Emergency repairs
to council houses

Contents

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities and the health service in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources.

The Commission has five main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit

- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions

- reviewing the management arrangements which audited bodies have in place to achieve value for money

- carrying out national value for money studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government and the NHS

- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information which they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils, 36 joint boards (including police and fire services), 15 health boards, 47 NHS trusts and five other NHS bodies. In total, these organisations spend public funds worth around £12 billion a year.

Executive summary

There are over 610,000 council dwellings in Scotland, worth around £23 billion in replacement cost terms. As landlords, authorities have statutory repair obligations, and during 1996/97 spent a total of about £345 million on repairs and maintenance to their stock. This covered planned maintenance work and response repairs - those notified by tenants.

Emergency repairs are those which fall into the most urgent of the categories used by authorities to classify response repairs. They include, for example, burst pipes, broken windows, and faulty electrics - repairs which, if unattended, could cause injury, or damage to the building fabric.

Emergency repairs are important for reasons of both service quality and cost, and there may also be health and safety implications if they are not addressed. How well authorities handle repairs will be a major influence on tenants' perceptions of service quality; repairs frequently crop up as problems in members' surgeries. Emergency repairs are also costly, frequently carrying a premium on top of the price of less urgent repairs.

A total of about 700,000 repairs to council dwellings in 1996/97 were classed as emergencies. This represented 32% of the total response repairs. The number of emergency repairs per dwelling per year varied widely - in one area it was 0.05 emergency repairs per dwelling, whilst in another it was 3.42 per dwelling. At an average cost of around £47 per emergency repair, the total cost of the service is around £33 million per year.

Causes of emergency repairs

Variations in levels of emergency repairs can be attributed to variations in the levels of:

- over-categorisation - treating less serious repairs as emergencies
- fair wear and tear - affected by age of stock and levels of previous investment
- vandalism
- tenant misuse/abuse.

There is scope to reduce the levels of over-categorisation of repairs in some authorities. A number of councils are already taking action - by monitoring levels of over-categorisation, by training repairs clerks, by using IT to help identify required repairs and by tightening the definition of which repairs constitute emergencies.

Savings of up to £1.3 million across Scotland may be possible if councils take action to reduce levels of over-categorisation of repairs.

Authorities have less influence over the numbers of emergency repairs arising from fair wear and tear - these in part depend on age of stock and the levels of previous investment. However, reductions in levels of repairs arising from wear and tear can be made by monitoring which repairs are occurring where, and incorporating them in planned maintenance programmes where possible. In the longer term, increasing the level of investment in planned, preventative maintenance should reduce both the numbers of emergency and total response repairs.

Vandalism and tenant misuse and abuse give rise to emergency repairs. Although councils have less control over these factors than over levels of over-categorisation, actions to reduce them can still be taken. For example, investment in anti-vandalism measures may be justified by reductions in emergency repairs. Also, issuing guidance material on tenants' responsibilities and on recharge policies may help to reduce levels of tenant abuse in some areas.

So, although some of the factors which give rise to emergency repairs are more under the control of authorities than others, there are a variety of actions available to councils which will help to reduce levels of emergency repairs.

Costs of emergency repairs

Contracts for emergency repairs can be on a stand-alone basis or as part of a bulk contract covering emergency and less urgent repairs. Reductions in the direct cost of emergency repairs can be made by ensuring that those paid on a dayworks basis are kept to a minimum and by ensuring that there is tight monitoring of contractors' charges.

Levels of pre-inspection and post-inspection of repairs vary among authorities. The need for pre-inspection of emergency repairs should be assessed carefully. Pre-inspections may increase the time taken from notification to completion and add cost. The need for pre-inspections may be reduced by actions such as training of repairs clerks and making available good technical support - the actions are similar to those required to reduce levels of over-categorisation.

Management information

Authorities require good management information to be able to take effective action to reduce numbers of emergency repairs and their costs. For example:

- a knowledge of how many repairs are caused by vandalism, or misuse/abuse is needed before decisions on the cost-effectiveness of deterrent measures can be made

- a knowledge of the number of repairs occurring outwith normal working hours is needed, as it will be relevant when a price is agreed for bulk contract repairs

- a knowledge of the number and nature of repairs paid for on a dayworks basis is needed to decide which should be done on a schedule of rates basis

- a knowledge of how many repairs are being treated as emergencies when they are less urgent is needed to assess how much over-categorisation is costing the authority.

Many councils did not report information on these and other points. Given the importance of emergency repairs, authorities should ensure that they have management information systems in place which will allow them to track the effectiveness of actions taken to reduce levels of emergency repairs and/or their costs.

Improvements

Authorities can reduce their emergency repair costs in two ways - reducing the number of emergency repairs and reducing the costs of repairs (exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Where improvements may be made

Authorities can reduce both numbers and costs of emergency repairs.

Reductions in the level of repairs	Reductions in the costs of repairs
Reductions may be made in the level of repairs which are over-categorised by: • defining unambiguously which repairs will be treated as emergencies and communicating these effectively to tenants, staff and members • increasing training for repairs staff • increasing IT and technical support for repairs clerks.	**Reductions in the direct costs of repairs may be made by the following means:** • reducing the number of repairs which are carried out on a dayworks-priced basis rather than on a schedule of rates basis • ensuring that the risk of overcharging by contractors is kept to a minimum by random checks on work claimed compared with work carried out.
Reductions may be made in the level of repairs due to tenant abuse and misuse by: • communicating and applying recharge policies • considering altering lease conditions to make certain repairs commonly caused by misuse the responsibility of the tenant.	**Reductions in the indirect costs of repairs may be made by the following means:** • reducing the level of post-inspection of repairs to between 10% and 20%, by developing a range of checks on possible over-charging • reducing the level of pre-inspection of repairs where possible, by working to improve accuracy of repair identification.
Reductions may be made in the level of repairs due to vandalism by: • installing anti-vandalism measures where it is cost-effective to do so.	
Reductions in the level of repairs arising from fair wear and tear may be made by: • extending, where possible, the planned, preventative maintenance programme.	

Introduction

Background

All 32 authorities in Scotland act as landlords for council houses. Stock levels range from just over 1,000 dwellings in the Orkney Islands to around 100,000 in Glasgow. In total, there are over 610,000 council dwellings in Scotland, worth around £23 billion in replacement cost terms[1].

As landlords, authorities have statutory repair obligations, and during 1996/97 spent a total of around £345 million[2] on repairs and maintenance to their stock. This work covered:

- planned maintenance: the programme of work to maintain and renew houses, eg renewal of window frames, or re-roofing work

- response repairs: those that are carried out in response to the tenant's notification of a problem, eg loose floorboards or broken guttering

- emergency repairs: those response repairs which need urgent attention, eg broken locks or burst pipes.

This report deals with the service provided by councils on emergency repairs. It is an important part of the overall housing service, particularly because how well an emergency repair is handled will be a major influence on what the tenant thinks about the council as a landlord.

Emergency repairs are important for other reasons:

- they are more costly than planned work. They generally carry a premium charge rate because they need to be attended to more quickly than other repair work. Thus, the higher the level of emergency repairs in an authority, the less money may be available for non-emergency repairs and for planned maintenance programmes

- they disrupt work schedules. If a joiner has to be pulled off his or her work to secure a broken window, then the planned work has to reprogrammed, at some inconvenience to tenants, and loss of efficiency for the contractor

- if emergency repairs are not addressed quickly, the level of damage to the dwelling may increase, leading to more substantial and so more costly repair work

- there may be health and safety risks to the tenant and also possibly to the public.

The emergency repairs service

The repairs service depends on a series of effective handovers of information - accurate information passed timeously at each step of the chain - from tenant to repairs clerk, to contractor's depot to operative and so on (exhibit 2). For an effective emergency repairs service, these handovers have to be done both quickly and accurately.

Exhibit 2: The emergency repairs process

There are a number of handovers in the process.

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │    Repair notified  │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Repairs clerk       │─────▶│    Repair may       │
                    │ identifies, codes   │      │  be pre-inspected   │
                    │ and issues          │      └─────────────────────┘
                    │ works order         │                │
                    └─────────────────────┘                │
                              │                             │
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                    ┌─────────────────────┐◀───────────────┘
                    │    Job sent to      │
                    │  contractor's depot │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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                    │ Repair completed    │─────▶│    Repair may       │
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                    │  Job satisfactory?  │
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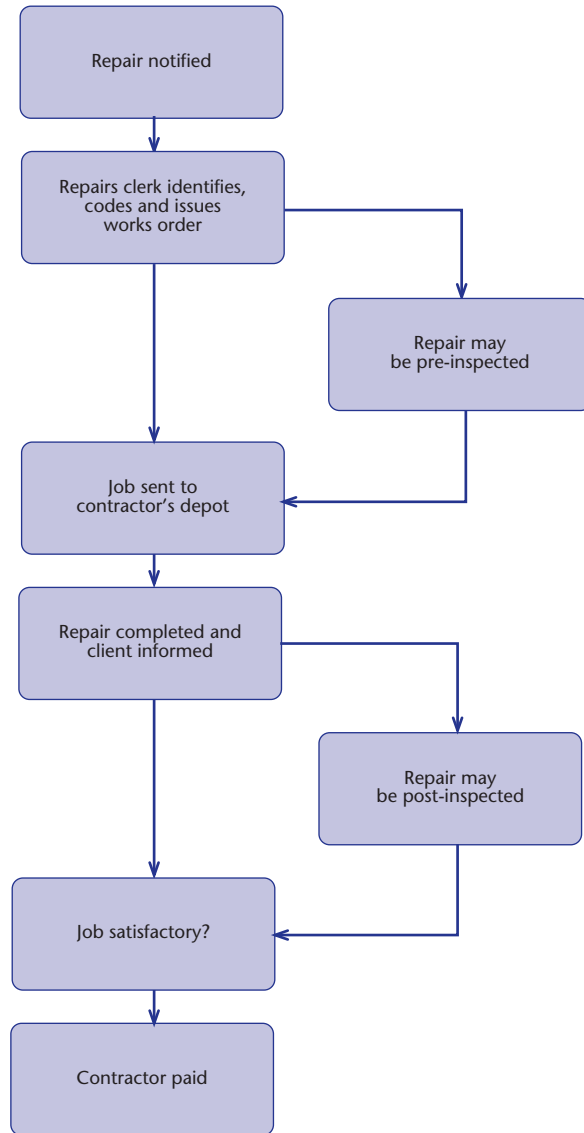
Emergency repairs are expensive; in most authorities they attract a premium payment, irrespective of whether required within or outwith normal working hours. This can be either an additional flat-rate sum or a percentage uplift on rates for non-emergency repairs. Some authorities have bulk contracts which cover all repairs, at an all-in price. In this case, the expected level of emergency repairs will influence the level of the all-in price.

