

Housing & Property Services

# Data Strategy

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## OUR VISION

To know all our customers well enough to be able to deliver our services in a way that meets their needs.

To be able to use the information we have on our assets to inform our investment programme to the benefit of all.

## OUR AIM

To be accountable to you.

By 2027 Housing and Property Services will work collaboratively to implement this Data Strategy to maximise the capture and value of data, which will innovate our practices to meet customer's, colleagues, and the Regulator for Social Housing expectations.

## OUR PURPOSE

To ensure data is captured, maintained, and used in accordance with relevant legislative and contractual requirements.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Information and data are critical to every part of the Council's business. Our success is reliant on having clear reasoning and processes for our data management to ensure:
- knowing our customers and properties,
  - having data that is accurate and available for officers, contractors, and customers
  - to be able to access information to fulfil objectives, deliver improved services and increase our communication with our customers
  - while managing and protecting the data appropriately to ensure we comply with General Data Protection Regulations.
- 1.2 Key themes in this strategy are around information governance, asset ownership and responsibilities. We need to demonstrate that information is the responsibility of all officers. Housing and Property Services will commit to using data to its fullest potential by effective and timely information and data management. By becoming data driven in its decision making and making best use of the data to fulfil the key business objectives to create a clear understanding and knowledge by promoting a comprehensive and purposeful approach to data usage. This will ensure data is maintained and kept up to date.
- 1.3 We recognise it is a long-term commitment, changing the way we think about data by valuing it as a corporate asset and vital insight tool rather than a by-product of service delivery. Therefore, this Strategy sets out our approach to using data ethically, responsibly, and safely. It is designed to be action focussed to enable the best use of data and insight in helping to achieve our objectives and improve outcomes. It outlines the relationship between data and the context in which we operate, defines our overarching data-goals, and establishes our standards to support and coordinate their delivery. Our commitment includes investment in technology and prioritises upskilling our staff, but this is a culture change strategy, the focus is on our customers. In delivering this strategy we will be changing habits. There may be uncertainty and challenges around doing things differently whilst still complying with legislation and regulations but through a consistent and joined-up approach, which focusses on achieving a wide range of benefits for all stakeholders, we will work collaboratively and with common purpose to realise our vision.
- 1.4 The Strategy sets out our approach to managing our information and responding to challenges set out by our customers, the Regulator for Social Housing, the Housing Ombudsman and our colleagues. Embracing a move towards greater openness and collaboration with our contractors and customers.

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1 NEC Housing

NEC Housing is a comprehensive, flexible housing IT management system on one platform, providing a 360 view of customers and assets to enhance the ways of working.

### 2.2 Customer

For this strategy, the customer refers to the tenants and other household members living in the property.

### 2.3 Housing Regulator

The Housing Regulator of Social Housing sets consumer and economic standards for social housing providers and can act if these are breached.

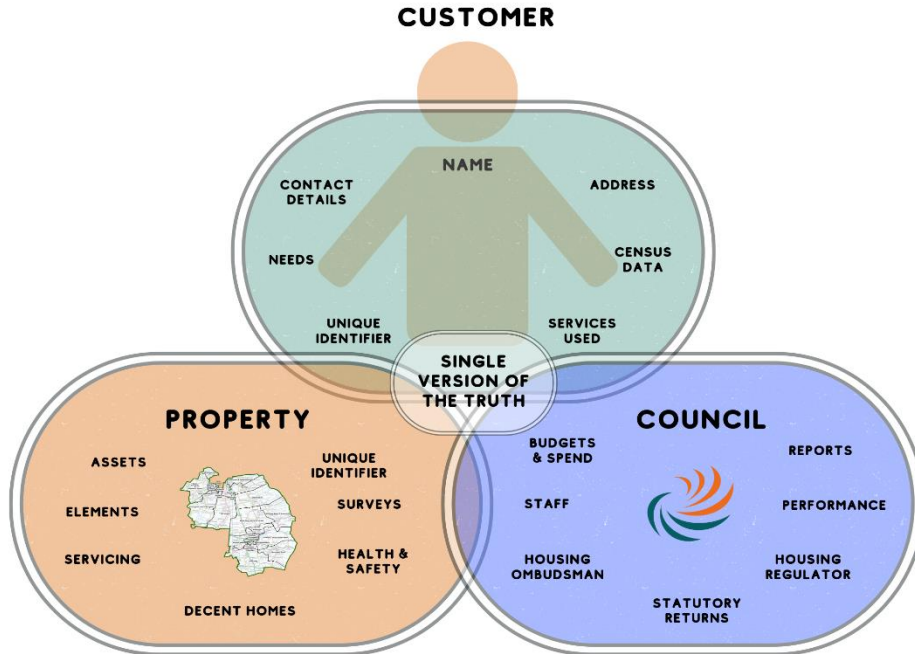
### 2.4 Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman Service is an independent, impartial, and free service for social housing residents. The Housing Ombudsman Service looks at complaints and the outcome of investigations which may include remedies, orders, and recommendations based on the case findings which can require the landlord to improve their service if necessary.

