



Housing Online Repairs

For consideration by: Housing Scrutiny Commission

Date: 28 February 2022

Lead Director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: ALL
- Report author: Charlotte McGraw
- Author contact details: 0116 4545167
- Report version number: 1.0

1. Summary

This report outlines the current position of the online provision for Housing repairs services, including the key repairs functions that can be undertaken online as well as any key barriers to uptake. It sets out recommendations for the next step of delivering online services for repairs including the potential to hard stop the two main areas of repairs calls to the customer service centre of reporting repairs and repairs enquiries. In 2020/21 91,000 repairs calls were made to the Customer Service Centre, making this one of the most resource intensive areas for the call centre and a priority area to reduce call volumes. The current service offer is only available for non-emergency repairs Monday to Friday during office hours. A move towards online services will enable tenants to access some services 24 hrs a day at a time that suits them.

The report details the support that will be place for all tenants to enable access to online services including provision for tenants who do not have access to IT or may not be able to use it or for those tenants who are housebound.

2. Recommended

2.1 The Housing Scrutiny commission are asked to make comment on the following recommendations;

2.2.1 To make comment on the approach to hard stop repairs enquiries from May 2022 subject to appropriate consultation and the support provision being in place within Housing to support tenants unable to access online services;

2.2.2 To make comment on the approach to hard stop the reporting of external repairs from June 2022 (subject to comments above)

2.2.3 To make comment on the approach to hard stop the reporting of internal repairs from July 2022 (subject to comments above).

2.2.4 To make comment on the approach to provision of support for tenants as outlined in this report.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

3.1 Housing Scrutiny Commission are requested to consider the contents of this report and make comments on it.

3.2 Tenants Forums were consulted on the proposals contained within this report on 10th February and their comments are included.

4. Background

Leicester City Council uses NEC Housing (formally known as Northgate) as its main Housing System, part of this product is Housing Online, which allows Housing tenants and applicants to sign up and access services online, including reporting repairs, viewing rent statements and if eligible, bidding for properties on the Leicester Home Choice scheme. To appoint, schedule and undertake repairs, the Council uses a separate mobile working system, Totalmobile.

At the start of January 2022, 4700 tenants (almost 1 in 4) have signed up for a Housing Online account. To date, 3,400 repairs have been raised via Housing Online. Whilst these figures are steadily increasing the majority of tenants are still reporting repairs by telephone, despite promotion of the service. Only 3% of repairs are currently reported via Housing Online.

Leicester City Council is a member of the Northgate Housing User Group which enables Local Authorities and Registered Providers who use Housing Online to discuss the system and progress in implementation. As part of this group we have benchmarked the implementation of Housing Online with similar sized local authorities. Limited responses were received but from those considered LCC is at a similar stage in progressing uptake.

4.1 Current Online offering

4.1.1 Reporting repairs

Leicester City Council tenants can sign up for a Housing Online account and verify themselves online and they are then able to view recent repairs recorded against their property, along with key information such as the status of the repair (outstanding, completed, cancelled) and any future appointment date. Screenshots of Housing Online are attached in Appendix 1.

Tenants can report a repair to their tenanted property using Housing Online with the help of diagrams, depending on the options chosen, the tenant is presented with some simple Yes / No questions to help prioritise the repair and they are also given some advice if appropriate (such as to turn the stop tap off if they have a leak). Emergency Repairs cannot currently be reported online. It is also not currently possible to raise any repairs for communal areas or for leaseholders to raise repairs for their leaseholder properties, however e-forms are available in My Account for these two areas to reduce call volumes for these areas.

When raising a repair on Housing Online, customers can select an appointment date and time slot (AM or PM) where there are appointments available. The tenant will then receive notification via Housing Online to confirm the appointment, in most cases this should happen on the same day.

One potential concern may be that the online offering will represent a reduction in the service offer when reporting repairs. At present a tenant reporting a repair, either via the Customer Service Centre or Housing Online, is offered an appointment subject to availability on Total Mobile. For non-emergency repairs this is generally on the 4th day after the repair is reported. So, if the repair is reported on the Monday the earliest available date for the repair is the Thursday. This allows the works planners to manage the availability of operatives and to prioritise emergency repairs. The 72-hour window was set up as a means to manage resource but could be reduced to a shorter period to meet increased demand. Regardless of whether the tenant is reporting by phone or online they

will receive confirmation that the repair is booked. Prior to the operative attending their property they will also receive a text message notifying them the operative is on their way. Providing sufficient support is made available to tenants in registering and accessing Housing Online tenants should not see a reduction in the level of service offered.