The increased costs and disruption caused by emergency repairs mean that councils should be able to make savings if they reduce the number of emergencies. Savings may also be possible by reducing the average cost of emergency repairs. Also, if the service is managed well, for example, by ensuring that the repair is correctly identified and thus is more likely to be fixed at the first visit, tenants' perceptions of service quality will improve.

Accounts Commission study

The Accounts Commission decided to look at the management of emergency repairs for two reasons:

- their importance to service quality and control of costs in housing
- the large variation in levels of emergency repairs reported.

The study took place in two parts. Initial fieldwork in summer/autumn 1996 looked in detail at the practices of 10 councils, which completed a detailed questionnaire. Site visits were made to seven of these. An audit guide was prepared on the basis of this work and this supported the second part of the study - local value for money (VFM) audits of emergency repairs carried out by auditors appointed by the Accounts Commission in most councils across Scotland. As part of the audit, authorities completed a detailed questionnaire. These local audits are continuing, and the data in this report refer to those authorities for which data summaries were completed by December 1997. Housing departments which have received this local audit will have a tailored report and action plan reflecting their own particular circumstances.

This report pulls together the data gathered by local auditors and also uses data published by the Accounts Commission in *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*.

At the time of the study some authorities had merged the repairs and maintenance operations inherited from their predecessor councils at reorganisation in 1996, whilst others retained the former district systems on an area-by-area basis.

Therefore, data reported are mixed - some are whole-authority figures; others refer to different constituent areas and reflect the practices inherited from predecessor districts. In all, 31 data summaries were received from auditors relating to 18 authorities. Four authorities reported on the basis of their predecessor districts, and 14 reported on a whole-authority basis.

We use the term area to refer to data - whether from whole authorities or from the areas covered by their predecessor councils. The full list of councils from which data have been used and also those which participated in initial fieldwork is attached at appendix 1.

Emergency repair activity

What are emergency repairs?

Emergency repairs are those which fall into the most urgent of the categories used by authorities to classify response repairs. Different councils have different numbers of priority categories - emergency, urgent, routine, and so on - and set different target times for satisfactory completion.

Emergency repairs are those which are deemed to involve risk to health and safety of the tenant or the public, and/or damage to the fabric or security of the building. Authorities' definitions are broadly similar (box 1).

Box 1: Definitions of emergency repairs from different councils

- Emergency work relates to damage which could affect the health, safety or security of the tenant, or damage to the fabric of the building, if the repair is not attended to immediately.

- Emergency work is defined as fire, flood, structural damage, interruption of mains services (ie gas, electricity, water), total loss of heating in winter, securing properties and any repair required to remove a major risk to health and safety.

- A defect that would, if not attended to within 24 hours of notification, affect the tenant's health, safety or security, contravene current legislation or adversely affect the building's integrity or stability.

Nature of emergency repairs

The types of repairs occurring most often were plumbing jobs, accounting for 36% of emergencies (exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3: Split of emergency repairs by trade

The most common emergency repairs were plumbing jobs.
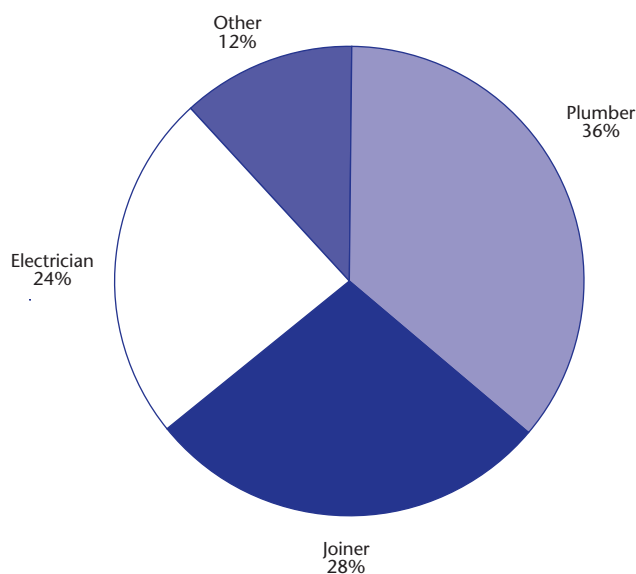
Source: questionnaires completed by authorities

The most common types of repairs for each trade are shown in the table below:

Plumbers	Joiners/Glaziers	Electricians
• leaking pipes/tanks	• forced entry, eg because of lost keys	• no power; sockets or lights not working
• blocked drain or toilet	• boarding up	• no heating

Repair categories

Most areas (80%) have three or four categories of response repairs, although some areas use as few as two, and others as many as five or six. Examples of the different response categories are shown below (exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4: Examples of authorities' response categories

Authorities vary widely in the number and target response times of their repair categories.
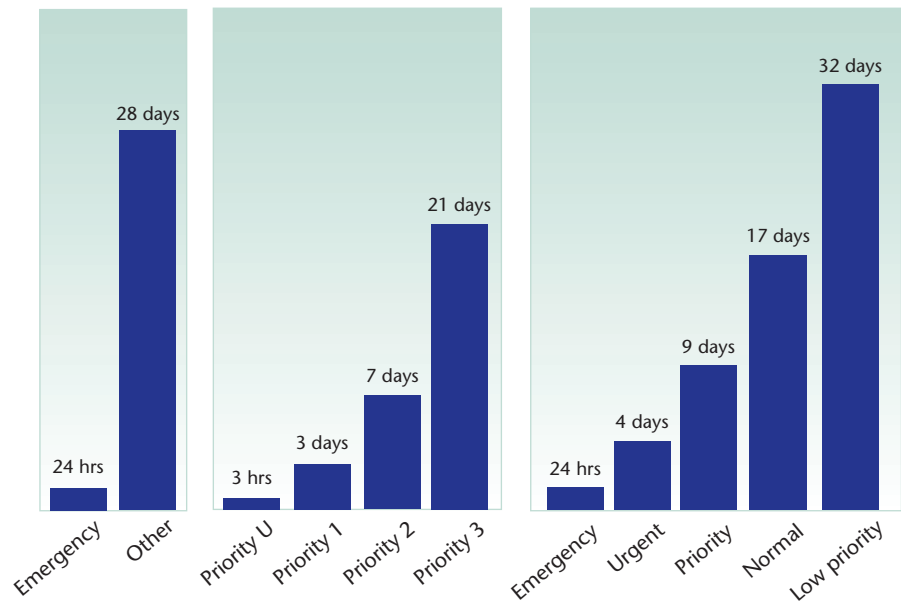
Source: Accounts Commission, *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*

In this study and in performance information data, emergency repairs are defined as those which fall into the most urgent priority category. In most councils, these are repairs to be completed within 24 hours; however, in some, it is less. The target response times[3] for emergency repairs ranged from 1 hour in two rural areas to 24 hours - the target of the majority (70%) of the areas.

Because of these differences in target completion times, the data were checked to see if there was a link between an area's target time for emergency repairs and the number per dwelling that it reported. There was no significant difference on average in the number of repairs per dwelling for areas with 24-hour target completion times and those with target times of less than 24 hours. For this reason, we make no distinction in the report between authorities reporting emergencies relating to response times ranging between 1 hour and 24 hours. However, points made about the management of emergency repairs may apply to other categories with short response times, not just the most urgent category.

Numbers of emergency repairs

The proportion of response repairs that were treated as emergencies varied hugely among authorities - ranging from 1% to 57% of all response repairs in 1996/97[4]. Across Scotland as a whole, emergency repairs accounted for 32% of the total response repairs. This represented around 700,000 jobs, an average of over one emergency repair per council dwelling over the year.

On a per dwelling basis, the range of emergency repairs varied from 0.05 in the Tweeddale area of Scottish Borders to 3.42 in Edinburgh.

The number of all response repairs, including emergencies, per dwelling also varied widely. The range was from one per dwelling in the Badenoch and Strathspey area of Highland council to over seven repairs per dwelling in Edinburgh (exhibit 5, page 10).

Rural areas were more likely to have lower levels of emergency repairs than urban areas, and this is probably due to the generally younger age of stock[5] and to their lower levels of social deprivation[6].

The numbers of response and emergency repairs per dwelling varied widely among authorities.

Number of repairs

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |

Scottish Borders - Tweeddale
Highland - Sutherland
Highland - Skye & Lochalsh
Scottish Borders - Ettrick & Lauderdale
West Lothian
Orkney Islands
Scottish Borders - Roxburgh
Highland - Badenoch & Strathspey
Highland - Caithness
Inverclyde
Angus
Western Isles
Aberdeenshire - North
South Lanarkshire - Clydesdale
Highland - Lochaber
Moray
Aberdeenshire - Central
Highland - Ross & Cromarty
Argyll & Bute
Aberdeenshire - South
Shetland Islands
Perth & Kinross
Falkirk
East Lothian
Highland - Inverness
East Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire - Hamilton
North Ayrshire
Highland - Nairn
East Renfrewshire
Fife
North Lanarkshire
Dumfries & Galloway
South Lanarkshire - Rutherglen & Cambuslang
Stirling
Midlothian
South Lanarkshire - East Kilbride
Renfrewshire
West Dunbartonshire - Clydebank
Glasgow City
Clackmannanshire
South Ayrshire
West Dunbartonshire - Dumbarton
Dundee City
Aberdeen City
East Dunbartonshire
Edinburgh, City of

☐ Emergency repairs per dwelling

■ Total response repairs per dwelling

Source: Accounts Commission, *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*

Causes of emergency repairs

Many factors influence the levels of emergency repairs, and councils have varying degrees of control over these (exhibit 6).

