Housing Disrepair Online Signposting Tool (OST)

Summary of Monitoring Data and Stakeholder Interviews

Protecting and advancing the principles of justice

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1. Executive summary

In March 2021, the Housing Disrepair Online Signposting Tool (OST) was launched on GOV.UK. This tool was designed with the purpose of providing information and signposting to private renters in England and Wales facing a housing disrepair problem.

By presenting data collected from OST users as well as from interviews with stakeholders of the tool, this report outlines who is using the tool and how it has been received.

1.1   Key findings

- The OST website received 35,553 visitors between the start of September 2021 and the end of August 2023. Visitor numbers showed a marked increase during February 2022 and an upward trend since then through to August 2023.

- The most common disrepair problems reported by survey respondents related to 'gas, electricity, boiler, heating or hot water supply not working' or 'damp/mould growing inside'.

- The most commonly reported intended actions by survey respondents following use of the tool were to 'contact my landlord' (20 responses), 'contact my local council' (18 responses) and 'contact an advice/support organisation' (15 responses). These options were closely followed by the option to 'do nothing', which was selected by 14 respondents.

- Qualitative feedback from government and external stakeholders suggested the tool was accessible and that it would provide users with new and helpful information.

- However, stakeholders believed that the tool might not be suitable for everyone, citing the 'technical language' used at some points during the user journey to likely be difficult to interpret by some, particularly those with English as a second language.

- A number of further improvements were suggested by stakeholders, including allowing users to navigate back and forth through the tool to check how different responses alter the advice they receive, and for the tool to signpost to users' local service providers rather than just nationwide service providers.

2. Introduction

In 2019, the Ministry of Justice published the Legal Support Action Plan (the 'Action Plan'),[1] outlining the department's new vision for legal support. The Action Plan committed to delivering improved forms of legal support that prioritise the needs of the person seeking help. As part of the Action Plan, several pilot projects were proposed to build an evidence base of what works to help people resolve their legal problems at the earliest opportunity, in the most accessible and effective ways possible.

When researching the experience of individuals attempting to resolve legal issues, a common theme is that many struggle to understand their rights and responsibilities, as well as where to find relevant and reliable information to help them reach a resolution. Furthermore, if those experiencing a legal issue are not directed to the most appropriate organisation or source of information within a reasonable amount of time, they can suffer from 'referral fatigue', at which point a resolution can seem further away than ever and they feel overwhelmed. Legal issues relating to housing disrepair are not uncommon and can be significant not only for the direct consequences of those issues, but also for the secondary effects such as health or domestic problems.

As such, an OST pilot was proposed to explore the role technology could play in helping to triage and signpost private renters in England and Wales to the most appropriate support for their needs when faced with an unresolved legal issue.

The housing disrepair OST was launched in March 2021 with three primary objectives:

1. Provide tailored information to users so they can solve an issue themselves or access further support if needed.

2. Encourage use of technology and foster innovation so users can access support and advice in a way that best suits them.

3. Begin to build an evidence base of who accesses different legal support services and how, as well as understand what works and what does not for different users.

Developing the tool

The tool was developed in line with Government Digital Service recommendations for delivering a digital service. Development followed agile methodology, including four distinct phases of project delivery:

- 'discovery' to understand the problem landscape and identify solutions
- 'alpha' to develop solutions identified in 'discovery'
- 'beta' to develop and test the service with limited participants
- 'live' where the service would be launched to the public

As part of the 'discovery' phase, a combination of desk and primary research (including 32 hours of interviews and observations in several locations, such as law centres) was conducted to understand user needs.

How the OST works

The OST is an example of a guided pathway tool. The tool first establishes whether someone meets the criteria to use the service. Users who do not live in England and Wales, who live in social housing, or who are experiencing a housing emergency that may be putting them in immediate danger are filtered out as they are not the target audience of the tool. Users who 'pass' the initial filter will answer additional predetermined questions about their circumstances, including any action they have already taken (e.g., speaking to a landlord or stopping rent payments) and the specifics of their disrepair issue (e.g., is it related to their gas supply, their water supply, or damp and mould in their home). Users are then presented with tailored information, guidance and signposting to appropriate resources based on their responses. Users have the option to print the information page (including their question responses) to either refer to when planning their next steps, or to present to a legal advice provider.

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1   https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-support-action-plan

3. Monitoring and performance

In order to monitor use of the OST, data collection mechanisms were built into the tool itself to provide insight into the volume and characteristics of tool users, the type of disrepair issues being experienced, and whether using the tool had improved their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities and their awareness of possible resolution pathways available to them. Qualitative data was also collected from a range of stakeholders to understand (based on their experience) whether the tool would address the needs of users in terms of content and user experience.

3.1 Data sources and methodology

Web analytics

Google Analytics was used to provide monthly figures on the number of unique and returning visitors to the OST website, as well as how long each visitor spent on the website and whether users left the OST landing page without interacting further with the tool (the bounce rate).

User survey

A user survey was designed to collect data on users' characteristics, type of disrepair issue being experienced, understanding of their issue and resolution options after using the OST, experience of using the tool, and any planned follow-up action. To access the survey (hosted on SmartSurvey), users were given a link after using the OST.

In total, this survey collected 56 responses between November 2020 and August 2022.

The number of survey responses collected was very low in relation to the number of users of the tool. It is also likely that responses will be biased to those with strong positive or negative views. We cannot therefore generalise any survey findings to the user population as a whole.

Interviews

As access to OST users for interviews was not possible, semi-structured one-to-one, paired and triad interviews (see Appendix 1 for topic guide) were conducted to act as a proxy measure for user opinion on the effectiveness and experience of using the OST. Interviews were conducted with individuals from two stakeholder groups.

External stakeholders

Local authorities and not-for-profit legal advice providers were interviewed to understand how the OST would be received from a user perspective. Six organisations made up the sample created for interviews: two local authorities, as well as organisations that were engaged in the development of the tool or that had volunteered to engage with the Ministry of Justice.

