



# Repairs Review

# Resident Scrutiny Group

RSG PROJECT LEAD: RUSSELL JANES  
SEPTEMBER 2021

## Resident Scrutiny Group Review: Repairs 2021

### Scope

Abri are responsible for repairs and maintenance to the structure and internal fixtures of all rented properties. As a result, the repair service is one which nearly all customers make use of during their tenancy. It is therefore an important topic for the Resident Scrutiny Group (RSG) to review.

It's evident that repairs is also an extremely large topic; therefore, the RSG took the decision to narrow down the scope of the repairs review to four specific elements which they felt were high priority and appropriate to review at the current time. These are:

- The timescales to carry out a repair
- The efficiency of the repairs service
- The use of subcontractors, and
- Communication with customers.

### Approach

A focus group was created from the wider RSG to carry out the repairs review. Members of the focus group met to agree the approach to be used to carry out the review. It was planned that the following methods would be used to gather information:

- A review of key performance indicator trends for repairs and customer satisfaction
- Review of the end-to-end repairs customer journey
- Meetings with staff to understand communication channels and processes regarding appointments
- Meetings with staff to understand Abri's use of subcontractors
- Meetings with staff to understand the timescales allocated for repair completion
- Meetings with Trades Operatives to understand a typical "day in the life"
- Mystery Shopper exercise<sup>1</sup> to map the process from initial contact to completion of repair
- A review of 'right first time' and repair cost data (in respect of value for money)<sup>2</sup>
- A review of repairs complaint data<sup>3</sup>.

It was agreed that individual members of the focus group would be responsible for each of the above tasks, and that the whole focus group would meet fortnightly to allow members to discuss their findings with one another and agree any recommendations or next steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Although a mystery shopper exercise was planned, during the review it became apparent that this would not be appropriate in this instance due to GDPR and data protection concerns.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of drafting this report the RSG lead for reviewing costs associated with repairs and value for money has been unable to meet with the relevant team. This exercise will take place and an addendum to the report will be issued in three months.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of drafting this report the repairs complaint data requested had not yet been provided due to other issues within the business. However, the Director of Optimisation and Business Improvement has attended two RSG meetings to update the group on overall complaints performance within Abri. This important exercise will still take place with the RSG being presented with the required complaints data. An addendum to the report will be issued in three months.

It is proposed that the recommendations made in this report will be assigned to the Executive Director of Operations and the Executive Director of Strategy, Business Insight & HR, with the intention that these will be reassigned to the appropriate roles within the organisation.

## Findings and Recommendations

### Key performance indicator review

1. The RSG reviewed the repairs related key performance indicators (KPIs), presented below, and noted the current variance in performance with all measures below target and trending negatively. This performance variance was discussed with representatives from the Homecare Team who provided a comprehensive explanation for this with key contributing factors being the impact of the pandemic and the current problems being faced due to resource and labour shortages across the sector. The RSG will continue to monitor relevant KPI's via their quarterly performance updates until the recommendations from the review are considered complete.

KPI Name	Data Type	Frequency	Target	April Performance	May Performance	June/Q1 Performance	Trend	RAG
Customer satisfaction with most recent repair (New Responsive Repair Survey)	Cumulative YTD	Monthly	92%	87.30%	83.70%	82.40%	↓	●
Average Time to Complete Responsive Repairs (excluding Emergency Repairs)	Cumulative YTD	Monthly	22 days	31.89	32.89	34.62	↓	●
Average Time to Complete all repairs (responsive and emergency)	Cumulative YTD	Monthly	15	24.79	25.93	27.37	↓	●
Percentage of Cancelled/Abandoned Responsive Repairs	Cumulative YTD	Monthly	No Target	13.41%	14.78%	15.83%	↓	n/a

### Timescales

2. Prior to the partnership between Radian and Yarlinton to form Abri, the two legacy organisations had different timescales in place for completing repair jobs. A longer timescale was applied across the whole of Abri while work is underway to align the two processes.
3. Currently the timescales are 24 hours for emergency repairs and up to 90 days for all other repairs. The RSG focus group agreed that 90 days for a repair to be completed was unacceptable and should be reduced significantly. It believes a key reason for Abri's below target customer satisfaction ratings is the experience of some residents of the repairs service. Ten days for routine repair jobs and up to 30 days for more complex jobs would be more acceptable timeframes. Abri are working to reduce the current timescales; it is important that all appropriate actions are taken to reduce these timescales as quickly as possible (while ensuring that any solutions are cost effective and sustainable for the business).
4. There are other factors which impact on Abri's ability to complete repairs within satisfactory timeframes. The review highlighted there may be a resourcing issue and Abri may not have enough operatives to meet the business need (due to external factors such as the pandemic and labour shortages). Currently, Abri use subcontractors

to complete works in Bristol (an area in which Abri hold small numbers of stock). This approach appears to be working well and could be considered in other areas where there are low stock numbers and no operatives nearby. Alternatively, one or two operatives from each Trade could be allocated to visit these areas regularly to complete all outstanding repair jobs. This may be more cost effective, assuming that there are operatives relatively nearby. It should be noted that contractors are also struggling in the labour market and resource challenges are similarly affecting sub-contractors.

