

Housing Scrutiny Commission

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Housing Solution Replacement - Northgate next Phase Project

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Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Purpose of report

This report provides an overview and update of the next Phase of the Housing Solution Replacement (HSR) Programme. This is the Housing Division's IT replacement scheme, replacing Open Housing. .

2. Briefing

Northgate were the successful bidder in the tender procurement process for the replacement of Open Housing. Northgate is now being used across the housing division to manage housing related requirements of its customers. The decision to replace Open Housing was taken for a number of reasons;

- Open Housing solution was costly to support
- The solution was unreliable
- The product was old and was unsuitable for meeting current and future business requirements

The initial phase of Northgate put in place the systems to collect rents, manage repairs and manage tenant accounts. This went live on 11th January 2016 and continues to provide a reliable and stable system enabling housing staff to become more productive and provide a more efficient service to customers.

The next phase is split into a number of stages;

- **Stage 1** will improve efficiency and control of customer's requirements and manage their data more effectively
- **Stage 2** will implement a number of customer "Self-Serve" Modules (Rents & Repairs) that will enable customers to transact on-line rather than through the authorities Customer Service Centre
- **Stage 3** will replace the current Repairs Mobility Solution to provide more stable, reliable and efficient management of repairs jobs and operative diaries.

2.1 Stage 1

The new system has brought a variety of benefits such as;

- Increased productivity gains and efficiencies
- Increased reliability and stability which has reduced downtime and lost working hours making the implementation a success.

There are currently a small number of outstanding issues which Officers are working with Northgate to address as a priority;

- Customers position on the Housing Register when bidding for a property
- AutoBid function completion (no external impact on customers)

Operationally on a day to day basis we have seen call volumes relating to Northgate incidents reduce dramatically and service requests stabilize. This indicates that the core system is working reliably and as the Council requires. Staff can therefore be more productive, meaning they can spend more time with customers and provide a high level of service.

2.2 Channel Shift Overview

For Housing, Channel Shift revolves around the drive to make Council services more available through the internet and the need 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.

The highest cost to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) relates to the number of Housing calls managed, around 2200 per week on average. On-line transactions are far cheaper than telephone or face to face transactions so to reduce costs the intention for the authority and many other organisations is to “Channel shift” (move) services on-line so a customer can carry out these functions themselves. Hence, reducing the number of Housing related calls is key to driving down the CSC total costs and therefore the charge to the Housing Revenue Account.

This is done 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.

Channel Shift Summary

- Move customer transactions on-line which is more cost effective
- Secure On-line customer portal required to do this
- 24x7x365 availability using technology
- Not a “one size fits all” solution, will still need to offer support to vulnerable & elderly
- Service improvements can be made

2.3 Stage 2 Rents & Repairs Self-Serve

Stage 2 will focus on the delivery of the Self-Serve Modules for Rents and Repairs to support the authorities Channel Shift agenda.

Northgate have a set of “Self-Serve” modules, the authority already uses the Choice Based Lettings and Housing Applications modules which our tenants already successfully use, removing the duplication of work and allowing customers access to these services 24x7 at their convenience.

Stage 2 is based around the implementation of two further Self-Serve modules, Rents and Repairs which will extend the on-line access for customers and provide the opportunity for call volumes to be reduced.

2.3.1 Rents Self-Serve Module

The Rents Self-Serve module will provide access to the following services for tenants;

- Make an on-line payment
- Setup a DD or regular payment arrangement
- View Account/Debt/Arrears history
- View or Print a Rent Statement
- Access Letters sent by the authority

Common calls from customers are to make a payment, check their account balance or request a Rent Statement so by providing these services on-line the customer should be able to meet these requirements immediately or when convenient to them.

Currently it is planned that Rents Self-Serve services will be available for customers to use in February 2017.

2.3.2 Repairs Self-Serve Module

Currently Repairs calls amount to the highest element of transactional and cost at the CSC so there is a real drive to reduce the number of calls and subsequently costs.

While it is a complex piece of work there is the opportunity to implement the Repairs Self-Serve process in two stages. The initial stage would deliver the benefits listed below with the main end-to-end solution being delivered at a later date.

The initial stage of Repairs Self-Serve would include the following services;

- Access to the secure Repairs on-line portal
- Ability to report a repair
- Ability to diagnose the issue using a Graphical Repair finder tool
- View the appointment (once made)
- View Historic Repair History

This would allow a Repairs call to be generated by the customer via the portal and a works order created which would be an improvement and result in some early savings.

However, the schedule of the job would still be a manual process and result in a call or appointment card being sent to the customer.

It is planned to have this stage of the solution available in February 2017 alongside the Rents Self-Serve module.

2.4 Stage 3 Repairs end-to-end Self-Serve & Mobile solution

- The second stage for the Repairs Self-Serve is ability to assign the correct operative and materials to the job along with allowing the customer to select their own appointment from a list that is presented to them.

Stage 3 will deliver the following services, in addition to the services in stage 1, to the customer via the on-line Repairs Self-Serve portal;

- Allow the customer to select a convenient appointment date & time
- Automatically log the job in Northgate Repairs
- Schedule the operative with the relevant skills and expertise
- Deliver the job information to the relevant operatives tablet device
- Manage the resources schedule / diaries for all operatives
- Confirm the appointment with the customer
- Allow details to be sent back to Northgate Repairs by the operative
- Allow jobs to be completed or re-scheduled by the operative

The expectation is that Housing will require 12 months to fully implement the full end to end solution described above. This would follow on from the stage 1 implementation where Repairs Self-Serve is available but in a cut down form.

It is planned to have the fully operational end to end Repairs Self-Serve available to customers by the end of 2017.

3. Financial implications

The next phase of the Northgate Housing Solution will require further significant capital investment. Budget for 2016/17 is £1.446m with further funding required to meet the revised size of the solution which is currently being quantified and will need reflecting in the 2017/18 HRA capital programme.

The programme is expected to drive further ongoing efficiencies and savings, including from channel shift initiatives and a more automated approach to delivering repairs.

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4. Legal implications
None
5. Equalities implications
None