The Ministry of Justice conducted five one-to-one interviews, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, with housing advice providers/managers, solicitors, senior managers, or members of digital legal content/advice creation teams from:

- Citizens Advice Mid-North Yorkshire
- Wiltshire Law Centre
- Dartford Borough Council
- Sunderland Council
- Shelter

In addition to the one-to-one interviews, the Ministry of Justice also conducted one paired interview and one triad interview (60 to 75 minutes each) with organisations that have created online tools or digital legal content similar to the OST:

- Shelter
- Law Works

Government stakeholders

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with government stakeholders engaged through the development of the OST, including members of the Ministry of Justice's legal support policy and analytical teams, the Government Digital Service, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. In total, the Ministry of Justice conducted seven interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes each.

3.2   Ethics

The ethical considerations guiding the collection of data were based on the six key principles outlined by the Economic and Social Research Council. Ethics guidance provided by the Ministry of Justice ethics advisory group was followed, as was the Government Social Research ethics checklist. A participation information and consent form was presented to survey respondents and external stakeholders (see Appendix 2) before the survey and interviews started. A record of consent received was kept so participants could withdraw their consent up until analysis was complete.

3.3   Data protection

Data protection was undertaken in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation. Primary data gathered from respondents was saved in a secure folder on an online drive accessed solely by the project team. The research materials were also sent to the Ministry of Justice legal team for review. Participant data was labelled using non-personal identifiers (i.e., a number) and participant names and locations were removed from the data before storing. Based on Government Social Research and Economic and Social Research Council principles, it was agreed that users' personal data would only be shared outside of the project team in the case of a significant safeguarding concern. This was highlighted to users as part of the participant information and consent form before using the tool.

4. Findings

All data was collected between September 2021 and August 2023 and was used to inform the following key areas of interest.

1) Monitoring the number of users of the tool and understanding their characteristics and disrepair issues.

Google Analytics was used to monitor the number of visitors to the OST web address and the proportion that navigated away from the tool before progressing beyond the 'landing page' (the bounce rate). The user survey collected self-report data on user characteristics and the types of disrepair issues being experienced by users.

2) Understanding if the tool has helped to improve users' knowledge of their rights, responsibilities and potential solutions to their disrepair issue.

Data collected from the user survey provided an indication of users' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities and possible solutions to their issue after using the tool, as well as their planned course of action.

3) Understanding how well the tool was received by users in terms of providing clear, relevant information.

The user survey collected data relating to user experience of the OST – specifically, whether new and relevant information was provided, how easy that information was to understand and whether users would recommend the tool to others. In addition, qualitative data from the interviews with government and external stakeholders provided insight (based on the experience of interviewees) into how the OST would likely have been received by users.

Survey response rates

It is worth reiterating the low number of survey responses compared to the number of visitors to the OST. The survey received 56 responses, with some questions receiving fewer responses. Findings based on survey responses should therefore be treated as indicative, rather than generalising to the OST user population as a whole.

4.1 Users and their housing issues

Number of users

Based on website analytics data provided by Google, the OST received 35,553 visitors between the start of September 2021 and the end of August 2023.

As illustrated by Figure 1, the number of website visitors increased markedly during February 2022 and has demonstrated an upward trend since then. This increase is likely to be a result of the OST being repositioned onto a more prominent part of the GOV.UK website, making the tool more accessible to individuals seeking legal support.

Between September 2021 and February 2023, the monthly bounce rate had a low of 34% (February 2022) and a high of 46% (April 2022), with a monthly average of 40%.

Figure 1: Number of users accessing the OST
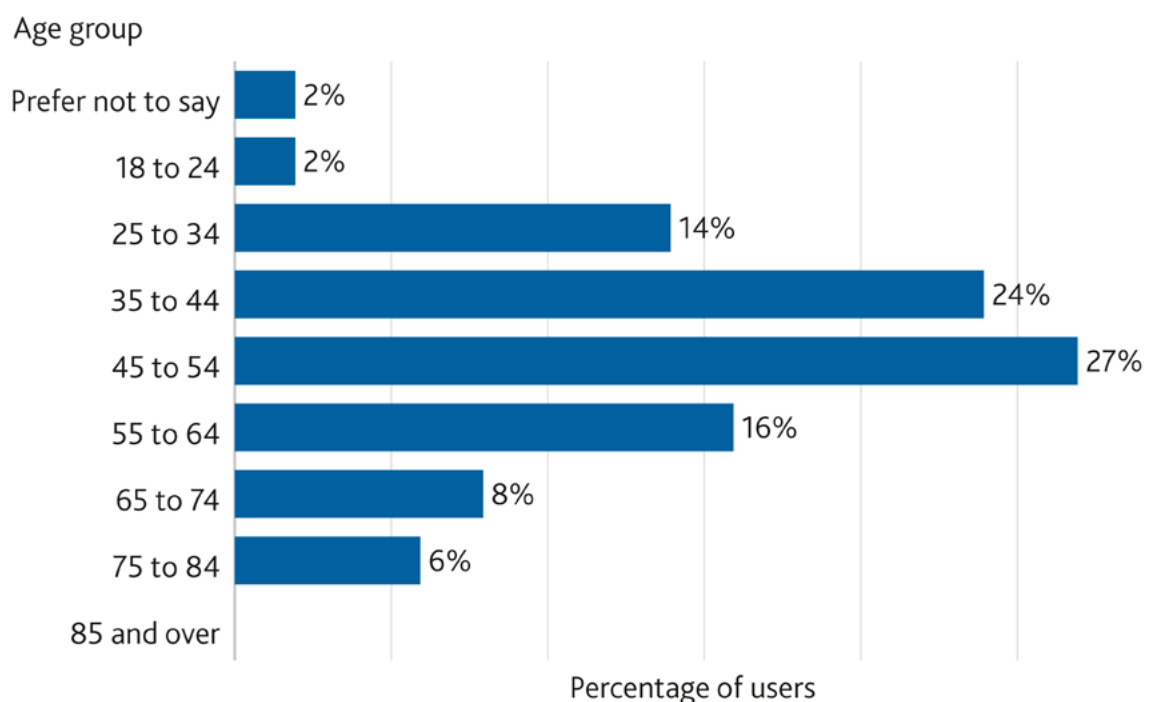