5. Following the investigatory work undertaken as part of this review, the RFG were under the impression that Abri currently only use one supplier for the whole Trades Team (Travis Perkins). Using only one supplier does present risks; if there are delays in that supplier sourcing materials, this will negatively impact on the time taken for Abri to complete repairs. However, after further discussions with Abri colleagues it was clarified that Abri originally issued all staff in the East with Barclaycards to procure materials. An internal audit highlighted the potential risk and the significantly increased cost of repairs materials associated with this approach. It was therefore agreed that Abri needed to move to one integrated procurement approach for materials across the Group.

Stage 1 of this process involved moving to a network of primary suppliers with a reserve of secondary suppliers and as a fall back, 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers. This medium-term change has as of September 2021 saved c£495k and involves 2 primary suppliers for building materials: Bradfords (W) and Travis Perkins (E), 2 primary suppliers for electrical components, Edmundsons (W) and City Electric (E) and a group-wide Plumbing supplier City Plumbing. Stage 2 involved an EU procurement for suppliers across 3 lots covering Abri's whole geography (Lot 1 building supplies, Lot 2 electrical supplies, Lot 3 gas supplies). Using Abri's new procurement framework an invite to the market was issued in June 2021, this provides the opportunity to leverage additional value because of Abri's combined scale and includes enhanced requirements for pricing, social value (community investment and jobs), performance management, data integrity, service levels, business continuity and safeguarding.

Tender responses were received in August 2021 and are currently being evaluated (with presentations to be heard in November) prior to letting new contracts in April 2021. Initial signs are that there will be further savings (c£150k) and importantly additional social value. These long-term contracts (5years +1 +1) also offer the potential for the contractors to invest in additional jobs and new IT enhancements that will ultimately help improve Homecare's van replenishment and other customer service enhancements, helping, despite a very challenging operating environment, to improve overall customer satisfaction.

6. Another issue highlighted in the review was the long wait times for follow on works to be completed. Sometimes an operative may be unable to complete a job at the first visit (e.g., because additional parts need to be ordered or because another Trade is needed to carry out part of the work). In these instances, a second follow on appointment will be raised on Abri's system for a second visit to take place. Generally, the second visit will remain part of the initial job and align to the original target for completion, but some customers have experienced an additional waiting time of up to 90 days. As this is for an ongoing repair, and not a new one, this is not felt to be fair: where a job requires more than one visit, the additional visits should be treated as a priority and completed in a more reasonable timeframe for the customer (e.g. say, 7 to 10 days).

7. It is important for Abri to measure customer satisfaction with repair jobs once they are completed, to understand which aspects of the process are working well and which areas could be improved. The Homecare team currently take a random sample of repair jobs each month to survey for customer satisfaction, but there are plans to survey all customers immediately after the repair is completed in addition to this. Whilst this will give a much more representative view of customer satisfaction with repairs completed, the results may not always be a true reflection of how the customer feels. For example, some customers may not feel comfortable reporting dissatisfaction with a repair while the operative who completed the repair is still in their property. This should be considered by the Homecare team while developing this new surveying process, and measures put in place to ensure that customers feel comfortable to give honest feedback.

Action Ref	Recommended Action	Officer Responsible	Deadline
R0921.01	Methods to reduce the timescales for completing repair jobs should be trialled, with the aim of reducing the timescales for routine repairs down to 10 days (standard jobs) and 30 days (more complex jobs).	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022
R0921.02	Consideration will be given to using subcontractors to carry out repairs in areas of low Abri-owned stock and where there are no in-house operatives nearby. If there are in-house operatives nearby, then an approach of allocating one or two days per week to each Trade for that area should be trialled.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
R0921.03	To report the outcomes of the materials tender to the RSG and if this will further reduce the risk of materials shortages impacting on repair completion times.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
R0921.04	To introduce a process so that where multiple visits are required for the same job the customer does not have to serve a further waiting period between each visit.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
R0921.05	To ensure more effective methods are put in place to capture customer feedback. And that new arrangements ensure the customer is comfortable to give their views when they are surveyed immediately after work is completed (e.g., carrying out the survey via text or email).	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021

### Subcontractors

8. Currently Abri use a mixture of in-house operatives and subcontractors to carry out repair works. There are several subcontractors Abri use regularly, and they are all required to provide key documents, such as copies of their public liability insurance and any necessary qualifications, to Abri before work can be assigned to them. They must also provide quotes so that Abri know what the job will cost before it is carried out. Subcontractors are required to work to the same timeframes as in-house operatives.
9. Subcontractor work accounts for approximately 20% of the repair jobs completed. This is approximately [50-100%] higher than Abri previously estimated. The increased use of subcontractors is primarily due to the partnership between Radian and Yarlinton to

form Abri, and the impact of aligning the repairs processes of two separate organisations. Abri have advised that they anticipate this percentage to reduce over time, as the two organisations become more aligned.

