

Committee: Community and Children's Services Committee	Dated: 14/09/2023
Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	02/10/2023
Subject: Resident Focus Project (Customer Service and Repairs Review)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y/N
Report of: Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management, DCCS	

Summary

An external consultancy, Pennington Choices, was commissioned in August 2022 to complete an independent review of customer service provision across Housing and Property Services. The review included significant engagement with staff, residents and Members and resulted in a report with multiple recommendations for service improvements, to enhance our customer service provision and improve the resident experience when accessing housing and repairs services.

This report summarises the project, outlines the recommendations made and explains progress already made on implementing changes.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report and note progress on the action plan.

Main Report

Background

1. The Housing Division underwent a restructure in 2021/22 as part of the Target Operating Model (TOM) changes across the Corporation. This resulted in significant changes to front-line teams and individual roles in the Housing Division.

2. To build on the work done as part of the TOM changes, a review was commissioned to look specifically at customer service provision across Housing and Property Services. The review was devised to be a comprehensive examination of current service provision, with a detailed evaluation of our present service, the identification of gaps or weakness, and recommendations for improvement.
3. The commissioning process began in July 2022 and Pennington Choices, a consultancy specialising in the housing and property sector, was appointed after a competitive exercise.
4. The review itself began in September 2022 and concluded in March 2023. Officers have now begun implementing the recommendations made by the consultants.

Scope of the Review

5. The review had two key elements:
 - i. Customer service provision across Housing and Property Services
 - ii. Repairs and maintenance provision, including a review of staff resources and structures.
6. The key outcomes sought for each element of the review were:

Customer Service

- Development of design principles for a new customer service offer
- Production of several options for the new structure and service
- Mapping of key processes for customer service, and design of improved processes
- Detailed design of the preferred option or model for customer service
- Assessment of impact on stakeholders, including residents and staff
- An implementation plan.

Repairs and Maintenance

- Proposed new structure(s) and detail of new or revised job roles.
- Assessment of impact on existing post holders.
- Assessment of impact on relevant stakeholders.
- Analysis of costs.
- Implementation plan.

Key Activities Completed

7. The review included the following activities:
 - A desktop review of documents (including strategies, policies and service standards)
 - A review of key performance data and management information

- Consultations with staff, residents and Members through facilitated online workshops in September and October 2022
- Clarifying a vision for the future service, based on feedback from staff, residents and Members.
- Gap analysis and assessment of the current service
- Appraisal of options for future service delivery
- Recommendations for improvement based on the potential options.
- Creation of an implementation plan for the recommended improvements

Summary of Key Findings

8. Some of the main findings of the review are:

Operational Governance

- There are some gaps in strategy, policies and processes, meaning that operational staff are not always clear on the strategic direction of the organisation or how services should be delivered.
- Current operational policies were found to be generally good, however some expected policies are missing.
- Standard processes in many areas are unclear and should be introduced, to give clarity and consistency of service.

Operational Assurance

- A more comprehensive suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is required; many relevant KPIs are currently used, however some expected KPIs were missing or are not measured in enough detail at present.

Operational Structure

- The current staffing structure was considered adequate to meet our strategic aims, however it was identified that improvements are required to processes and use of IT to enable staff to provide a better service.

Customer Service Standards

- There was a clear desire from all stakeholders for a clearer set of customer service standards and an effective way of monitoring and 'enforcing' these.
- Accountability was seen an issue by residents, staff and Members. It was identified that lack of clarity in internal processes often led to confusion and service requests being 'lost' or misdirected.
- Estate offices were valued by all stakeholders, however residents were generally more concerned about being able to contact someone easily and get

a response within a reasonable timeframe, whether that was through an office, or by telephone or email.

Communication

- A key theme arising out of the workshops was that communication needs improvement, particularly in terms of individual enquiries or service requests. Residents are often unclear about who to contact on certain issues.
- Communication regarding communal repairs was flagged as an issue of particular concern to residents.
- A clearer strategy is required for resident communications.

