

Keeping the World Heritage Site in good repair

The Edinburgh Shared Repairs Service was set up in 2017 and has just reported its performance for the first full year of operation during which it enabled £2.2 million of works.

Edinburgh is the first local authority to share details of property owners with their neighbours to allow the legal process for property repairs to be completed, and the service is hailed as a model for other towns and cities.

During the sunny days of last week the [Shared Repairs Service](#) arranged an event which was a combination of showing off traditional skills with a careers day for young people from Edinburgh schools. The Edinburgh Shared Repairs Service (ESRS) is the part of the council that gets people together to try and deal with some of the issues about common repairs or shared repairs in tenemental properties. Some of the skills on show were those which will be very much in demand when repairing buildings in the city.

The service itself is claimed to be a bit of a success story. Representatives were invited to give evidence at the Tenement Action Group which feeds into a Holyrood working group. The service has dealt with a total of 196 cases of which 152 have been closed. 44 cases remain open while 26 cases have had to proceed to the enforcement stage. Out of those, 20 property owners simply did not engage with their neighbours and in the remaining six cases the ESRS took over and progressed the case due to safety concerns. The council reports that no complaints have been recorded in relation to the new service.

Part of what the council department does is signpost for property owners where they can find information. [The council's Tenement Toolkit](#) has checklists and templates to help owners work with their neighbours, convene meetings and get their property maintenance carried out. If you need repairs carried out to your flat or tenement then this is where to start.

Appendix 1

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Edinburgh Shared Repairs Service

Edinburgh Shared Repairs Service Performance Update

2018/19 Performance Headlines

Customers		Website Views & Downloads		Emergencies Attended	
Phone Calls	7,077	Website Views	52,600	Masonry Falls	161
E-mails	3,924	Tenement Toolkit	6,800	Dangerous Roofs	87
Solicitor Enquiries	4,995	Missing Share	7,800	Drainage	903
Total Contacts made	15,996			Fire	5
				Police	7
				Number of Invoices raised	8,700

Missing Shares Applications in 18/19	Total Owners affected	Value of Works enabled by the Scheme	Total Missing Share Owners	Financial Commitment by CEC
21	207	£711,900	27	£32,316

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This forms part of a report to the council's Finance and Resources Committee on Thursday

Finance and Resources Convener Alasdair Rankin was happy to talk to us about the council's success in this area. He said : "I think there has been a lot of positive feedback from property owners of tenemental properties. One of the things that the service mainly exists to do is give advice and assistance to the owners. We can facilitate meetings for stair owners and put them in touch with Trusted Traders. The founding principle is that owners have a primary responsibility for the upkeep of their own building, but we recognise that in the past this has proved difficult.

"In some cases people have bought tenemental property and not been aware that they share a responsibility for the upkeep of the fabric of the building. That means all common parts such as the roof.

“One of the things we do is get that information out there to let people know what they are responsible for and if they need our help we are there to offer it. That has proved very successful.

“If there is an owner who won't pay then the council will pay that share and then claim it back while adding a charge on top for doing that.”

We asked the Finance Convener about the financing of the scheme. He said : “As a total cost it is quite small and it is a complete turnaround from where we used to be historically. Many owners have said this is something they really need.”

[The Finance and Resources Committee](#) meets on Thursday when they will hear details of the service and how it has operated in the last financial year. It appears from the report that it will be possible to decrease funding for the service moving forward.



Cllr Cammy Day Depute Leader of the Council trying his hand at a traditional skill

Cllr Day Depute Leader of the Council was trying his hand at stone carving. He explained that many years ago his father was a roofing contractor and at the time he was roped in to help. He confessed he wasn't particularly good at it but was happy to watch what was taking place in the quad. Cllr Day said : "We are a World Heritage City and if you look around this quadrangle alone at the masonry which will need repair over

the next hundred years so these old crafts are becoming more and more important to the city.

“We need to try and encourage more young people and so today we have had pupils from Leith Academy and Musselburgh Grammar coming to experience some of these crafts. As we go into a data innovation driven world we need to remember that there are craft skills like these for the next generation as well.”

Cllr Whyte leader of the Conservative Group on the City of Edinburgh Council said : “Shared repairs is part of what the council is doing and we support the ambition to give good advice to owners so that they can get communal repairs done where it is something in their building and it’s unclear how you get everyone together to get that work done.

“We do have a concern though that the council has to be very careful with this and does not overstep the mark. We saw that in the past when we had the scandal around statutory repairs – when the council was stepping in and undertaking work for owners and then billing them back.

“There were all sorts of problems with internal methods that some were even suggesting amounted to corruption. So we don’t want to go back there. We are also concerned that public money in some cases has been spent on things that are the responsibility of individual owners. We have to watch that very carefully.

“We have suggested a slightly more limited service but it doesn’t make any difference to getting good contractors and doing the work properly and especially in our heritage properties.”

It should be said that no charges were ever brought against any individuals in connection with the internal council ‘scandal’. The repairs service was then disbanded and has now been replaced by the Shared Repairs Service which is heralded as a model to follow.

One part of the new service is that the council can now help with funding what is called the Missing Share Scheme. This allows owners in tenements to proceed with a repair if the majority of them agree. Then the council pursues the non-paying owner for their share of the cost. This has been used in 21 cases during the last year helping out 207 property owners.

Scottish Traditional Building Forum



John McKinney coordinator of Scottish Traditional Building Forum

John McKinney is the coordinator of the Scottish Traditional Building Forum. It was he and his band of specialists from a range of traditional skills areas who set up shop in the quad at the City Chambers last week. They had invited young people from schools in and around Edinburgh to try out four key trades for the repair and maintenance of Edinburgh's rich built heritage.

Mr McKinney told us : "This might help them as potential career destinations. We have had about 60 young people here over yesterday and today. I think there are a few whose eyes have been opened to the options open to them. What we find in the traditional building sector is that people want to go into

construction but they don't know much about it. This is a chance to actually try four key elements which they may not have thought of as real career options."

He explained that the forum is a 'bunch of people who got together in collaboration for the benefit of the rich built heritage. We organise a number of events looking at the outputs delivering events not just talk about them."

Edinburgh's Old and New Towns were added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in 1995. The City of Edinburgh Council and other bodies continue to work to retain that status. With so many old buildings it is clear that we also need traditional skills in the capital.

Later in May the Edinburgh Traditional Building Forum will be outside Holyrood, at the Royal Highland Show and the Edinburgh Traditional Building Festival takes place during Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August.