

Communal repairs review 2022

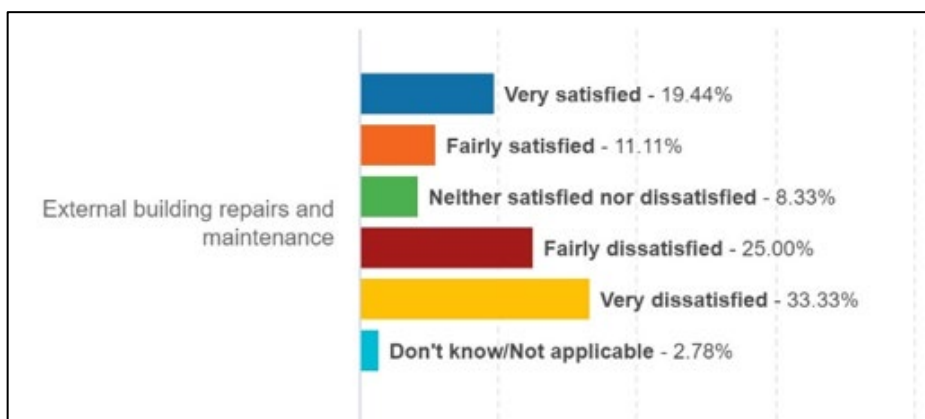
In 2019 Cottsway carried out a STAR survey of their shared-owners and leaseholders which found that less than half of homeowners (47%) were satisfied with how Cottsway deals with communal repairs and maintenance. This was reflected in similar ratings for repairs to communal areas and external building repairs and maintenance (both 45%). A second Star survey in 2021, again of shared owners and leaseholders, confirmed that customers were still dissatisfied with these service areas.

The Customer Insight Group decided to investigate this low level of satisfaction and commissioned the Scrutiny Group to carry out a review in 2022. This report sets out the Scrutiny Group's methodology and findings and also suggests a number of recommendations for future action.

Methodology

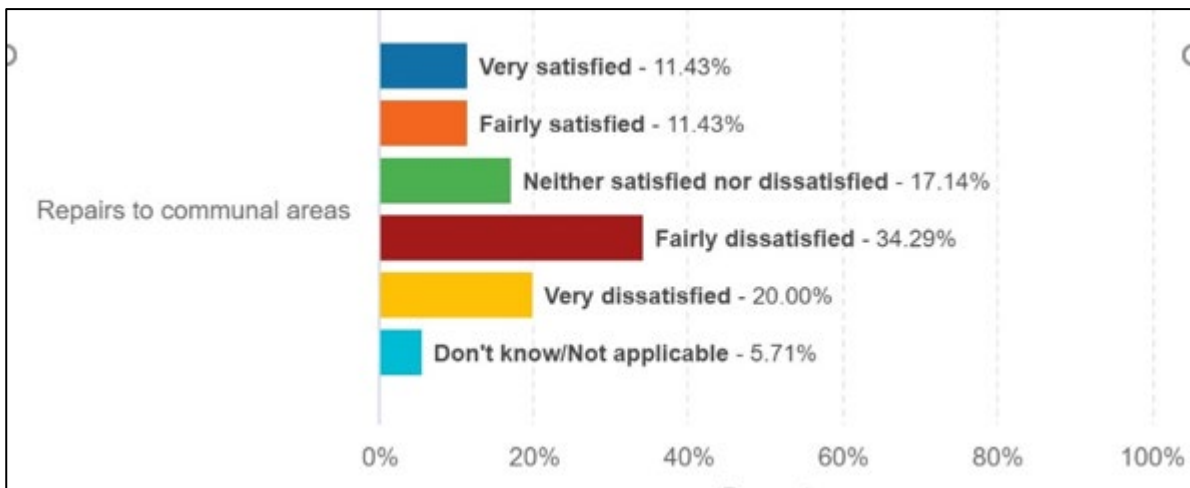
The Scrutiny Group agreed on some survey questions and the Customer Engagement Officer used Smart Survey to send the survey to 424 customers (including tenants, leaseholders and shared-owners) who share communal areas and therefore may have experience of the communal repairs service. A total of 36 responses were received. The survey was made up of four questions and a free text box to capture qualitative feedback. It also invited respondents to take part in interviews with the Scrutiny Group and five interviews were held. Survey results were:

