

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Tuesday, 31 January 2023
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 9.20 pm
Members Present:	Councillors H Kane (Chairman), D Wixley (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, R Bassett, R Brookes, I Hadley, S Heather, J Lea, J McIvor, S Murray, S Patel and J H Whitehouse		
Members Present (Virtually):	Councillors P Bhanot		
Other Councillors:	Councillors S Heap, S Kane, A Lion, J Philip, D Stocker, C Whitbread, H Whitbread and K Williamson		
Other Councillors (Virtual):	Councillors C McCredie		
Apologies:	R Baldwin and R Jennings		
Officers Present:	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), J Gould (Interim Strategic Director), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), A Small (Section 151 Officer), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), C Graham (Project Team Manager (Performance)), T Larsen (PMO Support), R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer), P Wharfe (Interim Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), M Moore (ICT Business Applications Team Manager) and K Sarama (PMO Support Officer)		
Officers Present (Virtually):	A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), M Thompson (Interim Acting Service Director (Technical)) and J Warwick (Interim Acting Service Director (Contracts))		
Also in attendance:	S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director) and B Johnson (Qualis Management Managing Director)		

55. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

56. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that Councillor R Brookes had been appointed as substitute for Councillor R Baldwin.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor R Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 (Qualis – Overview), as he was a Non-Executive Director of the Qualis Group Board. The Councillor stated that he would remain in the meeting but would only listen to the debate.
- (b) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest during the discussion of item 12 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee – work programme) because he referred to Roding Valley High School where he was a teacher.

58. MINUTES

It was noted that the minutes of 3 November meeting previously circulated were amended slightly at Minute no 43 (Transfer of Service to Qualis) to replace, 'on 1 April 2023' with 'in April 2023'. This was because it contradicted the agenda report on quarter 3 Corporate Performance Reporting under project CPP054, where the transfer of Grounds Maintenance had been updated to 'about 17 April 2023'.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 3 and 17 November 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

59. MATTERS ARISING AND OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

It was noted that there were no matters raised or outstanding actions from the minutes of the previous meetings.

60. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

61. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

62. QUALIS - OVERVIEW

The Chairman introduced Qualis Group Managing Director, S Jevans, and the Managing Director of Qualis Management, B Johnson, who gave a presentation. This encompassed an oversight of the property management and housing repairs service Qualis provided on behalf of the Council. It also covered Qualis' values, complaints and lessons learnt, performance in 2020 / 21 and how the Council monitored Qualis and its key objectives.

Before the Chairman took members questions, the webcast was stopped for around ten minutes regarding a private letter a councillor wanted to refer to at the meeting. On earlier advice received from the Monitoring Officer, the Chairman and Chief Executive would not allow the councillor to refer to the letter, even in a generalised way, as its contents were being investigated.

B Johnson answered a range of questions with help from S Jevans, a selection of which are detailed below.

- More expensive repairs over £600 needed approval from the Housing Asset Team as it was about managing the budget for the Council.
- In reply to whether the Council was saving money with Qualis, the Agreement was set up on historic pricing. Qualis was doing slightly less than the previous contractor but it was a challenging market as materials and staff costs were increasing. The Strategic Director and 151 Officer, A Small, added that Qualis' performance had been looked at and the productivity ratio had increased. Unless you go out to competition, you do not know the costs. Finance Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip, continued that officers were going through a procurement exercise for best value. Although this cost money, it was important to do benchmarking on costs and that the prices Qualis was charging were fair.
- Qualis was insourcing and employing people directly and delivering a better price usually, so doing more in-house repairs was better value for money.
- If a service failure complaint was received by the Council but it was Qualis' responsibility, it would be transferred to the Qualis Contact Centre unless both of us were involved in which case the Council would take the lead.
- Assurance was given Qualis did prioritise its service around Council tenants' vulnerabilities and did not just focus on productivity, as customer satisfaction was important, in reply to a concern our criteria threshold with vulnerable people seemed too high.
- Feedback from staff who had transferred to Qualis liked the cultural difference of working for a commercial company, its values, the measures in place, the positive culture and focus on delivering and improving performance. An engagement survey would also be undertaken.
- There was a request for the presentation to be circulated as part of the minutes, which was agreed.
- Of the 75 staff at Qualis, 25 were from the Council.
- Qualis was considering applying for Investors in People accreditation and it was agreed that updates on the process would be provided in due course.
- Voluntary Action provided help on small jobs around tenants' homes. Councillor H Whitbread advised there was a small service charge but there was quite a long waiting list.
- Qualis took over the boiler repair contract from Gracelands in April 2022 and it was a legal requirement to service tenants' gas boilers.
- In reply to a spike in demand for boiler repairs during the December cold snap when tenants used their heating, back up contractors had been used, not Gracelands.
- Amazon Cloud was a web-based product used remotely and backed up to the cloud.
- On customer surveys, Qualis focussed on transaction surveys which were followed up with the HRA to make improvements. The Council, as a social housing provider, undertook a different survey that was required by the regulator. This would be undertaken by the Council in the next 12 months and data would be corroborated with Qualis. As the regulator's questions were prescribed, it was easy to compare results with other local authorities.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee received an overview of Qualis.

