

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 42

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Customer Access Phase 3 – Customer Service and Access Strategy for Housing & Social Inclusion		
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Place		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Ododo Dafé	Tel: 29-3201
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presents the Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy for consideration by the Cabinet Member.
- 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 second report, agreed on 8 February 2010, included 10 'Broad Principles' on which improvements to customer access should be based. Following that, a third report on Phase 2 of the customer access review was agreed at the 27 September 2010 HMCC considering the establishment of a single point of contact for tenancy management enquiries; the co-location of Children and Young People's Trust colleagues at the Lavender Street Housing Office; and enabling access to housing services via community contact points at libraries.
- 1.3 The Housing & Social Inclusion Delivery Unit prides itself on placing its customers at the heart of everything it does, and its considerations for customer access are set out in the attached draft strategy. The strategy outlines actions to support the provision of excellent customer focussed services through a range of channels that increase customer choice.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Housing Cabinet Member approves the Customer Service and Access Strategy that is presented with this report as Phase 3 of the Customer Access Review. Key areas for action within the strategy include:

(1) Promotion and support for customers to use more effective methods for accessing housing information and services in line with council-wide 'Improving Customer Experience' work and our corporate Channel Shift Strategy.

(2) Consultations with staff on staffing structure to support proposed new customer access arrangements and service improvement.

(3) Consideration of opportunities for further office moves and best future use of some housing offices – notably Manor Place Housing Office and Victoria Road Housing Office.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

Customer Access - Broad Principles

3.1 The Broad Principles for reviewing customer access, as presented to HMCC on 10 February 2010 centred on the need for change to provide more accessible, efficient, preventative and better value for money services. It also covered areas of increasing choice, minimising waste, better use of staff resources targeted at where the need sits, and the involvement of staff and residents in the changes.

Lavender Street Housing Office co-location

3.2 Temporary staff moves to Oxford St Housing Office facilitated the co-location of Children and Young People's Trust teams at the Lavender Street Housing Office. The co-location has proved very successful, and customers have not been impacted by the new service model at this office.

Housing Centre

3.3 The Housing Centre was completed within target timescales and was available for staff to move into from April 2011.

3.4 Since then a number of teams have been relocated to the Housing Centre. They are:

- Mears Group
- Property and Investment
- Lettings
- Car Parks & Garages
- Estate Services
- Right to Buy & Leasehold
- Rent Accounting

3.5 Staff report that they are really happy with the office space and working environment afforded by the Housing Office, and are realising the benefits of working in close proximity to other teams within the service and Mears.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 Residents will be involved in the development of customer access improvements in a variety of ways. Examples include through feedback on our strategy via eg the internet and Homing In; joint working on aspects of service reviews – eg doing customer journey maps around the new tenancy process; Mystery Shopping our customer service; discussions at meetings; and face-to-face

surveys on the potential impact of moving staff at the Manor Place Housing Office.

- 4.2 Focus group work and satisfaction survey results have informed the development of the strategy.
- 4.3 Staff feedback has informed some aspects of the strategy, and staff, and their trade unions, will be formally consulted about relevant changes arising from the adoption of the strategy.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs and savings associated with the Customer Service and Access Strategy will be included within the HRA budget strategy for 2012/13 which will be reported to HMCC by February 2012.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Monica Brooks Date: 31/08/11

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no specific legal or Human Rights Act implications which need to be drawn to the Cabinet Member's attention at this stage.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 14/09/11

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 A summary of our draft Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 2. It will be finalised in light of the adoption or otherwise of the strategy, and before any proposals are implemented. Equalities implications have been considered throughout the strategy, as changing and improving customer access has the potential to affect a range of people including those with disabilities, people for whom English is not a first language, and others who can find it difficult to access services eg with no access to the internet.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability implications of any changes to customer access have been considered within the strategy. They include the potential to reduce the service's carbon emissions, reduce travelling, reduced use of paper in our operations, and increased use of access channels with the lowest environmental impact.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Rethinking the way we work and streamlining processes will free up officers' time, enabling them to spend more time with our most vulnerable tenants or out on our estates which may reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the perception of crime.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

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

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 There are no direct public health implications arising from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 Changes and improvements to customer service and access arrangements have been considered in a corporate context. Council wide work on eg Smartspace, Workstyles, systems thinking, web development had had, and will continue to have an impact on the actions within the strategy.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The strategy sets a framework within which we can consider different options for improving customer service and access within Housing & Social Inclusion.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To enable approval of the Customer Service and Access Strategy, and obtain feedback on its general direction and the actions within it.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Draft Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy
2. Draft summary equalities impact assessment

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

