





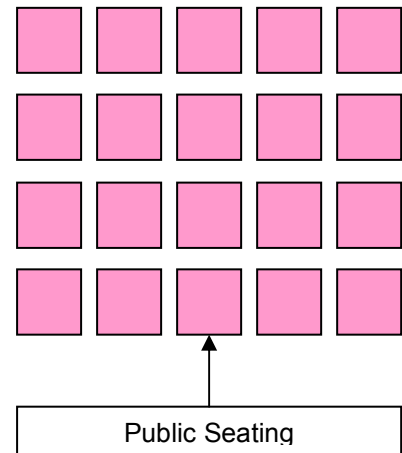
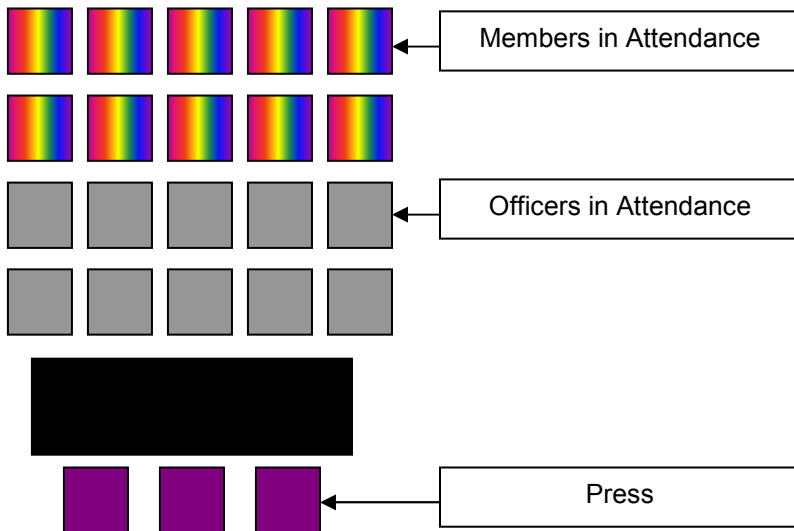
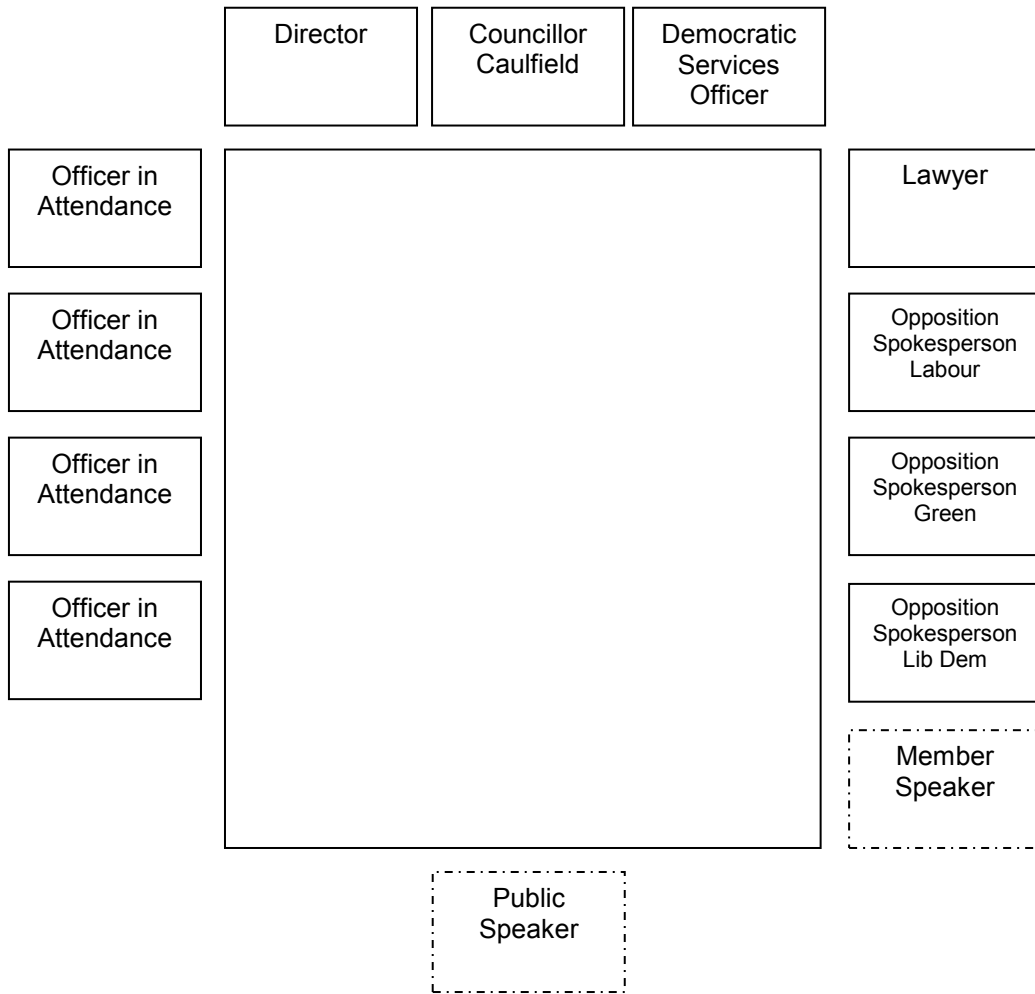
Brighton & Hove  
City Council

# Cabinet Member Meeting

Title:	<b>Housing Cabinet Member Meeting</b>
Date:	<b>20 October 2010</b>
Time:	<b>4.00pm</b>
Venue	<b>Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall</b>
Members:	<b>Councillor:</b> Caulfield (Cabinet Member)
Contact:	<b>Caroline De Marco</b> Democratic Services Officer 01273 291063 caroline.demarco@brighton-hove.gov.uk

	The Town Hall has facilities for wheelchair users, including lifts and toilets
	An Induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter and infra red hearing aids are available for use during the meeting. If you require any further information or assistance, please contact the receptionist on arrival.
	<b>FIRE / EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE</b>  If the fire alarm sounds continuously, or if you are instructed to do so, you must leave the building by the nearest available exit. You will be directed to the nearest exit by council staff. It is vital that you follow their instructions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You should proceed calmly; do not run and do not use the lifts;</li><li>• Do not stop to collect personal belongings;</li><li>• Once you are outside, please do not wait immediately next to the building, but move some distance away and await further instructions; and</li><li>• Do not re-enter the building until told that it is safe to do so.</li></ul>

# Democratic Services: Meeting Layout



**AGENDA**

**48. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

- (a) Declarations of Interest by all Members present of any personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- (b) Exclusion of Press and Public - To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

*NOTE: Any item appearing in Part 2 of the Agenda states in its heading either that it is confidential or the category under which the information disclosed in the report is exempt from disclosure and therefore not available to the public.*

*A list and description of the categories of exempt information is available for public inspection at Brighton and Hove Town Halls.*

**49. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**1 - 8**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 September 2010 (copy attached).

**50. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS**

**51. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION**

- (a) Items reserved by the Cabinet Member
- (b) Items reserved by the Opposition Spokespersons
- (c) Items reserved by Members, with the agreement of the Cabinet Member.

*NOTE: Public Questions, Written Questions from Councillors, Petitions, Deputations, Letters from Councillors and Notices of Motion will be reserved automatically.*

**52. PETITIONS**

No petitions have been received by the date of publication.

**53. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

(The closing date for receipt of public questions is 12 noon on 13 October 2010)

## HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

No public questions have been received by the date of publication.

### 54. DEPUTATIONS

(The closing date for receipt of deputations is 12 noon on 13 October 2010)

No deputations have been received by the date of publication.

### 55. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

No letters have been received.

### 56. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No written questions have been received.

### 57. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

No Notices of Motion have been referred.

