Our vision is
"to deliver excellent Housing Services"

Information Technology (IT) Strategy

2009-2012

Newark and Sherwood Homes Limited

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Information Technology (IT) Strategy has been developed to support the Vision and Objectives of Newark and Sherwood Homes and the delivery of our Business Plan. We have been particularly focussed in our first four years in establishing ourselves as a separate organisation, improving our services to meet the required standard when inspected by the Audit Commission and delivering the Decent Homes Programme. IT has been an essential and integral element of this establishment and improvement programmes.

1.2 To achieve our vision and to deliver our organisational objectives we need to provide the right tools for our team members and customers. Information Technology (IT) is central to improving service quality, improving access to services for customers, delivering efficiency and value for money. This strategy sets out our vision for IT, how it will contribute to the overarching objectives of the organisation and the steps we intend to take to support the delivery of this vision.

1.3 A coherent, integrated approach to IT is essential to maximise the positive benefits available to us, our customer and our business from effective use of development of our IT infrastructure. This IT Strategy sets out the context in which we are operating, outlines the improvements and changes made to date and sets out our intended actions to deliver our IT objectives in the future. It is designed to support effective decision-making and support prioritisation and investment decisions.

1.4 The potential benefits of IT are enormous. However, the risks associated with failure to plan or implement IT – related change are also considerable. Change is taking place at a pace that is unmatched in any other area of business activity and it is essential that change and modernisation are planned to effectively support and complement the transformation of business processes and service delivery.

1.5 This strategy reflects the change that has already taken place and sets out what we will do in the next two years to support that continued transformation and improvement process. This is a medium term vision, acknowledging the fast pace of change both within Newark and Sherwood Homes and the IT sector. As well as setting out how we will continue to support our corporate change agenda and deliver our Company objectives through our use of IT, it also sets out the steps that we will take to develop our longer term vision for IT within Newark and Sherwood Homes.

2. Purpose of the Strategy

2.1 This strategy sets out how the Company will develop IT to support the business objectives and delivery of the Business Plan through effective use of technologies. The strategy will ensure that current and future service delivery is maximized by the use of efficient and effective IT systems reflecting the provision of quality, cost effective services and demonstrate value for money, which are customer focused and enhance delivery of equality and diversity.

2.2 The benefits of formulating an IT Strategy are:

- Improved effectiveness: A business-driven approach to planning for IT improves the likelihood that current and future technology is 'fit for purpose'.
- Improved efficiency and value for money: A holistic strategy minimizes wasted investments and unnecessary expenditure.
- Making information and communication more accessible.
- Improving service delivery through improved flexibility and speedier communications for the benefit of service users.
- Overcoming social or geographical isolation in rural areas through provision of e-enabled services.
- Improved knowledge and operation of IT systems.

2.3 The key aims of the strategy are:

- To guide IT investment and development.
- To adopt a common set of principles in IT development.
- To ensure clear commitment and ownership of IT
- To review and monitor IT development and strategy.
- To ensure that services are e-enabled.
- To identify the benefits of IT in delivering value for money and maximizing efficiency.

2.4 Newark and Sherwood Homes recognises that successful delivery of services is dependent upon the availability of value added support systems and tools to reflect the diverse nature of the business. The strategy covers the following:

- Current and future IT requirements including identification of gaps.
- Business drivers and expectations.
- A set of general standards and principles for future procurement and delivery.
- How best practice has been incorporated.
- Emergent priorities.

2.5 In the initial operating years the Company's live systems have remained functionally similar, i.e. no replacement systems have been deployed during that time. However in recent years some significant projects have been

embarked upon including:

- The replacement of The Simdell Housing Environment (TSHE) with International Business Systems (IBS).
- The procurement of the Keystone Asset Management System
- Further development of the Newark and Sherwood Homes website
- Server procurement and replacement – to facilitate system and software upgrades.
- Work Scheduling (Optitime and Blackbay software systems) – an independent system that enables the scheduling of reactive maintenance personnel, ultimately using integrated mobile devices.
- NROSH.
- Implement work on mobile working through the introduction of Blackbay software and handheld devices.