4.1.2 Repairs Enquiries

Tenants can view online summary details of repairs reported for their property for the last 12 months, including emergency repairs. They can raise an enquiry against a specific repair, these are currently categorised as:

- Report a missed appointment
- Request a change of appointment
- Request an update on an outstanding repair

These enquiries are then emailed to the repairs service for a response, which can either be given via Housing Online in the form of a written update, or where appropriate a phone call directly to the tenant.

This functionality can also be used by LCC staff to provide proactive updates against repairs on Housing Online, thus potentially eliminating the need for the tenant to contact us regarding that repair.

At present there are over 7000 outstanding repairs this is gradually reducing but has an ongoing impact on the delivery of the repairs service. 1 in 4 repairs calls is a repair enquiry. It is proposed to pilot the hard stop initially with repairs enquiries. At present, as explained above, when a tenant raises an enquiry in Housing Online the enquiry is then emailed to the Works Planner who has 72 hours to respond to the tenant or CSC. Moving forward it is proposed that before a repair moves into the Outstanding Jobs category the notes section of Housing Online will be updated to explain to the tenant why the job has not been completed. This should encourage the tenant to register for Housing Online as they can receive an update without having to wait for the Works Planner to update them.

4.2 Account registration

Tenants must sign up for a Housing Online account to view and report repairs. This requires an email address and for the tenant to enter their full name, date of birth and their rent account number. This process validates the identity of the tenant and immediately allows them to access their records on Housing Online, there is then no need for them to enter their address or phone number when reporting repairs for example.

However, the single most challenging issue found to date with the system has been around data quality, for example where the name of the tenant held on Northgate does not match that used to sign up for Housing Online. Where this occurs to date, the tenant is provided with a link to an eForm on MyAccount so we can ask the relevant questions up front and help resolve their issue quicker. Moving forward if tenants are required to report all repairs online it is proposed to write to all tenants with the details held on Northgate in order to ensure successful sign up and reduce user and system error.

Housing Online has Open Authentication capability (OAUTH2.0). This means that it can support single sign on with third party systems that also support OAUTH2.0. The main example of this is Facebook, so it should be technically possible for a tenant to sign up to Housing Online and link it to their personal Facebook account. This would then mean that when they access Housing Online, they do not need to sign in if they are already logged into Facebook. If this could be successfully implemented, then this would likely lead to an increased usage of Housing Online.

At present, Housing Online has been promoted to tenants on the annual rent letters, by text and by email (where text and email addresses are held.) A communications plan has been developed and further methods of promoting the service, particularly around use of social media, are being explored.

5. Proposed next steps and support provision

The system for reporting repairs and repairs enquiries is now in place, however, take up remains relatively low. Whilst, further promotion will take place it seems likely that the only way to significantly increase uptake is to consider hard stopping the reporting of repairs and repairs enquiries, with the exception of Category 1, Emergency Repairs.

It is proposed that from May 2022 repairs enquiries are hard stopped. From June 2022 the reporting of external repairs is hard stopped and from July 2022 the reporting of internal repairs is hard stopped. It is anticipated that by hard stopping the reporting of repairs in the summer it will avoid the busier winter months where there may be additional pressures due to demand from cold weather. In addition, it will avoid a planned upgrade to Northgate in early May which is required to ensure our support remains in date.

In order to achieve the hard stopping all tenants will receive a letter providing their details for setting up online services to report repairs. Further communications will be developed and delivered through the Comms Team including promotion through Social Media and all letters to tenants. Recorded messages will also be placed on the Customer Service Centre phone lines to advise tenants of the proposed changes in advance of them taking place.

It is likely that there will be a number of highly vulnerable tenants who are not able to access online services and consideration is being given as to how we support these tenants. The Equality Impact Assessment is attached for consideration. Work is now underway to develop an Equality of Access Procedure setting out the step by step approach to ensuring our most vulnerable tenants are supported in accessing services.

It is worth noting that this would not be the first significant area of service Housing has delivered hard stops for, with success in the delivery of Choice Based Lettings and Housing Options Tier 1 Line. In addition to recorded messages placed on the ACD to advise of the hard stops it is proposed to place a further message advising tenants that they need support in registering for Housing Online to contact Housing (a number will then be provided and staff will be briefed in supporting registration over the phone.) If the tenant cannot register themselves (for example if they do not have access to IT) they will be directed to a library where an officer will provide support from an LCC PC. Furthermore, Housing staff will be made available in hubs to support tenants in registering for online services and reporting repairs/making repairs enquiries. For some of our tenants, who do not have access to IT and maybe housebound, our staff will assist them in registering and reporting the repair. A vulnerable persons visit will then be triggered for a Neighbourhood Housing Officer to undertake a home visit. There may well always be tenants who are not able to log repairs for themselves and we will have ongoing Admin resource in place to ensure support is provided.

