

NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES

HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

13 APRIL 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING OPERATIONS

MODERNISATION OF THE TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICE, INCLUDING THE CASH COLLECTION REVIEW

1 SUMMARY

Nottingham City Homes (NCH) is exploring a range of ways to modernise its Tenancy and Estate Management service to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants and leaseholders. This report provides an update on these proposals, including the Accommodation Review and provides an implementation timetable for the first phase, changes to Cash Collection, subject to the ongoing staff consultation.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Housing Management Services Committee:

- 2.1 Note the progress made in the first phase of the modernisation plans and approve the proposals.
- 2.2 Note the proposals for the second phase of the modernisation plans and approve the approach.
- 2.3 Note the proposals made for the wider modernisation plans for the Tenancy and Estate Management service (Phase Three).
- 2.4 Note the progress made in reviewing the Accommodation Strategy.

3 MODERNISING THE TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICE: PHASE ONE - CASH COLLECTION REVIEW

- 3.1 The last meeting of this Committee recommended to the Board that payment desks at Aspley, Bestwood, Bilborough, Lenton and St Anns be closed and the Home Revenue Collection service should cease. On 25 March 2010, Board approved these proposals, subject to formal consultation with affected staff and unions.
- 3.2 The formal staff and union consultation period commenced on 29 March 2010 and is due to end on 7 May 2010. A number of meetings have been arranged with Union representatives and there is a positive approach being adopted by all concerned.
- 3.3 A draft Implementation Timetable has been written (Appendix 1) and will proceed subject to the results of the staff and union consultation. It is

anticipated that payment desk closures and cessation of the Home Revenue Collection service will be effected by the end of August 2010.

- 3.4 Customers who pay in offices where the payment desks are proposed to be closed will be supported in choosing an alternative method in a number of ways:
- Direct mailing, including a Direct Debit application and reconfirming local Post Office and Paypoint sites.
 - NCC's Local Tax division will write separately to all of their non-tenant customers and joint promotions will be undertaken to save cost.
 - Flyers and posters will be displayed in offices.
 - There will be promotions and advice on opening a bank account.
 - Post Offices and Paypoint outlets are being briefed and will have their own publicity material.
 - In the last weeks of the payment desks being open, staff will "surf" the queue in busy periods providing direct advice and assistance.
 - The Aspley, Bestwood and St Anns offices will remain open, so will be able to signpost customers after closure to any one of the 150 sites in the City where they are able to pay.
- 3.5 Customers who currently use the Home Revenue Collection service will need more support and assistance due to their vulnerability. Support will be provided as follows:
- Each of the 454 customers will receive a home visit by a Rent Officer.
 - Help and assistance in choosing the most appropriate method of payment will be provided.
 - Referrals will be made to Financial Inclusion Officers for financial health checks and assistance in opening bank accounts as required.
 - Referrals and signposting particularly vulnerable tenants for further support.
- 3.6 Despite high levels of vulnerability amongst Collection service clients, all are in receipt of pension and/ or benefits which are paid into their bank account or are cashed at Post Offices. Tenants can pay direct at either and if the tenant themselves cannot get out, there has to be someone acting for them.

4 MODERNISING THE TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICE: PHASE TWO - SATELLITE OFFICE CLOSURES

- 4.1 The cessation of payment facilities at offices will result in much lower numbers of visitors to those housing offices. In some cases, the number of tenants using the office will drop considerably. Footfall analysis was undertaken in all offices during November and December 2009 to provide a baseline for future data gathering.
- 4.2 In earlier footfall analysis, over 83% of visitors to the Lenton office and 75% of visitors to the Bilborough office attended to make a payment only. As a result, and following consultation in April 2009, both of these offices reduced their hours of opening to 2 days and 3 days per week respectively.

- 4.3 The Dunkirk and Lenton Partnership Forum have expressed an interest in taking over the Lenton housing office and have been in discussions with the City Council. They have tentatively proposed an office share agreement for the first quarter of 2010/11, taking over sole occupation from July 2010. The main opposition to the Lenton housing office closing came from the local community who were more concerned about the office unit being vacant than the services provided by NCH. There is a Paypoint outlet 150 metres from the office and the partnership forum have indicated that they would be happy for the local Patch Manager and our Debt Advice Service to use the office for surgeries.
- 4.4 There is a Post Office and a main Paypoint outlet (the Co-Op) within 100 metres of the Bilborough office. In addition, there will be many other places to pay that will be nearer to tenants' homes than the office. The Bilborough library, situated opposite the office, is keen to expand the range of community services they provide or host and are happy to accommodate surgeries.
- 4.5 It is proposed that both the Lenton and Bilborough offices are closed by the end of July 2010 at the same time as the payment desks shut. Formal consultation has previously been undertaken so would not need to be done again. Support for tenants and leaseholders, combined with effective communication will ensure that they are aware of how to access services once the offices close.