### 58. CUSTOMER ACCESS PHASE 2

9 - 18

*Contact Officer:* Ododo Dafe  
*Ward Affected:* All Wards;

*Tel:* 29-3201

The City Council actively welcomes members of the public and the press to attend its meetings and holds as many of its meetings as possible in public. Provision is also made on the agendas for public questions to committees and details of how questions can be raised can be found on the website and/or on agendas for the meetings.

The closing date for receipt of public questions and deputations for the next meeting is 12 noon on the fifth working day before the meeting.

Agendas and minutes are published on the council's website [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk). Agendas are available to view five working days prior to the meeting date.

Meeting papers can be provided, on request, in large print, in Braille, on audio tape or on disc, or translated into any other language as requested.

For further details and general enquiries about this meeting contact Caroline De Marco, (01273 291063, email [caroline.demarco@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.demarco@brighton-hove.gov.uk)) or email [democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Date of Publication - Tuesday, 12 October 2010

### BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

### HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00pm 8 SEPTEMBER 2010

### COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Caulfield (Cabinet Member)

**Also in attendance:** Councillor Simpson (Opposition Spokesperson)

### PART ONE

#### 31. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

##### 31(a) Declarations of Interests

31.1 There were none.

##### 31(b) Exclusion of Press and Public

31.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the Act”), the Cabinet Member considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

31.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

#### 32. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

32.1 *Bevendean Community Garden Proposal* – The Cabinet Member reported that she had met with the community garden residents and had looked at a number of sites. This information would be fed back to the project group.

32.2 *Private Rented Sector Letting Agents* – The Cabinet Member reported that a Scrutiny Panel was likely to be established to look at this issue.

32.3 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting held on 7 July 2010 be agreed and signed by the Cabinet Member.

**33. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS**

33.1 There were none.

**34. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION**

34.1 **RESOLVED** – All items were reserved for discussion.

**35. PETITIONS**

35.1 There were none.

**36. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

36.1 There were none.

**37. DEPUTATIONS**

37.1 There were none.

**38. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS**

38.1 There were none.

**39. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

39.1 There were none.

**40. NOTICES OF MOTIONS**

40.1 There were none.

**41. MINUTES OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

41.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 24 June 2010.

41.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

**42. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2010**

42.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that the regulatory framework for social housing which came into effect on 1 April 2010, required "Registered providers" (including council landlords) to publish an annual report for their tenants containing a self assessment of their performance against the standards set by the Tenants Services Authority (TSA).

42.2 A full and a summary report had been produced with the involvement and scrutiny of tenants and leaseholders, in line with the plan and timetable agreed with the Housing

Management Consultative Committee on 14 June 2010. This followed discussions with the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group in April and presentations to tenants and leaseholders at the City Assembly and the Area Housing Management Panels in May and June.

- 42.3 The Housing Stock Review Manager introduced the report and explained that the full and summary annual reports were very well received at the Housing Management Consultative Committee on 1 September, with members recommending approval of the reports at the meeting. Final drafts had been tabled at the meeting today, which included the photograph taken of HMCC scrutinising the draft reports, together with some small improvements as a result of tenant feedback.
- 42.4 It had been suggested by a tenant representative that a list of tenant and resident associations should be included in the report. There were approximately 70 associations and there were changes from time to time, so this was not implemented; but a paragraph had been added to the inside back cover of the summary report stating:
- If you'd like to find out about your local tenant and resident association, or would like to get involved in other ways, please contact your local housing office.
- 42.5 The Housing Stock Review Manager hoped that more tenants and leaseholders would want to get involved as a result of reading the annual report and seeing what tenant representatives had achieved.
- 42.6 Other minor changes which had been made to the version agreed by HMCC were:
- An additional paragraph at the end of the summary report inside the back cover explaining again that tenants and leaseholders who would like to know more about the council's performance and plans, could get the full version of the report from their housing office, the council website, or ask for a copy by email or by phone.
  - As a result of a comment by another tenant representative outside of the meeting, the background shading had been lightened for the "What did tenants and leaseholders Say?" sections of the summary report to ensure that they were as legible as possible for people with poor vision.
  - To bring the full report into line with the summary report the following had been added:
    - The percentage figures to the bar charts on pages 7, 27 and 28
    - On page 4, How tenants and leaseholders were involved in producing the report:
      - that the consultation draft also went on the Tenant Forum
      - that the Housing In Tenant Editorial Board gave officers useful comments on the summary report and
      - thanks to the Tenant Editorial Board and all tenants and leaseholders who helped officers produce these reports.
- 42.7 Councillor Simpson agreed that the report had been very well received by the Housing Management Consultative Committee. It was clear, readable and accessible. She congratulated all those involved in producing the report, including the comments made

