

Customer Portal Resident Involvement Report

May 2021

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Report Purpose

Southern Housing Group (the Group) provide residents with the option to register to the Group's Customer Portal. Residents can currently use this portal to pay their rent, report a repair and find details for their local repair contractor.

The IT Project Team are carrying out staged improvements to the Customer Portal this year and wanted to ensure residents were involved in helping them to shape improvements for the from the options available we have with the developer.

This report details the resident involvement journey for a focus group that took place on Tuesday 25 May 2021 6.30pm-7.30pm. In this focus group residents were presented with a demo of the portal, some planned enhancements and were asked to provide feedback on these. Residents also participated in two polls, results from these are included in this report.

Report Summary

1.1. In May 2021, 6 residents from the following tenures took part in a 1-hour demonstration of the portal demo and new enhancements.

All residents had previously provided feedback to the resident involvement team. For full information please see the consultation findings. We have provided a summary below.

1.2. Demonstration of the Customer Portal

Dashboard- payment, tenancy requests

Residents told us that they would like the following:

- a) Have the choice to store their card details for future payments. Please refer to the feedback to the recommendations provided within the [Customer portal resident involvement Project Summary Report March 2021](#).
- b) Use the portal to make payments without having any issues that makes the portal freeze.
- c) Be assured that their data is protected.
- d) Receive a confirmation email of any requests they make for changes to their tenancies. Residents would welcome this feature as it would help them keep track of requests and as prove of what they have sent to the group.

Report a repair

- a) The IT project team confirmed that they will investigate the option to add a FAQ section on the portal with information on contractors' homeowners could contact to deal with repairs in their homes.

1.3. New features

- a) Residents liked that they could view and make payments towards different accounts they hold with the group i.e. garage and home.

1.4. Other discussions

i. Poll 1

- a) Two residents said that based on the improvement made so far, they would be registering onto the new customer portal.
- b) Three said that that they were already registered.
- c) Residents also asked if they will be able to see itemized service charge statements through the Customer Portal.
- d) Can the portal provide residents with prompts and important messages on what is happening in their area or prompts on service charges or rent payments coming up?

ii. Poll 2

- a) All residents that attended told us that residents should be informed prior to logging in to the New Online Repair Service that some services are not available to residents.
- b) Shared owners asked if they could report repairs via the repair's portal. The IT project team said the customer portal is available for all tenures that pay a service charge. Where communal repairs are arranged by the Estate Management Agent (EMA) the portal cannot be used.

iii. Residents asked if the out of hours repairs number could be added in the Customer Portal.

iv. Residents also asked if they could use the Customer Portal to communicate with their home services manager and other teams

1.5. Feedback received outside of the focus group

- a) There should be further communication for front line staff as to when homeowners would benefit from using the customer portal.

Responses from the IT Project Team

- Payments are made by residents using an external service called Pay360. Once the Group are made aware by this service that a 'wallet' has been created to enable different card details to be stored, residents that have a Customer Portal account will be informed.

- The Customer Portal is not known to widely have problems with freezing. Problems may also be dependent on internet speeds or browsers in different areas. Please let us know if problems continue when using the portal.
- The Customer Portal's developer and Pay360 use secure pages for their services.
- The IT Project Team will explore the potential to add an FAQ section to the Portal.
- The IT Project Team will ask services if a reply can be sent to residents to confirm receipt of a residents' request via the portal.
- We are discussing with our Communications Team the potential to place information outside of the Customer Portal. This information would let Wates residents and Home Owners living in an External Managing Agent (EMA) area that the Groups' online repair service cannot be used by them.
- Prior to our next focus group, we are arranging to meet with residents and staff on a one-to-one basis to ensure our next piece of development explores frustrations in communicating with services that may be in part be resolved through the use of the Portal.

Consultation Themes

To understand the following:

- To show residents a demo of the customer portal and record feedback from users and non-users.
- To show residents new features currently available and tell them about the potential new features the IT team are looking at developing.
- To understand whether residents that attended were current users or if they would consider joining the portal.
- To understand whether residents wanted to be told about limits of using the portal because of their tenure.

Consultation Methodology.