2.6 The IT Strategy is part of a suite of policies, procedures and strategies, called the Strategic Framework, which the Company operates within. The IT strategy complements and contributes to other policies, procedures and strategies, for example; The Customer Insight Management Strategy, The Communications Strategy, The Equality and Diversity Strategy, The Performance Management Framework and the Business Continuity Plan.

3. Strategic Context

Some key facts about Newark and Sherwood Homes.

3.1 Following an extensive Stock Options Appraisal, Newark & Sherwood District Council created an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Newark and Sherwood Homes in November 2004 to provide housing management services on behalf of Newark and Sherwood District Council.

3.2 Newark and Sherwood Homes has one shareholder, Newark & Sherwood District Council, and is a separate, independent company.

3.3 Newark and Sherwood Homes manages approximately 5,500 Council properties which accounts for 11 per cent of homes in the district and 145 leasehold properties through the borough and currently employ 169 staff. Almost 46 per cent of the Council's homes are sheltered and are occupied by mainly elderly people.

3.4 A Board of Directors manages Newark and Sherwood Homes. The Board is representative of our tenant profile and comprises of 15 Directors: 5 Tenants, 5 Council Nominees and 5 Independents.

3.5 Newark and Sherwood is the largest geographical District within Nottinghamshire covering over 65,000 hectares, containing 50,116 households. This District has three economic, cultural and residential centres: Newark, Southwell and Ollerton and a large number of small rural

villages throughout 85 parishes.

3.6 In our 4 years as an ALMO we have concentrated our efforts on improving services in order to achieve a 2 star rating with promising prospects for improvement.

3.7 Our Board has agreed 3 strategic objectives:

- To deliver upper quartile and improving performance in customer satisfaction and all areas of service provision
- To be providing Housing Services within the community
- To provide investment and service solutions to deliver sustainable Housing and sustainable Communities in the future

3.8 It has also agreed a set of Core Values, which guide us in everything we do within the Company:

- Customer First
- Valuing Everyone
- Delivering Excellence
- Making Positive Improvements
- Sharing Information

3.9 Newark and Sherwood Homes has delegated responsibility for providing housing management and maintenance services. The functions delegated to the ALMO can be summarised as:

- Stock investment decisions and repairs ordering;
- Rent collection, dealing with arrears, debt counselling;
- Consulting and informing tenants on matters which are the ALMO's responsibility;
- Promoting tenant participation, including involving tenants in monitoring and reviewing service standards;
- Enforcement of tenancy conditions;
- Similar functions for leaseholders;
- Managing lettings, voids and under-occupation; and
- Estate management, caretaking and housing related support services under the Supporting People Programme.

3.10 The functions retained by the Council include:

- Overall housing strategy and enabling;
- Determining policies on lettings and anti-social behaviour (in consultation with the ALMO) and determining rent levels;
- Managing the Supporting People Programme; and
- Homelessness and general housing advice

4. Newark and Sherwood Homes' IT Principles

4.1 Newark and Sherwood Homes has a set of IT principles which aim to guide IT development and procurement. These principles set a minimum standard expected by the Company and are business critical in the development of the Company in line with the Vision and Objectives.

4.2 The IT Principles are to seek:

- Full interface functionality between systems including links to contractors and suppliers
- Version control functionality
- Web accessibility
- Remote wireless functionality
- Security of systems and data to comply with current legislation
- To ensure that systems differentiate access levels
- Ease of recovery and system back up
- Possess mechanisms for review and audit
- Consistency in the standard of performance across all sites
- To maximise equality of access to services, products and systems
- Support the business operation to meet the Vision and Core Values and Objectives
- To procure systems in accordance with these principles
- The provision of accurate and timely management information

5. How Our IT Service is Delivered and Managed

5.1 The IT Service for Newark and Sherwood Homes is delivered in three ways:

- **Through our in house Systems and Quality Team by:**
  - Providing a help and support service for team members.
  - Training team members in key business systems such as the Complaints Compliments and Suggestions Scheme database.
  - Providing onsite support where required.
  - Consulting operation teams in developing new IT projects.
  - Project managing new system implementations such as IBS.
  - Supporting and testing upgrades.
  - Writing and publishing reports.
  - Extracting data for operational requirements.