1. External building repairs and maintenance:



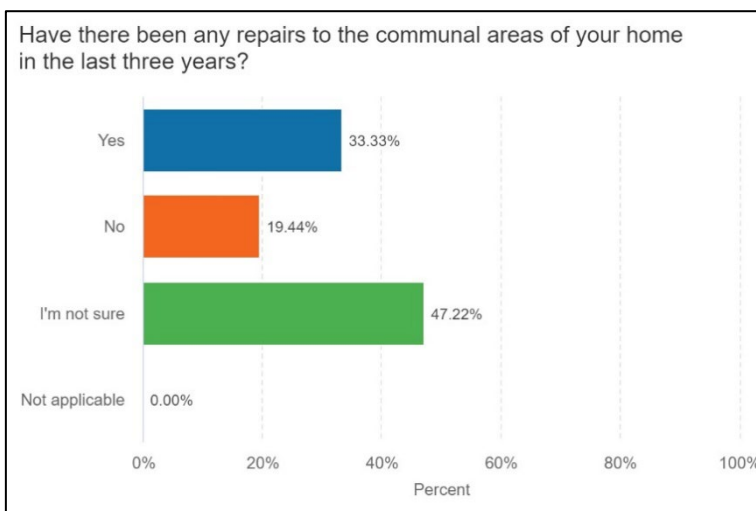
More respondents were dissatisfied with external building repairs and maintenance (58%) than were satisfied (31%). Just over 8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and almost 3% said they didn't know or the question was not applicable.

2. Repairs to communal areas



When asked about satisfaction with repairs to communal areas, again more respondents were dissatisfied (54%) than were satisfied (23%). Just over 17% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and almost 6% said they didn't know or the question was not applicable.

Q3. Communal repairs in the last three years



However, when asked if there has been a communal repair to their block in the last three years almost half of respondents were unsure (47%), with only 33% saying yes and 19% saying there hadn't been.

Q4. Net Promoter Score (NPS)

When respondents were asked if they would recommend Cottsway's communal repairs service to family or a colleague only 18% said they would. All other respondents are classified as detractors with none being neutral. This gives a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of -65.

1. Do you know where to find out which repairs are your responsibility and which are Cottsway's?

All customers were aware of where to look for information, quoting either their tenancy agreement, tenant information pack or Cottsway's website. Nobody mentioned the Customer Charter specifically. One customer pointed out that not everyone is able to go online because of a lack of internet access or disability.

2. Do you pay a service charge to Cottsway? If so, do you know what communal repairs your service charge will pay for?

All interviewees pay a service charge and most knew what it covered to some extent. Three were clear on what was covered, one had an annual bill but wasn't sure what it covered as it wasn't itemised and another did not know what it covered.

3a. If you have requested a communal repair, how easy did you find it to report to Cottsway?

Two customers said they had never reported a communal repair, although one had reported issues with the main entrance door which would have been classed as a communal repair. Two others felt it was easy to do by phone and one said it was '*not bad.*' One interviewee preferred to send emails in order to have a written 'trail' and another pointed out that being asked for photographs was potentially problematic and would prefer it if Cottsway '*took my word for it*' – this suggests customers may see requests for photographs as a demand for evidence rather than a tool to help diagnose the issue and get the most appropriate help for the customer.

3b. If you have not reported a communal repair, would you know how to?

Only one customer said they did not know how to report a communal repair although this customer later talked about reporting a communal repair, which they may not have considered communal. The other interviewees would either phone in or report it online.

4. What has been your experience with Cottsway staff when reporting a communal repair?

All interviewees felt Cottsway staff were good at dealing with reporting up to a point. One mentioned difficulty in explaining '*in-depth stuff*' and two others pointed out that the repair had either not progressed despite initial helpfulness or that it had never been completed.

5. When reported, was the communal repair completed in a timely fashion?

Two interviewees said their repairs had been completed on time. However, one said the repair had never been completed and another said that they had reported the same repair three times and it had never been satisfactorily dealt with and was still an ongoing issue. Another interviewee reported that the service was not reliable and could be down to an external contractor whose performance was not always good.

6. Was the repair to a good standard?

One interviewee repeated that the job had never been completed and another was very emphatic that the standard was '*absolutely not*' good. Another commented that performance was inconsistent ('*sometimes a bodge job*') and one interviewee had not had any communal repairs. Only one interviewee said the repair had been to a good standard.

7. What's your experience of ongoing communication with Cottsway regarding communal repairs, do they keep you well informed?