10. However, the RSG are keen for Abri to investigate whether there are any additional actions they could take to reduce this percentage more quickly, particularly as on average it costs around 20% more for a subcontractor to complete a job than an in-house operative (although it is not always possible for in-house operatives to complete jobs assigned to subcontractors due to the need for specialist skills etc.). Reducing the percentage of work assigned to subcontractors and the costs associated with this should be a priority.
11. Each month, Abri's repair supervisors carry out post-inspections of a sample of completed repair jobs, to assess whether they were carried out correctly and to Abri's high standards of workmanship. Concerns were raised during discussions by members of the RSG that these may not be fully effective for subcontractor work. Several anecdotal examples were provided where work by subcontractors was not carried out to the same standards as work carried out by in-house operatives. The current percentage split of post inspections between subcontractors and in-house operatives is not known. The RSG recommend that Abri investigates the current percentage split of post inspections between subcontractors and in-house operatives and increases the number of post inspections for subcontractors to help address this issue.

Action Ref	Recommended Action	Officer Responsible	Deadline
R0921.06	To take action to reduce the number of jobs being assigned to subcontractors that could be completed by in-house operatives.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
R0921.07	To ensure that post inspections can be split out between in-house and subcontracted jobs for reporting purposes.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
R0921.08	To increase the number of post inspections for subcontracted jobs.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021

### **Efficiency and effectiveness**

12. The RSG repairs focus group hasn't yet been able to view data to take a fully informed view about the efficiency of the repairs business process at Abri, but there is anecdotal evidence from members of the panel, from some family, friends, and neighbours, that there is waste and missed opportunity in the system. It is recommended that an exercise to review the cost efficiency of repairs should be undertaken within the next three months and an addendum to the report issued.
13. We have already highlighted the long wait times for follow on works to be completed. This can arise where an operative may be unable to complete a job at the first visit (e.g., because additional parts need to be ordered or because another Trade is needed to carry out part of the work).
14. RSG believes there are other examples of where a better end to end journey for residents would lead not only to improved satisfaction, but also to increased efficiency. For example, it believes there is scope to review how information is collected about potential repairs to help customers report more effectively the nature

and extent of the issues they are experiencing (see also the following section on communications).

15. The aim is to support operatives in having the best chance of ‘getting it right first time’. In this regard, it’s important to quantify how well Abri is performing here. The RSG asked what % of jobs raised are ‘wrong’ when the operative arrives, for example misdiagnosed at point of report. The response was that this is unknown as there is currently a recognised issue within the system which does not allow this to be captured. A method for capturing this data is being considered as part of the Abri Single Systems programme. The RSG also asked what % of jobs attended are unable to be completed due to incorrect materials. Again, this is not currently known but is being considered as part of a wider project to review van stock.
16. There’s also the opportunity for Abri operatives at every encounter with residents to be proactive if they identify further maintenance issues at a property to address these, even where that’s not possible during the booked visit. The proper care and maintenance of Abri properties is in everyone’s interest and Abri has recently launched an initiative called ‘see something, say something’. The purpose of which is to empower colleagues to report any concerns relating to an Abri property via a dedicated channel which ensures this is addressed appropriately.

Action Ref	Recommended Action	Officer Responsible	Deadline
R0921.9	To explore existing data and new data capture options to provide better performance insights about ‘getting it right first time’, for example % jobs misdiagnosed when reported; incomplete due to incorrect materials; or where follow-up work is required.	Executive Director Strategy, Business Insight & HR	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022

### Communication

17. This element of the review has two main areas of focus. The first is concerned with the routes through which customers can report repairs. In particular, the portal has attracted some feedback that it could be more intuitive and flexible. The RSG understand that work is ongoing to improve the functionality of the portal but recommend that customers have the opportunity to be involved in this process.
18. Secondly, the RSG would like to review Abri’s communication with customers regarding appointments, particularly where appointments are cancelled (e.g., how do Abri contact the customer to rebook the appointment?) and where operatives are likely to arrive late for the appointment (e.g., if an operative has been held up at another job, how is the customer informed of this?). The current procedure relies on operatives contacting the Customer Contact Centre (CSC) to advise they are held up or are not going to reach their next job in time. It is then the responsibility of the CSC colleague to contact customers to update them. Due to high volume of calls to the CSC and subsequent long wait times, this is not always a straightforward task for operatives or an effective use of their time. It is recommended that a dedicated contact route is created for operatives to utilise should there be need to notify a customer of any changes to their appointment.

19. The RSG noted that in some instances the time taken to answer calls within the Customer Contact Centre was considered significant and examples were provided. One example detailed a wait time in excess of 25 minutes for a resident calling to check when an operative would arrive as they had not yet arrived for a scheduled morning appointment, and it was now midday. In this instance the resident then went out for the afternoon, received a missed appointment card on their return and was responsible for rearranging the appointment. The RSG agreed that this was not good customer service and recommended that the customer experience of the CSC is reviewed as part of a wider Communications deep dive review. It was agreed that the RSG Advisor will ensure a Communications review is contained within the 2022/23 annual work plan and that the scope is clearly defined to meet these criteria.
20. We also want to review communication between Abri office-based staff and operatives through meetings with Homecare colleagues to discuss the appointment process and further understand what an average day for an operative is like. Due to the current identified resource issues within Homecare, Abri's priority has been to ensure customer needs are met and so appointing time to discuss these matters with the RSG has not been possible. However, Homecare recognise the importance of this exercise and it is recommended that a small number of operatives are invited to an RSG meeting to provide an overview of their day-to-day experience and responsibilities.

Action Ref	Recommended Action	Officer Responsible	Deadline
R0921.10	Review UX for the repairs functionality on the Abri portal, ensuring some of our customers are consulted as part of this exercise.	Executive Director Strategy, Business Insight & HR	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022
R0921.11	Create a dedicated contact route for operatives to utilise when communication is required with customers	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022
R0921.12	Schedule time for a small number of Homecare operatives to attend an RSG meeting to provide an overview of their day-to-day experience.	Executive Director - Operations	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2022

## Conclusion

The RSG acknowledges the challenging environment in which Abri has operated over the last eighteen months and supports the ongoing review to improve the repairs service for both customer and colleagues. The RSG have however, identified additional improvement opportunities in the key areas of communication, repair timescales and the use of subcontractors and has made twelve recommendations that it looks forward to working with Abri to implement. The RSG will issue an addendum report in Q4 to conclude this review once the value for money and complaints data has been reviewed and trade operative discussions have taken place.





Repairs Review

Addendum

Resident Scrutiny Group

NOVEMBER 2022

## Resident Scrutiny Group Repairs Review Addendum.

### **Introduction**

As part of the initial scoping of the Repairs Review, the Resident Scrutiny Group (RSG) was interested to understand how Abri ensures that value for money is delivered in respect of repairs and how complaints data is monitored to support service improvement. Members were also interested to meet with trade operatives and further understand the relationship between office based and supervisory colleagues with those on the front line and in customers' homes. This addendum provides a post review update on these areas of interest.

### **Value for Money**

At the time of completing the Repairs Review, Abri was undertaking a significant procurement exercise for its materials contractors; the aim of which was to source suppliers that would not only deliver value for money for Abri, but also align with Abri's values in relation to sustainability and customer satisfaction. This exercise has subsequently concluded and resulted in cost reductions of up to £900,000 per annum and significant social value benefits. The successful contractors have also committed to providing van stock solutions that will significantly reduce the occasions of 'stock shortages' when the trade operatives are attending repairs increasing first-time fix and job completion times for customers. The RSG received a comprehensive report detailing the outcome of the procurement exercise and is satisfied that value for money is being achieved through the new framework.

### **Complaints Data**

During the Repairs Review Abri was in the process of aligning its policies and procedures to the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code as well as implementing a revised complaints team structure. It was agreed that the RSG would continue to monitor repairs related complaints data via quarterly updates to the group. Since the review concluded Abri has introduced a root-cause analysis function within the complaints team to ensure that common complaint themes are identified and addressed with specific action plans. Improvements are beginning to be seen in the complaints data and performance metrics and whilst this has been noted by the RSG repair related complaints remains an area of focus for the group. Therefore, the Executive Director of Operations, Director of Commercial Services and Head of Quality Assurance will be attending an RSG meeting during Q3 of 2022-23 to provide an in-depth update on progress.

### **A Day in the Life ...**

The RSG felt it important to understand the day-to-day activities of an Abri trade operative to ensure that they are able to effectively undertake their duties and have the required support to do so, as this is critical to them being able to deliver the good customer service and quality of work that customers deserve. Four operatives attended a meeting with the RSG, and each provided an overview of their day-to-day activities. They also took part in a question-and-answer session with the group which covered the areas raised in the Repairs Review. The RSG found the session incredibly valuable and were grateful for the insight into the daily life as an Abri operative.