

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION ON HOUSING OFFICE OPENING HOURS

Report of the Director of Derby Homes

SUMMARY OF REPORT

1. This report summaries the results of the consultation with tenants, Community Panels, Trade Unions and Staff on proposals to change public counter opening hours at 15 Local Housing Offices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. To approve the implementation of the recommendations in this report from 1 October 2002.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

3. Consultation

- 3.1 Over recent months extensive consultation has taken place with tenants and users of housing offices on the proposed new office opening hours. The proposals were made after a monitoring exercise in September 2001 that measured the levels of usage of all offices. The proposals are:

- retain 9.00am opening for all offices
- close ten offices at lunchtime, leaving five offices open all day (Allenton, Alvaston, Mackworth, Sussex Circus, Stockbrook St)
- close all offices at 1.00pm each Wednesday
- pilot late night opening at New Sinfen Office from October 2002.

The aim of these proposals is to target staff resources at those offices most used, and to release resources to deal with housing management duties outside of the office and tackle improvement items identified through the Best Value Review of Front Line Services & Sustainable Estates.

- 3.2 The June/July 2002 edition of Housing News carried an article publishing the proposed changes to local office opening hours. Tenants were asked to comment on the proposals. Posters displaying the proposals have been sited in all public reception area and again visitors to the offices have been invited to comment.
- 3.3 A total of 156 responses have been received. Analysis of these responses is detailed overleaf:

Total responses 156 = 1.02% of total stock

94 in favour of proposals = 60% of respondents

38 against proposals = 24 % of respondents

24 comments not connected with proposals = 16% of respondents

Analysis of returns by Local Office.

In favour:against proposals:

Level One Offices

Sussex Circus	Allenton	Alvaston	Mackworth	Stockbrook St
12:0	6:1	23:1	13:0	8:1

Level Two Offices

N Sinfen	Austin	Chad Pk	Osmaston	Brook St	Cowsley
4:0	0:4	2:4	4:4	10:8	2:2

Level Three Offices

Spondon	Littleover	Old Sinfen	Chellaston
5:2	1:6	0:1	4:3

Level One offices remain largely unaffected by the proposals and therefore it is not suprising that there was very few comments against the proposals.

The major changes contained within the proposals affect Level 2 & 3 Offices where it is proposed to close each day at 1.00pm, with the exception of New Sinfen where the office will remain open on Thursdays until 6.00pm.

Most of the comments against the proposals to close each afternoon related to issues around making rent payments.

“as I work in the mornings it will no longer be possible to pay my rent in the afternoons”

“I finish work at 1.00pm – How can I then pay my rent?”

“I like the office to be open on a Monday afternoon – I sometimes use it to pay my rent”

Other comments related to service provision if the office is closed to the public.

“Will I still be able to phone the office if I have an emergency?”

“Will I be able to see someone face to face if I need to?”

- 3.4 Consultation has also taken place at 25 Community Panel Meetings across the City. The outcomes were:
- 17 panels agreed with or had no view on the proposals
 - 1 panel member expressed an objection
 - 7 panels – views still outstanding. (Of these 7 panels , 5 are in the Allenton/Stockbrook Street areas which are only minimally affected by the proposals, Derwent/St Marks panel due to consider this item on 20.9.02.)

The only panel member to object to the proposals was from Spondon Community Panel who was not in favour to the office only being open from 9.00am – 1.00pm daily.

Most panels were supportive of the proposals and understood the need to target resources where demand is greatest. The main points of discussion were around issues of reporting emergencies when the offices are closed and also looking for reassurance that job security would not be reduced.

3.5 **Proposals/Recommendations**

- 3.5.1 The original report detailed Level 1 Offices as Allenton, Alvaston, Sussex Circus, Mackworth and Stockbrook Street. During the consultation period the status of New Sinfon Office was discussed. Given that New Sinfon is situated in a prime location (Sinfon District Shopping Centre) recently having undergone major refurbishment it is recommended that this office is raised to Level 1 status. The Office has higher than average afternoon usage for Level 2 offices and it is also considered that to close this office in the afternoons would not be in line with the other retailers in the District Centre. It is recommended however that this office still closes for one hour at lunchtime which would then allow all staff the opportunity to take a break away from the Office during the working day.