by tenants and residents. Councillor Simpson was sure that a number of tenants would read the report with great interest.

42.8 The Cabinet Member agreed that the Annual Report had been very well received at HMCC and she thanked Carol Jenkins, Housing Stock Review Manager for her work on the report.

42.9 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions:

- (1) That the annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2010 attached at Appendix 1, be approved for distribution to the Tenant Services Authority and council tenant and resident associations and to all council tenants and leaseholders who request a copy;
- (2) That the summary annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2010 at Appendix 2 be approved for distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders.

### 43. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY ANNUAL UPDATE 2009-2010

43.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which outlined key achievements and progress in implementing year 2 of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2008-2013. The report sought to demonstrate that the council were operating and developing a service which realised the vision of temporary accommodation to "...provide good quality, effectively managed properties, that meet the needs of Brighton and Hove's diverse population, contributing to the development of sustainable communities".

43.2 The Cabinet Member considered the report to be excellent. She mentioned that she had visited the team earlier in the year when they had met their target. This was a great achievement. The contract with Mears had opened up new opportunities to improve the accountability of repairs and value for money.

43.3 The Cabinet Member reported that she and Councillor Trevor Alford had sent a submission to a Select Committee at the House of Commons. As Brighton & Hove was a high rent area, they had asked if the city could be reviewed in a different way in terms of transitional arrangements.

43.4 Councillor Simpson was impressed that the target had been met. She noted the changes to the local housing allowances, and asked for a copy of the submission to the Select Committee.

43.5 Councillor Simpson asked when a report would be submitted outlining changes in housing benefits and showing what the effect of the reduction would be. Councillor Simpson was worried about the effect locally if an exception was not made. It would have a drastic effect on people who were homeless.

43.6 The Assistant Director, Housing Strategy explained that a report on the changes in housing benefits would be available in a few weeks time, to coincide with the review from the Treasury.



43.7 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That progress made on delivering strategic actions of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy during year 2 of the strategy 2008-2013 be noted.

**44. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2013 ANNUAL UPDATE**

- 44.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which outlined the key achievements and progress of the Homeless Strategy 2008-13 which was a sub strategy of the Housing Strategy 2009-14.
- 44.2 The Service Improvement Manager, Housing Options explained that the report was the second annual update. The Homelessness Strategy addressed issues local to Brighton & Hove but also national government targets such as the 50% reduction of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 and an end to using temporary accommodation for single 16/17 year olds, except in an emergency by 2010. The strategy also linked into a broader “prevention agenda” in an attempt to improve wider outcomes and life changes for citizens and contribute to social inclusion in the city.
- 44.3 Table 2 of the report showed that homeless applications had reduced by more than two thirds since 2000/01 and since the implementation of the prevention approach in 2005/06 applications had reduced further to 966 in 2009/10.
- 44.4 The Cabinet Member considered the report to be excellent. She reported that she had attended a Task Force with St Mungo’s earlier in the year. Brighton & Hove had been hailed as a leading local authority in the country, in terms of its homelessness strategy. Those attending had been impressed with the way Brighton & Hove worked with other partners in the city.
- 44.5 In relation to Supporting People, the Cabinet Member had concerns regarding future cuts. She was drafting a letter to submit to the Secretary of State to voice the council’s concerns regarding any future cuts and to ask for a long term vision.
- 44.6 The Cabinet Member asked if a future homelessness strategy could be merged with the Youth Strategy. The Service Improvement Manager, Housing Options replied that he had been asked to obtain legal advice to see if it was possible to merge the two strategies into one document. He considered it would make sense to do so.
- 44.7 Councillor Simpson congratulated officers on their performance. The increase in homeless prevention was very good. Paragraph 4.3.7 referred to a multi-agency Recession Impact Working Group. She asked if this group would continue to monitor court activity and employment trends in the city, in the future, and whether it would change its name.
- 44.8 The Service Improvement Manager, Housing Options explained that the council had been tasked to have a Recession Impact Working Group under a previous government.

