Bury
Council

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DRAFT

Bury Council

Repairs Reality Check

Altair

Contents

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. Altair Consultancy and Advisory Services ("Altair") was appointed by Bury Council ("Bury") to conduct a mock inspection that aligns with the approach of the Regulator of Social Housing ("RSH"), which is currently focused on the consumer standards.

1.1.2. Included in the scope was a 'reality check' across engagement and responsive repairs.

1.1.3. This report focuses on the investigation and findings of the responsive repairs 'reality check', considering assurance and working practices across the function. The report should be read in conjunction with the overarching Mock Inspection report.

1.2. Scope

1.2.1. This report outlines our key findings and identifies gaps in current provision, identified during the 'reality check', as well as provides recommendations to mitigations that should be considered in the context of regulatory requirements and efficiency drivers.

1.2.2. The improvements and recommended actions of this paper are intended to sit alongside the recommended action plan provided in the Mock Inspection report.

1.3. Our approach

1.3.1. The 'reality check' project has involved the following activities:

- Document review
- Two discussion sessions (one with Team Leaders/Managers across repairs and assets, one with Contact Centre staff)
- Three one-to-ones with key stakeholders
- Alignment of findings with Consumer Standards and Specific Outcomes, in addition to the findings and recommendations in the Mock Inspection Report
- Reporting
- Action plan formation

1.4. Our findings

1.4.1. The repairs function, alongside the other functions within the landlord service, is currently in a period of transition after moving back into the Council from the ALMO – Six Town Housing.

1.4.2. Progress is currently underway to restructure the teams under direct repairs, compliance, and asset management, with the new structure aiming to develop clearer lines of responsibility between the client and contractor. New structures are currently in draft, with staff consultation anticipated to begin in the New Year.

1.4.3. Capacity and resource, and the ability to recruit to key roles was raised consistently as causing issues with service delivery, including the service being unable to recruit temporary agency workers to meet fluctuations in demand. Stakeholders within discussion sessions highlighted

that the additional demand on staff due to lack of capacity is impacting team morale, with this being described as being 'through the floor'.

1.4.4. Tenant feedback for repairs is positive, with tenants consistently reporting being 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the service received. In survey feedback, the attitudes and behaviours of operatives are noted as consistently being very polite and helpful. Some frustrations and concerns were identified by stakeholders in the Contact Centre and in other functions in relation to booking appointments due to operative capacity, with Contact Centre stakeholders reporting that they receive calls from frustrated tenants on a regular basis.

1.4.5. Communication with tenants is good, with tenants able to book timeslots for repairs via the Contact Centre and tenants receive text messages updating them on the progress of their repairs and/or reminders about appointments. Tenants are also contacted via text message to provide feedback on their experience.

1.4.6. Complaints handling in the Mock Inspection report is identified as positive for the landlord function overall, however, potential improvements could be made within repairs, with a dedicated case management system/process for responding to complaints and feeding learning from complaints into service improvements.

1.4.7. The service does not currently have a repairs policy in place. Although the website has information in relation to the service that tenants can expect, it is a recommendation in the Consumer Standard's Code of Practice (available here) that a repairs policy is in place, is adhered to by staff and is available to tenants. This will also provide the service with additional support in relation to disrepair cases, complaints and transparency.

1.4.8. The documentation of processes and procedures is currently limited, contributing to inconsistencies in approaches to service delivery and roles and responsibilities. The lack of documented processes can also impact the service's ability to manage performance, key indicators, SLAs and risk. This also applies to communal repairs.

1.4.9. The service has very limited or outdated contracts with subcontractors which poses a risk to procurement regulations, could negatively impact the service's ability to contract manage poor performance and provide assurance on value for money. Evidence of contract management was requested as part of the document review but were not provided.

1.4.10. There are not currently Schedule of Rates (SORs) in place for the delivery of repairs. Repairs are currently charged by costing the time spent by the operative in addition to the cost of materials, meaning costs can vary for the same job-type depending on the operative who completed it (skills, capacity etc). Due to the lack of SORs, assurance on value for money will be limited and this will make best-value comparisons between delivery in-house versus external contractors difficult.

1.4.11. There are limitations in relation to the current IT system, with work-arounds being developed using spreadsheets (this was noted for voids case management, disrepairs, damp and mould and complaints). This poses a risk to the service in relation to data management and case management, manual processes being time-consuming and the staff across the service not having access to 'one version of the truth'. Furthermore, the loss of dedicated IT support is

having an impact on rectifying IT issues and being able to develop more efficient system capability to support more efficient processes and case management.

1.4.12. The function does not yet have in place an improvement plan identifying the actions and activities required to drive improvements across repairs. This is acknowledged by stakeholders and Bury Council are keen to develop and implement improvements. The function should consider dependencies across the wider landlord function, in particular compliance and assets, when developing a future improvement plan.

1.4.13. Communal repairs are reported in the same way as individual repairs. Depending on the job required, communal maintenance and repairs is spilt between Caretakers (in the Neighbourhoods Team), the DLO, compliance and by Grounds Maintenance (via a SLA as this is a team sitting outside of the service). There are not currently formal policies/processes in place, and the response is not yet fully joined up across teams. When looking to review processes and the policy, Bury should consider including a communal repairs design – reviewing the process end-to-end including the different teams involved.

1.5. Our recommendations

1.5.1. We have set out our recommendations for each of the areas of the review for the 'reality check' in table 1 below.

Table 1: Recommendations

Area	Recommendations
Oversight, governance and assurance	**Recommendation 1:** To develop and implement a repairs policy and no access policy. A repairs policy will provide transparency to tenants on service standards and expectations, in addition to supporting the service to respond to and challenge disrepair cases, compensation claims and complaints. It will also provide assurance that repairs are managed effectively. **Recommendation 2**: Review data management and data quality across the function. Whilst senior stakeholders are confident in the quality of their data, the number of manual interventions and spreadsheets risk user error. Bury could consider development of a data management framework to review data integrity and quality within current systems and processes. **Recommendation 3:** Bury should consider having assurance activities as standing items at operational management meetings. This could include: • Reviewing and discussing KPIs to allow early intervention if concerns are arising • Reviewing risks aligned to the strategic risk register and ensuring mitigating actions are being completed • Budget monitoring

	Recommendation 4: There is currently no improvement plan in place for repairs. Bury has acknowledged this is a gap and there are plans to develop an improvement plan. An improvement plan should be developed in consideration with other activities required across the wider landlord function and with a particular emphasis on mapping dependencies between repairs, assets and compliance.
Reporting a Repair	**Recommendation 5:** Develop supporting information for Contact Centre staff, including diagnostic tools and call scripts. This will support a consistent approach to call handling/identifying correct repair timescales and provide tools and support for new starters. It was noted that a new Granicus form is currently being developed for tenants to report a repair online, which will support diagnosis and consistency. As this cannot be integrated into QL yet, care should be given to ensure all data is transferred into the IT system. **Recommendation 6**: Develop guidelines for supporting tenants with vulnerabilities or additional needs. The Contact Centre currently take additional steps to ensure vulnerable tenants are prioritised where possible, however, there are inconsistencies in what constitutes as a vulnerability / priority between teams. Developing guidance on more common vulnerabilities and how to respond will support Contact Centre staff and the wider repairs function. **Recommendation 7:** Bury should ensure staff contact information and current roles are kept up to date in the internal directory (Intranet). It is reported that identifying the right person to direct complex calls or cases to is often time consuming due to the Contact Centre not having up to date information. **Recommendation 8:** As per Recommendation 8 in detail below, Contact Centre staff / Planners should be included in the development of processes to ensure the process is designed end-to-end, considering the tenant journey.
Delivering a repair	**Recommendation 8:** Develop a suite of processes and procedures – ideally including a RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) model for each area of the business. We recommend conducting this in three stages: 1. Develop the repairs policy in the first instance, to inform the processes and procedures 2. Document the 'as-is' processes and identify 'quick win' improvements in process and tactical IT developments. This will provide assurance and provide a baseline for future redesigns 3. [Longer term] Consider an end-to-end redesign of the current processes once new structures are embedded, including identifying user requirements for future IT system upgrades

	Recommendation 9: Develop or adopt a Schedule of Rates (SOR). It is difficult with current practices for Bury to be assured that delivery across repairs is representing good value for money. An SOR will support the client / contractor relationship in ensuring works can be budgeted and charged for accordingly. It will also support the function in determining if works can be delivered at a lower cost in-house versus subcontracted (or vice versa).
	Recommendation 10: Undertake a review of current contracts in place and look to reprocure where required. It is acknowledged by the service that many contracts currently in place are out of date and/or no longer fit for purpose. The service needs to ensure contract thresholds have not been breached and are a potential regulatory risk. Reviewing contracts will also allow the service to ensure a competitive process is taken to provide best value for money, in addition to allowing Bury to challenge poor performance through robust contract management. It should also be noted that the Procurement Act is due to change in February 2025, therefore a review of current contracts should be completed as a priority and in line with the new requirements (see more [here](#)).
	Recommendation 11: Bury should consider the current approaches to recruitment of critical roles within the function. Bury acknowledges its current pay structure for Heads of Service roles are below the market rate and of nearby local authorities. Consideration should be given to completing benchmarking analysis of similar organisations, in addition to exploring market-rate supplements. The current process for recruiting temporary agency operatives is also causing capacity issues and impacting delivery. Bury should consider utilising additional agencies if the current one (Reed) is unable to provide resource required.
Tenant satisfaction	**Recommendation 12:** Tenant satisfaction is currently positive, and the service communicates regularly with tenants through the repairs process. Engagement and satisfaction could be strengthened through evidencing improvements made to delivery based on tenant experience and complaints, including feeding changes back to tenants.
Organisational culture	**Recommendation 13:** Whilst out of scope for regulatory assurance, the 'reality check' did identify some areas of concern in relation to staff culture and morale. Altair recommend, where possible, including stakeholders from across the business to be involved in future change and be provided opportunities to shape future delivery. We also recommend (if not already in place), working with HR to identify wellbeing support options for staff who are currently struggling with the recent changes (move into the Council, restructure of teams).

