink coffee and surf the net at the same time. It is surprisingly easy to set up link networks together to provide broadband access to communities that cannot get broadband at their local telephone exchange.

Wireless networks could be an interesting option for social landlords that are managing estates. A local access point can provide cheap or free Internet access for their tenants and also for staff to have the same access to their IT systems when they are out and about as they do when they are in the office. Repair reports could be entered into the system while a housing officer is still in the tenant's living room and contractors could be receiving an order for void works before the surveyor has even left the building. The investment required to set up such a system is relatively low since it does not require lots of extra kit or require users to learn how to use new devices and applications.

Home grown wireless networks are not going to replace the huge infrastructure developed by the mobile phone companies to provide ubiquitous coverage. But they do provide a valuable extra communication method that may be useful for many social landlords.

Seminar in Winchester

"A very enjoyable and informative day. Well done to all concerned!"



The NHMF sponsored a joint HAMMAR SE and SW Workshop and Roadshow in January looking at maintenance issues.

The most popular Workshops on Decent Homes Standard and the Richmond Housing Partnership/Mears Group experience of their first six months of partnering repairs were of especial interest to delegates.

Issue 5 2003

Bulletin



National Housing
Maintenance Forum

Decent Homes



Decent homes must meet the following 4 criteria:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>A It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (Fitness Standard)</p> | <p>C It has reasonably modern facilities and services (kitchens, bathrooms, external noise, communal areas)</p> |
| <p>B It is in a reasonable state of repair (building components not old & in need of replacement or major repair)</p> | <p>D It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (effective insulation and efficient heating)</p> |

When the Standard first emerged many organisations had a preconceived idea as to what would constitute a decent home. The very thought that any of their residents might be living in a "non decent" property sounded very improbable and completely unacceptable.

The published guidance explains how best to assess, implement and achieve the objectives of the Standard, but leaves the fine detail of interpretation to the individual landlord. This poses difficult questions for landlords: exactly what data should be held against each property to assess the current position and future potential position?

Key areas of ambiguity to address are:

- How to correctly understand the fitness standard in criterion A.
- Establishing the age of components for criterion B and subsequent life cycles.
- Defining poor kitchen layout and the inadequacy of common areas under criterion C
- How to tackle partial and communally heated properties under criterion D

In order to implement the Standard quickly,

some organisations are using old stock condition data collected prior to the Standard, or from historic maintenance records. A flexible stock condition database should enable you to do a retrospective analysis against Decent Homes criteria. But the surveyors will not have been briefed on the Standard required, so be aware of the risks in declaring a position based on unreliable data, and consider the effect on future monitoring. It would be wise to check the results with a structured sample specifically assessed by a surveyor against the Decent Homes Standard.

Where possible, Decent Homes data should be collected in the field by trained surveyors, based on at least a 10% sample survey to establish a statistically accurate picture. Further inspections would be required of properties at risk of failing the Standard before implementation of any action plan to achieve the relevant targets. A software package capable of accurately interrogating your stock data is essential: see Forecaster on page 3.

The Standard is intended to help prioritise, not to dictate expenditure. It should not

replace planned maintenance work to stock. Works to bring properties up to the Standard should be done as part of a programme, mitigating pepper-potting and the potential loss of economies of scale.

Greg Wheeler, Rand Associates

CONTENTS

Implementing Decent Homes Standard	
Richmond HP Partnering	2
Forecaster Upgrade	3
CDS Partnering Maintenance	4
Repairs by Appointment at Yorkshire Met	6
Housecall - Repairs Online	7
Version 5	
NHF Schedule of Rates	7
Development of Maintenance	7
Technology Corner: Mobile Networking	8
Seminar in Winchester	8

Won't You Join the Dance?

A View from the Front on Partnering



Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) is a large London RSL with 8,500 mixed tenure homes in Richmond and Hounslow. We will spend about £40m on general repairs and voids maintenance over the next ten years.

As a new social landlord, RHP has spent a lot of time and energy developing the culture of the organisation to support excellent services for our customers. This approach is founded on building strong and sustainable partnerships and is reflected in our name and the way in which we work with our tenants, leaseholders and staff.

One Day Conference & Workshop: 23rd July 2003

RHP and Mears are jointly sponsoring a one day partnering event in central London. The aim of the day is to give some straight forward and practical information about how to prepare your organisation for partnering, develop good documentation, the legal context, tender assessment, value for money/benchmarking. We will also have a live 'Partnering Workshop' to give participants a real experience of partnering.

If you would like to find out more, please contact Linda Wallace on 0208 404 5080

In 2001, our maintenance services and programme were experiencing familiar pressures – poor quality of service and workmanship, difficulty in recruiting good managers for our direct labour force and a generally low level of customer satisfaction.

