

REVIEW OF LOCAL OFFICE OPENING HOURS

Report of the Director of Housing and Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

1. This report concludes the current review of local office opening hours.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The City Board is requested to approve the following recommendations:
 1. Reduce opening hours at Sussex Circus and Bingham Street to 9.00am – 12.00 noon, Monday to Friday.
 2. Reduce opening hours at Austin Office to Tuesday and Thursday mornings 10.00 am – 12.00 noon.
 3. Reduce opening hours at Stockbrook Street to Tuesday and Thursday mornings, 10.00 am – 12.00 noon.
 4. To welcome the proposal to open a City centre office and note the intention to continue this service in the Council House when this reopens in 2012-13.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 We have been undertaking a review of service access since October 2010 as part of our business transformation agenda.
- 3.2 This review builds upon our earlier work to ensure that we continue to deliver excellent customer services whilst at the same time striving to operate in an efficient and cost effective way.
- 3.3 Derby Homes' Customer Service strategy was approved by Derby Homes Board in September 2010. A copy of the strategy is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Paragraph 3.2 of the Customer Service strategy states that "we will provide accessible services that our customers can utilise at a time and in a way that suits them".
- 3.5 Since September 2010, we have extended the ways in which tenants can access our services. The website now offers 24/7 access to the customer dashboard. Through this facility tenants can view their rent accounts, make payments, report repairs and make a range of other enquiries at a time to suit them.

- 3.6 In November 2010, Derby Homes Board approved the closure of cash offices at Sussex Circus and Allenton Housing Offices. These changes took effect in February 2011 and despite an initial increase in enquiries in relation to the cash office closures we have now seen footfall reduce at these offices.
- 3.7 In February 2011, the City Board approved proposals within a report on the review of customer access. This report contained proposals to consult on a reduction in opening hours at all Derby Homes' offices and co-locations. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.8 In June 2011, the City Board approved changes to the opening times in offices co-located within libraries at Mackworth, Alvaston and New Sinfyn. These changes have been effective since 4 July 2011 and we have not received any negative feedback from customers as a result of these changes.
- 3.9 Agreement has been reached with Derby City Council to integrate the delivery of Derby Homes' advice services within the Council's Customer Service Centre on Albion Street. From September 2011 we will be providing a 9.00 am – 5.00 pm city centre service, which tenants and leaseholders will be able to access. This service improvement has been delivered as a result of feedback from our customers who requested our presence within a city centre location to provide a convenient and accessible access point.
- 3.10 Since October 2010, we have been measuring and analysing footfall (callers) at the local housing offices. We have looked at the reasons customers contact the office in person and the ages of the customers.
- 3.11 Anecdotally we have always assumed that the majority of callers at the local offices are elderly customers. The footfall monitoring has shown this not to be the case with the majority of customers using the local offices being aged 54 years or under.
- 3.12 The top reasons for visitors to the local housing offices are as follows:
- Repairs/maintenance
 - Allocations/rehousing
 - Rent/benefit queries
 - Tenancy queries

- 3.13 The table below shows the current and proposed opening hours at our local offices.

AREA	OFFICE	CURRENT	PROPOSED
North West	Brook Street	Tues & Thur 10.00 am – 12 noon	NO CHANGE
	Mackworth	Mon 10.00 am – 12 noon Tues & Thur 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm	NO CHANGE
North East	Sussex Circus	9.00 am – 4.30 pm Closed Wed afternoons	Mon – Fri 9.00 am – 12 noon

South West	Old Sinfin	Tues & Thur 10.00 am – 12 noon	NO CHANGE
	New Sinfin	Mon 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm Fri 10.00 am – 12 noon	NO CHANGE
	Osmaston Austin	Thur 10.00am – 12 noon Mon – Fri 9.00 am – 1.00 pm	NO CHANGE Tues & Thur 10.00 am – 12 noon
South East	Bingham Street	9.00 am – 4.30 pm Closed Wed afternoons	Mon – Fri 9.00 am – 12 noon
	Alvaston Library	Mon& Thur 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm Tues& Fri 10.00 am – 12 noon	NO CHANGE
Central	Stockbrook Street	Mon – Fri 9.00 am – 1.00 pm	Tues & Thur 10.00 am – 12 noon