Number of users
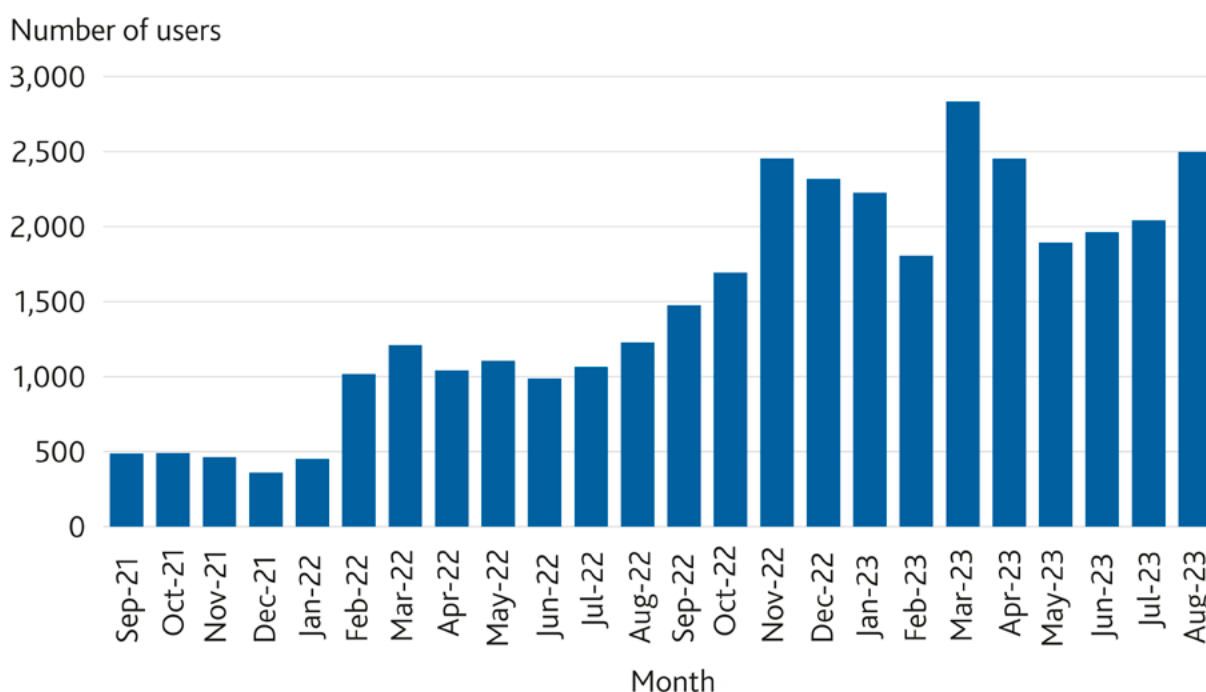
Characteristics of users

a) Gender identity

Of the 49 users who responded to the question 'what best describes your gender identity?', 25 identified as female, 19 identified as male, 5 preferred not to say, and none chose the 'prefer to self-describe' response option.

Figure 2: User age group (49 users)

Age group

Percentage of users

b) Age

The question 'what is your age?' was answered by 49 survey respondents. Responses indicated a spread of ages, with just over half of all respondents being between 35 and 54.

c) Ethnic background

47 survey respondents opted to select an ethnic background that best describes them from the 17 options provided.[2] The majority (72%) selected 'White – Scottish/English/Welsh/Northern Irish/British'. The next most selected options were 'White – Irish' (9%), 'White – Other background' (4%) and 'Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Other' (4%).

**d) Prevalence of mental health conditions and physical illnesses**

Users were asked about their personal experience of mental health conditions and physical illnesses that have lasted more than 12 months. They could select all options applicable to themselves from a list provided. Of the 42 users that answered this question, 19 reported having a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviours. 16 respondents answered that they suffered from a long-standing physical illness such as asthma, diabetes, chronic pain and heart disease. 14 respondents indicated having a physical health condition such as problems with limbs or difficulty hearing or seeing.

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2   White – Scottish/English/Welsh/Northern Irish/British, White – Irish, White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller, White – Other background, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – White and Black African, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – White and Asian, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Other background, Asian/Asian British – Indian, Asian/Asian British – Pakistani, Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi, Asian/Asian British – Chinese, Asian/Asian British – Other background, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British African, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Caribbean, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Other background, Other ethnic group – Arab.

Users' housing disrepair issues

Figure 3: Nature of users' disrepair issues (56 users)

Housing disrepair problems
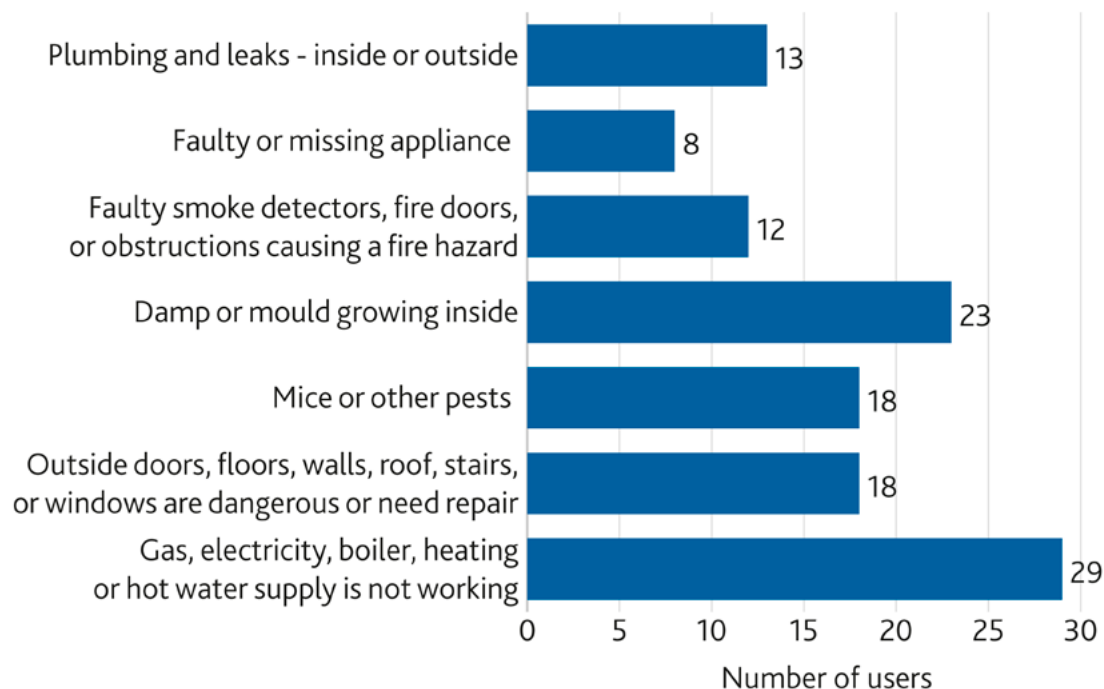
a) Nature of users' disrepair issues

