

**REPORT TO:** SHAREHOLDER SUB COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 29 SEPTEMBER 2020

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

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**RECOMMENDED that:**

**A** The Sub Committee notes the progress in 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**

3. The recent 'Landlord Survey' completed in 2018, identified the need for the Housing Service to enhance 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, with 30 per cent of the respondents stating that they would prefer to interact with the Housing Service through an electronic method of communication such as the internet.
4. The new Online Customer Repairs Portal went live on 30 August 2020. This will provide access to a range of housing services regarding their property and tenancy.
5. In addition to online repairs, the portal allows customers access to their rent accounts, access to their leasehold accounts and to update their personal/contact details with the ability to send messages directly. 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.

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 associated 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 wider Customer Access Strategy to move away from face to face enquiries and telephone contact.
7. Customers will have the ability to request repair time slots on line which best meet their needs for their own personal circumstances, as well allow HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd (HTS) to better plan around the demands of the customer communication and notifications. It is expected for HTS efficiencies to be realized both in repairs communications and contact with the customer with the repair centre having information available on line when required.
8. The new online repairs portal will align to the Council's Customer Services and Access Strategy and will be reviewed on a regular basis. The Council can now evaluate the options for implementing additional functions into the portal, including online housing and garage applications, Choice Based Lettings, reporting anti-social behaviour and other estate management functions.
9. At present there are 128 registrations to the portal and the current breakdown of registrations is as follows:

Application Status	Total	Comment
Verified	50	Registration complete
Person Matched	20	Waiting on applicant to apply code
New Registrations	9	Awaiting internal validations
Declined	49	Applicant advised to make contact

a) Of the 50 complete registrations we have had 9 repair requests that have been completed via the portal.

b) The above is despite no real advertising of the customer portal to date.

10. The Council is considering capturing advertisement of the customer portal to all tenants and leaseholders through the quarterly statements due in October 2020.

### **Appointments/Planned Repairs**

11. HTS currently reports the number of appointments made and kept and this. Performance reports indicate there has been a slowdown in enquiries and complaints during the first quarter of 2020/21. Trend analysis indicates however, this is increasing as the Covid-19 lockdown is eased. Recurring themes still indicate repairs complaints and enquiries listing inconsistent levels of communications between HTS and customers.

12. The landlord survey, however, in 2018 highlights the biggest source of dissatisfaction with the Council is related to the repairs service communications. The Council has reaffirmed the requirement for the long term replacement of the “Planned Works” priority in its current form.
13. In 2019/20, 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. The Covid-19 pandemic has stalled progress, and HTS are establishing a “Recovery Plan” for all its activities, which primary focus is on reducing backlogs, and establishing new working arrangements.
14. 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 developing a feasibility study for providing more flexibility when offering an appointment slot for planned works at the point where the is first reported, with the ambition to provide an appointment date/time when a repair categorized as needing to be planned is first reported, keeping the customer informed. Progress will be kept under review and aligned to priorities from the Best Value review, reporting progress back to the Sub Committee meeting.

### **SMS Text Messaging**

15. HTS introduced 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.
16. This function has gone live in 2019.

### **Next Steps**

17. 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 continue to be enhanced to provide further transparency about the type/cost of repair undertaken. 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.

## **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 Property and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

### **Housing**

As contained within 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 contained within the report.

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

## **Appendices**

None.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

HTS – HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd