

# Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy Consultation Report



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## Aims of the consultation

It is important that we hear from as many people as possible who live and work in Sandwell every day when developing our policies.

This consultation was designed and completed to obtain feedback from residents, tenants, employees and councillors on our Housing Repairs and Maintenance policy prior to its publication. This consultation sought feedback on whether the policy is clear, whether respondents agreed with the aims of the policy, and whether respondents believed the policy to reflect the service in practise. Feedback received in this consultation will inform the final version of the policy.

Sandwell Council is committed to ensuring the safety, security, and comfort of our tenants and leaseholders by providing well-maintained, high-quality homes.

We want to make sure that our repairs services are easy to use and worthy of our resident's trust.

This policy outlines the principles and standards for our responsive repairs service, detailing how we will:

- Maintain homes in line with all regulatory and legislative requirements to ensure safety and compliance.
- Deliver a timely, high-quality, customer-focused service that adopts a right-first-time approach, ensuring homes are kept in good repair.
- Maximise operational efficiency and demonstrate value for money through effective decision-making and procurement practices.
- Engage with residents to influence the development of the service by prioritising, measuring, and reporting customer satisfaction, and using customer feedback to drive continuous improvement.

## Approach to the consultation

Please note that the analysis of feedback found in this report pertains only to survey feedback received in the public consultation.

### **Policy Engagement Sessions with Residents:**

We held two separate engagement sessions in both November and January with residents, facilitated by our Community Partnerships Team, to gain insight into the current state of our Housing services and to define the policy approach needed to address Housing and Asset Management challenges in our communities over the next five years. These sessions included participation from Housing and Asset Management staff, as well as approximately 30 tenants and leaseholders across the various meetings.

### **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities (SNAC) Board**

Additionally, feedback was provided by elected members regarding operational delivery when the policy was presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 6th February 2025. These suggestions have been incorporated into the final drafts of the policy documents.

### **Online Consultation**

Online consultation took place over a 4-week period, from February 5th to March 5th 2025. The survey included a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions, allowing respondents to provide feedback on the policy proposals, assess the document's accessibility for residents, and highlight any missing elements. Based on the feedback received, revisions will be made to the policy document where necessary before it is finalised and presented for Cabinet approval in April 2025.

## Summary of consultation results

The consultation findings highlight broad support for the policy's aims, while also underlining respondents concerns with the policy's implementation, accessibility, and the council's responsiveness to repairs.

While the majority of respondents support the policy's aims, respondents were sceptical about whether the council can deliver on them.

Concerns about accessibility were also raised, with respondents highlighting potential barriers for those with language difficulties, and those with limited digital access. The policy's use of 'plain language' was praised, but there were calls for more accessibility support to ensure that all tenants can engage with the policy. Suggestions from respondents included clearer guidance on where to seek help, such as Citizens Advice, and consideration of how the policy is communicated to tenants.

In response to question 8, which asked respondents if they had any additional feedback, respondents emphasised their dissatisfaction with service delivery, suggesting that there needs to be a 'culture change' at Sandwell Council.

This feedback suggests that for the policy to be truly effective, Sandwell Council must commit to visible and sustained improvements to the housing repairs service.

## Consultation questions and responses

As of March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, this consultation had **48** responses.

### **Please tick which best describes your interest in this consultation.**

38 of 48 (79%) were interested in this consultation as they are a tenant living in socially rented accommodation.

2 of those 38 respondents confirmed that they were also employees of Sandwell Council. In total 3 respondents confirmed they were employees of Sandwell Council (6%).

7 (15%) selected 'prefer not to say'.

1 (2%) selected Councillor or Cabinet Member.

1 (2%) selected a homeless person, or person with a non-secure address.

