

## Victims of Wrongful Entry

An analysis of the Home Office's housing provider in Glasgow using copies of keys to enter asylum seekers' homes



26 April 2019

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connecting people, improving lives

## Victims of Wrongful Entry

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# SUMMARY of Asylum Seeker Research in Glasgow

## ‘Victims of Wrongful Entry Using Keys to Homes’

26 April 2019

**Women & Asylum Seeker Housing Project** carried out research in response to Serco staff and contractors working for the Home Office regularly using copies of keys to enter homes of Asylum Seekers without notice, whether they are present or not.

W-ASH is an independent project that helps Asylum Seekers report housing issues to Serco their current accommodation provider. We have received regular reports of this practice happening since we started in 2015. The research was conducted to gain an accurate picture of the situation in Glasgow between January and March 2019, using participative community research methods.

The aim of this research is to highlight that gaining entry to asylum seekers’ homes by using copies of keys is the accommodation provider’s usual practice. This is unacceptable and completely out of keeping with the Human Rights standards expected in Scotland today.

There were 7 research volunteers on the team from an asylum or refugee background who carried out 30 individual surveys with asylum seekers and two focus groups with a total of 14 participants. The survey questions were devised by these researchers with WASH, ASH and other volunteers also helping. These addressed the frequency of keys being used, in which type of situations, and the impact it has had on individual residents and their families.

### Conclusions

Analysis of the answers to the survey questions shows:

- 93% of respondents believe that Serco staff and contractors use their own copies of keys to access asylum seekers’ homes when the residents are not present
- Serco staff and their contractors use copies of keys to access asylum seekers’ homes when residents are in their homes
- The use of front close door intercoms to announce a visit is inconsistently used
- The use of knocking on the house door (door bells are not part of the contract) is inconsistent: knocking does not always happen before keys are used; the knocking can be at an acceptable sound level but can also be extremely loud and frightening
- The use of ID is inconsistent, mainly provided by Housing Officers and usually unavailable from contractors or landlords’ representatives

## Research: keys being used to enter asylum seekers homes April 2019

- Around a third of asylum seekers felt they were not always treated respectfully in their homes, if they were present
- Around a third said that workpeople who entered their homes with keys when they were absent, had used asylum seekers' personal materials for cleaning up
- Written notice of monthly housing officer inspections is by way of a laminated notice inside the front house door which is updated after every visit. It was found that: housing officers usually do not arrive on the date noted and that they can then arrive more than 2 days earlier or later without notice
- A majority of asylum seekers said the practice of Serco representatives coming in with keys had a negative effect on them emotionally, making them feel extremely distressed, scared, unsafe, stressed and worthless
- A small number of asylum seekers that were upset had complained about the practice of Serco representatives coming in with keys but the majority had not felt able to
- Every asylum seeker asked said that they would like notice that someone was coming to visit them or their home. A variety of methods were suggested

**Please contact Community InfoSource if you have any questions**  
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[contact@ashproject.org.uk](mailto:contact@ashproject.org.uk) or on [07734 742 900](tel:07734742900)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for Home Office, Police Scotland and Glasgow City Council

- A. The Home Office should commission or undertake an urgent and sensitive investigation into what we have researched. Waiting for individual asylum seekers to report to them puts an unfair onus on an already vulnerable group. We ask you to take responsibility and undertake a proper investigation to ensure the fundamentals of this public service – safety, security and peace of mind – is not being violated, systematically or otherwise.
- B. Police Scotland should listen to what we are reporting and undertake to meet asylum seekers in an anonymised manner to hear about their concerns on this issue. It is important to understand whether criminal offences may be being committed.
- C. The new Glasgow Regional Asylum Dispersal Partnership Board, set up as a result of the Glasgow Asylum Taskforce should consider this. We suggest the first meeting of this group discuss this issue and in the longer-term ensures that it holds to account the Home Office and its current and future contractors from any such practices.

### Recommendations for the housing provider

1. Identity badges to be worn by Serco staff and all of their representatives at all times and to be automatically shown to asylum seekers
2. Full Disclosure checks to be carried out on any Serco staff and their representatives who will be entering asylum seekers' homes
3. Visits and repairs should be arranged with the residents, with a minimum of 5 days' notice. These should be arranged by a phone call and a follow-up text message. A reminder text message should be sent 24 hours before the visit.
4. Serco representatives to refrain from entering asylum seekers' homes using their own copies of keys if the asylum seeker is not present, except in emergencies
5. Serco staff, contractors, landlords and their representatives should treat asylum seekers with the respect and dignity that all Scottish residents deserve in their own homes
6. Where available front door intercoms should be used on visits to give advance notice that there is about to be someone at the house door
7. Staff, contractors and landlords should always knock on the front door before using keys to gain entry but should be aware that stress levels of asylum seekers in a vulnerable situation are increased by inappropriately loud knocking
8. Workers should not use the residents' personal cleaning materials
9. When asylum seekers complain to Serco about their representatives entering homes with keys, these complaints should be acknowledged within 24 hours and resolved within 5 days.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **With thanks to everyone who worked on this research project:**

- The seven asylum seekers or people from a refugee background, who developed the research and carried out the one to one surveys and two focus groups
- Fiona Ballantyne, Volunteer Coordinator supporting this study
- Ailish Thompson from Glasgow University, Department of Law, who input all of the data and produced many of the graphs
- Anna Pearce, ASH caseworker, who completed the analysis
- Dr Duncan Sim who oversaw the project and shared his expertise

Also thanks to everyone else who helped with the report throughout its many stages: making suggestions, proof-reading, providing an overview of the content etc.

With grateful thanks to Glasgow City Council, East Area Partnership, Wards 18 East Centre and 21 North East, for the grant of £1,973 which enabled us to carry out the research. Also as suggested, we will share the findings with the Glasgow Hate Crime Working Group

**The launch** of this research took place on Friday 26 April 2019. As the research was funded by Glasgow City Council's East Area Partnership (Wards 18 East Centre and 21 North East) Councillor Annette Christie from East Centre was asked to open the event.

In keeping with Community InfoSource's ethos of commitment to diversity and equality there was a mix of 'New Scots', refugees and asylum seekers present, as well as people from longer established communities. 48 people attended and had access to childcare, a light lunch and travel expenses for W-ASH volunteers and all asylum seekers who came. Eight of the nine volunteer researchers and their Volunteer Coordinator were present as well as respondents who had taken part in the research through either the Focus Groups or One to One surveys.

Sheila Arthur  
W-ASH Manager and CIS Director

## Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to CIS, W-ASH and what CIS do

The Women & Asylum Seeker Housing (W-ASH) service is part of Community InfoSource (CIS) which has developed, and now supports and manages it. CIS was founded in 2006 and has recently become a charity. Two of our four directors come from an asylum seeker background. CIS undertakes community development in partnership with refugee, migrant and BME communities to support developing groups to put their ideas into action with joint projects building towards rights-based integration.

In 2016 we moved into the Albany Centre, which is a welcoming and accessible building near Charing Cross, not far from the city centre. It belongs to Glasgow Council for Voluntary Organisations and is their Training Centre.

[www.infosource.org.uk](http://www.infosource.org.uk)



### Asylum seekers in Glasgow

Dispersal of asylum seekers arriving in the UK and claiming refugee status began in 2000 to Glasgow and is still on-going. The numbers are now as high as they have ever been, with Glasgow currently accommodating over 5,000 individual asylum seekers within the city boundary, with around 1,000 families and roughly 1,000 single people within this number.

The areas where asylum seekers are housed have changed significantly over the intervening years with around a third now living in the East End of Glasgow. This rise in asylum seeker dispersal in the East End has also been reflected in the casework undertaken by the W-ASH projects with nearly half (49%) of our work based in the 7 postcode areas within the NE Sector.

The current method for the Home Office, through its Visa and Immigration section (UKVI), to provide accommodation and support for asylum seekers is through the COMPASS contract, which has been in place for 7 years and has been held by Serco for Scotland and Northern Ireland. This changes in September 2019 with the new 10-year Asylum Accommodation and Support Services contract (AASC) to be held by the Mears Group in Scotland.

A major part of CIS's work has been developing W-ASH due to increasing demand for housing support.

**The W-ASH project aims to:**

1. Raise awareness with asylum seekers of their rights and responsibilities regarding accommodation
2. Support asylum seeker residents to report repairs and resolve issues with their housing provided under the Home Office's accommodation contracts
3. Improve the quality of housing and service provision for asylum seeker residents
4. Create an evidence base, collating information and conducting new research
5. Campaign at strategic level for improvements in the quality of housing and service(s) to ensure equality for asylum seekers

*'We assist asylum seekers to report housing issues  
to the accommodation provider'*

One of our key concerns, borne out by research we have conducted, is that asylum seekers often find it hard to report housing issues to the accommodation provider (Serco at present, Mears Group from September 2019) for a variety of reasons, for example: difficulties with language barriers; fear that reporting a repair may affect their asylum claim due to the accommodation and support contract being funded by the Home Office.

Additionally, another concern for us is that the accommodation provider has not always provided a satisfactory level of support when issues are reported.

We have taken steps to support asylum seekers facing housing issues:

- Provide a Rights and Responsibilities leaflet in various languages
- Hold Drop Ins twice weekly at the Albany Centre
- Hold various external Drop Ins and awareness raising events in areas where asylum seekers are housed or supported by others
- Provide awareness raising information to organisations and groups supporting asylum seekers in Glasgow
- Liaise with the accommodation provider to support asylum seekers with issues that may not have been resolved

## Phone Lines

In 2015, we opened our phone lines to help asylum seekers access support when seeking help to report housing issues. They allow access to support at any time:

**ASH Project: 07736 646 197**

**WASH Project: 07734 742 900**

The phones are staffed by trained volunteers happy to offer confidential advice or to advocate on behalf of asylum seekers facing problems with their housing.

We also use WhatsApp, Viber, emails etc. to aid communications.

### Email us:

[contact@ashproject.org.uk](mailto:contact@ashproject.org.uk)

[contact@washproject.org.uk](mailto:contact@washproject.org.uk)

**ASH Project**



**WASH Project**



## **1.2 Development of this research: “Victims of Wrongful Entry Using keys to Homes”**

This Research Project has come about following years of complaints from asylum seekers who have been angered and stressed by people representing Serco or contracted by them to carry out work, coming into their homes, using Serco’s copies of the house keys without providing any advanced warning.

Sometimes asylum seekers asked us to complain on their behalf directly as a result of this issue (see Appendix 3 for a response to one of our complaints from Serco). Often it emerged incidentally when asylum seekers support for an unrelated issue mentioned that it had occurred. Most of them thought a Landlord using their own keys to access their properties was usual practice in the UK and were not aware it was illegal under the Housing (Scotland) Acts 1987 and 1988.

### **Background to W-ASH gathering evidence on use of keys, 2015 to 2018**

In our previous Report: “**W-ASH Report 2015 – 2016**”, published at the start of December 2016, we wrote the following with reference to Orchard & Shipman who had provided the accommodation and support service on behalf of Serco:

#### *Extract*

#### **Unplanned visits from the Housing Provider**

The Occupancy Agreement stipulates that should the housing provider wish to access a property in order to carry out repairs they must contact the occupant and give 5 days’ notice in writing.

We asked asylum seekers if they usually received a letter from Orchard & Shipman regarding a planned visit. The majority stated that they did. But some felt that they did not receive sufficient notice.

*The five working days’ notice is hardly respected. On one occasion, I was informed of the flat inspection a day before.*

We also found that 14 people had been visited by Orchard & Shipman staff, without any prior warning.

*Most of the time they come without notice and enter using a master key. As we don't have a doorbell, they don't wait for the door to be opened when they knock.*

*O and S repair people used their own key when I was already in my home.*

*They do not give a specific day when they come. They write, then just turn up any day they choose without warning.*

Asylum seekers complained such visits made them feel unsafe.

*We fear for the immigration officers to enter our property and put us in detention centre. We don't feel safe to go back in our accommodation.*

ASH would contest that this practice is not only a breach of the COMPASS contract itself but also may be in contravention of Scottish housing law and Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998:

- Article 4.2.3 of the COMPASS contract states that the service provider must 'brief the service user(s) occupying the accommodation wherein reactive maintenance work is to be undertaken'.
- Schedule 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Acts 1987 and 1998 require a landlord to 'give 24 hours advance notice in writing of their intentions to enter a property'.
- Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 stipulates the 'Right to respect for private life and the home', including the right to live in one's home without intrusion.

## Case Study E

**Earlier in the year we were approached by an asylum seeker concerned that Orchard & Shipmen (O&S) had been entering her property to carry out repairs without letting her know. This practice, highlighted in our research above, made the resident worry for her personal safety and concerned about her lack of privacy and personal belongings.**

We took the case up and with the support of the asylum seeker made a formal complaint to O&S regarding this practice. O&S responded by defending the practice, claiming that, 'access is allowed in reactive repair situations'.

Soon after receiving the reply from O&S, we learned that O&S had once more entered the property without giving notice or as much as a courtesy call to the resident. In fact, the resident only became aware of the visit when she discovered an open bladed Stanley knife left behind by workers.

Disappointed that the practice was continuing and not satisfied with the response from O&S, we raised this issue with Serco in early July 2015.

### Case Study F

In summer 2016, we were made aware of a situation where Orchard & Shipman changed the locks on one of their flats without any warning to the occupier. The occupier returned to her flat in the early evening with her three year old child to find she had been locked out. It then took Orchard & Shipman a further 90 minutes to get someone to the flat to let the family back in. This did not happen until after 9pm – long after her small child should have been in bed, rather than standing outside waiting to eat.

We complained to Orchard & Shipman that their behaviour showed a clear lack of respect for the service user. They were also in breach of their contractual obligations since the Occupancy Agreement stipulates they give 5 days' notice in writing before they wish to enter the flat. In this case, the resident was given no warning at all.

Unfortunately, this is indicative of a widespread failure among Orchard & Shipman staff to respect the privacy of their service users and to give them due notification when they wish to access the property.

*End of extract*

Since the autumn of 2016, the W-ASH manager has been attending the Forum which Serco hosts on behalf of the Home Office, UKVI section for the COMPASS contract. Representatives of groups who support asylum seekers in the city attend this Third Sector Engagement Forum (TSEF). While this issue had been raised as an area of distress for asylum seekers, it was not until April 2017 (see Appendix 2) that it was officially stated by the UKVI representative and Serco, that the COMPASS contract timescales were not achievable without Serco representatives using Serco's own copies of keys and going into asylum seekers' homes without notice.

In February of 2017 the WASH Project conducted focus groups in Cranhill and Parkhead, funded through a Glasgow City Council North East Area Partnership Grant and one of the major issues raised was fears about security due to unauthorised entry.

W-ASH had noticed that not all Serco staff followed this procedure and some, particularly Housing Officers, did contact asylum seekers, usually by telephone or text, to advise or arrange their visits.

However, by spring 2018 W-ASH had become concerned that Serco representatives entering asylum seekers' homes, without notice and using their own keys, was increasing. W-ASH staff and volunteers became aware that reaction to this practice was one of general disbelief that housing rights were being ignored in this way. In order to be able to show that this is a constant area of concern, we decided to try to access grant funding for a pilot to carry out research to provide evidence that this is a current issue.

We focussed on the East End of Glasgow due to the large increase in asylum seekers living there and in areas of deprivation. We asked Glasgow City Council North East Partnership to provide funding for this Community Safety research survey and Wards 18 East Centre and 21 North East awarded funding of £1,973 in November 2018, enabling us to look at the issue of Serco accessing asylum seeker homes using Serco's own copies of keys and without notice.

This was also seen to be a pertinent time to conduct the research as the Home Office, through UKVI, were about to enter into a new contract for the provision of Asylum Accommodation and Support Services with a 10 year lifespan, and it would be useful to throw a light on this issue before it started. Serco were not successful in securing this work and the contract will pass to the Mears Group from September 2019.

## **Chapter Two: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Previous research**

Having conducted a comprehensive desk review of previous research carried out in this field, we have been unable to identify any research into officials entering asylum seekers' homes using keys and without notice.

Given that UKVI has said, during a Third Sector Engagement Forum meeting, that the provider of the COMPASS contract needed to be allowed this route to meet timescales, we expect that there will be many instances of distress caused by this issue in the other five COMPASS regions in the UK where asylum seekers are accommodated.

We, in Glasgow, are highlighting this issue with the aim of trying to stop the practice of housing providers and their contractors entering asylum seekers homes using copies of keys and with no advance notice. This research is a pilot and we hope to make an impact with it.

### **2.2 Previous information on accessing homes using copies of keys**

While there is no direct research about the practice of an accommodation provider accessing asylum seekers' homes using keys and without notice, the issue of housing access by accommodation provider staff and safety issues have been raised by organisations throughout the UK since 2013 (as known).