High levels of customer satisfaction are at the top of our list of priorities and we believed that an incremental approach simply could not give us the step change we needed in our repairs service. We decided to look for a partner to provide us with a holistic service for our routine repairs, voids, cyclical maintenance and our internal upgrade works.

Our decision to seek a single partner for such a long contract period (10 years initially) was driven by our belief that excellence in maintenance is a "long game" with improvements driven by building strong relationships, experience of the stock, standardisation of product and components and by recruiting and retaining the best staff in the business. We recognised that our improvement programme was an excellent "carrot" – but our focus has remained clearly on delivering an excellent and cost effective day to day repairs service as the thing which will really differentiate us as a landlord in the long term.

Our contractor selection approach was based on a 70/30 quality to price split with price assessed on profit and overheads, rather than on core costs.

In January 2002, after a 6 month selection process, we selected Mears Building Company (part of Mears plc) as our preferred partner for the 10 year programme.

With a "live" date of 1st April, frantic activity followed, with new offices being established and equipped, vans

commissioned, staff transferred, recruited and trained and existing staff briefed for new systems and ways of working.

Since then, we have carried out about £5m worth of work, with around 30,000 points of contact (a repair, cyclical painting, improvement works) between Mears and our customers. The results have exceeded our expectations – with high levels of customer satisfaction (90%+) and excellent achievement of completion of works on time (95%+) across the board. Obviously, it is still early days – but we, and our customers, have seen a 10% improvement across the board in the last 12 months.

There are a few things we have learned and understood in the last year that might be helpful to others thinking of venturing down this path.

Tender Documents

Go for a plain English approach to the documents, describe the style, quality and delivery of the services you want as clearly as possible and test your contractors' understanding of what you want as they build up their tenders. It is amazing how easily the written word is misunderstood!

Pricing

Once you have decided what price you are measuring, assessment is relatively easy and you can – as we did – farm this out to an independent consultant and focus the attention of your panel on quality.

Quality

Assessing quality is not easy!! You may not know what quality means to you until you see it and you need to leave room for the contractors to surprise you with their imagination. After all, you are trying to tap into their expertise in this process. The best advice we can offer is to be

ready and willing to change your mind about how you measure quality as you go along. Obviously, you need to ensure that you do this in a proper and accountable way (we got our external auditors to validate process).

Cost Management

This year we have spent endless hours in the happy discussion of overheads (not a subject that had ever fascinated before!) and are, we believe, just beginning to understand how to share the management of central costs and to maximise the benefits of the overheads we both carry. Again, this is a task really worth persevering with if you want to manage long term costs efficiently.

Relationship Management

This is tougher and takes longer than you can possibly imagine. Our two organisations have invested a huge amount of senior time in managing the relationship – day in and day out – over this first year. Things will inevitably go wrong – and you need to prepare both staff and customers for this. But you also need to manage the response to problems very actively to avoid cynicism creeping back into the service.

Value for Money

You need lots of ways to assess value for money and you need to review them all the time. Benchmarks need to be specific and relevant if they are to improve your service. We haven't solved this one – but feel that small benchmarking clubs may be the most helpful, combined with robust market information on product and labour pricing.

Contract

The contract should reflect the way you want to work together – so don't write it until you know. RHP and Mears took a deliberate decision to delay contract drafting until we had run the service for a significant period, operating instead under a letter of intent. This has significantly altered the contract form, better reflecting actual management



Analyse Stock Condition Data and Plan Future Maintenance

FORECASTER Upgrade

Forecaster is our stock condition software for forecasting and planning repairs in the short, medium and long term. A major upgrade to Forecaster was issued at the beginning of the year, with faster and more powerful reporting facilities. There is now a Microsoft SQL Server version for larger users where an Access database would be inappropriate.

The Decent Homes report will allow you to carry out a retrospective analysis of existing stock data against Decency criteria by selecting the range of survey components relevant to each criterion.

We can supply a library of component codes defining all the questions required to establish whether a property meets the Decent Homes Standard now and in the future. We can also supply a complete library of survey questions for a comprehensive stock survey.

Long term forecasts use life cycle costing to project the long term demand for major repairs and renewals across the stock for budgeting purposes. Short Term forecasts can be analysed in a variety of ways to appraise alternative stock re-investment options, such as elemental or whole unit refurbishment.

Decent Homes Summary							
	Current Failures			Potential Failures			
	Count	%	Cost	Count	%	Cost	
A: Fitness	748	22.1%	£1,432,400				
B: Reasonable Repair		0.0%					
	Non Key	0	0.0%	£0	173	5.1%	£0
	Key	66	2.0%	£144,800	1,263	37.4%	£2,130,300
C: Modern Facilities	0	0.0%	£0	0	0.0%	£0	
D: Thermal Comfort	641	19.0%	£1,589,750				
Total failed properties	1,130	33.5%	£3,166,950	888	26.3%	£2,130,300	
Total Properties	3377						

Email info@hssl.co.uk for a demonstration disk, or download it from www.forecaster.co.uk

responsibility, risk and reward.

My Staff Are Behind Me...

We need to bring other staff on board with the concept and ethos of partnering. We are now planning an extensive period of training and coaching and induction for Mears and RHP staff to redress this. Your teams will not instinctively understand what partnering means and the danger is that, when faced with difficulty, people revert

to what they have always done.

Overall, we would say our decision to partner has been a huge success. We have learned a great deal over this year – on both sides – and are just beginning to see what potential there is in a strong a long term relationship between Mears and RHP. Be brave!!

Linda Wallace,
Richmond Housing Partnership



CDS Housing is in Partnership

CDS Housing has procured maintenance services in a number of different ways over the last few years, based on the works to be undertaken. Although this has worked, it hasn't worked as efficiently as we would have liked.

CDS Property Services Team undertook a review of the services being provided in the following areas:

- Responsive repairs
- Repairs to voids
- External repairs and painting
- Reinvestment
- Gas servicing and heating repairs

The conclusion of that review was that:

- Too many contractors were being used, making it difficult to effectively manage performance, productivity, customer service, etc
- Procurement methods were slow, cumbersome, and costly for all parties
- CDS customers were unhappy with various aspects of the services
- Housing Management teams were also unhappy with the service
- Systems were slow, paper driven, and an administrative burden to CDS and contractors
- Many processes were inefficient, and were repeated two or three times
- Communications between CDS staff and Contractors often broke down
- The CDS and Contractor teams had no real relationship, trust, or understanding of each others roles,

responsibilities or problems

It was obvious that these issues needed to be tackled by both CDS and Contractor teams if we were to improve our repairs and maintenance services. To make this happen CDS decided on partnering using a fully integrated team approach in order to establish a 'Virtual Company' and strategic alliance of like minded organisations.

The first stage for us was to put together the project team to implement the changes. This consisted of a range of staff internally, external consultants and customers

Project Team – Pre Contractor Selection

Key objectives on contractors selection:

- The project would be sub-divided into the 3 distinct areas of work:

- 1 Response and void works

- 2 Gas servicing and heating repairs
 - 3 Property investment
- Commitment to local companies, local employment and the local economy, with retention of best performing contractors
 - Partners must have a commitment to working as a Team
 - Partner contractors must see the CDS contract as a significant and important part of their current business, and their future plans
 - Commitment to partnering must be clearly demonstrated at the highest level within each organisation
 - The service would be delivered by a 'group' of partner contractors working as a single team
 - Existing contractors be kept informed of the process at each of the key stages
 - Decision on selection would be based 80% on quality and 20% on cost

Stage 1

22 contractors were invited to take part in the first stage of the process. This involved a site visit to the offices of each contractor, followed by the submission of a simple form to assess their financial capacity, company structure, and basic knowledge and experience of partnering.

Stage 2

The 9 shortlisted contractors were each supplied with a document outlining:

- Project aims and objectives
- Scope of the works
- Current financial information
- Current performance
- Outline of the method statement submissions required
- Basic health and safety information
- Details of possible contract document and clauses

Along with this the contractors were required to provide details of profit and possible overhead costs. No other cost information was requested at this stage.

Working together
to deliver
excellence in
service and value
in an open,
honest and no
blame culture

Stage 3

Final face to face meetings with each of the short listed contractor teams proved to be the most crucial element of the selection process. CDS, consultants, customers and contractors teams had the opportunity to 'test' the written submissions on the content, plus their understanding and commitment to partnering and team working. It was an opportunity for the teams to get a feel for the group dynamics, and confidence in working together.

Selection

The pre-selection process had taken 5 months from April 2002 to September 2002. The contracts were awarded as follows:

The new project team was formed at this point with representatives from each of the new partners. The role of this new team was to develop the original brief ready for implementation in April 2003.

- 1 Design and agree joint aims, objectives and mission statement
- 2 Review existing processes, systems and procedures with a view to reducing administration, improving efficiency, reducing costs and improving customer service
- 3 Design and agree standard KPI's for each of the areas of work, plus the project as a whole
- 4 Design a new Pricing Mechanism and Payment Structure to meet the requirements of this new way of working
- 5 Review the IT infrastructure and plan the implementation of a programme of integration with:

- Direct system to system links to generate orders
 - Web access to CDS Housing system to enable contractors to view and report on orders with job completions and variations to be done electronically
 - System to system electronic invoicing
- The principal was that each operation should be undertaken only once – either by CDS or the Contractor

- 6 Review of working practices within CDS and each of the Contractors to remove duplication of tasks, and identify who was best placed to do what
- 7 Development of a single multi-party Partnering Charter – containing the management structure, dispute

resolution process, etc

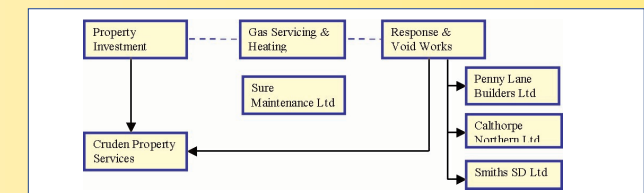
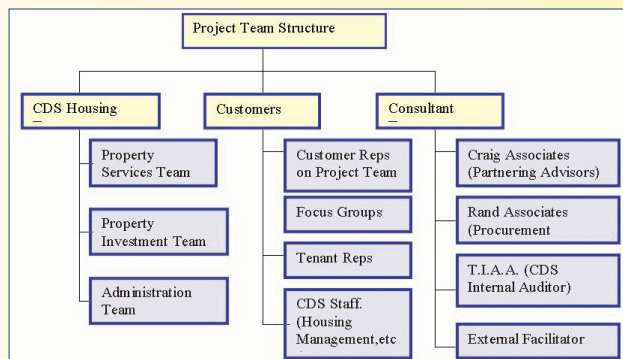
- 8 Agreement of a single bespoke form of contract to be used for the project. This was to be one form of contract that each of the partners would sign with CDS Housing, and which needed to reflect the spirit of the partnership, and not the traditional 'Master/Servant' contractual relationship

The Partnering Team has been built from day one on the principle that all members of the team are equal, and that the team as a whole will make the decisions on all aspects of service delivery. Each partner has brought with them a wealth of knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm. They have proved themselves to be honest, open, both trusting and trustworthy, and completely committed to the process and the partnership.

As a client, CDS Housing has had to take a lot of steps forward in faith during this process, and has relinquished many of the traditional 'comfort blankets' that provide protection for us during procurement, but which are in reality often divisive and incompatible with working in an equal and open partnership. This has been difficult but essential.

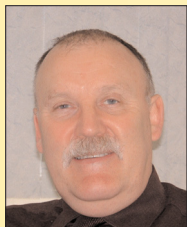
The new partnership is unique in that it is a single partnership covering all aspects of maintenance and property investment through a number of committed partners. This arrangement also seeks to offer opportunity to engage existing locally employed contractors, who were unsuccessful in acquiring Principal Partner status.

Paul Fadden, CDS Housing



Repairs By Appointment

In 2002 Yorkshire Metropolitan HA set Repairs by appointment as a Key Issue in the reform of the repairs service.



Working within a geographical area in excess of 2,000 square miles and covering some fourteen local authorities, our 5,500 homes are spread thinly across rural areas with concentration of properties in cities such as Leeds, Sheffield, Barnsley, Huddersfield and Bradford.

At the outset, the task appeared to be more aspirational than achievable because of the dispersed nature of our stock.

A team of three YMHA staff worked on the project – Phil Pattison, System Development Officer – Karen Arnold, Help Desk Manager – Graham Teed, Maintenance Manager.

The brief was simple: "When a customer calls our Repairs Service to request a repair for work inside their home, we will offer to make an appointment at the same time. This will be on a day and at a time that is convenient to them."

We looked at other appointment systems in and beyond the industry, but none appeared to match our requirements. So we set our own course, using our data and the skills within the team.

Taking November 2001 as the busiest month of the previous year, we analysed

what resources would be needed in a given area to match the volume of work.

This exercise identified the busiest areas and the trades required for those areas. This enabled the number of time slots that would be made available to our customers to be calculated for one day.

We calculated how much time is required for a given job by changing our repairs diagnostic software to Locator Plus and having the software interrogate the NHF Schedule of Rates repair code for the job time and making a simple calculation to determine the number of time slots required. We chose to work on 15 minute time slots.

We had a variable time inflation factor to take account of travelling time.

Based on the data gathered in November 2001 and in consultation with our contractors, diaries were set up for:

GENERAL REPAIRS	10 areas	6 trades	60 diaries
ELECTRICAL	4 areas	1 trade	4 diaries
GAS	2 areas	1 trade	2 diaries

Customers get a choice of am/pm on two days per week for each trade in each area.

