



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Responsive Repairs Update
Date:	15 January 2025
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Cllr Simy Dhyani, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	N/A
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	WIP – Work In Progress

Report Author / Responsible Officer

Dan Thurlow – Head of Asset Management

Corporate Priorities	<p>Service improvement and delivery: Running the Council efficiently and putting residents at the heart of everything we do</p> <p>Homes to be proud of: Enable well-maintained and affordable homes, where people want to live</p> <p>Proud and thriving borough: Realise our potential as a great place to live and work with a thriving business community</p>
Wards affected	All wards affected

Purpose of the report:	To provide an update on the improvements made to date and assurance of continual improvement to service provision whilst tendering the new R&M Contract
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	For the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the contents of this report
Period for post policy/project review:	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 The Responsive Repairs service plays a pivotal role in the overall satisfaction of residents, representing one of the most frequently utilised services by tenants. It directly impacts the daily lives of residents, ensuring their homes are safe, functional, and well-maintained.
- 1.2 There are several statutory responsibilities, that need to be met by Dacorum Borough Council as a landlord. Regulation and legislation in repairs are evolving and we will soon see Awaab’s Law introduced and a new decent homes standard. This will likely see more focus on risk, transparency, quality and condition. We also need to manage the financial risk associated with potential high cost repairs and the risks to reputation of getting this service wrong.
- 1.3 Recognising its importance, recent improvements have been implemented to enhance both service efficiency and resident satisfaction. These enhancements are designed not only to meet the increasing demand for repairs but also to minimise operational risks, optimise resources, and reduce costs for the council. Effective management of the service, with a focus on responsiveness and quality, is instrumental in maintaining high levels of resident satisfaction while mitigating financial and operational risk. This report outlines the key improvements made to the service, highlighting their positive effects on both residents and the council.
- 1.4 Due to an IT system issue, some resident survey data is not available for October and November.

2. Work in Progress

- 2.1 Work in Progress (WIP) plays a critical role in improving both resident satisfaction and operational efficiency within the Responsive Repairs Service. We have undertaken a targeted reduction programme reducing the WIP from 2883 in April 2024 to 1676 in November 2024, which represents a 42% reduction or 1207 jobs.
- 2.2 By reducing the number of open repair orders the service can ensure that each responsive repair request is handled with the necessary attention and focus, leading to quicker resolutions and higher-quality outcomes for residents. With the same amount of resource managing fewer open repair orders, we can undertake new work quicker with improved supervisory oversight.
- 2.3 To reduce the WIP we have undertaken the following activities:
- Cardo hold weekly meetings with sub-contractors. This covers off performance and completion of works.
 - Sub-contractor performance is reviewed on a monthly basis, and poor performing contractors are removed.
 - Specialist trades are mainly delivered by Cardo’s sub-contractors, such as roofing and drainage. Cardo have reviewed the capacity of these sub-contractors and where needed have increased the number of sub-contractors to meet the demands of the workstream.

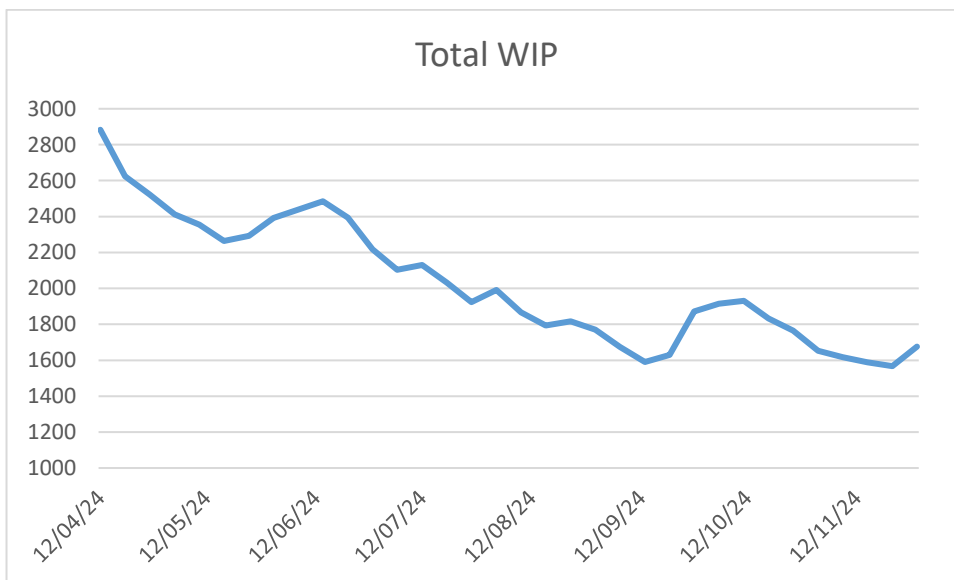
- Cardo’s senior management hold a weekly review. In this meeting they monitor how much work has an appointment in the next two weeks, and address issue blocking more work being booked in. This has increased capacity from around 500 jobs to around 900 a week. Any orders that might miss the deadline for completion are also discussed and plans made to address risk.