Survey respondents were asked to select the type or types of housing disrepair issue they were experiencing from a selection of options. Users could select more than one response from those presented. 29 of the 56 users who responded to this question indicated that their issue related to 'gas, electricity, boiler, heating, and/or hot water supply not working'. The next most common response was issues relating to 'damp or mould growing inside a user's house' (23 responses).

b) Time since users first noticed their disrepair problem(s)

Users were asked how long they had been experiencing their housing disrepair issue. Of the 34 users who answered this question, the majority had been aware of their issue(s) for over six months.

Time	Number of users
1 week or less	7
1 month or less	0
1 to 6 months	7
More than 6 months	20

Table 1: Time since users first noticed their disrepair problem(s) (34 users)

c) Steps users had already taken to resolve their problem(s)

56 users responded to indicate what steps they had taken so far to resolve their problem. Users could select all options relevant to them from a list of seven options. As illustrated in figure 4, the most common actions were to contact their landlord or property letting agent (33), consult with their friends or family (29) and contact their local council (27). Two users selecting the 'other' response option commented that they had decided to repair the issue themselves or called someone to do so privately.

Figure 4: Steps users had already taken to resolve their problem(s) (56 users)

Number of users

Steps taken	Number of users
Spoken to friends and/or family	29
Contacted landlord or letting agent	33
Contacted local council	27
Searched for information online	21
Called a telephone advice line	16
Gone to an advice centre	13
Other	10
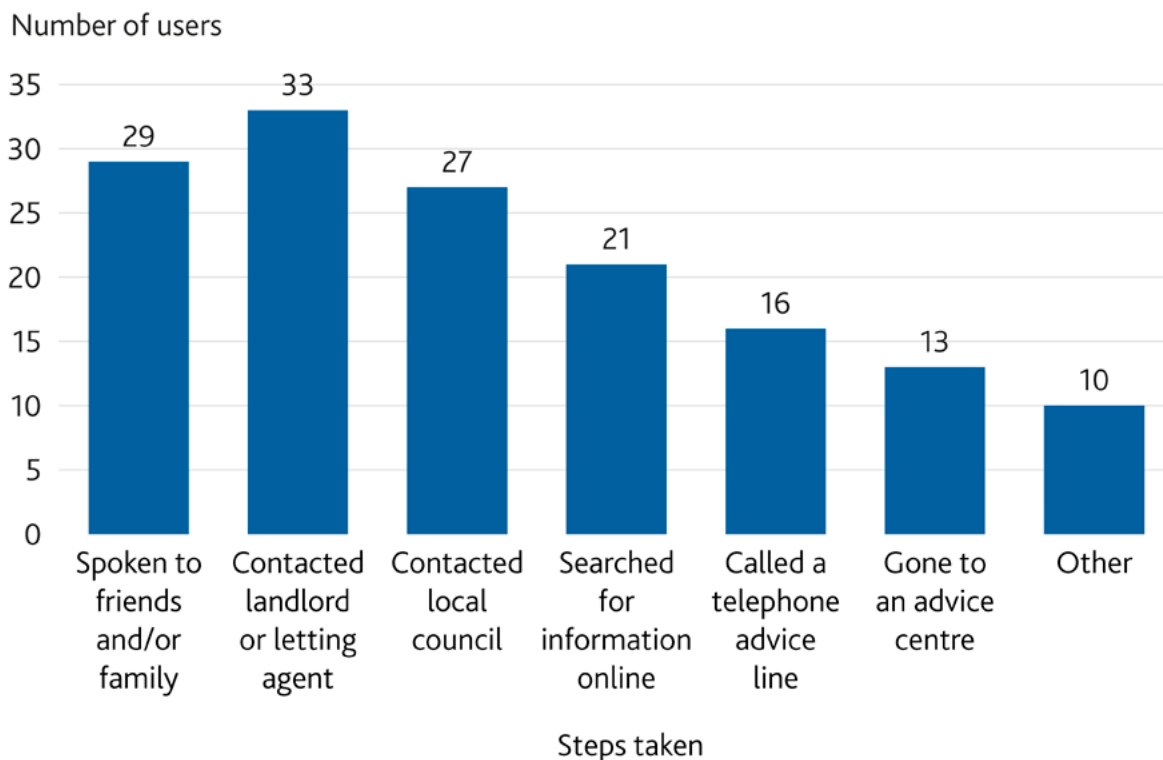
4.2 Tool content and user experience

Figure 5: Users' knowledge and awareness of the ways to resolve their problem(s) (52 users)