Action:

- (1) That the Qualis presentation be included as part of the minutes.

63. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN YEAR 5 2022/23 - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORTING**(a) Priority projects – Quarterly progress updates**

The Committee raised the following queries.

CPP009 Housing & Asset Management System

The HRA Interim Service Director, P Wharfe, advised members that as the project was in the red for quarter 3, an external review of progress took place in December 2022. The project's delivery would be rebased in January 2023 with a revised timeline.

CPP026 Waste Management Contract

The Interim Acting Service Director (Contracts), J Warwick, informed the Committee the current contract with Biffa was until 4 November 2024. The Finance Portfolio Holder, who had attended the Waste Management Partnership Board meeting earlier today, continued that it looked hopeful waste collections would improve if Biffa delivered what it was promising to improve matters, as the backlog had been cleared. The Waste Management Team was working with a difficult situation and wanted a reliable service as did residents, so the Council needed to ensure waste collection services improved. It was acknowledged the Customer Contact Team had employed more staff to answer residents' phone calls.

When a councillor was concerned a Biffa refuse vehicle's wing mirror had brushed the top of her head while walking along a pavement in Waltham Abbey recently, J Warwick assured the councillor he would raise this issue with Biffa as pedestrian care was paramount. He was also not aware if side mirrors had to be a certain height.

CPP054 Transfer Services into Qualis

Although a councillor was unhappy quarter 3 status was at green because in his opinion Grounds Maintenance should not have been transferred, the Finance Portfolio Holder was pleased as the project was on schedule and would deliver what was expected.

CPP090 North Weald Master Planning/Enterprise Zone

In reply to a query, the Project Management Office Manager, C Graham, advised the project sponsor would be updated. The Finance Portfolio Holder added that he was having regular project meetings with D Goodey, Service Manager (Commercial).

(b) Quarterly KPI reporting**Customer Services: Overall Customer Satisfaction**

R Pavey, Service Director (Customer), replied there were a number of ways customer satisfaction was monitored and included how customers were treated but that they might not get the answer they wanted.

Customer Services: First Point Resolution

R Pavey advised the Committee the target would be reviewed in the following year and moved up.

Community Health and Wellbeing: No of homelessness approaches

When the 22% increase on the same period last year was queried for quarter 3, J Gould, Strategic Director, confirmed a response would be provided for the minutes by the Homelessness Team Manager, D Blake.

Community Health and Wellbeing: Engagement in community, physical or cultural activity

Play in the Park was acknowledged as being a very popular children's activity, but as EFDC had increased its prices significantly for next year, Loughton Town Council had halved its bookings. J Gould acknowledged these changes to the programme, but the Council would be monitoring these activities over the next 12 months.

Contracts: No of people on Learn to Swim Programme (Swimming lessons)

As a councillor had received complaints that lessons were being cancelled and there was currently no teacher for the older children, J Warwick reported that it was an ongoing process and Places Leisure was continually recruiting. It was quite a lengthy process to train swimming teachers and get DBS checks done.

Housing Management: Rent Arrears

Answering a query on why 102% of the rent due from council home tenants was paid, P Wharfe advised more rent debits and recovery of other monies from previous years had been collected.

Planning and Development: Percentage of applications determined within agreed timelines: Minor and Other

The Planning Services Director reported that the Local Plan should go to Council for adoption but the policies in the emerging Local Plan were being used in the decision-making process. Although performance was still on red status, the percentage of applications determined on time had improved. Planning officers had been very busy and removed the backlog.

Less agency staff were being used as Planning Services now had staff who had been with EFDC for several years. Hopefully when the Local Plan was adopted, more applications would be submitted, but Planning Services might need to bring in additional resources.

RESOLVED:

That the committee reviewed the FY 2022-23 Corporate Performance reporting for quarter 3.

Actions:

- (2) CPP090 North Weald Master Planning/Enterprise Zone – that C Graham update the project sponsor.
- (3) Community Health and Wellbeing: No of homelessness approaches – that the Homelessness Team Manager provide information on why there had been a 22% increase.

(Post meeting update:

Action (3): the Homelessness Team Manager provided this reply after the meeting. The 22% increase in homelessness applications was being caused by three main areas in particular, domestic abuse, family and friend's no longer being able or willing to accommodate and people's accommodation within the private rented sector coming to an end.

