Making a Difference

Powering success

Digital Strategy
2025–2030

watford
community
housing

We embrace *solutions* that help us to deliver for our *customers* and our *communities*.

As a forward-thinking organisation, we believe in exploring technologies that can help us to offer a great customer experience and empower our teams to do more.

Our Digital Strategy sets out how we will move with the times by being a fast-follower, adopting proven solutions to give us the best possible platform for success, and using data-led insights to proactively improve our services and guide our decision-making.

Making online easy

Managing a tenancy should be effortless and stress-free. We will make sure we have the right options in place to provide a reliable, modern and efficient service to our customers.

Because we know that online services offer the simplest way to get things done, we will take a 'digital first' approach, while continuing to offer choice.

By enhancing our digital offer, we will make it easier for residents to access the services and support they need, whenever they need it.

A comprehensive online offer

The ease of online services makes them the most efficient and effective way to engage with us, allowing people to access self-service options – such as requesting a repair or checking their rent account – at any time. We will expand our current offering with new functionality to improve the customer experience.

We will continue to improve our online repairs booking service, to make it easier to book appointments and track repairs through our website. We will add the option to self-select a convenient time for gas safety appointments, along with intelligent repairs tracking, enabling customers to check the status of outstanding jobs.

We will introduce integrated payment options, making it easier to make payments online. Customers will also be able to access key information and documents through their online account, including their tenancy agreement, and the Landlord Gas Safety Record and Energy Performance Certificate for their home. Members will also be able to download their AGM information packs from their account.

Growing our digital services

We will enhance our online services to make it easy for customers to manage their tenancy through our website.

By 2030, we aim to have:

- at least 65% of our customers signed up and regularly using their online account
- 20% of all repairs being booked online

'We will expand our communications channels by introducing the option to contact our Customer Service team through an instant messaging service.'

Enhanced communication

We will embrace digital technology that allows us to engage more effectively with customers and provide better support. As part of this, we will expand our communications channels by introducing the option to contact our Customer Service team through an instant messaging service.

To resolve repairs queries quickly and efficiently, we will make use of video calling, enabling customers to show us what the problem is before we attend. This will allow us to make sure our operative arrives with all the parts and tools they need to fix the issue first time. If there is an easy fix that the customer can carry out on their own, such as restarting a boiler, we will talk them through how to do it so that they don't need to wait for us to visit.

We will continue to expand our use of digital signage in our blocks to deliver targeted information and updates to residents. To make our online services accessible to as many people as possible, we will also install self-service kiosks in our community hubs and communal areas in our blocks and independent living properties, giving easy access to all.

Exploring possibility

Everything we do is geared towards delivering for our customers – and modern technologies offer us opportunities to do more.

Advances in AI, smart-tech, communications tools and hardware all have the potential to improve the efficiency of our operations, help us manage our homes more effectively, and ensure proactive engagement with our customers and between our teams.

We will embrace new ideas, trialling different technologies and learning from others who have implemented them already, with a view to adopting those that enable us to provide better services.

Working smart

The Internet of Things (IoT) offers significant opportunities for housing providers, making it possible to monitor every home's performance and systems remotely and in real time. Through a network of smart devices, it has the potential to gather a range of data to support effective asset management, including damp and mould monitoring, temperature and humidity sensing, leak detection, energy consumption tracking and boiler performance.

We will utilise these technologies where proactive monitoring empowers us to make cost-effective improvements to how we manage our homes – allowing us to identify and rectify faults quickly, automatically test systems such as emergency lighting, and target maintenance and improvement works where they are most needed.

'AI has the potential to help us deliver a more responsive service through dynamic housing stock management.'

Artificial intelligence

The AI revolution has implications for every sector, including housing.

We recognise the opportunities offered by AI to unlock more effective ways of working and ensure that data drives our decisions. We also recognise that some people will have concerns about how AI is used and any potential risks.

For customers, AI has the potential to help us deliver a more responsive service through dynamic housing stock management – working alongside IoT devices to identify repairs and maintenance concerns quickly. It could also ensure a more consistent customer experience, through standardised corporate communications.

