

 <p><b>Northwards Housing</b> North Manchester's Council Homes</p>	<p><b>Report to:</b></p> <p>Northwards Housing Board</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> July 2019</p>	<p><b>Item No:</b></p> <p><b>11c</b></p>
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<b>Title:</b>	Northwards' Digital Roadmap
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<b>Date:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2019
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<b>Confidential:</b>	<b>No</b>
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<b>For:</b> (Please tick action required)	<b>NOTING</b> ✓	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>APPROVAL</b>
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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update the Board on progress in respect of the organisation's digital roadmap.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Board note the report

**IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Risk Management</b>	CRR-05 'Ineffective customer services' is monitored via our corporate risk register. Further information on risks are included in the report.
<b>Regulatory &amp; legal compliance</b>	Our management agreement with MCC requires us to provide accessible services.

**Consultation/Consideration:**

	<b>Yes, No or N/A:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Sub-Committee:</b>	No		
<b>Task Groups:</b>	No		
<b>Ward Councillors:</b>	No		

In September 2018 the Board approved Northwards' Digital Roadmap, a high level indicative plan of the key milestones from 2018 to 2022.

The plan, which is attached in the appendix of this report, is aligned to Northwards business objective. It is also closely aligned with Northwards' ICT Strategy and associated action plan, and, as you would expect, there is much cross-over between the two documents, with ICT infrastructure and applications so crucial to our ambition for digital services.

The key objectives of the plan, as described in the Digital First Strategy, were:

- a. Rationalisation of front of house customer services to support self-service and a review of the telephone answering service to support channel shift
- b. Promoting more efficient ways to pay rent and reducing those that are no longer cost effective
- c. Website improvements to facilitate online transactions, particularly for repairs
- d. Increased support for tenants who are digitally excluded
- e. Improving communication with tenants who have ordered a repair
- f. Deploying modern working methods where appropriate

All of these objectives remain key to the improvement of Northwards. The majority of these issues relate to customer experience and after the recent appointment of Belinda Rourke as the Head of Customer Experience we will need to carefully consider whether these elements would better sit under the over-arching Customer Experience Strategy and whether the more technical issues should be addressed through the ICT strategy. Irrespective of the outcome of this consideration, the content plan will need to be formally updated to account for changing priorities, developments in technology, improvements identified in service reviews and recommendations made by stakeholders.

However, until that time we present the following update to the Digital Roadmap, specifically those aims listed to be completed in 2019/20:

#### Soft launch of website portal / increase in end to end automation

##### *Rent/My Account*

The rent element of the website has been operating since 11<sup>th</sup> April and over 1,100 tenants have signed on to 'My Account' since the launch.

The 'soft' launch has been useful for identifying the main technical barriers to registration – while most people have been able to register without help our feedback is that some have struggled. The most common reason is people trying to register with the wrong reference number or their details not matching what's in QL. So when it comes to the 'hard' launch we are proposing to write to people with the exact details they need to try and make the process as smooth as possible.

There has been one technical issue regarding the system, with a very small number of payments through PARIS not automatically updating the tenants' balance. A manual workaround has been found for this, so Board members should be reassured that no tenant has suffered, but a long-term solution requires improvements to the PARIS system, which is being replaced, so we are reluctant to invest and we are instead looking at alternatives in conjunction with our partners at the Council.

##### *Repairs Service*

Despite a number of technical challenges that have slowed down development of the repairs element of the portal we remain on track for a soft-launch this summer.

Our development partner, Prodo, has almost completed all of the work linking the portal to both QL and Mears' IT system and the website platform will be sent to Northwards in July. Once received Northwards' staff, most notably Communications Officer Mark Hesford, will populate the site with our information and branding before undertaking a rigorous testing schedule in partnership with repairs and ICT.

### Campaign to encourage online access to services

The 'soft' launch of rents and the absence of the repairs element has meant we have not engaged in significant promotion of online access. So far our promotion has been limited to:

- CSC officers advising tenants who ask about rent to register for the system online and talking them through the registration process.
- An email that sent to all people who have made enquiries about the online service in the last 6 months with instructions of how to register.
- Our Digital Inclusion Officer working with all new tenants to help them set up their account and encourage them that this is the easiest and quickest way to pay.

Despite this limited promotion we continue to get between 10 and 20 new registrations every day and the slow build up of active users allows us to test the resilience of the system more effectively.