2.4 One of the key benefits of reducing the number of open orders is the ability to concentrate resources on individual cases when problems arise. With fewer ongoing tasks staff can dedicate more time to addressing specific issues, ensuring that residents receive timely and tailored solutions that align to their expectations. This increased focus reduces the risk of unresolved or overlooked repairs, fostering greater trust and satisfaction among residents.

2.5 Additionally, a more streamlined WIP means there is a reduced need for residents to chase or follow up on outstanding works. This reduction in administrative workload frees up valuable time for the call centre, allowing them to shift focus towards proactive initiatives such as regular communication with residents when there are problematic repairs, and identifying potential issues before they escalate into larger problems. Proactive work not only prevents service disruptions but also contributes to a more positive experience for residents, who feel that their concerns are being anticipated and addressed before they become urgent.

2.6 Fig 1 shows the consistent WIP reduction since April. The increases on September and November reflect the impact of adverse weather. As we continue to reduce the WIP, we will see the impact of such events smooth out and reduce back to normal faster. As we are still in the improvement phase, we see an inverse correlation with resident satisfaction with each severe weather event. One of the tests that we have successfully completed this improvement programme will be when we don’t see that correlation.

Fig 1 - WIP Reduction Graph



2.7 Unfortunately, all good news comes at a cost. The success of the WIP reduction programme has led to additional revenue pressures as each completed job needs to be paid for. This has contributed to budget pressures resulting in the need to manage all spending proactively to avoid overspending. We may need to defer some more expensive works to the beginning of the next financial year, to ensure we remain on budget.

2.8 In summary an efficient WIP management system enables a more responsive, proactive, and resident-focused approach, improving both satisfaction levels and the operational effectiveness of the responsive repairs service. By reducing the strain of excessive open orders, the service can focus on resolving issues quickly and efficiently, benefiting both residents and the council alike.

3. First Time Fix

3.1 Achieving a first-time fix is a key driver of customer satisfaction in responsive repairs. We have measured the correlation between first time fix and customer satisfaction since April 2024 using a piece of software called CX Feedback which has demonstrated that when a repair is completed on the first visit customer satisfaction reaches 91%. In contrast, when a repair requires multiple visits satisfaction has fallen as low as 38%. This significant disparity underscores the value customers place on a swift and efficient resolution to their issues. The convenience of not having to reschedule appointments or deal with ongoing disruptions plays a major role in improving the customer experience, fostering trust, and enhancing the reputation of Dacorum Borough Council as a landlord.

3.2 To improve first time fix we have undertaken the following additional activities:

- Cardo’s Planning Team are allocated specific time for follow-on work.
- Cardo have moved the planning team into specialist roles. This provides an expertise in each trade, allowing work the correct materials and operative to be identified, thus reducing errors.
- Where possible we are standardising materials and holding these in van stock and in the warehouse. This has had some benefit, but mainly it will increase first time fix over the next few years.
- Van stock has been reviewed to make sure we hold the items most likely to be used in repairs.

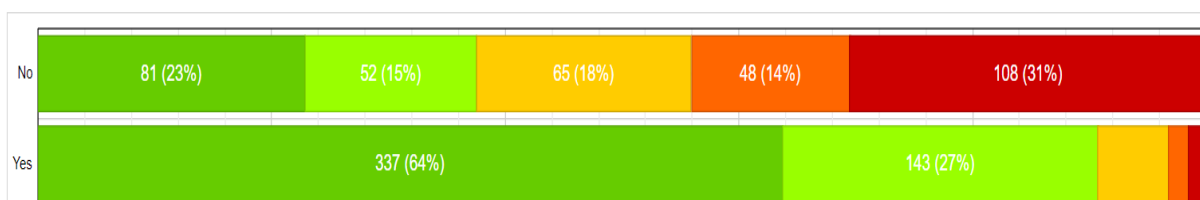
3.3 **Fig 2** provides a snapshot of customer satisfaction levels aligned with first time fix statistics.