Recommendation: That New Sinfon housing office is redesignated a Level 1 Office.

- 3.5.2 Retain 9.00am as the opening time at all local housing offices. No objections were received in respect of this proposal.

Recommendation: To approve that all offices continue to open at 9.00am.

- 3.5.3 Bring forward Wednesday afternoon closing to 1.00pm at all Level 1 Offices, these offices currently close at 2.00pm. No objections were received in respect of this proposal.

Recommendation: To approve that Level 1 offices close at 1.00pm on Wednesday afternoon.

- 3.5.4 Reduce opening times in Level 2 Offices (Osmaston, Chaddesden Park, Austin, Cowsley, Brook Street) to 9.00am – 1.00pm, Monday to Friday.

There have been concerns expressed in relation to this proposal – although these are very low in numbers. Comments were mainly in relation to maintaining an adequate telephone service and also concern that tenants would no longer be able to make rent payments in the afternoon.

There are no proposed reductions to service provision in relation to telephone hot-lines, in addition the appointment service will be enhanced and promoted to allow for users to visit the office, or for staff to visit customers in their homes.

Payment options are now extended throughout the Post Office network, these locations are open from 9.00am – 6.00pm Monday to Friday and provide an alternative means of making rent payments during the afternoon. Further improvements will include direct debits, internet payments and the option to pay by telephone using a debit card.

A full publicity exercise explaining the additional methods by which payments can be made will be undertaken during September 2002.

Recommendation: To approve that all Level 2 Offices open 9.00am – 1.00pm daily.

- 3.5.5 Cease Monday afternoon opening at Level 3 Offices (Chellaston, Old Sinfon, Littleover and Spondon), regulating opening hours in line with Level 2 Offices (9.00am – 1.00pm Monday – Friday).

As with the proposal at 3.5.4 a few concerns were received from users of the above Offices. Again the concerns related to rent payments and contact in the case of emergencies. Monday afternoon opening was retained at these offices following the last review because there was a perceived demand. The monitoring which took place in September 2001 showed that actual usage was in fact very low with the majority of use being for cash transactions. As detailed above in 3.5.4 Derby Homes recognises the need for improved payment options and has indeed made more facilities available and continues to make further improvements in the future.

Recommendation: To approve that all Level 3 Offices no longer open on Monday afternoons, regulating office opening hours in line with Level 2 Offices – 9.00am – 1.00pm Monday to Friday.

- 3.5.6 Pilot Late Night Opening at New Sinfon Local Office.
There has been little response to this proposal – it is therefore proposed to run more area based consultation with users of the office and also users of the district centre before progressing this proposal further.
The consultation will be carried out during September 2002 and a further report produced for October 2002.

Recommendation: To approve further area based consultation prior to implementing/rejecting this proposal.

3.6 Reviewing and Monitoring.

- 3.6.1 It is proposed to report the results of the consultation exercise in Housing News in October 2002 and introduce the new opening hours from November 2002.
- 3.6.2. The new hours will be monitored and reviewed over the following 6 months, particularly in relation to rent payments/rent arrears. A similar survey to the one conducted in September 2001 will be conducted in April 2003 analysing the usage at each local office.

CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 4. Any further comments as a result of the published findings can be taken into account and responded to at that time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5. No immediate financial implications arise out of this report. Financial implications as a result of the late night opening pilot will be detailed in a separate report to the Board.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6. None.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7. These proposals will be the subject of consultation with Trade Unions. Consultation has already taken place on the original proposals and there was general support.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8. None.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9. The Local Housing Office network provides a convenient method of contact for many tenants. Most offices are within walking distance and many are within local shopping parades.

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