- 3.14 This report proposes to reduce opening hours at four offices, Sussex Circus, Bingham Street, Austin and Stockbrook Street.
- 3.15 Sussex Circus and Bingham Street remain the two busiest offices, in terms of customers visiting the offices. After the closure of the cash offices, Allenton is dealing with an average of 10 customers per hour and Sussex Circus 4.8 customers per hour. These figures also include customers who are invited into the offices for interviews. At both Sussex Circus and Bingham Street, visitors are quite evenly spread across the week and therefore we believe that there is still a strong need to have these offices open Monday to Friday, but reducing the office hours down to mornings only 9.00 am – 12 noon.
- 3.16 Austin office is situated within the Austin Community Enterprise building on Browning Circle. This office is currently open to the public Monday to Friday 9.00 am – 1.00 pm with visitors spread reasonably evenly through the week and averaging 2.2 customer visits per hour. The proposal is to reduce opening hours at the Austin Office to Tuesday and Thursday mornings 10.00 am – 12 noon.
- 3.17 The Stockbrook Street Office is currently open mornings only Monday to Friday. They currently deal with an average of 1.6 customers per hour. Given that a new customer service facility will be opening in the City Centre the proposal is to reduce opening hours at Stockbrook Street to surgery provision on Tuesdays and Thursday mornings between 10.00 am and 12 noon.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 These proposals were discussed at Chair's briefing on 8 August 2011.
- 4.2 We will actively work with customers who use the housing offices affected by the changes during September.
- 4.3 Housing Focus Groups and the DACP will be kept informed.

5. PERSONNEL

- 5.1 These proposals are part of a service access and structure review affecting the provision of front line housing management. Implementation of the structure review within the Business Transformation programme is dependent on these proposals to reduce opening hours being approved.
- 5.2 Staff and trade unions are currently being consulted concerning the structure proposals.

6.0 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The analysis of footfall at each office has taken account of the age of customers. This shows that at each office, the highest level of use is from customers in the age bracket 35-44 years. At all offices the lowest usage was from customers above the age of 55 years. We do not expect that the revision and reduction in opening hours will disadvantage any group of customer. We will ensure adequate publicity is given to the changes and alternative methods of service access.

7.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 7.1 Health and safety requirements stipulate that a minimum of two staff should be present during opening hours at any local office.

8. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN

- 8.1 Business transformation requires Derby Homes to achieve savings of £1.2M over the next four years. The review of frontline housing management and customer service will contribute to these savings.
- 8.2 Within the Customer Service Strategy, Derby Homes Board has already agreed to develop a wider range of options for customers to access services in cost effective means. The strategy sets targets to reduce local office visits from the current estimated 35% to 20% by April 2012 and 10% by April 2015.

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

- Environmental
- Legal and Confidential
- Risk
- Policy Review

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or Phil Davies, Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org – Phone: 01332 888528

Author: Maria Murphy, Director of Housing and Customer Services. Telephone 01332 888522
maria.murphy@derbyhomes.org

Background Information: None

Supporting Information: None



Derby Homes Customer Service Strategy

To provide the people of Derby with the best housing service in the country

1. Introduction

Derby Homes is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) that manages, maintains and improves the housing of Derby City Council. It was set up in 2002 by the Council as an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and is the largest provider of social housing in Derby with just under 14,000 properties.

The organisation has an excellent national reputation. In 2002, Derby Homes was inspected by the Audit Commission and was awarded the highest rating of three stars for excellent services. Following re-inspection in February 2006, the organisation retained its 3-star status. Derby Homes has also achieved and retained a number of other significant awards including Customer Service Excellence, Investor in People, ISO9001, Positive About Disabled People and RoSPA Gold for commitment to health and safety.

2. Purpose of this strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to describe the vision, goals and aspirations of Derby Homes in relation to our Customers and how they access the services we offer. The Strategy is key to ensuring that Derby Homes' customers have access to services and information beyond traditional office hours and also enables Derby Homes to deliver services more cost effectively.

We want to ensure we are consistently delivering excellent customer services. This strategy sets out our vision for the future development of our customer services and outlines the improvements that we need to make to ensure that we achieve this.

We will build upon earlier work which includes our agreed Customer Care standards and a comprehensive service review carried out in 2005. The review resulted in the rationalisation of our housing offices and cash collection services enabling us to provide a more efficient service to our customers by freeing up housing staff to enable them to spend more time out on estates and by providing our Enquiry Centre to allow our contact hours to be extended.

The strategy has been developed around customers' needs and aspirations, gathered through ongoing consultation and details how this customer insight will be translated into service improvements. This plan will develop ways to make it easier and quicker and more convenient for customers to contact us and to provide access to services in a variety of ways through cost effective channels.