There were a number of factors contributing to those three increasing causes of homelessness, but in the main:

1. **Domestic Abuse** - *The Domestic Abuse Act received royal assent in April 2021, and we have continued to see a rise in presentations where domestic abuse was the reason for homelessness. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 6 homeless applications with domestic abuse as the sole reason for the approach. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 14 applications where domestic abuse was the sole reason for approach – **that was an increase of 133% on the same period last year.***
2. **Family License Terminations** – *This had always been the leading cause of homelessness within Epping Forest District, as it was for most councils, but we were seeing a steady rise in applications where family were no longer willing to accommodate each other and I think, certainly for last quarter and those moving forward, this could largely be attributed to the cost-of-living crisis first and foremost. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 22 homeless applications where family/friends were asking a member of their household to leave. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 38 homeless applications where family/friends were asking a member of their household to leave – **that was an increase of 72% on the same period last year.***
3. **End of privately rented accommodation** – *This was the second leading cause of homelessness within Epping Forest District. We were seeing an increasing number of landlords selling their accommodation because of financial hardship. Equally, the main reason for customers approaching us from this type of tenure was because they were worried about being able to afford it. In Q3 of 2021, we took a total of 10 applications where the ending of privately rented accommodation was the reason for homelessness. In Q3 of 2022, we took a total of 19 applications where the ending of privately rented accommodation was the reason for homelessness – **that was an increase of 90% on the same period last year.***

64. CHAIRMEN TO REPORT ON THEIR SELECT COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(a) Stronger Communities Select Committee

The January meeting had been cancelled but two meetings were scheduled for March. Councillor J Lea remarked that a lot of items had been completed but she wanted the select committee to scrutinise a housing association.

(b) Stronger Council Select Committee

Councillor J McIvor reported that on 24 January the select committee had received an interesting presentation on the onboarding/induction process and was updated on the developments of the Wellbeing Hub, which set a high standard for other local authorities. Members also pre-scrutinised the Cabinet's draft budget proposals for 2023/24.

(c) Stronger Place Select Committee

The select committee had reviewed an update on parking, the Off Street Civic Parking Enforcement Policy, and the Air Quality Action Plan. Councillor R Balcombe added that progress of the Local Plan and sustainable transport were due on 7 March. Members also wished to know when the Climate Change Action Plan would

be scrutinised. They also wanted to add scrutiny of Planning to their work programme and A Small offered to liaise with the Chairman on this.

Following a query on internal communications to councillors before the local media, Councillor C Whitbread commented that press releases, agendas, minutes and emails were regularly sent out. He further clarified that on a recent Biffa matter there was a slight delay before communications were announced, as progress and agreement between the waste contractor and the Council had to be agreed first.

RESOLVED:

That the select committee Chairmen reported on progress against the achievement of their respective current work programme.

65. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Current Work Programme

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed progress against its work programme and noted that pre-scrutiny of the business case for the transfer of MOT and Fleet was on hold and no longer on the Cabinet's Key Decision List, so this item would be removed from the current work programme. Also, the Epping Forest District Museum's operating model would be scheduled for the next municipal year.

(b) Reserve Programme

There were no reserve work programme items.

Councillor S Murray commented that quite rightly external scrutiny of the Epping Forest Sixth Form Consortium had not been undertaken, as the sixth forms in the consortium of schools had always operated independently. However, he announced that Roding Valley High School had an outstanding sixth form following a recent OFSTED report.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee reviewed its current and reserve work programmes.

Action:

- (4) That the business case for the transfer of MOT and Fleet be removed from the work programme.

66. CABINET BUSINESS

Cabinet's Key Decision List (KDL) of 3 January 2023 was scrutinised by the Committee and the following points were raised.

(a) Portfolio – Leader

Local Government Council Size and Boundary Review – Councillor C Whitbread advised the final proposals from the Boundary Commission for England were expected by early March.

(b) Internal Resource

Pay strategy – to clarify a query if this future decision would involve moving away from national agreements, Councillor S Kane replied, no. The Council was required to publish a mandatory statement on our pay strategy on the website.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee reviewed the Executive's current programme of Key Decisions of 3 January 2023.

CHAIRMAN



Oversight & Scrutiny 31st January 2023

Agenda

- Overview of Capability and What we Deliver
- Our Values
- Complaints and Lessons Learnt
- Performance in 2021/22
- How the Council monitors our performance
- Key objectives in 2022/23



Our Services



- ✔ General repairs – outside and inside your home and in communal areas
- ✔ Gas heating breakdowns/repairs
- ✔ Annual gas safety checks
- ✔ Electrical safety checks
- ✔ Void (empty) properties – Preparing them to hand back to EFDC to rent
- ✔ Planned works programme – full replacement of kitchen and bathroom installations and electrical rewires
- ✔ Customer Feedback including compliments, complaints and customer satisfaction (see contact below)

Contact Qualis Customer Service Centre

- ☎ 0333 230 0464
- @ repairs@qualismanagement.co.uk
- qualismanagement.co.uk
- 💬 Available via our website above (Mon-Fri 10:00 – 16:30 except bank holidays)

For Qualis Management Customer Feedback please contact:
Call our Customer Service Centre on the number above or

- @ feedback@qualismanagement.co.uk
- qualismanagement.co.uk/feedback/

- ✔ Major planned works programmes (incl. full window replacement, front and rear door replacement, complete roof replacement and estate regeneration)
- ✔ Properties with major structural issues.
- ✔ Some larger works will be referred to EFDC where their Housing Assets team will manage
- ✔ Authorisation for alterations to your home
- ✔ Estates and Land / Ground maintenance
- ✔ Disabled adaptations to your home following Occupational Therapist (OT) referral
- ✔ Tenancy and Housing enquiries
- ✔ Rent enquiries
- ✔ Home ownership/leaseholder enquiries

EFDC cover a wide range of services including council tax, recycling and rubbish collections, planning applications as well as many more services and these can be found on their website listed below.

Contact EFDC Customer Service Centre

- ☎ 01992 564000
- @ www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/



Resource- Operatives

- 75 staff
- Repairs 80% self delivered
- Voids 25% self delivered
- Gas 95% self delivered
- Electrical 50% self delivered



Resource- Customer Contact Centre

- Team Leader and 6 staff
- Amazon Connect (New in Jan 22)
 - Webchat
 - Call back
 - Quality monitoring
- Number of calls 24,300 (per year)
- Customer Experience Assistant

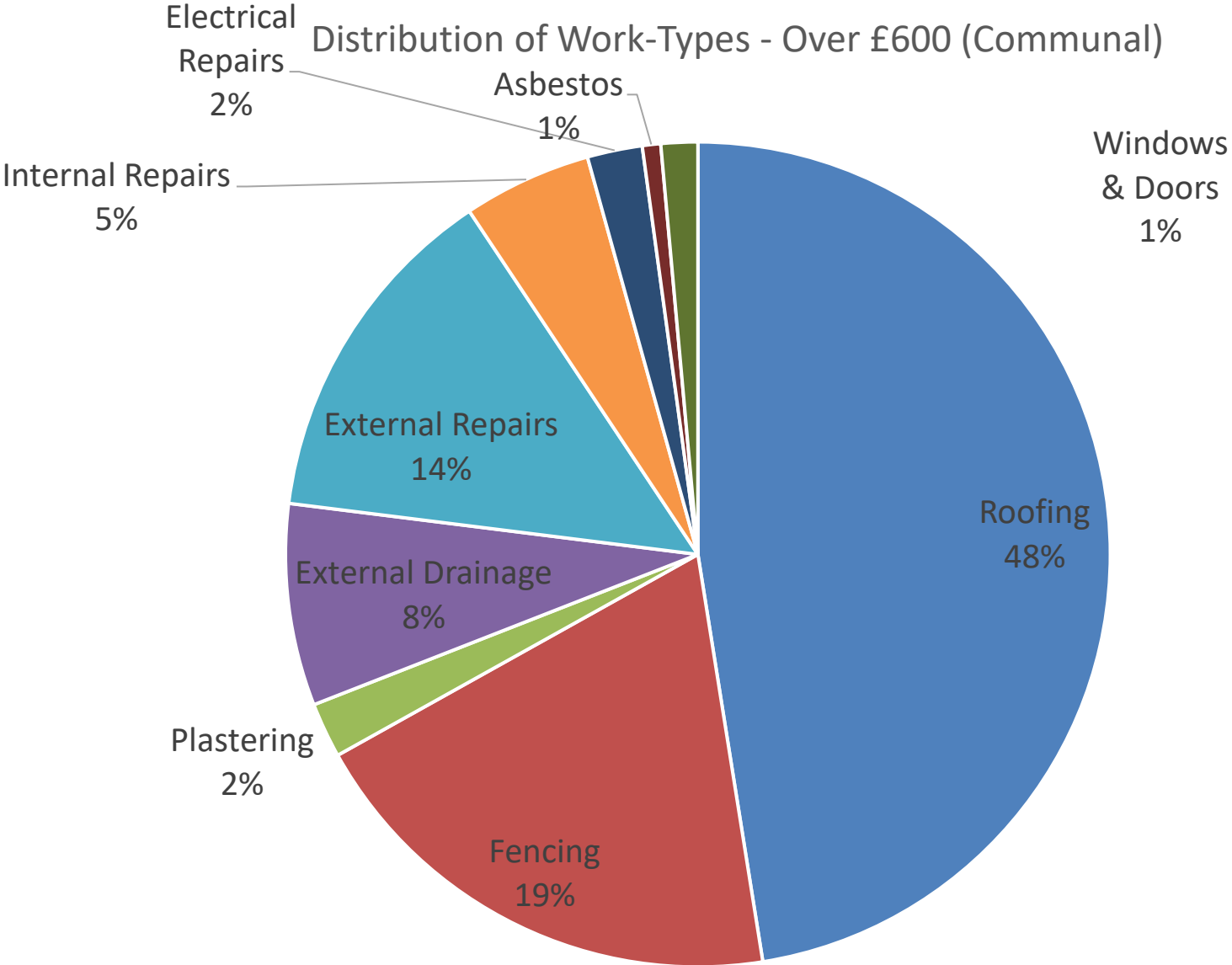


SLA Model



	Historic	QM	EFDC
Repairs (6253)	£452 ppp	£420 - £600	Over £600 Approval
Voids (352)	£5,300 ppv	£5,301 - £10k	Over £10k Approval
Gas (6253)	£195 ppp	£171 pp	BER Approval