**Scottish Refugee Council in 2014 in its report "Extent and Impact of Asylum Accommodation Problems in Scotland"** following focus group contact with asylum seekers:

*"Lack of respect by Orchard and Shipman staff (Serco's sub-contractor) to asylum seekers, with reports including unannounced and even unbidden entry or not giving their names to asylum claimants."*

**The Scottish Government in the “New Scots Strategy: 2018 to 2022” says:**

*“3. The need for careful consideration of questions around the quality and location of asylum accommodation, in order that **asylum seekers are safe and secure** and are able to access the support and services that they require.”*

**ASH Project made representations to the UK Government’s Home Affairs Select Committee enquiry on Asylum Accommodation in 2016:**

***‘5. Entering Flats Without Providing Notice***

*ASH is aware that the provider is entering flats without providing any notice to residents*

*Possible legislative breaches*

*We believe that this practice contravenes The Housing Scotland Act 1988 and the Housing (Scotland) 1987, Schedule 10 which requires a landlord to give 24 hours advance notice in writing of their intentions to enter a property.*

*In addition, we feel unannounced entry into a resident’s accommodation is contrary to the principles of article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, ‘Right to respect for private life and the home.’*

**Extracts from Home Affairs Committee Report Into Asylum Accommodation Jan 2017(page 41)**

*“107. Unannounced visits and ‘invasive behaviour’ came in for particular criticism. Asylum seekers have reported instances of housing officers going through belongings without permission; one person said, “I walked in to him with my phone, going through my phone, I was worried he was going to take it”.*

***Another complaint was about entering property without advance warning. Examples included:***

***“They come in at any moment and [your] dignity and privacy are compromised”;***  
***and***  
***“As a person who has been trafficked, [this causes] me to panic and relive traumatising experiences of the past.”***

*SYMAAG told us about one case where G4S knew an asylum seeker was severely traumatised but still continued to come unannounced to the house and “enter with their keys without waiting to be let in.” Serco told us that, if they receive claims of poor behaviour that appear to have substance, “we investigate them immediately and thoroughly” and we have heard of instances where Providers’ staff have been dismissed for inappropriate behaviour of this kind.”*

Source:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/637/637.pdf>

**Written evidence to first Home Affairs Select Committee, asylum accommodation inquiry, in 2013**, which provided evidence of the persistence of unbidden access / privacy issues across UK.

***“Background on why this (potential) protection gap matters”***

*It is best that I start with why all this matters: to ensure that people’s safety is not compromised through inadequate disclosure requirements set by the Home office and / or low-level or no disclosure checks by its contractors. The risks to safety are largest when the position involves a de facto unequal relationship (which sadly I think is the case with the contractors and people in this housing). And, then on top of that if that relationship involves unsupervised contact with people many of whom may be vulnerable as well as with children. And then if is such conduct is regular, as it is in initial accommodation as well as with housing officers doing their monthly inspections etc., it may become a serious problem.*

*As touched on above a recurrent strand of complaints to the Home affairs committee’s (HAC) recent inquiry into asylum accommodation related to unbidden entry through to other reports of privacy being*

*violated sometimes to the extent that the safety of asylum seekers in this public service of housing has been compromised etc. So this is definitely not a theoretical problem. Noteworthy written evidence included from: [Migrant voice \(section 4\)](#), [Liverpool asylum seekers and refugee association](#), [Helen Bamber Foundation \(section 4\)](#), [Bradford city of sanctuary \(section 5, case studies 10, 12 and caseworker testimony 22\)](#) and [Birmingham asylum and refugee association \(Bara members' experience of their accommodation\)](#).*

*Issues of unbidden entry, privacy being invaded and safety being risked have been persistent throughout the Compass contracts including in our casework and those of local partners, such as the Asylum support housing project. This and other evidence was reflected in the HAC's final inquiry report at its [privacy, dignity and respect section \(paras.106-110\)](#) and was (in our view inadequately) responded to by the UK government in its [response \(pp16-17\)](#)."*

Therefore, the issue of the current accommodation provider, working for the Home Office, entering the homes of asylum seekers using keys and without notice has been raised publically with the UK Government, for a number of years, without it being addressed.

### **2.3 Review of relevant documents**

There are a number of documents which underpin this research, that are included here:

1. Scottish legislation re access to homes
2. Statement of Requirements (SOR) for both the outgoing COMPASS contract and incoming AASC contract, published by UKVI.
  - Extract referring to local laws
  - Extract referring to requirements on notification to residents
3. Occupancy Agreement published by Serco (COMPASS SNI Limited), the COMPASS contract holder
4. Repairs Timescales published by UKVI for COMPASS contract

It is from these documents that we can understand how the housing provider should act, according both to the law and the guidelines set by the Home Office and Serco.

## 1. SCOTTISH LEGISLATION

### Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 and 1987

Schedule 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Acts 1988 and 1987 require a landlord to 'give 24 hours advance notice in writing of their intentions to enter a property'.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Schedule 10 states;

“1(3)The landlord, or any person authorised by him in writing, may at reasonable times of the day, on giving 24 hours' notice in writing to the tenant or occupier, enter any premises in respect of which this paragraph applies for the purpose of viewing their state and condition.”

The Housing Scotland Act 1988 stipulated the date on which the Housing Scotland 1987 Schedule 10 provisions came into force, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1989.

Source:

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/43/pdfs/ukpga\\_19880043\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/43/pdfs/ukpga_19880043_en.pdf)

### Scottish Government Letting Code Of Practice (2018)

Scottish Government has published guidelines for Landlords with regard to gaining access to their properties.

Extract

#### “Property access and visits

**80.** If you hold keys to the properties you let, you must ensure they are kept secure and maintain detailed records of their use by staff and

authorised third parties – for instance, by keeping keys separate from property information and holding a record of the date the keys were used, who they were issued to and when they were returned.

**81.** You must take reasonable steps to ensure keys are only given to suitably authorised people.

**82.** *You must give the tenant reasonable notice of your intention to visit the property and the reason for this. At least 24 hours' notice must be given, or 48 hours' notice where the tenancy is a private residential tenancy*, unless the situation is urgent or you consider that giving such notice would defeat the object of the entry. You must ***ensure the tenant is present when entering the property*** and visit ***at reasonable times of the day*** unless otherwise agreed with the tenant.

**83.** *If the tenant refuses access, you, the landlord or any third party have no right to enter the property using retained keys without a warrant.*

**84.** You must make it clear to the tenant or occupier beforehand if a third party will visit the property unaccompanied.”

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/letting-agent-code-practice/>

### **Scottish Core Standards for Accredited Landlords (2014)**

Good practice guidelines were also published in 2014.

Extract

“5.1

A. Access to the property by the landlord (or anyone acting on their behalf) for a repair inspection or for carrying out a repair should be the subject of mutual agreement between the landlord and tenant.

B. The tenant must give the landlord reasonable access to the property but failing mutual agreement, ***the landlord must give 24 hours advance notice in writing of their intention to enter the property*** - except where an emergency repair is required.”

Source: <https://www.landlordaccreditationscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/Scottish-Core-Standards-for-Accredited-Landlords.pdf>

## 2. STATEMENTS OF REQUIREMENT FROM HOME OFFICE

### UKVI COMPASS Statement of Requirements

The COMPASS contract for asylum accommodation provision is held by Serco until September 2019, when the Mears Group will take over the re-named AASC contract. Under COMPASS, Serco must adhere to the UKVI's Statement of Requirements (SOR) written for that contract, and must continue to do so until September of this year.

### COMPASS Statement of Requirements

#### 1.1 STATUTORY & MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

*1.1.1 The Provider in delivering all the services defined within this Schedule 2 shall ensure that it complies with all relevant mandatory and statutory requirements and the Authority's rules, guidance, instructions and policies including but not limited to housing, food, road traffic, hygiene, employment, equal opportunities, race relations, child protection, data protection and health and safety. **Should there be any conflict between the requirements of this Schedule and Relevant Law then Relevant Law shall prevail.***

**4.2.3** States that the service provider must *'brief the service user(s) occupying the accommodation wherein reactive maintenance work is to be undertaken. These briefings are to be conducted in a language understood by the Service Users and to be accompanied by a written instruction to the Service Users in a language and form understood by the relevant Service User;'*

This means that the asylum seeker living in the accommodation must be advised that work is to take place and what it will be.

It does not detail how much information the asylum seeker should be given about the work to be undertaken or how much advanced notice.

In spite of this being a requirement, Home Office do not carry out any checks into whether these are being adhered to or not. There is no Performance Standard about notice periods being adhered to therefore it seems there is no monitoring on this issue.

## **UKVI AASC Statement of requirements**

The new AASC contract will adhere to a revised Statement of Requirements which must be followed by Mears from September 2019:

### **“1.1 STATUTORY & MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS**

*1.1.1 The Provider in delivering all the services defined within this Schedule 2 shall ensure that it complies with all relevant mandatory and statutory requirements and the Authority’s rules, guidance, instructions and policies, including but not limited to housing, food, road traffic, hygiene, employment, equal opportunities, race relations, child protection, safeguarding, data protection and health and safety. **Should there be any conflict between the requirements of this Schedule and Relevant Law then Relevant Law shall prevail.**”*

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*1.2.7.6 Where the Provider detects or is informed of Accommodation maintenance requirements by Service Users as part of their required inspection and property maintenance activities, these shall be remedied by the Provider in accordance with Paragraph 4.1.2 and the Response Times defined in [Annex B](#) of this Schedule*

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*4.1.2*

*8. The Provider shall manage and administer the pre-planned maintenance service. In doing so, the Provider shall:*  
*a. provide five (5) working days’ notice to the Service User in the Accommodation that maintenance work is planned for the Accommodation;*

*b. brief the Service Users occupying the Accommodation on what the pre-planned maintenance work entails and any collateral action the Service Users need to take. These briefings are to be conducted in a language understood by the Service Users and to be accompanied by a written instruction to the Service Users in a language and form understood by the relevant Service User;*

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*e. brief the Service Users occupying the Accommodation on what reactive maintenance work is required and any collateral action the Service Users need to take. These briefings are to be conducted in a language understood by the Service Users and to be accompanied by a written instruction to the Service Users in a language and form understood by the relevant Service User;*

As in the COMPASS contract, there are no access arrangements defined for reactive maintenance, only for pre-planned.

Therefore, local legislation should be followed.

### **3. SERCO'S OCCUPANCY AGREEMENT**

This is signed by every occupant, or head of family grouping and by the Serco Housing Officer. A copy is always given to the person signing usually in English although we have been told that some are in a suitable language spoken by the asylum seeker. The extract below is a recent example from 2019, as they have changed over the seven years of the contract.

This Agreement (Appendix 1) specifies when an asylum seeker must allow Serco to have access to an asylum seeker's home and any conditions (such as timescales) which Serco (COMPASS SNI Limited) must adhere to:

#### **Extract:**

*'2.9 To allow an authorised member of COMPASS SNI Limited staff, or an approved contractor to enter the property at a prearranged time, giving 5 days' notice, for the purpose of inspecting the property and any*

*furnishings and utensils provided therein, and to allow inspection of electricity meters and electrical appliances.*

*2.10 To allow COMPASS SNI Limited staff, or an approved contractor to enter the property at a prearranged time, having written to give 5 days' notice in order to carry out general maintenance.*

*2.11 To allow COMPASS SNI Limited staff, or approved contractor to enter the property in the case of an emergency, immediate or urgent maintenance needed to be carried out.'*

#### **4. COMPASS REPAIRS TIMESCALES AND EXAMPLES**

This document gives details of timescales for each category of repairs and examples of which type of repairs fits within each category (Appendix 2).

**'8.The following contractual repairs timescales must be adhered to:**

- 8.1 Immediate: within 2 hours. Examples provided below
- 8.2 Emergency: within 24 hours. Examples provided below
- 8.3 Urgent: within 7 working days. Examples provided below
- 8.4 Routine: within 28 working days'

W-ASH has adapted the document a little, for example where the timescale of "days" was used Serco has interpreted this to mean "working days" rather than calendar days, so we have added that in. Plus we have added some additional information for further clarification. For example, if Serco usually carries out a repair in a quicker timescale than given, we have added this in as a note.

#### **5. ADDITIONAL SERCO INFORMATION**

**Extract from Third Sector Engagement Forum 26 April 2017**

Since the autumn of 2016, the W-ASH manager has been attending the Forum which Serco hosts on behalf of the Home Office, UKVI section for the COMPASS contract. Representatives of groups who support asylum seekers in the city attend this Third Sector Engagement Forum (TSEF) which usually meets every two months. While this issue had been raised as an area of distress for asylum seekers, it was not until April 2017 that it was officially stated by the UKVI representative and Serco, that the COMPASS contract timescales were not achievable without Serco representatives using Serco's own copies of keys and going into asylum seekers' homes without notice.

This extract from the revised minute of 26 April 2017 has the revision highlighted in red in the revised minute, which was accepted by both Serco and UKVI as having been said at the meeting, and was then circulated on 23 October 2017 (see Appendix 2)

'Discussion took place on the issue of Serco staff or contractors routinely entering properties using keys when the occupant was not there (or had not opened the door). AK (Anne Kinghorn, Serco) advised that this was required to enable Serco to meet their target timescales for completing repairs. CL (Charles Laughton, UKVI) confirmed that the COMPASS contract would not be workable if keys were not used to allow workpeople access to carry them out.'

## **Complaint and Response re accessing asylum seeker's home**

Having sent many Complaints to Serco regarding this issue, below is a variation on a standard response received during the period of the research, extract here:

*"Serco are contracted to visit all occupied properties within the portfolio at least once per calendar month. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, we must ensure the properties are compliant with the contract in terms of the standard of repair, and in addition, we complete a welfare and residency check to ensure the wellbeing of our service users. For standard monthly inspections, all service users are notified in writing of the inspection date each month by means of a fixed notice within the property, indicating the date of each inspection. This notice is subsequently updated each month by the visiting housing officer, writing*

*the next date of inspection and effectively giving the service user one months' notice in writing. A Housing Officer will only use keys to access a property where there is no response from the service users after*

*knocking three times on the door. This is then followed by a courteous call to highlight to any occupant that the housing officer is about to enter the property. Once within the property, the housing officer will introduce themselves and sign the visitation log within the property. As I'm sure you will understand, we have a duty to ensure the property is in a good standard of repair, and if the service user does not make themselves available on the date of inspection, we have no alternative but to check the property in their absence, to ensure there are no defects and no immediate welfare issues for the service users, for example self-harm issues etc.*

*In terms of the maintenance staff, there are occasions where defects must be repaired on an emergency basis. On these occasions, we do still attempt to ensure the service user is aware of the timescales for when to expect our maintenance staff, and the housing officer would communicate this information in person at the time of reporting the fault, where the service user is present in the property. For routine defects and pre-planned maintenance, where possible, the timescales and completion end date will be noted on the fixed laminate within the property, giving the service user notice of when to expect the maintenance staff will be in attendance.*

*Please be assured that at no time is it the intention of Serco staff to cause any additional or unnecessary stress to any of our service users, or indeed to invade on anyone's privacy."*

*See Appendix 3 for the full email chain*

## 2.4 COMMENTS FROM OTHERS

### Glasgow & West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations

**From:** David Bookbinder [<mailto:david.bookbinder@gwsf.org.uk>]

**To:** Contact

**Subject:** Re: Research into Entering With Keys

.....

In relation to the properties our members manage through mainstream Scottish Secure Tenancies, whilst GWSF itself has no policy, I'm happy to assure you that housing associations NEVER make entry to someone's home without full consent unless there is reason to believe some imminent danger exists, and in any such circumstances the police or other emergency services would be very likely to be present.

Even with our legal obligations to check the safety of gas supplies annually, Housing Associations do not seek to break into any homes unless, again, there appears to be an imminent danger to life. This can mean delays in checking gas safety, but the privacy of our tenants takes priority.

We know that the terms of occupation Serco uses in properties for asylum seekers are different, **but would expect those terms to be reasonable and to be adhered to**, not least when a significant number of these properties are leased from housing associations.

I hope this reply is helpful, but do please let me know if I can help further.

With best wishes,  
David Bookbinder  
Director

**Scottish Refugee Council, Graham O'Neill, Policy manager said:**

“This public service of housing is for men, women and children fleeing persecution and abuses. They desperately need the safety, security and privacy of a home. Unless there is a genuine emergency there is no provision in either the Home office contract with Serco or, indeed, in Scottish housing law for such unbidden entry. The reports of such practices here are of the most serious kind and, sadly, echo similar reports in other asylum dispersal areas in the rest of the UK, as captured by the Home affairs committee in 2017.

The Home office’s response then lacked urgency so now it must act quickly, sensitively and investigate what is being reported here in Glasgow. It does not get much worse than someone coming into your home unannounced. That is the antithesis of safety and security and in so far as that it is happening it is intolerable and must cease.

It is a well-established principle in Scottish housing law that reasonable notice must be given and, indeed, the Home office contract requires Serco to provide a week’s notice albeit, shockingly, there seems to be no contractual performance monitoring of this requirement. These reports from asylum seekers themselves in the ASH report suggest that something may be going seriously wrong here so urgent investigations are now essential.”

This case study is an example of how it feels to have people coming into your home without your permission or knowledge

### **Asylum seeker O**

(Female)

*“I think there are maybe three times when men have entered my home, with keys, no knocking. It’s always men.*

*The Housing Officer, she never comes when she says she will come and then suddenly I will get a call from her on a different day, when I am out of the house, telling me she is there in the house.*

*One time a man came into my house with keys – I remember it because it was at the beginning of my pregnancy. I was in the shower. Me and the lady I was sharing with, we were friends, so even though there was a small lock on the bathroom door I didn’t lock it. Suddenly I heard a man in the hallway, shouting ‘Is anybody there? Is anybody there?’. I ran out of the shower and held my hand against the bathroom door so he couldn’t walk straight into the bathroom.*

*He only showed me his ID card and told me he was from Serco after. He was there to fix something, but we had no notice that he was coming.*

***I couldn’t believe that he didn’t think: maybe this is her fear, maybe this is her trauma – a man just walking into my house. Because of my trauma and my experiences in the past, this is what I am seeking psychological treatment for and then this man just walks straight in.***

*When I shared this experience with my friends, women who were or are asylum seekers, they all said “Oh, me too!”. They all had stories of men coming into their houses, no knocking.”*

Although this case study is from 2017, W-ASH hears this type of story frequently.

## Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Aims of the study:

#### **‘Victims of Wrongful Entry Using Keys to Homes’**

The Women & Asylum Seeker Housing Project carried out this research in response to Serco staff (and their contractors) working for the Home Office, UKVI department, regularly using copies of keys to enter the homes of asylum seekers without notice, whether they are present or not.

The research was conducted to gain an accurate picture of the situation in Glasgow between January and March 2019, using participatory community research methods, with the aim of highlighting that gaining entry to asylum seekers’ homes by using copies of keys is the accommodation provider’s usual practice. The effect this has on the asylum seekers, whether they are at home or not, is explored in this survey as well. This is unacceptable and completely out of keeping with the Human Rights standards expected in Scotland today

The information for this study was gathered in a variety of different ways, including background information on literature, obtained from ‘desk top’ research and consultation with others, a survey of 30 asylum seekers, using a series of closed and open ended questions and two focus groups.

The main driver for the type of methodology using “action research” was the principle of using researchers from the group of people being interviewed to develop and carry out the research. Therefore we aimed to recruit around 80% of the volunteer researchers, interviewers and analysts from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. The inclusion of 20% from a local background was expected to aid integration and could provide additional local knowledge for the group.

Accordingly therefore, the interviews with individual asylum seekers were also conducted by those from an asylum seeking or refugee background. This approach has been shown to have a number of advantages (Mestheneos 2006). Participation in the research can be a valuable professional experience, enhancing skills and boosting self-esteem. In addition, there is satisfaction in working on a project which has the ability to influence policy and practice and to benefit others. We also found that refugee and asylum

seeker researchers had a clearer understanding of the issues facing other asylum seekers.

This 'peer research' approach, in which individuals are interviewed by their 'peers', has been used successfully in many other studies. Within Glasgow, Roshan (2005) assessed the health needs of refugees and asylum seekers in north Glasgow using peer researchers, suggesting that they gained both professionally and personally from their involvement in the work. In London, Dumper's (2002) skills audit of refugee women for the Mayor of London's office used other refugee women to carry out the interviews. Dumper suggests that barriers arising out of a mistrust of strangers and people in authority were overcome, and the exercise helped to empower those refugee women who became involved.

Recently a chapter called "Community-based participatory research – an approach to research in an urban context" has been published in *Urban Health*, by Galea, Ettman and Vlahov, through Oxford University Press in 2019. This shows that this method is still considered very suitable for accessing information from people who may be reluctant to speak up to those from outside their community.

### **Identifying potential research volunteers**

Potential researchers were identified through advertising widely and by the provision of information about the benefits of volunteering in such a project. Organisations which had contact with asylum seeker communities were provided with the advertising (emails and flyers) and it was also sent out through social media such as our three Facebook pages and WhatsApp, to contacts of our organisations. As the project was developed and managed by people who were either from a refugee and asylum seeking background themselves, or who worked with that group, there was significant word of mouth advertising as well.

Potential researchers were asked to complete an application form and were then invited to come for a discussion with the Team. These meetings took place in the Albany Centre at Charing Cross, where Community InfoSource and the W-ASH Project are located or in the local Woodlands Community Hall nearby.

The work involved and the commitment being made by both the volunteer and the project team was explained by the Volunteer Coordinator who was a well-respected person, known from previous experience working in community development within the Scottish Refugee Council. By January 2019 we had recruited a starting group of 9 research volunteers with 8 from a refugee background or who were still asylum seekers.

At the stage the research was being completed we were working with 9 volunteers, with 7 who were asylum seekers or from a refugee background. Interestingly the volunteers were from 9 different counties:

<b>Vol</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>
<b>1</b>	Algeria
<b>2</b>	Afghanistan
<b>3</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>4</b>	England
<b>5</b>	Isle of Man
<b>6</b>	Kenya
<b>7</b>	Nigeria
<b>8</b>	Syria
<b>9</b>	Zimbabwe

Of the 9 volunteers, 2 were male and 7 female. 4 were asylum seekers and 3 were from a refugee background.

The Research Project started with the volunteers being given an induction into the organisations involved in the project and with information about what we were hoping to achieve as a result of the research. There was also a discussion opportunity for the new volunteers to contribute their thoughts on the process and questions to be included.

### **3.2 Methods used**

#### **Research proposal at December 2018**

We were seeking to carry out a study to conduct a survey through carrying out 1:1 interviews with a minimum of 25 asylum seekers to probe the prevalence of this issue which has a profound effect on the safety and wellbeing of asylum seeker residents:

### **Unauthorised Entry to asylum seeker homes:**

1. Does it happen
2. How frequently has it been experienced
3. How is entry gained
4. Has the required notice been given by the Housing Provider
5. Were the contractual timescales adhered to for access arrangements
6. Who has gained entry, Serco Housing Officers / Serco maintenance staff / contractors and subcontractors / others (the landlord etc?)
7. Did the asylum seeker report it / who to / was any action taken as a result
8. Has the asylum seeker received information about their rights, are they aware of them in relation to housing visits and maintenance work

### **Training volunteer researchers**

In total, nine volunteer researchers were recruited during the research period. The volunteer researchers came from Algeria, Afghanistan, D R Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Syria and Zimbabwe. The range of countries of origin meant that we were able to use a wide range of languages during the interviewing process.

Each researcher was asked to commit to volunteering until the interviews and focus groups were completed and the data uploaded for analysis, as a minimum (unless they had a change of circumstance).

Following recruitment, training was provided by Community InfoSource. The training focused on types of survey development, interviewing skills, cultural and ethical issues, methods of recording interviews and analysis, dissemination and, where necessary, IT skills.

The training also sought to provide support in terms of confidence building for the interviewers, in order to enable them to carry out the survey. In addition, support was put in place in case the interviews raised difficult issues for the interviewers and / or interviewees.

### **Developing the research methods and analysis**

Following the training, the research group started development of the survey form and planned two focus groups in the East End. They met weekly to do this, consulted WASH and ASH volunteers and staff, and then conducted a pilot to make sure it worked as effectively as possible, with only minor changes thereafter.

The research method used for the individual surveys was One to One interviews where a survey was completed in writing by the researchers. This used both closed and open-ended questions. Appendix 6).

The survey was developed by the volunteer researchers who were mainly asylum seekers or from a refugee background, plus particular individuals in Glasgow who had specific expertise and contact with refugee communities living in Glasgow.

Each interview was expected to last about 45 minutes, but could take longer if an interpreter had to be used. The interviews mainly took place in the Albany Centre or a local community facility where the interviewee and interviewer felt comfortable, although some took place at other community locations to suit the interviewee.

The focus groups were added to the research proposal near the beginning, to provide more in-depth information than the surveys. The questions were devised by the volunteer researchers along with the Volunteer Coordinator and the groups were facilitated by asylum seekers. A review of what was said is attached as Appendix 5.

## **The interview process and sample**

### Individuals

Prior to the interviews, basic information about the project was given to the expected respondent: aims and objectives, contact details for the team, and how the results would be used. This briefing emphasised the confidential nature of the process.

To overcome the language barrier we used an interviewee's mother tongue whenever it was possible. We would also have used interpreters if necessary.

## Sampling

We decided to start our sample by asking asylum seekers, living in the East End of Glasgow, who had requested help from ASH Project over the previous few months, if they would be interested in helping with the survey. We also specifically asked asylum seekers in the East End, who had reported this as an issue to ASH, even if they had not asked us to take it forward as a complaint. Thereafter we used the "snowball" method whereby we asked asylum seekers being interviewed, if they knew anyone else who would like to take part. In this way we focussed on the East End where we received grant funding, but were able to show that the issue was in effect throughout Glasgow.

Similarly with the focus groups, we held two in the East End, one in Parkhead and one in Easterhouse. We did not specify or restrict where the respondents had to live however.

## CASE STUDY

This case study is an example of how it feels to have people coming into your home without your permission or knowledge

### **Client P (Female)**

Client P and her family have endured continued entry with keys, which has occurred over a sustained period of more than 12 months. Client P herself, and ASH on her behalf have together made many documented complaints, but the entries using keys have continued.

These include:

- Housing Officer and a male Serco staff member entering property with keys whilst Client P was in the shower. When Client P went in to her bedroom to get dressed, the housing officer entered her bedroom without giving her time to dress.
- A neighbour advising Client P that three men had entered her home with keys whilst Client P was out and no one was in the house.
- Client P's housing officer phoning Client P to advise she was inside the property (having let herself in with keys), carrying out an inspection which was slated for two weeks' earlier, but which the housing officer had not turned up to perform.

## Chapter Four

## SURVEY ANALYSIS

This survey focused on the experiences of asylum seekers when Serco staff or contractors entered their homes with keys. The survey was conducted by trained researchers within the research project. All researchers were W-ASH Project volunteers, who were either asylum seekers or from a refugee background. The information was collected from the end of January to the end of March 2019.

Respondent were asked to answer a total of 36 questions in three different formats. These were:

- Pre-set multiple choice questions, in which respondents were asked to tick the answer most applicable to them.
- Likert-type questions, in which respondents specify how far they agree or disagree with a given statement
- Open-ended questions which encouraged respondents to express how they felt about certain issues regarding the use of keys to enter homes.

The results for each question asked are listed below, with graphs used to illustrate trends observed.

The results for the questionnaire have been ordered thematically, rather than in the order that they appeared in the original questionnaire. This is to help contextualise the results for the reader. The sections (listed above each page) are as follows:

- Background on respondents
- The Issue – entering with keys
- Notification of visits and entry
- Staff conduct in the home
- What respondents would like to see
- Final Comments

Below each set of results is also a short analysis and contextualisation, supplemented with observations from the focus groups.

## **BACKGROUND ON RESPONDENTS**

The respondents consisted of a group of 30 adult asylum seekers. There were both male (42%) and female (58%) respondents.

28 respondents were receiving support from the Home Office at the time the survey was conducted. 2 respondents had received a refusal on their last claim and so were not receiving Home Office Support.

All respondents live in accommodation provided by Serco spread across Glasgow, from Easterhouse to Cardonald.

### **Living Circumstances**

Respondents lived in a range of different circumstances, with around half the respondents living with children:

- Living Alone – 20%
- Living with partner only – 0%
- Single parent living with children – 23%
- Living with partner & children – 27%
- Sharing with housemate – 27%
- Other – 3%

By and large, the housing provider will accommodate single persons with one or more other single persons, as this is more cost-efficient. Self-contained single accommodation is available, but mostly when the inhabitant has specific needs that require this.

Asylum seekers are given accommodation on a no-choice basis, and cannot choose who they live with – their first contact with a housemate is when they or the housemate is moved in to the property.

## **Length of time in Serco Accommodation**

Significantly, the majority of respondents (87%) had lived in their property for over 6 months. In two cases, a respondent had lived at their property for 5 years, and another for 7 years. The remaining 13% had lived in their homes for between 1 and 6 month.

Given that most respondents had lived in their accommodation for a considerable amount of time, having someone enter your home without notice and with keys is likely to undercut the sense of security one could build from having a stable home. It is important to note that first asylum applications in the UK are subject to considerable delays, with more than 50% of negative decisions now overturned at appeal.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is very common for asylum seekers to make multiple fresh claims before receiving status, meaning that people are in need of Home Office provided accommodation for some years.

## **Level of English**

67% of respondents stated they had a good level of English, with only a third considering themselves to have a weak level. This would indicate that communicating with Housing Officers and other Serco staff and contractors about when visits are scheduled should not pose a significant problem.

In cases in which an asylum-seeking resident's level of English not sufficient to communicate with Staff, the housing provider should be using interpreters (be that in-person or via Migrant Help's Clearvoice telephone interpreting) and providing letters and information translated into the resident's language.

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<sup>1</sup> Law Society. *Press Release: Failures in UK immigration and asylum undermine the rule of law*. 12 April 2018. From: <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/press-releases/failures-in-uk-immigration-and-asylum-undermine-the-rule-of-law/>

## **Disability / Illness**

31% of respondents suffer from a long-term disability, with 6 further stating this disability had been diagnosed by their Doctor. These can be mental and/or physical disabilities, which can affect mobility and / or emotional and cognitive responses.

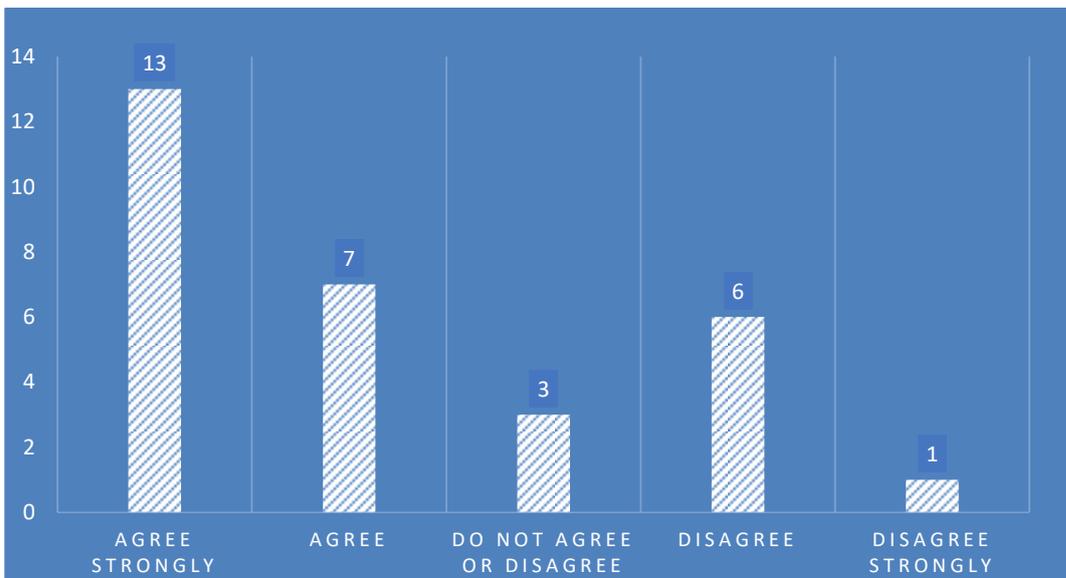
One respondent has been allocated single accommodation because of their diagnosis of PTSD, and yet still endures unannounced entries with keys and loud aggressive knocking. The respondent commented that such visits exacerbated their PTSD symptoms:

*“Yes, I have PTSD and that really frightens me a lot, especially my anxiety”*

Please see below for more detail on how respondents felt their physical and mental health problems were affected by entry with keys.

## THE ISSUE – ENTERING WITH KEYS

**Serco staff or workers have entered my home using keys.**



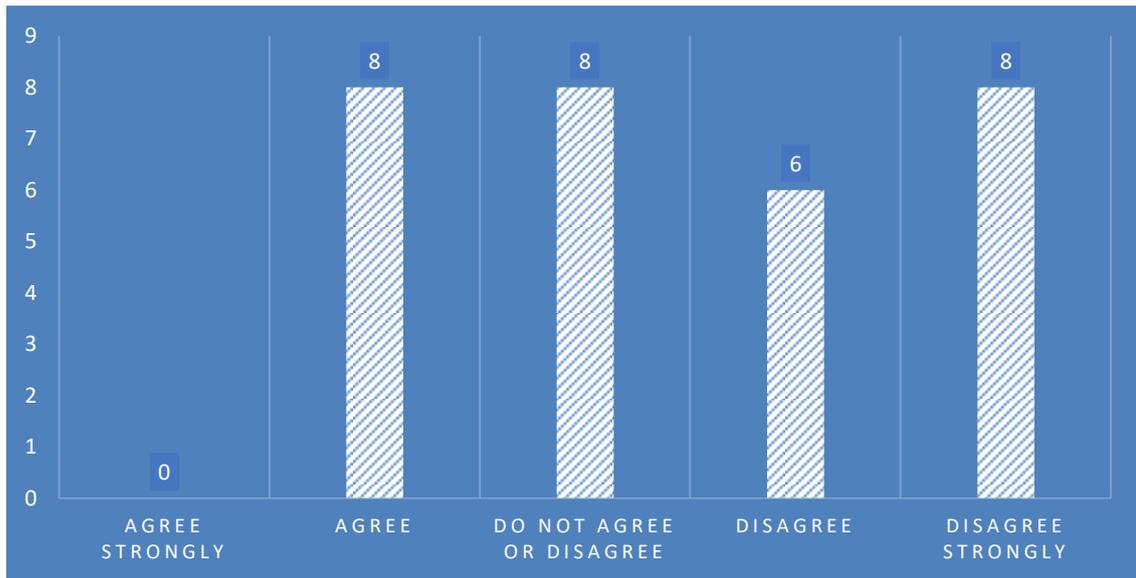
67% of respondents agreed persons sent by Serco had used keys to enter their homes.

According to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, Schedule 10:

*“1(3) The landlord, or any person authorised by him in writing, may at reasonable times of the day, on giving 24 hours’ notice in writing to the tenant or occupier, enter any premises in respect of which this paragraph applies for the purpose of viewing their state and condition.”*

This legislation would require that in order for Serco to lawfully carry out their work, they must always give 24 hour’s written notice to the inhabitant before entering.

**Agree / Disagree: I am always notified in writing if Serco staff or workers are coming to my home.**



46% of respondents disagreed outright with this statement. A further 27% answered 'Do not agree or disagree', and the written comments which accompanied this answer indicated respondents were sometimes notified and sometimes not:

*"Sometimes workers come without notification."*

*"Sometimes send letters sometimes no."*

One respondent who did not agree or disagree commented that they were telephoned sometimes, instead of receiving a letter. Two more stated that whilst there might be notification of a visit (via a laminated sheet on the front door, marked with the arrival date or week of the next monthly visit), the housing officer or contractor would then turn up on a different day:

*"They come at anytime."*

*"May come at anytime, sometimes write but then doesn't come."*

Only 27% of respondents could agree that they always received notification in writing of a visit by Serco.