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Across Housing and Property Services, we use data in our daily working lives as we work to achieve our objectives. We recognise the importance of data for our organisation and will embark on a journey to increase our understanding of how to best use data to achieve our strategic goals and needs.
- 3.2 The Regulator for Social Housing expects social landlords to understand and respond to the diverse needs of customers and to know our properties, without accurate data there is a potential risk to the authority. Poor data quality also creates missed opportunities (e.g. with respect to supporting customers). We are less effective than we otherwise could be, as we find ourselves prevented from using existing data to its full capacity and from taking advantage of exploiting new data.
- 3.3 Over the coming months managers need to ensure that officers follow the correct principles in storing data on the NEC Housing Document Management System, to assist all housing and property officers with their day-to-day duties and destroy old information that is no longer relevant in line with General Data Protection Regulations. This will significantly advance our awareness of data issues and build strong foundations for information management and governance and improve our data capability. However, we are already aware of the many issues that we currently have with our data which persist due to the legacy of old technologies and ways of working e.g. user shares and shared drives where data is held instead of being on the Housing and Property Document Management System for everyone to view.
- 3.4 Single Version of the Truth - If information about both the customer and the property can be viewed together within one housing management system, you can use that to understand and segment the customer base better to make sure communication is focused, captured, and personal.
- 3.5 The Regulator for Social Housing wants housing providers to work with their customers to collect the information they need and clearly explain how it will be used to improve their homes and services. This is why a Data Strategy is vital to the service, setting out where the data will be held, why it is being captured and who will have access to it.
- 3.6 Customers want to know their data is held securely and that the information will be used to treat them fairly and equally. Protocols should be agreed as part of an overall Data Strategy to ensure the right people have access to the right data, at the right time. This will not only help to target resources to improve support for customers but will also avoid erroneous information inadvertently being used to disadvantage the customer.

# SINGLE VERSION OF THE TRUTH





## 4. OUR ICT SYSTEMS

- 4.1 Housing are in the process of introducing NEC Housing Document Management System. This system is a browser-based document management system that provides a single, flexible, reliable repository for all documents and files. It delivers an architecture that is integrated with departmental systems to deliver efficiencies through sharing of information, collaborative working, reduction in duplication and data accuracy. The system delivers a fully integrated, end to end document management solution that will enable both controlled information management and service improvement by making documents universally accessible and managing their processing through a suite of powerful workflow tools within NEC Housing.
- 4.2 Many areas within NEC Housing need significant improvement, additional modules need implementing to reduce the use of having various standalone systems like Oneserve (Repairs) and the Strategic Asset Management system where asset information data is kept separately. Therefore, there is a requirement to streamline systems and bring everything onto one platform “NEC Housing” to enable all data to be held in one place for easy access for officers, and to reduce the risk of non-compliance with health and safety, and not meeting the Housing Regulators requirements. At times, the poor quality of data on collection creates unnecessary challenges and problems throughout its lifecycle, inconsistent, incomplete, and duplicated records. This reduces the use of data as people do not trust it, which translates into higher costs of data processing and more effort being needed for data collection and management.
- 4.3 Teams dealing with data are also fragmented and not necessarily communicating and sharing efficiently. Clarity over which tools should be used also contributes to the inefficient use of data and information. It is important to recognise that the work described in the Data Strategy will need to be undertaken in alignment and in collaboration with the Corporate ICT Strategy. It must identify its needs and goals, focus minds on outcomes if it wishes to achieve using data and provide clear guidance. Data principles and ownership of managers needs to be agreed to inform priorities and decisions taken around actions and ICT plans. The Data Strategy needs to reiterate commitments, re-state goals and map out a clear path and action plan to achievement.
- 4.4 The implementation of this Data Strategy will help everyone to understand the value of data and their part in making the Council data driven, making them more aware about the accuracy, value of data and enriching their own work.