Key

- Dark Green – Very Satisfied
- Light Green – Satisfied
- Light Orange – Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied
- Dark Orange – Dissatisfied
- Red – Very Dissatisfied

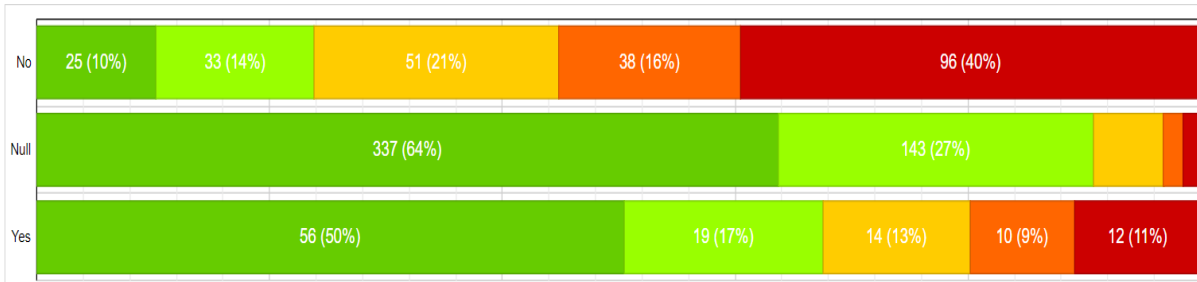
Yes = There has been a first time fix
 No = There has not been a first time fix

Fig 2



3.4 From a satisfaction perspective we know we can recover the customer satisfaction to some extent by offering an immediate follow up appointment. **Fig 3** shows the impact on satisfaction when we are able to offer a follow on appointment immediately. (Null denotes there was a first time fix, Yes – there was a follow up appointment made straight away, No – the follow up appointment was not made straight away)

Fig 3 – Resident satisfaction when a follow on appointment is made



3.5 Operatives are now able to book a follow on visit with the tenant whilst they are still in the resident’s home, however a follow on repair can only be booked with the permission of a supervisor. The supervisor will go over the reason a follow on is needed and where possible unblock the issue so there can be a first time fix.

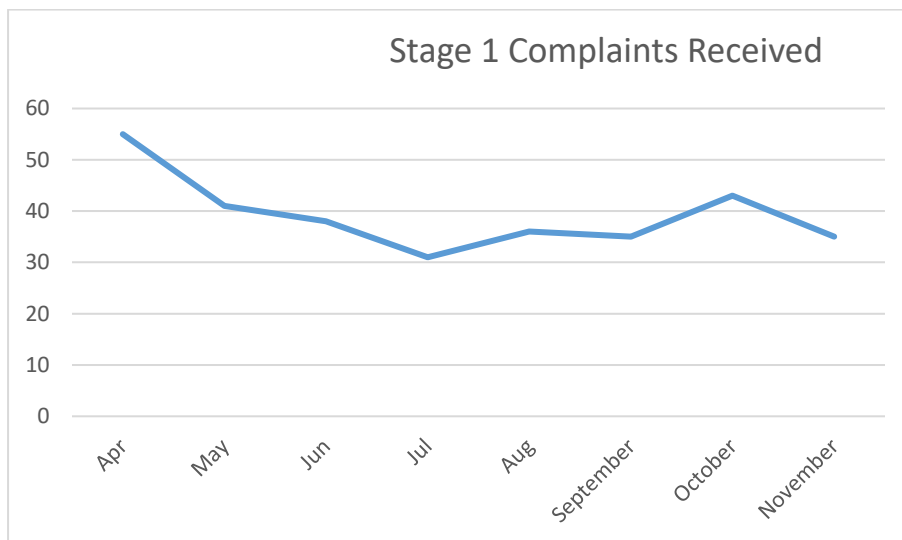
3.6 In summary, focusing on first-time fix rates offers substantial benefits including higher customer satisfaction, improved operational efficiency, and greater cost savings. By ensuring repairs are completed in one visit, both Cardo and Dacorum Borough Council stand to gain from a more streamlined, cost-effective, and successful partnership.

4. Complaints

4.1 Effective complaint management is a cornerstone of any responsive repairs service. With approximately 27,000 responsive repairs completed annually, within the constraints of a limited budget, it is inevitable that we will receive a significant number of complaints. However, rather than viewing complaints as a negative outcome, we embrace them as valuable opportunities for improvement. Our culture welcomes feedback, ensuring that every complaint is seen as a chance to better understand customer concerns, enhance service delivery, and build stronger relationships with those we serve.

4.2 Fig 5 demonstrates the number of Stage 1 complaints received each month.

Fig 5



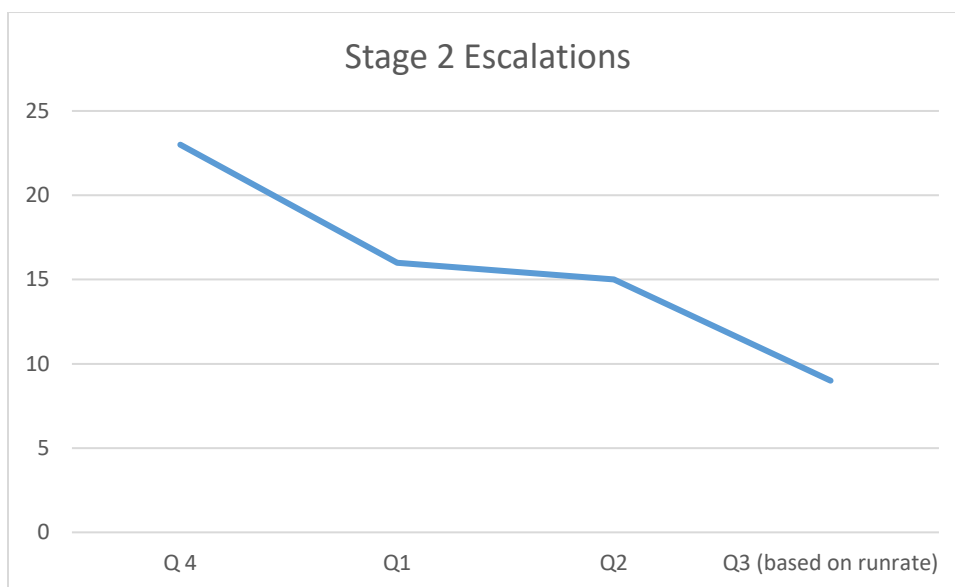
4.3 The management of stage 1 complaints focuses on delivering the basics of complaint handling. We call the resident when a complaint is received to make sure we understand the issue and what resolution the

customer wants. The issue is then investigated and before we write back, we will call the resident again to confirm the outcome and what will be in the response letter. This gives us an opportunity to address any additional points the customer raises and avoid an unnecessary escalation to stage 2. Where appropriate we will visit the resident during the investigation so we can make sure the problem has been correctly diagnosed and the correct specification issued to contractors.

4.4 Our approach to complaint management focuses on transparency, accountability, and proactive resolution. By maintaining a customer-centric philosophy, we aim to address concerns promptly and thoroughly, preventing escalation and fostering trust. One of the key indicators of success in this area is the reduction in the number of complaints that escalate to Stage 2. We have seen a positive trend in this metric, signalling that our efforts to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity are proving effective.

4.5 **Fig 6** – Stage 2 escalations showing number of stage 2 complaints each quarter

Fig 6



4.6 A crucial part of this success is our commitment to track each promise made to customers and ensure follow-through. We carefully track all commitments and ensure that each is fulfilled as agreed. This rigorous follow-up process helps us identify and resolve potential issues before they grow into larger problems, preventing the need for escalation.

4.7 These commitments are reviewed weekly by each individual team and at a senior level at least once a month to make sure focus is maintained.

4.8 We have undertaken the following additional actions to assist in complaint handling

- Flexibility has been booked into the scheduling system to make sure complaints and high priority jobs are not cancelled should an operative call in sick.
- Weekly meetings are held to review commitments made in complaint response to make sure nothing is missed
- Cardo have dedicated operatives who are allocated tasks related to complaints. These operatives are multi-skilled and have demonstrated the highest standards of customer care, so we can be sure the issue is dealt with the first time.
- We review what customers tell us works well, so we can replicate this across other work. Particularly in the feedback to operatives on how to approach resident communication.

4.9 The benefits of an efficient complaint management system are far-reaching. By reducing the number of Stage 2 escalations, we not only improve customer satisfaction but also reduce the strain on resources, freeing them to focus on more complex issues and further improvements. In addition, managing complaints effectively helps identify recurring issues or systemic challenges, offering us valuable insights into areas where operational improvements can be made. This continuous feedback loop supports service innovation and the refinement of processes, ultimately leading to higher quality repairs at a lower cost.

4.10 Moreover, a well-managed complaint process enhances our reputation. When customers see that their concerns are being taken seriously and that we act swiftly to resolve them, their trust in our service increases.

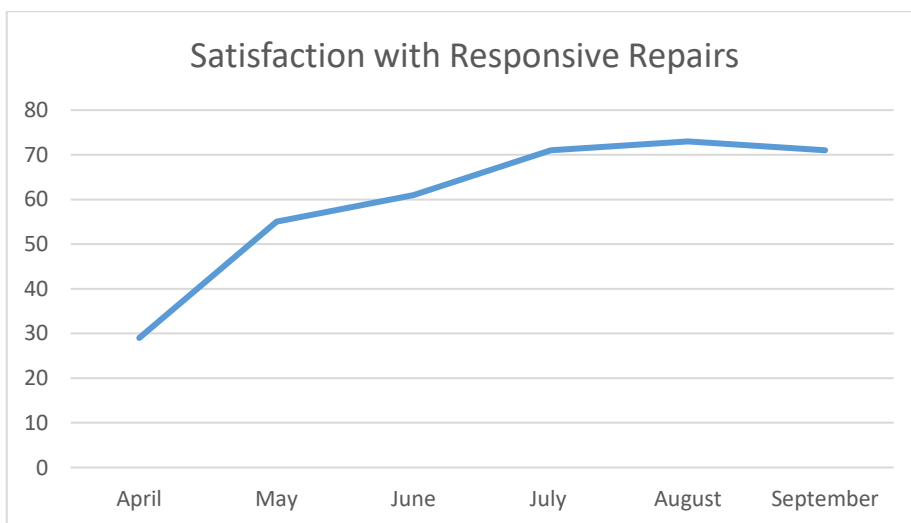
4.11 In summary, complaint management is a critical element of our responsive repairs service. Given the volume of work and the inevitable nature of customer complaints, our proactive, transparent, and accountable approach ensures that issues are resolved quickly and effectively, minimising escalations and improving overall service quality. By embedding a culture that welcomes complaints and follows through on commitments, we strengthen both our operational efficiency and customer relationships, ultimately driving continuous improvement across our service delivery.

5. Resident satisfaction

5.1 We have seen a consistent increase in resident satisfaction since April 2024. Unfortunately, an IT issue has meant we have not received the electronic notifications from Cardo, which would be our trigger to send the satisfaction survey. We only received a handful of responses in October and November. These placed satisfaction at 46% & 47% respectively. We are confident the small sample size is not reflective of the overall service.

5.2 The deluge of rain towards the end of September had a negative impact on satisfaction. We were not yet in a position to quickly respond to the influx of additional work. We received approximately 900 additional repair orders in this time. As the WIP reduction programme continues and we deliver other service improvements our ability to respond to significant adverse weather events will continue to improve.

5.3 Fig 7 resident satisfaction from transactional survey



5.4 We have made considerable progress in improving resident satisfaction. This is achieved by focusing on the drivers listed above. We have also undertaken the following activities:

- A new KPI for the planning team has been introduced based on the oldest job rather than the number of jobs they are booking, so they are not incentivised to book in the easiest work only. This reduces the number of overdue jobs.
- Where access for asbestos tests is a problem the call centre are making courtesy calls to try to unblock this, which speeds up the overall repair time.
- A materials tracker has been introduced; the call centre will update residents if orders for materials are delayed.
- 'We've not forgot you call' being made for any out of target jobs, by the call centre every two weeks.
- Learning from complaints is applied, so other residents benefit
- We hold a weekly service improvement meeting, which focuses on a different workstream each week. This generates some immediate ideas for improvement and other things we add to an action plan.
- Capital workstreams are allocated early, allowing Cardo to mobilise and communicate plans with residents. Capacity is allowed within this programme for unexpected responsive works that we find out about during the year.
- A new induction programme for all labour working on our contract has been introduced. This has more focus on customer service standards.
- A dedicated Resident Liaison Officer has been allocated to Cardo's damp and mould workstream
- We have reduced the number of open damp and mould cases from 573 in April 2024 to 263 as at December

