

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 12 JANUARY 2015
REPORT ON: REVIEW OF HOUSING REPAIRS CENTRE AND HOUSING INVESTMENT UNIT
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
REPORT NO: 6-2015

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report summarises the findings from a review of Housing Repairs Centre (HRC) and the Housing Investment Unit (HIU). The review was carried out to consider if it would be possible to consolidate these two teams into the Corporate Contact Centre (CCC).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The report recommends that the HRC to be consolidated into the Corporate Contact Centre to provide greater efficiencies in contact handling and to further drive forward one contact centre for Dundee City Council.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no direct savings proposals in this report.

3.2 Consolidating the HRC into the Corporate Contact Centre will result in greater efficiencies in contact handling, utilising the HRC staff's downtime on other contact types and using the increased resource from the HRC staff to assist CCC staff during busy periods.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 Following the Changing For The Future Review of Customer Services it was agreed by the Council's strategic management team that the Council should operate out of one consolidated Customer Contact Centre.

4.2 To date the Housing Repairs Contact Centre operation and the Housing Investment Unit have remained within the Housing Department. The objective of this review was to scan the tasks carried out by each of these teams to determine if there are any particular risks associated to moving within the Customer Contact Centre to identify potential solutions to enable this to happen.

5.0 REVIEW

5.1 To better understand the type of tasks and contacts received from both the HRC and HIU teams and decide what of these could be consolidated into the Corporate Contact Centre, data was captured across an 11 day period between 27th August – 10th September. The data gathering looked at what contacts were received by the contact centres, as well as what admin tasks they carried out in addition to answering calls.

5.2 The contacts received by the contact centres were carefully categorised and logged to both understand the type of contact, but also if the call was deemed to be either 'straightforward' or 'complex'. A 'straightforward' call would be considered a type of call which could have been picked up by an advisor in the Corporate Contact Centre, one which did not require a lot of specialist knowledge or time to resolve. A 'complex' call would be a call which required specialist knowledge or a longer time to resolve, making it an unsuitable call to be taken by an existing Corporate Contact Centre advisor.

Housing Investment Unit (HIU)

5.3 The Housing Investment Unit is based within the housing department in Dundee House and consists of 6 FTE grade 4-6 staff. The contact team deals with enquires on the HRA Capital and External Cyclical Maintenance (ECM) Programmes, medical adaptations and general programme enquiries as well as issuing notices and invoices for owner re-charging. Additionally in 2013/14 they dealt with compliance issues under the Factoring (Scotland) Act 2011.

5.4 The HIU receive far fewer calls than the HRC or the Corporate Customer Centre and received just 840 calls in the 11 day data capturing period. Of the 840 calls received, there was quite a range of call

reasons with only 4.5% of all of those calls being deemed to be 'straightforward' (38 calls). While the volume of calls was low over this period, there was a substantial amount of admin work which was carried out.

HIU Data Summary

Calls received: 840

% of calls deemed 'straightforward': 4.5%

% of calls deemed 'complex': 95.5%

Housing Repairs Centre (HRC)

- 5.5 The Housing Repairs Centre is located within the Environment Department Construction Services (EDCS) offices at Clepington Road. It comprises 7 FTE, grade 4-6 staff who are responsible for receiving telephone requests for repairs to Council tenancies and for correctly instructing the details to the contractor – Environment Department Construction Services. The HRC's current location was chosen so that the Contact Centre Advisors could build positive relationships with the EDCS tradesmen and supervisors so as to troubleshoot problems as and when they arise.
- 5.6 In addition to handling housing repair queries, the HRC is also charged with ensuring the efficient and effective programming of annual gas safety inspections in Council houses and does this by telephone and letter. The HRC was offered approximately 97,000 repairs phone calls in 2011/12.
- 5.7 The HRC receive a much higher volume of calls than the HIU but handle a wide range of customer housing queries. In the 11 day data capturing period, the HRC received 2,639 calls of which a number of these were considered 'straightforward'.

Contact type	Volume	% 'Straightforward'	% 'Complex'
Logged Jobs	1188 (45%)	100%	0%
Follow-up work	449 (17%)	0%	100%
Gas Appointments	264 (10%)	82%	18%
Progress Chasing	264 (10%)	0%	100%
Transfer Call	290 (11%)	100%	0%
Miscellaneous	185 (7%)	100%	0%

- 5.8 Of the contacts received by the centre, 72% (1,900 calls) were considered a straightforward call. In addition to answering these contacts from customers, the HRC staff also spend around 30% of their time carrying out admin duties.