A potential risk to hard stopping services is that there may be a reduction in the reporting of repairs which could lead to longer term deterioration of our stock. In order to monitor this it is proposed that the number of repairs logged would be monitored closely against previous years to determine the impact on online service provision. If approved, it is proposed that the hard stops are put in place for a pilot period of 3-6 months and that monthly reports monitor complaint levels and repairs reporting.

Self help videos will be developed and placed on line which have been effectively used by other social Housing providers when encouraging online take up.

It is further proposed that tenants be incentivised to set up an online account through a monthly prize draw enabling tenants to win decorating vouchers, which in turn will improve their property.

Key to the success of hard stopping any services will be quality communications and support provision for our most vulnerable tenants.

6.0 Tenants Forum Feedback

7. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

7.1 Financial implications

The HRA makes a contribution in the region of £650k towards the cost of running the Customer Service Centre, based on call volumes from Council tenants. Ultimately, if a significant reduction in call volumes took place then this contribution is likely to reduce. However, this could take some time to materialise, and savings would be dependent on the ability of the CSC to reduce staffing numbers. At least some of the savings would be offset by additional administration within the Housing service.

Existing HRA budgets can accommodate the cost of implementation. This includes the additional staffing support which will be required during the implementation period, as 3.5 FTE vacant posts exist within the Admin team to facilitate this. The use of these posts will mean a delay to savings which would otherwise have been declared.

Stuart McAvoy – Principal Accountant

7.2 Legal implications

In the last few years the Council has faced a significantly increased number of claims on behalf of tenants seeking damages for the Council's failure to carry out repairs within a reasonable period of time. These claims are largely precipitated by companies seeking potential claimants, who are then referred to specialist solicitors to pursue claims on a no win, no fee basis.

Such claims are now averaging 2-3 per week and incur significant time, resource and expense for both the Housing Services Division and the Legal Services Division.

In principle, any system that streamlines the reporting and completion of repairs is beneficial. It is important to note, however, that the Council, as landlord, will still be regarded as "being on notice" of the need to carry out repairs if those repairs are brought to the Council's attention by other means. It is sufficient for the tenant to inform any "responsible source" of a repair that is needed. For example, the Council will be considered to be "on notice" if the tenant notifies a Housing Officer or an operative present on the property to undertake some other work such as an annual gas safety check.

If the ability for tenants to report repairs by one prescribed mechanism is such that it leads to a more haphazard approach e.g. increased reports to Housing Officers and Repairs Operatives, this may give rise to a greater risk of failure to undertake repairs and, therefore, open the Council to the potential for more claims.

In order to reduce the risk of potential liability, it is helpful for repair work to be channelled to the correct area of the Council as quickly and reliably as possible.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation)

7.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a continuing Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in making decisions and carrying out their activities they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The proposals will affect people from across all protected characteristics, it is likely that there will be a number of highly vulnerable tenants who are not able to access online services and consideration will need to be given as to how we support them. Our Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to pay due regard to any negative impacts arising from our decisions (and this would include decisions on how we deliver our services) and put in place mitigating actions to reduce or remove those negative impacts.

It is anticipated that the main issues that will need to be continually addressed through the lifespan of this Channel Shift project are the potential barriers people with the protected characteristics of age, disability and race may have/experience in accessing/reporting council information online either at home or at a customer service centre: availability of assistive technology that enables disabled people to understand this information; support that enables people with poor English language skills to understand this information – either because of literacy levels or because they do not read or speak English; or support for those who are not confident in using or do not have ready access to online technology.

It is important to consider those who may be adversely affected by the proposals and whether they are likely to be disproportionately affected in relation to a protected characteristic. The report cites that an equality impact assessment will be undertaken, it is advised that this is used to inform the decision on adopting the proposals, taking into account information relating to the protected characteristics of those who will be affected and the responses to the proposed consultation. In the event that any disproportionate negative impact relating to a specific protected characteristic/s is identified in undertaking the equality impact assessment, mitigating actions must be identified to reduce or remove that impact.

Surinder Singh, Equalities officer Ext 37 4148.

APPENDIX 1- Sample screenshots of Housing Online

Screenshot A - Housing Online Summary Screen

My Summary

Please note: In order to protect the security of personal data held within Housing Online, the system will automatically timeout after 15 minutes of inactivity.

