

**REPORT TO:** SHAREHOLDER SUB COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 7 NOVEMBER 2018

**TITLE:** RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND CUSTOMER ACCESS REVIEW

**LEAD OFFICER:** ANDREW MURRAY, HEAD OF HOUSING  
(01279) 446676

**CONTRIBUTING OFFICER:** JAMES FULCHER, HOUSING ASSET AND BUSINESS SYSTEMS MANAGER (01279) 446316

**RECOMMENDED that:**

**A** The Sub Committee notes the report.

**BACKGROUND**

1. At the Sub Committee meeting in October 2018, there was a request by members for the Council to implement a facility to report repairs online.
2. This report sets out the progress with the above, as well as other changes that are proposed for enhancing customer access to the Council's responsive repairs service. This includes, enhanced repair tracking processes, appointments/treatment of planned repairs priorities, and the provision of a SMS text message appointment reminder service.

**ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

**Repairs Online Portal**

3. The planned go-live date for Online Customer Portal is December 2019. The main objective is to provide customers with an online portal that will provide a number of services relating to housing, one of which being the ability for customers to raise repairs for both their own property and flat block online.
4. In addition to online repairs, the portal will allow customers access to their rent accounts, access to their leasehold accounts, to update their personal/contact details and the ability to send messages directly to Housing staff. This will allow enhanced visibility of information, easier access to Council services, and will generate ongoing efficiencies for the Council, allowing resources to be utilised more effectively.
5. The 'Landlord Survey' carried out by Council in 2018 identifies the requirement for the Council to transform the way it interacts with its customers. Almost 70 per cent of respondents stated that their last contact with the Council was regarding

a repair. In addition to this response, 30 per cent of the respondents stated that they would prefer to interact with the Council via an electronic method of communication such as internet.

6. The introduction of the Customer Portal will reduce the number of manual transactions being processed by the Council, speeding up these types of requests by reducing the amount of data entry required by Council Officers. The new business processes being created to deal with the contact from customers will allow more effective responses to customer enquiries as part of the Council's drive to move people away from face to face enquiries and telephone contact. In addition, online services will reduce the possibility of duplicate repair jobs being raised and should reduce the amount of contact customers have with the repairs contact centre as information is available online when required.
7. The new online repairs portal will align to the Council's Customer Services and Access Strategy and will be reviewed on a regular basis. Once the portal is live, the Council will evaluate the options for implementing additional functions into the portal, including online housing applications, Choice Based Lettings, reporting anti-social behaviour and other estate management functions.

### **Review of Appointments Processes/Treatment of Planned Repairs Priorities**

8. HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd (HTS) currently reports the number of appointments made and kept and this stands at 97.48 per cent as of September 2019. Corporate data indicates that the number of complaints received by HTS continues to reduce year on year in line with the overall Council complaints totals, however there is evidence to suggest there is still a recurring theme of poor communication between HTS and customers throughout the repairs process.
9. The landlord survey undertaken in 2018 highlights both good perception of the repairs service and areas that require improvement, such as the length of time customers are awaiting repairs and being kept informed about a repair. The biggest source of dissatisfaction with the Council is related to the repairs service.

### **Appointment Slots**

10. Councillors have reaffirmed the requirement for the long term replacement of the "Planned Works" priority in its current form.
11. Over the past year, HTS have reduced the repairs timescale for planned works from 12 months to nine months, with an aspiration to reduce this timescale further where achievable. In addition, day to day repair appointment slots have been changed from two hour slots to four hour slots in order to improve productivity. As part of these changes, HTS has agreed to investigate further enhancements to improve their productivity and deliver better customer outcomes by extending their working hours for urgent/standard repairs, as well as offering weekend working for certain trades. In addition, HTS are undertaking a feasibility study for providing more flexibility when offering an appointment slot for planned works at the point where the is first reported.

12. When a customer rings to report an emergency, routine or standard repair, the repair is prioritised as above with an appointment date and time being given. If the date of the appointment changes, the customer is advised. However, for planned jobs, such as plastering, roofing, or carpentry, no appointment date is currently given when the repair is first reported. Councillors have requested that this response is enhanced with the ambition to provide an appointment date and time when the repair is first reported, aligned to other repairs priorities.
13. Progress will be kept under review and aligned to priorities from the Best Value review, reporting progress back to the next Sub Committee meeting.

### **Enhancements to repairs information shared with the Council**

14. There are a number of areas where improvements can be made to the information available to the Council about the status of a repair and specific work carried out to the property. There are IT system interfaces available that share this information automatically between the IT systems in use at both the Council and HTS. These interfaces will be enhanced to provide further transparency about the type/cost of repair undertaken.
15. The “repair events” interface is already in operation and currently provides the Council with limited repair status updates. The ambition is to increase the number of events being passed between IT systems which will enable the Council to provide customers with much more information about repairs they have reported to HTS, rather than re-directing the customer to the repairs contact centre.
16. Work has already commenced to enhance the current interfaces and is expected to go live in April of 2020.

### **Implementation of SMS text message appointment reminders within the Callsys system**

17. HTS have committed to introduce the ability to send an SMS (text message) reminder of an upcoming repairs appointment. This allows for enhanced customer information to be provided, with the aim being to reduce the number of failed appointments due to “no access”. The introduction of SMS reminders also has the potential to reduce the number of paper letters being sent to customers to confirm repairs appointments when repairs are raised.
18. This function is expected to be live by the end of November 2019.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

None specific.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning**

**Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

As contained within the report.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

**Housing**

As outlined in the report.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

**Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

As contained within the report.

**Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

**Governance (Includes HR)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance**

**Appendices**

None.

**Background Papers**

None.

**Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

HTS – HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd