

# HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

**Agenda Item 30**  
Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Housing Management Customer Access Review  
**Date of Meeting:** 12 October 2009  
**Report of:** Director of Adult Social Care & Housing  
**Contact Officer:** Name: Sam Smith Tel: 29-1383  
E-mail: sam.smith@brighton-hove.gov.uk  
**Key Decision:** No  
**Wards Affected:** All

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report informs Housing Management Consultative Committee of the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service.
- 1.2 The Housing Management division provides a range of services to the residents of council managed properties in Brighton & Hove. Our customers currently access services through a number of different channels (e.g. face to face, telephone, email, website etc) and through a range of teams (e.g. housing offices, income management and repairs desk). Reviewing customer access and developing a strategy for the future is a key project in the Housing Management Improvement Programme 2009-2012.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Housing Management Consultative Committee:

- 2.1 (1) note the customer access review work to date and agree the next steps.
- 2.2 (2) approve the resident involvement in the Customer Access Review as detailed in paragraph 4.1 and 4.2

### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

#### What are we doing?

- 3.1 The Housing Management Service Improvement Plan presents a programme for managing and maintaining council housing over the next three years. It has been developed with the overall objective of achieving excellent housing management services for council tenants and leaseholders in Brighton & Hove. A key priority in the Improvement Plan is

to 'Improve services to an excellent standard, with residents at the heart of everything we do'. The central action to achieve this is to work with residents to develop a new Customer Access Strategy for the Housing Management service.

- 3.2 The Customer Access Review is being led by Andrew Willard (Project Officer) with the support of staff within Housing Management. The project involves an analysis of previous work undertaken to improve customer access, a review of current arrangements, and the development of an improved customer access model and strategy for the service.
- 3.3 The corporate Customer Access Programme Board has agreed to support Housing Management's work by providing specialist support to undertake an analysis of customer access within the division. This work will look at the customer journey (i.e. what happens when a resident contacts the council to request a service) with a focus on improving the experience of customers accessing the services.

### **Why are we doing it?**

- 3.4 Current customer access arrangements for Housing Management involve a number of teams and are provided from several offices. The most popular method of contacting Housing Management is by telephone and there are currently several different telephone numbers for different teams within the division and no call routing system. The services provided and details of location and enquiry types are broken down in a table in Appendix 1.
- 3.5 The 2008 'Status Survey' of residents found that 72% were satisfied with the overall service provided by the council. When asked specifically about customer service 72% found staff helpful and 81% found it easy to get hold of the right person. The costs for the service are high when compared to other councils and social landlords at £17.11 per week per property for 2008/09.

### **What are we hoping to achieve?**

- 3.6 We are aiming to produce a new Customer Access Strategy for Housing Management which will detail proposals for improving access to the services provided by Housing Management. This should include:
  - Improving the experience of customers when contacting a Housing Management service
  - Understanding what really matters to residents and making sure the service delivers this
  - Quicker resolution of enquiries, requests and complaints
  - Getting service requests right first time
  - Making it easier to contact the team required
  - Making improvements to telephone access
  - Improve satisfaction by making improvements that matter
  - Look at different ways for residents to access our services

## **Next Steps**

- 3.7 The timetable for completing the review process is as follows:
- Completion of review and analysis – November 2009
  - Development of Strategy – November to December 2009
  - Special meetings of Area Panels – December 2009
  - Housing Management Consultative Committee – February 2010
  - Housing Cabinet Member Meeting – March 2010
  - Implementation – from February 2010

## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Residents need to be fully involved in the development of a new customer access strategy through Area Panels. A 'Mystery Shopping' exercise is being developed with residents trained to contact the variety of Housing Management services and feedback on their experiences. It is proposed that a special meeting of each Area Panel is held to receive feedback from the 'Mystery Shoppers' and consider issues raised by the customer access reviews. The Customer Access Strategy and recommendations from these meetings will be reported back to Housing Management Consultative Committee.
- 4.2 Staff will be involved throughout the review process and consulted about any resulting changes that affect them.

## **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs of carrying out the review of Customer Access are included within existing budgets.

It is too early in the process to identify future savings or service pressures which may result from the recommendations of the review. Therefore, any future savings or service pressures will be reported as part of the Customer Access Strategy at a Housing Management Consultative Committee in the new year.

Finance Officer: Sue Chapman

Date: 17 September 2009

### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Under the Housing Act 1985 the council has a general power to manage its housing stock. The development of a Customer Access Strategy as outlined in the report is incidental to that power. It is not considered that any individual's human rights will be adversely affected by the proposals

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 It is important that equalities implications are considered in the development of a new Customer Access Strategy and an Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken. Changing and improving customer access arrangements has the potential to affect those with disabilities and others who can find it difficult to access services. The needs of people for whom English is not a first language should also be considered.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability implications of any changes to customer access need to be considered. This should include potential to reduce the service's carbon emissions and increase the use of access channels with the lowest environmental impact.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Freeing up Housing Officer's time by improving customer access processes and arrangements has the potential to enable them spend more time out on estates which may reduce crime and the fear of crime.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A risk analysis will be undertaken on the new strategy to identify key risks and their mitigation.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 Changes and improvements to customer access arrangements in Housing Management need to be considered in a corporate context. The close links between this project and the second phase of the corporate Value for Money programme will enable the outcomes of this work to be coordinated with corporate developments. The review process and outcomes will be used as a case study to help other council services to improve their customer access arrangements.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 6.1 The review of customer access will consider different options for the future customer access arrangements for Housing Management.
- 6.2 If the review was not undertaken arrangements would remain in their current state which is not always effective, efficient or meeting all customers needs.

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 To inform HMCC and gain support for the review of customer access and development of new strategy.

- 7.2 To gain approval for continued resident involvement via the 'Mystery Shoppers' and special meetings of Area Housing Panels.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

#### **Appendices:**

1. Table detailing current customer access arrangements for Housing Management.

#### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None.

#### **Background Documents**

None

## Current Customer Access arrangements in Housing Management

Team	Services provided
<b>Housing Offices</b> (Five offices covering different geographical areas - taking telephone, face to face and email enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Housing Management enquires</li> <li>• Transfer requests</li> <li>• Complaints about noise/anti-social behaviour etc.</li> <li>• Rent payments</li> </ul>
<b>Repairs Desk</b> (Based in Bartholomew House - taking telephone and email enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repair requests</li> <li>• Repair progress request</li> <li>• Planned maintenance enquiries</li> </ul>
<b>Whitehawk Repairs Base</b> (Local office staffed by Mears – Face to face and telephone enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot scheme with local office where residents in Whitehawk can report and discuss repairs issues</li> </ul>
<b>Income Management Team</b> (Based in Bartholomew House - taking telephone and email enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent arrears enquires</li> <li>• Requests for support or advice about rent account and finances</li> </ul>
<b>Sheltered Housing</b> (Wardens and central team based in schemes and Oxford Street Housing Office – telephone and face to face )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wardens deal with day-today issues</li> <li>• Central team deal with transfer requests and other issues which can't resolved on local level</li> </ul>
<b>Lettings Team</b> (Based at Manor Road Housing Office – taking telephone, face to face and email enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request and enquiries about let viewing properties and moving</li> </ul>
<b>Car Park &amp; Garages Team</b> (Based at Lavender Street Housing Office – taking telephone, face to face and email enquiries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requests for car parking spaces and garages</li> <li>• Repairs</li> <li>• Accounts and arrears</li> <li>• Related issues e.g. enforcement</li> </ul>
<b>Estate Services Team</b> (Based in Hollingdean Depot – take referrals from Housing Offices and repairs Desk; also direct referrals from the public, mostly by phone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lock changes</li> <li>• Emergency break-ins</li> <li>• Minor repairs</li> <li>• Estate improvements</li> </ul>