

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>FINANCE &amp; MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:13</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	<b>13<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2020</b>	<b>CATEGORY: DELEGATED</b>
<b>REPORT FROM:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (CORPORATE RESOURCES)</b>	<b>OPEN</b>
<b>MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:</b>	<b>ELIZABETH BARTON, HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES <a href="mailto:elizabeth.barton@southderbyshire.gov.uk">elizabeth.barton@southderbyshire.gov.uk</a> or 01283 595779</b>	<b>DOC:</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>TRANSFER OF HOUSING REPAIR CALLS INTO CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>	
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM 11</b>

## **1.0 Recommendations**

That the Committee approves:

- 1.1 The transfer of Housing Repair calls into Customer Services and the creation of an additional Customer Services Advisor post on the Council's Establishment – which will be either a full time Modern Apprentice, or a part-time (18.5 hours a week) skilled Customer Services Advisor (see points 5.2 & 5.3).

## **2.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to gain approval from the Committee for the transfer of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services, which aims to improve the customer services the Council delivers to our residents and businesses, and better streamline/enhance back office activity.

## **3.0 Executive Summary**

- 3.1 The Council has been trialling a move of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services this autumn and is seeking approval to make this move permanent from March/April 2020, dependent on recruitment. The move will benefit the Housing Repairs team by addressing several recommendations made in the Housing Quality Network review of the repair service, which was presented to Committee in June 2019.

## **4.0 Detail**

- 4.1 A trial has been taking place this autumn to explore the move of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services.
- 4.2 Currently the Housing Repairs team processes about 16,000 (approx. 61) incoming telephone calls a day, which are received through two direct dial telephone numbers.

- 4.3 The direct dials are reached either directly from numbers published in tenant handbooks etc, or through the Council's main call system, when a customer chooses option 3.
- 4.4 The Housing Repairs lines are manned by two members of staff in the Housing Repairs team. If these staff members are busy on other calls, away from their desks or absent, the telephone rings out and cuts off after several rings, with no answerphone experience (if the customer has selected option 3) or goes to a busy tone (if the customer has direct dialled).
- 4.5 Often a high volume of customers will call in the morning, leading to a high volume of abandoned and repeat calls, frustrated customers who cannot get through, and a poor customer experience, despite the best efforts of the team to provide a quality, tailored service.
- 4.6 A move into Customer Services will increase resilience and boost the service the Council provides to its customers in the following ways:
- A wider pool of staff will be able to answer/process calls, leading to shorter wait times for customers (the average wait time through Customer Services is currently 22 seconds) and a significant drop in abandoned call rates. It will also provide greater capacity to identify and manage call volumes by type and duration.
  - Calls are monitored through an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, including call times, wrap up times (the time an operative takes to finish off any associated administration linked to a call) and voice recording, in case of complaints or issues dealing with potentially vulnerable or aggressive callers.
  - Customers who have queries relating to repairs and other issues, for example a query on rents, council tax, waste or benefits, will be able to have their full enquiry handled by one call operative and will not be asked to 'call another team' or be transferred.
  - Customers who have an emergency call, for example a gas leak, will be able to speak to someone within approximately 22 seconds and will not experience a phone dialling out or an engaged tone.
  - The Customer Services team benefits from a programme of ongoing training and support to ensure their customer service skills/processes are in line with the latest guidance and legislation.
  - The Customer Services team benefits from new technologies/safeguards, including call recording software and more.
- 4.7 A move of calls out of Housing and into Customer Services will benefit the Housing Repairs team by addressing several recommendations made in the Housing Quality Network review of the repair service, which was presented to Housing and Community Services Committee in June 2019. These benefits include:
- enabling the current backlog of jobs to be cleared and ongoing jobs to be processed in a timelier manner, boosting customer service and reputation.
  - enabling more efficient ordering and monitoring of bespoke materials for jobs the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) deliver (for example a replacement pane of glass).