1.6. Our conclusions

1.6.1. The housing service is going through a period of transition since it was transferred back into Bury Council in January 2024. The repairs function has a high number of interim senior staff and is currently undergoing a restructure across its service.

1.6.2. The new structure will support the service to develop a 'client-contractor' relationship, in addition to setting out clear expectations in relation to roles and responsibilities.

1.6.3. The service is missing some key elements to demonstrate compliance with the Safety and Quality standard, in particular, not being able to evidence policies and procedures or value for money within delivery. These aspects should be considered as priority activities in order to meet requirements.

2. Introduction

2.1. Context

2.1.1. Bury Council is the provider of approximately 7,815 homes, of which 103 are owned by Six Town Housing and 284 are managed by Springs Tenant Management Organisation (TMO). In January 2024, Bury in-housed Six Town Housing, the Arms-Length Management Organisation set up to deliver landlord services on behalf of Bury.

2.1.2. The powers of the RSH changed on 1st April 2024, meaning that the RSH will take a proactive approach to regulating local authority landlords with more than 1,000 units. In response to the changed regulatory environment, Bury commissioned Altair to conduct a mock inspection exercise during the period of September – December 2024. The mock inspection also included a 'reality check' across tenant engagement and responsive repairs.

2.1.3. The repairs 'reality check' has considered the Consumer Standards and Specific Expectations when reviewing the function's performance, the detail of this is provided in Section Three. The 'reality check' has also considered points raised in the [Consumer Standards Code of Practice](#).

2.2. Scope

2.2.1. The aim of this review is to provide Bury with a report across the responsive repairs function which:

- Provides an overview of performance against the Consumer Standards,
- Tests Bury's current position highlighting any areas of concern and non-compliance,
- Prioritises Bury's actions and areas for development via improvement plans,

2.2.2. During the discussions with operational staff, some additional concerns and areas for improvement were identified and these are reported in Section 8. It is unlikely that an inspection from the Regulator will result in interviews of these staff groups, and therefore may not directly impact an assessment, however, the findings have been included in this report due to their potential impact on assurance across repairs and current staff morale and culture.

2.3. Approach

2.3.1. The 'reality check' has considered the responsive repairs function across four main categories – assurance, reporting a repair, delivering a repair and tenant satisfaction. There was a fifth category added (organisational culture) following findings from discussions with staff.

2.3.2. To complete the 'reality check', Altair built on the findings from the initial Mock Inspection and conducted a deeper review across the repairs function. Whilst the focus of the 'reality check' was responsive repairs, the review also considered the alignment between assets and compliance.

Table 2: Our approach for the repairs reality check

Stage	Objectives

Document Review (combined context document and scoping document)	Additional documentation was requested in relation to the repairs function. The purpose of this exercise was to: • Identify strengths and risk areas. • Identify potential gaps in documentation. • Inform the interview questions.
One-to-one discussions	Altair conducted one-to-one discussions with the following stakeholders: • Interim Head of Direct Works • Interim Head of Compliance • Repairs and Maintenance Consultant
Discussion sessions	Altair carried out discussion sessions across two groups covering the Contact Centre, Voids, Planned Works and Repairs.
Observations	Altair observed the Repairs Management Meeting [Chaired by Interim Head of Direct Works].
Reporting	Reporting includes: • Our findings, including our rationale. • Our recommendations.

2.3.3. Bury has supported this review by providing document-based evidence as requested by Altair and by making key individuals available for interviews. The full list of documents reviewed can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3.4. We would like to thank the Bury team in supporting the development of this report through the provision of key information and taking time to speak with Altair through discussion sessions.

3. Regulatory Requirements

3.1.   The RSH is responsible for regulating Registered Providers ("RPs") of social housing including local authorities. For this report, Altair has focused on the Safety and Quality Standard, which contains specific expectations related to repairs. The table below identifies the specific area of the Standard considered and the types of activity/evidence investigated.

Table 3: Safety and Quality Standard: Repairs and Maintenance

Required Outcome
1.4.1 Registered providers must provide an effective, efficient and timely repairs, maintenance and planned improvements service for the homes and communal areas for which they are responsible.