Repairs

- It was felt by all stakeholders that the reporting and tracking of repairs requires significant improvement.
 - There was positive feedback on minor or straightforward repairs, however many respondents felt that more complex repairs were often mishandled and took too long.
 - Communication around repairs was felt to be poor, with stakeholders suggesting many improvements such as the ability to track a repair once it was raised.
 - It was felt that repairs appointments should be more flexible and geared towards the convenience of residents, not contractors.
9. The report identified that staff, residents and Members shared broadly the same concerns about the current service and made similar suggestions for improvement.
10. The review also identified high levels of positive engagement and interest from key stakeholders, including staff. It was noted that there is recognition that services need to improve in many areas and a willingness among Housing Division staff at all levels to make the necessary changes for the benefit of residents.

Recommendations

11. The report makes twenty-four recommendations, which are shown at Appendix One. They include recommendations at strategic and operational levels and range from changes that could be implemented relatively quickly, to those which would require quite extensive further work (e.g., the creation of a new Resident Involvement Strategy or establishing a Housing Contact Centre function).
12. Further service improvements (listed below) will be added to the action plan by officers. These additional items will complement the recommendations made by the consultant and address areas for improvement identified in the report.

- Repairs and Maintenance – regular operational meetings, post-inspection of works, works in progress reviews, review of accreditations and qualifications
- Robust monitoring and measuring approach that provides assurance properties are habitable and free from Category 1 hazards.
- Plan to ensure that housing management staff are suitably qualified as per new government requirement.
- Review methodology for collecting repairs customer satisfaction data to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of performance.
- System for monitoring and reporting on service performance, including regular transactional customer surveys
- Add workflow management to Civica (housing management IT system) to record resident contacts and an auditable trail
- Improving and developing a digital offering alongside chosen delivery model

13. Officers will allocate timescales to these additional pieces of work.

14. Overall, the recommendation is that the Housing Division takes a ‘back to basics’ approach to service delivery, ensuring that the fundamental building blocks of a good service are in place. This includes a refreshed strategy, procedures, service standards, performance measures and improvements to the use of IT.

15. Some key recommendations include:

- Develop an Asset Management Strategy to sit alongside the Housing Strategy
- Create process maps and procedural documents across a full range of housing and repairs services, to ensure clarity and consistency for both staff and residents.
- Implement a central team with one number and email address for enquiries, to deal with queries immediately where possible (i.e., a housing-wide contact centre).
- Introduce a clear resident communication strategy.
- Create a comprehensive set of service standards for all operational areas in housing and repairs.
- Improve staff induction process and complete a skills scan to identify key training required by role.

Next Steps

16. Officers have established a project group to manage the implementation of the recommendations.

17. Updates on the progress of the review and implementation of the recommendations are now provided via the housing web pages and regular resident and staff newsletters.

18. A dedicated page for the project has been created on the City Corporation website. Monthly updates on progress will be provided and the action tracker at Appendix Two will be updated monthly and published on the web page.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

19. The review, and resulting recommendations, will assist us in meeting several aims in the current Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy. The overall aim is to improve services for residents and support our staff to provide quality and responsive services.

Financial implications

20. The main financial implication of this project is the additional cost of recruiting a staff member to coordinate and complete many of the recommendations, however this cost can be met from the temporary staffing budget.

Conclusion

21. An external consultancy, Pennington Choices, was commissioned in August 2022 to complete an independent review of customer service provision across Housing and Property Services. The review included significant engagement with staff, residents and Members.

22. Officers are now implementing an action plan in response to the recommendations. Many recommendations will be easily delivered, however some will require further work to complete.

23. The recommended changes are intended to support staff to deliver better services to residents and enable us to achieve our strategic aims for housing and repairs services.

Appendices

- Appendix One – Summary of Findings
- Appendix Two – Recommendations and Progress

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