- **Through our IT Service Level Agreement with Newark & Sherwood District Council's ICT service by:**
  - Providing a help desk service for team members.
  - Providing network connections to all sites.
  - Managing our servers.
  - Managing CITRIX software.

- Managing Financials software.
- Providing and supporting hardware including telephony.
- Supporting and assisting in projects involving new hardware.

- **Through Contracts with Third Party Suppliers.**

  - Providing our key operations systems such as Simdell, IBS, Keystone, Blackbay, Optitime, TP Tracker and Vizual Personnel Manager.
  - Providing and developing our internet site.

5.2 **We manage our IT service by:**

- Benchmarking satisfaction levels and training requirements by surveying our service users.
- Using Housemark data.
- Quarterly minuted meetings with Newark & Sherwood District Council to discuss the performance of our Service Level Agreements.
  - We will manage the Service Level Agreement costs and service provision quality at these meetings.
- By reviewing the Service Level Contract with Newark & Sherwood District Council to ensure that it represents value for money.

6. Business Systems

Integrated Housing Management System

6.1 The main business system currently utilised by operational teams is the Integrated Housing Management System provided by Aareon's TSHE product.

6.2 The TSHE system is supplemented by additional software procured in an ad-hoc manner by Newark and Sherwood Homes and previously by Newark & Sherwood District Council. This includes SMB (Stores), Lifespan (Stock Condition), Optitime (Work Scheduling), TP Tracker (Tenant Participation) to meet the operational requirements of the service providers. In addition operational teams employ a wide array of spreadsheet, databases and manual systems to support the day to day operations of the Company.

6.3 In December 2008, following a rigorous assessment and valuation process, Newark and Sherwood Homes entered into a contract with International Business Systems (IBS) to provide and implement the Open Housing and Open Contractor Products.

6.4 Open Housing and Open Contractor will not only replace TSHE but also the multitude of other systems and databases. This will create a truly integrated system for operational usage, data storage and the provision of management information and reporting. Open Housing will also be fully interfaced with systems which it will not replace; the Keystone Asset

Management System, Cedar E-Financials and the work scheduling and mobile working solutions.

Asset Management Systems

6.5 The Keystone Asset Management System was procured in the Summer of 2008 following a market test of the lead asset management systems.

6.6 Once fully implemented in the Autumn of 2009 the Keystone Asset Management System will contain detail on all properties managed by Newark and Sherwood Homes in relation to; Stock Condition, Life Cycle Planning, Decent Homes Programme and Programme and Financial Planning.

6.7 This system will be enhanced through the inclusion of live data from the 20% sample stock condition survey undertaken in the Summer of 2009 and continually updated using live data.

Microsoft Office Suite

6.8 All new desktop PCs have the Microsoft office suite of Office 2007 programs including Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access and Microsoft Word, Microsoft Powerpoint and Desk Top Publisher.

6.9 As with all modern software the IBS Open Housing System can merge and export data to programs in the Microsoft office suite.

7. Business Influencers

7.1 A number of business influencers are apparent which contributed to the formulation of this Strategy.

7.2 The Company operates in a continually changing environment and therefore requires the ability to adapt and embrace new technologies and services in order to achieve excellence in service provision. The environment is determined by a number of factors which include the requirement and expectation to deliver e-government, e-solutions and e-service initiatives as demanded for example by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) Standards best practice and both internal and external customers expectations. The TSA standards identify effective use of IT in delivering service objectives and improvements, achieving efficiencies in operations and provision of management information as part of an integrated approach to improving access to services.