Specific Expectations	Areas investigated
2.3.1 Registered providers must enable repairs and maintenance issues to be reported easily.	• Access to services • Contact Centre processes • Tenant feedback
2.3.2 Registered providers must set timescales for the completion of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements, clearly communicate them to tenants and take appropriate steps to deliver to them.	• External information provided (e.g. website) • Policies, processes and procedures
2.3.3 Registered providers must keep tenants informed about repairs, maintenance and planned improvements to their homes with clear and timely communication.	• Tenant feedback • Processes and service-level agreements (SLAs) between client/contractor
2.3.4 Registered providers must understand and fulfil their maintenance responsibilities in respect of communal areas.	• Process/policies in relation to communal repairs (via discussion)
2.3.5 Registered providers must ensure that the delivery of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements to homes and communal areas is informed by the needs of tenants and provides value for money, in addition to the requirement at 2.1.2 [Registered providers must use data from across their records on stock condition to inform their provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for tenants.]	• Contract management and SLAs • Operative productivity • Tenant feedback • Access to services

4. Governance, oversight and assurance

4.1.1. Governance and oversight across the service has been investigated as part of the overarching Mock Inspection. The repairs 'reality check' has built on this information to investigate activities that can provide both strategic and operational assurance.

4.1.2. Currently, the function does not have a repairs policy. The website provides some information to tenants in relation to repairs expectations and timescales for delivery, however, a policy will enable a consistent approach across the service and provide further transparency to tenants. It is a recommendation in the Consumer Standards Code of Practice that a repairs policy is in place, is adhered to by staff and is available to tenants. This will also provide the service with additional support in relation to disrepair cases, complaints and transparency.

4.1.3. A repairs managers meeting was observed as part of the 'reality check'. The meeting covered operational issues and outstanding actions. Lines of defence could be strengthened by setting aside time in these meetings to analyse, discuss and agree improvement activities across:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – including those linked to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and internal performance and KPIs

- Risk management – understanding the risks identified within the strategic risk register and ensuring mitigating actions are being completed and the risk score / comments being amended accordingly

- Operative performance – reviewing outputs delivered by operatives in line with internal targets, helping to identify pressure points and potential capability / capacity gaps early

- Budget management – reviewing team budgets and investigating over/under spend and planned activities for the next cycle

As noted, the function is currently undergoing a restructure, and this was the predominant topic of discussion, as may be expected. We would advise reviewing the points as above and look to include this as regular standing items at each managers meeting.

4.1.4. Contract management is a particular challenge for Bury (discussed further in Section 6) and weaknesses in contract management practice will be inhibiting Bury's ability to evidence that its repair function offers good value for money. As per Specific Expectation 2.3.5, the council must evidence that its repair service is representing value for money for tenants.

4.1.5. Due to IT system limitations, the service has developed 'work-arounds' to case manage some elements of the service using spreadsheets. Use of manual data processing is prone to human error and is likely causing duplication of data entries. Holding data in isolation in spreadsheets will likely prevent staff having access to the information they need to respond to tenant queries, complaints, disrepairs or complete activities. Senior stakeholders interviewed indicated they are confident in the data held in systems and the KPIs being reported / managed, however, data held outside of systems poses a risk to data integrity. This should be considered in line with Recommendation 8 (reviewing processes and identifying tactical IT system developments).

4.1.6. There is significant change currently underway within the Landlord function, particularly across repairs, compliance, and asset management with the introduction of new team structures. There are also other change and improvement activities in progress and it is acknowledged that further activities are required. There is not currently an improvement plan / programme plan in place across the repairs function, which will make monitoring progress and dependencies / risk difficult.

4.1.7. We make the following recommendations to strengthen assurance activities across the repairs function.

4.1.8. **Recommendation 1**: To develop and implement a repairs policy and no access policy. A repairs policy will provide transparency to tenants on service standards and expectations, in addition to supporting the service respond and challenge to disrepair cases, compensation claims and complaints. It will also provide assurance that repairs are managed operationally.

4.1.9. **Recommendation 2:** Review data management and data quality across the function. Whilst senior stakeholders are confident in the quality of their data, the number of manual interventions and spreadsheets are likely to cause user error. Bury could consider development of a data management framework to review data integrity and quality within current systems and processes.

4.1.10. **Recommendation 3**: Bury should consider how assurance activities can become standing items at operational management meetings. This would include:

- Reviewing and discussing KPIs to allow early intervention if concerns are arising

- Reviewing risks aligned to the strategic risk register and ensuring mitigating actions are being completed

- Budget monitoring

4.1.11. **Recommendation 4**: There is currently no improvement plan in place for repairs. Bury has acknowledged that this is a gap and there are plans to develop an improvement plan. An improvement plan should be developed in consideration with other activities required across the wider landlord function and with a particular emphasis on mapping dependencies between repairs, assets and compliance.

5. Reporting a Repair

5.1.1. Repairs are currently reported by tenants in two ways – via phone call or via email, both of which are managed by the Contact Centre, with the Contact Centre receiving approximately 100 emails per day. The Contact Centre has recently developed a Granicus form for tenants to self-report repairs online and this form will support capturing of key information to diagnose repairs, in addition to pulling data into a useable format rather than free text within an email. As the form cannot yet be integrated into QL, care should be taken to ensure data is regularly and accurately transferred into the IT system. This approach is currently in place for reporting of damp and mould and is working well.

5.1.2. Tenants are given some information on the website at point of contact and the Council clearly articulates the timescales and expectations of the repairs service. As previously noted, this would be strengthened through the development of a repairs policy that is available to tenants.

5.1.3. Frustrations were noted by the Contact Centre in relation to booking appointments due to lack of capacity across the repairs operatives – meaning non-urgent repairs are often cancelled or delayed if an operative is off sick or other emergencies take priority. This causes dissatisfaction in tenants and the Contact Centre taking negative feedback via phone call.

5.1.4. The lack of defined processes, diagnostic tools and roles/responsibilities cause additional frustrations and delays to delivery, particularly with new starters. Due to responsibilities not always being clear across the process, this can lead to the Contact Centre needing to contact multiple colleagues and results in unnecessary 'hand-offs'. This is further exacerbated by a lack of up-to-date contact information held on key staff.

5.1.5. The Contact Centre staff displayed care and a real desire to provide a positive service to tenants, particularly in relation to tenants who required additional support due to vulnerabilities. This, however, can lead to inconsistencies once the repair is passed to the repairs team, with colleagues not always agreeing on what constitutes as a vulnerability. The Contact Centre will identify priorities based on their understanding of a vulnerable tenant, whilst operatives do not always agree with those jobs being prioritised. The development of guidelines and a shared understanding of tenant risks and vulnerabilities would support staff across the pathway to take a consistent approach. Whilst it would be difficult to develop a guide that covers all possible eventualities, a joint understanding of more common vulnerabilities and requests (through guidance, collaborative workshops etc) would provide support and consistency. The Consumer Standards also expect that tenant diverse needs are considered when providing services, which is demonstrated through conversation, however, written guidance and processes would evidence that this is being delivered.

5.1.6. We recommend the following activities to support improvements in reporting a repair.

5.1.7. **Recommendation 5**: Develop supporting information for Contact Centre staff including diagnostic tools and call scripts. This will support a consistent approach to call handling/identifying correct repair timescales and provide tools and support for new starters. It was noted that a new Granicus form is currently being developed for tenants to report a repair

online, which will support diagnosis and consistency. As this can't be integrated into QL yet, care should be given to ensure all data is transferred into the IT system.

5.1.8. **Recommendation 6**: Develop guidelines for supporting tenants with vulnerabilities or additional needs. The Contact Centre currently take care and additional steps to ensure vulnerable tenants are prioritised where possible, however, there are inconsistencies in what constitutes as a vulnerability / priority amongst teams. Developing guidance on more commonly seen vulnerabilities and how to action these will support Contact Centre staff and the wider repairs function.

5.1.9. **Recommendation 7**: Bury should ensure staff contact information and current roles are kept up to date in the internal directory (Intranet). It is reported that identifying the right person to direct complex calls or cases to is often time consuming due to the Contact Centre not having up to date information.

5.1.10. **Recommendation 8**: As per Recommendation 8 in detail below, Contact Centre staff / Planners should be included in the development of processes to ensure the process is designed end-to-end, considering the tenant journey.

6. Delivery of a Repair

6.1.1. At Bury, the delivery of responsive repairs services is provided mainly by an inhouse repairs team. Gas services are provided by an external contractor. Some planned works are delivered by the inhouse repairs team, and some is procured externally.

6.1.2. The repairs function is currently undergoing significant change, with the development of new staff structures, recruitment to permanent senior roles and managing activities related to bringing the landlord function back into the Council. The new structures aim to develop a clear line of roles and responsibilities between the 'client' and 'contractor'. Discussions with stakeholders have suggested that main limitation to service delivery at the current stage is a lack of resource across operatives. Since Six Town Housing moved into the Council, some elements that were previously in place for recruiting staff have changed (e.g. use of a dedicated recruitment agency that specialised in trades), in addition to recruitment being paused whilst final structures are developed and consulted on.

6.1.3. Bury experiences a high proportion of emergency repairs, which has been as high as 50% but has generally been reported as being between 20-30%. A high level of emergency repairs impacts on the ability to deliver routine repairs within time scales as operatives are deployed to emergency repairs.

6.1.4. Bury have recently changed the coding on repairs to include an 'urgent' category. Prior to this, repairs were reported as either 'emergency' (24-hour response) or 'routine'. This led to a significant number of repairs being reported as emergencies that did not meet the 'emergency' threshold. The new approach has seen a decline in the number of emergency repairs being requested, however, this could be further strengthened with supporting information being provided to the Contact Centre (as reported in Section 5).