Number of users
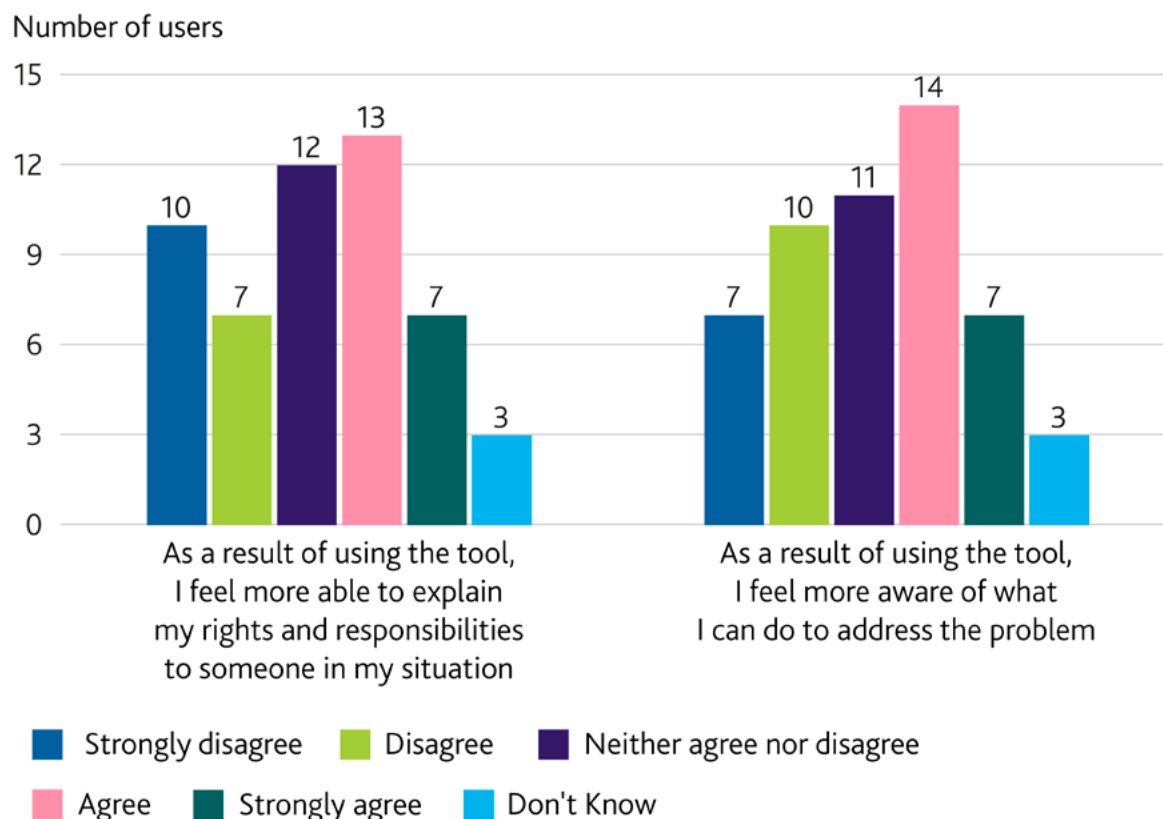
To understand how well the tool meets the needs of its users, data relating to user experience and the information provided was collected directly from users responding to the embedded user survey in the form of questions with fixed response options and through qualitative feedback from tool stakeholders.

4.2.1 Survey data

Knowledge and awareness

Users responding to the survey were asked to agree or disagree with two statements designed to understand if using the OST had positively impacted their ability to explain their legal rights and responsibilities, as well as how aware they were of potential courses of action to resolve their issue.

a) Being able to explain their rights and responsibilities with respect to their situation

After using the tool, 20 respondents (out of 52 who answered this question) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' to feeling 'more able to explain my rights and responsibilities to someone in my situation'. 17 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement.

b) Awareness of possible measures to resolve problems

After using the tool, 21 respondents (out of 52 who answered this question) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' to feeling 'more aware of what I can do to address the problem'. 17 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement.

Follow-up action

When asked what action(s) users intended to take after using the tool, the most common response options were 'contact my landlord' (20 responses), 'contact my local council' (18 responses) and 'contact an advice/support organisation' (15 responses), closely followed by the option to 'do nothing' (14 respondents).

Figure 6: Actions users intend to take after using the tool (56 users)

User actions

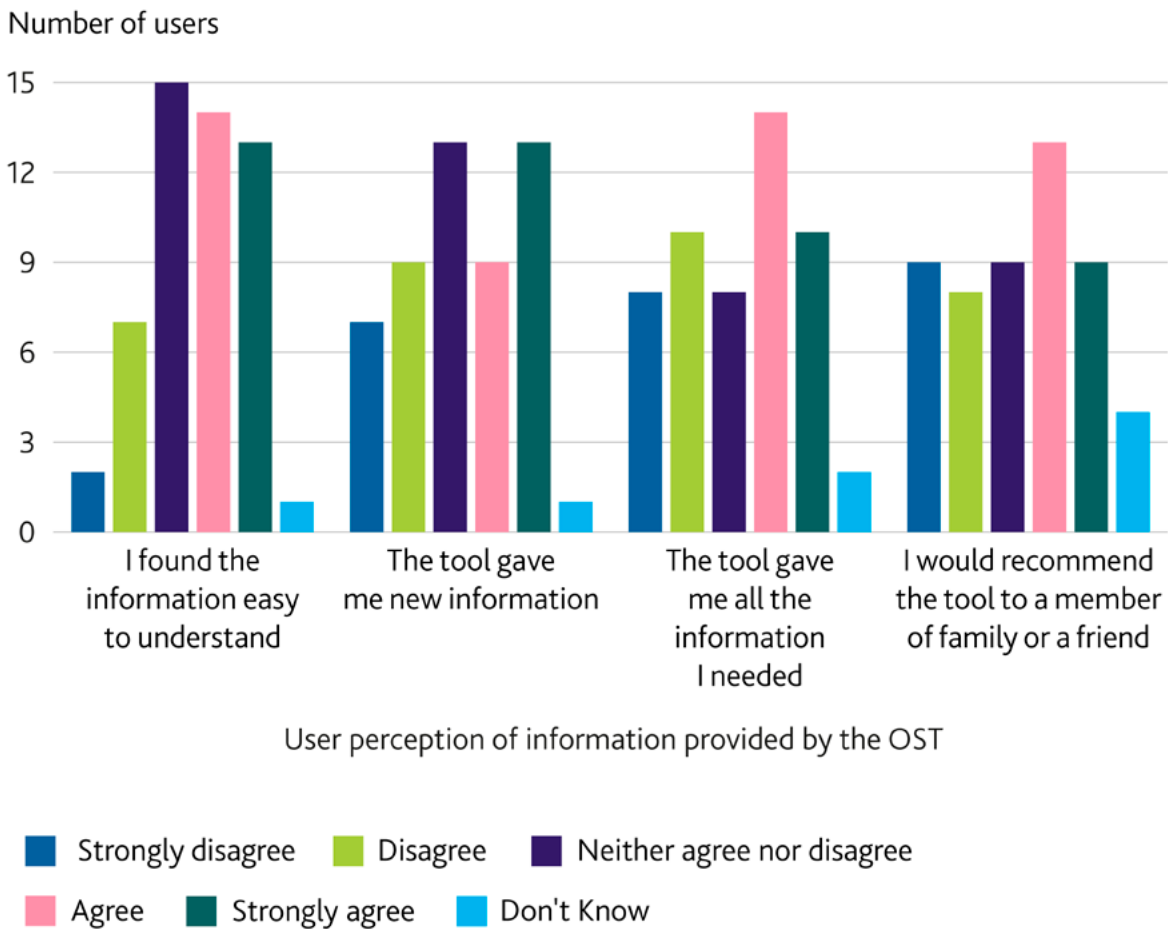| Action	Number of users
Do nothing	14
Organise the repair work myself	11
Conduct a further internet search on my problem	4
Review information from advice organisations	8
Review legislation	11
Contact my landlord	20
Contact my local council	18
Contact an advice/support organisation	15
Use a mediator	9
Other	10

