

A little bit about Your Homes Newcastle

Your Homes Newcastle manages 29,000 council homes for Newcastle City Council's tenants. Its mission statement is to be the best housing association in the North East and continue to provide 3 star excellent services. Your Homes Newcastle is the only social housing organisation in the North East to have achieved this rating from the Audit Commission.

Your Homes Newcastle – Pushing Boundaries

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) is dedicated to continuous improvement and wanted to extend the service it provides to tenants by giving them the ability to access and understand their own rent accounts online.

Like any top performing Management Organisation, YHN wanted an extremely price competitive system that was highly secure, robust, easy and fast to implement, with minimal impact on the existing IT infrastructure. Additionally, it had to be user friendly and be seamlessly linked to their existing corporate website. YHN chose Housing Rents Online from Gandlake.

Immediate Benefit for Tenants

Housing Rents Online enabled tenants with internet access to log on and examine their rent charges, levels of housing benefit, benefit overpayments, payments made by themselves and any money they owe to YHN. These queries can be made from the comfort of their own home at any time of the day or night without being restricted to regular office hours.

This means they no longer have to wait until their local housing office opens or spend time on the phone waiting to speak to a member of staff. Tenants will even be able to choose to view their Rent Statements, Rent Cards & Rent Increase Notification Letters in PDF format via the same web portal.

Gandlake's Housing Rents Online also includes a web based user guide that helps to reduce calls and face-to-face enquiries from tenants even further. Plus YHN is now free to include additional services meaning tenants can access any other linked accounts such as outstanding debt from previous tenancies, benefit overpayments or court costs.

Benefits

- Additional fast and easy channel of communication for tenants
- Online statements mirror original paper version
- Improved tenant service
- Better tenant experience
- Reduced number of calls to Local Housing Office
- Reduced face-to-face enquiries
- 120,000 rent statements automated per year
- Paper, staff and cost savings
- Reduced carbon footprint



YHN Director of Finance and Resources Ross Atkinson

Gandlake's Housing Rents Online aims to make it simpler for tenants to keep track of their rent by offering a secure area on our website which allows them to view details of their account online. This will ultimately enable YHN to make some paper, staff and cost savings as well as improving customers' overall online experience.



Immediate Benefit for YHN

Housing Rents Online immediately relieved the pressure on the Front Line Staff at the Local Housing Office. Granting secure online access to tenants to view and interrogate their own personal accounts meant tenants could answer their own queries and therefore were less likely to contact their Tenancy Service Officer. This gives staff at the Local Housing Office more time to deal with more complex queries.

Cost Saving

Looking forward to phase 2, YHN is anticipating significant cost savings as more and more tenants start to use more services. These cost savings will be in the form of print and postage as tenants become comfortable using the online channel and move away from paper based communication. YHN sends out around 200,000 sheets of paper to tenants every year. Encouraging them to view account information online rather than paper not only means lower costs for YHN but also an overall reduction in its carbon footprint.

Keeping the look and feel

Through extensive research and consultation YHN found that tenants were happy with the existing format of the paper statements and would like the look and branding carried across to the online version. This would avoid confusing the tenants and make sure additional calls to the Local Housing Office would be kept to a minimum.

So is it proving popular?

More than 300 tenants signed up in the first month of going live. They have now had over 850 registrations and more than 6700 logins. This bodes well for the realisation of the project's business case.

What does the future hold?

Over the coming months, YHN hopes to provide email and text message to direct tenants to the online rent section of the website when there is new information for them to view, and expand the system so that staff can view the information as it appears on the tenants' computer screen.



**Ross Atkinson, Director of Finance and Resources,
Your Homes Newcastle**

We were really pleased with Gandlake making the online statements look exactly the same as the paper version our tenants were familiar with. This was a vital part of the overall project

