

LOCAL HOUSING OFFICE SURGERIES

Report of the Head of Housing Management

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes that all remaining local office surgeries are closed .

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To close all remaining local housing surgeries from 1st July 2017.

This would allow time for a localised push on other service access methods, working with customers as they visit the surgeries in the affected areas between April and June.

3. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Local Housing surgeries are not a cost effective way to deliver front line customer contact. Furthermore, evidence shows that they are hardly used.

4. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 On 20 October 2016 the Operational Board approved the closure of the surgery at Austin Neighbourhood Base and requested a wider review of all surgery provision with a view to considering the continued provision of these services.
- 4.2 The Customer Service Strategy, approved by the Operational Board on 22 October 2015, supports the migration towards online services and therefore the review of frontline services forms part of this work.
- 4.3 Derby Homes Board, Local Councillors and customers have been keen to ensure that whilst new methods of customer contact emerge, there remains a facility for customers to have face to face contact with staff. This has meant that we have reduced this gradually in line with demand as new service access options have been developed and customers have got used to using them. We have now reached a stage where the housing surgeries are no longer needed.
- 4.4 Operational Board members will recall a report on a review of the surgery at Austin Neighbourhood base following the termination of the lease, which was discussed on 20 October 2016. That report proposed that the surgery be reduced from two days a week to one. However the Operational Board agreed that the surgery should be closed completely because only 6 people a week on average were using it. We have now carried out a further review of the remaining surgeries

- 4.5 The levels of use of surgeries from March 2016 to March 2017 is shown in the following table

	DH	HB/CTB	TOTAL	Av DH pw
Mackworth Library *	583	131	876	12.1
Alvaston Library	277	206	612	5.8
Old Sinfin Office *	422	37	456	8.9
Sinfin Library	183	100	315	3.8

*Income surgeries, by appointment would still continue. The contacts listed above only include drop in customers.

- 4.6 The figures show that the numbers using the surgeries is low in general. There are two other things to note. Firstly, a good proportion of the people seen by Housing Officers are not Derby Homes tenants at all. Secondly, a good proportion of enquiries are about Housing Benefit (HB). Many customers, the majority of whom are not Derby Homes tenants, find it much more convenient to go to a Derby Homes office to sort out their HB and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) than go to the Council House.
- 4.7 Derby Homes Customer Service strategy emphasises the need to promote more cost effective ways of accessing services. Operational Board members will know that we are launching a further initiative aimed at accelerating channel shift to the use of the website and away from face to face 'counter' service. Tenants have a broad range of service access options and having staff waiting for people to come into a surgery is the least cost effective. We still however emphasise the importance of face to face contact, but that is done through office appointments and home visits. In fact having surgeries open reduces our ability to work proactively on estates and carry out visits and will slow down the channel shift we are aiming to achieve.
- 4.8 We will still retain the two area offices at Sussex Circus and Allenton, open to the public every morning, plus the counter service in the Council House.
- 4.9 Operational Board members will note the comments made by Sinfin Ward Councillors (paragraph 6.1 below). The current tenant's dashboard allows tenants to undertake a range of services online which include rent payments, balance enquiries, raise repairs and make general housing enquiries. The new tenants dashboard to be introduced in 2018 will enhance these services.

5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Do nothing. Officers do not consider that this is a sensible option and would not help achieve our aim to encourage more tenants to use online services.
- 5.2 Reduce opening hours. This is not proposed as a solution due to the very low usage of the surgeries. We believe that the change is better managed by closure and supporting tenants to access services in alternative ways.

6. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Ward members have been consulted and are in support of these proposals except for Ward Members for the Sinfin Ward who suggested that we should leave the Old Sinfin Office open until the new tenants IT portal(replacing the current tenants dashboard) is up and running. The Sinfin Ward Councillors also suggested that we await the outcome of a Derby City Council Cabinet report on the future of libraries which is due by June 2017.

7. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 These proposals will help deliver Derby Homes Customer Service Strategy and will enable greater flexibility in service delivery
- 7.2 Derby Homes will pay £8,146 to the City Council this financial year for space at the three library locations. The proposal means we will be able to make a saving based on the closure date of the three library surgeries.

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

Legal and Confidentiality
Council
Personnel
Environmental
Equalities Impact Assessment
Health & Safety
Risk
Policy Review

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

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Background Information: None
Supporting Information: None