

Scrutiny Review:

How can Cheltenham Borough Council better work with tenants to improve the Repairs Process?

August 2025 – November 2025
Tenant Panel Scrutiny Review



CHEL TENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing services



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Table of contents

Introduction2

Aims, Objectives, Evidence Base4

Aims and Areas of Interest 4

Objectives 4

Evidence Base 4

Method5

Key Areas of Focus..... 5

Methods and Timeline..... 5

Who Has Been Involved?7

Tenant Panel Members 7

Staff Stakeholders..... 7

Summary of Key Findings.....8

Recommendations.....8

Recommendations Summary 8

1. Communication and Transparency..... 8

2. Workforce and Training 9

3. Systems and Data..... 9

4. Quality and Follow-Up 9

5. Tenant Engagement..... 9

Conclusion10



Introduction

The Tenant Panel is an independent group of residents who work closely with Cheltenham Borough Council to review housing services. Their role is to make sure that tenants' views and real-life experiences help shape how services are run and improved.

This review looks at the repairs service, which tenants regularly say is one of the most important parts of housing services. Repairs and maintenance are vital for keeping homes safe and comfortable. They also strongly affect how tenants feel about the Council as their landlord. In recent years, tenant feedback has shown a growing gap between what tenants expect and what they experience, especially around communication, waiting times, and consistency.

The Panel chose to review this service based on:

- Feedback from the **Acuity Tenant Perception Survey (Q1 2025/26)**
- Information gathered through the Council's own tenant engagement activities, including **follow-up surveys**

The Acuity survey showed that while **81.3% of tenants were satisfied** overall with the repairs service, **only 58.5% said they were very satisfied**. This suggests that experiences are very different depending on where people live and the type of property they have.

At the same time, **14.6% of tenants said they were dissatisfied**. The main reasons given were:

- Delays in communication
- Unclear timescales
- Needing several visits to fix the same problem

Although **83.8% of tenants were happy with the time** taken to complete their most recent repair, written comments showed frustration about long waits, poor follow-up, and the need to chase for updates.

Tenant comments supported these findings. Many people praised the politeness and professionalism of individual trades staff, but raised concerns about how the overall system works.



Common issues included:

- Difficulty contacting the right person
- Little or no updates after a repair was reported
- Not knowing who to contact to check progress

Some tenants said they “have to phone again and again to get repairs done,” while others described communication as “virtually non-existent.” Others mentioned poor quality or inconsistency, such as repairs being “done quickly but not properly,” or contractors visiting, taking photos, and then not returning.

This feedback shows that improving the repairs service is not just about fixing homes, but also about rebuilding tenants’ trust and confidence. Tenants made it clear that honesty and consistency matter more to them than speed alone. One tenant summed this up by saying:

“The organisation needs to communicate better with tenants and be honest about what they can and can’t do.”

In response, the Tenant Panel carried out a detailed review between August and November 2025. They were supported by the Community Investment Team and housing service leads at Cheltenham Borough Council. The aim was to understand how the repairs service currently works, what is working well, what needs to improve, and how staff and tenants can work together to deliver a better and more reliable service for everyone.





Aims, Objectives, Evidence Base

Aims and Areas of Interest

To explore how Cheltenham Borough Council can improve its repairs service so that tenants receive repairs on time, to a good standard, and with clear and regular communication at every stage.

Objectives

The review aimed to:

1. Understand how tenants experience the repairs process from first reporting a problem to completion and follow-up.
2. Identify the main reasons for delays, repeat repairs, and dissatisfaction.
3. Look at how well communication works between tenants, trades staff, and the contact centre.
4. Review how feedback and complaints are used to improve performance and responsibility.
5. Develop practical recommendations to improve tenant satisfaction and engagement.

Evidence Base

The review was based on:

- Data from the Acuity Tenant Perception Survey (471 responses), showing 81.3% overall satisfaction but clear differences in views on timing and communication.
- Complaint data (August 2024–August 2025), showing that almost 25% of Stage 1 complaints were about repair delays, unfinished work, or lack of follow-up.
- Written tenant comments highlighting communication problems, repeat visits, contractor standards, and difficulty contacting the right team.
- Interviews and a site visit with repairs staff, supervisors, and service leads to understand challenges and see how work is carried out.



Method

Key Areas of Focus

From the evidence, the Panel identified four main areas to investigate:

1. **Communication and Transparency** – How tenants are kept informed and whether messages are clear, consistent, and easy to access.
2. **Timeliness and Scheduling** – Whether repairs are completed on time and what causes delays or cancellations.
3. **Quality and Follow-Up** – How well work is checked, repeated if needed, and confirmed as complete.
4. **Accountability and Learning** – How data, complaints, and tenant feedback are used to improve the service.

These areas guided the Panel's review and helped capture both tenant experiences and staff views, leading to clear and practical recommendations.

