

AUSTIN NEIGHBOURHOOD BASE – REVIEW OF THE OPENING HOURS AT THIS HOUSING ADVICE DROP-IN SURGERY

Report of the Head of Housing Management and Housing Options

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Derby City Council leases 9/10 Browning Circle from a private landlord and Austin Neighbourhood Base leases 9/10 Browning Circle from Derby City Council.
- 1.2 Derby Homes has a licence agreement with Austin Neighbourhood Base to occupy space in these buildings.
- 1.3 From these buildings Housing Officers cover a drop-in housing advice surgery to our customers on Tuesday and Thursday mornings between 10am – 12pm. Our Income Team also pre-arrange appointments for a Housing Benefit Advisor to see our customers during these opening hours.
- 1.4 The Austin Neighbourhood Base has served notice to terminate the lease of these buildings with effect from 24 December 2016. In turn the Council has served notice to terminate the lease on these buildings on the same date to ensure it is not left with on-going responsibilities for the properties beyond the occupation of Austin Neighbourhood Base.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Approves that Derby Homes occupies another building in the area but offer a reduced drop-in surgery from 4 hours to 2 hours a week on a Tuesday between 10am – 12pm and that Derby Homes continue to promote the new additional ways that our customer can access our services. Austin Neighbourhood Base currently leases 8 Browning Circle directly from the private landlord and is agreeable to us occupying space in this building.
- 2.2 Notes that the last surgery in the current buildings will take place on the 30 November 2016. This will allow Austin Neighbourhood Base time to clear the building in readiness to hand back to Derby City Council and will allow us time to clear the buildings of our property.
- 2.3 Notes that Derby Homes aims to open the surgery in the new building on the 10 January 2016 subject to the building be ready and the new lease agreement being signed.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The attendance level at this drop-in surgery is low with an average of 6 of our customers attending a drop-in session. Most of these customers use this facility because it is local and therefore do not use a different surgery or choose to contact us in another way. Over the years we have also advertised the surgeries to our customers and encouraged our customers to use it.
- 3.2 The attendance levels at the pre-arranged Housing Benefit appointments are low with an average of four appointments being utilised over the two weekly sessions. The Income Team is able to accommodate pre-arranged appointments at other locations and they also visit our customers in their homes when required.
- 3.4 Because Derby Homes now has to look at offering this drop-in surgery from another location it is a good time to review the opening hours of this surgery before we enter into a new lease agreement with Austin Neighbourhood Base.
- 3.5 By reducing the hours the drop-in surgery is available, the Housing Officers will be able to carry out more pro-active estate based work rather than dedicating time to the operation of a poorly attended surgery. Housing officers are out on this estate daily and are communicating with customers in this area already in a variety of different ways.
- 3.6 Our customers can consider choosing other ways to contact us which might be more convenient for them. However, our customers will still be able to attend a locally based housing surgery weekly in this area if they prefer.
- 3.6 A number of years ago we did complete a Service Access Review which identified the need to close some of our housing offices due to falling footfall and experience has shown that this does not lead to deterioration in customer satisfaction, or access to services.
- 3.7 Derby Homes has implemented the additional new ways that our customers can access our service through the website and social media and we continue to promote these to our customers and this was an aim of the updated Customer Service Strategy that was introduced April 2016.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 We have consulted with all Ward Councillors for Normanton Ward on the proposals. All three Normanton Councillors have been notified about the change and no comments were raised.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 We are currently paying rent to Austin Neighbourhood Base to use and occupy space and it has been agreed by the Group Accountant that the budget allocated for this can be used to access the move costs. There is also potential for rent savings as a result of the reduced hours.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

- Health and safety
- Equalities Impact
- Risk
- Council
- Policy review

If Board Members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact:

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Background None

Information:

Supporting Information: None