This is in direct conflict of the Housing Provider’s duty under the above Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Schedule 10 (1)(3).

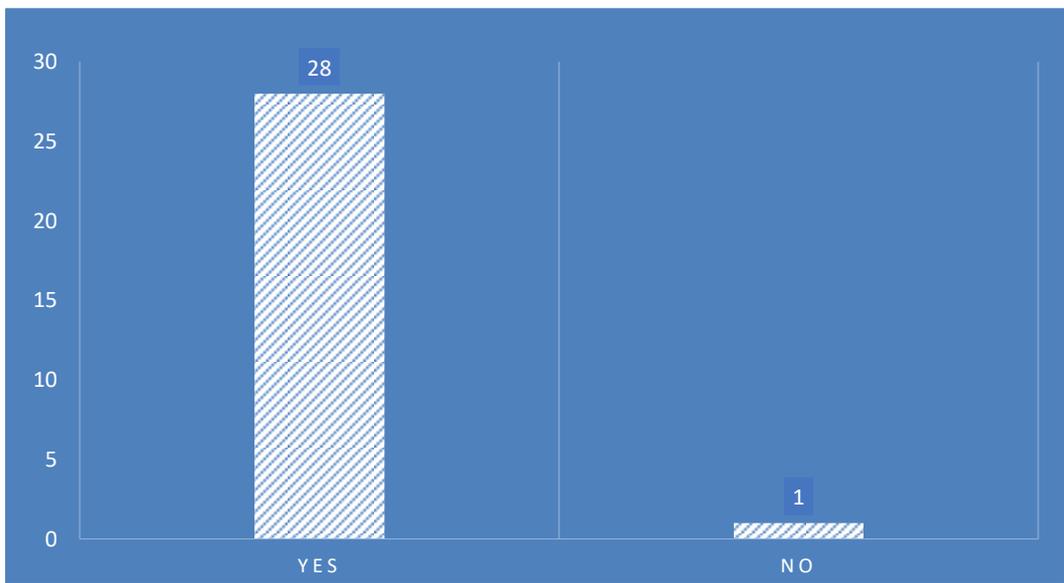
By contrast, the Scottish Government’s “*Letting Agent Code of Practice*” states:

***Property Access and Visits***

**82.** You must give the tenant reasonable notice of your intention to visit the property and the reason for this. At least 24 hours’ notice must be given, or 48 hours’ notice where the tenancy is a private residential tenancy, unless the situation is urgent or you consider such notice would defeat the purpose of the visit. You must ensure the tenant is present when entering the property and visit at reasonable times of the day unless otherwise agreed by the tenant.’

Source: ...<https://www.gov.scot/publications/letting-agent-code-practice/>

**Has someone from Serco used keys to come into your home when no-one is in?**



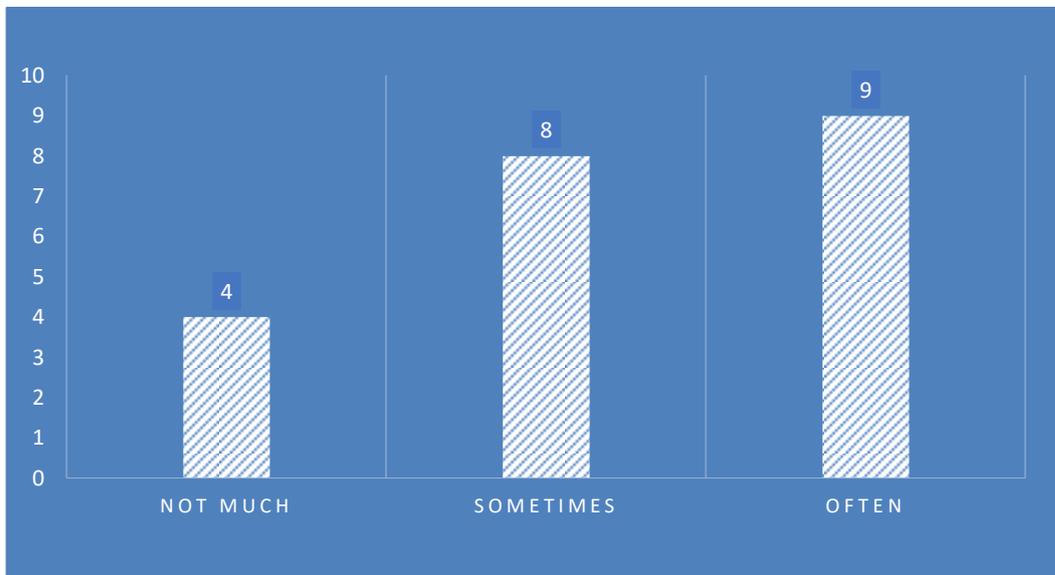
There was strong agreement from most respondents that this practice had occurred. These answers show that Serco staff and contractors do not see a person not being home as a barrier to entry.

Respondents knew that someone had been in their home often because belongings had been moved:

*“Have had pictures taken and items, documents moved about in my absence.”*

Another respondent, a single mother, recounted leaving the house to go out one afternoon and locking the door. When she returned, she found a repairs person inside the house.

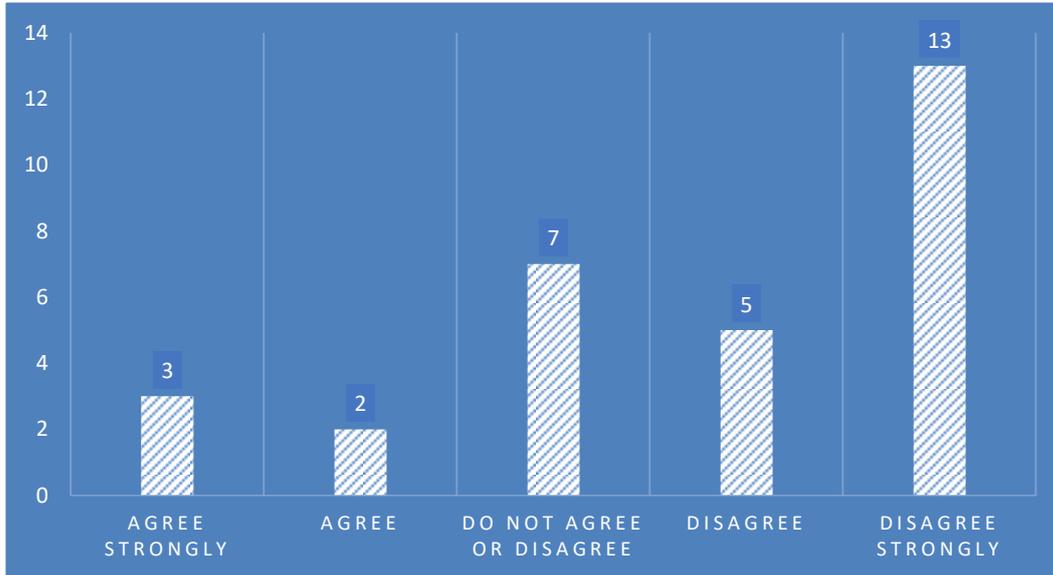
**Where respondents agreed Serco staff had entered their homes when no one was in, how often did this occur?**



Where respondents agreed this practice did occur, a majority of all respondents agreed the practice occurred either sometimes or often. It should be noted the respondents were unlikely to be aware of all times their property had been entered in their absence.

Please see Question 15 below, for more expanded answers on how this practice made respondents feel.

**I feel comfortable with Serco staff or workers entering my home when I am not there.**



Respondents had almost unanimously agreed Serco representatives entered their home whilst they were not present.

Again, the response to this question suggests a significant amount of discontent with the practice.

As found in focus group discussion, there was evidence given that suggested the possessions of respondents had been moved around whilst they were not in the property:

*“Have had pictures taken and items, documents moved about in my absence”*

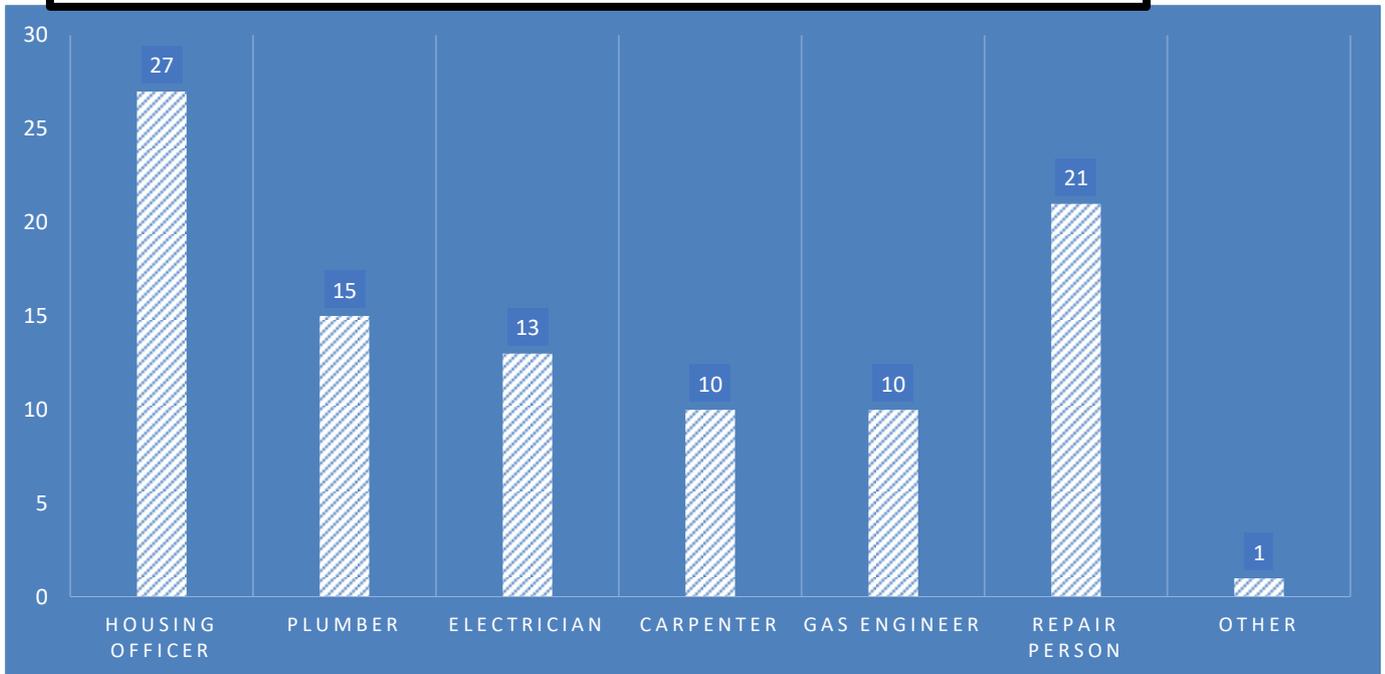
*“I’m not comfortable.”*

*“I don’t like when I am not at home and sometime enter there.”*

The responses suggested discontent stemmed from the fact the possessions of asylum seekers had been moved around in their absence.

It should also be emphasised that some respondents were not always sure of when this practice had occurred, it was only where their possessions had been moved, that they had confirmation.

## Who from Serco has come into your home using keys?



Whilst a housing officer is responsible for inspections and general upkeep, Serco contract out the majority of repairs of to non-Serco repair persons. The responses show housing officers entered properties using keys most often, followed by repair persons. Gas engineers, electricians and carpenters also entered the properties of respondents, however a smaller number of respondents agreed this had occurred. This could indicate that housing officers and repair persons need to access properties more regularly than other contractors.

The responses confirm, however, that all groups had at some point entered the homes of asylum seekers using keys. This means that Serco are providing the keys to non-Serco personnel without notifying the inhabitant of the property, which is likely to reduce the sense of security a person would have in their home.

## How does Serco's staff or workers using keys to come into your home make you feel?

The majority of respondents stated the practice had a negative impact on them.

Many felt very emotional about this issue, and it had an impact on how they perceived their status as a person and as an asylum seeker:

*"Unsafe, scared, nervous, anxious, that I'm useless, that I'm unsafe in this country, that they will kill me."*

*:As if am nobody."*

*"They enter like their home, I feel like a slave."*

A number of responses suggest the practice intimidated respondents, creating an atmosphere of fear within their own homes:

*"Scared and stressed."*

*"Uncomfortable, scared, unsafe."*

*"Scared and abused."*

*"Depressed, not safe and not free, and like you're locked out."*

*"When they open the door by their own, it's feel so scary."*

These responses make for devastating reading - particularly when we consider that a lack of safety is what respondents were fleeing from in the first place.

A number of responses seemed to suggest the practice undermined the relationship between the respondent and Serco:

*“I feel I don’t have confidentiality and privacy.”*

*“Invasion of my personal space and privacy.”*

One respondent stated, ‘*Shocking, because I have mental illness*’, and it is evident respondents suffering from mental health issues were significantly impacted (see question 23).

It is important to note that Housing Officers and contractors are **representatives** of Serco – if their conduct undermines a relationship with a resident, then there is the potential for the resident to feel that they cannot trust Serco as a whole.

Some respondents felt less emotive about the issue, viewing it as an inconvenience in everyday life.

*“As I said before it is just embarrassment when I take a shower or sleep and find a person.”*

A number of responses to this question again referred to the lack of prior notice provided by Serco as a problem.

*“For me this is not a big problem but it would be better to have notice in advance.”*

*“It okay, just to know when they will be coming.”*

**Does your disability / illness make you feel unsafe or scared when people come in using keys?**

A number of respondents said they suffered from mental health problems, and it was evident the practice of using keys to enter homes had an impact on this:

*“Depression she feel stress – she is on medication.”*

*“Yes doesn’t like to open door unless someone else at home.”*

*“Exactly, makes me scared and have more stress.”*

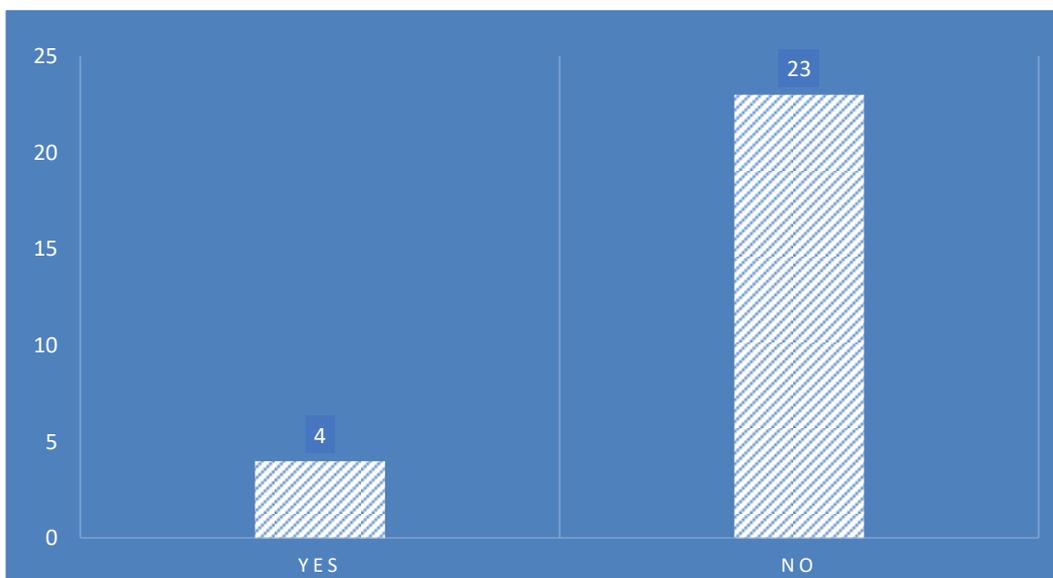
*“Yes I have PTSD and that really frightens me a lot especially my anxiety.”*

In addition, where a respondent suffered from heart palpitations, the practice also impacted them:

*“Yes I feel scared.”*

These responses directly link the practice of entering with keys to compounding of pre-existing mental health conditions. Since the housing provider is no doubt aware of the high prevalence of mental ill health amongst the asylum seeking population and will also be aware of particular health conditions of individual residents, it is unacceptable that Serco should allow a practice which has such a debilitating effect on those in their care

**If this practice makes you feel bad, have you ever complained about it to Serco?**



Only four respondents had ever complained about the practice to Serco, suggesting respondents do not feel empowered in their relationship with the housing provider.

Significantly, since the housing officer is supposed to be the asylum seeker's link with the housing provider, this trust can be broken by the very fact that it is frequently housing officers who are involved with this practice.

### If no, was there a reason for not complaining?

The most frequent response to this question referred to a sense of fear:

*"Scared."*

*"They intimidate you all the time."*

In particular this fear was due to the belief complaining would have an adverse impact on the application for asylum by respondents.

*"I do not want to, maybe it may affect me negatively."*

*"Scared to complain, think they will affect my situation at the home office."*

*"Maybe next time I will complain. Now that I know it is okay to do that. I think Serco work with the home office and they can report me."*

*"Just I don't want to be in trouble."*

It is important that the housing provider works to assure residents that any complaints made about housing issues **will not** affect asylum applications.

Residents should be given multiple points of contact. For many, their primary point of contact is the housing officer and so if a complaint relates to the housing officer and their conduct, there must be clear routes to alternative complaints procedures.

A large number of respondents were also not aware of the unlawfulness of such a practice:

*“Thought it was lawful.”*

*“They feel it is their right to come in anytime.”*

These responses suggest Serco staff and contractors are themselves ignorant of the illegality of this practice, or are taking advantage of the lack of knowledge and agency of asylum-seeking residents.