### **Please state which type of accommodation you live in.**

Of the 48 respondents:

28 (58%) live in a house

11 (23%) live in a flat

5 (10%) live in a maisonette

3 (6%) live in a bungalow

1 (2%) respondent selected the 'prefer not to say' option

### **Please state your age group.**

Of the 48 respondents:

1 (2%) was aged 18-24

2 (4%) were aged 25-34

27 (56%) were aged 35-59

7 (15%) were aged 60-64

10 (21%) were aged 65+

1 (2%) respondent selected prefer not to say

### **What is your gender?**

Of the 48 respondents:

36 (75%) identified as female

11 (23%) identified as male

1 (2%) respondent selected prefer not to say

**What best describes your ethnicity?**

Of the 48 respondents:

36 (75%) were white British, English, Welsh, Scottish, or Northern Irish

2 (4%) were Caribbean

2 (4%) were other, mixed or multiple ethnic groups

1 (2%) was Bangladeshi

1 (2%) was Indian

1 (2%) was other, white

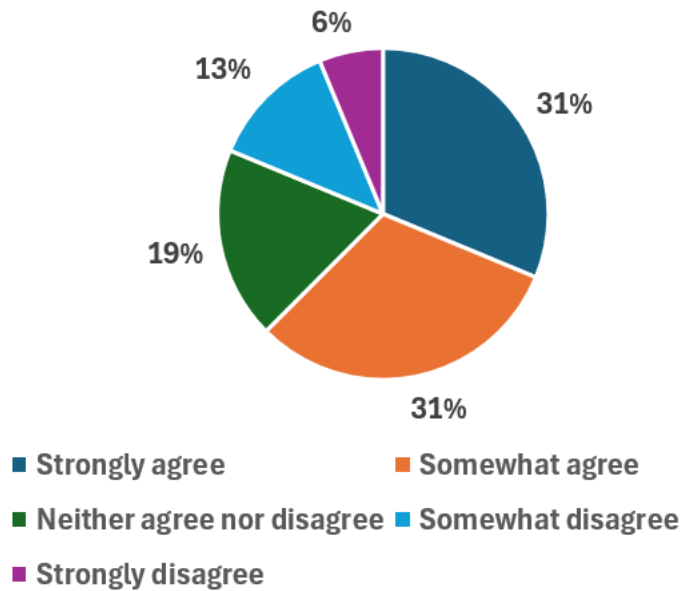
5 (10%) selected prefer not to say

**For all questions, respondents could select one of the following answers:**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**1) Before reading this policy, I was aware of the support Sandwell Council provides to tenants and leaseholders regarding repairs and maintenance.**

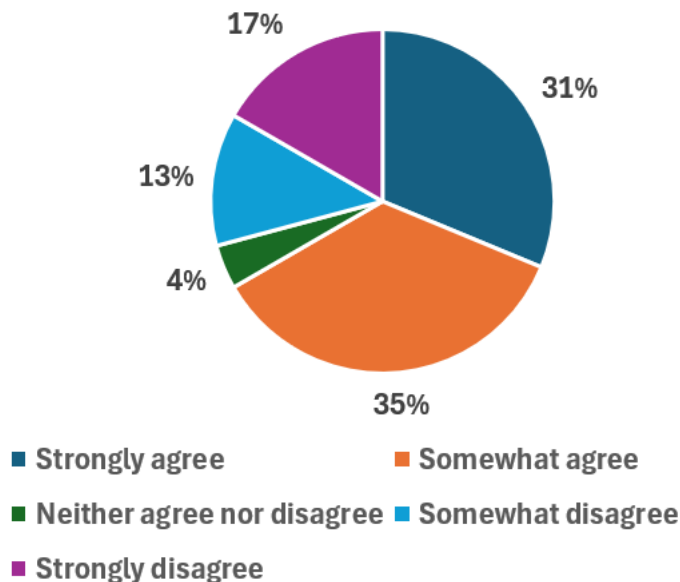
The majority of respondents, 30 of 48 (62%), agreed with the statement that they were aware of the support offer for tenants and leaseholders regarding repairs and maintenance.





## 2) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the aims of the Repairs and Maintenance Policy?

The majority of respondents, 32 of 48 (66%) also agreed with the aims of the repairs and maintenance policy.