Residents were invited via email and were allowed 2 weeks to respond. For this zoom focus group, we invited residents interested in testing a system and digital users. We also invited residents that had been involved with previous sessions for the Online Repair Service and the Customer Portal.

In line with standard research practice, and due to the numbers of residents involved, the findings of this review group cannot be viewed as providing representative feedback on the views of all the Group's residents. These results do provide an insight into the views and opinions of residents.

Respondent profile

6 residents took part.

Residents took part from the following locations

- 2** London
- 1** Surrey
- 1** Berkshire
- 1** Hampshire
- 1** Isle of Wight

The following tenures gave feedback

1 Leaseholder, **3** Shared Owners, **2** General Needs,

Consultation findings

We have outlined below the qualitative and quantitative feedback residents have provided

Residents fed back and asked the following after the IT team had presented the demo for the portal.

1. Dashboard- payment, tenancy requests

- **Can the portal store card details for future payments?**

The IT project team fed back that this feature is not currently available, but it is in the plans to add a “wallet” feature where residents can save card details.

- **A resident told us that he tried to log in and make a payment towards his rent, but the portal froze at the stage where he confirmed the payment and logged him out. He tried to log back on again, he experienced the same problem.**

The IT team asked the resident to share details of the time and date when he tried this. At the focus group the project team suspected that this might be an issue with capita who is the Group’s business processor for payments.

- **How secure and is the data held encrypted?** The project team explained that the Group holds the data within its system and that data is highly secured and protected when linking with other providers such as Active Housing.

- **If residents request for a change in their tenancy such as adding or removing an occupant will the resident get a confirmation email with the request made?**

The project team told residents that they will get a confirmation email that the request has been received but details of what was requested will not be included in this email. The team explained this is something that they are considering and will need a lot of thought. The team also explained that when their request is followed up- residents should be able to see their original request.

2. Report a repair

- **Residents asked if shared owners could use the online repairs service.**

The project team added that in essence a resident's tenure shouldn't influence whether they can use the service or not. If a resident pays service charges and has a communal area where services are provided by the group and its contractors residents should be able to raise a repair. Also, residents should note that the system should be able to distinguish between tenures and therefore let residents know whether they can report a repair or not.

- **One of the attendees also asked if the service would be able to recommend providers to residents that pay for their own repairs.**

The team explained that currently only tenants can call our service centre to arrange for paid minor repairs, but this is not an option for homeowners. They also added that they will consider adding this type of information under an FAQ section, this may be possible should it be internally agreed.

3. New Features

Resident's feedback on these features were as follows:

- **Residents will be able to select the account they would like to make a payment to.**

For example, some residents have a rents account for their home and a garage. All residents like this feature and did not have any further comments.

- **One resident asked, will the portal have information on out of hours numbers for emergency repairs?**

The team advised that they believe that when residents ring the usual number for repairs in their area, if the call is out of hours, their call should be transferred to the out of hours number.

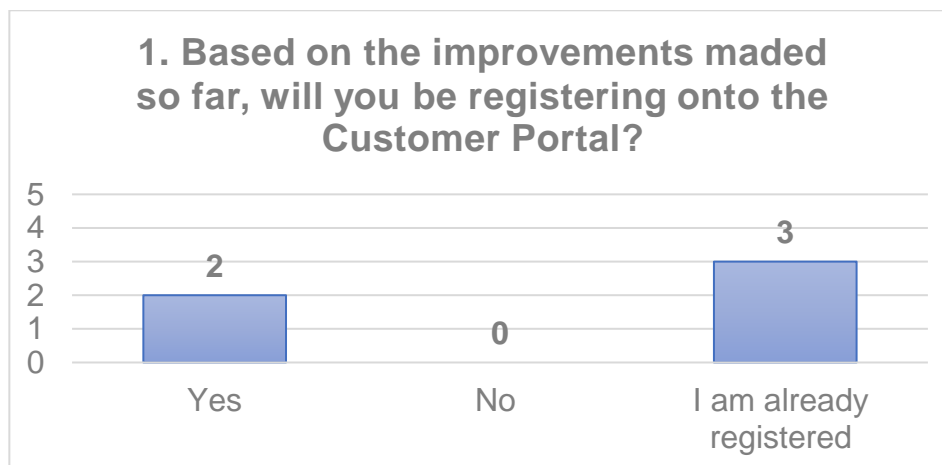
- **Resident asked what the relationship between the portal and Home services managers (HSM'S) was.**

Residents were advised that their HSM's role will not be impacted by the portal but will explore the option for residents to be able to communicate through the portal with them.