7.3 Paramount to the development of IT is the needs and requirements of both staff and customers alike, not just now but also in the future as expectations and aspirations arise.

7.4 It is important that IT development is considered in context with resources

required not just in budgetary terms, but also staff and the potential impact upon day to day service delivery. Management of change and projects is therefore essential to the successful development of IT.

7.5 The strategic business requirements are set out in the Business Plan. Systems are needed to support the objectives of the business:

- To deliver upper quartile and improving performance in customer satisfaction and all areas of service provision.
- To deliver the Decent Homes Standard in accordance with the annual profile and for all NSDC stock by the end of March 2010.
- To be providing Housing Services within the community post 2010.
- To provide investment and service solutions to deliver sustainable Homes and sustainable Communities post 2013/2014.

7.6 The Diverse needs of the Company's customers are a key business influencer on the IT strategy. From comprehensive research undertaken Newark and Sherwood Homes is aware of the requirements which IT systems need to deliver to ensure that services delivered meet the requirements from each of the six strands of equality and diversity. This will include enhanced technological access by customers in addition to more effective systems utilised by staff to provide services to customers over the phone, in writing or face to face. Through consideration of this influencer Newark and Sherwood Homes will ensure that all customers have effective access to services regardless of their diversity.

7.7 A key driver in the achievement the Company's Vision and Objectives is the awareness of customers needs and wants so that wherever possible services can be tailored to meet the specific needs and wants of tenants. The Customer Insight Management Strategy relies heavily on the data from the Company's IT systems to allow accurate customer profiles to be developed which in turn will ensure the customers wants and needs are delivered.

7.8 The Company remains proactive in its continuous improvement journey and has attained quality processes such as ISO9001:2008, Customer Service Excellence Award and Investors in People. Progress towards and achievement of quality will require systems that stand up to scrutiny and support such processes. Like any good business the Company is working hard on continuous improvement initiatives and improved communication between staff, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders.

7.9 There is a need to continue to meet strict standards for compliance in the areas of Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Health and Safety and other technical legal requirements for example, the storage of safety certifications and the need to carry out and record inspections. This demands robust records management processes and systems. It also places demands on the storage and retention policies of paper records.

7.10 Infrastructure has a finite life. Demand increases over time and eventually

outgrows capacity or business changes render systems obsolescent or obsolete if they are not adapted over time. Technology becomes obsolete as spares or replacements become hard to source from manufacturers. New technologies are constantly emerging and evolving.

7.11 Growing expectations of roles in an organisation places greater reliance on having an IT infrastructure that is fit for purpose.

7.12 New 'channels' are continuing to open up for communication, in addition to SMS (text) messaging, web cams and camera phones. We now have social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and professional networking sites such as Linkedin. Mobile solutions are becoming more prevalent supporting the need for staff to become more customer facing and to reduce dependency on traditional location-based working methods.

7.13 Network technology is converging which means that increasingly voice, TV and data can all be channeled through the same network infrastructure. Hand held technology is also converging with any combination of: PC type software (email, diary, spreadsheet, word processor, etc.), phone, camera, music and video player, location and positioning software, etc. all being combined into a single device, e.g. the Blackberry or PDA.

7.14 Open Source (free) software is becoming prevalent in the IT industry which potentially may reduce software costs for the Company in the future, however, this approach would need to be treated with caution due to the implications on existing systems.

7.15 The Internet has revolutionised the way businesses operate and the way customers and suppliers expect to be able to interact. Customers expect to be able to buy goods and services such as book appointments and apply for jobs on-line.

7.16 The Government is demanding that authorities become 'e-Enabled', i.e. that they do business and communicate with their clients over the Internet. Software has been developed that make the creation and maintenance of websites relatively simple for users. New web standards enable business transactions to take place between websites from different organizations by using standard data and message structures.

7.17 As a Company's IT systems are fundamental to the support of the business so are the people that operate them. Skills have to match the expectations of job roles and as staff are replaced or move roles these skills have to be maintained in the organisation.