The strategy is built around key priorities accompanied by a detailed action plan. Each of the priorities is listed below with a summary and a selection of the actions for each priority highlighted. The full action plan together with details on how the actions will impact upon our customers can be found in the DECATS Action Plan.

3. Proposal

3.1 A Customer focused workforce fully equipped and empowered to consistently provide excellent services.

We will ensure that our staff have the right attitude, behaviours, experience, skills and equipment to enable them to deliver excellent customer services. We will review our standards with Customers every two years. We will continue to develop a culture where going the extra mile is standard and initiative taking is encouraged, learning development plays a leading role in delivering this priority.

Key Actions:

- Recruitment panels will include customers to ensure this is a priority in the recruitment process
- Provide a framework of learning and development that builds upon the skills of our staff
- Working with our training provider we will incorporate any changes into the compulsory Customer Service training.
- Ensure that Staff attend Customer Service training on a two year rolling programme
- Our service standards in our customer charter will be monitored by our managers, tenant inspectors and performance team in order to ensure we are meeting our targets.
- We will consult with customers and staff regularly and be accountable by providing feedback on our performance.
- We will continually review our work processes to create services that meet customer needs and performance targets.

3.2 We will provide accessible services that our customers can utilise at a time and in a way that suits them.

We will enable customers to communicate with Derby Homes by providing a range of options. We will embed Customer Service Excellence within the Organisation. Customer expectations continue to rise and we will use the Customer Experience system to promote and ensure we meet these expectations. We will encourage and promote the most cost efficient means of service delivery. We will use marketing and communication to ensure our customers are aware of our services.

Key Actions

- Customers will be able to contact Derby Homes by the internet, email, text, telephone, minicom and letter 24 hours a day 7 days per week.
- We will ensure that our local housing offices are fully accessible and we will carry out home visits for customers that request this
- We will co-locate with other agencies and will actively encourage joined up services.

- We will implement software that allows us to record all customer contact on a comprehensive database.
- We will continue to improve our customer feedback system that enables us to listen to and co-ordinate the views of all our customers.
- We will involve our customers in continually reviewing and improving the service they receive through Focus Groups, Process Improvement Teams and other groups
- We will work with the Derby Association of Community Partners (DACP) and Scrutiny Panels to involve them in feeding back on our services.
- The role of the Enquiry Centre will continue to be developed to deal with all enquiries without the need to transfer calls. The Enquiry Centre will be open 8 till 8 Monday to Friday and on Saturday mornings. Customers will also be able to contact a specialist officer or arrange a home visit through the Enquiry Centre.
- We will use our website, press releases, public events, newsletter, leaflets and posters to ensure customers are aware of the services we provide

3.3 We will invest in efficient and effective processes and technology that will enable us to provide excellent customer services.

This priority focuses on enabling our workforce to deliver excellent customer services through the provision of new technology.

Like any modern organisation we make extensive use of IT to support our staff in delivering excellent services to customers. Increasingly, we are also using IT to allow our customers to get the information they want electronically, and to communicate with us directly – especially over the internet.

Key Actions

- We will continue to develop ways to make it easier and quicker for customers to contact us and to provide access to services through a variety of ways.
- The website will continue to be developed with our customers. Customers will be able to contact the organisation through the website and a list of Frequently Asked Questions will enable customers to find key pieces of information easily.
- The website will provide access to on line services, such as rent payment, registering of complaints and customer feedback, reporting of repairs, accessing of rent statements and other important information about tenancy issues. The website will also provide information on performance and the services we offer.
- We will ensure that our website contains accurate and up to date information and will make signpost customers to enable them to find the most up to date information.
- We will continually improve our customer satisfaction surveys including looking at new ways of surveying our customers, such as by SMS text and e-mail.
- We will continually review the ways in which we communicate with our customers and will look for the most efficient ways of doing this. We will offer options to opt out of hard copy materials in favour of electronic versions of

leaflets etc.

We will continually improve our range of tenant involvement opportunities and look for ways of getting customers involved through other means such as on line forums and interactive voting on our website.

3.4 We will use customer insight to continuously improve and develop our services.

Customer insight is about knowing who are customers are, understanding their behaviours, needs and preferences then using this information effectively to enable us to deliver excellent customer services.