Factors influencing levels of emergency repairs

Councils have varying degrees of control over the causes of emergency repairs.
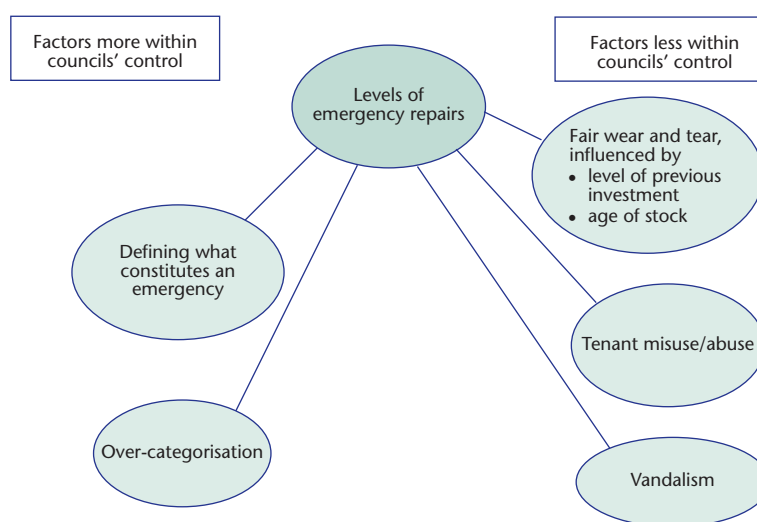
Understanding and tracking the incidence of different causes is important to the management of the repairs service as a whole. For example, if managers have robust information on where vandalism is occurring or where tenants regularly exaggerate the severity of repairs to receive emergency treatment, they can then target improvement actions. Actions could include looking at anti-vandalism measures, and developing new guidance material for tenants.

The issue is not that housing officers don't generally know where the problems lie. It is more that the information should be available in a systematic rather than anecdotal way, and that it should then be used to develop cost-effective actions which will reduce the number of emergency repairs.

This study asked authorities to report or estimate the levels of emergency repairs that had arisen as a result of fair wear and tear, vandalism, tenant misuse or abuse and over-categorisation (repairs that did not match the council's criteria of 'emergency').

By far the biggest cause of emergency repairs is fair wear and tear (exhibit 7, page 12).

Exhibit 7: Causes of emergency repairs

Fair wear and tear is considered to account for the majority of repairs.
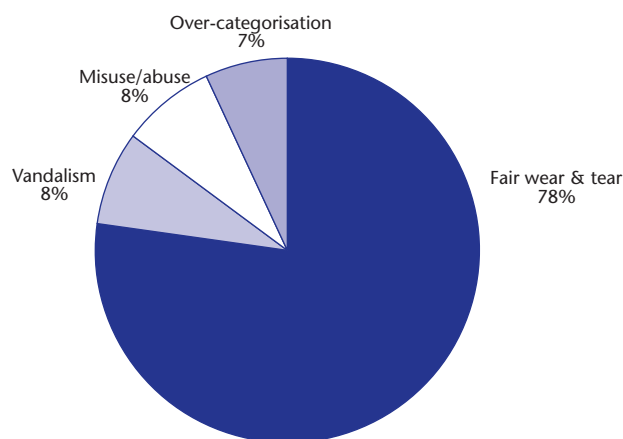
Source: questionnaires completed by authorities[7]

Fair wear and tear

In this study, estimates of the proportion of emergency repairs arising from fair wear and tear varied among areas from 45% to 100%, with an overall average of 78%. Estimates provided by areas are shown in appendix 2.

The number of repairs arising from fair wear and tear will vary according to the condition of the stock. The stock condition is, to an extent, dependent on its age and on the levels of previous investment in it - factors over which the new councils have little control.

One measure of the condition of housing stock is the cost of the repairs that are needed. The Scottish House Condition Survey carried out by Scottish Homes in 1996 has data on average visible repair cost[8]. This is defined as the cost of making good the visible disrepair to a dwelling. The average visible repair cost per Scottish local authority dwelling in the 1996 survey was £645. This is an indication of the level of repairs which authorities need to address currently.

The Scottish House Condition Survey found that the visible repair costs were significantly higher for older stock than for newer stock. This study has shown that older stock is significantly more likely to require response repairs, and to require emergency repairs, than newer stock (appendix 3).

While the age and state of repair of dwellings now is a result of decisions made over decades, councils can help to reduce levels of emergency repairs by developing their planned maintenance programmes to prevent emergency repairs arising. To do this, councils should track which repairs are happening in which dwellings and areas. This can reduce levels of emergency and response repairs by grouping renewal work into a planned work schedule, rather than responding to faults as and when they occur. This approach may be particularly cost-effective where there is a high likelihood of faults appearing in stock of a similar age or construction. Glasgow City has taken this approach and this may be one of the reasons behind the council having a lower level of response repairs than expected for the age of its stock (box 2 and appendix 3).

In the longer term, increasing planned maintenance programmes, where possible, will reduce the level of spend on response repairs as a whole.

Box 2: Increasing planned maintenance programmes

Glasgow City Council has increased the proportion of its revenue repairs budget being spent on programmed works from 6% to 30% since 1996. It has made a number of changes to the way repairs are programmed, and to its repairs contract. These have allowed the increase in programmed work and have delivered increased value for money from the budget.

One of the changes implemented is the introduction of repair holding categories. Fabric repairs that are not causing water ingress or deterioration to the property are placed in a holding category by trade required and by street. These are then carried out on a planned project basis at a discount of 18% on the reactive rates paid under the previous contract. So, for example, if 20 houses out of 35 need gutter cleaning, these will be held and all 35 will be done together on a project basis. These will then reduce the levels of the more expensive response repairs. Staff in neighbourhood offices have been encouraged to identify opportunities for this type of planned, preventative approach and savings made in their repair budgets can be used to put more of these types of projects in place.

Recommendation

Authorities should monitor which repairs are occurring where, and how often. This information can then be used to assess whether a planned maintenance programme would be a cost effective way of reducing the number of response repairs.

Tenant misuse/abuse

Some emergency repairs can be attributed to tenant misuse or abuse - doors being forcibly opened, some broken windows and so on. Estimates of the proportion of emergency repairs caused by misuse or abuse range from 0% to 30%, with an average of 8% (appendix 2). Extrapolating this finding to all Scottish councils means that over £2.5 million was spent on emergency repairs due to tenant misuse or abuse.

Authorities vary in the extent to which they recharge tenants. Some authorities do not pursue recharges of under a certain amount: for example, £30 in one case, £100 in another. In one urban authority an audited sample of 60 jobs yielded 10 which should have been subject to recharge. Of these 10, the recharge had been levied in only two cases, the others were not pursued.

Authorities may not pursue recharges because of the cost involved. One authority said that the cost of chasing recharges can be high, sometimes for little return - they cited payback rates awarded at court of sometimes 50 pence or £1 weekly depending on the disposable income of the tenant. The authority felt that the time taken to monitor this was not cost-effective.

Authorities may be able to reduce tenant misuse/abuse by clarifying their recharge policies. One council area has a very low incidence of repairs caused by abuse, except for a town which transferred into its area at reorganisation. The town had a much higher rate of repairs due to abuse, which the council attributed to a more lax recharge regime operating within the former district council area.

Because of the difficulties in levying recharges, some authorities have investigated alternative solutions to the costs of repairs from misuse or abuse (box 3).

Box 3: Reducing repairs caused by misuse/abuse

An alternative approach taken by one authority is to clarify that the repairs likely to be caused by abuse are the tenant's responsibility. This affects mainly non-urgent repairs, for example, those required to internal doors, toilet seats and kitchen units. Tenants have been informed that these and a range of other repairs are their responsibility.

In one authority, there are a small number of houses where the incidence of misuse/abuse repairs has been so high that further repairs have been stopped.

Recommendation

Authorities should consider the effectiveness of their policies on recharging tenants for misuse and abuse, both in acting as a deterrent and in recouping costs. Once a policy is agreed, it should be communicated effectively to tenants and applied consistently.

Vandalism

Emergency repairs due to vandalism were estimated by authorities to be between 0% and 20%, averaging around 8% (appendix 2). Extrapolating these figures across Scotland means that over £2.5 million was spent on emergency repairs due to vandalism in 1996/97.

Most of the areas reporting on this question reported estimates; however, many did not report at all. In a number of areas where audits were conducted, auditors found that vandalism was either unreported or under-reported. This means that authorities risk underestimating the costs of repairs due to vandalism. In turn, this means that they may not have accurate information on which to base decisions on investment in preventative measures.

The costs of deterring vandalism can be high. They range from around £1,200 to £1,600 for a standard controlled entry system to a block of flats, to between £3,000 and £4,000 for a steel door with twin magnetic locks, to the much higher costs of closed circuit television systems (CCTV).

Authorities should assess the costs of installing deterrent measures against the costs of repeated vandalism repairs, with priority given to measures that have a payback of three years or less. However, if authorities do not track the number of repairs caused by vandalism, decisions on the cost-effectiveness of deterrent measures will be based on incomplete information.

Recommendation

Authorities should ensure that emergency repairs that arise as a result of vandalism are recorded as such. The data can then be used to assess the cost-effectiveness of proposals for anti-vandalism measures.

Over-categorisation of repairs

Over-categorisation is when repairs are treated as emergencies, even though they do not fit with the council's definition of an emergency. Over-categorisation can occur for a number of reasons:

• the tenant exaggerates the severity of the problem to get a quicker response

• the repairs clerk misdiagnoses the problem; this may be exacerbated by inexperience or lack of training

• the job is treated as an emergency because the tenant is elderly or infirm.

Authorities' estimates of the level of over-categorisation ranged from 0% to 40% (appendix 2). These estimates were reviewed by local auditors by looking at a sample of records, and in a number of instances audited results differed from authorities' own estimates.