The council had merged its Prevention Working Group to have a number of partners on board. It could possibly change its name but people had got used to the current name.

44.9 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions:

(1) That the report be noted.

#### 45. SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP) 10/11 UPDATE

45.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that the Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate of the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) recommended that local authorities ensure that there are a range of provisions in place to address the needs of rough sleepers in their area during winter. These provisions are commonly termed “Severe Weather Emergency Protocols” or SWEP. Housing Strategy had apportioned some funds each year from the CLG Homelessness Grant to ensure that provision exists to protect rough sleepers from sub zero temperatures and ultimately to ensure as far as possible, that people do not die while sleeping on the streets during winter.

45.2 The Single Homeless, QA and Risk Manager reported that the primary reason for the protocol was to prevent loss of life. The secondary reason was to engage with hard to reach people, in order to help them receive support and onto a housing pathway.

45.3 The Cabinet Member mentioned that the severe weather last winter had tested the system and had shown that the plans in place were excellent.

45.4 Councillor Simpson was pleased to see that the protocol could be brought into action if necessary. She asked for assurance that up to 20 places in the night shelter was adequate. The Single Homeless, QA and Risk Manager considered the provision was adequate and stressed the importance of ensuring that agencies were aware of what was going on. This year officers would ensure that City Clean and the Seafront Officers were aware of the protocol.

45.5 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions:

(1) That the plan for delivering of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) during the winter 2010/11 be noted and the protocol agreed.

#### 46. LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN FOR HOUSING

46.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that in February 2010 the authorities in this sub-region were invited to prepare a Local Investment Plan (LIP) for housing which would set out their priorities for housing investment. Following the adoption of a Local Investment Plan, a Local Investment Agreement would be agreed, which would set out the Homes and Communities agency’s proposed investment in the area over the next three years.

- 46.2 The Cabinet Member commented that the report, along with the work the Homes and Communities Agency were carrying out, was timely as it tied in with the work on Ainsworth House and the provision of more council housing.
- 46.3 Councillor Simpson referred to Brighton & Hove being grouped with Arun, Adur, Chichester and Worthing, the "Coastal West Sussex" sub-region. She considered that the characteristics of Brighton & Hove were quite different from the towns it had been grouped with.
- 46.4 The Cabinet Member referred to paragraph 5.5 in the report. At the moment all social housing grant aided housing schemes must meet Code Level 3 of the Sustainable Code. In 2011 there was an expectation that new affordable housing schemes would meet Level 4. This would have a financial impact on new developments.
- 46.5 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions:
- (1) That the proposed process and timetable for completion of a Brighton & Hove Local Investment Plan for housing be agreed.
  - (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing Strategy be given delegated authority to agree the final content of the Local Investment Plan prior to the sign off with the Homes & Community Agency in September 2010.

#### 47. **CONTRACT FOR COMMUNAL DIGITAL TV SYSTEM FOR COUNCIL HOUSING**

- 47.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that presently most of the council's blocks of flats had analogue communal aerial systems. The South East (including Brighton & Hove) analogue signal would be switched off in January 2012.
- 47.2 To meet this deadline, a contract would need to be awarded as soon as possible. In order to achieve best value for money, the tender process commenced in July 2010, on the basis of a citywide contract to lease or purchase outright and maintain an IRS 9 Wire Sky+ (integrated reception system) digital aerial system, for all HRA blocks with existing communal aerials.
- 47.3 The Assistant Director, Housing Management reported that there had been recent professional advice that purchasing systems would be more cost effective. The procurement had been commenced on the basis of leasing and purchasing systems in order to obtain best value.
- 47.4 The Cabinet Member asked for the report to be submitted to the next Housing Management Consultative Committee for information.
- 47.5 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decision:
- (1) That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4.50pm

Signed

Cabinet Member

Dated this

day of

# HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 58

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Customer Access Phase 2</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>20 October 2010</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Acting Director of Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Ododo Dafé</b>	<b>Tel:</b> <b>29-3201</b>
	<b>E-mail:</b>	<b>ododo.dafe@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b>	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Forward Plan No. (HSG 17571)</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report updates Cabinet Member Meeting on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presents a number of proposals for consideration.
- 1.2 A report detailing the customer access review and proposals for taking the review forward was considered by HMCC on 12 October 2009. A report was agreed by Cabinet Member Meeting on 3 March 2010 which included 10 Broad Principles on which improvements to customer access should be based. A version of this report went to HMCC for consideration on 27 September 2010.
- 1.3 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 (eg teams at housing offices, income management and repairs desk), see Appendix 1.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Housing agrees the proposals that are being considered by phase 2 of the Customer Access Review.
  - (1) A single point of contact is established for all Tenancy Management telephone calls, emails and written enquiries.
  - (2) That one free phone and one local number is introduced for Repairs and Tenancy management and telecoms technology is utilised to route calls to the correct destinations.
  - (3) That some Children & Young People's Trust services are provided from the Lavender Street Housing Office as part of a co-location arrangement with local housing area staff continuing to be based at that housing office.

(4) That work continues on looking at providing access to housing management services through 'Community Contact Points' in libraries.

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

#### **Customer Access Review Group**

- 3.1 Since the agreement of the broad principles the service has been undertaking further work with staff and residents to look at what can be done to improve the current service, fulfil these principles and provide better value for money to residents.
- 3.2 A staff Customer Access Review Group has been set up which is made up of staff from various service areas including those who's work includes dealing directly with residents. They have been looking at exactly what customers are asking us for when they contact us and focusing on how we achieve their requests with minimum waste. This involves observing our services from the customer perspective, and importantly, discussing that specific service with some individual customers at the point of transaction. It enables the group to better understand the nature of their enquiry, whether they have contacted us previously on the matter, the use they make of housing offices, what else they might like to see at offices and their access to the internet for example. The work has also involved talking with staff providing the service, and tracking the work as it progresses.
- 3.3 Towards the end of the group's work looking at how customers access our services they will involve the relevant managers and teams in developing improvements and planning for changes that will enhance the experience of customer using our services. The group will also be using tenants feedback from mystery shopping work to inform the customer access review recommendations. This work is one way that we are looking to improve our ability to satisfactorily complete customer transactions at the first point of contact.

#### **Why look to improve customer service?**

- 3.4. Poor customer service seems to stay in the mind a lot longer and is spoken about more amongst customers than good customer service.
- 3.5 Our aim has always been to provide our customers with an excellent level of service, but we know we need to give this a much higher focus if we're going to make the step change that we want. Our customers value receiving services from friendly, knowledgeable, courteous and considerate staff, and they also want to receive services in the ways that suits their individual needs at a time that suits them. Coupled with this is the imperative upon all organisations, but especially those using public funds, to provide services quickly, efficiently and effectively.

## **Customer Access - Broad Principles**

3.6 The findings from the 2009 review of customer access to tenancy management services were formed into 10 broad principles which provide a basis for the service to change and develop. The aims are to improve the experience of customers contacting the service and ensure that enquiries are resolved 'right first time' or 'once and done'. These principles are:

- 1) Housing management should provide an effective and efficient service that meets residents' needs
- 2) Current ways of working need to change as they are resource intensive and do not always deliver what residents want
- 3) All residents should be able to easily access the service
- 4) There should be a range of ways for residents to contact the service
- 5) Administrative functions should be organised to reduce waste and avoid duplication
- 6) Housing Officers should have a proactive role focused on providing support and tackling problems as early as possible
- 7) Housing Officers should spend less time on administration and more time with residents and taking care of their neighbourhood
- 8) Support should be targeted at those who need it most
- 9) It is possible to improve service delivery whilst reducing costs
- 10) Residents and staff should be involved in developing and delivering change and improvement

3.7 Within this area of work we are looking at all the ways in which customers access our services. Our aim to achieve a variety of choice for residents that enable them to contact us using the method they prefer, and at a time of their choosing. In doing this, we have to make sure that all channels provide an excellent customer service that meets our customers demands in a professional, complete and timely way.

## **The new Housing Centre**

3.8 The council has signed the lease for a building in Moulsecoomb (Unit 1, Fairway Trading Estate, Eastergate Road, Brighton) which will enable us to improve accommodation for staff and service delivery for residents. Work can now start on developing the building so that it meets the needs of the service and the Repairs & Improvement Partnership.

3.9 The Housing Centre will bring a number of benefits which include:

- An area for residents where they can access resources and hold meetings
- Modern office accommodation
- Onsite training facilities and meeting rooms
- Co-location of supply chain partner with on-site stores
- The opportunity to locate back office functions together in a single office rather

3.10 The centre will be an important factor in how we can organise the Housing Management service to deliver customer focussed improvements. The building is large and therefore brings the potential to co-locate a number of housing teams along with Mears staff, and further develop communication, cross-team working and partnering relationships. The Repairs Desk will also move from their location in Bartholomew House to the Housing Centre enabling these staff to work more closely with the Property & Investment and Mears teams to resolve issues more quickly and effectively than current arrangements allow.

#### **‘A Council the City Deserves’**

3.11 As part of the overall transformation of the council taking place under the banner ‘A council the city deserves’, Housing Management staff are working with staff from other service areas in order to provide an improved and more consistent approach to customer service across the city. This involves creating consistent standards for customer service and reception areas across council services, looking at ways of improving the experience of customers contacting the organisation and improving access to services via the internet.

3.12 Part of this corporate approach involves looking at opportunities to link up services and share offices. This has the advantages of providing customers with access to a range of services at a single point, as well as achieving financial savings. The council is also looking at ways of using libraries as community contact points where people can access a range of information about local services, and be assisted by specially trained Libraries staff to access a range of services via the internet. This could have significant benefits for residents who do not have access to computers at home or need support to use the internet.

#### **Co-location at the Lavender Street Housing Office**

3.13 As part of these council-wide changes and improvements, Housing Management have been looking at an opportunity to share Lavender Street Housing Office with the Children’s and Young People’s Trust. Residents should notice little difference in the service they receive as local area housing staff will continue to be based in the office. It will however, be an opportunity to provide access to a wider range of services from this location and improve public phone and computer provision within the reception area.



## **Improving customer service**

- 3.14 Most customers contact us by phone, so for many it might be the only experience they have of our service. It is therefore important that we get it right, as a poor service leaves a lasting impression. We currently run five mini call centres and five face-to-face customer service points from our housing offices, and this has proven to be resource intensive particularly during less busy times.
- 3.15 One way of improving the experience of customers that is being looked at by the service is to reduce the number of public telephone numbers used by the service. Currently there are many different numbers that customers use for contacting tenancy management services, for example enquiring about a rent account, reporting neighbour nuisance and enquiring about transfer request etc. This can cause confusion for residents who are not always clear who they should contact about a particular issue. It is also an expensive way to organise the service as each phone-line and reception needs to be staffed in working hours.
- 3.16 Housing Management would like to create a single phone number for accessing all tenancy management services which will be answered by a dedicated team. This team would be given the training and authority to deal with the majority of enquiries when they are first received. The council would use telecoms technology to ensure that calls are routed effectively and answered as quickly as possible. Trials at Selsfield Drive housing office have shown that over 80% of enquires can be resolved on first contact when staff are trained and empowered to do so.