Number of users

Information provided by the tool

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to the information provided by the OST. These responses indicate how well the information provided meets user expectations in terms of its relevance, language, format and the overall experience of using the tool.

For each of the four statements, the combined number of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses were slightly higher than the combined number of 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses. This difference was most prominent with the statement 'I found the information easy to understand'.

Figure 7: Users' views on the information provided to them (52 users)

Number of users

User perception of information provided by the OST

Legend: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree, Don't Know

4.2.2 Qualitative data

Semi-structured interviews conducted with government and external stakeholders were used as a proxy for qualitative user feedback to understand user experience and the perceived effectiveness of the OST. This section outlines the key findings taken from those interviews.

a) Providing users with all the information they need in an accessible way

Interviewees believed that the tool struck a good balance between providing accessible content without oversimplifying matters, and that the information was accessible even for individuals with little to no knowledge of their housing rights. The tool was noted to be supportive in identifying distinct categories of disrepair. Interviewees also thought that the ability to select multiple disrepair issues and the simple yes/no format of answer choices offered a good degree of personalisation, which was considered a positive given the complexity of some housing disrepair issues.

b) Reflecting situations users are usually in

All stakeholders interviewed agreed that the tool reflects user situations well and acknowledges the presence of multiple disrepair issues. One stakeholder highlighted that the OST complements information that might be found elsewhere on the GOV.UK website, serving as a focused and bespoke tool for private renters that helps them navigate their housing disrepair issues. Stakeholders also believed the tool would increase users' knowledge about their rights and responsibilities.

Interviewees felt that the tool would be most useful for individuals experiencing minor to moderate disrepair problems, with a relatively amicable relationship with their landlord or letting agent.

However, advice providers highlighted that the tool may fall short when users are facing 'clustered' problems in their life, of which housing disrepair may be a part. This would then demand a case-by-case approach to advice, which the tool might not be able to diagnose well.

c) Providing information users may not already know

Stakeholders interviewed noted that the tool may increase users' knowledge not only of their own responsibilities regarding housing disrepair but also that of their landlords, which might lead them to check their tenancy rights. However, this may be dependent on the user's ability and willingness to engage with the legislation the tool often signposts to.

One interviewee noted that the tool informs private renters that they could contact their local council in cases of housing disrepair issues, which in their experience has not been common knowledge.

d) Highlighting a legal dimension to a user's problem(s)

All stakeholders interviewed agreed that the tool allows the user to understand if the issue can be resolved or if a legal recourse may be required. For example, advice providers noted that the tool warns users of the consequences of not paying rent and potentially facing eviction in the process.

"It's quite interesting to see the tool provides advice about not stopping paying your rent, which is good. Not paying your rent is the worst thing to do, as landlords can then take possession of the property."

e) Providing information to help users act on their issue and resolve it

Interviewees felt that while the tool may have provided users with information to guide their next steps, it was difficult to infer that users' issues would definitely be resolved because of the tool. While it is likely the tool 'provides users with the best possible option to resolve', whether users acted on the options provided could only be known by tracking user journeys.

> "From our research, users assume they are going through a journey, and the tool would not have been helpful for those who mistake it to be a transactional tool that will give them a space to 'apply' for a solution. It may have been most helpful for people who are stressed and need advice broken down into steps."

f) Users who may not be able to use the tool

External stakeholders were asked if, based on their experience, there were users who would not be able to use this tool. Stakeholders noted that access to the internet tends not to be an issue, except for those in remote locations with poor signals or connections, but that the digital capabilities of users tend to vary and can cause barriers. Older users who may prefer traditional modes of advice provision such as face-to-face or telephone may not use the tool. People who speak English as a second language may struggle to use the tool without support, particularly when it uses 'technical language' subject to interpretation (such as 'extreme temperatures', 'appliances' and 'urgency') or signposts to legislation or lengthy documents.

g) Suggested improvements

Through the course of stakeholder interviews, the following suggested improvements were noted.

1. The intent of the tool could be made clearer at the start of the user interaction. Users should understand that the tool aims to increase awareness of rights and responsibilities and advise on potential

courses of action, but that it will not necessarily lead to a simple resolution for their disrepair problems.

2. The tool should provide an estimate of how long it might take to navigate from start to finish so users can ensure they have enough time set aside.

3. Users should be able to navigate back and forth through the tool to experiment with different scenarios or edit their answers.

4. Language could be made simpler and the tool perhaps could be synced with Google Translate (or a similar service) to make it easier for non-native users.

5. Steps could be prioritised in order on the results page (for example, 'First, you should contact your local council'), to not overwhelm or confuse users, particularly where the tool encourages further reading.