6.1.5. It was highlighted in the Mock Inspection report that information on diverse needs of tenants is not available to contractors when jobs are raised to them. This area was investigated further and detailed in Section 5 above, with a recommendation that collaborative guidance is completed in relation to tenant vulnerabilities to meet the requirements of the Safety and Quality Standard. The information being collated within the new online Granicus form will support this information to be passed on to operatives, and the service should consider how IT systems / processes can be used to keep operatives included in tenant needs.

6.1.6. The repairs function does not currently have a Schedule of Rates (SORs) in place for the delivery of repairs. Repairs are currently charged by costing the time spent by the operative in addition to the cost of materials, meaning costs can vary for the same job type depending on the operative who completed it (skills, capacity etc). There were concerns raised that the current process/system can sometimes make it difficult to assign the correct materials to the right job. Due to the lack of SROs, assurance on value for money will be limited and this will make best-value comparisons between delivery in-house versus external contractors difficult. Bury should consider development of a SOR to support assets with charging and performance management of the 'contractor' function. For longer term improvements, Bury could consider developing a Price Per Property (PPP) model to support with annual budget planning.

6.1.7. The service has very limited or outdated contracts in place with subcontractors which poses a risk to procurement regulations, and risks negatively impacting the service's ability to contract manage poor performance and provide assurance on value for money. Evidence of contract management were requested as part of the document review but was not provided. Stakeholders were asked if they felt staff had the capabilities in-house to effectively procure new contracts and performance manage contractors. It was suggested that these skills are in place, and staff currently do performance manage contractors and have regular meetings with providers, however, without robust contracts in place it will be difficult for Bury to challenge when needed. It would be advisable to consider conducting a skills audit / look to develop training and development for staff in relation to procurement and contract management as part of the roles and responsibilities being developed in the new structure.

6.1.8. Repairs staff do not currently have access to contractor portals, making it difficult to see job status' in 'real-time'. Information is fed to/from contractors via spreadsheets which then requires manual processes to update IT systems – duplicating work, adding time and risking losing data due to human error. On looking at reprocuring contracts, Bury should ensure access to contractor portals is an essential requirement and this should be further considered as part of process development.

6.1.9. Although out of scope for responsive repairs, further discussions were held to understand the relationship between the compliance function and the repairs function. It should be noted that compliance has improved recently and a new Damp and Mould Policy has recently been implemented in line with anticipated Awaab's Law timescales. There are limitations in compliance delivery when work is passed to the repairs function to complete, with staff within compliance unable to see the status of the job end-to-end, and often needing to chase this or recruit an external contractor to complete works that repairs do not have the capacity to undertake. The lack of SOR codes also makes charging for works difficult. When looking at developing future processes (as per a point further in this report), this should also include a collaborative approach to process design between repairs, assets and compliance to understand and eradicate 'pain points' and lack of visibility of information.

6.1.10. Voids performance is good, with relet times positive in relation to sector averages. Concern was raised that capacity is currently lower in voids than previously, and relet times are at risk of increasing.

6.1.11. Whilst evidence of some documented processes and procedures was provided, this was very limited. The lack of consistent processes, procedures and roles and responsibilities was also highlighted during discussion sessions. The lack of documented processes is likely to cause inconsistent approaches and can also impact the service's ability to manage performance, key indicators, SLAs and risk. It is also an expectation in the Consumer Standard's Code of Practice that the function has documented processes, aligned to policy, and these are embedded within operational delivery.

6.1.12. Communal repairs reported in the same way as individual repairs. Depending on the job required, communal maintenance and repairs is spilt between Caretakers (in the Neighbourhoods Team), the DLO, compliance and by Grounds Maintenance (via a SLA as this is

a team sitting outside of the service). There are not currently formal policies/processes in place, and the response is not yet fully joined up across teams. When looking to review processes and the policy, Bury should consider including a communal repairs design – reviewing the process end-to-end including the different teams involved.

6.1.13. Below are our recommendations in relation to improvements in repair delivery.

6.1.14. **Recommendation 8**: Develop a suite of processes and procedures – ideally including a RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) model for each area of the business. We recommend conducting this in three stages:

1. Develop the repairs policy in the first instance to inform the processes and procedures
2. Document as-is processes and identify 'quick win' improvements in process and tactical IT developments. This will provide assurance and provide a baseline for future redesigns
3. [Longer term] Consider an end-to-end redesign of the current processes once new structures are embedded, including identifying user requirements for future IT system upgrades

6.1.15 **Recommendation 9**: Develop a Schedule of Rates (SOR). It is difficult with current practices for Bury to be assured that delivery across repairs is representing good value for money. An SOR will support the client / contractor relationship in ensuring works can be budgeted and charged for accordingly. It will also support the function in determining if works can be delivered at a lower cost in-house versus subcontracted (or vice versa).