6 Damp & Mould

- 6.1 Damp and mould continues to be a demanding workstream. We have amended the way we triage works, which now focuses as much on any vulnerabilities as we do on the property issue. This helps us to identify if there are any people living in the property who might be more vulnerable to mould in the home.
- 6.2 Previously all damp and mould cases were passed to a Dacorum Borough Council surveyor to decide on the works needed. We have now authorised Cardo to issue immediate works following the triage. For example, they will ask questions to identify if there are any leaks or ventilation repairs needed. They will also raise orders for mould washes immediately, rather than waiting for a survey. This creates some space for the surveyor to investigate the cause of the issue, without compromising safety or delaying works.
- 6.3 We have also introduced initiatives to find damp and mould that has not been reported by residents. Each servicing visit completed by Aaron Servicing now includes a damp and mould inspection, they will report back to us if they see, smell or the resident reports damp or mould. We also inspect for this during the stock condition survey, so every home is receiving at least one pro-active damp and mould inspection a year.
- 6.4 Where we have capital programmes, we consider how we can address damp and mould issues whilst we are undertaking works such as increasing loft insulation whilst replacing roofs, ensuring optimum levels of ventilation are incorporated into the design of the windows we replace etc. We also look to prioritise properties that have known mould issues when considering the decarbonisation programmes such as the recent Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2, albeit these works are also subject to strict grant funding criteria.
- 6.5 Cardo have a dedicated damp and mould team, with a supervisor, resident liaison officer and specially trained operatives. We also have other contractors working on damp and mould cases, to make sure there is sufficient capacity to respond to the demand. Along with our dedicated surveyors the wider team have developed a detailed knowledge of the damp and mould issues in Dacorum Borough Council's properties. In most cases they know the underlying cause if the damp before they attend the property, based on similar cases they have seen. We are looking to document this knowledge and create a playbook to ensure we catalogue a history of the measure undertaken that have proven to be effective. Given we have a fixed

number of archetypes and a fixed number of issues, we can set the solution to each scenario and keep adding to this this each time we learn something new. This will gradually improve our first time fix rate.

6.6 To monitor the more complex cases and those we believe might reoccur, we can use an environmental sensor which detects the temperature, relative humidity and carbon dioxide levels. This helps us to identify where a solution may not have worked or provide crucial data for us to share with our residents to help them help themselves to reduce humidity, improve ventilation and ultimately reduce the impact of increased humidity levels in their homes.

6.7 We are aiming to be able to profile all the properties that have had mould and damp reported over the last 12 months, either from a resident report or from the pro-active inspections by April 2025. We will combine this with the archetype data we have and produce a comprehensive database of the property types and locations that have damp and mould issues.

6.8 We will use this data as a basis as we look to undertake works at scale to reduce the number of new damp and mould cases arising in the future.

7 Preparation for the new contract

7.1 We have reviewed what works well in the current contract as well as the areas we need to improve on. These lessons will be embedded into the new repairs and maintenance contract as far as possible. We have also considered how the repairs market has changed over the last ten years and where we believe issues will be in the future, leaving flexibility to adapt to new information.

7.2 We are designing the new contract to provide flexibility for Dacorum Borough Council, in partnership with residents, to influence how the key drivers of customer satisfaction are delivered. We have also carefully considered how to balance budgetary risk and deliver the required operational performance.

7.3 As we move into the final year of the current contract, we will be increasing our contract management to make sure we are controlling costs due to the risk that Cardo may look to profit maximise during this time. To balance this risk, we also focus on relationship management, practically with officers who are delivering the contract on a day to day basis, as the majority are likely to TUPE over to the new contract. The joint leadership course attended by Cardo and DBC's management team has proven to be very effective and we can see a different atmosphere in the office with far more collaboration and less blame. This boosted relationship will help us in the final stages of the contract.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The repair service is on a journey. We are delivering against a constrained budget, increasing demand for repairs, changing legislation. The improvements we are making will put us in a good position to meet the changes ahead. There is still considerable work to be done, the trajectory we are on is positive and continues to improve.