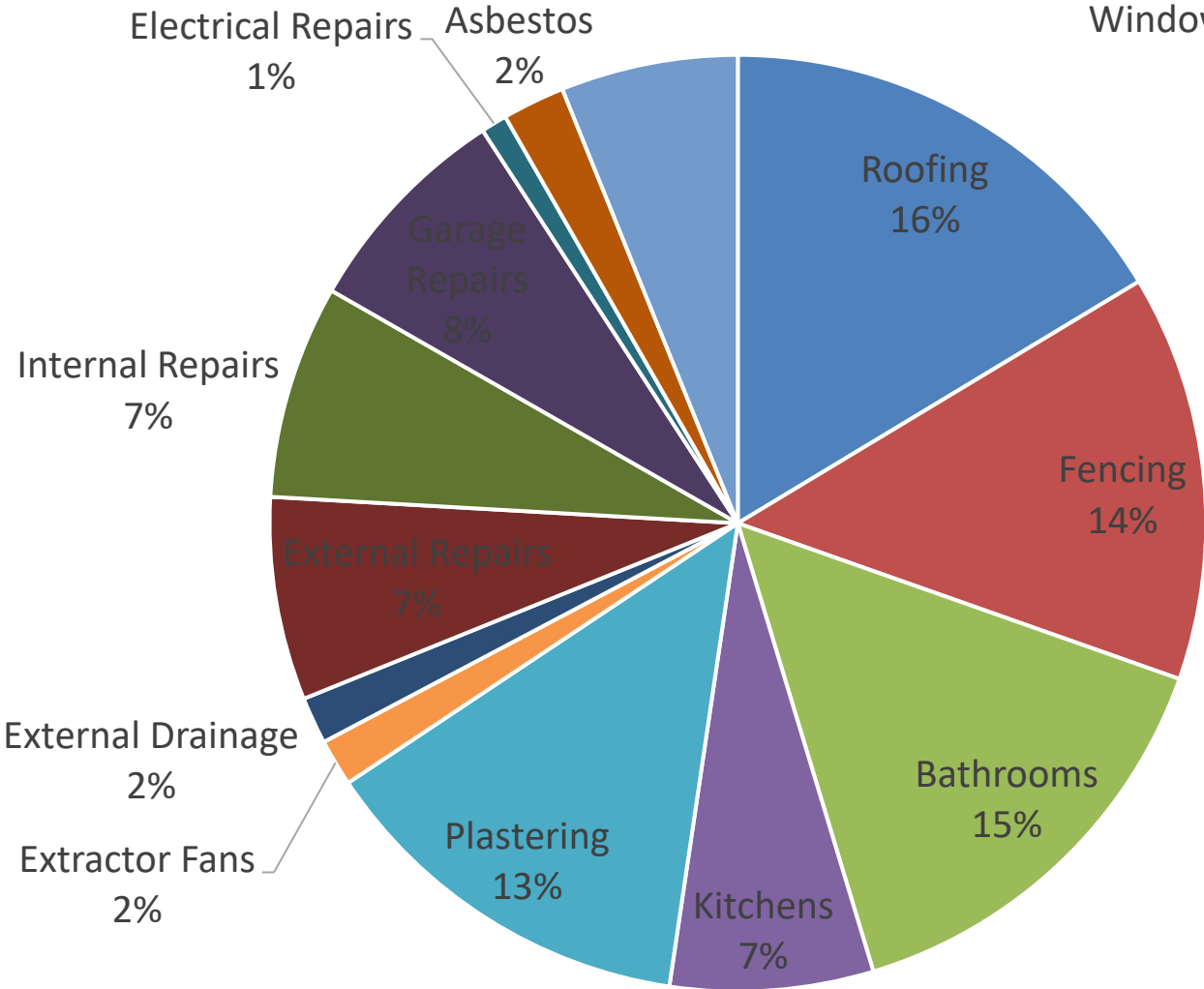
SLA Model



SLA Model



Distribution of Work-Types - Over £600 (Dwellings & Garages)