- 4.5 All staff are responsible for: managing and protecting the council's information assets that they handle: engaging with training, and applying learning; following policies and procedures, ensuring accuracy, recognising and reporting breaches of data protection.
- 4.6 Staff should ensure devices are turned on for a minimum specified time and duration, to ensure all IT security policies, audits, operating system and application updates are maintained.
- 4.7 The delivery of this Strategy will be the responsibility of the Housing Systems and Business Manager in partnership with key data owners, Housing Services Manager and Property Services Manager.

## 5 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 There are many areas within Housing and Property Services which can be improved. Where poor data is collected, we start from a low baseline, and this persists through the data and information lifecycle. As a result, officers do not trust the data they are given, and more effort is put into data collection and management of the data. Value is then lost, data does not yield much return on investment, and does not provide accurate business intelligence. We are not aligned with good practice and are therefore at risk of regulatory enforcement.
- 5.2 We hold thousands of records that have accumulated over time and are not easy to search for or find. Some documents are held within our current Documotive central filing system, other data is kept within Technical and Housing shared drives, and some are saved on officer's user shares. As a result, staff may have little knowledge about what useful data is held by other teams. In other cases, the existence of the data is known, but is too hard to use as records are in different forms. Common quality issues include:
- Multiple IT systems with different data
  - Some of the records are still paper based.
  - Some records are digitalised, but are hard to find limiting their usefulness.
  - Data is recorded inconsistently both in format and location.
  - Not all records about the same person or thing have a common unique identifier.
  - Lack of standardised naming conventions for records and files
  - Data can be inaccurate – misspelt, misnumbered or out of date
  - Some records are unknowingly duplicated.
  - Colleagues have varying degrees of confidence in gathering, maintaining, accessing and updating data.
  - Data has no retention policies assigned to it.
- 5.3 The above individually and collectively present a risk when trying to support our customers, deliver services, respond to Freedom of Information and/or Subject Access Records. It prevents us from utilising existing data to its full potential and as a result we are less effective than we otherwise could be. There are also lost opportunities from inefficient recording and transmission and use of data. Data is often handled manually; automation would save time and money.

## 6 ACHIEVING OUR VISION

*To know all our customers well enough to be able to deliver our services in a way that meets their needs. To be able to use the information we have on our assets to inform our investment programme to the benefit of all.*

### 6.1 Themes, Culture, Technology and Skills

#### 6.1.2 Themes

The Data Strategy sets out our approach for achieving this through three overlapping themes, each with an overarching data-goal:

#### 6.1.3 Culture

- We will develop a culture that recognises and promotes the value of data in everything we do.
- We will build on existing arrangements and develop innovative approaches.

DATA QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS
1. <b>Accuracy:</b> data is accurate when it reflects reality – the correct and current name uprn address is needed for accurate reporting and confident decision making.
2. <b>Completeness:</b> a data set is complete when all the data required for its use is present. This means defining what data is required for completeness and what is optional.
3. <b>Uniqueness:</b> data is unique if it appears only once in a database. A record can be a duplicate even if it has some fields that are different. e.g., the same customer surname Mr R Smith and Mr Robert Smith
4. <b>Consistency:</b> consistency is achieved when data values do not conflict with other values within a record or across difference data sets
5. <b>Validity:</b> validity is defined as the extent to which the data confirms to the expected format, type and range. E.g., an email address must have @

### 6.1.4 Technology

Ensure consistent, joined-up and best use of data tools, technologies and approaches across the service. Technology plays a key role at each stage of the data cycle, from defining how data is created and captured (e.g. mandatory fields in online forms and NEC Housing), to ensure it is safely destroyed in accordance with regulations and retention periods. The ICT Plan for this Strategy includes technology themed actions that drive improvements in line with the data lifecycle and to inform long term plans to rationalise the number of IT systems currently in use, drive efficiencies and enable a single version of the truth by prioritising systems that support customers' needs and high-quality data. This will include reducing the amount of data created and storage of paper files and spreadsheets, and deletion of old records increasing the opportunities for customers to self-serve.

### 6.1.5 Skills

Enable and empower all colleagues with the skills and confidence needed to maximise the value of data in the capacity of their role to the improvement of our services.