Methods and Timeline

The Tenant Panel used a structured approach that combined data review with real tenant experiences. The review took place between August and November 2025.

1. Scoping and Planning (August 2025)

The Panel agreed clear aims, timescales, and measures of success. Using Acuity data, they identified communication, timing, and quality as key themes. A plan was created to explain how evidence would be collected and reviewed.

2. Data Review (September–October 2025)

The Panel reviewed:

- Acuity satisfaction scores for repairs and timeliness
- Complaint and compliment trends from the previous 12 months
- Performance data on response times, job completion, and first-time fixes
- Written tenant feedback showing real experiences



3. Service Lead Interview (October 2025)

Panel members met with the Interim Estates and Voids Manager, Jason Peters.

4. Tenant Engagement and Survey (October 2025)

An extra survey was sent to tenants by text and email, focusing on recent repairs. Several tenants responded, and two follow-up interviews were held. Feedback matched the Acuity results: staff were praised for being polite and skilled, but delays, poor communication, and weak follow-up were criticised. Some external contractors, such as I Williams, were praised for being more consistent.

5. Site Visit (October 2025)

The Panel visited Barlow Road and Pope's Close to see how repairs are reported, assigned, and recorded. They saw operatives using smartphones to record completed work with photos. While staff professionalism was clear, the visit also showed gaps in how information is shared between teams and tenants.

6. Analysis and Recommendations (November 2025)

All information was reviewed and grouped into themes. Communication and follow-up issues appeared repeatedly. The Panel developed practical and realistic recommendations, which will be reviewed with service leads.



Who Has Been Involved?

This review was a joint effort between tenants, staff, and managers.

Tenant Panel Members:

Kelly Johnson, Agnieszka Wisniewska, Edwin Trevena, Lisa Sheppard, Yvette White, Hanan Shami, Meg Riley, Tim Lansdown and Veronica Overton

Staff Stakeholders:

Andy Barrell – Business Analyst

Natasha Dhillon – Complaints Officer

Tilly Regan – Complaints Officer

Jason Peters – Interim Voids Manager

Liam Pem – Resident Engagement Officer

Ellen Pollicott – Community Investment Manager

Robert Nock – Estates Supervisor





Summary of Key Findings

The review found that the repairs service is supported by experienced and committed staff, but still faces problems with communication and consistency. Emergency repairs are usually completed on time, but delays can happen with routine or longer-term jobs, often due to staff shortages or scheduling pressures.

Communication was the biggest concern for tenants. While operatives were praised for their attitude and skills, many tenants said they felt “left in the dark” after reporting a repair. Having to chase updates or not knowing who to contact was often more frustrating than the delay itself.

The Panel also identified challenges around staffing levels, recruiting multi-skilled workers, and linking contractor systems. However, positive steps are being made, including better stock management, apprentice recruitment, and using photos to track work. The Panel believes that clearer communication, better coordination, and small changes to processes could greatly improve tenant satisfaction.

Recommendations

The Tenant Panel understands how complex it is to run a large repairs service. The recommendations focus on practical steps to improve communication, quality, and trust.

Recommendations Summary

1. Communication and Transparency

- Introduce a clear and consistent update system so tenants receive information at every stage, including for communal repairs. Use text or email updates where possible.
- Provide a simple “What You Should Expect” guide after a repair is reported, explaining timescales, next steps, and who to contact.
- Make contact routes clearer so tenants always know who to speak to and when they will receive updates.



2. Workforce and Training

- Continue investing in apprenticeships and refresher training to keep a strong, multi-skilled workforce.
- Encourage experienced staff to mentor new workers.

3. Systems and Data

- Ensure operatives upload clear before-and-after photos for every job and fully understand the work before attending, with the right tools and equipment.
- Explore a real-time repair tracking system, similar to parcel tracking, so tenants can follow progress from start to finish.

4. Quality and Follow-Up

- Arrange any follow-up visits before staff leave the property to avoid delays and confusion.
- Increase random inspections across different property types to check repair quality.

5. Tenant Engagement

- Share regular “You Said, We Did” updates to show how tenant feedback has led to real improvements.





Conclusion

The Tenant Panel believes the repairs service has a strong base built on genuine care for residents. While problems remain with communication and consistency, the service is well placed to improve.

What stands out most is the commitment of staff, many of whom have worked in the service for many years and take pride in doing a good job. This dedication, combined with new apprentices and managers who are open to learning from feedback, creates a real chance for long-term improvement.

Tenant feedback has been central to this review and has directly shaped the recommendations. The findings show a service that is willing to listen, learn, and improve through working in partnership with tenants.

The Panel is confident that with better communication, continued teamwork, and investment in people and technology, the repairs service can deliver a better experience for all tenants.

Overall, this review highlights not only areas to improve, but also a shared commitment to doing better. The foundations are in place for a repairs service that is efficient, reliable, and focused on what matters most: safe, well-maintained homes and tenants who feel informed, valued, and confident in their landlord.