### **If yes, how many times?**

Only 4 respondents had tried to complain about the practice.

Two respondents complained directly to their Housing Officer, one had received no response 4 years on. The other was informed by their housing officer Serco were able to do this:

*“She told me Serco have the right to come and visit your house any time they want.”*

One respondent had complained to Serco’s office a number of times.

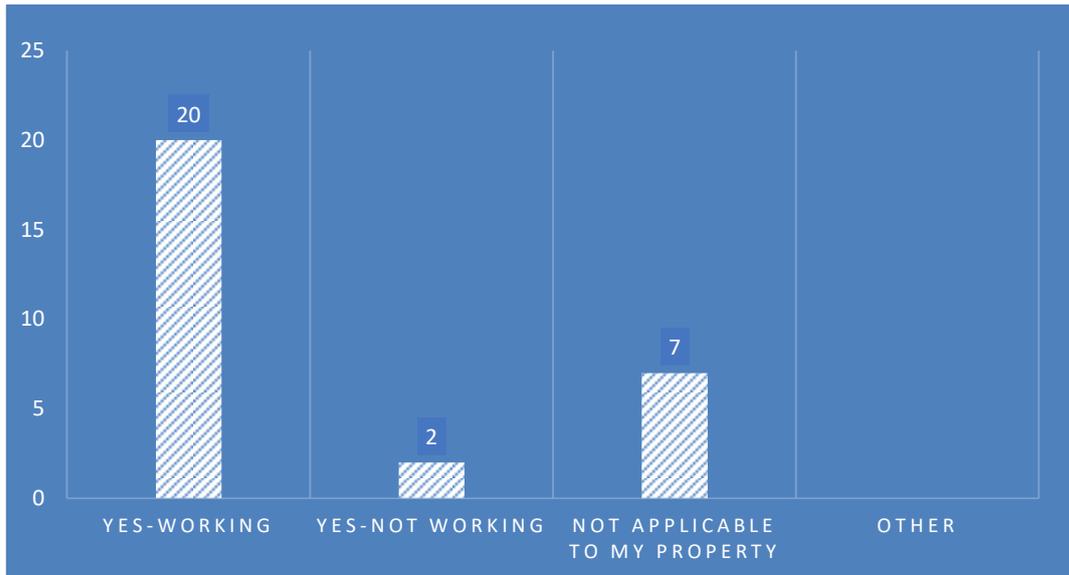
*“Yes – Many times. Called the office they say they’ll call back and sometimes they say I need to hold on till do they speak to the HO, and then nothing happens.”*

One respondent’s mother had complained on their behalf, and again there was no response from Serco.

These answers suggest that Serco have ignored or not taken seriously complaints made about entering with keys.

## NOTICE OF VISITS AND ENTRY

**Do you have a buzzer / intercom at the front close door to your property?**

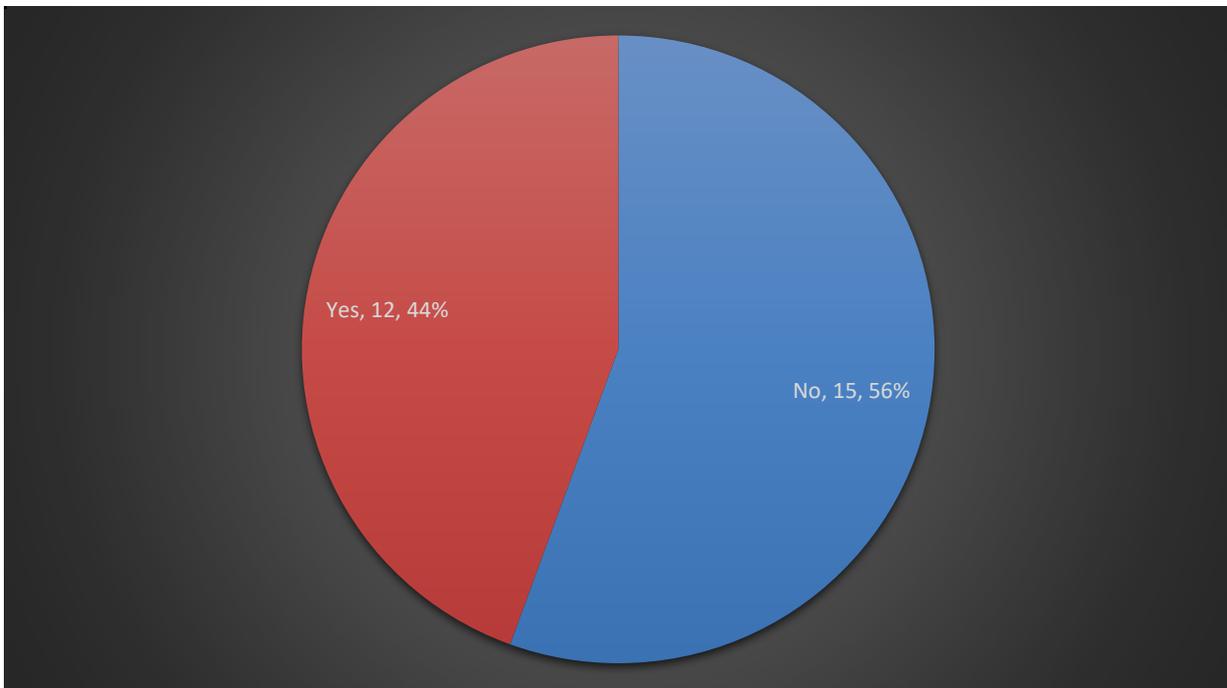


The majority of respondents had working buzzers / intercoms at the ground floor close door, where applicable to their property. Only two respondents reported their buzzer was broken.

This shows that there are no barriers to Serco staff and contractors using the buzzer to let the resident know they are there.

In instances where a buzzer is broken, the housing provider should fix these within contractual timescales and, in the meantime, arrange to telephone the resident when they are outside the property and want to gain entry to the property.

**Does your housing officer always come at the time arranged for the monthly visit / inspection?**



Majority of respondents answered that their housing officer had failed to arrive at their property for an inspection at the agreed time.

Written responses also suggested some asylum seekers were not notified of the time their Housing Officer would arrive:

*“I don’t know the actual date the housing office suppose to come, but he comes once in a month.”*

*“No time is arranged.”*

*“She does not have a regular Housing Officer and never knows when they are coming.”*

*“Housing officer explained she’s busy and have a lot of houses to visit.”*

*“The housing officer always put not available at the time of inspection into the record sheet.”*

Failure to agree to specific time or date had an impact on the lives of the respondents.

*“they don’t mention the time, we have to stay at home all day.”*

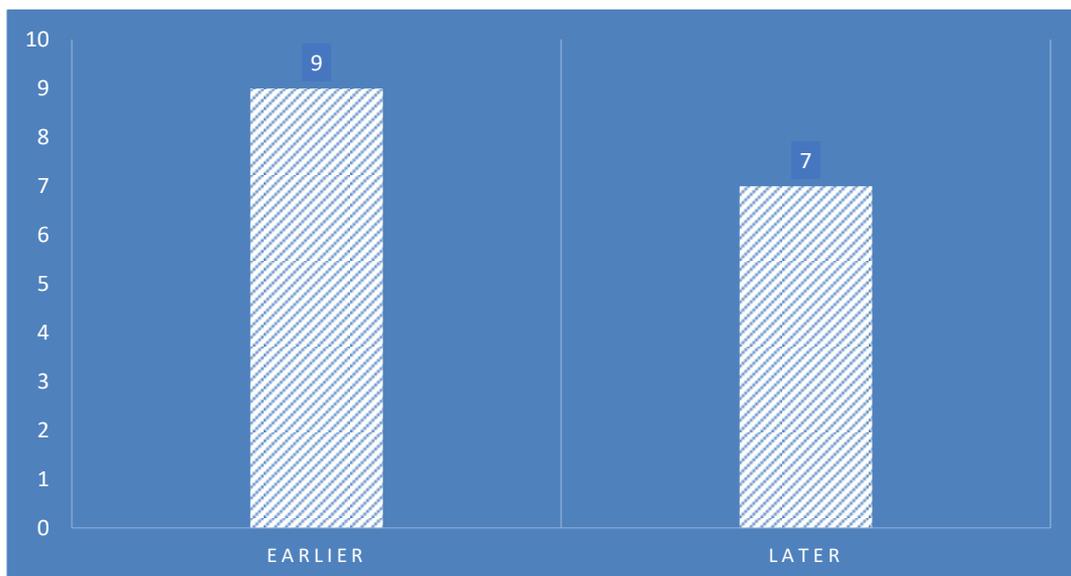
It is imperative that Housing Officers visit at the scheduled times. In the event that a scheduled visit **must** be changed, it is equally important that Housing Officers reschedule the visit, once again with the required notice period.

Housing officers having large workloads is not an acceptable excuse for standards of practice to slip.

Again, comments from respondents made it clear the large difference in terms of positive impact that a small difference in conduct can make:

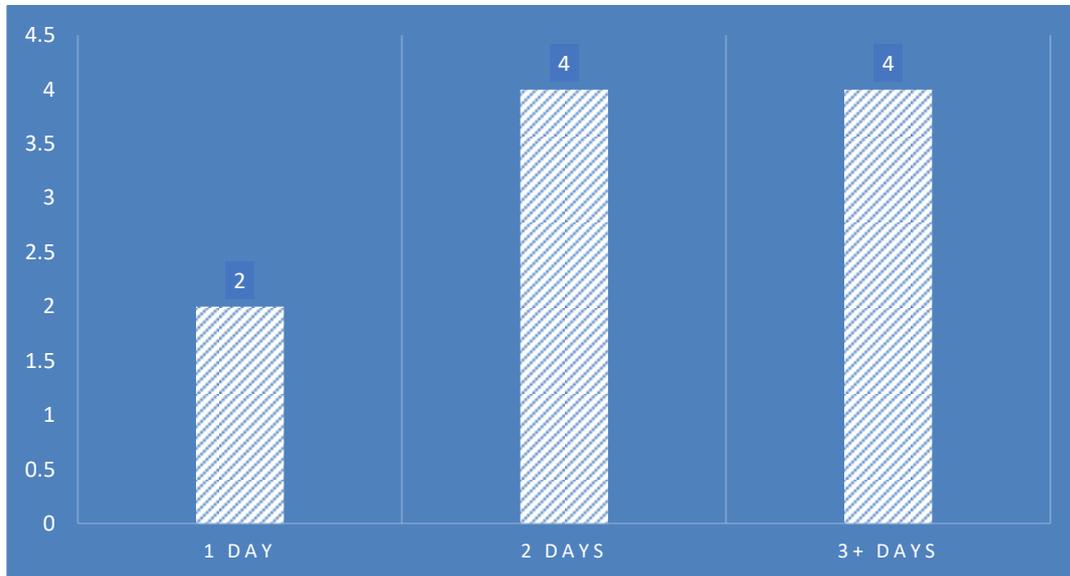
*“I have no problem from visit anybody, but it will be better if they come on time, to arrange myself.”*

**If no, please select whether the housing officer comes before or after the day stated in the letter?**



There were a significant number of responses that showed the Housing Officer had arrived earlier than the time agreed for the inspection. Responses indicated this could be significantly earlier or later, with 9 respondents stating this could be over a day earlier or later.

**If a different day, how many days earlier or later does the housing officer come?**



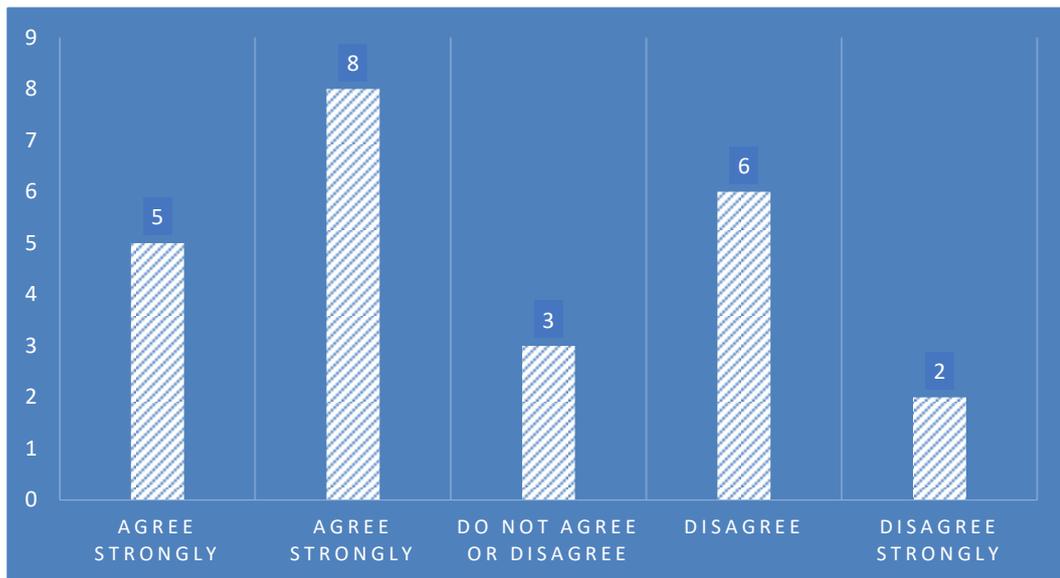
Most respondents stated that the housing officer came 3 or more days earlier or later than the given date, with one respondent even stating this difference could be up to two weeks:

*“Sometimes even 2 weeks later and when he comes and don’t find he gets angry and he didn’t tell when his coming.”*

*“Sometimes weeks and when she comes sometime she says she was on holiday a different person will come without notice or telling me.”*

The responses suggest not only were the time and date of inspection incorrect, but that a different Housing Officer could be sent without prior notice to the asylum seeker.

**Agree / Disagree: Before entering my home, Serco staff or workers will first press the buzzer at the front close door (downstairs).**



It should be noted this was not applicable to a small number of respondents who either didn't have a working buzzer, or a buzzer was not applicable to the type of property they were staying in.

There was an even split in answers between whether Serco staff would buzz before coming up to the property, suggesting inconsistency in practice.

*"Sometimes they press buzzer from main door or sometimes they pass through main door and knock my house door."*

*"All the time."*

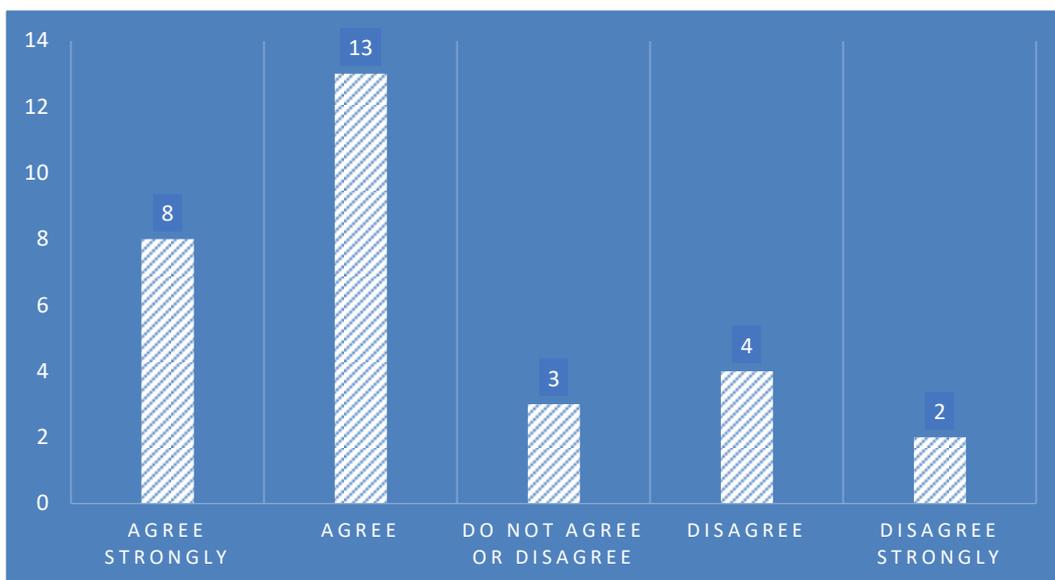
There was also suggestion this practice varied according to the type of contractor entering the property.

*"Only the repair person use the buzzer."*

Again, the responses show some evidence to suggest Serco do use the downstairs buzzer first, however the approach taken by different contractors

varies. Given these results, coupled with the inconsistency around written notification of a visit, it is arguable that Serco are not training their staff in consistent practice and the importance of this particular issue.

**Agree / Disagree: Before entering my home, Serco staff or workers will knock on my front door three separate times.**



Here, there was fairly strong agreement to suggest Serco representatives would knock on the front door of respondents three times before entering.

Some respondents had taken steps to prevent persons entering with keys:

*“Because I leave the key in the door, that is why they knock.”*

Suggesting that otherwise the staff member or contractor would enter with keys if they could. Again, inconsistency in practice was observed:

*“They knock the door and sometimes they don’t.”*

In order to give someone a sense of security in their home, it is imperative that housing provider staff and contractors always knock three separate times to notify the inhabitant of their presence.

## Do you hear the knocking?

All respondents heard the knocking at their front door, although over 1/3 of respondents stated this was only sometimes. One response suggested this depended on where they were in their property:

*“But it’s hard to hear when in my bedroom.”*

Since most respondents did hear the knocking this would indicate that this is an effective practice when carried out. However, taking into account the possibility they might not hear the knocking, the Housing officer or contractor can also call them to notify them of their presence.