## **Housing Offices**

- 3.17 As part of the review, the way that housing offices respond to face to face and telephone enquiries will be examined. In the past a full range of services to residents were provided from housing offices and most enquires could therefore be resolved by calling or dropping into the local office. However, over the last 10 or so years this has changed significantly with services such as repairs, income management, garages and car parks, anti-social behaviour and lettings being provided by specialist teams who cover the whole city and are based at one location rather than across the local offices. This means that housing offices are not able to resolve many of the issues that they did in the past. Residents who call in to see or speak to their Housing Officer are often unable to as they are only on duty for certain periods and often out of the office visiting people in their homes, attending meetings or working on the estates. This can lead to frustration for residents calling or dropping into offices, but also means that a lot of staff and resident time is taken up dealing with enquiries that are not directed to the most appropriate place for a response.
- 3.18 In order to look at how we can better use housing offices the council is examining what happens when people contact a housing office either by phone or in person and looking at how effective our response is. Whilst we wish to continue to provide opportunities for residents to talk directly to their Housing Officers and other staff this may be better provided by appointment and ensuring that it is simple to contact an officer who can immediately

resolve a particular issue directly by telephone, internet or email. Any changes would need to consider the needs of vulnerable residents who require support to access services, and would also need to make provision for resolving emergency situations quickly and effectively.

- 3.19 There is an increasing national trend of encouraging payments for goods, services and utilities through cost effective methods and at times that best suit customers. The service would like to further promote the full range of methods that tenants can use to make rent and household insurance payments.

### **Next Steps**

- 3.20 The work will continue with the review group reporting on their findings and suggestions for service improvements. The changes to Lavender Street should be in place for January 2011. The service will continue to work with Libraries and other services on the community contact point pilot. The service will look at how best to simplify telephone and internet access and how staff can be best organised in order to ensure that enquires are resolved as quickly as possible. There will be a particular focus on using the new Housing Centre to improve service provision and value for money.
- 3.21 Progress and further decisions will be reported to future meetings of Housing Management Consultative Committee.

## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Residents will be involved in the development of customer access improvements through working groups drawn from Mystery Shopping volunteers. The group of twenty mystery shoppers comprises some elected tenant representatives, including members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee, and other that have not been involved before. They have already reviewed the Repairs Helpdesk twice (before and after the new partnership with Mears). They have also tested the service provided by housing office receptions.
- 4.2 There has also been opportunities for residents to be involved when officers are observing enquires as part of their review. Wider residents will be informed of developments through communications such as 'Homing In'.
- 4.3 Staff and trade unions will be involved throughout the review process and consulted about any resulting changes that effect them.

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

### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The implementation of recommendations 1 and 2 will be met within existing Housing Revenue Account budgets and staff resources.

The co-location of staff from Children & Young People's Trust (CYPT) will bring efficiency savings of approximately £0.090 million per annum.

The continuing work of reviewing access to housing management services and the review of rent payment methods will be met within existing HRA resources and any financial implications resulting from these reviews will be reported back to this committee.

Finance Officer: Susie Allen, Principal Accountant                      Date: 9.09.10

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no significant legal or Human Rights Act implications arising from the report's recommendations.

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley, Senior Lawyer                      Date: 14.09.10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 A draft Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and will be agreed before any proposals are implemented. It is important that equalities implications are considered in any changes to customer access. Changing and improving customer access 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 will also be considered.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability implications of any changes to customer access need to be considered. This should include the 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, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A risk analysis will be undertaken 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 council's 'A council the city deserves' work and will enable the outcomes of our projects to be coordinated with corporate developments.

**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 Cabinet Member for Housing of progress and gain agreement on the broad principles and recommendations in this report.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

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

**Documents in Members' Rooms:**

None.

**Background Documents**

None.

## Appendix 1

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>• Cleaning of common areas</li> <li>• Cleaning of graffiti</li> <li>• Clearance of fly tipping</li> <li>• Lock changes</li> <li>• Emergency break-ins</li> <li>• Minor repairs</li> <li>• Estate improvements</li> </ul>