6.1.16 **Recommendation 10**: Undertake a review of current contracts in place and look to reprocure where required. The service needs to ensure contract thresholds have not been breached and are a potential regulatory risk. Reviewing contracts will also allow the service to ensure a competitive process is taken to provide best value for money, in addition to allowing Bury to challenge poor performance through robust contract management. It should also be noted that the Procurement Act is due to change in February 2025, therefore a review of current contracts should be completed as a priority and in line with the new requirements (see more here).

6.1.17 **Recommendation 11:** Bury should consider the current approaches to recruitment of critical roles within the function. Bury acknowledges their current pay structures for Heads of Service roles are below the market rate and of nearby local authorities. Consideration should be given to completing benchmarking analysis of similar organisations, in addition to exploring market-rate supplements. The current process for recruiting temporary agency operatives is also causing capacity issues and impacting delivery. Bury should consider utilising additional agencies if the current one (Reed) is unable to provide resource required.

7. Tenant Satisfaction

7.1.1. The TSM results relating to repairs shows positively compared to other landlords according to reporting by the RSH. The percentage of non-emergency repairs completed within timescale for Bury for 2023/24 was 87.35%. This compares to a median TSM result for all landlords of 81.3%

and 89.2% for the upper quartile. For emergency repairs, Bury reported that 98.43% were completed within timescale in 2023/24 compared to a median result for registered providers of 95.3% and upper quartile of 98.7%.

7.1.2. Bury also report high levels of customer satisfaction in relation to the completion of repairs, with this further evidenced through text message and survey data provided in the document review. Tenants speak highly of the positive attitudes of operatives and that the jobs are completed well. There have been some frustrations noted by tenants and Contact Centre staff in relation to getting appointments booked in and completed due to capacity.

7.1.3. Communication with tenants appears to be positive and in accordance with the Consumer Standards that tenants should be kept informed of progress related to repairs. The current approach includes sending text messages out to tenants when a repair is imminent with updates provided. This could be better strengthened/evidenced by ensuring customer 'touchpoints' are documented and recorded as part of process design activities.

7.1.4. Complaints handling in the Mock Inspection report is identified as positive for the Landlord function overall, however, efficiencies could be made within repairs with a dedicated case management system/process for responding to complaints and feeding learning from complaints into service improvements. It was noted during discussions that complaints are currently managed via spreadsheets and gathering evidence is time consuming due to system limitations. This is also similar in relation to disrepair cases. A lack of robust evidence and recording will impact the service's ability to appropriately challenge and evidence complaints, and although discussions indicated that the service does take learning from complaints and feed this into improvements, this has not been evidenced in the document review. For Bury to provide assurance, it would be advised to develop a way to track lessons learnt from complaints and feedback improvements to tenants – 'you said, we did'.

7.1.5. **Recommendation 12**: Tenant satisfaction is currently positive, and the service communicates regularly with tenants through the repairs process. Engagement and satisfaction could be strengthened through evidencing improvements made to delivery based on tenant experience and complaints, including feeding changes back to tenants.

7.1.6. In addition, as per Recommendation 1, a policy will support the service to be transparent with the service offered and set out clear standards and expectations to tenants.

8. Organisational culture

8.1.1. During the discussions with operational staff, some additional concerns were identified. It is unlikely that an inspection from the Regulator will result in interviews of these staff groups, and therefore may not directly impact an assessment, however, the findings have been included in this report due to their potential impact on assurance across repairs and current staff morale and culture.

8.1.2. Staff have indicated that their biggest driver to doing a good job is tenant satisfaction and being able to leave tenants happy and safe. They consider their biggest limitations to be a lack capacity, a lack of consistent processes and outdated IT systems.

8.1.3. The capabilities of staff and operatives working across repairs is considered to be good, and this is further reflected in the feedback from tenants. Sickness and absence levels of staff are good as is staff retention, however, it was noted that the workforce is an aging workforce and will likely see many operatives retire in the coming years. The function does not currently employ apprentices, but this is something being considered next year once the new structures are in place.

8.1.4. Managers have reported that they and their staff understand HHSRS hazards and how to identify these, and when to escalate concerns and where to.

8.1.5. Some stakeholders suggested that mental health and wellbeing support is lacking across the repairs function, with some managers dealing with staff with mental health concerns and staff in general needing further support to manage the changes in structures.

8.1.6. Staff feel empowered to make decisions and fix issues there and then with a tenant and feel supported by senior management to challenge / push back where appropriate.

8.1.7. Managers have indicated performance managing poor staff is difficult and often avoided, due to fear of being unable to replace staff if they were to be terminated, in addition to feeling HR structures were not set up to support them to do so.

8.1.8. **Recommendation 13**: Altair recommend, where possible, including stakeholders from across the business to be involved in future change and be provided opportunities to shape future delivery. We also recommend (if not already in place), working with HR to identify wellbeing support options for staff who are currently struggling with the recent changes (move into the Council, restructure of teams).