6.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

- 6.1 There is an opportunity to provide a greater customer service offering to our customers by combining the work of the Housing Repair Centre and the Corporate Contact Centre (benefit details listed in 7.2).
- 6.2 The only perceivable impact of relocating the team into the Corporate Contact Centre in Dundee House is that the on-site relationship between the HRC team and the EDCS tradesmen and supervisors would be lost. This relationship is not essential for the straightforward contact (72% of contact) however is beneficial for the complex contact (28% of contact).
- 6.3 There is a further opportunity to look at how the HRC communicates with the EDCS tradesmen and supervisors and if this necessarily is required to be done face to face or if it would be more efficient to have this contact over the phone (especially as the tradesmen are often out working on jobs and not on site).
- 6.4 There is also an opportunity to restructure the team to work more efficiently. It would be beneficial to move 2 of the 7 FTE from the HRC team into the HIU team. The additional headcount in this team would allow for the complex work handled by the HRC team such as the 28% complex phone calls and the more complex gas appointment admin work to be moved from the customer facing HRC team.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The primary recommendation of the review is to consolidate the Housing Repairs Centre with the Corporate Contact Centre, keep the Housing Investment unit as a back office team and move 2 FTE from the HRC into the HIU team to process complex issues and gas appointments.

7.2 The main benefits of the proposed consolidation are:

- It would remove the need for a separate number for housing repairs, reducing the number of phone numbers customers need to remember to access council services
- Allows customers calling about housing repair queries to access other services during the phone call such as housing benefit, for example, without having to dial another number
- As 72% of the calls received by the HRC are straightforward, these could be spread across all advisors in the CCC, reducing customer wait time and improving efficiencies
- The additional 6 FTE coming across to the CCC from HRC could help the existing CCC advisors on other contact types at busy times of the day/month, again improving the customer experience
- By increasing the pool of advisors which can take calls in both CCC and HRC skillsets, the impact of absence is minimised in all skillsets

7.3 Achieving this change is quite straightforward and can be carried out in stages:

- The first stage would be to move the HRC team to Dundee House and have them report directly into the Customer Services Manager. The team can continue to answer the same calls from the same number to ensure consistency of service for customers
- The second stage would involve training the staff from both teams in how to handle the different skills sets and review the options for combining the two telephone numbers into one and communicating this change to customers
- With staff relocated, trained and customers informed of the new number, the consolidation would be complete

7.4 Consolidating the HRC into the CCC would come with the following stipulations to ensure that the service provided to customers remains consistent with the service currently provided:

- If a call needed to be transferred to a specialist advisor because the call was a complex one and required their expertise, the call transfer would be a 'warm transfer' meaning that the contact centre advisor would explain the customers query and any relevant details to the specialist advisor before passing the customer through. This would ensure that the customer does not need to explain the nature of their query twice and would therefore not aggravate the customer un-necessarily
- Although the service is moving from the housing department to the corporate services department, the housing department will still be involved in the service provided by the advisors and will remain responsible for the repairs service (in partnership with the EDCS). In the same way that Housing and EDCS maintain a working partnership to provide this service to customers, a partnership will be created between the customer contact centre and the housing department.

The Customer Services Manager would be responsible for the day to day management of the advisors in the customer contact centre, including the additional staff from the HRC team. The process of how to handle straightforward and complex contacts (e.g. how repairs are booked in, any changes or improvements to the process, etc.) would be done in partnership with the Housing Services Manager. The details of how this new working arrangement would work should be discussed and agreed during transition.

- As customers and the Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations (DFTA) are very familiar with the existing 434343 number to contact the HRC team, it is recommended that this number would be kept active and all calls to this number be diverted to the customer contact centre. This would be kept active for as long as was deemed necessary to keep a consistent level of service for customers. The ultimate aim would be to close this line and update all literature,

posters, websites, etc. which contain the 434343 number with the new customer contact centre number.

To ensure that closing this line does not impact customers, the customer contact centre would monitor the call volumes received through this route regularly to ensure that it is only closed once contact volumes through this line reach an agreed low level.

7.5 There would be no major additional costs to this change.

7.6 A review of the changes agreed should be undertaken 12 months after implementation.

8.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Risk Management. There are no issues in this regard to report on.

9.0 CONSULTATIONS

9.1 The Strategic Management team have been consulted in the preparation of this report

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

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