- enabling more efficient price checking, stock control and reconciliation of orders placed for standard items with the Council's suppliers and the Council's own stock of commonly used materials, held by the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO).
  - enabling more efficient billing processes to be put in place for tenants who are required to pay for a job, for example, if they have broken a window or a lock needs changing.
  - providing greater capacity for the management of variations to works orders placed with the repair support contractor.
  - providing greater capacity for the development of workflows and processes for all aspects of the repair service.
  - enabling stronger processes to be put in place in relation to meter readings at void properties after and before a tenancy.
  - enabling better management and training of tradesmen who deliver jobs on behalf of the Council.
  - enabling the team to carry out customer satisfaction surveys to ensure jobs are delivered well and customer services standards are upheld.
  - enabling team members to be cross-trained on all duties, providing better resilience.
- 4.8 Above all, the move of housing repair calls into Customer Services will improve the quality of service the Council delivers to housing customers, boost the Council's reputation, enable processes to be put in place to further safeguard and protect Council finances, improve team and service resilience, and improve staff morale.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

### **Summary**

- 5.1 In order to facilitate the move of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services, it is proposed that additional resource will be recruited into the Customer Services team.
- 5.2 Based on current call volumes it has been estimated that a 0.5 FTE (fully trained) is required. Because it is not possible to divert Housing Repairs calls to just one Customer Services operative, and Housing Repair calls would need to be distributed across the wider team, the new staff member would need to be capable of handling calls from across the spectrum of services the team currently supports including waste, benefits, council tax and recovery, National Non-Domestic Rates Return (NNDR), rent enquiries, housing options enquiries, pest control and environmental health etc.
- 5.3 The two options the team has considered are a 0.5 FTE fully trained Customer Services Advisor, or a full-time Modern Apprentice, which would allow time for training to be incorporated in their weekly duties. The costs of the two options are:

<b>0.5 FTE</b>	£12,313 per annum	£24,626 for two-year fixed term
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	£21,850 per annum	£43,700 for two-year fixed term

- 5.4 It is proposed that the team will aim to recruit a Modern Apprentice as a first step and will only move to recruit a skilled part-time post if recruitment of a Modern Apprentice is not successful.
- 5.5 If approved, the financial implications of the post will be included in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 5.6 Subject to several small technical developments (login issues, re-routing of phone numbers and permissions) the team will be ready to recruit the new post from March 2020. This work can be carried out in-house by the Council's technical team.

### **Additional detail**

- 5.7 Transferring the calls via the Council's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system that monitors volumes, call times, wrap up/admin times etc, will enable the Council to accurately model the exact costs/resources required to support Housing Repairs calls in the future.
- 5.8 The proposal for a two-year fixed term post will also enable the Customer Services team to review its requirements ongoing, in line with future changes in the team as a result of upcoming digitisation/channel shift projects that could impact on team workload and type of work, as more calls and services are handled centrally across the organisation.
- 5.9 The appointment of a two-year fixed term post will also enable any future requirements to be reviewed at the end of the two-year period and reflected in the revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recharge schedule.

## **6.0 Corporate Implications**

### **Employment implications**

- 6.1 There are no employee implications for existing staff for the project included in this report.

### **Legal implications**

- 6.2 There are no legal implications.

### **Corporate Plan Implications**

- 6.3 In our Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 the Council has made the following commitments:
- Provide modern ways of working that support the Council to deliver services to meet changing needs.
  - Ensure technology enables us to effectively connect with our communities
  - Have in place methods of communication that enable customers to provide and receive information.
  - Improve the condition of housing stock and public buildings.

The initiative outlined in this report underpins these commitments.

## **Risk Impact**

- 6.4 The Customer Services team will offer a less informed service to Housing Repairs customers. To address this, the Customer Services team is working closely with the Housing Repairs team, including shadowing and mentoring in the run up to the move of the calls. Resources have also been developed to support telephone calls in Customer Services.

## **7.0 Community Impact**

### **Consultation**

- 7.1 A trial has been carried out in a trial over a period of two months.
- 7.2 This has allowed the staff involved to be consulted and for Customer Services to get up to speed on customer needs.
- 7.3 This intelligence will inform the services the team will deliver moving forwards.
- 7.4 The proposal has also been considered by the Council's Housing and Community Services Committee.

### **Equality and Diversity Impact**

- 7.5 The move of Housing Repairs calls will enhance the customer services the Council can deliver to Housing Repairs customers, and long-term will ensure Housing Repairs calls benefit from any service enhancement the Council delivers through its corporate function, from assistive technologies through to online enhancements.

### **Social Value Impact**

- 7.6 The move of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services will positively impact on the quality of customer service provided to Housing customers and better triage emergency calls. It will also impact positively on customer satisfaction and the reputation of the Council.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

- 7.7 N/A

## **8.0 Conclusions**

- 8.1 In conclusion the move of Housing Repairs calls into Customer Services will enhance the quality of services delivered by South Derbyshire District Council.
- 8.2 The proposals also underpin the delivery of the Council's new Corporate Plan 2020-2024.
- 8.3 The proposals also underpin the Council's ambition to be inclusive and supportive to all.

## **10.0 Background Papers**

None