A number of areas (8) felt that no jobs were being over-categorised. In five of these, auditors found that there were indeed cases where repairs were treated wrongly as emergencies. In one of these authorities, the level of over-categorisation, judged by the authority's own criteria for an emergency, was assessed by the auditor to be 32%.

Pressure to over-categorise may arise if there is a big gap between the target completion time for the emergency category and the next most urgent category of repairs. For example, repairs clerks may be more likely to treat repairs as emergencies if they know that otherwise the tenant may have to wait for 8 to 10 days. Equally, the tenant may be more likely to exaggerate the severity of the repair to get it treated as an emergency if they know they will have to wait 8 to 10 days rather than 2 to 3 days to get it fixed.

The avoidable cost of these over-categorised repairs for those areas which returned data is over £0.5 million[9]. Extrapolating these results to the whole of Scotland leads to an estimated cost of over-categorisation of approaching £1.3 million[10].

Councils planned a number of measures to tackle over-categorisation. These included training for repairs clerks; introduction of computer-based diagnostic packages; feedback to repairs clerks following post-inspections of repairs; and development of information for tenants about the types of repair that come under specified priority categories.

Over-categorisation is one area which is more or less totally within the control of councils. Most authorities which submitted data in this study could cut their emergency repairs, some by over 20%, by tackling this issue alone. For those councils which do not currently monitor levels of over-categorisation, the priority must be to start checking what the levels are and then to take action to reduce them.

Recommendation

Authorities should monitor levels of over-categorisation, the reasons for them, and take action to reduce them.

Defining jobs which constitute emergencies

Although authorities' definitions of emergency repairs are broadly similar, some repairs which will be treated as an emergency in one authority may be treated less urgently in another. One authority which brought together two districts found a number of cases where the same type of repair was treated differently. For example, repairs to radiators were treated as emergencies in one area and as 28-day category repairs in the other.

Some councils have redefined the lists of jobs that they regard as emergencies, in a number of cases to bring them into line with those identified in Right To Repair legislation (box 4). This legislation defines which repairs should be carried out within what timescales.

Ensuring that tenants, repairs clerks and elected members are aware of which repairs are regarded as emergencies should reduce pressures to over-categorise.

Box 4: Defining an emergency repair

West Lothian Council wanted to reduce the number of emergency repairs as part of a strategic review of their entire repairs service. They felt that the emergency category had become, in effect, simply another repair category, rather than for what the council would define as true emergency work. The authority has issued a repairs booklet to all tenants clarifying what is a tenant's responsibility and what is the landlord's responsibility, and also defining what they would regard as emergencies. The repairs booklet generally has pictures of repairs that relate directly to those displayed on the screen used by repairs clerks.

The approach was discussed with elected members and tenants prior to the policy being adopted. The authority feels that clarifying both the tenant and landlord roles through the repairs booklet means that reported emergencies are more likely to be genuine. Local members are less likely to be called in when a tenant's repair is refused for emergency treatment as they are fully aware of the policy and in a more informed position to explain the decision to tenants.

West Lothian believe that ensuring all stakeholders in the service - tenants, housing staff and members - are clear about the policies and procedures in respect of the emergency repairs service means that they are less likely to be subject to abuse.

Recommendation

Authorities should review the list of repairs which they treat as emergencies, and ensure that tenants, repairs clerks and elected members are aware of these.

The potential to reduce numbers of repairs

The levels to which authorities can reduce the repairs due to vandalism, tenant misuse/abuse and fair wear and tear will depend to an extent on local circumstances. However, there are actions which authorities can take to reduce repairs arising from all these factors, and these have been outlined above. In contrast, levels of over-categorisation of repairs are very largely under the control of councils, and can be reduced substantially by measures such as training, improved guidance materials and other measures outlined above.

Authorities wishing to benchmark their levels of repairs can do so by comparison with authorities whose housing stock is of a similar age (appendix 3), and which have a similar level of social deprivation and urban/rural split. The Commission would be happy to pass on requests for information to appropriate councils in order to facilitate benchmarking.

Approaches taken by two councils to reducing their numbers of repairs are outlined below (box 5).

Box 5: Two approaches to improving the service

East Dunbartonshire Council has been carrying out a review process for all its housing policies and procedures since summer 1997. This was in response to its 1996/97 performance indicators and following a review of the Council's structure and staffing levels in March 1997.

A working group of councillors, officers and tenant representatives met regularly between July 1997 and March 1998. Their aim was to develop an effective, efficient and high-quality response repairs service, at a reasonable cost. When they looked into the service, they found that their high level of emergency repairs per dwelling was mainly due to policy - treating minor repair requests from the council's many elderly tenants as emergencies, and to a desire to attend to the repairs of all tenants as quickly as possible. However, this approach meant that there were increased costs and the level of disruptive emergency work meant that managing the overall response repairs service was made very difficult.

The working group has a number of proposals which are currently being discussed. These include the setting up of a call-centre with highly trained staff instructing repairs, and more joint working between client and contractor sides within the council. The proposals are expected to reduce costs and bureaucracy whilst retaining a high level of tenant service.

Aberdeen City Council is implementing a number of changes to its management of the repairs service. The authority is examining the scope of repairs services offered to tenants and is considering redefining emergency repairs as those required under the Right to Repair legislation. In addition, Aberdeen emphasises in its communications to tenants - handbooks, tenants' charter leaflets and so on - that emergencies are only those involving threat to life or property.

Management of the out-of-hours emergency repairs service currently rests with a contractor, and is being brought under the control of the Property and Technical Services Department in autumn 1998.

Implementation of the changes has been facilitated by the purchase of a housing integrated computer system, the repairs module of which should allow more accurate identification of repairs, particularly outwith normal office hours.

Costs of emergency repairs

Councils can reduce the costs incurred on emergency repairs by reducing the numbers of repairs, and/or by reducing the cost of repairs. This section deals with the costs.

Contracting for repairs

Emergency repairs normally attract a premium rate - a percentage or flat-rate sum added to the prices paid for less urgent repair work. Payment for them can be based on two methods.

First, councils can have a contract specifying the additional premium to be paid for emergency jobs. Reductions in the number of emergency jobs can then release immediate savings.

Second, councils may have negotiated an all-encompassing, or bulk contract, where the unit cost per repair is based on estimates of the different proportions of repairs which are emergency, non-urgent and so on. The price of this bulk contract will in part be based on the expected level of emergency repairs and the notional premium that they carry.

Reduction in the number of emergency jobs during the life of the bulk contract may result in no immediate financial benefit to the client, though there will be a saving to the contractor (which, in many cases, is the council's direct labour organisation, so the saving will go to the council). However, at renegotiation or at retendering, the unit cost per repair should reduce to reflect the lower level of emergency repairs.

Twenty-three areas were able to give the average cost of emergency repairs. The cost varied between £26 and £86 (exhibit 8). The average cost was £47[11]. The total number of emergency jobs carried out in Scotland in 1996/97 was about 700,000. Using these figures gives an estimate of the total cost of emergency repairs in Scotland in 1996/97 of around £33 million.

Exhibit 8: Average cost of emergency repairs

The cost per emergency repair varied widely between areas.
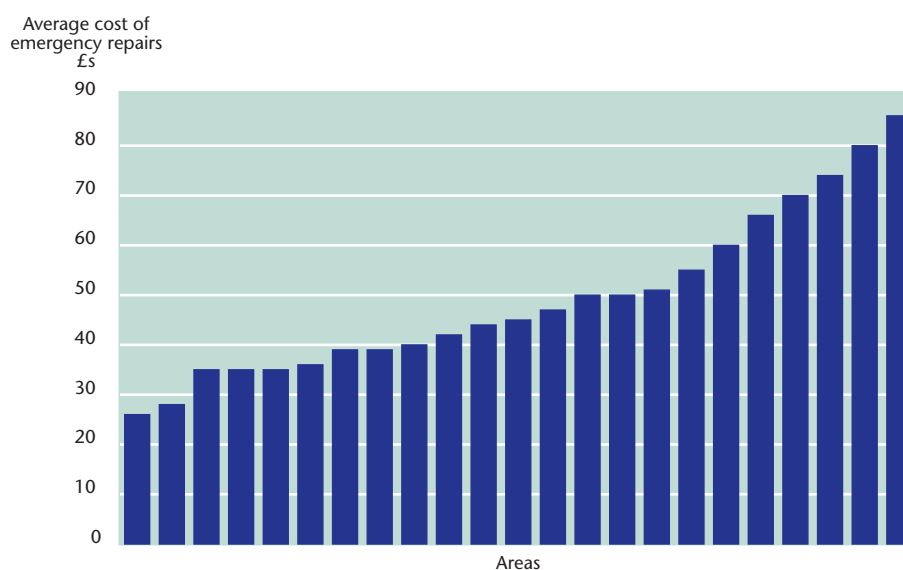
Source: local VFM audits

It is very difficult to compare the reported costs directly, as they reflect a number of factors:

- the types of repair undertaken as emergencies
- the level of standard repair price to which a premium may be added, which in turn is also affected by the level of competition among contractors in an area
- the size of the premium paid by authorities, whether added as percentage uplifts or as flat-rate additional sums
- the basis of charging for emergency repairs - schedules of rates or dayworks
- the level of repairs which are done outwith normal working hours.

We look at the last two of these in more detail below.

These factors mean that it is difficult to establish whether an average emergency repair cost of, say, £50 rather than £80 represents better value for money. To do this, authorities would have to benchmark their detailed practices and prices with others and then consider whether there were opportunities to improve value for money.

Basis of charging emergency repairs - schedules of rates and dayworks

Emergency repairs can be charged according to a schedule of rates (SOR) or by dayworks rates.

A schedule of rates is a specification of jobs together with the agreed prices. These standard prices may be subject to a premium if the repair needs to be done as an emergency. Alternatively, non-emergency work may be discounted. However it is done, emergency repairs are, in most cases, more costly, especially for work outside normal working hours.