Welcome Mrs Penn. What would you like to do today?

 My Login Details	 My Rent Accounts	 My Contact Details
 My Messages	 My Repairs	 My Applications
 My Custom Enquiries	 Apply to the Housing Register	 Contact Us

https://zhsgliveapp.lcc.local/ords/houlive_selfserv/f?p=RSV:185:1305133523552:INITIALISE:NO:RP,185:2

Screenshot B – InterFinder Useful Information Screen

EMERGENCIES

We have an emergency repairs service to deal with urgent repairs. If you are reporting an emergency repair call us on 0116 454 1007 (option 1) Monday - Friday 8am - 6pm. Outside of these hours please call 0116 254 9439

Emergency repairs may include:

- Dangerous electrical faults
- Fire Damage
- Major plumbing faults resulting in large loss of water
- Heating failures involving elderly or sick people

We do not deal with jobs which can safely be left until normal working hours. We will usually 'make safe' or carry out temporary repairs.

Permanent repairs are left for normal working hours, so please do not expect the job to be done fully during emergency hours.

SMELL GAS?

If you smell gas you should immediately call Cadent, their freephone number is 0800 111999. They will deal with any report of a gas escape for free. In the meantime, open all the doors and windows, don't smoke, light a mat or produce any other naked flame, don't turn lights on or off and avoid using other electrical switches and appliances, as this could trigger an explosion. More details can be found on the Cadent website at <https://cadentgas.com/home>

REPORTING REPAIRS

You should know that:

- You are responsible for some repairs.
- You may be liable to pay for repairs cause by accidental damage, misuse or neglect.
- You are responsible for providing us with a crime incident log number from the police if your issue has been caused by a break-in, criminal damage or vandalism. Please get this before ordering and include it in the details of your repair.


For further details and advice on these and other repairs issues please refer to our Repairs Handbook, which can be found online here:

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/housing/council-tenants/housing-repairs/>

If you wish to report a repair to your communal area, please call us on 0116 454 1007, do not log this repair on Repairs InterFinder.

When raising a repair please ensure that the best described fault is selected and any further details entered in the comment box failure to do so may result in a delay in the repairs being completed.


















Screenshot C - InterFinder Contents Page

Text Only version | search fault keywords... 


[Emergencies](#) |
 [Extreme weather conditions](#) |
 [Your responsibilities](#) |
 [Gas safety checks](#) |
 [Smell gas](#) |
 [Making improvements to your home](#) |
 [Damp and condensation](#)

Contents Back

Please select the appropriate section:

 Basins and sinks	 Baths and Showers	 Cookers	 Cupboards and shelves	 Doors	 Drainage and gullies	 Electrics	 Floors, walls and ceiling
 Gutter and downpipes	 Heating and hot water	 Kitchen units	 Outside the property	 Roofing	 Stairs	 Toilets	 Water supply and leaks
 Windows							

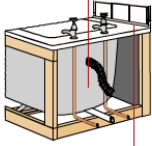


Screenshot D – InterFinder Fault Section


Search fault keywords... 

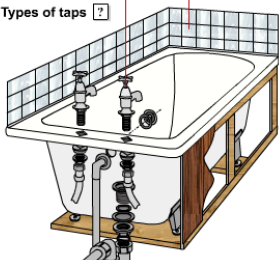
[Emergencies](#) |
 [Extreme weather conditions](#) |
 [Your responsibilities](#) |
 [Gas safety checks](#) |
 [Smell gas](#) |
 [Making improvements to your home](#) |
 [Damp and condensation](#)


Contents > Baths and Showers > Baths

Please select the label that best describes the fault or damage:
 Related Items:
 Basins | Drainage and gullies | Sinks | Toilets | Water supply and leaks

<input type="checkbox"/> Bath tap is dripping or broken <input type="checkbox"/> Damaged or loose tile	<input type="checkbox"/> Bath panel is loose or broken  <input type="checkbox"/> Water is seeping between bath and wall	<input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom rail is loose or damaged 	<input type="checkbox"/> Bath plug and chain is broken or missing 
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Types of taps 



Leaks 

 Bath waste is broken or leaking
 Bath waste is blocked

Screenshot E – Appointment Selection Screen

Successful

Works order 60842792/1 successfully created.

Appointment Information

Please indicate when you require an appointment. Only one appointment may be selected.

Wednesday, September 08, 2021

12:00 to 15:59

Thursday, September 09, 2021

08:00 to 11:59

12:00 to 15:59

Friday, September 10, 2021

08:00 to 11:59

12:00 to 15:29