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Maintenance Forum



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Some members of NHMF



## Technology Corner Making Connections

Bob Williams of Redsmoke Ltd looks  
into the future:

A couple of years ago we were expecting services to tenants via the Internet to take off in a big way. Everyone would soon have the Internet available through their TV so, without the need for a PC, the main barrier to online access would have been overcome.

It has not quite turned out like that. Although Internet access continues to spread, few people are surfing from their sofas. Consumers are unenthusiastic and the business plans of the digital TV companies now look wildly over optimistic. And, if you have ever tried to get online from a TV, you will know that there are a few technical problems to iron out as well. One day all TVs will be digital and will include high speed Internet access as a standard feature. But it is going to take more than a couple of years for that to happen.

The pioneers are learning some useful lessons though. There are no immediate and substantial cost savings to be made by putting services online. The Internet will only supplement other means of delivery which, for the time being, will still be required on the same scale. This might convince you not to get involved at all but there are some other benefits from these early experiments that are being exploited by other businesses. Most important is the increased pressure to make connections between different computer systems. At the moment, a repairs request may get passed between several different databases with humans inputting details each time. When the initial information we receive is in digital form, it should stay in digital form.

Fortunately, the Internet gives us the means of making those connections and the language of the Internet now allows a lot more information to be processed automatically. This is a common language that is not owned by any single company and there are no license fees to be paid for its use.

Repair requests coming from any source – surveyors on site, staff in area offices, call centre operators or customers themselves – should arrive in a format that can be read by your job ordering system. Similarly job orders could be tracked through the system and their

progress reported back to any device with an internet connection.

The NHMF is currently looking at establishing and promoting a "vocabulary": a standard method of describing data that would allow all types of systems to interact with each other. This would not be linked to any specific product or supplier and would be freely available for all to use and adapt.

### Web Services

Associated with the idea of making connections easier over the Internet is that of 'web services' or 'web applications' (and, sadly, you will also see the term 'webication').

An early example of a web service for RSLs is our own Housecall system ([www.housecall.co.uk](http://www.housecall.co.uk)). This is a repairs reporting system for tenants that appears as part of your own website but actually runs from our web server. The charm of this is that you do not need to install or maintain any software but you still get all the benefits of a system customised to your requirements. With no purchase or maintenance costs to worry about, Housecall is cost effective even for low volume use.

Locator Plus is ready for this type of use. It runs entirely within a web browser and so can be used like a conventional desktop application or it can be run remotely. It can also produce information in a form that can be picked up by a local database system or transmitted over the web to a remote system with equal ease.

These are just tasters. The potential for using the internet to join up different systems and run applications has still hardly been tapped. Real progress also needs widespread use of high speed Internet connections that come at a reasonable price.

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# Bulletin

Issue 4 June 2002



National Housing  
Maintenance Forum

## Partnering Repairs

### SBDC Launch Lump Sum Repair Contract



"I am fully committed to this new way of working and think that this is the most important first step to fully integrated working relationship with our contractors."  
*Simon Timmins, author and manager of this contract*

In August 2001 South Beds District Council took the Standard NHF Measured Term Contract and adapted it to include a lump sum element: the tenderers submit a rate per unit (dwelling, garage, communal area) per annum to cover anticipated repairs and renewals for individual jobs not exceeding a certain value (£350), to be paid in a 4 week cycle. Any jobs exceeding £350 are paid in full under the measured term contract, applying an agreed percentage adjustment to the Schedule of Rates. Void repairs and aids and adaptations are also paid under the measured term contract. Gas and electric are excluded from this contract.

This type of contract reduces the amount of pre-inspection of works by the maintenance officer, leaving more resources for post inspection. It is therefore imperative that an acceptable maintenance standard is agreed within the contract documents.

The Bonus Payment Scheme, pioneered by South Beds District Council, is based on tenant satisfaction. It depends on the number of complimentary letters received from customers within a four week period and is offset by the number of letters of complaint. For example if 10 letters are received and 9 of these are complimentary, for that period the percentage satisfaction is 90% and a payment based on this is issued.

An Inconvenience Payment was introduced to try and ensure that appointments are kept so as not to 'inconvenience' the customer. A contractor will be charged £10 for every unjustified missed appointment and this payment goes straight to the customer. The

contractor contacts the customer to apologise, and arranges another visit on a "morning" or "afternoon" basis. Late attendance at an emergency repair is treated as a missed appointment.