Dayworks is charging a rate per hour or per day for trade work. This method of charging is normally used where the type of repair is uncommon and hence there is no SOR item which covers the work content. Emergency repairs done on a dayworks basis are likely to be more costly as there is no monetary incentive for the work to be completed quickly.

Twenty-four areas supplied information on the percentage of total emergency repair costs paid on a dayworks basis. Of these, seven carried out 100% of emergency repairs on dayworks rates. The majority, though not all, were rural former district council areas. Of the remaining 17 areas, four reported 5% or less repairs on dayworks rates, and the remainder lay between 5% and 50%. Box 6 shows how one authority saves money by reducing dayworks.

Seven areas did not report the split of repairs funded via SOR and via dayworks. Given the likelihood of dayworks-pricing being more costly than using SOR items, councils should monitor its level of use, and reduce it where possible.

Box 6: Converting dayworks to SOR items

> Savings may be possible by reducing dayworks-priced jobs. In North Lanarkshire Council, less than 5% of jobs were priced by means of dayworks. The client continually monitors dayworks jobs, and when ones that recur are identified, an SOR item is raised and a price is agreed with the contractor.

Recommendation

Authorities should ensure that they have information on the level of dayworks-priced repairs, and then take steps to reduce the number where possible.

When repairs are carried out

Emergency repairs require a fast response. For this reason, a number of repairs are undertaken outwith normal working hours. These may attract an additional premium, over the level paid for daytime emergency work.

Overall, the level of repairs done outwith normal working hours (OWNWH) was about a third of the number carried out within working hours. This overall pattern masked very considerable variations among authorities (exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: Percentage of emergency repairs that are outwith normal working hours

There is a wide variation in the proportion of emergency repairs undertaken outwith normal working hours.

Percentage of emergency jobs OWNWH
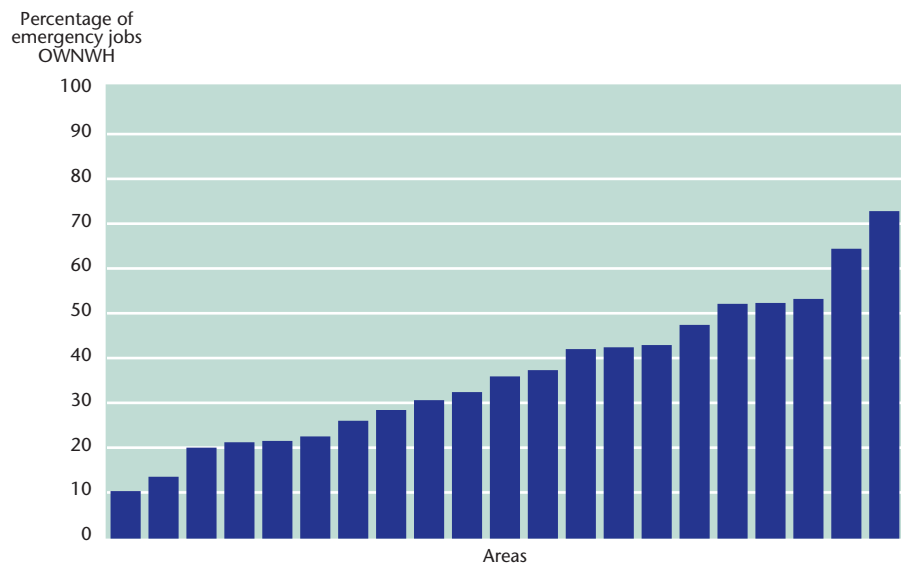
Areas

Source: local VFM audits

In some areas, over half of all emergency repairs were done outside normal working hours. In others, the majority of repairs were done within normal working hours. Ten of the 31 areas supplying data for this analysis did not report information on the proportions of emergency repairs carried out within and outwith normal working hours.

There was a weak relationship between the proportion of emergency repairs undertaken outwith normal working hours and the average cost of emergency repairs in the 14 areas which were able to report both datasets. Thus, if more repairs were done out of hours, the average cost was higher.

Monitoring of this information is important because if there is a high number of out-of-hours emergency repairs, the cost of the bulk contract for repair work may increase. Likewise, if the level of repairs out of hours could be reduced, it should lead to a reduction in costs when the bulk contract is renegotiated or retendered.

For authorities where there is a contract(s) covering emergency repairs alone, a reduction in out-of-hours work is likely to lead to an immediate reduction in costs.

One of the factors affecting the cost of repairs being done out of hours is whether the operative completes the job when called out or whether he or she simply 'makes safe' the repair and completes it at a second visit. The latter approach may be cheaper, particularly if the repair can then be incorporated into a planned schedule of work.

The trade-off is between the cost of two visits, one at emergency rates and one at lower rates, and the cost of one longer visit at emergency rates. Tenants' perceptions of service quality will also have to be taken into account - depending on the nature of the repair, they may prefer completion on the first visit.

Recommendations

Authorities should monitor the levels of repairs that occur within and outwith normal working hours, because this information will affect costs and will be relevant in the negotiation of contracts with contractors.

Authorities should examine the level of emergency repairs outwith normal working hours and consider their policies on which repairs should be carried out on a 'make safe' basis and completed later.

Monitoring repair costs

When the emergency repair is notified to the neighbourhood office, the repairs clerk identifies what repair is required. He or she then issues a works order, specifying the work and schedule of rates (SOR) item and price, and this is then transferred, usually electronically, to the contractor's depot. The work is carried out, the operative informs the contractor, who then books off the job as completed. Then the contractor is paid by credit transfer.

There are a number of opportunities in this process for overcharging by the contractor to occur:

- there may be differing interpretations of the work content of the SOR item, and this can result in wrong or unnecessary additional SOR codes being claimed by the operative

- in some areas the contractor has discretion to incur additional costs, eg 25% of SOR price, or £50, without referral back to the client. This can result in overcharging, particularly where the post-inspection rate of jobs is low.

In the initial fieldwork for this study, samples of 60 to 70 claims were taken at each of five councils and checked. In four councils, the charge exceeded the cost of the work specified, for 7% to 37% of the sampled jobs. In the remaining authority no potential overcharges were found on the sample of jobs examined. In this authority the contractor has to receive client authorisation for any increase in price.

It may be possible to make savings by monitoring the average cost of each category of job by trade, area office and contractor to identify any substantial variance, and following up cases where there is cause for concern (box 7).

Box 7: Monitoring costs of contractors

Savings may be possible by comparing costs between contractors. In one council the client-side had found that DLO charges were on average 18% higher than those of private contractors.

The client put the differences down to the fact that DLO operatives work from a job description book which is used for bonus purposes. The descriptions are often brief and are misleading in that they do not tie in with schedule of rates (SOR) descriptions. This can result in operatives claiming the same item twice - as a single SOR item, and as a composite SOR item. For example, both the item, *remove and replace lock,* and the item, *remove and replace lock including all ironmongery,* were being claimed in respect of the one emergency repair.

The client-side also found a difference in how often one item was claimed - when plumbers have to 'rod down' pipes to clear blockages when carrying out drainage work. This should be claimed on an 'as and when required' basis. On analysing the frequency of claim it was found that DLO plumbers claimed 'rodding down' each time they carried out drainage work while private contractors claimed once every three occasions.

The client-side prepared a report for senior management recommending:

- providing operatives with full descriptions of SOR items

- carrying out random checks of completed jobs and comparing work content with work claimed by operatives

- ensuring work descriptions issued by repairs clerks and technical inspectors match schedule items claimed by operatives.

Recommendations

Authorities should ensure that there is clarity over the work content of schedule of rates items. This may be made easier by using a good IT-based system, which helps identify repairs, and/or increasing training in effective use of the schedule of rates.

Authorities should examine the costs of claims, for variations between contractors and neighbourhoods in the charges for seemingly similar work, and investigate the underlying causes of these.

Managing the emergency repairs service

The emergency repairs service depends on a number of linkages - from tenant to housing office to contractor to operative and back again (exhibit 10). Effective management of the service needs good management information on what is happening at each stage and actions taken where required to improve matters.

This section looks at the whole process from tenant notification and issuing of work to repair completion.

Exhibit 10: The housing emergency repairs process

There are a number of handover and decision points in the process.
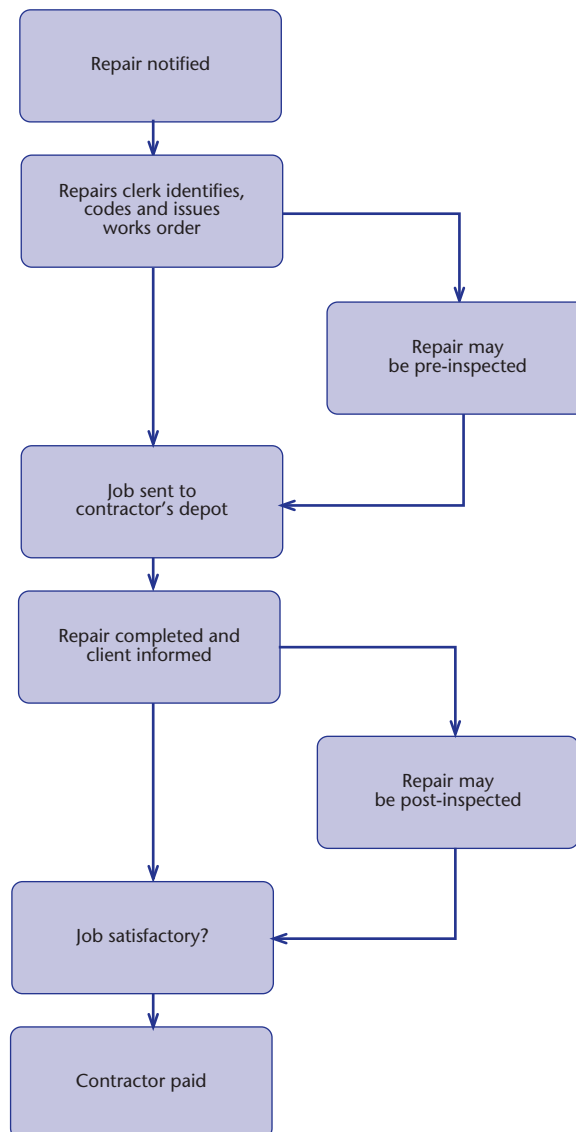
Notification and issuing of work

The tenant notifies the housing department, by telephone or in person at their neighbourhood office. The call is received by a repairs clerk or inspector who identifies the repair required, often using a 'Jobfax' manual or equivalent which illustrates different repairs. He or she then issues a works order specifying the repair, its schedule of rates (SOR) item and details of the tenant. The works order is usually transmitted by computer link directly to the contractor's depot (the contractor may be the council's direct labour organisation or a private contractor).