5 MODERNISING THE TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICE: PHASE THREE - WIDER MODERNISATION & THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

- 5.1 The current Tenancy and Estate Management (TEM) Service is a high cost, low tech, labour intensive service. It is traditional in nature managed from a number of dispersed locations across the City. STATUS survey results inform us that more than 80% of our tenants prefer to contact us by telephone rather than using the area offices. Increasing pressures on the HRA requires NCH to make service efficiencies whilst at the same time improving customer satisfaction in service delivery.
- 5.2 The wider modernisation plans continue to develop, but are dependant upon the delivery of the Customer Service Centre. NCH want to refocus the service to;
- Target resources at the most vulnerable;
 - Increase the proactive focus of the service by ensuring 80% of front line staff time is spent on estates;
 - Maximise the benefit of technology to improve interfaces with customers and to facilitate home working;
 - Maximise effective, cost efficient access routes;
 - Build upon the success of specialist services that have already been established;
 - Reduce costs by 25% to ensure the Company is able to respond to future financial pressures;
 - Create a cost effective Customer Services Centre, which will deliver long term savings and increase customer satisfaction;

- Move to the most cost effective methods of cash collection and cease to provide payment facilities in the area housing offices and the rent collector service;
- Review TEM structures taking into account the NCC review of Neighbourhood Management Services;
- Provide a more proactive responsive service through the development of an appointment system for TEM services;
- Enhance operating hours to meet customer expectations;
- Separate services from bricks and mortar.

5.3 Customers will benefit in the following ways:

- ✓ Easier access to a single point of contact with enhanced operating hours;
- ✓ Mobile technology will bring services to the customer;
- ✓ Vulnerable customers will receive enhanced support;
- ✓ Services will be delivered more proactively;
- ✓ Efficiency savings will delivery better value for money.

5.4 RXP are working with the Company to scope the terms of reference for the Customer Services Centre (CSC), a key focus for the modernisation plan. The CSC will be able to deal with a wide range of housing and housing related issues efficiently and effectively. The guiding principle will be getting it right first time, achieving upper quartile performance for National Indicator 14 in relation to avoidable contacts. RXP are to provide a Customer Services Centre blueprint by May 2010 which will be reported to this committee at the next meeting.

5.5 The CSC will be at the heart of the new Customer Services division which will be managed by the Assistant Director of Tenancy and Estate Management Services. Front line service advice at all NCH offices will be in this division, helping to ensure consistency of advice, raising standards across the Company, with the expected outcome being increased customer satisfaction. The ethos will be for a service which is solution focused and outcome based; proactively seeking ways to improve service delivery rather than reacting to situations as they arise. We aim to make better use of customer feedback to direct future service delivery.

6 ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

6.1 The majority of the accommodation occupied by NCH staff, including the Hounds Gate head office, is not up to modern standards. Staff are spread over too many dispersed locations in generally sub-standard buildings that are costly to service and provide poor working conditions. This is balanced against low rent levels, although the City Council have indicated that they may wish to review the current subsidised rents at all NCH occupied sites in the future.

- 6.2 RXP have also been assisting the Company with the Accommodation Strategy review. A number of options have been proposed, including a potential move to a new head office. A cost/ benefit analysis has been undertaken and a workshop held to explore the efficiencies that could be gained in moving away from Hounds Gate.
- 6.4 The continuing future of some housing offices will be reviewed at phase 3 of the modernisation plan when the decision on any change to the head office is confirmed.

7 FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Phase One: the closure of payment desks in the five offices stated and cessation of the home Revenue Collection service will provide estimated net savings of £298,000.
- 7.2 Phase Two: the closure of the Bilborough and Lenton offices will provide additional overhead savings of at least £65,000.
- 7.3 Phase Three; it is anticipated that further savings of up to £500,000 will be realised when the modernisation of the Tenancy and Estate Management service is complete.
- 7.4 Risk Assessments have been completed for phases one and two of the programme and appropriate mitigations put in place.

8 IMPLICATIONS FOR NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 Modernising Tenancy and Estate Management will provide tenants and leaseholders with a fit for purpose service that will meet their needs and aspirations and deliver value for money.
- 8.2 Whilst customer satisfaction amongst some tenants may be adversely affected initially through the proposed changes to the way they pay their rent, overall satisfaction is anticipated to increase in response to a modern and efficient Tenancy and Estate Management service.

9 VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY ISSUES

- 9.1 A modern Tenancy and Estate Management service will provide a more responsive and better quality service for tenants and leaseholders at a lower cost.

10 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A good proportion of office payers are elderly or disabled as are almost all Home Revenue Collection Service customers. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and an Action Plan devised to ensure that no diversity strand is adversely affected by the proposals.

**11 BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS
REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

- 11.1 NCH Board report of 25 March 2010.
Housing Services Committee report of 17 February 2010.
NCH Board report of 23 July 2009.

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Modernising TEM Phases One & Two;
Cash Collection Review & closure of satellite offices

Implementation Timetable

Date/ Indicative Date	Action
5 March 2010	Tenant consultation period ends
25 March 2010	Board decision to close payment desks and cease the home Revenue Collection service
29 March 2010	Beginning of formal staff consultation period
30 March 2010	Collective consultation meeting with trade unions
7 April 2010	Collective consultation meeting with trade unions
April 2010	Individual consultation meetings with affected staff
5 May 2010	Collective consultation meeting with trade unions
7 May 2010	End of consultation period
Throughout May 2010	Home Revenue Collection service customers individually visited at home, advised of cessation of service & assisted with alternative payment options
May to July 2010	Publicity on the Cash Review & alternative payment options to be clarified; see Communication Plan
Mid May 2010	Detailed decisions announced
Late May 2010	Notices of redundancy issued to staff if required
Early June 2010	Recruitment and selection process for ring fenced posts
Late June 2010	New structure in place
Late June 2010	Home Revenue Collection service stops
July & August 2010	Closure of payment desks at Aspley, Bestwood, Bilborough, Lenton and St Anns commences on a phased basis
July & August 2010	Closure of the Bilborough and Lenton offices on the date set for the payment desk to shut
By 31 August 2010	Phases one & two complete.

Other milestones:

Monthly	Review Risk Register and Equality Impact Assessment & take action as appropriate.
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