We believe that a variety of AI innovations could help us to work more efficiently too. Robotic process automation can be used to streamline repetitive data management tasks, while generative AI could make the process of report-writing less labour-intensive.

To help our teams access the information they need easily, AI support agents will be implemented to offer guidance, training materials and self-help tools around policies and procedures, human resources, IT and systems support.

To deliver an action plan for how we will embrace AI in a way that aligns with our values, we will explore the possibilities carefully and have a robust conversation about how and where we will start to utilise it. To mitigate risk, we will take a measured and phased approach to its implementation.

Fully equipped

We will ensure that our teams have the right equipment and up-to-date technology, so that they can deliver for our customers and work well together, whether they are in the office, out in our communities, or working remotely.

By extending our use of Microsoft 365 and Teams telephony, we will offer more reliable services to our customers, with additional functionality including call transcriptions and the use of voicemail.

We will also embrace smart devices that can enhance our service offering, by allowing our teams to access information easily while on the move or use apps for environment monitoring, to help identify problems such as excessive humidity in residents' homes.

To help tackle fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour, we will expand the use of mobile CCTV, and we will explore the use of body-worn cameras to help protect team members when dealing with challenging situations.

For our asset management, repairs and development teams, we will use drones to survey existing properties and potential construction sites more thoroughly. Time-lapse cameras could also be deployed to help monitor and document the progress of construction where we are building new homes.

'We will also embrace smart devices that can enhance our service offering, by allowing our teams to access information easily.'

Well protected

The security and resilience of our systems underpins our ability to operate efficiently and provide our services consistently.

We will ensure our digital infrastructure remains robust, so that our systems are reliable, the data we hold is safe, and we have comprehensive disaster recovery solutions in place.

Stable systems

We will keep working to make our systems as resilient as possible, to ensure that they run smoothly for our customers and our teams. To provide additional resilience, we will continue to migrate more of our disaster recovery, infrastructure and software services to the cloud.

We will test our disaster recovery systems bi-annually and monitor system performance to minimise downtime. Through a continuous refresh programme of our IT estate, we will take a phased approach to replacing older equipment, to ensure that our technology remains up to date while managing costs effectively.

A thorough approach

We are committed to staying ahead of the curve to protect and manage our data assets. We take our responsibilities around cyber security extremely seriously, ensuring our approach is thorough and in line with best practice, to protect our systems against cyber attacks or hackers.

To provide assurance around the security controls we use, we will maintain our Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation over the next five years.

Keeping data safe

We recognise the importance of keeping our customers' information safe and secure, so we will maintain excellent working practices around data protection and compliance, ensuring that the information we need to hold in order to deliver our services is managed responsibly.

We will adhere to clear retention periods for the data we keep, with regular mandatory training on data protection for all employees, and software in place to monitor and minimise the risk of data loss, by preventing sensitive information from being sent by email or downloaded.

'We will maintain excellent working practices around data protection and compliance.'

Intelligence and insight

We are always looking for ways to improve and work more effectively.

Our work will be data-driven, using insights to make best use of our resources and ensure our decisions are informed by facts.

We will also continue to rationalise our systems so that they work seamlessly together, enabling us to provide better services to our customers and communities.

The right digital infrastructure

We will look at ways to improve our internal systems and solutions, which in turn will lead to better overall services for residents. We will achieve this by ensuring we have fully integrated housing, asset management and repairs systems – as well as exploring alternative customer relationship management systems.

This will give us a 'single view of the customer', bringing together all the information we have about each resident and their home in one place, so that we can understand their needs better and offer a more joined-up and consistent customer service experience.

By rationalising these systems, as well as making better use of Microsoft's Office 365 suite, we will empower our teams to work more collaboratively and deliver better services together.

'Accurate information needs to be at the heart of our decision-making, so that we can work efficiently.'

Business intelligence

Accurate information needs to be at the heart of our decision-making, so that we can work efficiently and target investment wisely. To support informed decisions, we will ensure comprehensive reporting is in place across our business.

We will continue to use Power BI to produce meaningful customer insights, monitor key performance indicators and produce thorough data for our regulatory returns. We will also ensure we maintain comprehensive and good-quality data on our homes and appropriate data about our customers, making sure that systems and processes are working effectively and efficiently.

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