Of those that agreed with the aims of the policy, they did so because 'it is a good overall policy', that is 'easy to understand' and is 'common sense'. One respondent said 'I wholeheartedly agree with the aims of the repairs and maintenance policy, and it has been long overdue. I personally welcome this policy and look forward to engaging with housing services in the future to influence the development of the service'. One respondent said that it outlines a 'better service than a private landlord', and another added 'this would be/make a great improvement'.

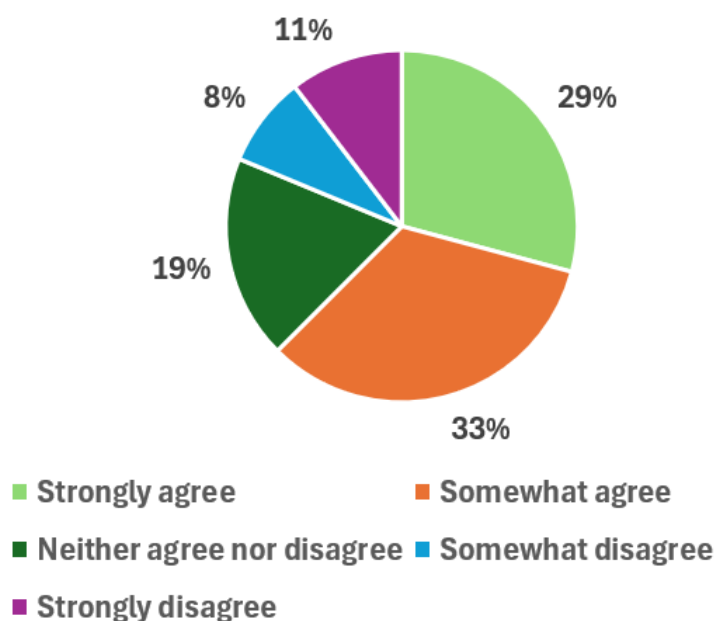
However, some who agreed with the aims of the policy also raised their concerns about the policy being enacted in practise. Respondents said it would be 'great if practice of getting repairs reflected (the) policy', and 'that all sounds good as long as you (Sandwell Council) stick to it'.

Having a repairs and maintenance policy and delivering against performance indicators and timescales was clearly important to respondents. Respondents said, 'Sandwell Council must take tenant feedback seriously and make significant improvements in handling repairs', that currently in terms of repairs and timescales, Sandwell Council is 'not fit for purpose', and that 'providing an efficient, customer-

orientated quality service by the repairs team is of great importance to ensure services work for both tenants and the repairs team simultaneously’.

### 3) The repairs responsibilities for tenants, leaseholders and the council outlined in this policy are easy to understand.

The majority of respondents, 30 of 48 (62%) agreed that responsibilities were outlined clearly.



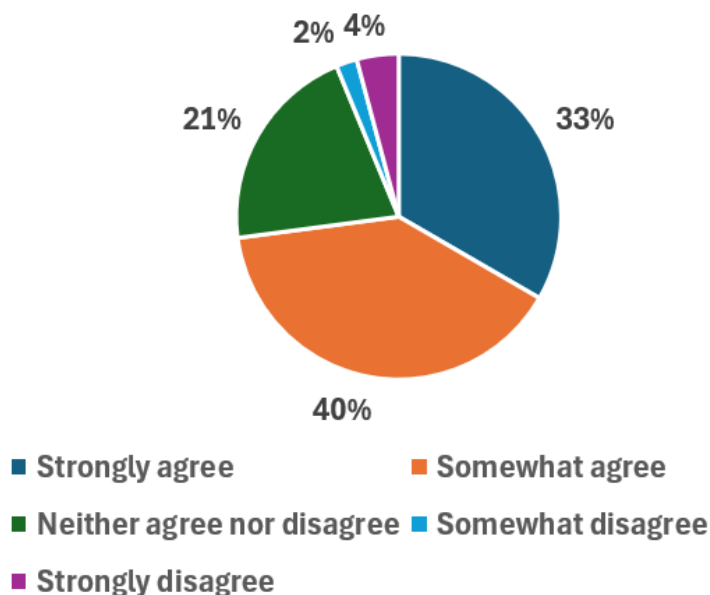
Of those that agreed, they believed the policy to outline responsibilities clearly because ‘it does not go into too much detail’, and neither is it ‘over simplified’, and because the ‘information is clear, straightforward and descriptive’. Another respondent added that the policy was ‘clearly stated’, and one respondent confirmed that ‘very clear and plain language’ has been used.