Our Values



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We are customer focused



We think commercially



We take personal ownership



We work as one team

Our Values

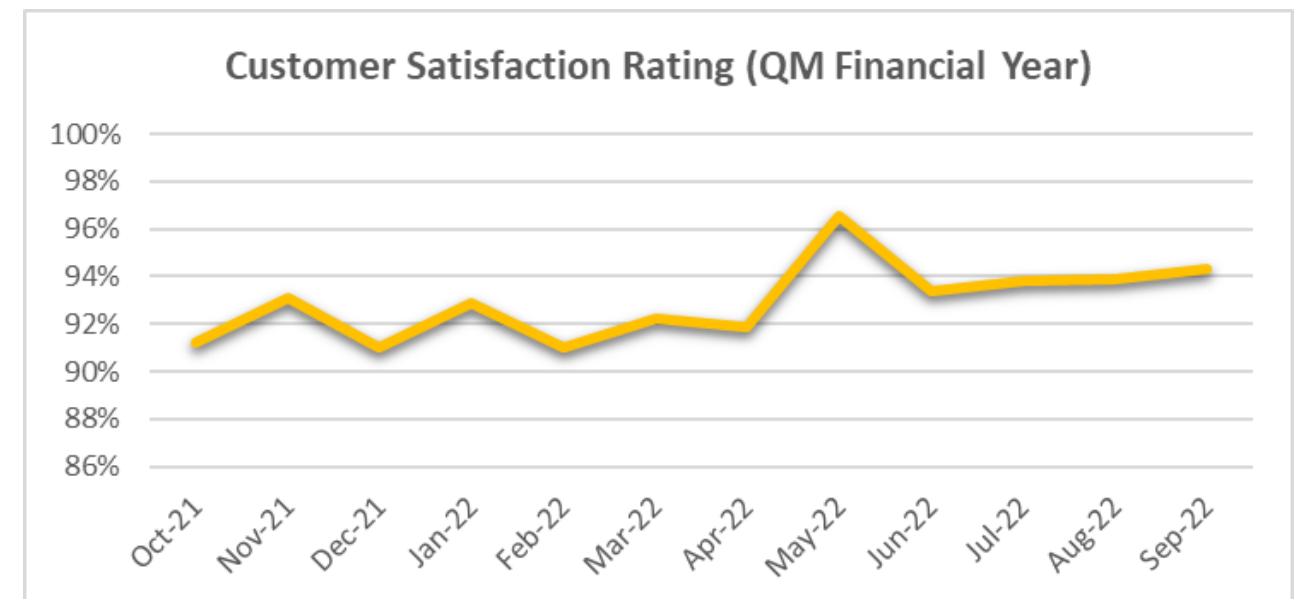
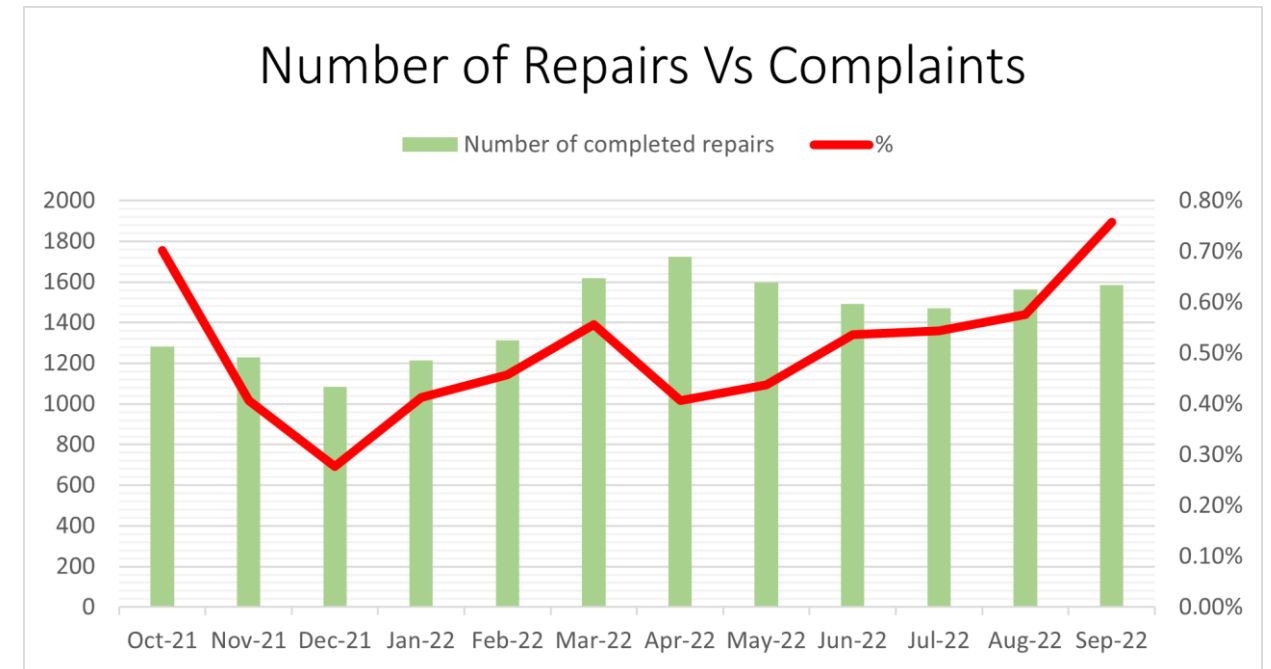
Our values are critical to our success and are core to how we deliver high quality services to our customers



Customer feedback Oct 21 – Sep 22

- 17,174 completed repairs
- 22% return rate (plus EFDC surveys in next few months)
- 93% customer satisfaction (surveys)
- 1,112 compliments (6.4% of total repairs completed)
- 88 complaints (**0.5% of total repairs completed**)
- Total feedback - 7% complaints vs 93% compliments
- 91% complaints responded to within target (since Jan 22 100% of complaints responded to within target)

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Complaints Reasons & Resolutions



Main causes of complaints

- Length of time to complete repairs
- Material supply issues
- Communication

Case study

- Sometimes it goes wrong but important that we learn and make changes
- Customer called and said that heating isn't getting up to temperature.
- Our call operative didn't ask about vulnerability and put on a 10-day repair.
- Customer wasn't happy and put a google review and contacted Councillors but didn't make a formal complaint.
- Resolution attended that afternoon.
- Further training and monitoring of Contact Centre operator



Complaints Reasons & Resolutions



General Improvements

- Customer complaints re. delays and issues with blown and broken glass units when needed replacing – brought on Crystal Clear to deal with blown units to reduce wait times and costs.
- Customer complained the electrical testing was unclear and there was no option on the phones to select for electrical testing – We changed the wording on all letters to make it clearer and added an option for customers to select if they had electrical testing queries.
- Customers complaining of delays for heating repairs – changed procedure of using one supplier and sourced two alternative suppliers so if it takes over a certain number of days to get a part, we will source through another supplier to speed up the repair.