Under this contract the contractor is not limited to completing the repairs when visiting a property. Any other obvious problem can be done immediately without having to complete lots of paperwork and make a new appointment, saving time and money for both the contractor and the council.

As a council that likes to encourage friendly, non-adversarial relationships we designed and included a Partnership Agreement. The fundamentals of this are a pre-agreed set of principles laid out in a Partnering Charter with the following mutually agreed goals:

1. To deliver each job to the agreed budget, timetable and standards of quality.
2. To understand each party's role and to maintain good relationships.
3. To be committed to a process of continuous improvement.
4. Provide all necessary skills to deliver the project.
5. Build a balanced workforce and ensure good practice in terms of equal opportunities.
6. Define, manage and present the jobs with a responsible attitude towards the environment, the local neighbourhood and the health and safety of all.
7. To use local suppliers, materials and firms where possible.
8. To reduce waste and time.
9. To control costs and time.
10. To avoid disputes and conflicts.
11. Monitor performance and provide feedback to all parties during the contract period.
12. Inform everyone involved in the project of these commitments

This new partnership forms part of a wider

range of improvements in the repairs service at South Beds DC, arising out of their Best Value review. Including a freephone number to help tenants report repairs, a Mobile Estates Assistant that can do small repairs quickly and cheaply, leaflets explaining the repair service to tenants, and a road show giving tenants a chance to air their views face-to-face with officers and to see how the Council works as a bigger picture. A new website gives tenants direct access to housing.

A void welcome pack welcomes and informs new tenants, and a void satisfaction form helps ensure high standards. Maintenance inspectors use handhelds to cut down paper work and get repairs into the system speedily, with an increase in post inspections



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# Major Review for NHF Schedule of Rates



The NHF Schedule of Rates is a fully priced composite schedule defining the repair and renewal tasks for day-to-day and void repairs complete with contract documentation for letting a measured term contract. In the eight years since it was first created, it has become established as the standard schedule for repairs to residential dwellings across all housing sectors, with 250 users.

This year we are undertaking a thorough review of all the job specifications to ensure they conform to best practice, building regulations and current and proposed environmental policies, re-assessing standard minute values where necessary, and re-evaluating the schedule. We expect to publish Version 5 towards the end of 2002.

All users will receive upgrades to the documentation via the internet. They will receive an email with a link that allows them to download the latest version automatically. It will still be available on floppy disk or CD for those that prefer it that way.

There is also a new format for transferring the data into your computer system. In addition to the Excel tables, you will receive the schedule in an XML file. This format is rapidly becoming an industry standard for transferring information between systems, and allows us to issue a standard upgrade that will not interfere with tailored additions to your schedule.

## Innovative Uses

One of the main growth areas in use of the NHF Schedule of Rates is for partnering repairs. Because it is so widely used, it can provide a realistic check on value for money, and the basis for defining work that has been carried out under a partnering contract. (See page 6)

NHF Schedule of Rates is increasingly used to provide a comprehensive set of job definitions that establish quality standards for repair works, and avoid ambiguity in ordering repairs. This is invaluable to call centres using repair diagnostic systems to deal with repair calls for a number of different client organisations. And it is also very useful where tenants report their repairs via the internet using graphical diagnostic systems like Housecall.

Similarly the NHF Schedule is widely used in benchmarking to compare the cost of a basket of jobs, so as to separate out the key elements in the cost of repairs: contract costs, direct management costs, and overheads. Separate

baskets can be specified to represent the work done on response repairs, voids, cyclical maintenance, and planned maintenance. This also allows a tighter distinction between repairs and improvements, which can otherwise distort comparisons in the cost of providing repairs services by different organisations.

## Better Prices

Tender returns for London have shown a steady fall in prices in relation to the rest of the country over the last four years. It used to be one of the most expensive areas, but is now one of the cheaper, judged on tender prices alone. Almost 80% of RSL stock in London is managed using the Schedule. The larger contractors are servicing a number of clients from depots in different areas of London, using a common schedule, which makes them more competitive. A similar effect has been seen in Wales, where take up of the NHF Schedule is also very high.