Accurate identification of the repair is a key stage in the management of the service as a whole:

- it means that the repair is much more likely to be fixed on the first visit - this both improves the level of service to the tenant and reduces costs

- it means that the repair is more likely to be assigned the correct level of priority - thus the premium for carrying out work on an emergency basis will be incurred only where it is necessary, and levels of over-categorisation of repairs will reduce

- accurate identification of the cause of the repair allows management to track patterns of repairs and to decide on an informed basis where, for example, anti-vandalism measures may be most cost-effective

- inspection levels may be reduced, lowering costs.

Because of the importance of the role of the repairs clerk, authorities have taken a number of steps to increase the accuracy of their repairs diagnosis. These include training staff in questioning, giving them hot-line or direct access to technical staff, and using IT packages which give on-screen prompts.

This approach will help to ensure consistency and accuracy of repair categorisation among clerks and neighbourhood offices.

Recommendation

Authorities should review the issuing of work by repairs clerks on a group and individual basis, and address repeated instances of over-categorisation using training and technical support.

Issuing of work outwith normal working hours

Within normal working hours the great majority of emergency repairs orders are issued by client staff - repairs clerks or inspectors. Outwith normal working hours a higher proportion of emergency repairs orders are issued by contractor staff (exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11: Client and contractor issues of emergency repair notices

Contractors often issue emergency repair notices outside normal working hours.
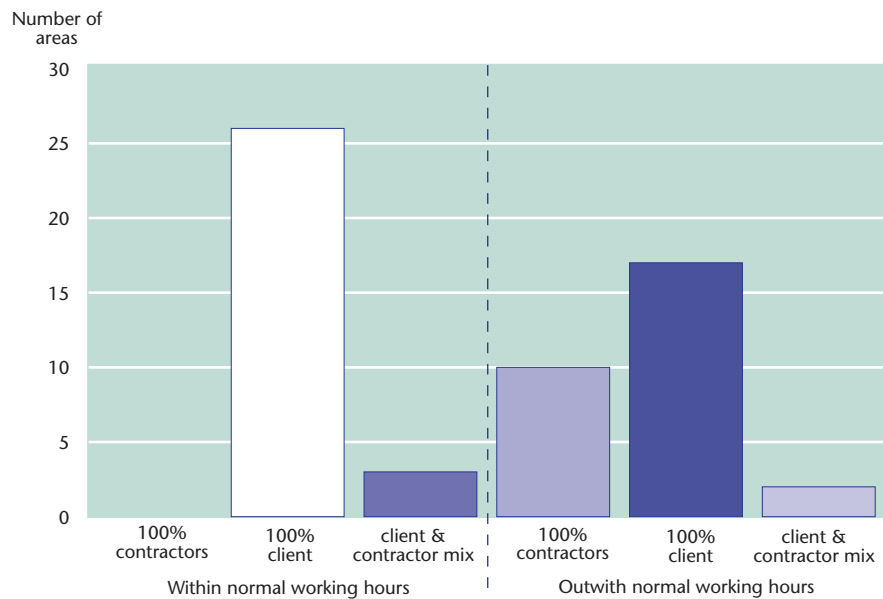
Source: local VFM audits

Where the contractor issues emergency repair notices, there may be an increased level of post-inspection by the client-side and there will also be a charge levied by the contractor to issue the job. However, it may be more cost-effective on occasions for the contractor to issue work, for example when they already have controllers who are on duty.

One authority found that over-categorisation of repairs was more likely to occur at night, when contractor staff were receiving calls - it was easier for the tenant to get emergency attention if the repair was notified outside normal working hours. The authority was looking at steps to address this.

There is an incentive for the contractor, when receiving repair notifications directly from tenants, to err on the side of over-categorising repairs where there is a premium paid on emergency work. Authorities should take this into account when reviewing the arrangements for receiving calls outwith normal working hours.

The decision on whether the client or the contractor should issue emergency repair jobs outside normal working hours should be based on cost-effectiveness rather than on historical practice, and take into account the additional costs borne by the client in increased post-inspection of repairs.

Recommendation

Authorities should review the ways in which work is issued, especially outwith normal working hours, and assess the cost-effectiveness of these procedures.

Pre-inspection of work

Pre-inspection of repairs can help to ensure that the repair has been accurately diagnosed by the repairs clerk, and to check what work is required. The latter reason is especially important if the repair is uncommon and so not part of the schedule of rates. However, emergencies by their very nature require a fast response time. Pre-inspection may delay the work and may adversely affect the tenant's perception of service quality. Pre-inspection will also add to costs of emergency repairs. One authority reckons the cost of a pre-inspection to be about £15. This is about a third of the average cost of the repair itself.

The level of pre-inspection of emergency repairs carried out by areas varied between 0% and 35%. About 40% of areas (12 out of 29) pre-inspected over 10% of emergency repairs.

High levels of pre-inspection, say over 10%, may occur due to a number of reasons:

- a lack of comprehensiveness in technical manuals and support material used by repairs clerks to identify accurately the job description and the appropriate category

- a lack of knowledge or training on the part of repairs clerks in the identification of repairs

- vague or misleading descriptions by tenants

- concerns about contractors' performance or risk of overcharging.

The first three of these reasons can be addressed directly by authorities, with resulting reductions in pre-inspection rates, and hence the indirect costs of managing the emergency repairs service.

Recommendation

Authorities should review their level of pre-inspection of emergency repairs and reduce it where appropriate.

Completion of jobs

On receiving the works order from the client, the contractor's supervisor will contact the appropriate local team or operative by means of radio or pager and give basic job details. In situations where the site visit indicates that job details vary significantly from those issued by the repairs clerk, some councils require contractors to seek clearance from the client technical inspector before carrying out additional work. In other areas, the contractor will carry out the additional work and leave it to the client to decide whether to check or query the additional work claim.

On completion of the work, the operative will submit job details to the supervisor covering material usage, the SOR item claimed and completion time. From this and other information the contractor will prepare the invoice and inform the client that the job is complete, usually by means of the council's computerised repair system.

Post-inspection of repairs

Once informed that the repair is complete, the client may choose to inspect the repair for one of a number of reasons:

- regular monitoring of a sample of contractors' claims, to ensure the cost claimed reflects the work completed

- to check whether a particular repair method was successful

- complaints from a tenant

- to check work by a new contractor during their run-in period

- level of cost

- a need for additional work.

While post-inspections of repairs have obvious benefits, they also carry costs. They take time that could be saved or used elsewhere.

Levels of post-inspection reported in this study varied widely, from 0% to 35%. Three of the 29 areas for which information was available post-inspected over 20% of emergency repairs.

Authorities should consider the appropriate level of post-inspection for their emergency repairs. A reasonable level of post-inspection is likely to be in the range 10% to 20%. This range is based on recent studies, interviews with client managers, and study findings.

Post-inspection of emergency repairs may be reduced if there are good supporting procedures in place - for example, random checking of repairs so operatives do not have advance notice, strict disciplinary procedures used by the contractor if overcharging is found and so on.

Post-inspection of repairs is usually taken to mean physical inspection of the repair on site. However, checks should also be made of contractors' claims on screen or on hard copy. This would allow levels of discrepancy between works orders and claims by different contractors and different areas to be assessed and compared. This could be done on a routine basis prompted by the IT system, or on a manual, sample basis.

Recommendation

Authorities should review the level of post-inspection of emergency repairs, and consider whether it may be reduced without loss of effectiveness.

Overview of management information needs

Gaps in management information have been referred to in a number of areas of this report. Effective management of the housing emergency repairs service requires attention to a number of issues in order to achieve service improvements or cost reductions. Good management information is needed to support this. The table below summarises aspects of the information needed for effective decision making. A number of these information requirements will also be useful for the management of the repairs service as a whole, not simply the emergency service.

Objectives	Management information needed
• to reduce repairs due to vandalism and tenant misuse/abuse	• accurate coding of causes of repairs, analysed by area
• to shift response repairs to planned maintenance programmes	• repair nature and incidence analysed by area
• to reduce over-categorisation of repairs	• repair over-categorisation levels analysed by office and staff member if possible
• to reduce overcharging	• levels of additions or amendments to works orders analysed by contractor and by area
• to monitor levels of different types of repair in order to reduce costs in future bulk contracts	• levels of emergency repairs carried out within and outwith normal working hours.

Improvements: Service manager's checklist

This study has shown that there is scope in some authorities to reduce the number of emergency repairs, and/or to reduce the costs of these. Since inheriting disparate repairs functions on reorganisation, a number of authorities have tackled the issues with success and other authorities should draw on this experience.

This checklist covers questions that managers may wish to ask when they are reviewing their repairs service.

Generally, a yes response indicates good practice, whereas a no response indicates that further action should be considered.

Reduce levels of over-categorisation

- do we know what the levels of over-categorisation are? ☐

- do we track differences in levels of over-categorisation between neighbourhood offices and members of staff? ☐

- do we carry out sufficient training for staff in the diagnosis of repairs? ☐

- is there adequate technical support available to repairs clerks to assist them in coding repairs accurately? ☐

- has the authority defined which repairs it considers to be emergencies and communicated this information to members, tenants and staff? ☐

- is there good, well-presented material available to tenants about which repairs constitute emergencies? ☐

- have we considered whether the difference in response time of the emergency and next most urgent category of repairs is creating pressure to over-categorise? ☐

Reduce levels of repairs arising from fair wear and tear

- do we track which repairs are occurring where? ☐

- do we consider whether repairs may be grouped and carried out more cost-effectively under planned, preventative maintenance programmes? ☐

- can we increase the investment programme to improve the condition of the stock? ☐

Reduce levels of vandalism

- do we have accurate information on how many repairs are due to vandalism? ☐

- do we track the incidence of vandalism by locality? ☐

- do we know how much we spend on repairs caused by vandalism? ☐

- do we take into account the cost of repairs caused by vandalism when assessing investment in anti-vandalism measures? ☐

Reduce levels of tenant abuse/misuse

- do we know how many repairs are due to tenant misuse or abuse? ☐

- have we considered the effectiveness of our recharge policies? ☐

- are recharges being applied in line with policy? ☐

- have we considered whether altering lease conditions might reduce our liability for repairs caused by misuse or abuse? ☐

Schedule of rates and dayworks

- do we know the number and value of repairs priced on a dayworks and on a schedule of rates (SOR) basis? ☐

- do we measure frequently occurring repairs and convert these to schedule of rates items? ☐

- is the level of dayworks-priced jobs kept to under 10% of total jobs? ☐

Level of overcharging

- are SOR items clear and unambiguous? ☐

- do we check the work claimed against the work carried out on a random basis? ☐

- are we confident that the procedures for carrying out additional work are not increasing the risk of overcharging? ☐

- do we compare the costs of repairs between contractors and areas? ☐

Level of pre-inspection

- do we know how many emergency repairs are pre-inspected? ☐

- do we consider the costs of pre-inspection - staff time and possible inconvenience to tenants - when we decide appropriate levels? ☐

- could we reduce the levels of pre-inspection by, for example, increasing training for staff, IT support, technical support and so on? ☐

Level of post-inspection

- do we know how many emergency repairs are post-inspected? ☐

- do we consider the costs of post-inspection, for example, staff time and possible inconvenience to tenants, when we decide appropriate levels? ☐

Repairs outwith normal working hours

- do we know how many repairs are undertaken outwith normal working hours? ☐

- if contractors take calls outwith normal working hours, are we confident that there are sufficient checks to ensure that non-emergency work is not treated as emergency work? ☐

- are we confident that we have the right balance between repairs that we make safe and those which are completed on a first visit when the call is outwith normal working hours? ☐

Summary of recommendations

The recommendations included throughout the report are summarised here for ease of reference.

Reducing repairs arising from fair wear and tear

Authorities should monitor which repairs are occurring where, and how often. This information can then be used to assess whether a planned maintenance programme would be a cost effective way of reducing the number of response repairs.

Tenant abuse/misuse

Authorities should consider the effectiveness of their policies on recharging tenants for misuse and abuse, both in acting as a deterrent and in recouping costs. Once a policy is agreed, it should be communicated effectively to tenants and applied consistently.

Vandalism

Authorities should ensure that emergency repairs that arise as a result of vandalism are recorded as such. The data can then be used to assess the cost-effectiveness of proposals for anti-vandalism measures.

Over-categorisation of repairs

Authorities should monitor levels of over-categorisation, the reasons for them, and take action to reduce them.

Authorities should review the list of repairs which they treat as emergencies, and ensure that tenants, repairs clerks and elected members are aware of these.

Dayworks

Authorities should ensure that they have information on the level of dayworks-priced repairs, and then take steps to reduce the number where possible.

When repairs are carried out

Authorities should monitor the levels of repairs that occur within and outwith normal working hours, because this information will affect costs and will be relevant in the negotiation of contracts with contractors.

Authorities should examine the level of emergency repairs outwith normal working hours and consider their policies on which repairs should be carried out on a 'make safe' basis and completed later.

Monitoring repair costs

Authorities should ensure that there is clarity over the work content of schedule of rates items. This may be made easier by using a good IT-based system, which helps identify repairs, and/or increasing training in effective use of the schedule of rates.

Authorities should examine the costs of claims, for variations between contractors and neighbourhoods in the charges for seemingly similar work, and investigate the underlying causes of these.

Issuing of work

Authorities should review the issuing of work by repairs clerks on a group and individual basis and address repeated instances of over-categorisation using training and technical support.

Authorities should review the ways in which work is issued, especially outwith normal working hours, and assess the cost-effectiveness of these procedures.

Pre- and post-inspection of work

Authorities should review their level of pre-inspection of emergency repairs and reduce it where appropriate.

Authorities should review the level of post-inspection of emergency repairs, and consider whether it may be reduced without loss of effectiveness.

Appendix 1: Participating authorities

Fieldwork

Data from fieldwork visits and detailed questionnaires were gathered from the following authorities during summer and autumn 1996. Work in these authorities led to the production of an audit guide for use by auditors with all councils in reviewing their housing emergency repairs service.

Aberdeen City	Glasgow City
Argyll & Bute	North Lanarkshire
Dundee City	Perth & Kinross
City of Edinburgh	Renfrewshire
Falkirk	South Ayrshire

Audit reports

Auditors worked with a number of councils, and those reporting data by December 1997 have been included in these analyses.

Those authorities where auditors have undertaken this work will have a tailored report and action plan reflecting their own particular circumstances.

Aberdeenshire	North Lanarkshire
Angus	Orkney Islands
Clackmannanshire	Perth & Kinross
Dumfries & Galloway	Renfrewshire
East Dunbartonshire	Scottish Borders
East Lothian	Shetland Islands
Glasgow City	South Lanarkshire
Highland	West Dunbartonshire
Moray	Western Isles

Appendix 2: Levels of repairs caused by different factors

Estimates of the levels of repairs arising from different causes are shown below. Data are from questionnaires completed by authorities as part of local VFM audits.
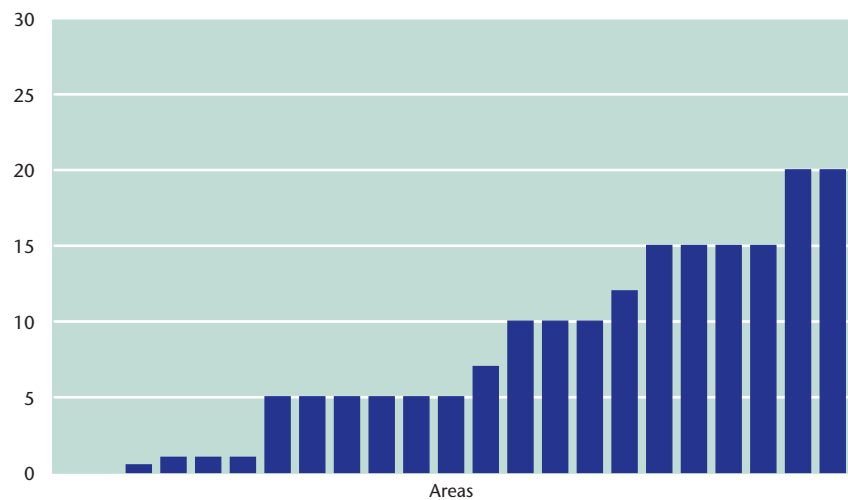
Fair wear and tear

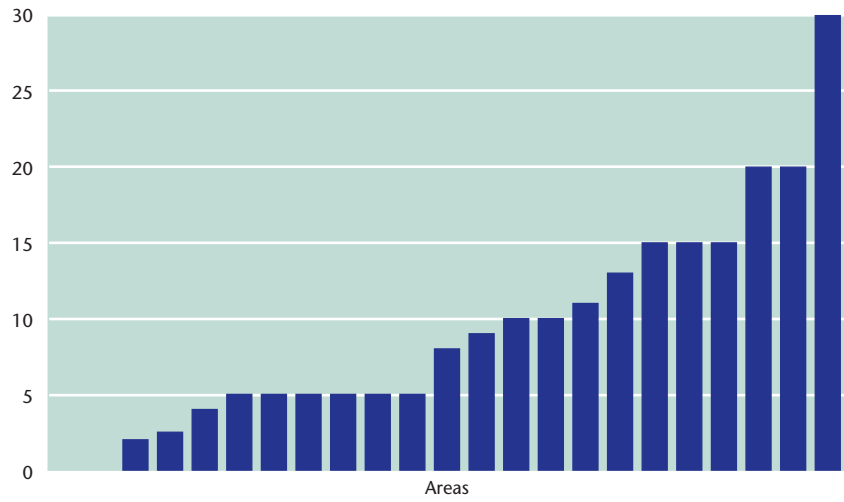% of emergency repairs
caused by
fair wear and tear

Areas
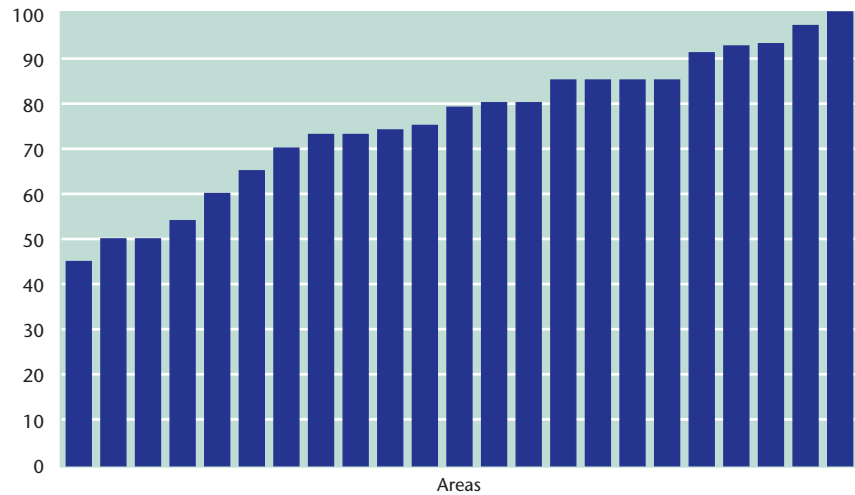
Vandalism

% of emergency repairs
caused by
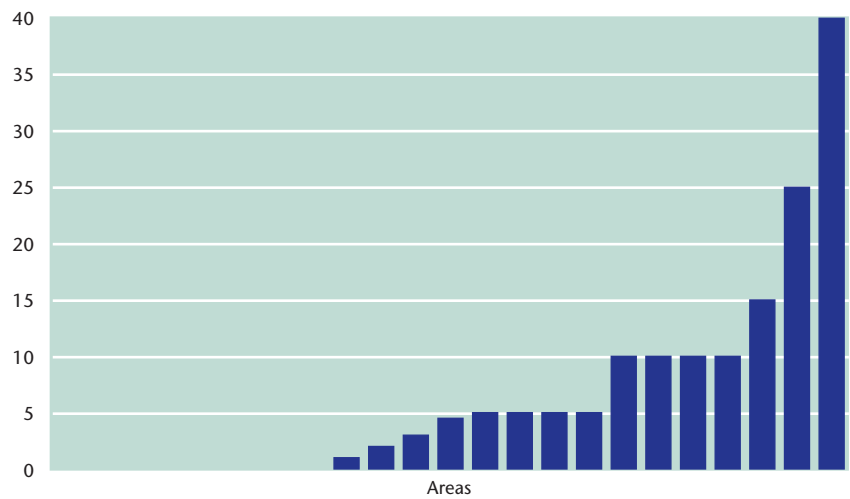vandalism

