

Repairs and Social Housing Stigma

- *You're getting free repairs – what are you complaining about?*
- *That'll do – they're only tenants*
- *What does it matter if we're late for a repair's appointment? They're just tenants – they haven't got anything better to do*
- *Tenants are thick, stupid and lazy*
- *Tenants don't work – they're all on benefits*
- *Social housing is for poor people, benefit scroungers, druggies, and people who don't want to better themselves.*

These are a selection of tenant quotes we got from our research. Social housing tenants suffer from *social housing stigma*. Every day, tenants are being made to feel like second class citizens, because they live in social housing.

The **Stop Social Housing Stigma** campaign is working with tenants, landlords, contractors and others to address social housing stigma. There is more face to face contact from repairs staff and contractors with tenants than with any other staff and so it is important that we address this contact.

We are particularly concerned about conscious or unconscious, negative, generalised and unfounded assumptions about social housing tenants and about tenants being treated without respect and empathy, or in ways that demonstrate a lack of trust.

Tenants told us that a lot of this is because of the repairs service – attitudes and behaviours either from some people who manage the repairs service within the landlord, or some of the repairs operatives going into tenants' homes.

This is important because tenant perceptions of how repairs and major works are managed and delivered affects the satisfaction ratings they give them and whether they make complaints – both areas that are now increasingly important.

We know there are many great and dedicated people who work in repairs services and who do repairs for tenants. But we ask everyone who works in delivering repairs to think carefully about the issues below.

For repair operatives

- Please treat all tenants and their homes with fairness, respect and courtesy. Treat the home and tenants like you would wish to be treated at home yourselves.
- Discussing tenants or their homes negatively with anyone is stigmatising. Please don't share personal information in a negative way when you have left their home. We are not in a position to make judgements about tenants or anyone else – we don't know anything of each other's struggles, lives or circumstances.
- Having said this, you may come across a safeguarding issue when you are working in a tenant's home. If you do, please report it in accordance with the landlord's or your employer's procedures.
- Being at home for a repair often means that tenants are taking time out from what they do. Tenants have busy lives, like you. Many are in work and have caring commitments and appointments. If you cannot attend at pre-arranged time for a repair's appointment, this can cause tenants considerable problems. If you will be delayed, please communicate with the tenant or ask the office to let tenants know what is going on.
- When working in tenants' homes, please know and understand the landlord's Code of Conduct for contractors. In particular:
 - a) be particularly empathetic where the landlord has told you that a tenant is vulnerable and has additional needs
 - b) let the tenant know what you're doing, why and how long it will take
 - c) don't work with a "that'll do, they're only tenants" culture
 - d) don't use the tenant's facilities without asking
 - e) be mindful of tenant's furniture, carpets and possessions
 - f) leave the tenant's home in a state of cleanliness

For those who manage repairs:

- please listen, be patient and trust what the tenant is saying to you
- giving repairs operatives all the information they need to do the job is important, including access information
- it is also important that vulnerability information on tenants is kept up to date, and that this information is provided to operatives – including information about tenants who may need a particularly empathetic approach; who have additional needs; language barriers; tenants who might need more time to understand issues or answer the door
- contractors *cold calling* tenants is often very annoying for tenants and can be very distressing for vulnerable tenants with particular needs. Please ask contractors to always make an appointment.
- we have heard how operatives have reported visits as no-access where the truth has been that the tenant is vulnerable and, in some cases, frightened to open the door. Please question whether no-access, really is no-access, when it relates to a vulnerable tenant.
- it can be very frustrating for tenants where a repair cannot be completed first time. Please be empathetic with tenants when this happens, perhaps agreeing any next visit with the tenant before the operative leaves the home.
- similarly, if an additional minor repair comes to light during a repair that the operative could complete on the same visit, consider whether this might be preferable to requiring the tenant to take more time off to get the repair done.

For senior managers in landlords and contractors:

- please show your commitment to the tackling stigma journey by passing this tackling stigma guidance on to all your repairs managers and all operatives working in your tenants' homes
- please discuss with tenants ways to monitor and review the attitudes and behaviours of repairs managers and operatives
- please also discuss with tenants ways that you can reward good behaviours and attitudes towards tenants and be prepared to address poor behaviours and attitudes
- if you are a contractor or if you lead an in-house repairs team, please consider how you can train operatives regarding social housing stigma, both on induction and periodically in “tool talks”
- if you are a manager procuring a contract, please discuss with tenants how you can include tackling social housing stigma as part of the contract and subsequently monitor behaviours and attitudes

Finally – we want to hear from you. We want to know how successful you are tackling stigma in repairs. Are the issues we have raised in this tackling stigma guidance the right issues? Are we misunderstanding how things actually work in practice? Are there ways that we could improve the guidance so that we all work together to tackle stigma in the repairs service.

If you want to contact us, get in touch with:

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