



Leicester  
City Council

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# ***Housing System Replacement and Housing Channel Shift***

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr E Cutkelvin

Lead Director: Chris Burgin

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 0.1

### 1. Purpose of report

This report provides an overview and update of the Housing System Replacement Programme and Housing Channel Shift.

### 2. Background

The current IT system within Housing is provided by Northgate and went live in 2016 replacing Open Housing which had become costly to support, was unreliable and would not meet the future needs of the business.

The new system brought a variety of benefits including increased productivity and efficiencies and increased reliability and stability which has reduced downtime and lost working hours. The existing contract with Northgate runs until June 2023 and work is commencing in 2019 to consider the options for the procurement of a new contract from this point with a new supplier or with Northgate. A further extension of the contract after 2023 is not permitted.

In addition to the Housing System Replacement the team is also focusing on the development and delivery of channel shift for Repairs and the further roll out of Rents online which are all high-volume call areas for the Councils' Customer Service Centre and the ongoing implementation of the new mobile working solution, Totalmobile which went live in February 2019.

#### 3.1 Channel Shift

Channel shift is the process by which the Council can encourage customers to access or interact with services via more effective methods. For most organisations, including Leicester City Council, this is to encourage customers to access services online rather than face to face or by telephone. Channel Shift is about providing more accessible services to our customers. Predominately this means our customers will be able to access more services online via the Leicester City Council website.

Channel Shift means giving better, more up to date information to customers. When we send letters out, often the details of that letter may go out of date before they have arrived (e.g. rent statements). Being able to view this information online means customers will have up to date information. It also allows us to make more information available which would otherwise be too costly to do so.

Channel Shift is not about removing our Customer Service Centre. We acknowledge that Channel Shift will not be suitable for everyone. Channel Shift will be an additional way to interact with our services should it be suitable for the user, we will of course encourage and support people who want to use online services where we can.

The key drivers for Channel Shift are;

- to reduce costs which are being incurred through the provision of services that a customer could potentially do themselves given on-line access. This enables more appropriate use of Council resources;
- to improve customer service by enabling customers to access services online and 24 hours a day

Channel Shift will also allow us to communicate with customers via email more effectively as we will have up to date email addresses for customers. This will allow us to send communication via email instead of physical letters where appropriate. This will allow for quicker communications and save money from printing and postage costs.

Channel shift is achieved through the use of technology by implementing software that will enable a customer to log onto a secure web portal 24x7 providing them with the benefit of accessing services at their convenience. Once logged into their account the customer will have access to carry out tasks such as report a repair and select an appointment, view their Rent Account, make a payment, access Rent Statement history, etc. The system is secure with access provided to only those who complete the registration process. A similar example is the use of On-line banking which is now very common.

It is widely accepted that “Self-Serve” is not a “one size fits all” solution and shouldn’t be used as such. Not all customers will use a self-serve solution, so the authority will still need to keep a range of service channels open for certain profiles of customer - this could include elderly and vulnerable customers.

It is worth noting that the Council have already successfully implemented a number of large-scale channel shifts within Housing including Choice Based Lettings, Housing Applications, and more recently Housing Options Tier 1 and Rents this year. These are currently provided by the Northgate Self-Serve portal.

### **3.2 Rents and Repairs Channel Shift**

Rents Channel Shift went live in February 2019, tenants are now able to login whenever they want and view and print their rent statement, much like online banking. They will also be able to register for Direct Debit payments if they wish with the new version of Northgate due to be installed in the Autumn 2019.

Housing have been actively promoting the uptake of Housing Online with flyers sent out with the annual rent letters, targeted emails sent out to tenants and the Tenancy

Management Officers promoting the service to tenants with the Income Management Team. Discussions are also taking place with colleagues in the Customer Service Centre to use recorded messages on the call lines for tenants to be informed of the service whilst they are waiting for their calls to be answered. In addition, a Frequently Asked Questions page has also been developed to inform and educate on this service.

Subject to a successful upgrade of our Northgate systems in autumn 2019 our tenants will be able to view repairs and send an enquiry regarding the repair directly from the portal. LCC staff will pick up the enquiry and be able to respond, which the customer can then see in the portal. Tenants will be able to see the status of the repair, the date it was first reported and the description of the repair.

Following on from this the next step will be for tenants to be able to request a new repair (for specific types of repair only) and this will raise the repair instantly in our Northgate and Totalmobile systems. There will be a set of pictures and derived questions to help ensure the correct type of repair is logged. Tenants will also be offered a suitable range of appointment dates and slots, they will also be able to change an appointment if it is no longer convenient. Tenants will also be able cancel repairs if they are no longer required.

Tenants will still be able to contact Customer Services and local Housing Offices if they prefer. We would like customers to use online services where possible, but this may not always be appropriate due to the circumstances involved.

#### **4.0 Mobile Working Solution**

To enable a full end to end online repairs service (from reporting a repair, to booking an appointment and the repairs being completed) to be provided to our customers this year the Council has successfully updated our mobile working solution. Housing have purchased a new mobile working solution called Totalmobile and successfully rolled it out to over 180 repairs operatives. The Mobile Working Solution sits alongside the Repairs Channel Shift and includes the following:

- The ability to assign a qualified operative and materials to the job automatically
- Manage the resources schedule / diaries for all operatives
- Deliver the job information to the relevant operative's mobile device
- Allow details to be sent back to Northgate Repairs by the operative
- Allow jobs to be completed or re-scheduled by the operative
- Text messages reminding tenants of appointments and informing them when an operative is on their way

In addition, the system has enabled;

- increased productivity as the system is more user friendly
- more control over the design to ensure we get what we need,
- improved reporting leading to more effective performance management;

- improved customer service as the operative can see historical and current jobs;
- the ability to be able to produce and view electronic gas safety certificates.

The following will also be enabled as the system is continually developed:

- emailing of gas safety certificates to tenants
- where a second visit is required, operatives will be able to agree and make the second appointment with the tenant while in their home
- improved monitoring of appointments that are at risk of being missed or late, allowing for more proactive intervention and communication to the tenant
- the ability for agency and contractor operatives to use the system on their own devices to send / receive work, reducing paper use and increasing flexibility and productivity

#### **4. Financial implications**

As outlined within the report, there are financial benefits associated with channel shift and mobile working, whilst improving the customer experience. Efficiencies arise from contacts being made through less costly routes, reduced duplication of communal repair requests, a reduction in postage costs, increased productivity and improved performance management.

Stuart McAvoy – Principal Accountant (37 4004)

#### **5. Legal implications**

None

#### **6. Equalities implications**

None