

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	11th September: HOMES SUB-COMMITTEE]	
DATE OF DECISION	NA	
REPORT TITLE:	NEC Update September 2024	
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DECISION TAKER:	NA	
AUTHORITY TO TAKE DECISION:	Guidance: NA	
KEY DECISION?		N/A
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?		NA
WARDS AFFECTED:	NA	

1 INTRODUCTION

- .1 The original project to procure and implement a Housing Management system to replace the OHMS system was initiated, in June 2016, however it did not proceed effectively until the project was reevaluated until Autumn 2022. The project incorporated change management to influence the culture of the Housing directorate, making sure that adequate records were maintained and putting in mechanisms and policies to administer a sophisticated software system, enabling a performance culture within the directorate.

- .2 The previous Housing Management system could not provide all the functionality needed to deliver consistent services to customers and was supplemented with other databases and spreadsheets which officers couldn't read across to understand the customer. NEC Housing helps officers to get closer to the customer and replaces these spreadsheets and manual systems.

- .3** The following primary objectives of the project to replace the OHMS system have successfully been achieved:
- provide a single view of the customer eliminating duplicated data and enabling a more collaborative working culture within and across all service departments
 - have processes designed to safeguard residents and comply with Health and Safety obligations
 - use data more intelligently to deliver better services to customers
 - replace an ageing data driven system with a modern process driven system capable of adapting to changes in requirements or legislative demands
 - integrate information between systems such as the Oracle financial system, Revenues & Benefits and document management

2 CURRENT POSITION

2.1 In late May 2023, less than one year after the project was re-set, OHMS was set to read only and in June 2023, the core NEC Housing modules went live, allowing the OHMS system and the Temporary and Emergency Accommodation (TEA) database to be replaced.

2.2 The core modules that went live include:

- Allocations and Lettings – this allows us to maintain our housing register and allocate and let council homes to those who apply
- Housing Advice and Temporary Accommodation – for managing homelessness applications and temporary accommodation provided to homeless households
- Rents – to manage rent accounts and rent arrears
- Service charges – to manage leasehold service charge accounts and arrears
- Repairs – to record repair requests from our residents and support the repairs service provided by our contractors, managing payments in respect of these
- Planned Maintenance – for managing works and cyclical servicing e.g. boilers, lifts etc.
- Voids – to manage repairs to empty properties and to let them as efficiently as possible

2.3 As part of an improved digital offering to customers, the resident portal (Housing Online) was launched in December 2023. Residents can report repairs using an online, structured form, rather than the previous approach of sending an email with free text requests for help. Tenants can update their contact details, view rent account details and statements, make payments and apply to purchase

their property. Those seeking accommodation can register and apply as homeless, apply for accommodation or request a transfer.

2.4 There is a Homelessness application form available online. This has gone through an iterative process of testing and consultation with partner organisations, who assist applicants to complete the online form. The project team and the Homeless service held discussions with these external agencies, resulting in improvements to the customer journey through the online form.

2.5 In our drive to automate manual processes, and thereby provide a faster and more effective service for customers, we have implemented the following new interfaces between NEC and other corporate systems:

- Rents General Ledger – Oracle Financials
- Repairs Accounts Payable – Oracle Financials
- Service Charges and Major Works General Ledger – Oracle Financials
- Rent accounts - Revenues & Benefits
- All modules – Document Management
- Online lettings – Home Connexions
- Repairs works orders – Contractor Job Scheduler

2.6 Information in NEC Housing is much more visible and the following reporting dashboards have been launched: Finance; rents; allocations; lettings; housing needs; property purchase and voids along with a suite of repairs reports. Phase two of the project will see dashboards on Compliance (Health & Safety indicators) and Tenancy.

2.7 NEC Housing now communicates directly with the main repair contractor systems, passing works order information and status updates between LBC, Wates, Mears and K&T. This means that repairs requested by residents are immediately visible to the appropriate contractor and progress can easily be tracked.

2.8 NEC Housing has highlighted long-standing issues with data accuracy or missing data. This allows the Housing directorate to analyse information, correct data and rely on the reports that are being presented to them. The migration from the previous IT system provided the opportunity to reconcile data and Phase two will continue to build on this work. NEC Housing also incorporates rigorous data validation routines so that once data is correct, it is much easier to maintain it to a higher standard. This protects our customer's information and helps us to ensure that our view of the customer is accurate so that we can deliver responsive services to them.

2.9 A range of reports are now available for KPI, operational and management reporting purposes and there is an ongoing program to deliver additional reporting functionality and executive dashboards. The presentation of information through graphical reports, which can be drilled down to analyse the base data, gives the organisation full visibility of the current position and past trends since implementation. This underpins an information driven culture within the organisation, and NEC Housing is a fundamental tool to promote this culture.

2.10 Data returns to the Central Government (MHCLG) reporting homelessness are now automated via NEC Housing. The service is still completing a data cleansing exercise to ensure accuracy.