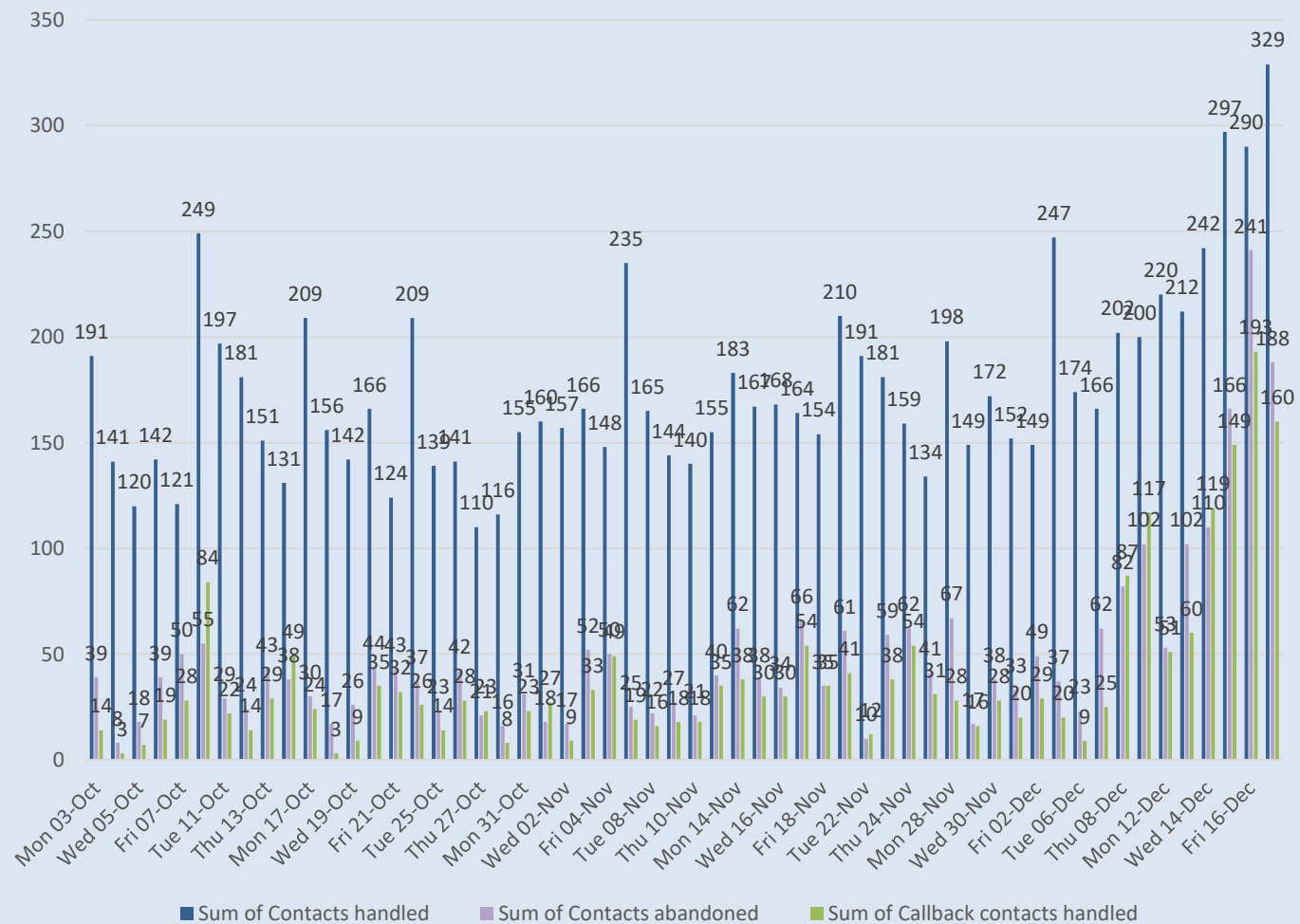
Performance Impact



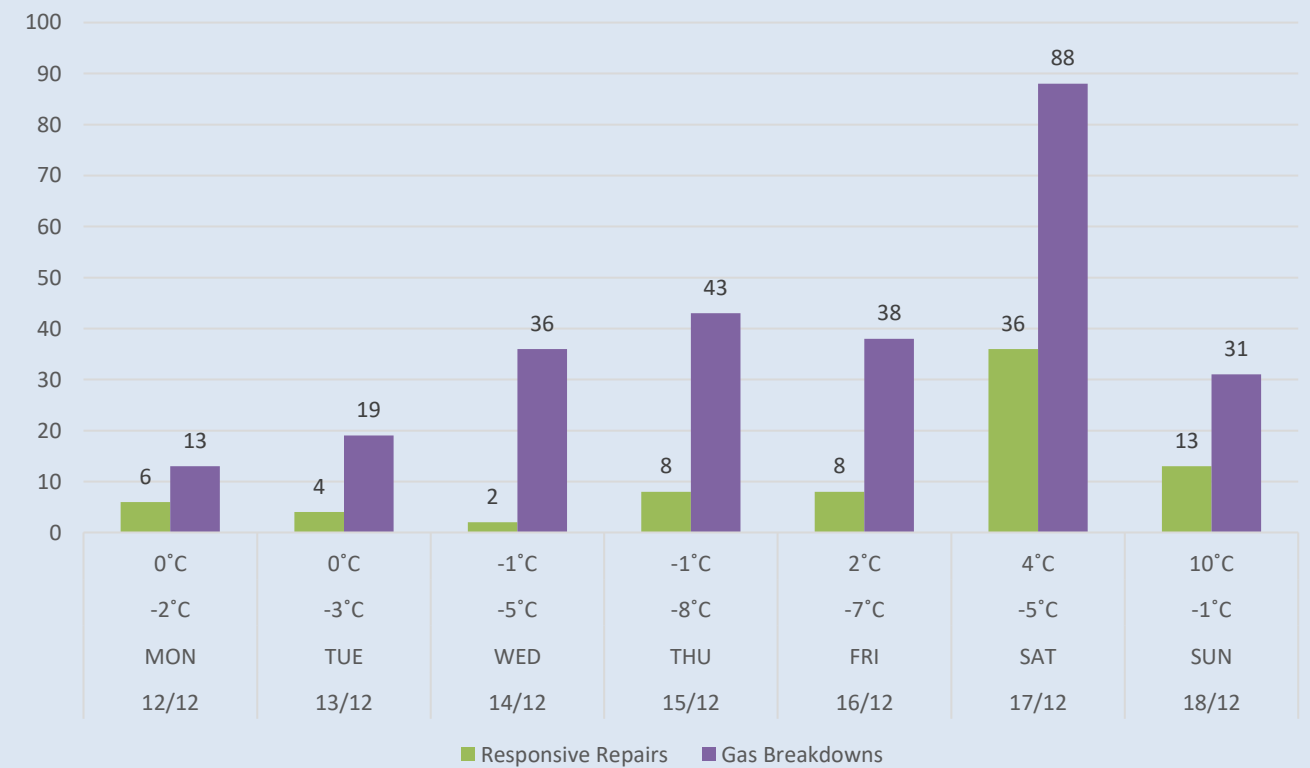
- Cold weather in December- Very high demand for gas breakdowns.
- Contact Centre calls doubled.

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Breakdown of number of calls by weekday: 03/10/22 - 19/12/22



Out of Hours 12/12 to 19/12



Performance 2021/22 Year End (Sept to Oct)



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RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS	Year End 20/21	Year End 21/22	Bench mark	Target 21/22	Target 22/23
Responsive Repairs (all priorities) Completed at Customer Convenience within Target.	76%	84%	90%	90%	90%
Customer Satisfaction Survey	96%	93%	89%	90%	92%
Productivity- Average Jobs per Operative (per day)	3.4	3.7	4.0	4.0	4.0
Repairs Completed on First Visit % (FTF)	80%	86%	87%	80%	85%
Gas Servicing – Compliance	N/A	99.6%	N/A	100%	100%
VOIDS	Year End 20/21	Year End 21/22	Bench mark	Target 21/22	Target 22/23
Percentage of Void Priorities Completed within Target Time	56%	95%	97.8	90%	90%
Average Void Turnaround Time (working days)	22 Days	20 Days	23 Days	25 Days	23 Days

How EFDC Monitor our Performance



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Providing high quality property solutions to our customers

What We Delivered in 2021/22



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We are extremely proud of our end of financial year performance and achievements



17,174 completed responsive repairs



3,144 Gas services



313 Voids



21 formal complaints and 65 informal resolved



Identified £0.5m of ongoing savings through offering new contracts at a reduced cost against previous contract arrangements



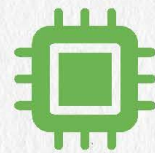
Profitable at year end



Offered four apprentice roles to the local community



Reduced the use of contractors and more work insourced, creating circa 20 new roles



Technology introduced to track individual performance and productivity



New cloud-based telephony solution, call back and Artificial Intelligence technology



Mobilised three new service work streams

Providing high quality property solutions to our customers



Key Objectives



2022/23

- Increase in-sourcing of works.
- New work streams successfully mobilised
- Exploring external works opportunities
- Review of our customer experience standards
- Increasing apprenticeships



How to Contact us



Councilor Contact

- Members Briefing
- CouncillorContact@qualisgroup.com