6. It would be more helpful for users to be signposted to local or regional resources rather than nationwide organisations. This could be implemented by adding an option for the user to enter their postcode so the tool can generate a list of local advice providers, in addition to templates for writing letters to landlords or local authorities.

7. As some users may prefer to speak to an advisor after using the tool, contact numbers of organisations, particularly housing specialists and legal aid providers, could be provided.

8. It should be made clear upfront that the OST is not for people with 'urgent' problems requiring immediate help.

9. The tool could be clearer in terms of providing further personalised information on risks, particularly around eviction or where the next step may involve costs (such as for seeking legal advice after receiving an emergency court order).

5. Conclusion

Since its launch in March 2021, the OST has been receiving a steady flow of visitors (35,553 between September 2021 and August 2023). This indicates that there is an appetite for individuals experiencing issues relating to the maintenance and upkeep of their rented properties to be able to access information regarding their legal rights and responsibilities in an online format.

When the OST launched, the Ministry of Justice aimed to collect data that would provide insight to help understand who was using the tool and whether their needs were being met. While data collected directly from users of the OST indicated the characteristics of tool users, their housing disrepair problems, views on using the tool, and whether it gave them helpful information, the low number of survey responses means that findings cannot be generalised to the user population as a whole.

However, by conducting interviews with government stakeholders, representatives from local authorities, not-for-profit legal advice providers and organisations responsible for creating digital tools similar to the OST, the Ministry of Justice has been able to collect feedback that can act as a proxy for the collection of user data. This feedback indicates that the OST has been largely successful in providing a tool that is easy to navigate, presents a good range of input options that match with real world problems, and offers helpful information and potential follow-up action(s).

Interviews have also been a useful source of suggestions for improvements to the OST. As well as implementing some or all of these suggested improvements, thought should be given to how to improve the amount of data that can be collected directly from users of the tool. If this can be achieved, not only could improvements be made to the OST, but deeper learnings could be used when considering the development of similar guided pathway tools

in the future. This will be particularly important as people's engagement with the justice system becomes increasingly digitised.

5.1 Future changes to housing disrepair policy

Future updates to the OST will also need to reflect planned changes to the policy landscape in relation to the private renter's access to redress where they are affected by the disrepair of their home, and the legal definition of housing disrepair. The Renters (Reform) Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, will deliver the government's commitment to 'a fairer private rented sector' – improving the system for responsible tenants and good faith landlords.

The reforms, which will be introduced through the Bill, will include access to an Ombudsman service where a landlord has failed to resolve a legitimate complaint, including complaints relating to housing standards and property disrepair. This will give all tenants free access to justice so they have greater confidence to exercise their consumer rights and feel secure in their homes.

The Ombudsman will have strong powers to 'put things right' for tenants, including being able to compel a landlord to take or stop taking an action, issue an apology or explanation, and award compensation. The Ombudsman will complement the work of local councils, who will continue to play a role in enforcing the minimum regulatory standard.

In addition, we will also legislate to introduce a Decent Homes Standard for the private rented sector. This will introduce new decency requirements for private rented sector homes.

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview topic guides

Topic guides were shared with interviewees in advance to indicate the discussion themes, given the semi-structured nature of conversations.

Semi-structured interview topic guide for advice providers/local authorities

Participant background

1) Could you tell me a bit about your organisation in terms of:
   - the kind of social welfare problems it mainly deals with
   - the main locations you provide support in England and Wales?
   - the size of your organisation
2) Could you tell me a bit more about your role in the organisation?
3) Did you know of the OST previously?

Theme 1: Tool content

1) Does the tool highlight how there may be a legal dimension to a user's problem?
2) Does the tool provide people with all the information needed and in an accessible way?
3) Does the tool provide any information that you think users may not know?
4) How likely do you think someone with a housing disrepair issue would be to act on the steps?
5) Does the tool highlight the risks, obstacles and consequences of possible next steps?
6) Can the tool signpost to advice options better? How?

Theme 2: Tool users/target audience

1) Does the tool reflect the situation you see users in?
2) What stage of a user journey is it most helpful for – early or advanced?
3) Are there any groups within this target audience that the tool would work well or not so well with?

Theme 3: Guided pathways as a service

1) Could this be replicated for other areas of law or welfare issues (like employment, debt, welfare benefits in particular)? And why?
2) What considerations would we need to bear in mind?

Open comments: Is there any other feedback that you would like to share before we finish?

Semi-structured interview topic guide for government stakeholders

Participant background

1) Could you talk about your role in relation to your engagement with the housing disrepair OST?

Theme 1: Project set-up

1) In terms of the set-up, what has worked well? What has been the biggest challenge?
2) Is there anything you would replicate or do differently to improve the initial set-up period?
3) Has the tool turned out as anticipated?

Theme 2: Impact and delivery of the OST

1) To what extent did the tool reflect the situations users were in?
2) To what extent do you think the tool provides information that was useful for the users to act on their issue? Do you think users were able to resolve issues because of the tool?
3) Could the scope be broader if the tool is scaled up?
4) Overall, did the tool deliver as anticipated?

Theme 3: Guided pathways as a service and scaling up the OST

1) What stage of users' problems do guided pathways work best for?
2) Do you think accessing the signposting service was the first action users took?
3) Did users previously seek information, advice or problem resolution methods?
4) Is the tool more helpful for easy or more complex problems?
5) Are there any delivery implications for scaling this up into other areas of law?
6) Who would this work for? Are there any considerations around digital capability/confidence?
7) What are the implications from a technical, resource, cost, evaluation perspective?

Theme 4: Lessons on project and stakeholder management

1) Any lessons on working with different stakeholders – digital and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities?
2) What are your thoughts on the resource and cost engagement with this tool?
3) Any lessons learnt from the evaluation and any other perspective?

Open comments: Is there any other feedback that you would like to share?

Appendix 2: Participant information and consent forms for external stakeholders and survey respondents

Housing Disrepair Online Signposting Tool

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. This information sheet has been produced to give you an overview of the research and help you understand what involvement as a participant will look like.

Please note that your participation is voluntary. Your participation will not affect any current or future relationships with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

What is the purpose of the research?