4. Other discussions

4.1. Poll 1

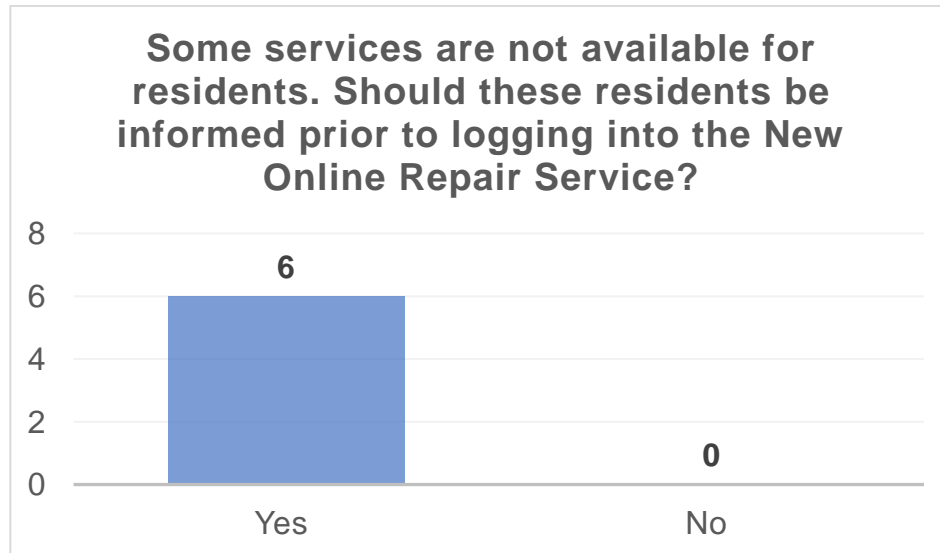
Please see below for results of the polls we asked residents to provide feedback for:
5 out of 6 attendees responded.



- Other questions asked by residents included whether the portal would provide itemized service charge statements?
- It was also discussed that there is potential for the portal to provide bulletins at the top of the dashboard page- this bulletin would be specific to the area where the resident lives. For example, if there are any planned works, lifts not working and any other notices and news that might be of interest to residents. This could also be used to remind residents of upcoming appointments as well as letting them know when their next service charges are due or if a resident's rent was going to increase.
- Residents also asked if the portal can be used as a way for them to access teams rather than going through the Service Centre as some felt that this delayed them getting a response.

4.2. Poll 2

6 out of 6 residents responded



5. Feedback received outside of the focus group

- 5.1. We received feedback from a resident that didn't attend the focus group. The resident told us that he did not attend because he had been informed by his HSM that his scheme would not be using the online repair service or the customer portal. This resident is a shared owner with an estate management agent.

The IT project team have told us that Shared Owners whose block repairs are managed by an External Management Agent (EMA), won't be able to raise a repair using either the Online Repairs Service or the Portal (which currently just links off to the Online Repairs Service). However, there are many other aspects of the Portal that a Shared Owner could use the portal for:

- View their charges, make payments, and generate high level statements.
 - Change their contact details automatically. Specify their preferred language.
 - Request to change their name / marital status.
 - Contact Service if they have any queries including accessing webchat between 9am – 5pm.
- 5.2. Going forwards, residents agreed that before they try to use any online service, they should be told what they can and can't do depending on their tenure. Residents also

agreed that it was important for all the Group's residents to be made aware of the customer portal and how it can be used depending on a resident's tenure.

- 5.3. Finally, other feedback we received outside of the focus group was from a resident that attended. He advised that he had encouraged one of his neighbours to sign up to the customer portal. Feedback on the portal was that the resident really like the design and the online repairs section. However, the repairs portal stated someone from United Living/DW will contact you within 48 hours to make the appointment. This did not happen and was made without a call. There was no option to reschedule the work. Therefore, defeating the purpose of using the portal.