7.18 The Company will continue to be proactive in its search for new IT products which enable it to improve its service to tenants and be more cost efficient. A number of products have been identified already as having potential benefits in this way which require further evaluation.

7.19 In considering all the data from current and future provision in addition to

the business drivers and best practice, gaps and emergent priorities were identified.

8. Data to Support the Strategy

8.1 Newark and Sherwood Homes recognises the value and importance of involvement to shape the services it provides. This best practice approach is inherent within our service planning and delivery mechanisms. In compiling this Strategy, numerous external sources and examples of best practice have been considered, these included:

1) Government guidance and standards:

- The e-Government Unit which requires services enabled by IT to be standardised and simplified with design taking account of customer needs
- E-Gif which sets standards for governing electronic information flows in the public sector
- Project Nomad promoting wireless connectivity
- Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA)
- National e-Service Delivery Standards (NeSDS) standards for e-delivery: in particular Housing eService Delivery Standard and IT Services eService Delivery Standards
- Office of Government Commerce
- Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry

2) IT industry Best Practice:

- Supplier consultation and product information compliance with
- Software quality and Accreditation Standards
- Industry Standards and Practices, e.g. Information Technology Information Library or ITIL for service management
- Security through BS7799 for IT
- IT technology "white papers"
- Website Accessibility Standards as detailed in W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

3) Examples of strategy documents from other ALMO's, housing and Local Government organisations.

4) Examples of best practice from other ALMO's and housing organisations. For example IT initiatives as listed on Housemark and Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) best practice websites.

9. Options and Analysis

9.1 The Improvement Planning Process and subsequently the Business Plan has identified Information Technology as a key driver in delivering service to customers which are e-enabled and integrated in line with current business influencers. In addition IT represents a major opportunity to shape the future structure and size of the Company through the flexibilities and efficiencies technological solutions can provide.

9.2 The options analysed have been split into 2 categories for the purposes of this strategy; those already considered and being implemented and those to be considered for future implementation.

9.3 ***Options Already Considered***

9.3.1 The replacement of the TSHE Housing Management System with the IBS Open Housing and Open Contractor products has safeguarded the Company's primary business system but has also provided many opportunities. The adoption of IBS will create a primary database for Newark and Sherwood Home's people, property and tenant data. This will have a primary benefit in the immediate availability of data for front line service deliverers to respond to customers but will also have a number of key secondary benefits:

- Enhanced Reporting – Through the collation of data in a single database and the adoption of a more powerful reporting tool embedded in the IBS product the reporting ability and capacity of the Company will be improved. This enhanced reporting also represents an efficiency as reports will be written once and scheduled for future production rather than the current cumbersome manual data collection.

- Customer Profiling – The enhanced reporting capability and single data store will enable the further development of customer profiling in line with the Customer Insight Management Strategy.

- Equality and Diversity Reporting – Through linked data and reporting an increased capability for Equality and Diversity Reporting will enable Key Performance Indicators to be reported by each of the Equality and Diversity strands.

- Geographical Reporting – Through linked data in a central database and an enhanced reporting tool the ability to present data in a geographical context will be enhanced. This will be a true Geographical Information System but will not have the pictorial display capacity of some tools in the first instance.

9.3.2 The vast majority of staff within the Company now use I.T. and specific systems to fulfill their jobs roles. I.T. skills are embedded in job roles

and users will require appropriate training to ensure they make the most effective use of the systems available. I.T. training, as any other training, is a personal journey and each individual member of staff will be supported on this journey by the Company's well established training and development mechanisms. In addition, for the new systems being adopted by the Company a network of Super Users is being established to train and support staff through the implementation and beyond.

9.4 ***Options to be Considered***

9.4.1 The Company, as part of its 2008 Key Task to Option Appraise both Office Accommodation and Service Delivery points has identified a number of actions which require investigation and possible implementation to ensure that the future requirements of tenants, customers and the business are met.

9.4.2 There is a need to enhance the electronic storage of documents to gain efficiencies and also to ensure the effective availability of information for all service users. Options include a full Electronic Document Management and Records System (EDRMS) or systems associated to the Integrated Housing Management System.

