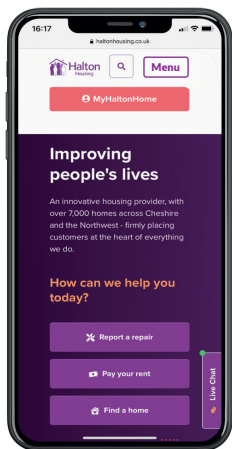# Active Housing develops a new website for Halton Housing

WHO ARE HALTON HOUSING?

Halton Housing is an innovative Housing Association based in Runcorn and Widnes. The organisation has over 7,000 homes across Cheshire and are now branching out further into the North West. They have won awards for their innovative and forward thinking approach to housing technology, including being listed as Housing Digital's number 1 provider on the 'Top 30 Digital Housing Providers' list.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In Summer 2020, Active Housing was awarded the project to redevelop the Halton Housing website through a competitive tender process. The organisations were already partnered, working
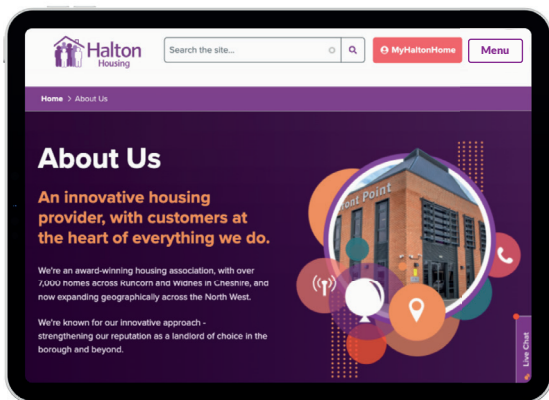
together on their self-service repairs project.

Halton wanted a new website to gain greater control over their site structure and content. They had little flexibility with their existing website and needed to go through their supplier in order to make the majority of changes. For the new website, the organisation wanted to have more freedom, flexibility and control with what they could do on the site.

The previous Halton website was inherited by the current project team which meant it had a build up of legacy content. The new website allowed for a fresh start, as well as an opportunity to build on the strong brand identity of Halton Housing.

DESIGN AND BUILD APPROACH
Design
As Halton's previous website didn't follow the same brand guidelines as other areas in the organisation, Active Housing

used Halton's internal resources and guidelines (as used for their print media) to create the look and feel of the new website. This gave a consistent look across all of Halton's branding and contributed to what is now their distinctive brand identity.

Throughout the design process, Active Housing made sure that accessibility was kept under close inspection when bringing aspects of design from print to digital; things such as colours and font sizes from print that would not have passed the WCAG 2.1 guidelines. Active Housing worked closely with Halton, to provide them with alternatives whenever something didn't meet the WCAG 2.1 guidelines, ensuring that the website was accessible and met their specific brand guidelines.

The Approach
When the project first started, Halton were still defining their navigation and content for the website. To build a truly flexible website without the content fully defined upfront, Active Housing chose to go with an approach of designing numerous drag and drop building blocks, which could then be used to build pages. This method allowed Halton to design their pages and produce content as the project was progressing, also giving them full control over new pages and content on the site as they desired. The building blocks and website was built in Drupal, one of the world's most powerful and secure Content Management Systems, which is utilised across multiple products in the Active Housing product suite.

The blocks were designed out of multiple scoping sessions between Halton's key stakeholders and Active Housing, where they created individual blocks for every scenario that they needed, both present and future.

The building block approach gave Halton full autonomy of how they wanted their pages to look and be structured, unlike

their previous website where they had no control. Using the building blocks, Halton then designed each page on the website exactly as they wanted it, as well as having the freedom and flexibility to change or update this.

The website including the building blocks was designed and developed using an Agile methodology, consisting of multiple sprints and releases. Every time there was a release, the Active Housing team would conduct a show and tell session, as well as producing training videos recorded using screen recording software. These videos were then used to create a library of how-to videos for future Halton colleagues who may need to make amendments to the site.

Key stakeholder engagement Throughout the project the Active Housing and Halton Housing team got feedback from key stakeholders including senior management, members of staff and tenants, to ensure that the website was fit-for-purpose, matching everybody's vision.

User-testing was carried out online, due to COVID restrictions, with Halton Housing tenants. There were also remote focus groups, where Active Housing's UX designer went through each individual section of the website in an InVision prototype, asking the group open-ended questions such as 'What would you change about this section?' and 'What do you like and dislike about it?' The user testing and focus groups then gave the teams feedback to make changes to the website prototypes.

WEBSITE FEATURES

In the scoping sessions, the Halton team outlined the key features they required for the website and Active Housing made sure to implement these. The website now has the following key features and more:

Customisable drupal blocks
The drupal blocks can be added anywhere on any page of the website. Each block has multiple abilities including toggling buttons, images and links on or off.

Events page
The events page allows Halton to share the latest in-person and online events.

Latest news page
The latest news page which automatically updates with every new article published.

Embed and autoplay videos
With an embed code, videos can be embedded to the website with the ability to autoplay when a user lands on the page, as well as play the video on loop.

Vacancies page
The Vacancies page on the website has an Application Programming Interface (API) that retrieves all of Halton's live job postings and displays them on the page.

Content links to the tenant portal
Various sections of the website 'deep link' to Halton's customer
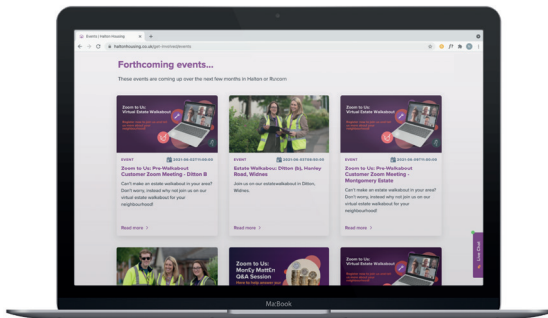
portal, linking to relevant pages such as 'Pay my rent' and 'Report a repair'.

Live chat
Live chat functionality is available during working hours to connect the user with the Halton support team.

Browsealoud Integration (now ReachDeck)
Browsealoud toolbar extension added to maximise accessibility.

WHAT HALTON THINK
"We were delighted to work with Hallnet on our corporate website project with them having so much experience within the housing sector and being a local and long established agency. The website that we have built together really does complete our digital offer and offers customers an easy to navigate, user-friendly, engaging and interactive website. We're really pleased with the end result and look forward to the ongoing relationship with Hallnet"

CONCLUSION
Overall, the project was considered a great success, delivered on time and on budget. Active Housing Project Manager, Rachel McAulay, said: "I'm proud of this project and the work completed by ourselves and Halton. The Halton team were great to work with and heavily involved in the project from start to finish. They are so passionate about what they do and I have really enjoyed working with them." The organisations are now working together to make further developments to the site, as well as working on their repairs project.

GET IN TOUCH

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