There were mixed responses to this question. Two interviewees said they had to chase Cottsway for information or weren't given enough information, just that a job was going to be done. Two others said communication was inconsistent about the details of the job, when it was complete or when the external contractor was due to attend (again possibly the contractor being the problem by not attending). Text messages do not always get through due to poor signal.

8. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Cottsway keeps communal areas safe and well maintained? (Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied)

The interviewees were evenly split on this question – two were satisfied (one fairly, one very), two dissatisfied (one fairly, one very) and one was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

9. Do you have any further comments, good or bad, that you would like to share regarding Cottsway's communal repairs service?

- Problems with the bin stores – insecure (need keys), currently suffer from fly-tipping and council then won't take away the rubbish. Rats sighted.
- Need to complete jobs right first time. Better communication would help e.g. let everyone in block know to avoid parking where drains are so operatives can do the job and not have to come back. Another customer also noted 'Apart from the front door, all jobs get rectified **eventually**.'
- Fire safety – some residents do not obey rules and block communal areas with stuff which would need to be moved in the event of a fire. Customers want to see Cottsway enforcing rules for everyone.

Conclusion

Whilst a relatively small sample of Cottsway's customers have taken part in the survey and subsequent interviews the results do seem to support the original findings of previous surveys in that dissatisfaction with the service outweighs satisfaction. Comments from the survey and feedback from the interviews give a greater understanding of the reasons behind this and show dissatisfaction is often the result of inadequate communication about the repair; a perceived delay in the repair being carried out and sometimes dissatisfaction with the quality of the repair itself.

Recommendations

Having reviewed the available evidence the Scrutiny Group's recommendations are to:

1. Update the Customer Charter to include a section on services to communal areas, including setting out the service standards customers can expect when reporting a communal repair.
2. Review response times for communal repairs and publish.
3. Run a communication campaign to encourage residents of blocks to report communal repairs, raising awareness of the process and service standard applied.
4. Improve the level of communication with all residents of the block when a communal repair is reported, letting them know the repair has been reported and the timescale for completion.
5. Communicate when the repair has been completed to all residents of the block.
6. Problems with doors seem to be a recurring theme – review the data Cottsway hold on communal doors and identify how this can be addressed.
7. Ensure regular estate inspections are identifying and reporting communal repairs.
8. Adapt the repairs satisfaction survey to record satisfaction with communal repairs to enable improved monitoring of the service.
9. Improve internal monitoring of the standard of the communal repair, perhaps request photos on completion of job.
10. Carry out a further Star survey of shared-owners and leaseholders in 2022/23 to continue gathering satisfaction from this cohort.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to all the Cottsway customers and staff who helped provide information and evidence for this review.

Appendix One: A selection of comments received in the survey

- Some things have been fixed well... But we have some areas that have been ignored or not properly fixed... Just kind of 'botched'.
- Main front door has never been repaired, still opens from outside giving access to anyone.
- Work seems to get done quickly and efficiently. Repair team are always friendly and polite.
- Once the repair was raised it took a long time for Cottsway to arrange for them to be sorted, with a couple of bits never sorted (one raised over 2 years ago and chased multiple times and still no action). Have found Cottsway prefer to fix the immediate issue and not the long-term issue (e.g. got us into the building when the front door was faulty but didn't correct the issue with the door itself meaning we have to repeatedly ring for a locksmith every time the part malfunctions.) As a positive, they are always friendly when you ring them.
- Their answer to complaints about the communal lighting being only partially on was to turn it on 24/7. When I complained about that (asking who was paying for this lighting to be on all day and night) Cottsway's response was to turn it off altogether. This is unacceptable as in the event of the breakout of a fire and presumably totally against health and safety regulations which they don't seem too concerned about, otherwise they wouldn't have done it!
- Things get reported but never acted upon.
- The path to the front door had raised up & broken, my daughter tripped on a slab that was broken I rang them straight away they were very good they came out & repaired it.
- When someone from Cottsway comes to look over the place they constantly ignore things that are damaged like the handrail for the stairs and focus on things they don't like, like how and where people dry their washing, or keep their stuff.
- Communal area and stair area have not been cleaned/hovered for several weeks. This has happened numerous times which has resulted in me having to Hoover the landing stairs on my floor to keep it clean. The cleaners have said there is no power in the sockets so they are unable to Hoover. We have had numerous faults with our communal/fire exit door it needs to be slammed to shut. They keep replacing the locks but not the door. The good part is the maintenance staff are always friendly and helpful.

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