## Knowing Our Customers

Registered providers are expected to have robust information about their customers and keep this information up to date to understand their diverse needs, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, communication needs and additional support requirements. The last major census that was undertaken within the Housing and Property Service was back in 2011. Since that date we have maintained all demographic disability and some vulnerability information. As part of our Housing and Property ICT Plan (Appendix 2) our focus for 2024/25 is to undertake a new census that focuses on vulnerabilities and our communication needs to individualise our service delivery wherever possible. Currently, this information is collected and recorded on Abris at first point of contact when a customer approaches the Council to apply for housing, and is then transferred onto NEC Housing system so all landlord services within housing can adhere and comply with the regulations. It should be integral to the culture of the organisation.

Examples of how we can ensure fair access to our landlord services may include, investigating complaints of alleged discrimination from customers promptly and implementing any relevant learning, providing regular equality, diversity and inclusion training for staff, and carrying out work to understand the barriers different groups of customers might face in accessing services and working to remove those barriers.

In 2024 we will be implementing NEC Customer Relations Management (CRM) system this is an integrated module within NEC Housing, which will enable Housing and Property to have a comprehensive, single view of our customers. This system is a comprehensive picture of every customer and their interaction with our organisation. It will enable improved, consistent customer engagement and the ability to record new communications, guiding users through a scripted process that is routed depending on the responses given.

If our customer prefers to communicate via social media, NEC Housing CRM also provides the ability to view and respond to Facebook posts and Tweets, all within NEC Housing.

It makes customer communications more consistent. It will streamline processes to make sure needs are met and actions get resolved in a timely manner.

### 6.3 Knowing Our Homes

As part of the current Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, we shall ensure that customers' homes meet the standard set out in section five of the Governments Decent Homes Guidance and NK Homes Standard and continue to maintain their homes to at least these standards.

North Kesteven must have accurate, up to date and evidenced understanding of the condition of our homes that reliably informs our provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for our customers. We need to hold data/records on stock condition surveys and ensure the following: -

- Compliance with Health and Safety Legal Regulations.
- Compliant with the Decent Homes Standard and NK Homes Standard.
- Delivery of repairs, maintenance, and planned improvements to our stock.
- Allocating homes with adaptations appropriately.

All the above relies on data, this is why streamlining of IT systems within our service is crucial. The Strategic Asset Management (SAM) system which was a standalone product has now been replaced with NEC Asset Management which integrates fully with our current NEC Housing system and allows us to work in an agile environment using tablets to data load stock condition surveys of our properties in real time, saving on officers' time in keying information and reducing errors. This system will interface with NEC Repairs and Maintenance, Risk Management to monitor health and safety and asbestos so all information is held and captured in one place. Decent Homes reports will be generated from this information.