3 SECOND PHASE

3.1 The second phase of the NEC implementation will address risk mitigation in the areas that touch on compliance and safety. Management of Health & Safety work will be integrated with the main NEC system so that there is no reliance on spreadsheets to record and track performance. Automated returns to the regulators will be developed, reducing manual intervention and potential data inaccuracies as a result. NEC Housing will allow LBC to monitor the registers of the top six compliance areas:

- Gas
- Asbestos
- Fire
- Electrical
- Water Hygiene
- Lifts

3.2 Effective monitoring of compliance areas will protect residents and satisfy regulatory requirements more robustly. LBC still rely on a series of spreadsheets to manage these areas. This approach could expose the Council to reputational risk and sanctions from the Building Safety Regulator and the Health & Safety Executive. The initiatives in Phase two of the NEC project will enable the council to make the transition from manual systems to automated processes with event alerts and a full audit trail, using a far more robust management tool containing accurate and current data

3.3 Work has already started on the second phase and the full Asbestos register, replacing the current spreadsheet, has gone live along with the graphical repair diagnostic tool that is used by the contact centre to generate the correct trades and repair details when residents are reporting repairs. The servicing module is currently in test for gas and once completed in September 24, other functions such as fire; electrical; water hygiene and lifts will follow on. Work has commenced on disrepair functionality and damp & mould management modules.

3.4 Housing Online, the digital offering to customers, will have additional features and functionality added, starting in November 24. In early 2025, residents will be able to use a repair diagnostic tool, similar to that used in the contact centre, to report repairs and make repair appointments. The voids key to key process that is currently in place is being reviewed by the business and changes path will be configured in November / December 24.

3.5 To build on this new integrated solution with a single view of the customer, Phase two will provide workflow functionality to encourage much more collaborative working practices and improve inter-departmental communications and subsequently the communication with our residents. This will assist residents through the development of end-to-end processes, picking up work so that it doesn't get missed in the process. Staff will have all information to hand to complete work promptly and update customers, improving customer satisfaction and reducing complaints.

3.6 The introduction of workflow will present fewer opportunities for services to work in silos and will create efficiency savings, through improved communication and collaboration between departments and with other LBC directorates. Managers and supervisors will be able to track cases to ensure that all customer cases are followed up and not lost in the event of absence or workload peaks.

3.7 Other areas for development as part of the second phase will include: Asset management; CRM; protected characteristics; performance dashboards; energy integration and automated SMS.

4 Summary

4.1 The NEC Housing system is an integrated Customer Relationship Management tool that provides a single view of the customer with transparency of information that can be shared throughout the Directorate and with other areas of the Council. All officers have access to a single set of resident information and a single property register. This means that there is much more opportunity to work in a collaborative manner and make sure that our customers receive the services promptly and efficiently. We can see the customer as a whole and all the services we provide to them as a landlord.

4.2 Phase two of the NEC project is a major part of the Housing Transformation Programme, putting customers first, delivering more efficient and timely services and ensuring that the Council's Health and Safety compliance obligations are met so that residents are safeguarded and the regulatory conditions are achieved.

4.3 By consolidating disparate systems into NEC Housing, we benefit from the single view of the customer, reducing data duplication and the need for reconciliation. Phase two will facilitate the monitoring, validation and cleansing of data. The system will be configured so that managers can develop accurate budgets with forecasts based on activity.

4.4 Efficiency savings will be derived from the introduction of workflow across the Housing directorate and the automation of the voids path and through more effective management of disrepair. An automated rent arrears escalation policy will underpin the collection of rents and recovery of arrears. Phase two will ensure effective record keeping and reliable data that can be validated and audited. The delivery of a complete suite of information dashboards will also contribute to informed decision making and KPI automation. NEC Housing is a fundamental part of managing homelessness and making sure that the homelessness team can provide a fast and effective service.

4.5 When the NEC mobile working solution is implemented, officers will be able to work remotely, within the community, without having to return to a fixed location to update their cases. This will start with repairs inspections but will roll out to estate inspections and tenancy visits. Consideration will be given to the corporate roll out of handheld devices and the dependency on that Council wide exercise.

4.6 NEC Housing is one of the most widely adopted Housing Management systems in the Housing sector with approximately 130 Councils and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating the system. The market is led by around five suppliers of systems that support the functionality needed to deliver housing services. All these systems, including NEC Housing, provide a framework of building blocks that require a combination of consultancy services, from NEC, and technical expertise, provided by the Council, to construct a working solution that aligns with the policies, processes and working practices of the Council.

4.7 Part of the focus of the project is turned towards encouraging greater staff engagement and developing consistent usage of NEC Housing whilst delivering services to customers. A permanent support team is currently being recruited to manage NEC Housing and exploit it's potential in the future. This will ensure the specialist skills, currently provided by interim staff can be retained within the Council and build up the necessary knowledge and experience internally.

4.8 There is an ambitious training programme that has been rolled out to officers, showing them how to use NEC Housing as part of their daily tasks and a series of refresher training courses has been designed to keep knowledge up to date. NEC Housing is already providing better integration with other systems with the new interfaces between the Housing system and the Finance system. The development and implementation of NEC forms a key part of our transformation programme in terms of culture.