## A Brief History

It all began at a West Region HAMMAR meeting in 1993, when Nick Wood of Sovereign Housing Association asked if anyone else was willing to get involved in putting together a schedule of rates. Eight RSLs ended up sharing the costs, and formed working parties, meeting every other week to list the contents of each trade section, and develop the contract conditions and trade preambles.

Rand Associates won the tender to write the schedule against some stiff competition. The National Housing Federation (or NFHA as it was then called) agreed to market it as the NHF Schedule of Rates. The working parties reformed as the NHF Schedule of Rates Steering Committee, and expanded to represent new members from each region of the country. It was officially launched at the NHF Maintenance Conference in July 1994.

The timing was perfect. Much of the initial impetus came from RSLs formed out of transfers from local authority housing, where

they had been using schedules of rates since the early eighties. Most of these were written in-house to suit working with their direct labour organisations under competitive tendering. Some of the larger RSLs were already using measured term contracts. But many more were beginning to recognise the potential benefits over day works. Much of the initial promotion was aimed at explaining the potential improvements in both cost and quality that could be achieved by letting repairs and maintenance contracts on a measure term basis.



Contractors often preferred the NHF Schedule to the bespoke schedules they were used to. They regarded it as a more even-handed

document, with fewer rates on which they were at risk of losing money on a swings and roundabouts basis. Not that contractors were uncritical: some regard the contract conditions as onerous and weighted in favour of the client. But we quite often find contractors encouraging other clients to use the schedule, because of the administrative savings they can make, and the ease with which they can price against it based on their existing experience.

Take up of the NHF Schedule has been slower in local authorities than in RSLs - there are a few dozen compared with more than 200 RSLs. Some authorities are reluctant to move away from their own bespoke schedules, which in many cases are woefully out of date, but are integrated into everything they do. They tend to invite tenders for re-developing their own schedules to their own specifications, instead of looking at what is available off-the-shelf, even though it would be much more cost-effective to buy a standard package. The NHF Schedule has been adapted to meet the specific requirements of a number of local authorities: Rand Associates can provide additional jobs to cover

## Thermal Insulation Regulations

FENSA stands for the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme. It has been set up by the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF), with Government approval, in response to the new Building Regulations for England and Wales.

From 1 April 2002, all replacement glazing in dwellings will come within the scope of the Building Regulations. Now anyone who installs replacement windows or doors will have to comply with improved thermal performance standards.

When having their windows and doors replaced from this date homeowners must ensure that they get a certificate from Local Authority Building Control or have the work completed by a FENSA Registered Company.

One of the main reasons for this change to the Building Regulations is the need to reduce energy loss.

For more information visit: [www.fensa.co.uk](http://www.fensa.co.uk)

## Improving the Safety of Solid Fuel Domestic Heating

We asked Jim Lambeth of the Solid Fuel Association to advise maintenance staff about their responsibilities in servicing solid fuel appliances.



With the advent of gas central heating and the introduction of the Gas Safety Regulations we have come to accept an annual gas service contract using CORGI installers as commonplace. Solid fuel users have been left without this benefit. Tenants and other users are still burdened with the task of booking a local chimney sweep or doing the job themselves. The use of solid fuel for central heating purposes, using a variety of appliances, did not alter the situation and to this day many landlords still require tenants to make their own arrangements. This leaves everyone vulnerable to the efforts of unqualified tradesmen, and leaves landlords open to criticism.

In recent years the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have looked at the situation with varying results. But they have recognised that Landlords have a Duty of Care to tenants to ensure that heating equipment is in good working order and safe to use. In January 2002 the DTLR published a Good Practice Guidance Note entitled Housing Disrepair Legal Obligations. Within its pages it makes clear that "the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985...makes it an implied term of every tenancy that the landlord will...keep in repair and proper working order the installations for the supply of water, gas, electricity, and for sanitation and space heating and water heating." In short: landlords should not leave it to chance that solid fuel equipment

is being properly maintained especially when old or infirm tenants are involved and where they may not understand the risks or just forget to have the job done.

We have received numerous calls from Maintenance and Housing Officers in past months about their legal responsibilities and it is pleasing to note that many are to introduce planned maintenance schemes to safeguard their position. This shift of attitude is undoubtedly a move in the right direction. It is only a matter of time before legal action by HSE results in prosecution.

From 1st April 2002 several changes were made to the Building Regulations for England and Wales, the most significant being the requirement for heating installation work to be undertaken by Competent Persons. Previously there was no legislation regulating who was permitted to undertake this work, which in many instances was done by tradesmen with little specialist knowledge. Now however, installation of solid fuel equipment must be carried out by an HETAS (Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme) Registered Engineer who holds a Certificate of Competency and is legally permitted to sign a Completion Certificate. If a non-qualified contractor is used the Certificate must be issued by a Building Control Officer.

To find out more contact  
Solid Fuel Association on: 0845 601 4406  
[jim@solidfuel.co.uk](mailto:jim@solidfuel.co.uk)  
HETAS on 01462 634721, [www.hetas.co.uk](http://www.hetas.co.uk)

the wider range of buildings for which a local authority has responsibility.

In 2001 the committee that manages the NHF Schedule and is elected by users was reformed as the National Housing Maintenance Forum. It has a budget of £40,000 a year to spend on research and development and policy concerns of maintenance departments across the housing sector. Some of this contributes to the new Asset Management Leader post at the NHF.

Starting from the model schedule of rates documentation we have developed a whole suite of products, with modules covering every aspect of maintenance and re-improvement, and diagnostic packages on a personal computer or in book form to help repair staff to identify the right job in the schedule to meet a repair. This is now available on a Palm Pilot (see page 5) allowing repairs staff to receive inspection requests and email back orders via their mobile phone. We produce Repair Handbooks for your tenants in your own corporate style, and Housecall to help tenants report repairs over the internet. More recently

we launched Checkmate as a national benchmarking club for repairs and maintenance. There are more products in the pipeline.

If you are interested in the National Housing Maintenance Forum visit [www.nhmf.co.uk](http://www.nhmf.co.uk)

Further details from the Secretary:  
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## Partnering Repairs

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to the highest standards. Locator software is used by maintenance assistants to improve accuracy of repair descriptions so that contractors are more likely to complete the job on one visit. Contract monitoring checks that jobs are not lost or forgotten in the system, and that the best service for the tenants is provided.

For information contact:  
[simon.timmins@southbeds.gov.uk](mailto:simon.timmins@southbeds.gov.uk)

## Decent Homes Standard

Karen Tait, Asset Management Leader at the National Housing Federation, explains the thinking behind the Decent Homes Standard.

We are now more than six months into the Housing Corporation's implementation of the Government's Decent Homes Standard. By 2010 all tenants should be living in a "decent home", supporting the Government's aim of seeing the country's £20bn housing repairs backlog tackled.

The achievement of the target is one of the key objectives for the Housing Corporation. They will be introducing a new performance indicator in the 2002 Regulatory and Statistical return, initially on a voluntary basis. This will request information on the percentage of homes that meet the standard. The Corporation has allowed a further year for organisations to establish mechanisms to collect the data before this information becomes a requirement.

The Government's concept is simple - set a standard, work out where you are now and where you need to be, and by when. Then monitor to make sure it is achieved. In brief, the Decent Home Standard is one which meets the following four criteria:

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (to be replaced soon

- by the Housing Health and Safety Rating)
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The 2001 English House Condition Survey (EHCS) is currently being finalised and preliminary results are expected soon. This will set the baseline for the Government's target. After which the EHCS will be carried out annually to provide estimates of the level of non-decent homes in the social housing sector at the national level to enable the Government to monitor RSL's and Local Authority's progress towards the target.

Over the next year Housing Associations will need to establish data on their housing stock through local stock surveys, and other sources to show the level, location and type of their non-decent housing stock. They will need also to estimate the likely level of deterioration of their stock if no investment is made and assess the effect of different investment options on the non-decent stock.

Current Government assumptions, based on the 1996 EHCS, are that about one-third of housing association homes would fail the standard. If this were so, there would be a need for significant investment, in the region of £4-5bn to meet this target over the next eight years: a

figure that is expected to rise as the result of stock transfers. This is no mean task in the current regime of rent restructuring, rising building costs and low demand housing. The National Housing Federation and the Housing Corporation have been working in partnership to independently assess the number of RSL homes that are likely to fail and to ascertain the level of investment needed. Early information is needed from the sector, as housing associations become more familiar with the Standard and its requirements, to establish the global costs of meeting the target.

Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSR) rates the safety of housing from a health and safety standpoint, and is currently being evaluated by the DTLR with a view to its implementation next year. In the mean time RSLs need to ensure that their stock data systems allow for the current fitness standard as well as for the Housing Health and Safety Rating when that comes in.

Decent Homes Standard is fundamental to the Government's aim of improving social housing and keeping the focus on those that really count: your residents. It sits alongside Best Value and aims to raise quality and choice in housing. It is not another fad that will go away.

For more info see HC Circular R3-26/01 and visit the DTLR website: [www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/dhgf](http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/dhgf)

## Setting the Standard



Implementing the Decent Homes Standard is not straightforward: you will have to make your own interpretation of what meets the Standard.

Confusion remains despite three official guidance notes on how to test a home for decency. While the Standard seems clear enough to the lay-person (like your tenants)-modern facilities and efficient heating, as practitioners we need more detail. In each piece of guidance there is useful advice, with examples drawn from the English House Condition Survey. But many details are still left unclear, while the Housing Corporation allows each landlord some flexibility in their response to the Standard.

Greg Trimmer of Calford Seaden Trimmer (now Housing Consultancy Trimmer CS) led a research project commissioned by the Housing Corporation into the extent of non-Decent Homes owned by the largest Housing Associations in England, and has also worked with local authorities on the Decent Homes Standard. We asked him what it would mean for RSLs and local authorities.

Landlords will need to start with their own review of the Standard, producing an interpretation of the guidelines appropriate to their stock. Our research showed just how difficult it is to assess the Decent Homes Standard using existing information. The Decent Homes Standard asks questions which most stock condition surveys have never had to answer. A lot of the tests in the Standard are still open to many possible interpretations. For example: what exactly constitutes an inadequate kitchen layout?

Once the landlord has established how many homes fail the Standard, monitoring systems will show progress towards meeting it. Local Authorities are required to give regular updates to their regional Government Office. The Housing Corporation's statistical return (the RSR) is to include questions on the Decent Homes Standard for housing associations.

The policy makers still need to decide what to do about those properties which will never meet the Decent Homes Standard. One housing association we know has back-to-back houses with restricted access. There is no way of extending these properties. So what should happen to them?

All homes managed by social housing landlords and local authorities should be kept in a good state of repair. The Decent Homes Standard implies that past standards did not always deliver the kind of homes we need now and in the future. Our challenge as professionals is to interpret the detail behind the Decent Homes Standard, to find the resources required to deliver the improvements, and to do this in a way that our tenants understand.

Contact Greg Trimmer on 020 7717 8413 or [greg.trimmer@trimmercs.co.uk](mailto:greg.trimmer@trimmercs.co.uk)

## How to Measure and Monitor Decency



Barry Patient of Rand Associates compares methods

There is no substitute for gathering site based information on "Decency" at the dwellings, except where you have unassailable evidence that the standard is met for any properties that were newly built or completely refurbished since the early eighties. The obvious route is to gather the information as part of a sample stock condition survey, and extrapolating or cloning this to similar properties. Subsequently this can be checked for each individual property.

There are a number of difficulties that need to be tackled when collecting data: How can data from external surveys be assigned to the dwellings? How do you correlate the incidence of failure under the 4 criteria at each dwelling? You cannot judge the age of a component from its appearance, so you may have to work backwards from a judgement of its remaining life to suggest its age. Although this is a critical facet of condition surveying, it may not give the true determination of decency.

So two questions need to be answered about key and non key components for establishing the current and potential status: - when will it become old, and when will it be in poor condition.

Monitoring can only be satisfactorily effected if completed works are accurately logged in the condition database. Analysing and reanalysing the database needs a good understanding of the Standard to avoid misrepresenting the true position.

The cost of remedying decency sensitive components and features where they fall below the standard is likely to exceed the cost to achieve the minimum standard necessary. So how should you state the financial liability? Many questions remain.

For more information: [bpatient@rand-associates.co.uk](mailto:bpatient@rand-associates.co.uk)

## Launching NHMF Pocket Locator

We have always specialised in package solutions to common repair problems - solutions that work straight out of the box, but that can be adapted by you to your own circumstances with a minimum of consultancy from us or anyone else.

