



Leicester  
City Council

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

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Andy Connelly

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

In 2016 the new Housing System Replacement provided by Northgate went live. Northgate replaced Open Housing which had become costly to support, was unreliable and would not meet the future needs of the business.

The initial phase of Northgate put in place the systems to collect rents, manage repairs and manage tenant accounts. 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 current phase of the delivery of the Housing System Replacement programme is focusing on the development and delivery of channel shift for Rents and Repairs which are all high volume call areas for the Councils' Customer Service Centre and the implementation of the new mobile working solution, Total Mobile.

#### 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 When we send letters out, often the details of that letter may go out of date before they have arrived (e.g. rent statements).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

The highest cost to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) relates to the number of Housing calls managed. 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. Housing related enquiries (excluding Housing management enquiries) account for over 30% of all contact through the Customer Service Line.

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. These are currently provided by the Northgate Self-Serve portal.

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

When Self-Serve is introduced, tenants will be able to login whenever they want and view their rent statement, much like online banking. They will also be able to register for Direct Debit payments if they wish.

Rents channel shift go-live was slightly delayed to enable Northgate Upgrade to Version 6.16 which enables the most up to date version of rents channel shift. This has now been installed and rents channel shift will go live by the end of this calendar year.

We will continually introduce more Self-Serve services and following on from the rents, tenants will be able to view details of repairs to their home.

By Spring 2019 tenants will then be able to log certain types of repairs and this request will go straight into our Northgate and mobile working systems. There will be a set of questions and pictures to help ensure the correct type of repair is logged. We will also provide the ability for tenants to select from a range of appointment dates and times when logging the repair. 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 in our system and offer 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 to chase repairs and cancel them 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 the Council needs to update the mobile working solution. The current system in place is GRASP which is outdated, slow and does not meet the needs of the business. Housing have purchased a new mobile working solution called Total Mobile and are about to rollout training to all staff before the new system is implemented in the autumn. The Mobile Working Solution will sit alongside the Repairs Channel Shift to include 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 tablet device
- Allow details to be sent back to Northgate Repairs by the operative
- Allow jobs to be completed or re-scheduled by the operative

In addition the system should enable;

- 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 certificates.

## **5. E-Communication**

As part of Leicester City Council's Channel Shift Strategy, Housing are also introducing SMS (text) Messaging and Email Functionality. This will mean we can send emails and / or texts to customers automatically. For example

- Sending text reminders if a customer has missed a rent payment.
- Sending emails to housing applicants who have requested an adapted property when an adapted property becomes available.

Electronic communication allows organisations to save money on printing and postage costs while also communicating with customers quicker and more effectively.

Practically this will mean communicating with tenants in more effective ways, such as by email and text message where we have contact details. An example would be where a tenant has reported a waylight repair in a communal area. Moving forward we intend to send everyone in that block of flats an email acknowledging the repair has been logged and giving any appropriate appointment details. This enables improved communication with tenants and avoids duplication in more than one tenant reporting a communal repair.

## **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