Housing officers and contractors also do not leave enough time for a resident to get to the door to open it. As one respondent commented:

*“When I’m asleep I’m afraid to open and sometimes they open door before I get there to open.”*

## How do they knock?

There were a wide range of written responses to this question, again suggesting inconsistency in practice,

*‘once’,*

*‘two/three times’.*

*“Gently and sometimes loudly.”*

*“Normal knocking.”*

A number of responses suggested the knocking could be intimidating:

*“Aggressively.”*

*“Very loud is scary.”*

*“Very loud like the police and that scares me”*

It is evident where Serco representatives knocked harshly, and if the respondent had not been notified in advance of their visit, this could be a distressing experience for respondents.

It is vital to consider that many respondents and asylum seekers in general may have had traumatic experiences that mean that aggressive or loud knocking could be at least stressful, if not triggering, for the resident.

There is a much higher prevalence of mental health issues, and particularly complex PTSD, in the asylum-seeking population as compared to the general population.

## **How does the knocking make you feel, and why?**

This question received a wide range of responses. However, there was general agreement this practice upset respondents, with written responses including:

*“Angry, sad, disrespected.”*

*“Very bad, without any respect enter.”*

*“Tensed feeling.”*

*“Very angry.”*

This is very worrying, given the context of poor mental health and trauma in asylum seeking population. A large number of responses also linked the lack of notice they had received to their feelings of discontent.

*“Nervous, panicky, anxious, scared – it's not normal to knock like that. I'm not expecting it so it startles me.”*

*“I feel afraid especially when I'm not expecting anyone.”*

*“Sometimes I’m scared specially when I don’t know when they will come.”*

*“When I’m sleeping I’m afraid to open the door and sometimes they open the door before I get there to open.”*

It should be noted that a small number of respondents (5 in total) did not share these feelings:

*“I feel ok no problem at all.”*

*“It’s okay.”*

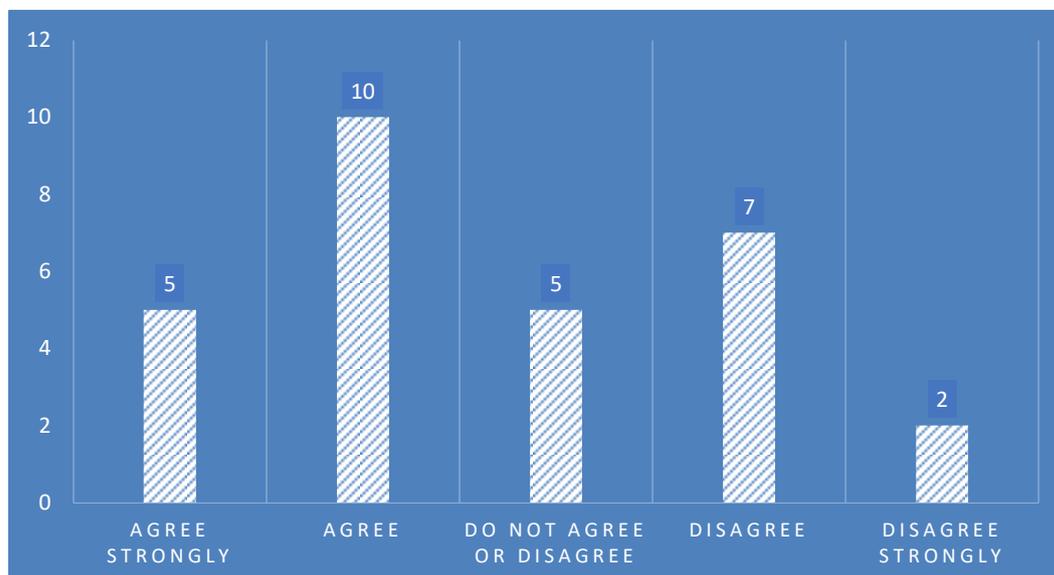
To give an indication of how good practice can make a difference, one respondent - who stated that Serco staff *did* knock before entry two or three times at an adequate volume - commented that this made them feel:

*“Good, because they knock my door, not enter without knocking.”*

These various practices show how the stark contrast between the impact of good and bad practice on residents.

If all housing provider staff were to simply knock three separate times to notify inhabitants of entry and never enter with keys, this could have a significant positive impact on the security and agency of asylum-seeking residents.

**If they knocked, the Serco staff member or worker  
waits until I answer the door**



There was no clear agreement from respondents as to whether staff members would wait after knocking until the door was opened, before using keys.

Again, the written responses further supported this inconsistency in practice:

*“Sometimes they wait and sometimes they don’t wait.”*

*“If I’m late to open the door they entered that is what I don’t like.”*

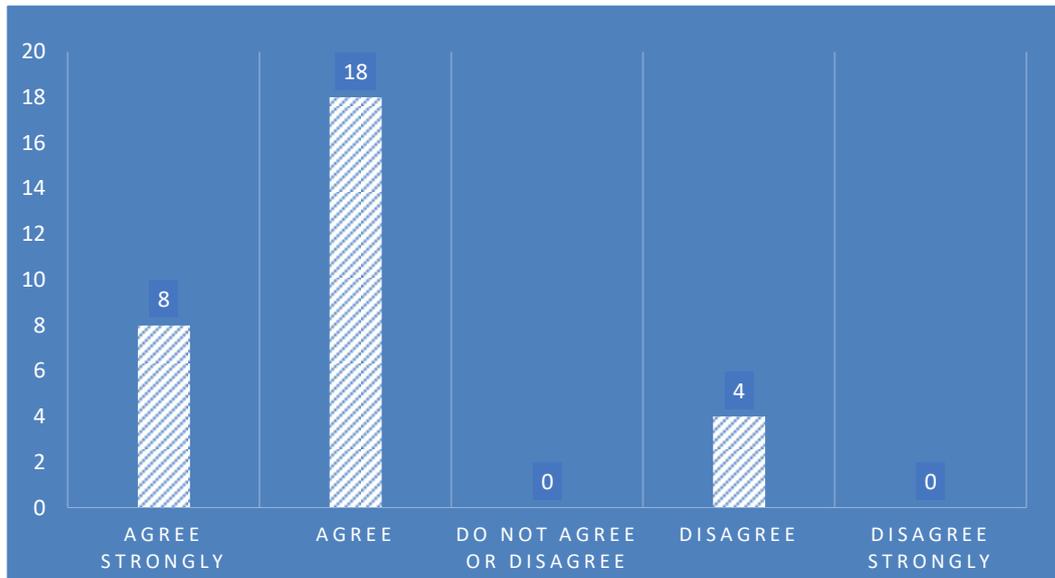
Around half of the respondents agreed the Serco representative did not wait long enough for them to answer the door.

It should be noted a number of respondents did agree that often Serco representatives would wait,

*“They wait until I open the door.”*

## STAFF CONDUCT IN THE HOME

**Once they have entered my home, the person always explains clearly who they are, and why they are there.**



All participants agreed with this statement apart from 4 respondents.

However, there was evidence the explanation provided was limited – and sometimes incorrect.

*“They only say they are from Serco but not their name or why they are there.”*

*“They say very shortly who they are but no badge.”*

It is concerning that whilst personnel identify themselves as being affiliated to Serco, they don't consistently identify themselves by name and / or with an ID badge. This means if misconduct was to take place or a complaint about their conduct was to be made, the resident would not be able to give any names or ID numbers.

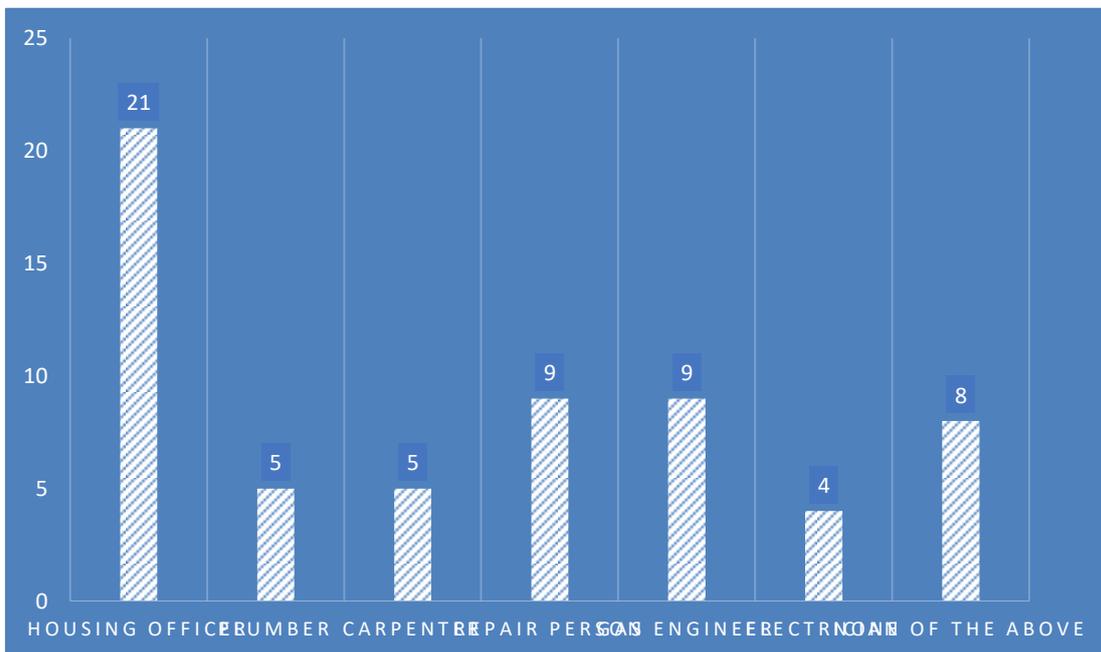
It is clear from written responses an explanation is often provided,  
*“Yes I normally ask them and then they explain.”*

It should be noted that respondents should not have to ask, and that personnel should identify themselves **before** they have entered a home.

Furthermore, written responses suggested that identification rarely went beyond contractors explaining that Serco had sent them.

The results of the survey also emphasised the lack of formal identification provided, particularly by contractors – some of whom are sent to the property by the landlord, and not Serco. It is evident there is need for formal identification for anyone entering the home of an asylum seeker.

### Which Serco staff or worker shows ID without being asked, after coming into your home with keys?

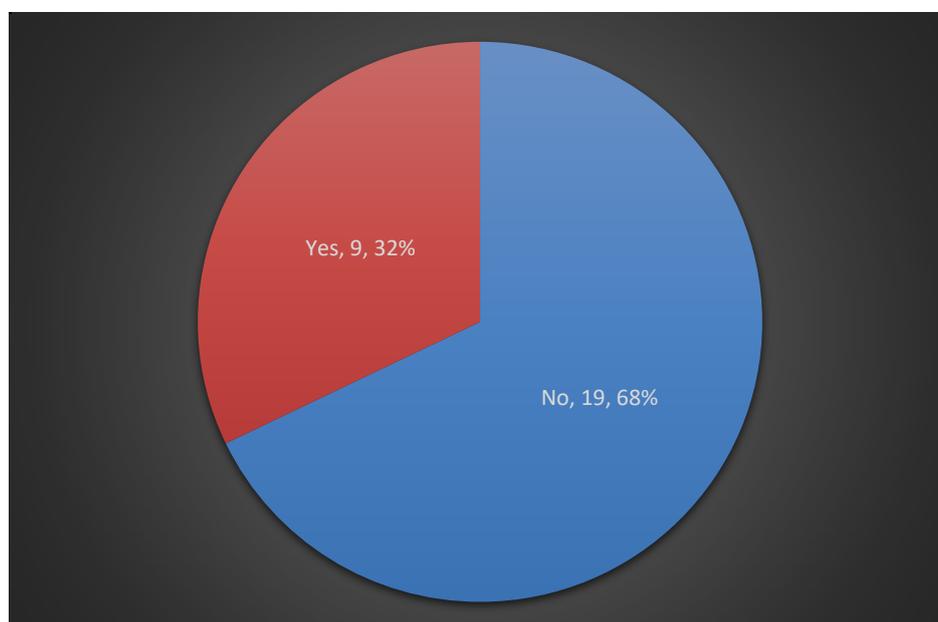


Over 2/3 of respondents agreed their housing officer would show ID upon entering their home, however for the other categories there was generally weak support, with around 1/3 of respondents agreeing repair persons and gas engineers would do so.

Notably, 8 respondents confirmed no Serco staff or worker had showed ID before entering their home.

This is particularly significant given the number of different personnel who are entering the homes – without ID, the asylum-seeking resident cannot be sure who the person is or who they were sent by, or even if they are safe.

**Do Serco Staff or workers use their own cleaning materials, after coming into your home with keys?**



Nine respondents stated contractors sent by Serco had used their own cleaning materials to clean up mess after repair work. 68% (19) said “no”, they had used the asylum seeker’s materials.

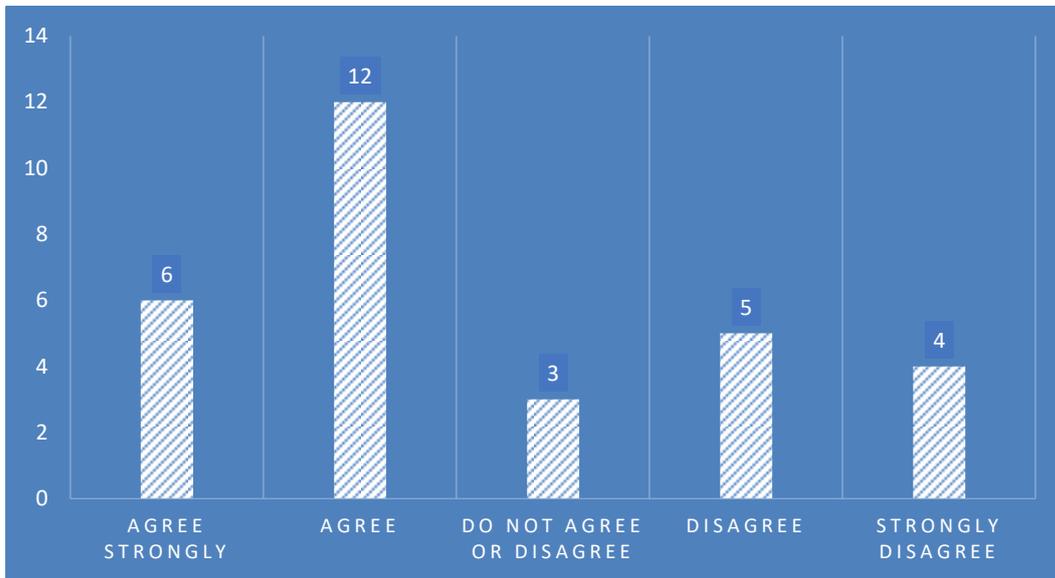
This was strongly supported by discussion in the focus groups. Items mentioned by respondents were “brushes”, “towels”, “bleach”, “washing liquid”, “mop”, “dishcloths” and “shovels”. This has also been a frequently raised issue with W-ASH Project.

It is vital to note that asylum seekers have access to a maximum of only £37.75 a week, if they receive Section 95 support. Those on Section 4 support have access to money only on a pre-paid ASPEN card, which can

only be used in a narrow selection of supermarkets and some charity shops. Some asylum seekers may have no access to money at all.

Given this context, it is clear that either contractors should bring their own cleaning supplies when they come to work or that the housing provider should supply their contractors with said supplies, as the current situation could place unnecessary financial burden on those already living in poverty.

**Serco staff or workers always treat me with respect in my home.**



17 respondents agreed they had been treated with respect in their home, with around 9 respondents disagreeing.

The written responses again suggested this differed according to which type of Serco representative was entering their home.

Two responses stated their Housing Officer treated them with respect:

*“The housing officer does.”*

Other responses suggested there was less respect from other representatives.

*“The housing officer is very good but others and not all of them, sometimes they are ignoring my speech.”*

*“Depends which staff”*

*“Not all of them respect me.”*

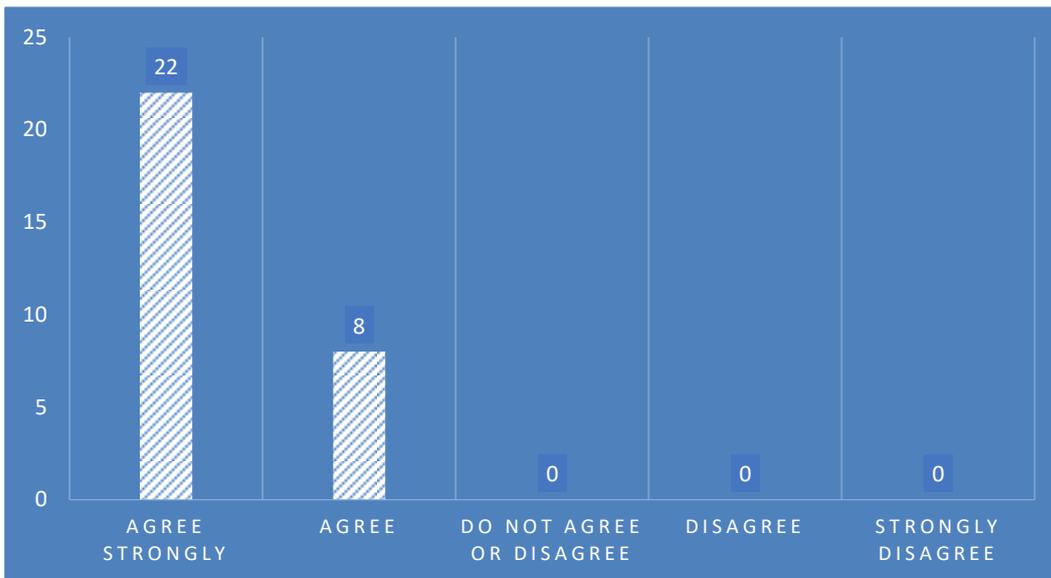
Responses suggested contractors treated them with less respect than housing officers, but again there was variation in treatment by both types of Serco representatives.