This year we are launching Pocket Locator. This puts the whole of the NHF Schedule of Rates onto a Palm Pilot, together with quick and easy ways of finding the right job to deal with a repair. Inspections or job requests can be downloaded to

downloaded to the Palm Pilot via the hotsynch cradle attached



to your PC, or by email via a mobile phone. The resulting reports identifying the job required can be emailed back to base, or downloaded when you return to the office.

Pocket Locator gives this new technology to housing officers or inspection staff to speed up repair reporting, and reduce the time they need to spend back at the office. The standard package has most of the functionality of Locator including a Rates Browser that can access the whole of the schedule of rates by tapping on menus to drill down through trade, headings and sub-headings. Find out more from our Product brochure, or email [info@hssl.co.uk](mailto:info@hssl.co.uk)

Pocket Locator is being piloted at four RSLs with opportunities for others to join in if they wish, and will be fully available this summer. Prices start at under £1,000 for a small organisation and would typically be around £2,000 to £3,000 for an average RSL for installation on any number of handhelds. Training will be available, although it is so simple to use that we expect most users would provide their own in-house training. We are developing Pocket Locator in partnership with Peter Muckle of Fieldhand who has been using Palm Pilots for recording data from archaeological surveys.



# Key Principles in Partnership Repairs



**Dave Treanor has organised a number of seminars on partnering for the NHMF and summarises some of the lessons that have been learned.**

Many potential benefits can arise from a less adversarial approach to managing a repairs contract. But there is still a need for imaginative and proactive management of any partnering contract to ensure a fair balance of benefit and responsibility, and that trust is not abused, or acting as a cover for inefficiency.

The initial impetus for rethinking construction was the need to make contracting more profitable and reduce costs to the client by streamlining the procurement and management of contracts. At the same time, it should be possible to benefit the consumer, by dealing with more repairs on one visit.

## Controlling Costs

Under a measured term contract it is in the interests of the contractor to do as much work as possible on each job. Pre and post inspection regimes are designed to keep this under some degree of control, helped by more accurate repair reporting and monitoring of variations.

Flat rate payment of overheads and profit: the pricing of jobs includes the labour, materials, and administrative overheads, plus a margin of profit. By making a regular monthly payment to cover the fixed costs (overheads and profit, and base labour costs) the incentive for the contractor to raise variations to increase the work on each job is removed, and their cash flow becomes more predictable. Bonus incentives should be changed so they do not encourage operatives to find additional work.

Lump sum contracts: pay a fixed price per unit to cover all basic repairs, perhaps with a cut-off

for jobs above a certain value. It is then in the contractor's interest to minimise repair calls by dealing with repairs in one visit, and encourages preventative maintenance. The contractor checks the condition of the items that cause the most repairs, to reduce subsequent repair calls, like an "MOT".

**Open book accounting:** this is often accompanied by a cost plus agreed profit approach to payments. The danger is that the time saved in administering the contract is shifted to the accountants examining the contractor's books. Where the contractor works for more than one client it is particularly difficult to prove that costs are correctly applied.

**Payment on invoice:** contractors still complain about the time and hassle involved in clearing invoices for payment because of wasteful bureaucracy within RSLs and local authorities.

Self-billing, with one invoice attached to a statement of all orders completed in a month can help. Any queries over the detail can be settled by an adjustment to next month's payment, so that the contractor gets immediate payment.

**Measuring work done:** It is important to keep a good record of jobs done so that increases in demand for repairs or the types of repair being ordered can be spotted and managed appropriately. Where a standard schedule of rates like the NHF Schedule is used, value of work done can be compared with payments made under the contract, and the cost as percentage of the base price can then be compared with tender returns of other organisations under measured term contracts.

## Monitoring Performance

There is a shift away from monitoring each order towards broader performance indicators focussing on customers.

Measuring tenant satisfaction is crucial, with a number of approaches. Response cards left by the contractor or sent by post with confirmation of each order often have low return rates, but these may be boosted by prize draws or other incentives. Call centre staff may be asked to follow up a percentage of repairs during slack times in their day. Newsletters report to tenants on their feedback, so that they are aware it is taken seriously.