This priority concentrates on the collection of demographic information and how we will utilise this information to tailor our services accordingly. We need to move towards being pro-active in responding to customer need rather than re-active. It also looks out how we will encourage and utilise feedback to continuously improve our services. It recognises that Derby is a diverse city with many communities and we need to reflect this in our work

Key Actions

- We will increase the amount of detailed demographic information which we hold on our tenants and leaseholders.
- We will use the information that we gather to identify customers who may be interested in or benefit from additional services.
- All customers will have equal access to our services. By recognising different needs we will make the necessary arrangements to ensure people with physical disabilities can access our services and remove any language barriers that could restrict access.
- There will be comprehensive equalities monitoring across all service areas and Equalities Schemes covering race, age disability, sexual orientation, religion and gender.
- We will complete Equality Impact Assessments for all key service and new policy areas to ensure customer and diversity impacts are identified and addressed.
- We will ensure our workforce reflects the customers we serve

3.5 We will reward good customers and neighbours

Good tenants reduce the costs of the service by looking after their homes, paying their rent on time, keeping appointments, being good neighbours and supporting their neighbourhood and community.

This priority aims to provide tenants with incentives to be good customers and neighbours.

Key Actions

- We will promote good neighbour contracts amongst tenants in flats and on estates.

- We will hold a range of competitions each year, for example, to reward good rent payers, best gardens, customers who adopt the website self service system, and customers who keep appointments.
- We will work with new tenants and with vulnerable tenants to ensure they are good customers and neighbours.
- We will ensure that customers who add costs to the service are required to pay for these, such as through recharging for any damage to properties.
- We will work with the Council to ensure we do not re-house former tenants who have failed to pay rent or other costs or who have been bad neighbours.

4. How we will monitor our progress

The milestones for this strategy are consolidated in the Delivery and Business Plan, Service Plans and the DECAT Improvement Targets. We will report our progress through the Value for Money Working Party and Senior Management Team.

We will promote and report on new services through the website and other publications.

5. Implications

Implementing this strategy will result in significant expenditure. Detailed costs are identified in the DECATS and Business transformation documents. New IT and mobile working equipment is expensive. We will operate within Derby Homes financial plans which give a priority to modernising our services.

Where appropriate and in consultation with our customers and stakeholders we offset cost against savings in other areas resulting from improved processes and revised operational practices.

This could include:-

- Increasing the amount of rent collected by using our new systems to provide more accessible payment channels to customers;
- Reducing current service costs across our service areas by pooling resources to provide a shared customer facing function through co-location
- Freeing up highly trained specialist staff from dealing with basic queries to focus on more value added areas by utilising self service options through the website

6. Outcomes for tenants/leaseholders

We expect that over the course of the next three years our customers will see a marked difference in the level of service that they receive in the following ways:

- A greater percentage of our customers will have their enquiry resolved at the first point of contact.
 - It will be even easier to contact us at times and in ways that suit the customer's individual needs and preferences.

- When customers contact us they will experience a consistently excellent service delivered by a customer focused organisation.

7. Equality and Diversity

Through the strategy we aim to options for every customer to access to our services in a way that best suits their individual needs and preferences.

We will direct and encourage customers to use more cost effective methods of accessing our services such as website, SMS, telephone, direct debits. A more comprehensive understanding of what our customer's needs and preferences is enabling us to identify and pro-actively remove any barriers that might exist.

We will also provide greater choice through increased and improved access channels enabling all of our customers to contact our organisation in a way and time that best suits their individual needs.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on this strategy.

Customer Use targets

Customer access routes targets:

	Current %	% By April 2012	% By April 2015
Telephone Contact Enquiry Centre	60	65	60
Other Telephone Contacts	0.5	1	1
Letter	1	1	1
Email	2	3	5
SMS	0	5	10
Visits to offices	35	20	10
Website self service	1.5	5	13

Cash Collection use targets

	Current %	% By April 2012	% By April 2015
Post Office/Corner Shop	30	35	20
Council House / Local Office	20	5	0
Direct Debit	8	12	20
Telephone	1	3	10
Website	1	5	10
HB Nothing to pay	40	40	40

These targets will be monitored annually.

REVIEW OF CUSTOMER ACCESS

Report of the Director of Housing Management and Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

This report explains how Derby Homes can provide better customer care and obtain better value for money by using a mixture of service access methods.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- To delegate the implementation of these proposals to the Chief Executive of Derby Homes.
- To receive regular progress reports.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Derby Homes Customer Service Strategy is shown at Appendix 1. The strategy says that we will:

'provide accessible services that our customers can utilise at a time and in a way that suits them' and that we will 'invest in efficient and effective processes and technology that will enable us to provide excellent customer services.'