Links were made from Locator Plus into our Orchard IT system to enable pasting of slot times into the Appointments Module and the system was tested with our General Repairs contractor over a two month period in Summer 2002.

With no major problem, the Appointment System was drawn into our new NHF Schedule of Rates Contracts which

commenced on 1st October 2002.

Our experience to date shows we have not taken up all the appointment slots available for the major General Repairs Contract and only minor adjustments have been made to the diaries set up for Electrical and Gas.

How Does it Work in Practice?

Q What repair priorities are covered?

A All repair priorities except Emergency Repairs.

Q What happens to a repair request?

A It is assessed by our trained Repairs Advisors and the appropriate Schedule of Rates Repairs Code selected. The number of slot times are transferred into our Repairs Ordering system and checked against available appointment slots for that trade.

The customer selects a suitable day and time and the repair is ordered.

The work requested and appointment made is confirmed in writing the same day, and the customer is provided with a survey questionnaire to comment on all aspects of the repair ordered.

Q What aims has Yorkshire Metropolitan met?

A customer focussed repairs service
Improved customer satisfaction
Meeting customer expectations
Offering customers a choice
Introducing flexibility, certainty and reliability into the responsive repairs service

Graham Teed,
Yorkshire Metropolitan HA

Housecall – Could It Be Any Easier?

We are seeing a lot more interest in Housecall, our Internet repair reporting system for customers of social landlords. Not surprising when the government is putting pressure on local authorities to provide all their services online by 2005. We are also seeing a steady increase in its use by tenants and their family members.

Putting services online can be a challenging and expensive operation but implementing Housecall is as simple as it gets. There's nothing to install or maintain, yet social landlords get a comprehensive service that is fully



Roofs/Drains



Kitchen

integrated with their website for a low subscription cost.

The customers benefit from a system that guides them through the process of making a repair report with advice and tips always available. They make more accurate reports, which saves time for everyone and helps to make the repair service more efficient. If a social landlord uses the NHF Schedule of Rates, they get the extra benefit of a suggested item. But many of our Housecall customers are not using this SOR and they still appreciate receiving structured reports with clear definitions of common problems.

You can check out the whole system from the Housecall website – make a test repair report yourself and see how some of our customers have implemented the system for themselves. www.housecall.co.uk

Development of Maintenance



Over the past fifteen years the maintenance service provided by Associations has seen vast changes, exemplified by the NHF now referring to it as Asset Management. Old practices of phoning a contractor and telling them to carry out the necessary repairs have long gone. All landlords have to monitor costs, contractor performance, tenant satisfaction, and meet many new legal requirements.

To accommodate this change, the people who provide and administer this service have also had to change, to the extent that a new profession has emerged, that of Maintenance, Property Services, Asset Management – there are many titles, but

the basic function is the same.

The people who provide this service have a predominantly technical background, usually in construction or surveying. However, they must also be fully aware of other requirements such as service delivery, tenant satisfaction, tenancy agreements and statutory regulations. These requirements may give the impression that Maintenance is being obstructive; this is certainly not the case.

Maintenance is part of the very heavily regulated construction industry. Best practice, legal frameworks and Health and Safety regulations are constantly changing and non compliance can bring imprisonment, a heavy fine or both. Maintenance departments have a duty to

Overhaul of the NHF Schedule of Rates

Changes

All job definitions have been reviewed and updated where appropriate. Rates have been reviewed and priced at December 2002 labour and materials prices.

Contract Conditions have been simplified and adapted to allow Partnering Contracts.

Items are now organised into 19 elements rather than the previous trade headings. This format helps users tailor the Schedule. Items have been inserted, but overall the Schedule is smaller.

Format

NHF Schedule of Rates on disk comes in three formats: Word, Excel and XML. The long descriptions in Word are now presented in tables and are indexed. Medium descriptions in Excel should look very familiar to existing users. XML format for the "data file" has been used to make sure that tailoring of the Schedule and integration with repairs ordering software will be as easy as possible.

Updates to Locator software are now available that allow you to switch between versions of the Schedule. You can download the appropriate update from Locator itself – click on the Locator Five or Locator Plus logo on the Home page and go to Online Support.

VERSION 5

their tenants and also to their contractors.

Other departments may have knowledge of some maintenance issues but they are not fully aware of all the regulation which must be taken into account. Housing Management personnel may only receive token instruction on maintenance issues, possibly a day or so in the course of a three-year period.

Certain departments undervalue Maintenance; we are a front line service, and the people who operate and deliver this service fully understand their responsibilities, which should be reflected in their status.

Mike Cleavelly, Orwell Housing