A respondent who ‘somewhat agreed’ did so because while the policy is ‘mostly’ clear, ‘it lacked clarity regarding blocked toilets’, stating that the policy suggests it is both the ‘tenant’s and council’s responsibility’. Another respondent added that the ‘document is somewhat clear’ but needs to be more specific about ‘actions’ and ‘improvements’, and one respondent would have liked to have seen instruction on ‘who to contact, should you be happy with Sandwell’s repairs’.

Some respondents stated that they would like additional clarity on ‘what is (the) landlord’s and what is (the) tenant’s responsibility, and ‘who is responsible for what’. Other respondents didn’t believe that Sandwell Council deliver on what is stated within the policy, saying that ‘people on the phone just repeat something from a sheet of paper and no repair gets done’, that the policy ‘says one thing and when someone comes to your house to do repairs/update the property, they say something completely different’, and that ‘Sandwell council does not honour its responsibility towards tenants’.

#### 4) The policy clearly explains how and when tenants should report repairs.

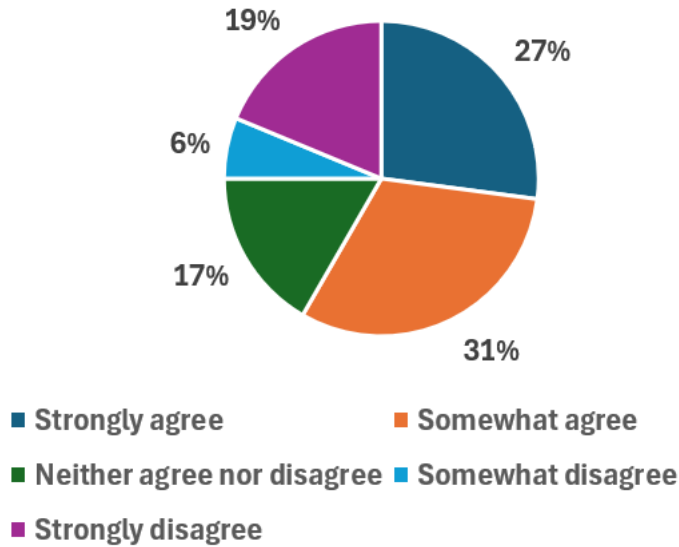
A strong majority of respondents, 35 of 48 (73%), agreed that the policy clearly explains how tenants should report repairs. Just 3 respondents (6%) disagreed.



Of those that agreed, they did so because it is ‘clear and concise’ and ‘easy to understand’. One respondent, who somewhat agreed, also emphasised the importance of having ‘contact information provided for both those who can use the automated platform and those who need to either phone or visit a facility in person, (as) not all are technologically literate or have phone lines/internet access’. A further respondent added that while the policy is ‘easy to follow’, ‘nothing is ever done’.

**5. This policy reflects the council’s approach to repairs and maintenance, including major and emergency repairs.**

The majority of respondents, 28 of 48 (58%) agreed with the statement.

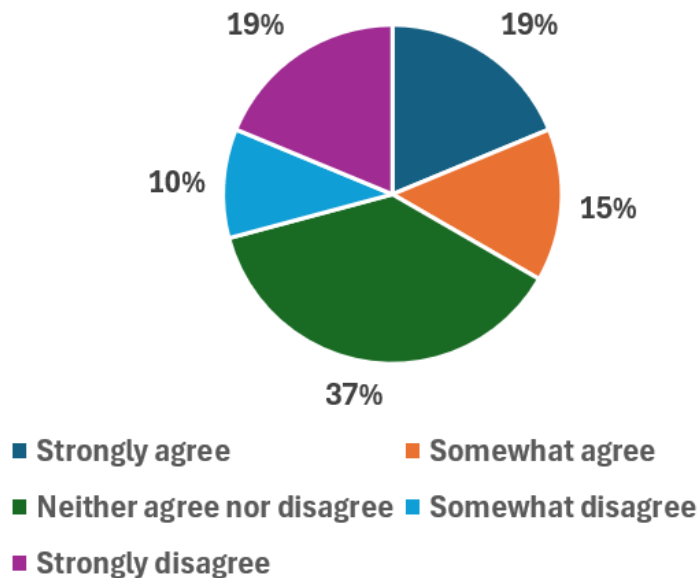


Of those that agreed, they did so because ‘it does reflect the council's approach quite accurately’, and because ‘there has already been evidence of some improvement in repairs being done. (The council) just need to maintain and gather momentum to tackle the backlog.’ Another respondent who somewhat agreed said that they would also however like ‘more clarity regarding eco strategies, improvement programmes and upgraded timetables’.

One respondent who disagreed, suggested a lack of compassion and effort has been shown by the council to improve the standard of maintenance and repairs.

## 6) The policy clearly outlines how damp, mould, and health-related hazards will be addressed.

Respondents gave mixed feedback, with a relatively equal amount both agreeing and disagreeing with the statement. 16 of 48 (34%) agreed, 14 of 48 (29%) disagreed and 18 of 48 (37%) neither agreed nor disagreed.



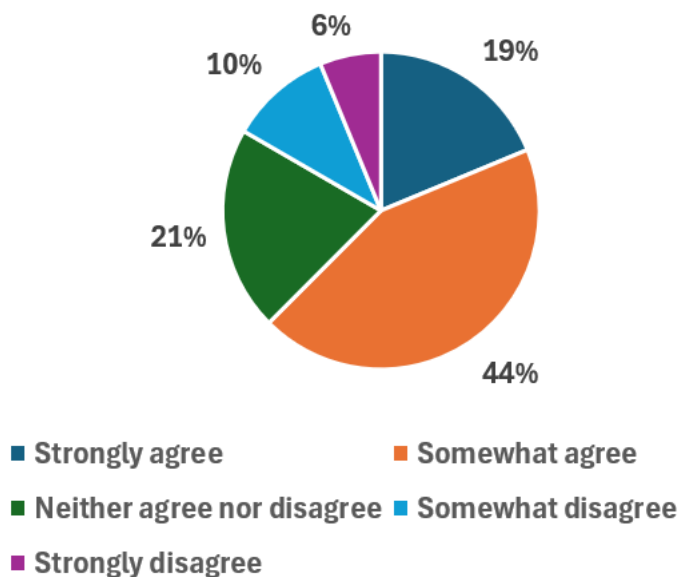
Of those that did agree, they did so because 'these issues must be (a) top priority for health and safety reasons', because the policy gives an outline for the whole borough as opposed to individual postcodes and because it uses 'clear language' and avoids 'ambiguity'. A further respondent added that the policy is clear on 'damp, mould and hazardous living conditions, identifying risks that could cause harm to tenants'.

However, respondents who disagreed with the statement, said that 'it does not go into detail', solely providing an 'outline', with one respondent stating that they 'did not see anything regarding damp and mould' in the policy. Another respondent stressed that 'what is written on paper to how the council react are totally different', a sentiment echoed by multiple respondents throughout the consultation.

One respondent who somewhat agreed with the statement also suggested that they would like to see more on 'asbestos, which is still in properties in Sandwell'.

### 7) To what extent to you agree or disagree that the majority of tenants and leaseholders will understand this policy?

The majority of respondents, 30 of 48 (63%) agreed with the statement.



Respondents who agreed, described the policy as ‘very clearly written’, using ‘plain language’. One respondent added that the policy is ‘straight forward to read’.

However, respondents who disagreed raised concerns surrounding how accessible the policy is for those with ‘language barriers’, ‘the elderly’, ‘and those who lack sufficient knowledge about their rights and responsibilities’. One respondent said that ‘those with literacy or language problems will struggle’, and another stated that ‘while individuals who are well-informed may have no difficulty, consideration must be given to those who may struggle. The council cannot tailor its approach to every individual need, but it should take great care in ensuring that all affected individuals have access to clear and accessible information. Guidance should also be provided on how to seek assistance, such as through Citizens Advice, to ensure that every tenant can fully understand the policy. It is crucial that no tenant is left misinformed due to inadequate support or communication from the council’.

Similar feedback was received from another respondent who stated that ‘Sandwell is an incredibly socio-economically deprived area. Many don’t have English as a first language, and there’s a lack of further education, and so the policy should be made as crystal clear as possible’.

A further respondent strongly disagreed on the basis that 'most tenants don't know about the policy', and one respondent said that they found some parts easy to understand and other parts difficult.

### **8) Any other comments**

Respondents were then asked if they had any additional comments on the policy.

Respondents told us that the service provided to tenants must improve, and that tenant satisfaction must be treated 'as a priority'. This sentiment was echoed by other respondents, one of which added that 'all I want is a council who actually cares for its citizens', and that 'there is a need for a culture change in some approaches to tenants and the standard of the delivery of the service'.

A further respondent said, 'please look in detail at the poor state of properties that are being released to people'.





## Actions taken in response to consultation feedback

During the consultation, respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on the reasoning behind their answers to the multiple choice questions. Question 8 also asked for any additional feedback on the policy not otherwise stated. Feedback received from respondents can be found in the table below, in addition to our response and any actions we are taking.

What respondents told us	Our response	Relevant actions	Timescale
<p>Need to maintain houses for people especially with health issues e.g. damp and more urgency with repairs not quick at present time leads to frustration and no confidence in repairs section time lapse debatable.</p>	<p>In response, we are developing a Damp and Mould Policy aimed at addressing these concerns in more detail. The policy will focus on prioritising repairs for residents who are most affected, particularly those with health vulnerabilities. It will include clearer guidelines for identifying and addressing damp and mould issues promptly, ensuring that repairs are carried out in a timely manner. Additionally, the policy will outline measures for regular</p>	<p>Develop a Damp and Mould Policy in collaboration with resident engagement groups, in preparation for the implementation of Awaab's Law in October 2025.</p>	<p>December 2025</p>

	inspections and follow-ups to prevent recurrence, offering residents more confidence in the repair process.		
Repairs timescales should be included in the policy instead of the tenant handbook, as it can be difficult to see these expected timescales if you don't have online access.	We do understand that more easy-read summaries need to be developed for more of our policies and documents. Therefore, we will be developing a housing repairs-specific booklet combining the Repairs Policy and Tenant Handbook – this will include information on Service Standards, KPIs, etc. We will consult with tenant groups and update the handbook to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.	Create a Repairs-Specific booklet that combines the Repairs Policy and Tenant Handbook, incorporating KPIs, Service Standards, and other key details, while also developing easy-read summaries for additional policies and documents.	April 2025
Tenants and residents are concerned around the lack of consistency in the	Once the policy is implemented, the Housing Repairs Service will	Deliver comprehensive training on the new Housing Repairs and	September 2025

<p>information and guidelines provided in the policy will be followed by all staff.</p>	<p>organise training to ensure a consistent approach across the service in line with the Repairs and Maintenance Policy. This training will also be extended to Housing Officers, the Customer Services Team, and other relevant staff.</p>	<p>Maintenance Policy to all relevant staff, including Housing Officers and Customer Service Team, to ensure consistent implementation across the service.</p>	
<p>It needs to be very clear on what is landlord and what is tenant responsibility. It didn't mention anywhere what us tenant or council repairs.</p>	<p>Sections 4.1 to 4.4 outline the repairs responsibilities for tenants, leaseholders and the Council.</p>		
<p>Does not tell/address to you fully as to whom you contact, should you be happy with Sandwell's complaints on repairs.</p>	<p>Section 4.27 of the policy document provides guidance on this matter. If a tenant or leaseholder is dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, they can contact a member of the Customer Feedback Team via post, phone,</p>		

	<p>email or the Council website. The team will listen to any concerns, discuss the issues raised, and work towards a satisfactory resolution.</p>		
<p>When to report repairs is very clear, how marginally less so. Ensure contact information is provided for both those who can use the automated platform and those who need to either phone or visit a facility in person. Not all are technologically literate or have phone lines/internet access.</p>	<p>Section 4.5 explains the procedure for tenants to report defects or faults to the Council.</p> <p>It includes information on reporting by phone or online via MySandwell. However, details on how to report in person has not been included.</p> <p>Providing specific information on how to report in person at each office may present challenges, as not all Housing Offices are open five days a week, which means tenants might visit</p>		

	<p>an office that is closed. Instead, we should prioritise Housing Officers visiting vulnerable customers directly.</p>		
<p>More clarity would be welcome regarding eco strategies, improvement programmes and upgrade timetables.</p>	<p>Sandwell's <a href="#">Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy</a> provides information on eco strategic priorities in relation to housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page 30 details the energy efficiency work that will be carried out to ensure all properties are Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Rating C or above by 2030.</li> <li>• Page 31 provides information on Sandwell's Net Zero Neighbourhood Planning Project. The ambition is that we enable communities to</li> </ul>	<p>We will revise section 4.12 of the Repairs and Maintenance Policy to include a greater direct reference to the Housing Asset Management Strategy and its net-zero and energy-efficiency initiatives.</p>	<p>April 2025.</p>

	<p>reduce carbon emissions, improve energy efficiency, and enhance the overall quality of life.</p> <p>In addition, more specific information on our improvement programmes and timescales can be found on page 29 of our <a href="#">Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy</a>.</p>		
<p>Yes but not much about asbestos which is still in properties in Sandwell although I believe safe if not disturbed. Some tenants are concerned it is in their property and therefore don't feel safe.</p>	<p>This is useful feedback. We will take these comments on board and ensure that the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy is updated to include relevant information about asbestos, providing clarity and reassurance for our tenants.</p>	<p>A specific section on Asbestos will be incorporated into the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy.</p>	<p>April 2025.</p>

<p>English is not a first language for some households, and this should ensure that the policy should be made as crystal clear as possible.</p>	<p>We need to assess our corporate priorities regarding this as this is a prevalent issue across . While there are online tools available to help with language barriers on the website, there are still noticeable gaps.</p>	<p>Conduct a review of corporate priorities regarding language barriers online, in person, and in policy documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess current online tools available for language support.</li> <li>• Identify gaps in language accessibility for digital, in-person interactions, and policy documents.</li> <li>• Prioritise areas for improvement across all these areas.</li> <li>• Develop a plan to implement additional resources or tools to address these gaps.</li> </ul>	<p>April 2025.</p>
<p>Post inspections – this needs to be mentioned within the policy document.</p>	<p>While the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy already outlines the Lettable Standard that tenants can expect, we will also include a section</p>	<p>A dedicated section on post-inspections will be included in the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy.</p>	<p>April 2025.</p>

	<p>on post-tenancy property inspections to offer additional clarity and reassurance to our tenants.</p>		
<p>Sandwell Council needs to specify clearer timeframes for appointment slots, as some tenants are currently informed that repairs officers could arrive at any time between 8 AM and 5 PM. This should be reflected both in the policy and in communications such as text messages.</p>	<p>When booking an appointment, tenants will be offered the following slots to suit your convenience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All DAY (08:00 - 5.30)</li> <li>• MORNING (08:00 - 1:00)</li> <li>• AVOID SCHOOL RUN (10:00 - 2:00)</li> <li>• AFTERNOON (12:00 - 5.30)</li> </ul> <p>This information will be included in the easy-read summary document we prepare.</p>		