Areas

Tenant abuse/misuse

% of emergency repairs
caused by
misuse/abuse
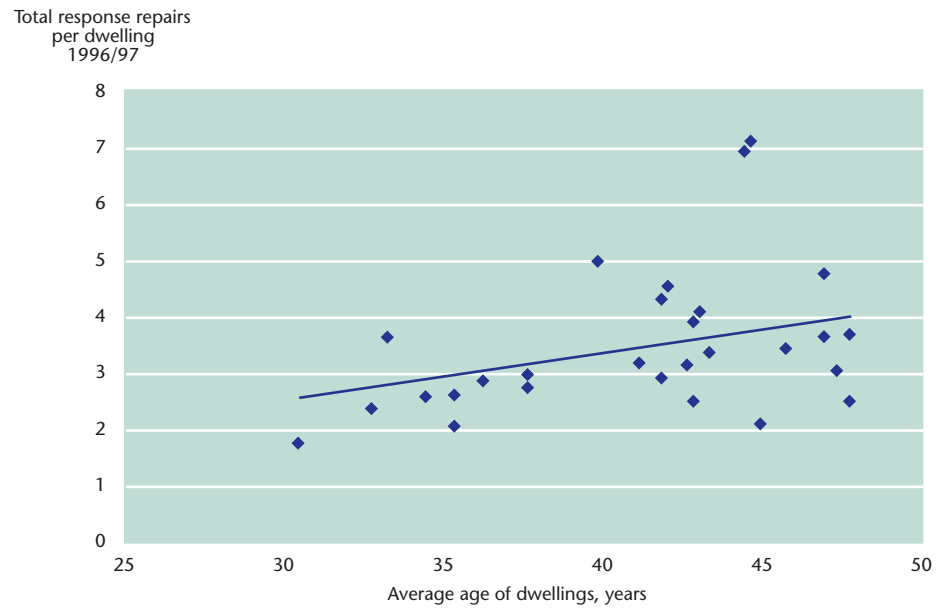

Areas

Over-categorisation

% of emergency repairs
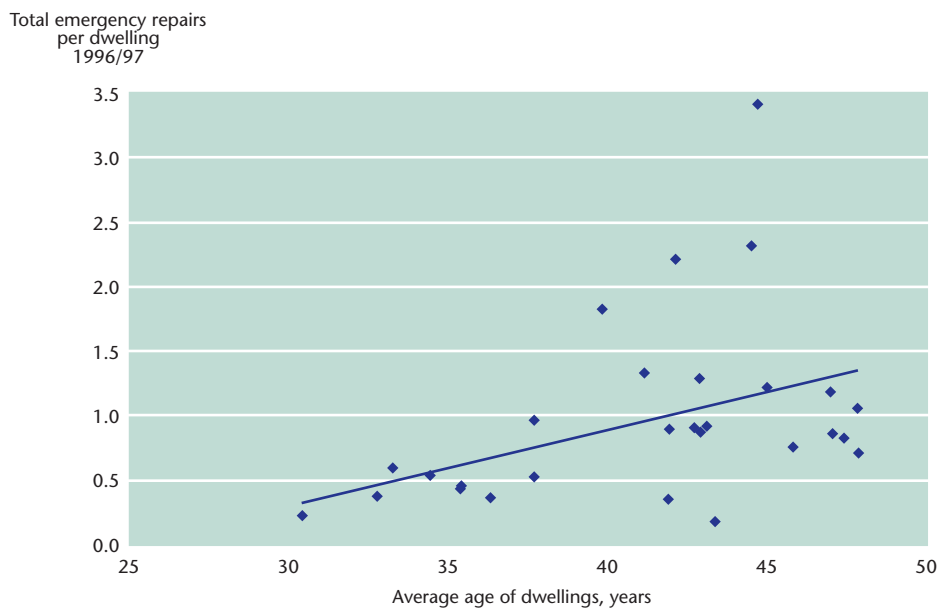which are
over-categorised

Areas

Appendix 3: Stock age and level of emergency repairs

The levels of total response repairs, and emergency repairs due to fair wear and tear, are related to age of stock. The graphs below show the relationship for both response repairs as a whole and emergency repairs. Older stock tends to need more repairs. The range in levels of repairs among councils with similar aged stock shows the influence of factors other than age. Authorities can take actions to reduce the effects of some of these factors, regardless of the age of their stock.

Age of stock and levels of response repairs

Total response repairs per dwelling 1996/97 (vertical axis) vs Average age of dwellings, years (horizontal axis)

Age of stock and levels of emergency repairs

Total emergency repairs per dwelling 1996/97 (vertical axis) vs Average age of dwellings, years (horizontal axis)

All else being equal, a council with stock on average aged 35 years could anticipate 2.9 response repairs per dwelling per year, compared to 3.9 per year for stock aged 45 years. The difference for emergency repairs is starker. All else being equal, a council with stock on average aged 35 years could expect 0.6 emergency repairs per dwelling per year. Stock aged 45 years on average might require 1.2 emergency repairs per dwelling per year.

Tables of stock age and levels of repairs

The tables below group authorities according to the age of their stock[12] and show the average levels of repairs per dwelling and emergency repairs per dwelling[13].

Average age of stock over 45 years

	Average age	Emergency repairs per dwelling	Total response repairs per dwelling
Perth & Kinross	47.7	0.72	2.53
Stirling	47.7	1.07	3.71
East Lothian	47.3	0.83	3.07
East Ayrshire	46.9	0.86	3.67
Renfrewshire	46.9	1.19	4.78
Falkirk	45.7	0.76	3.46

Average age of stock between 40 and 45 years

	Average age	Emergency repairs per dwelling	Total response repairs per dwelling
Glasgow City	44.9	1.22	2.13
Edinburgh, City of	44.6	3.42	7.12
East Dunbartonshire	44.4	2.32	6.94
Scottish Borders	43.3	0.18	3.39
Fife	43.0	0.92	4.11
South Lanarkshire	42.8	0.88	2.53
Clackmannanshire	42.8	1.29	3.93
East Renfrewshire	42.6	0.92	3.17
Aberdeen City	42.0	2.22	4.62
North Ayrshire	41.8	0.90	2.94
Inverclyde	41.8	0.36	4.33
West Dunbartonshire	41.1	1.33	3.06

Average age of stock between 35 and 40 years

	Average age	Emergency repairs per dwelling	Total response repairs per dwelling
Dundee City	39.8	1.78	5.00
Argyll & Bute	37.6	0.53	3.00
Dumfries & Galloway	37.6	0.97	2.77
Angus	36.2	0.37	2.89
Aberdeenshire	35.3	0.46	2.09
Moray	35.3	0.44	2.64

Average age of stock between 30 and 35 years

	Average age	Emergency repairs per dwelling	Total response repairs per dwelling
Highland	34.4	0.54	2.61
Shetland Islands	33.2	0.61	3.66
Western Isles	32.7	0.38	2.40
Orkney Islands	30.4	0.23	1.79

References and notes

1. Accounts Commission, *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*; additional information from Statistical Bulletin, Housing Series, HSG/1997/4, The Scottish Office.

2. Statistical Bulletin, Housing Series, HSG/1997/4, The Scottish Office.

3. This is the target elapsed time between the earliest date or time a request is received (from either the tenant or council inspector) in the client department and the time the work is satisfactorily completed in the opinion of the client.

4. Data from Accounts Commission, *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*.

5. Scottish Homes, *Scottish House Condition Survey 1996*. Main Report and Annex Tables, Scottish Homes, 1997.

6. Measure is the percentage of enumeration districts (EDs) in worst (most deprived) 20% of EDs in Scotland, drawn from 1991 census.

7. Numbers do not add to 100% due to rounding.

8. Scottish Homes, *Scottish House Condition Survey 1996*. Main Report and Annex Tables, Scottish Homes, 1997.

9. The auditor's estimate of percentage of repairs over-categorised for each area was used.

10. Assuming that these repairs would need to be done anyway, the additional cost incurred is the premium for emergency treatment. Assuming a 50% uplift on standard response rates, the unnecessary cost is about £0.5m for those areas reporting levels of over-categorisation in this study. Extrapolating these figures to Scotland as a whole gives an avoidable cost figure of £1.3 million.

11. Data from local VFM audits. Figure of £47 is the weighted average based on numbers of repairs per authority at reported prices.

12. Average age of stock based on data in Statistical Bulletin, Housing Series, HSG/1997/7, The Scottish Office. Average age of stock calculated from data in bulletin by assuming all stock in given age bands to be built at mid-point of age period; stock built pre-1919 assumed to be all built at 1910. Data for Glasgow supplemented by more detailed information from Scottish House Condition Survey, 1996, Local Authority Boost Reports, Scottish Homes (available from Scottish Homes library). Midlothian, North Lanarkshire, South Ayrshire, and West Lothian councils are not included in the table as there was insufficiently detailed information on the age of stock.

13. Response and emergency repairs per dwelling taken from Accounts Commission, *Performance Information for Scottish Councils, 1996/97*.