- 3.2 Derby Homes now has an opportunity to build on progress made in developing the following:

- Derby Homes website
- Derby Homes Enquiry Centre
- The introduction of proactive text messaging
- Mobile working and 'hot desking'
- Home working
- Improved remote monitoring arrangements

- 3.3 Customer service access at Derby Homes has evolved over time as new ways of delivering the service have developed. At one time we had 15 decentralised local housing offices, each with a cash office. Most of those offices were open to the public all day. Clearly it is extremely inefficient to keep an office open when it is not being used. As a consequence, office opening hours were reduced and offices closed as new ways of delivering parts of the service came on stream. This included opening alternative co-located service outlets.

- 3.4 Derby Homes vision for the continued evolution of service access is to concentrate

on four strands:

- position the Enquiry Centre as the main focus for direct customer contact
 - maximise self service via the internet as quickly as possible
 - maximise the use of text messaging
 - ensure that traditional 'office opening' is kept to a necessary minimum level
- 3.5 Derby Homes Enquiry Centre will eventually handle all incoming telephone calls. At the moment, approximately 90% of all calls are about repairs. The Enquiry Centre telephone number is only number we advertise. However the old 'Featurenet' numbers are still in operation diverted to the new 'Cisco' numbers. This means that for the next few months tenants who know a member of staff's former extension can still ring them direct. This means that we need to increase the capacity within the Enquiry Centre. There is also a problem of fluctuating demand levels for service as evidenced by the recent cold weather.
- 3.6 We intend to address this by training all Housing assistants to become Enquiry Centre operators. These members of staff will be based within the local offices but will be able to log onto the Enquiry Centre system when we need them to. There will also be a planned reduction in the overall number of housing assistants.
- 3.7 We intend to maximise self service as quickly and as much as possible. Self service via the internet has 4 important advantages:
- It is by far the cheapest way to deliver services
 - Service access is available 24 hours a day, from any location, 365 days per year
 - Requests for service such as repair request received via the internet can be dealt with at a controlled rate
 - We can ensure there is absolute consistency in levels of service
- 3.8 The demographic of our customer base is changing. Whilst we still have many tenants who are not confident in using the internet, the proportion of our tenants who are is increasing. In time nearly all of our tenants will be comfortable with routinely obtaining goods and services via the internet. At the moment approximately 60% of tenants have access to it.
- 3.9 Derby Homes will launch the tenant dashboard of our website during May 2009. For the first time tenants will be able to interactively request and monitor the service they receive.
- 3.10 The project plan to introduce text messaging as a core communication medium is well underway. We already send out confirmations of repairs appointments by text message and will shortly be able to broadcast text messages to all tenants, groups of tenants and individuals relating to all aspects of the service.
- 3.11 The 'Contact' software enables service managers to send and receive text messages. Text messaging is the preferred way of communication for many people. Other organisations such as Wokingham Borough Council are more advanced than ourselves in the use of text messaging. The lessons learned are that Enquiry Centre and other staff will increasingly communicate with customers via text message. This will enable us to manage workflow more efficiently.

- 3.12 There will always be a need to provide face to face contact. However, we need to ensure that this is cost effective. The development of alternative service access options as explained above mean that we can review opening hours. At the moment we provide a counter service at local offices and co-locations with the library service.
- 3.13 We propose to consult on a reduction in opening hours at all Derby Homes' offices and co-locations. This will enable us to achieve 3 aims:
- An overall reduction in the number of counter staff (housing assistants)
 - A change of emphasis in their role, as explained in item 3.3 above, increasing their overall productivity
 - To increase the level of mobile working
- 3.14 The reduction in opening hours at current locations will be balanced by ongoing consideration of alternatives such as surgeries and a new co-location with the City Council at the NEXT shop prior to the move to the Council House.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Consultation will be carried out with elected members, tenants and leaseholders and other stakeholders on any proposal to alter office opening hours.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These proposals will make efficiency savings in support of Derby Homes' overall value for money objectives. They also promote and support Derby Homes Customer Service Strategy.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Any reduction in staffing levels at Local Housing Offices will form part of the wider consultation being carried out with staff and trades unions on business transformation.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 A summary of the Equality implications is:

A reduction in opening hours will impact particularly on older tenants who may not be as proficient in the use of the internet or text messaging as other tenants. We will reduce the impact of this by ensuring home visits are offered to any tenants who want one.

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

- Legal and Confidentiality
- Environmental
- Health & Safety
- Risk

- Policy Review

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or Phil Davies, Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org – Phone: 01332 888528

Author: Murray Chapman / Housing Services Manager / 01332 888593 / murray.chapman@derbyhomes.org

Supporting Information: Derby Homes Customer Services Strategy