9. Alignment with Mock Inspection report and recommendations

9.1.   The recommendations identified within the repairs 'reality check' have been developed into a table below and aligned with recommendations identified in the Mock Inspection report, to demonstrate where recommendations overlap and can be actioned simultaneously.

Table 4: Alignment with Mock Inspection Recommendations

Area	Recommendations from repairs 'reality check'	Alignment with recommendations from Mock Inspection report
Oversight, governance and assurance	**Recommendation 1:** To develop and implement a repairs policy and no access policy.	**Recommendation 3:** Develop a policy register of key policies for review and publication. Upon production of the policy register, Bury should seek to implement and review policies by risk.
	Recommendation 2: Review data management and data quality across the function.	**New Recommendation** (though aligned to Rec. 1: put in place an assurance framework)
	Recommendation 3: Bury should consider how assurance activities can become standing items at operational management meetings.	**Recommendation 1:** To put in place a clear assurance framework that outlines the responsibilities and accountabilities of each group, which is supported by suitable forward plans for each group
	Recommendation 4: An improvement plan should be developed in consideration with other activities required across the wider landlord function and with a particular emphasis on mapping dependencies between repairs, assets and compliance.	**Recommendation 4:** To consider developing a comprehensive action plan in conjunction with managers and supervisors within the property maintenance service to address all the areas of concern and based on
Reporting a Repair	**Recommendation 5:** Develop supporting information for Contact Centre staff including diagnostic tools and call scripts.	**New Recommendation**
	Recommendation 6: Develop guidelines for supporting tenants with vulnerabilities or additional needs.	**Recommendation 6:** To further develop data gathering on tenants diverse needs and ensure that the information is available and shared

		with those that need it to be able to provide services effectively, in line with data protection principles.
	Recommendation 7: Bury should ensure staff contact information and current roles are kept up to date in the internal directory (Intranet).	**New Recommendation**
Delivering a repair	**Recommendation 8:** Develop a suite of processes and procedures – ideally including a RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) model for each area of the business.	**New Recommendation**
	Recommendation 9: Develop a Schedule of Rates (SOR).	**New Recommendation**
	Recommendation 10: Undertake a review of current contracts in place and look to reprocure where required.	**New Recommendation**
	Recommendation 11: Bury should consider the current approaches to recruitment of critical roles within the function.	**New Recommendation**
Tenant satisfaction	**Recommendation 12:** Engagement and satisfaction could be strengthened through evidencing improvements made to delivery based on tenant experience and complaints, including feeding changes back to tenants.	**Recommendation 7:** To provide a more robust process for reporting on engagement activities and the outcomes of these in relation to influence and accountability.
Organisational culture	**Recommendation 13:** Altair recommend, where possible, including stakeholders from across the business to be involved in future change and be provided opportunities to shape future delivery	**New Recommendation**

10. Conclusion

10.1.1. The housing service is going through a period of transition since it was transferred back into Bury Council in January 2024. The repairs function has a high number of interim senior staff and is currently undergoing a restructure across its service.

10.1.2. The new structure will support the service to develop a 'client-contractor' relationship, in addition to setting out clear expectations in relation to roles and responsibilities.

10.2. There are a number of gaps identified internally and some work is already being developed in these areas but further work is required.

10.3. The service is missing some key elements to demonstrate compliance with the Safety and Quality standard, in particular not being able to evidence policies and procedures or value for money within delivery. These aspects should be considered as priority activities in order to meet requirements.

10.4. The lack of documented processes is a risk to consistent approaches to service delivery, and in supporting performance management, SLAs and risk management across operational activities.

10.5. Tenant feedback is positive, and this can be further strengthened through creating transparent expectations (repairs policy) and by evidencing learning from complaints and feedback into tangible actions.

Appendix 1   – Additional Repairs Documentation Reviewed

The documents below have been reviewed in addition to the original documents provided for the Mock Inspection report.	
Theme	Document name (including linked documentation)
Structures	Draft Structures – Head of Building Safety, Head of Property, Head of Direct Repairs
Processes & Procedures	CWPR001 - Emergency Access Procedure
	RMPR002 – Day to Day Repairs Process
	A.Disrepair Flow Chart PI
	B.Disrepair Flow Chart PI
	Damp and Mould Process Map – Draft- Copy
	Disrepairs Procedure
	No Access Process - Gas
	SIPR013 – DFA – Process for Work Carried out by RD Handover Sept 22
	Voids Process
Repairs Feedback	CX repairs data
	Repairs – Transactional Surveys Oct & Nov 24
Training	H&S Training
Productivity	240530 – Job Count operatives

Appendix 2 – List of Interviewees and meetings observed

No.	Interviewee
1	Interim Head of Compliance
2	Interim Head of Direct Works
3	Repairs and Maintenance Consultant

No.	Discussion Sessions
1	Interim Head of Compliance
2	Interim Head of Direct Works

No.	Meeting Observed
1	Repairs Managers Meeting

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