It is concerning that asylum seeking residents cannot be certain that they will be treated with respect by all housing provider staff and contractors who enter their homes.

These findings would suggest that Serco has not extended the training their staff might receive to those that they contract out repairs to, or made it an issue for that firm to address.

## WHAT RESPONDENTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE

**Would you like to be notified in advance when Serco staff or workers are coming to your home?**



There is clear agreement from all respondents that they would prefer to be notified in advance.

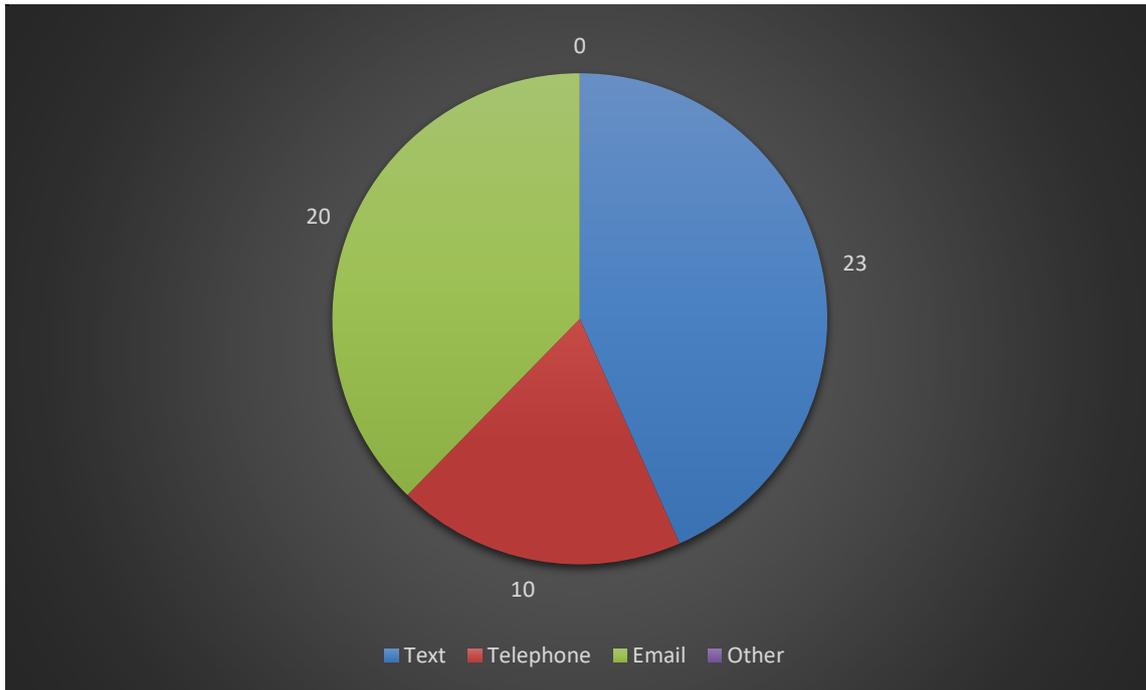
The lack of prior notification had been addressed in previous answers, as it led to greater distress where Serco representatives were knocking loudly on the front doors of the respondent's homes.

*"Yes that will be very good."*

*"It will be great."*

Prior notification of visits would strengthen a sense of security in the residents' homes – that no one representing the housing provider or landlord can come to their home without them first being notified, except in emergency circumstances.

## What method should be used?



A strong majority of responses support notification by text or email from Serco. This would mean that asylum seeker can be notified of a visit if they are in the house or on the go, and would doubtless be a more cost-effective and less time consuming option for the housing provider.

Any postal delays would not have to be taken into consideration. In the event of any urgent or emergency repairs needing to be done, communication between resident and housing provider personnel would be more instantaneous.

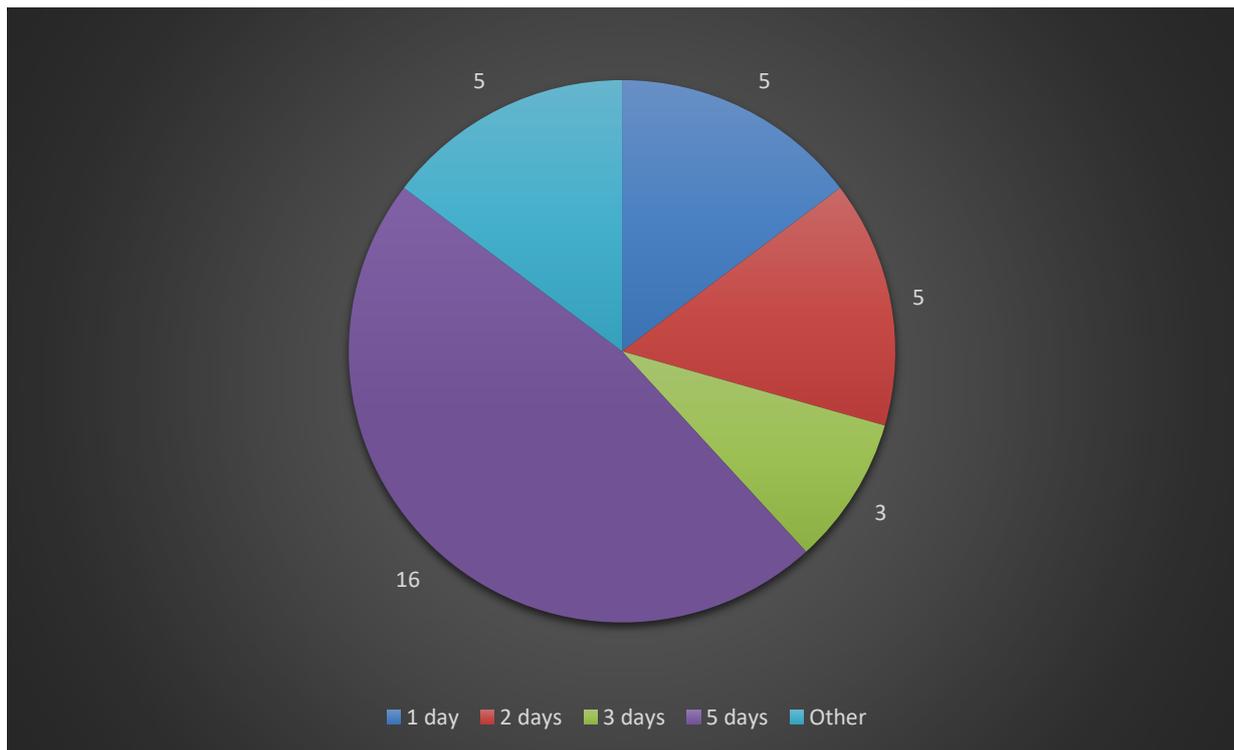
## How much notice should be given?

Nearly half of the respondents preferred 5 days' notice to be given, which is Serco's current notice period for non-urgent repairs or visits.

There was some variation, however, with 13 respondents stating three or less days was satisfactory and three respondents stating 2 weeks' notice should be given.

These results indicate that **at least** 5 days is preferable, but that the housing provider should be flexible.

This is particularly relevant for vulnerable residents, who may require longer notice periods and more than one notice to be given.



## FINAL COMMENTS

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether they had any additional comments to make, regarding the use of keys to enter their home:

*“Thank you so much W-ASH for this opportunity and the work you are doing am really happy and hope something good will come out, Again thank you. Am really frightened when Serco come in my home because I am a single parent, and the way they don’t respect me at all. Very rude especially the repair men, housing officer. I always feel am worthless, am very happy they lost the contract. I get bad anxiety and feel so anxious every time I leave my home, because I don’t know when I come back who will be at my living room, or suspect if someone was there because my things are moved.”*

*“It is not right, and not notify someone, and just come to the house is not nice. There is no privacy at all, you feel like you are naked.”*

*“Some of the Serco’s workers don’t give any respect for asylum seekers and sometimes say you are a beggar.”*

*“I hope everything to be changed in future, for good and some improvement coming up.”*

This case study is an example of how it feels to have people coming into your home without your permission or knowledge

### **Asylum Seeker M**

(Male)

*“All the time people are coming into your house, they never tell you when. Sometimes I feel so angry, I don’t want to be with anyone and then these people just can walk straight into your house.*

*This time they came into my house when I was sleeping. I was so tired that day – I had appointment with Red Cross but I didn’t go because I was so, so tired. Instead I was sleeping. Suddenly I heard ‘Hello! Hello! Hello!’ – I wake up and they are in the bedroom. It was two men, one man from Serco and the other from the new company – He said I am here from the new company. They told me, you must wake up because we take pictures of this room. **Only the one from Serco showed me his ID card, the other one he said just ‘I am from the new company and I will take the pictures’.***

***Before I got a letter saying it was not going to be Serco any more but a new company, and they would come to the house for inspection. They typed all this, but they never said what day they would be coming.***

*To be honest, I knew they have keys because many, many times I am come back and I see that my stuff has been moved, but who moved it? I don’t know who.”*

## Chapter Five

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

## Conclusions

It is clear from the results of both the W-ASH survey and focus groups that Serco staff and contractors entering with keys and without notice is a regular occurrence. This is contrary both to Scottish legislation, UKVI guidelines and the guidelines which Serco has set for itself. These all stipulate that entering a property without notice is to be conducted only in cases of emergency – the exception, rather than rule.

What is also clear is that there is little consistency in practice concerning both notice of visits (such as letters, texts or phone calls) and the conduct during the visits (in terms of the use of buzzers, knocking and showing ID to residents).

Consistency is a vital part of building trust with a resident – not only do asylum seekers particularly suffer from strangers walking into their homes, due to their previous life experiences, they also have no idea when these incidents might occur. Even if a scheduled date and time is provided – which as the results indicate is not a regular occurrence - residents cannot rely on their housing officer, much less outside contractors to show up on time, or even on the day. Practices such as aggressive or loud knocking are completely unnecessary and harmful.

Insecurity and precariousness are heightened by the fact that entering with keys and without notice is a practice that occurs even when residents are not present in the accommodation. The fact that respondents stated that documents and possessions have been moved in their absence is simply unacceptable. Significantly, these documents can be medical or Home Office documents, which refer to a person's asylum claim or status. These are strictly confidential and private, and yet one of the respondents stated: *“I feel I don't have confidentiality and privacy.”*

Other respondents noted that the practice had a significant impact on how they perceived their status as an asylum seeker, saying that they felt: *“Unsafe, scared, nervous, anxious, that I’m useless, that I’m unsafe in this country, that they will kill me.”*

Given that so many other elements of an asylum seeker’s life can be precarious and difficult, and their circumstances in their country of origin even more so, we would hope that UKVI and the housing provider would want to ensure that homes were of a high standard, safe and secure.

Sadly, the emotional impact of this practice as told by the respondents in this survey would suggest that this is not the case. As previously stated, the asylum seeking population has a much higher incidence of mental ill health, particularly complex PTSD, than the general population. The practice of entering with keys and without notice is one that would arguably have a significant negative emotional impact on anyone without these mental health problems, let alone those with depression, anxiety and historic trauma.

Equally concerning are the very low rates of complaint by respondents, and the lack of response from Serco to those who did complain. These findings would suggest that asylum seekers are not well informed enough of their rights and/or do not feel comfortable or empowered to make complaints.

Written responses such as, *“They feel it is their right to come in anytime”*, suggest that Serco staff and contractors are not conducting themselves in a manner that is respectful of asylum-seeking residents, their homes and boundaries.

Fortunately, the respondents were able to give clear and concise suggestions as to what could help the situation. Many suggested text or a phone call as being preferred methods of contact by which housing officers can notify inhabitants of necessary visits and/or repairs. 5 days was given as the best notice time period. These points and other conclusions drawn from our findings form the recommendations below.

There is great opportunity in the development that a new company, the Mears Group, is taking over the housing provision contract as of September 2019, and we hope that they will take these findings into account.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations for Home Office, Police Scotland and Glasgow City Council**

- A. The Home Office should commission or undertake an urgent and sensitive investigation into what we have researched. Waiting for individual asylum seekers to report to them puts an unfair onus on an already vulnerable group. We ask you to take responsibility and undertake a proper investigation to ensure the fundamentals of this public service – safety, security and peace of mind – is not being violated, systematically or otherwise.
- B. Police Scotland should listen to what we are reporting and undertake to meet asylum seekers in an anonymised manner to hear about their concerns on this issue. It is important to understand whether criminal offences may be being committed.
- C. The new Glasgow Regional Asylum Dispersal Partnership Board, set up as a result of the Glasgow Asylum Taskforce should consider this. We suggest the first meeting of this group discussed this issue and in the longer-term ensures that it holds to account the Home Office and its current and future contractors from any such practices.

### **Recommendations for the housing provider**

- 1. Housing officers and contractors should not have easy access to keys to asylum seekers' flats. Keys should only be used in cases of emergency, such as a gas leak or serious illness or injury to a resident.
- 2. Visits and repairs should be arranged with the residents, with a minimum of 5 days' notice. These should be arranged by a phone call and a follow-up text message. Another reminder text message should be sent 24 hours before the arranged visit.
- 3. In instances where an asylum seeker has significant mental health issues or historic trauma, longer notice periods and methods of notification may be agreed in consultation with the resident.

4. Where there are language barriers, in-person or telephone interpretation should be used, as well as translation for written communication.
5. Housing officers and repairs persons must keep to the scheduled day and time of the visit/repair. If changes must be made, a new date and time must be agreed with the resident(s). Residents should feel they can complain about housing officers and contractors who do not show up without letting them know that they will not be attending.
6. A Complaints Procedure should be set up that is independent to the housing officer, including a free-phone telephone line. Information in the Welcome Pack should clarify that asylum seekers have access to this free, confidential complaints line and be advised of the full procedure.
7. All complaints should be answered according to the Housing Provider's timescales (currently a maximum of 5 days' time) and fully resolved where possible to the satisfaction of the resident.
8. The Housing Provider should be transparent about complaints it receives on its staff and their conduct, particularly when multiple complaints have been made about the same housing officer.
9. All housing officers and contractors should treat asylum seekers with the utmost respect at all times. All housing officers, repair people and any outside contractors should undergo training to this effect, as well as training on general awareness about issues that asylum seekers face.
10. Housing officers and contractors must bring all their own supplies and never use those of residents.
11. All housing officers and contractors should be subject to full disclosure checks.
12. When attending properties at the agreed time and date, housing officers and contractors must use a buzzer intercom system (where applicable) to gain entry. They must also employ three separate knocks

at a firm, but not aggressive volume. If there is no answer they may call the resident(s).

13. All housing officers and contractors always must state their full name and company name if asked before the door is opened. Once the door is opened they must always show their ID badge *before* entering and whether or not they are asked to so.
14. If no answer is given after using the buzzer, knocking three times on the front house door and a follow-up telephone call, housing officers and contractors must leave the property and reschedule with the resident(s) for another time and/or day.
15. In instances where any of these methods could exacerbate mental health conditions, alternative methods of notifying the resident must be agreed in consultation with the resident.

# Appendix 1

HOME OFFICE

COMPASS CONTACT

EXAMPLES OF REPAIR TIMESCALES

## 8. The following contractual repairs timescales must be adhered to

### 8.1 Immediate: within 2 hours. Examples provided below

- Flooding or free standing water within property
- Water penetration through the structure
- Damaged asbestos lining through the structure
- Fire damage
- Structural instability

### 8.2 Emergency: within 24 hours. Examples provided below.

- No operational smoke alarms - *or CO2 detector if gas in house*
- Partial loss of mains water or electrical services
- Plumbing leaks that affect other properties - *heavy leaks*
- Bared or exposed electrical wiring
- No operational hot water supply - *usually give an extra kettle, then 7 days*
- No heating system - *should relocate if not repaired in 24 hours*
- Blocked drainage inside or out that affects the accommodation
- Falling or unstable ceiling
- Hole in or weakened floor
- Ground floor windows or entrance doors that are *incapable* of being closed or locked
- Complete loss of mains water, electrical services and as supply

### 8.3 Urgent: within 7 working days. Examples provided below.

- Taps requiring new washer
- Doors and windows requiring easing
- Broken glazing (make safe) - *usually 24 hours*
- Whole cooker not operational - *hob rings or microwave usually given*
- No valid gas / electrical safety certificate
- Lounge heater *not working* - *usually provide a temporary heater*
- Broken toilet cisterns / baths

### 8.4 Routine repair: within 28 working days. Examples provided below

- Glazing repairs - *usually 7 working days*
- Washing machines
- Cooker ring, oven or grill
- Fridge / freezer - *broken fridge usually 7 working days*
- Resealing of baths
- Splashbacks / grouting
- Toilet seats
- Furniture repairs
- Balcony netting
- Bedroom, kitchen, hall or bathroom heaters - *one usually repaired in 7 working days*  
(all of these together would be classed as an emergency)
- Minor water leak

**Where the timescale is in days, it means working days (there are 5 working days in one week)  
A Public or Bank holiday is not a working day either**

*Asylum Seeker Housing Project comments in italic*

## Minutes of Meeting



### **Glasgow Third Party Sector Engagement Forum**

To be held on **26<sup>th</sup> of April 2017** at **14.00**

Venue **Melisa House**

#### **Attendees**

Anne Kinghorn (AK) Serco, David McLean (DM) Serco, Priscille Mulhearn (PM) Migrant Help, Charles Laughton (CL) UKVI, Carol Ann Nesbitt (CAN) TARA, Norma McKinnon (NM) Freedom From Torture, Lori Sullivan (LS) North Glasgow Integration Network, Sheila Arthur (SA) W/ASH

Apologies: Scott Ross Serco, Sarah Zadik British Red Cross, Trish McMonagle UKVI, Heather Bryson Mai Knani Serco

#### **Agenda items**

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Agreement of Previous Minutes
3. Matters Arising
4. Round Table updates
5. AOCB
6. Dates of Next Meeting

**Notes of Meeting**

**Action  
by**

---

## Notes of Meeting

Action  
by

### Welcome and Apologies

AK welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were undertaken.

### Agreement of Previous Minutes

Matters Arising from previous minute

.....

AK provided an update on the concerns of entry to property with vulnerable SUs. There is an interim vulnerability check currently in place where Administrative support advise Maintenance Officers on a daily basis of specific vulnerabilities. There is a system review being carried out for a potential upgrade which will allow more clarity of any vulnerable groups in properties. AK also clarified that in emergency circumstances they will gain entry to property to ensure safeguarding of SU. CL advised that to minimise the safety risk to SUs entry would be gained if SU does not provide access. AK also advised that repair teams now work to a patch model that will lead to a better link with the Properties and build rapport with the SUs.

*\*\*Additional note as per SA request\*\* Discussion took place on the issue of Serco staff or contractors routinely entering properties using keys when the occupant was not there (or had not opened the door). AK advised that this was required to enable Serco to meet their target timescales for completing repairs. CL confirmed that the COMPASS contract would not be workable if keys were not used to allow workpeople access to carry them out.*

Consideration also needs to be given to the health and safety of SU's regarding outstanding hazards/defects not being rectified if access is not gained to the accommodation.

.....

### Update around table

### AOCB

**Dates of next meetings in 2017- the last Wednesday of alternate months.**

## Appendix 3

**From:** [snifedback@serco.com](mailto:snifedback@serco.com) [<mailto:snifedback@serco.com>]

**To:** ASH Project

**Subject:** RE: Complaint: Name and Address - Unauthorised Access To A Service User's Property

**Classification:** Serco in Confidence

Good Afternoon Name

I am writing to acknowledge the issues you have reported to us concerning Address. We would like to assure you that all comments you have raised have been considered and the following action has been taken:

Serco are contracted to visit all occupied properties within the portfolio at least once per calendar month. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, we must ensure the properties are compliant with the contract in terms of the standard of repair, and in addition, we complete a welfare and residency check to ensure the wellbeing of our service users. For standard monthly inspections, all service users are notified in writing of the inspection date each month by means of a fixed notice within the property, indicating the date of each inspection. This notice is subsequently updated each month by the visiting housing officer, writing the next date of inspection and effectively giving the service user one months' notice in writing. A Housing Officer will only use keys to access a property where there is no response from the service users after knocking three times on the door. This is then followed by a courteous call to highlight to any occupant that the housing officer is about to enter the property. Once within the property, the housing officer will introduce themselves and sign the visitation log within the property. As I'm sure you will understand, we have a duty to ensure the property is in a good standard of repair, and if the service user does not make themselves available on the date of inspection, we have no alternative but to check the property in their absence, to ensure there are no defects and no immediate welfare issues for the service users, for example self-harm issues etc.

In terms of the maintenance staff, there are occasions where defects must be repaired on an emergency basis. On these occasions, we do still attempt to ensure the service user is aware of the timescales for when to expect our maintenance staff, and the housing officer would communicate this information in person at the time of reporting the fault, where the service user is present in the property. For routine defects and pre-planned maintenance, where possible, the timescales and completion end date will be noted on the fixed laminate within the property, giving the service user notice of when to expect the maintenance staff will be in attendance.

Please be assured that at no time is it the intention of Serco staff to cause any additional or unnecessary stress to any of our service users, or indeed to invade on anyone's privacy.

You stated in your complaint that over the last couple of weeks, Name has advised you that her flat has been accessed with keys when she was not home on at least the following occasions;

- Date 1 – It is alleged that when Name came back home, the toilet door was open and someone had used the toilet evidenced by urine splashes around the bowl. Serco can confirm that there were no staff in the property on this date.

- Date 2 days later – The bedroom door was left wide open which Name always keeps closed for privacy. Serco can confirm that there were no staff in the property on this date.
- Date 3 days later– The bottom mortice lock to the flat door was locked which both flat mates always leave unlocked. We can confirm that a member of staff attended the property on this date to carry out work that was required to be completed. The member for staff had locked this to ensure that the property was fully secure, however we will ask staff to be mindful of leaving things the way they are found if it is safe and practical to do so.

It is essential to note that there is another service user who stays within and has full access to the property, therefore there may be other issues which explain Name’s belief that a 3<sup>rd</sup> party has been within the property.

I note your belief that Serco are in breach of both our contractual obligations and our own occupancy agreement, and I would like to clarify the following for your understanding.

**Occupancy Agreement**

*"2.9 To allow an authorised member of Serco’s staff, or an approved contractor to enter the property at a prearranged time, **having written to give 5 days’ notice**, for the purpose of inspecting the property and any furnishing and utensils provided therein, and to allow inspection of electricity meters and electrical appliances"*

As stated, all service users are notified in writing of the inspection date each month by means of a fixed notice within the property, indicating the date of each inspection. This notice is subsequently updated each month by the visiting housing officer, writing the next date of inspection and effectively giving the service user one months’ notice in writing.

**Occupancy Agreement**

*"2.10 To allow a Serco staff, or an approved contractor to enter the property at a prearranged time, having written to **give five days’ notice** in order to carry out general maintenance"*

This refers to general maintenance within a property. For example, if we wished to complete a full décor of a property, or we had any general works to complete, then this would constitute pre-planned or “general” maintenance. The majority of work assigned to either in-house maintenance staff or contractors is not general – it is reactive maintenance, responding to defects which have been reported.

**"COMPASS Statement of Requirements: 4.2.2 The Provider shall provide serviced accommodation for Service Users within the Specified Region.**

- i. Provide 5 Working Days’ notice to the Service User that maintenance work is planned for the accommodation;*
- j. Provide 5 Working Days’ notice to the Service User that the accommodation is to be inspected or Health and Safety Assessment is to be conducted*
- k. Brief the Service Users occupying accommodation on when pre-planned maintenance work is to be undertaken and on what the work entails and any collateral action the Service Users need to take. These briefings are to be conducted in a language understood by the Service Users and to be accompanied by a written instruction to the Service Users in a language and form understood by the relevant Service User"*

I assume however, that your reference is in relation to the COMPASS Statement of Requirements: 4.2.2 The Provider shall provide a Serviced Accommodation pre-planned maintenance service. The

section under 4.2.2 is in relation to pre-planned maintenance, and as previously mentioned, the majority of works carried out are reactive maintenance tasks, and must be completed within very strict timescales. As I'm sure you would agree, repairing defects to ensure service users are housed in safe, habitable and fit for purpose accommodation is crucial, and for this reason, reactive maintenance timescales are given the utmost importance.

I note your confirmation that the service user has advised you that she had not reported any repairs within her accommodation, however our housing officers and compliance team report repairs during their inspections, to ensure the highest level of standards to our service users. I'm sure you would agree that it would be negligent for us to solely rely on service users reporting their own defects and take no pro-active action as the accommodation provider.

I trust this resolves the matter, however should you have any further concerns please contact Serco Compass on 0141 428 3260 or contact the housing officer direct.

Kind Regards

Name

**Name Name**  
**Team Co-ordinator, Compass SNI**  
**Serco UK Central Government**

**T: +44 (0)141 428 3260**  
**[www.serco.com](http://www.serco.com)**

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## Victim of Wrongful Entry Using Keys to Homes?

Have you experienced your housing provider (Serco) staff, contractors and others coming into your home, using their own keys without telling you they were coming?



Would you like to be interviewed by a volunteer researcher (who is an asylum seekers or ex asylum seekers)?



### Drop In to ASH Project

Albany Centre, 44 Ashley Street, G3 6DS

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019**  
**any time between 10am and 12 noon**

Contact us

Phone or WhatsApp:  or text **07734 742 900**

Email: [contact@ashproject.org.uk](mailto:contact@ashproject.org.uk)

Telling us about your experience will help us build a case for this to stop so all asylum seekers feel safer in their homes

**We will provide a day bus pass**

The Women and Asylum Seeker Housing Project aims to make a difference to the housing situation of people supported by the Home Office contract in Scotland

### Victims of Wrongful Entry Using Keys to Homes

#### Focus groups

Two focus groups were held during March 2019, one in Parkhead and one in Easterhouse. The purpose of focus groups was to encourage asylum seekers to discuss their experience of Serco staff and others coming into their homes using keys.

Findings from these discussions would be combined with the results of one to one interviews, helping the Asylum Seeker Housing Project to build a case for this practice to stop so that asylum seekers feel safer in their homes.

Discussions focused on four key questions. A total of fourteen asylum seekers participated in the focus groups and the following key points were noted:

#### **1. What has been your experience of someone coming into your home using keys?**

All participants had experienced someone coming into their homes, using keys without being notified of this. Some participants advised that sometimes the person entering their home did not knock beforehand. One participant stated that someone came into their home, using keys, in the middle of the night. Participants stated that some contractors treat the house as their own. No respect is shown for either the asylum seeker or their home. One participant stated that the Serco housing officer said to them “when are you going back to your own country”

It was felt that housing officers give one date to come for inspection then arrive a few days earlier. One participant advised that a housing officer came in using keys and started taking pictures of their belongings, which were then sent to the home office. This was felt to be a human rights violation. Another participant mentioned that a housing officer looked in their fridge. One person came home to find a stranger lying on their bed. A number of situations were described of someone coming in when resident was in the shower.

The stress of being at home when someone comes in using keys is exacerbated when the resident has no or little English.

#### **2. Has someone come into your home using keys often? Tell us a bit more about this.**

Participants stated that the practice of coming in to their homes using keys brings an unsafe environment and that, combined with treatment in the asylum process,

there is a lasting impact on those who have experienced it. Participants stated that they always know when someone has been in their home. There was a feeling that Serco staff had no understanding that people are vulnerable.

Participants also questioned why inspections are undertaken every month.

### **3. When someone has come into your home using keys – how has this made you feel?**

The overwhelming impact of this practice is making residents feel unsafe. Feelings ranged from fear and anxiety to anger and one participant mentioned that it breaks people more after being broken by trauma. It was also noted that those experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are particularly affected by loud knocking.

Many participants feel intimidated and stated that it felt like bullying. Participants felt that they had no way of protecting themselves and that this practice had a lasting impact on their mental health.

### **4. Do you feel you have any rights in terms of your home?**

There was an overwhelming feeling that the system is wrong. However many participants were afraid to complain as they felt that it could harm their asylum claim. Other participants had complained but nothing was ever done about it.

One participant stated that he always put something behind the front door when he went out, so that he would know someone had been in his home. One participant mentioned that a tradesman had come into her home and was upset when asked to provide ID, which he had left in the van.

Participants were unsure if they had rights and that any rights should be spelt out in welcome packs.

Concern was expressed about the Serco staff transferring to new accommodation provider and that the same poor attitudes and lack of understanding or empathy would be evident.

## Appendix 6

# Victims of Wrongful Entry Using Keys to Homes

ADMIN USE ONLY

Date:

Ref. no:

*This survey is for asylum seekers living in housing provided by the Home Office. It will look at your experience of staff or workers sent by Serco to your home who use keys to access your property, whether you are present or not.*

*This is a confidential & anonymous survey and your details are not known by others. All questions are optional.*

*All information is stored safely in terms of GDPR requirements.*

**Before we begin, please give us the start of your postcode:**

**Please circle the box that fits best with what you think**

**1. I am always notified in writing if Serco staff or workers are coming to my home.**

 				 
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Serco staff or workers have entered my home using keys.**

 				 
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick or circle any of the following answer(s) that apply:**

### 3. WHO DO YOU LIVE WITH?

- Living alone
- Living with your partner
- Single parent living with children
- You & partner living with children
- Sharing with someone you did not know before, or a friend

Other / what?

### 4. HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN YOUR HOUSE?

- Less than 1 month
- From 1 month to 3 months
- From 3 months to 6 months
- From 6 months to 1 Year
- From 1 year to 2 years
- Over two years: how long?

**5. HOW WELL CAN YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH?**

- Very well
- Quite well
- A bit
- Not much
- Not at all

**6. WHICH GENDER DO YOU IDENTIFY AS?**

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Rather not say

**7. DO YOU HAVE A BUZZER (bell) AT THE FRONT DOOR TO YOUR BUILDING (CLOSE)?**

- Yes - working
- Yes - not working
- Not applicable to my property
- Other / what?

**8. HOW MANY TIMES HAS SOMEONE FROM SERCO VISITED YOUR HOME?**

*Please answer both categories*

**A. In the last week B. In the last month**

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1    | 1    |
| 2    | 2    |
| 3    | 3    |
| 4    | 4    |
| 5    | 5    |
| 6    | 6    |
| More | More |

**9. HAS SERCO USED KEYS TO COME INTO YOUR HOME WHEN NO-ONE WAS THERE?**

**Yes** Often, Sometimes, Not much

**No**

**COME INTO YOUR HOME USING KEYS?** *Tick all that apply*

- Housing Officer
- Plumber
- Electrician
- Carpenter
- Gas Engineer
- Repair person
- Other (please specify)

**11. HOW MANY TIMES HAS SOMEONE FROM SERCO COME IN USING KEYS?**

**A. In the last week B. In the last month C. In the last 6 months D.**

- |    |    |    |                      |
|----|----|----|----------------------|
| 1  | 1  | 1  | <b>a. Don't know</b> |
| 2  | 2  | 2  | A.                   |
| 3  | 3  | 3  | B.                   |
| 4  | 4  | 4  | C.                   |
| 5  | 5  | 5  |                      |
| 6+ | 6+ | 6+ |                      |

If a lot, was there a special reason?

---

**12. WHICH SERCO STAFF OR WORKER SHOWS ID WITHOUT BEING ASKED, AFTER COMING INTO YOUR HOME WITH KEYS? *Tick all that apply***

- Housing Officer      Plumber
- Carpenter              Repair person
- Gas Engineer          Electrician
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

**13. DO SERCO STAFF OR WORKERS USE THEIR OWN CLEANING MATERIALS, AFTER COMING INTO YOUR HOME WITH KEYS?**

- Yes, always
- No, use my things  
Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_
- Sometimes use my things  
Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

**During my time in Serco housing .....**

**Please tick or circle the box that fits best with what you think**

Refer to answer at Q.9, ask if applicable

**14. Before entering my home Serco staff or workers will first press the buzzer at the front close door (downstairs).**

Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**15a. Before entering my home, Serco staff or workers will knock on my front door three separate times.**

Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**15b. Do you hear the knocking? Yes / No / Sometimes / Never**

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**15c. How do they knock?**

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**15d. How does that make you feel, and why?**

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**16. If they knocked, the Serco staff member or worker waits until I answer the door.**

				
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Once they have entered my home, the person always explains clearly who they are, and why they are there.**

				
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**18. I feel comfortable with Serco staff or workers entering my home when I am not there.**

				
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**19. Serco staff or workers always treat me with respect in my home.**

				
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**20.a Would you like to be notified in advance when Serco staff or workers are coming to your home?**

				
Agree strongly	Agree	Do not agree or disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**20.b WHAT METHOD SHOULD BE USED? *Tick all that apply***

1. Text to mobile phone
2. Telephone call
3. Letter
4. Other / what

**20.c HOW MUCH NOTICE SHOULD BE GIVEN?**

1. 24 hours / 1 whole day
2. 2 days
3. 3 days
4. 5 days
5. Other / what

***Please use the following questions to make any other comments about the use of keys by Serco staff or workers, or circle the correct answer***

**A.1 Does your Housing Officer always come at the time arranged for the monthly visit / inspection?** *(Usually written on plastic paper with thick pen, on front door)*

**Yes / No**

**A.2 If no, please select whether the housing officer comes: **Earlier / Later** than the time or day arranged?**

**This happens:** Always, Usually, A different day

**A.3 If a different day, how many days earlier or later does the housing officer come:**

**S/he comes:** 1 Day 2 Days 3 or more Days

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

---

**B. Are you still financially supported by the Home Office, or are you destitute?**

1. Still supported.

2. Currently destitute, for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. 1. Do you have a long-term disability or illness?** **Yes / No**

**C. 2. If yes, has it been diagnosed by a doctor?** **Yes / No**

**C. 3. Does the disability / illness make you feel unsafe or scared when people come in using keys?**

---

**D.1. How does Serco's staff or workers using keys to come into your home make you feel?**

---

**D. 2. If bad, have you ever complained about this to Serco?** **Yes / No**

**D.3a. If no, was there a reason for not complaining?**

Comment \_\_\_\_\_

**D.3b. If yes, how many times?** \_\_\_\_\_,

To whom or how was the complaint made? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you get an answer? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the answer? \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you very much for helping with this survey. ANYTHING ELSE TO SAY?**  
*Write here*

The results will be on our website in April 2019 [www.infosource.org.uk](http://www.infosource.org.uk)

Please return completed survey form to: Fiona Ballantyne, W-ASH Research Coordinator at CIS Office, Albany Centre, 44 Ashley Street, Glasgow G3 6DS [fiona@infosource.org.uk](mailto:fiona@infosource.org.uk) or 0141 258 2773

\*\*\*\*\*

**If you would like us to refer you to another organisation for support, please give us your contact details (and complete a Mandate):**

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