As previously agreed, the large campaign to encourage online access to services will only be launched when the repairs element of the website is up and running and any technical issues resolved. It is hoped that the campaign, which will be developed and lead by our Communications team with support from the relevant operational staff, will begin in the new year.

### Promote digital inclusion support network

The majority of work in this area has been carried out by our Digital Inclusion Officer, Andrew Beavan. In addition to his work with the New Tenancy Team around supporting new tenants to register and use My Account:

- Working in close collaboration with Yes to offer 6 digital support sessions, funded by Clarion Futures and supported by Yes digital champions. These sessions support tenants completing online forms, using the Northwards website and access to further accredited City and Guilds online basic digital skills training.
- Running a joint project at the TLM Centre/Collyhurst Yes with Places for People in Collyhurst, providing a free laptop to tenants who complete an accredited basic online skills course.
- Managing Northwards' digital champions in their support of tenants at drop in sessions to improve their digital skills and help with managing day to day tasks online.

### Development of customer insight to plan targeting of services

Our work around customer insight remains in its early stages. Northwards' Business Analyst continues to work with staff across the business to develop and improve the information available to teams about our tenants and consider how this can be used to tailor services. In addition, Northwards is in the process of appointing a Customer

Experience Manager who will, amongst other things, be responsible for following up each complaint made against Northwards to establish whether systems and services need to be changed to address the issues faced by tenants.

However, we acknowledge that this piecemeal approach will not be sufficient if Northwards is to make significant improvements as to how our services are delivered. With this in mind, Northwards' Head of Customer Experience will be responsible for the development and implementation of a revised Customer Experience Strategy that will, amongst other things, contain detail of Northwards over-arching approach to customer insight in the coming years.

#### Introduction of mobile working in surveying services

Significant progress has been made against this target.

Northwards has worked with Aareon and Mears to develop a mobile working solution in respect of responsive repairs before rolling this out to other aspects of the repairs service. Once completed the software was trialled by two members of staff across a month long period, with information on bugs and feedback provided to the developers. After expanding the trial to a larger number of staff there remains only one technical glitch which is scheduled to be resolved by a consultant from Aareon on the 1<sup>st</sup> July. This will then be applied to the Test and Development system for surveyors to complete the testing plan before it is added to the live system.

In addition to developing the software Northwards has been trialling different equipment that best suits the needs of the staff undertaking the work. After testing 4 different handheld devices a consensus was reached that a Huawei tablet was the best option. Unfortunately, security concerns around Huawei mean we cannot risk investing in this model so we are now undertaking a fresh review of equipment available.

Once we have gone live with the responsive repairs team we will move on to the Void Inspection team. We have already shared the Standard Voids Pre-Inspection Module Specification for consideration with the relevant staff and from this we will identify changes we require to be implemented before full testing.

#### Commence accommodation review and identification of future needs

This review will be taking part in the second half of the year. However, more so than any other issue within this roadmap the issue is dependent on the view of the Council, both in regard to our accommodation at Hexagon Tower and the potential consolidation of neighbourhood offices. Without their support, it would not be possible for Northwards to act any meaningful change in respect of our accommodation.

Prior to undertaking the review we need to understand the view of the Board in respect of these issues. Once this has been established we can begin a dialogue with the Council about the parameters of the review.

#### Identify and plan approach to "paperless" workplace and electronic archiving and agree programme of roll out across the business

The issue of paperless working is closely related to the issue of mobile working. Until such time that staff are able to access all digital information off-site then there will still be a requirement to maintain paper files. Our progress in respect of mobile working is documented above and whilst we are not as far in this journey as we would like we remain hopeful that the key services at Northwards will be truly mobile within the next two years.

That does not mean that we cannot put the systems and processes in place to enable paperless working in the future. Rather than a single plan to roll out paperless working across the business, paperless working has now been added as key objective of all service reviews and individual improvement plans agreed with ICT.

So far the most significant development in respect of paperless working has been in respect of tenancy management services. Until paperless tenancy management files are in place we have been scanning all new documentation and storing it for access within the QL system. In addition, we have begun the process of looking for a partner to assist us in the scanning all of our old tenancy management files so that they can be added to the system. This will be a massive task, one that we could not undertake without specialist external support, but initial indications are that this can be completed by the Autumn.

Once this process has been completed in respect of tenancy management we will then undertake a similar process across neighbourhood services and then property services.

Beyond the digital access considerations this is also an opportunity to engage in quality assurance/data cleanse of the documentation we hold, which will be beneficial in the context of our GDPR responsibilities and our accommodation requirements.