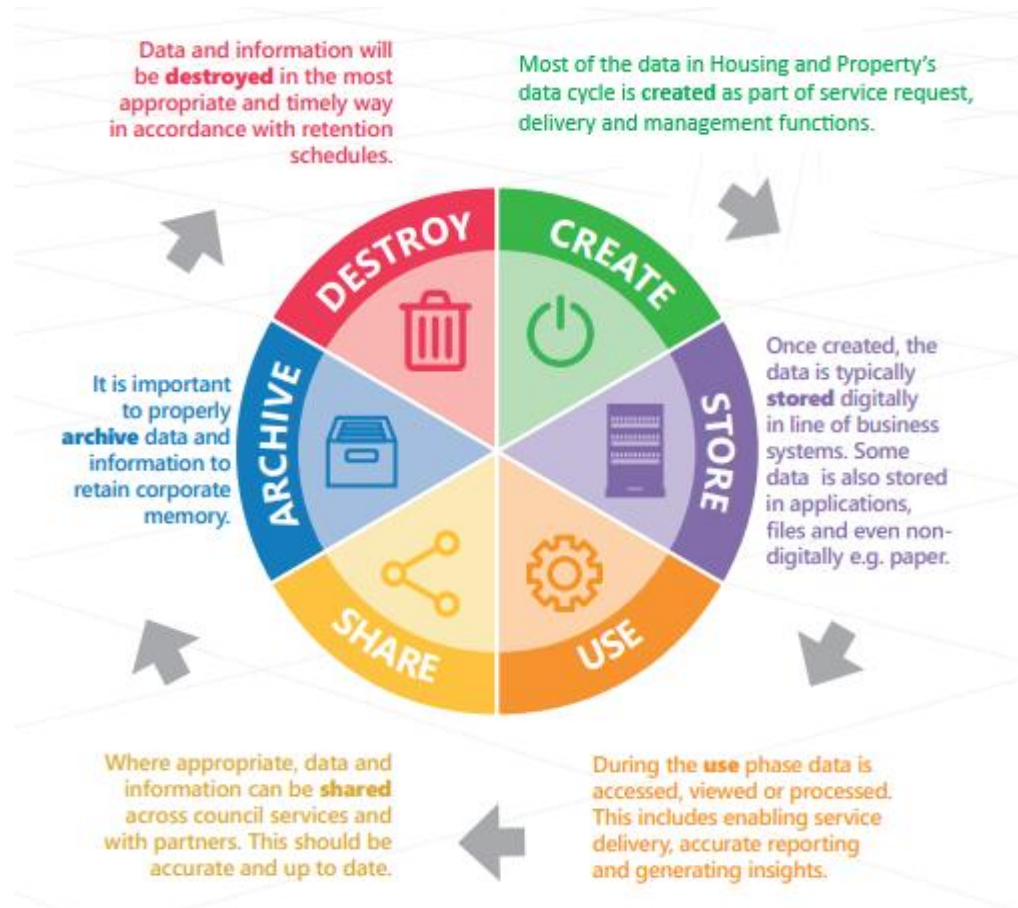
## 6.4 Action Plan

- Reduce the usage of standalone systems, and use one platform NEC Housing for records, services, and document management.
- Empower all officers to be responsible for data management, recognising the importance of having accurate and accessible data to assist them and others, through training and support to deliver clear set out expectations
- Through introducing NEC Housing Online, our customers will be able to access and maintain their own data, with ability to view their service requests, progress and outcomes.
- Undertake a census to capture key information to understand who our customers are, their vulnerabilities and communication needs and preferences.
- Recognise and support those not digitally enabled.
- Adopt a “tell us once” approach for when Customers inform us of a change of circumstances, to avoid call backs from customers and repeating the changes.
- Clear and comprehensive procedures on document management for ease of maintenance and reference.
- To deliver the HPS 2024 - 2027 ICT Plan. Producing a year-by-year implementation project plan to be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, within the resources and timescales set out in Appendix 2.
- Introduce e-learning on NEC Housing, to improvement compliance.
- To value customer data and protect it, so that data breaches are extremely rare.
- Ensure continued compliance with the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing on the various elements within the standards that relate to data management.
- Ensure that data owners are identified and responsible.
- Build on our asset data to improve our ability to deliver and report on Decent Homes.
- To review data currently held in the Housing and Technical shared drives.

## 6.5 Data Lifecycle

Across the division we are delivering an array of different services and have responsibilities for how we legally store and use data. We are an aligned group of small services with a common public service ambition – to make North Kesteven better, this diversity is both an opportunity and a challenge.

Successful delivery of each service from allocating a property, collecting income, to repairing homes and complying with Health and Safety is underpinned by data. Every decision made, by every member of staff, in every department is based on understanding of data. Every action produces data with facts or information about a particular subject or transaction that is used to improve the service. To become a high performing service, we need to maximise the value of data to innovate, improve services and deliver better outcomes for North Kesteven, we need to ensure that the best data is available, understood and used in all decision making.





## 6.6 Data Foundations

The true value of data can only be fully realised when it is fit for purpose, recorded in standardised formats on modern, future proof systems and held in a condition that means it is findable, accessible, and reusable. By improving the quality of data, we can use it more effectively, and drive better insights and outcomes from its use.

- We will reduce delays and duplication through the reduction in disparate data systems to consolidate a single version of the truth. Improving quality through application of consistent procedures, improve appropriate data sharing across the organisation.
- We will be consistent in the way we hold and record data within systems to improve data quality.
- We will increase our ability to share data internally within the sections.
- We will hold central records that are easily accessible that show what data exists within our services for example a master data management solution. The Housing Asset Register holds some of the information required.
- We will have a strong functional structure and clear division of responsibilities for the varied teams that control and process data.

## 6.7 Our Customers

A key requirement in the proposed new consumer standards requires housing providers to act and ensure that all customers can access their services fairly and equally. NEC Housing Online will be introduced to assist customers with online capability, this will help to keep our census information up to date and contact details.

Customers will be able to access services at any time of the day, on any device, whether it is a tablet, phone or PC. The information is quick and easily available to customers. The system has many benefits, it reduces telephone enquiries, increases efficient savings, improves customer satisfaction and fully integrates with NEC Housing without the need for re-keying data or costly integration projects. This system will free up staff for dealing with more complex cases.

NEC Housing Online includes:

- Viewing rent account information, viewing statements.
- Completing a Pet Permissions or Permission for Works form.
- Making a general customer service enquiry.