Researchers from the government are exploring how well an online tool for private tenants with a housing disrepair problem is working. This is a new tool that was created in 2021, and we are now hoping to understand how well the service has worked and any implications of delivering in other areas.

Who is running the research?

Researcher Richa Sharma within the Access to Justice evaluation team.

Why have you been requested to take part?

The government has committed to better understanding how to direct people to the right support when they have a legal problem. As you or your organisation provide advice, we hope to understand how different legal support services are being accessed, and by who, to understand what works and does not work for people who are experiencing a 'housing disrepair issue' in their private tenancy.

What does the research project involve?

Your involvement should take no longer than 90 minutes of your time and will include three activities:

1) Reading, completing, and returning this consent form to confirm you understand and agree to take part.
2) Using the online tool which can be found on this link: https://check-how-to-get-repairs-done-in-your-rented-home.form.service.justice.gov.uk.
3) A 60-minute discussion with a researcher using Microsoft Teams.

What data will be collected?

To conduct the research, we will collect the following from you:
- contact details: name, email, and telephone number
- a video or audio recording of the 60-minute discussion and notes

Who will use the data and what for?

Only researchers will have access to the information you share that has not been anonymised. Any personal data (name, email and phone number) used to arrange the discussion, recordings, and notes will be stored in a password protected folder that will only be accessible by government researchers.

Any feedback and information shared will be confidential, meaning no one will know they are your comments. We will use the data you share to develop themes which will be combined with comments from others taking part in the research and any reporting will ensure that it does not reveal your identity. We may use quotes from what you say but this will be anonymised and used to highlight key points.

We will only share your personal information (e.g. name and contact details) outside of the discussion where we believe you or someone else may be at risk of harm.

Following the interview, you can withdraw from the research up until the point of reporting on findings. Please contact Richa (richa.sharma@justice.gov.uk) to arrange this.

Data protection, confidentiality, and anonymity

The data collected through these interviews will be kept in line with data protection laws. Any data collected, such as interview recordings and notes, will be handled by members of the research team only and stored securely on protected devices. Upon completion of the interviews and the report, any recordings will be permanently removed to ensure these are not held longer than necessary.

As a participant, we will keep your confidentiality throughout the interview and report-writing process. Responses and notes taken from the interviews will be anonymised, along with any excerpts used for the report itself. Any identifying information will be removed or replaced to keep your confidentiality and anonymity, such as names and institutions.

Are there any risks to taking part?

We do not expect any risks in taking part. If at any point in the discussion you don't want to answer a question, would like to end the discussion or withdraw your involvement, please let the researcher know.

Consent

Please read the following statements below which we need your consent for:
- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to think about the information and ask questions.
- I confirm that my involvement is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time, without giving any reason (and this won't affect any services I may be receiving).
- I understand that any information or quotes (exact words) used from this research will be anonymous and that I will not be able to be identified.
- I give permission for our discussion to be recorded and the notes taken to be used for report-writing purposes.
- I agree to take part in this study.

Participant consent
Name: [Click or tap here to enter text.] Signature: [Click or tap here to enter text.] Email address: [Click or tap here to enter text.] Telephone number: [Click or tap here to enter text.]

Contact information
If you have any questions before or after the interview, please contact Richa Sharma (richa.sharma@justice.gov.uk).

Privacy notice

This tool can be used anonymously. We do not store any of your answers unless you complete our feedback survey. The feedback survey is hosted by SmartSurvey. This page outlines your rights, and explains what we do with information collected through the feedback survey.

Why we are including a survey

This tool was created to provide people with support and signposting in relation to a housing disrepair issue. We want to make sure that as many people as possible have access to the help they need, and that the information we provide is useful. The survey asks for your age, gender, ethnicity and disability status. This information will be used to explore whether experiences of the tool are better or worse for certain groups, and if worse, how the tool can be improved. All questions are optional. You also have the opportunity to provide contact details including name, email address and telephone number if you would like to take part in future research. This will help us better understand your experiences over the longer term.

Getting your consent

The lawful basis for processing personal data is consent. By answering the survey questions you are consenting to the government's use of your data as described on this page.

Who will have access to your data

The information you provide is managed and protected by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Your contact details will only be used by the MOJ for optional follow-up research. The MOJ is the data controller and the personal information charter explains more about how it will process your contact details.

Sharing and storing your data

Data will be stored within a survey hosted by SmartSurvey (www.smartsurvey.co.uk). Access to this data will be restricted to a small group of government analysts and researchers. All data collected on SmartSurvey is kept in the UK and Ireland in a secure data centre. The data will be password protected and not shared with anyone outside of the MOJ. Contact details including name, email address and telephone number will be stored for at least six months from the date they were provided, and will only be accessible to government analysts and researchers working on the housing disrepair tool. The upper limit for our retention period is for 20 years. This is for research purposes and after this point it will be transferred to the Departmental Library and Records Management Services who will review and dispose or transfer to the national archives as relevant. Your contact details will be deleted from SmartSurvey and any extracts that contain your contact details, and survey data will be stored anonymously.

Your rights

You can ask to:

- see the personal data that we hold on you

- have the personal data corrected, removed or deleted

- have access to your personal data restricted

If you want to see the personal data that we hold on you, you can:

- complete a form to make a subject access request, which goes to the MOJ as data controller

- write to us: The Data Protection Officer, Ministry of Justice, 3rd Floor, Post Point 3.20, 10 South Colonnades, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4PU

Contact us for more information about the survey or further research

Email: housingdisrepairdata@justice.gov.uk.

Contact the MOJ Data Protection Officer about how your data is protected

Write to: The Data Protection Officer, Ministry of Justice, 3rd Floor, Post Point 3.20, 10 South Colonnades, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4PU

Email: privacy@justice.gov.uk

How to complain

See our complaints procedure if you want to complain about how we've handled your personal data.

Write to: The Data Protection Officer, Ministry of Justice, 3rd Floor, Post Point 3.20, 10 South Colonnades, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4PU

Email: privacy@justice.gov.uk

You can also complain to the Information Commissioner's Office if you're not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data lawfully.