



Aberdeen City Council – MyChoice Meals Ordering Service



About MyChoice

Aberdeen City Council has a long history of using technology enabled care to support people in their own homes. MyChoice is an example of how a relatively simple technological change can improve service delivery, by both reducing administration and freeing up staff time available to care.

The Council wanted to ensure that it was offering tenants the best possible meals service with a range of healthy and tasty options to choose from, while also creating a simpler, fairer and more cost-effective system. Tested in Coronation Court, Peterculter, MyChoice replaces the paper-based menu with an online system that lets tenants pre-order and pay for their preferred menu choices.

The Council has created a **MyChoice video**, which provides information on the new system for tenants, relatives, carers and the wider public.

The next phase of the MyChoice programme will be to extend the meal ordering system to other very sheltered housing complexes.



Partnership Working

The inspiration for MyChoice was the National Entitlement Card (Accord Card) used in Aberdeen schools. Pupils use the card and web-based technology to pre-order their lunch in the morning, and confirm that order at lunchtime. Together, the housing and Accord Card teams realised that, with a few tweaks, the online meals service in schools could be adapted for use in sheltered housing developments.

Both staff and tenants were involved as partners in the planning and specification of MyChoice, providing feedback on a test system and helping to refine the specification for the service.

Before the switchover to MyChoice, a touch screen TV was set up so that tenants, their relatives and carers could get used to tapping the screen to play music or games for example, breaking down any potential barriers to using the technology.

Two to three weeks before MyChoice went live, the original paper-based and new touch screen method of ordering meals ran in parallel, helping tenants to become comfortable with the system.



Taking A Person-Centred Approach

One of the main advantages of MyChoice is that it's easy for tenants to use. Tenants simply have to tap their Accord Card on the card reader attached to the touch screen TV in the dining area. This opens up the system and lets them check their balance, confirm their meal choices for the current week, and order meals for the week ahead. Menus are displayed in both words and pictures, making food selection easier.

If a tenant needs any support in ordering their meals, MyChoice is also available on mobile tablet devices in Coronation Court that staff and representatives can use to help place meal orders for tenants.

Tenants, their relatives and carers also have the option of receiving regular balance alerts either by text message or email, so they know what to pay and when. Payment can be made online at a time and place that's convenient.

Meals can be paid for either in advance or on a 'pay as you go' basis. To ensure that no tenant goes without a meal, a small amount of debit is allowed for in the system.



Service Redesign

The review of the sheltered housing meals service was prompted by a number of factors:

- **Administration** – Staff were spending a considerable amount of time managing the meals service; time that could be used to support people rather than taking meals orders and invoicing.
- **Food wastage** – Chefs were cooking more food than required because they didn't always know how many people they were catering for or which meal options would be most/least popular, leading to unnecessary expense and waste.
- **Security concerns** – Staff had to regularly bank cash from payments for the meals, which was a security issue for individuals and the Council.

All of these made finding a better way forward a priority.

Switching to MyChoice has already delivered several benefits for tenants and staff alike, including:

- **reducing administration and freeing up staff time** – Any meals service requires administration, undertaken by staff. MyChoice has significantly reduced the amount of paperwork compared to when tenants were completing paper order forms. These had to be collated and a charge calculated, which was then invoiced. MyChoice does all of this online, instantly, and keeps a record. This has freed up staff time to care for people, rather than spending it on paperwork.
- **a fairer charging system** – In sheltered or very sheltered accommodation, there's usually either a set charge for meals or an item by item charge. With MyChoice, tenants only pay for the meals they've selected and ordered. This also helps to reduce food waste and saves money on the overall budget, as chefs have more accurate information about what's being ordered.
- **online payments** – MyChoice enables tenants to pay for their meals online. For those tenants who don't manage their own finances, relatives or carers can easily access the system to pay for them. Instead of monthly bills, balance alerts are sent by text or email, and payment can be made at any time. As a result, most customers no longer need to be invoiced.



Connectivity

MyChoice requires access to Wi-Fi, so this was installed throughout Coronation Court, providing tenants with access to meals ordering and much more besides.

A small number of new tablet devices were bought for tenants to order their meals, as well as a touch screen TV for the dining area.



Funding/Resourcing

The touch screen technology and contactless smart cards have been used in schools in Aberdeen City for more than a decade. Adapting this system to another environment was relatively straightforward, meaning that the only system cost was a small fee to the supplier to make some minor adaptations. There were therefore no significant costs associated with setting up the online meals service. In fact, if Coronation Court had already had Wi-Fi installed, the costs would have been minimal.

The tenants' association provided funding to film a video, which gives tenants, as well as their relatives, carers and staff, an overview of how the system works and what to expect.

Staff from the Accord Card team were on site during the set-up of MyChoice and for several weeks afterwards to support tenants with using the system, and to deal with any technical issues.



Challenges

MyChoice uses proven technology, so there have been very few challenges in setting up and implementing the system.

One potential hurdle was the perception that tenants would only be comfortable using a paper-based system, but the project found that this wasn't the case.

A challenge for the future will be ensuring there's sufficient funding available to develop MyChoice for other sheltered housing developments. The Council plans to examine progress against the sheltered housing review and will evaluate how effective MyChoice has been.



About Aberdeen City Council



www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Aberdeen is the third largest city in Scotland. The City Council has a housing stock of 22,041 properties, which include amenity housing, sheltered housing and very sheltered housing. The Council undertook an extensive review of its sheltered and very sheltered housing in 2015.¹ One of the key findings of the review was the need for a fairer and more consistent approach to the provision of meals in the very sheltered housing complexes.



Contact

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