Missed appointments can be monitored and dealt with in more constructive ways. In some cases tenants are compensated when contractors fail to show, and contractors may also receive payments where they cannot gain access, particularly where the stock is scattered.

Performance measures include appointments kept by tenant and by contractor, accuracy of repair reports, the number of return visits to the same property in a year, and the number of jobs requiring more than one visits to complete. These are accompanied by more flexible rules on authorising variations where applicable, and improved accuracy in repairs reporting.

## Shortening Lines of Communication

Measured term contracts reduced the need to obtain quotes for each job above a certain value, with considerable savings in the administrative overhead.

Better IT systems use email and internet links to pass repairs orders direct to the contractor, and allow the client to monitor each stage of the repair. Contractors can feed back the appointment slots available in each trade and area to improve appointment systems. Schedules of rates such as the NHF Schedule can identify jobs that require more than one appointment slot. The latest version of Locator Plus has an option to show the length of jobs in ten minute slots.

Some client functions such as taking repair calls and making appointments can be shifted to the contractor. This is particularly common where the DLO is the main contractor. If the contractor is taking the orders it is crucial to accompany this with measures to remove incentives to increase the work, usually through paying at least the profit and overhead costs in a lump sum payment.

If the contractor takes the order they are more likely to have ready access to technical staff to diagnose repairs accurately, and can more speedily feed back any inaccuracies in diagnosis so as to improve performance. Similarly with appointments: the contractor is in a better position to judge workload and slots available for making appointments.

**Contact Dave Treanor for a list of RSLs and local authorities that are partnering their repairs: [dave@hsl.co.uk](mailto:dave@hsl.co.uk)**

# Partnering Repairs: Rosebery Homecall Property Services Ltd

In 2000, Rosebery Housing Group set up Rosebery Homecall with A.E.Williams (Builders) Ltd as a joint venture private company to provide repairs and maintenance services to Rosebery HA's 2200 customers. The Group parent is the majority shareholder, with the profits shared equally with A.E.Williams. The Company has its own independent Board.

The key aims were to improve service delivery and provide better value and quality by establishing a long term partnering relationship with one supplier.

We set out to get each job done on the first visit. There is a fixed cost per job for response repairs and a fixed labour and material plus % uplift for non-response repairs. Quality control by the contractor reduces duplication. A service

level agreement with tight performance targets underpins the business relationship. The operatives became salaried staff with the promise of improved terms and conditions consistent with the Group, as profitability increased. The labour cost is exempt from VAT, providing added value to the repairs service.

At the end of its first full operating year the Company has achieved some real successes. The tenants confirm that service delivery has improved, which was validated by the Housing Corporation on their recent Best Value Inspection. A Managing Director was recently appointed to develop the business, and has increased its client base to include other RSLs and commercial clients, and has won a maintenance contract with the London Borough

of Merton. Turnover has grown from £1.2m to circa £2m for 02/03. Staff now have a performance incentive scheme and pension arrangements.

So what have we learned? Firstly, to establish the right leadership for the business from the outset – the new MD now provides this. Do not underestimate the cultural change where private sector and RSL staff need to work together commercially; Homecall brought together A.E.Williams' operatives working with Rosebery's customer service staff and technical inspectors. The introduction of a new computer system added to the challenges, while good planning and detailed procedures in place early were essential.

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# Asset Management Post



**The NHMF helps to fund the Asset Management Leader post at the NHF. Karen Tait gives a summary of the work she is doing.**

Regional Newsletters and Bulletins and also national publications promoting asset management, the Project or the implementation of the Decent Homes Standard.

Over the next 12 months the Project will continue to promote network members' interests to the government and other agencies and support and develop knowledge on asset management.

Key aims are to:

- Establish the Asset Management Case Study Directory to encourage network members and the sector generally to exchange ideas and best practice.
- Issue regular notifications, newsletters and arrange seminars and workshops to increase knowledge and experience in the sector and support members.
- Publish the Asset Management Toolkits – Six briefing documents on asset management.
- Keeping up to Date – Revise, reissue or commission good practice publications following recent legislation and other developments.
- Decent Homes Standard – Provide good practice guidance and support.
- Housing Health & Safety Rating – Continue to represent the sector on the advisory panel.

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