## 6.8 Equality and Diversity

Housing and Property Services aim to create the best possible quality of life for all our customers who live within the district. North Kesteven District Council is an area of increasing diversity which brings positive benefits to us all. It is essential that we consider this diversity to ensure everyone has equal chances to live, work, learn and feel part of a community free from prejudice, discrimination, and harassment. Our aim is to improve customers experience by delivering a more personalised, fair, and inclusive service. We will use the information we hold to identify where we need to intervene, adapt our services to do something different and to understand the potential impact of our policies.

North Kesteven District Council is committed to providing services which embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. As an employer, the Council is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity within its workforce. The Council will not tolerate any discrimination, directly or indirectly.

In addition to the above equality and diversity aim for Housing and Property Services, we also work to support the wider corporate function.

## 6.9 Regulatory Scrutiny and Customer Data

The importance of data and collecting as much good quality and accurate information about our customers is crucial. Understanding who the service users are, including everyone in the household and not just the lead customer, will be even more essential under the new legislation. For example; knowing what their first language is, if they have disabilities or health concerns, will help us make sure the customers have access to the right housing services as well as keeping their communications appropriate, relevant, and inclusive. We must ensure that fairness, courtesy and respect is given to our customers and be accountable to adapt services and communications to meet their individual needs.

## 6.10 Our Colleagues

All staff will complete the mandatory e-learning training in respect of NEC Housing and for staff to be clear on their responsibilities in relation to information management.

Staff to have the skills to use new technology, to maximise their potential and know where to store the various different types of information and which modules are best suited to manage that information. Officers will be given training they need to ensure they understand the value of data controls and their responsibility to provide accurate information in a timely manner. We will apply realistic retention dates to records and look at automation where possible to save on officer time.

We will enable staff to manage, use and share information and knowledge where possible and support the needs of the business and adapt to changing requirements.

## 6.11 Tools to Deliver

Over the last five years we have seen a huge change in technology and the way we work. Agile working has now been introduced therefore the Council needs to think smarter and streamline their processes to accommodate this change of working. We have implemented two new modules to NEC Housing “Assets Mobile” and “Housing Mobile” to assist Housing Officers and Asset Surveyors to carry out their day-to-day duties using the right tools to save on officer time, paper usage and to give a smarter service to our customers.

Our Housing and Property Systems Service desk will capture and record our hardware assets to monitor where equipment is stored/located in the office and for agile working. It will be an audit trail of when NEC releases need testing by officers, when reports are required for Housemark and Performance Indicators.

## 6.12 Key Challenges

- For customers and colleagues to embrace the intended changes within the service and budget availability at a challenging financial time.
- To meet our Aim by 2027 for Housing and Property Services to work collaboratively to implement the Data Strategy to maximise the capture and value of data, which will innovate our practices to meet customer's, colleagues, and the Regulator for Social Housing expectations.

## 7.0 Delivering Our Priorities

### 7.1 Data skills

We will improve our understanding of data and its quality, ensuring we comply with legislation, and have strong processes in place.

We will enhance our use of data by embedding NEC Housing Dashboards to provide immediate access to key performance outcome measures. These tools will offer the powerful ability to drill down into NEC Housing application to view and act on specific records that maybe causing issues. It will enable us to see trends in our data and easily dig deeper. This removes the need to create adhoc reports, saving time and ensuring decisions can be made quickly. It provides quick and easy access to key performance data in real time.

We will ensure staff fully understand the principles of data security and the legislation underpinning it. Staff are trained corporately and understand data collection and the accuracy to make the best use of data and to work more collaboratively, making best use of skills and knowledge.

### 7.2 Data Availability

We will ensure that the right data is available to the right people with the correct security measures in place. We will be open with our data, where possible to encourage sharing, collaboration working across our offices.

### 7.3 Responsible Data

We will ensure compliance is met with all relevant legislation and use the data efficiently and effectively to improve our service. Officers will be responsible for the data input to ensure this is accurate, clear, and work as a joined-up service to achieve the same outcomes.

## 7.0 Monitoring

This policy will be monitored every year against its aims and actions by the Housing Systems and Business Manager.

## 7.1 Consultation & Communication

Consultation has taken place with the Tenant Representative Group and Housing and Property Departmental Management Team.

The policy will be made available on the corporate website.

## 7.2 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years in response to changes in legislation or statutory instruments by the Housing Systems and Business Manager and submitted to Executive Board for approval. Any other minor amendments i.e. change to ICT Plan will not be submitted for approval, unless additional funding is required.



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