
Housing Online- Repairs

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 27th November 2023

Lead Member for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin
Lead Director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: ALL
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- Report version number: 1.0

1. Summary

This report provides an update to the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the delivery of Housing Online- Repairs. This relates specifically to the move to significantly increase the number of repairs reported online and repairs enquiries made online. The report provides an update on progress to date in relation to sign ups, number of repairs reported online and the support provided to our digitally excluded tenants and to our tenants who require support in using IT services.

2. Recommended

2.1 The Housing Scrutiny Commission are asked to note and make comment on the update in relation to the delivery of Housing Online for repairs and the associated hardstops to the Customer Service Centre in relation to calls regarding repairs enquiries and the reporting of repairs (with the exception of emergency repairs, communal repairs and leaseholder repairs.)

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

3.1 A full programme of consultation took place ahead of the changes including consultation with Housing Scrutiny Commission, the Tenants Forum and multiple meetings with ward councillors.

3.2 In addition, tenants were written to advising of the proposed changes, emailed and texted (where emails and mobile phone numbers were available.) Tenants received further information regarding the service in the annual rent letters and the changes were publicised in Council buildings.

4. Background

Leicester City Council uses NEC Housing 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, making enquiries about existing repairs, viewing rent statements and if eligible, bidding for properties on the Leicester Home Choice scheme. Below is a screenshot taken from Housing Online.

The screenshot shows the Housing Online interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the following items: Emergency Repairs, Extreme weather conditions, Your responsibilities, Gas safety checks, Smell gas, Making improvements to your home, and Damp and condensation. Below this is a 'Contents' section with a 'Back' button. The main content area is titled 'Please select the appropriate section:' and contains a grid of 16 icons representing different repair categories:

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

Appointment Information

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

Thursday 20 July 2023

08:00 to 11:00

11:01 to 13:30

13:31 to 15:00

15:01 to 16:30

Friday 21 July 2023

08:00 to 11:00

11:01 to 13:30

13:31 to 15:00

15:01 to 16:30

At the start of January 2022, only 4700 tenants (almost 1 in 4) had signed up for a Housing Online account, with only 3% of repairs reported online.

In 2021, 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. At its peak tenants were waiting 16 minutes for calls to be answered with abandonment rates of 61%. Whilst this had started to reduce down it was still unacceptably high. A decision was taken to move those tenants who could access and use IT to online services to reduce the pressure on the Customer Service Centre and to improve the level of service received by tenants ensuring waiting times were reduced. Additionally with online services tenants can access the services they need 24 hours a day.

Following the rollout out of an extensive communications plan to tenants and councillors and detailed training for staff in Housing, Customer Services and Neighbourhood Services in August 2022 Customer Services hardstopped calls in relation to repairs enquiries. The following month Customer Services also hardstopped calls relating to the reporting of repairs (with the exception of emergency repairs, leaseholder repairs and communal repairs.)

4.1 Support for tenants

From an early stage it was identified that some tenants may face barriers to accessing online services these might include challenges with accessing IT equipment, language barriers, lack of IT skills and issues with mobility. Whilst the aim was to increase uptake of online services for the majority of our tenants it was also recognised that some tenants, even with additional support and training, may never be able to use online services.

Working with Customer Services it was agreed that on the first occasion of contacting CSC all tenants would be able to report one repair by phone and then be referred to access online services. If they were unable to use online services Customer Service staff were trained to take a Digital Exclusion Referral. Housing then assessed the referral and if deemed to be digitally excluded Customer Services would continue to take all repairs via the phone line. Since starting this process 1,025 tenants have been assessed as digitally excluded (approximately 5% of our total tenants.) The main reasons for digital exclusion were;

- Lack of access to IT (414)
- Disability (390)
- Lack of IT skills (211)

For tenants who are assessed as digitally able additional support is then provided to ensure they can access online services. Housing are providing a Housing Online Support Helpline which mirrors Council opening times. Support is always on hand for tenants to ensure they can access online services. In addition, Neighbourhood Service staff are trained in libraries to signpost tenants to PCs and crib sheets are provided. Adult Education will shortly be running pop up sessions for tenants who need additional support with accessing Housing Online. In order to build up sufficient numbers of tenants to make the sessions viable it was decided to run training sessions after 6 months. No tenants have been left without support during this period.

4.2 Progress to date

As at 3rd November 2023, 10,700 tenants have signed up for Housing Online, representing an increase from 8,200 when we last reported to HSC in February 2023. Around 37,000 repairs have been reported online (this equates to 23% of all repairs reported online, representing an increase from 14% in Feb 23.) This is a significant increase in the first 6 months of go live, prior to any hardstop, where only 4700 tenants were signed up for Housing Online and only 3% of repairs were reported online. This figure has steadily increased although tenants only tend to sign up for online services when they need to report a repair. One in four tenants has not reported a repair in the last 12 months. 25% of all reported repairs are emergency repairs and these are still reported to the Customer Service Centre by phone in order to ensure they are appropriately prioritised.

Takeup of online services varies significantly from ward to ward. With the highest level of uptake at 60% in Hamilton and Humberstone reducing to 30% in Westcotes. The average sign up rate across the city is now at 52% of all tenants having access to Housing Online.

In addition to monitoring the progress around take up of service, there is also a real commitment to evaluating feedback from tenants. All tenants who have a repair undertaken receive a Customer Satisfaction Survey by post. Tenants are now able to receive these online.

Feedback from tenants using the online service has been positive;

- 56% found Housing Online easy to use
- 32% found it average to use
- 12% found it difficult to use.

These figures have remained static since we last reported to HSC in Feb 2023.

4.3 Digital Inclusion Training for Tenants

During November and December Adult Education will be delivering pop up sessions across Leicester in libraries, neighbourhood and community centres to tenants who have not yet signed up for Housing Online to provide an introduction to using the internet and how to sign up and report repairs on Housing Online. To publicise this we have written to tenants and sent SMS messages, ward councillors, community champions and staff.

4.4 Next steps

We will continue to promote Housing Online and to support our tenants in accessing online services. We are committed to continuing to provide the Housing Online Support Helpline to assist tenants in accessing online services for as long as it is required. In addition, our most vulnerable tenants will continue to be able to access the Customer Support Centre to report repairs and all tenants will continue to be able to report emergency repairs by phone. We are also committed to reviewing the list of tenants who are digitally excluded

on a 6 monthly basis to ensure that all tenants who can be enabled to access online services are.

We are increasing the number of available appointments online to ensure tenants can access the repairs in a timely manner and continue to closely monitor response times and levels of customer satisfaction to ensure tenants receive the high quality service they deserve.

In addition, in 2024, tenants will be able to report communal repairs online and leaseholders will also be able to report repairs online. In the meantime they can continue to report these repairs via the call centre and through the use of eforms.

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

5.1 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.

Stuart McAvoy- Head of Finance

5.2 Legal implications

The report, which provides an update in relation to online repairs reporting, does not give rise to any specific legal implications.

Jeremy Rainbow - Principal Lawyer (Litigation) x371435

5.2 Climate Change Implications

There are limited climate emergency implications directly associated with this report, although more widely the provision of options for digital engagement by service users may potential deliver some savings through increasing the efficiency of service delivery.

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