9.4.3 The introduction of hot desking will require an I.T. infrastructure that supports this method of working through accessibility and security protocols which permit multi-user and multi image P.C.s.

9.4.4 The provision of mobile working is already underway for the Responsive Repairs Service and there is a view that this will be extended to other customer facing elements of the business. Mobile working means that front line service providers have the ability to access systems, whilst dealing with the customer, or at any location, enabling more efficient provision of information and therefore providing a more efficient service to customers. The options currently utilised are Personal Digital Assistants (P.D.A.'s) and Blackberry devices although other solutions may also be adopted all having connectivity to back office systems such as IBS.

9.4.5 The availability of the option of home working and home based staff will also become increasingly relevant in the future as this represents an efficient mode of working. The feasibility of increased home working is dependent upon the network infrastructure and the compatibility of software.

9.4.6 Business Process driven workflows are now accepted as good practice when processing information and delivering both internal and external customer outcomes. The implementation of the IBS will present Newark and Sherwood Homes with the option to build workflows associated to any of the key business processes managed within the system.

9.4.7 Building on the provision of performance information and specifically

geographical reporting provided through the IBS systems the Company may wish to further develop its geographical reporting to include data layering and customer profile information. In addition such a solution would look to incorporate community information such as that collated as part of the suite of National indicators for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

9.4.8 In addition to the more traditional technological methods of communicating with customers such as telephone, text, emails, social networking websites now provide a fashionable way to communicate with a self nominated interested element of the customer base. Options for harnessing this group of the customer base include facilities such as Facebook, Bebo and Twitter although given the selective nature of this communication it could only be in addition to established communication mechanisms.

9.4.9 The telephony systems utilised by the Company and subject to review by the provider of our I.T. infrastructure, Newark and Sherwood District Council. As an active participant in this review Newark and Sherwood Homes will ensure that any future telephony solution meets the business needs of the Company inclusive of supporting our plans for increased home working and hot desking.

9.4.10 Telephony in addition to web conferencing and video conferencing, can support the option of virtual meeting and conferencing. This option is both time and cost efficient as it negates the need to travel to and from meetings. Options for virtual meetings include telephone conferencing, video conferencing and web conferencing all of which require the appropriate hardware and software solutions to be in place.

9.4.11 The heightened requirement to access services over the internet is an issue which requires evaluation. One option is to look to further develop the current internet site to give further access to services and information. This development of IBS modules which could be accessed via the internet using a web portal. This option can realise significant benefits in terms of customer accessibility and in the cost effective delivery of services.

9.4.12 Similarly for staff the availability of accurate and up to date information is an issue to be addressed to build on the success of the Business Management System. The development of an intranet site is one option which could be combined with initiatives such as the development of workflow and EDRMS to provide integrated availability to processes and data.

10. Priorities

10.1 The following emergent priorities have been identified through the development of this strategy which includes consideration of good practice within and outside the ALMO and Housing Sectors, consultation with customers and other stakeholders, examination of the outputs of specific key tasks and the outputs of the Company's Improvement Planning Process.

10.2 These priorities have been identified and considered in the context of the delivery of the Company's Vision, Objectives, Priorities and Core Values.

- To ensure the effective and efficient use of technological, financial and human resources
- To utilise technological solutions to satisfy the future requirements of tenants and other customers
- To utilise technological solutions to meet the business requirements of the Company
- To build the capacity of staff and customer users through the development of appropriate skill sets
- To ensure a consistent standard of procurement, maintenance and delivery of IT across the Company
- To increase access to services and satisfaction with access to services by customers
- To ensure data is accurate, accessible, singular and secure

11. Actions

11.1 The specific actions to deliver the priorities identified within this strategy will be contained within the Company's Service Improvement plan as Corporate Key Tasks and will be monitored through the Performance Management Framework to ensure the delivery of outputs and outcomes within the prescribed timescales.

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