

Item No: 4	Classification: Open	Date: 24 June 2015	Meeting Name: Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee
Report Title:		Consultation on the Contact Centre 9 – 5 services	
Ward(s) or Group affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services	

Recommendations

1. The committee is asked to note the resident consultation undertaken prior to the implementation of the Contact Centre 9-5 service on 1st April 2015.
2. The committee is also asked to note the consultation and publicity concerning the budget setting process for 2015/16 in which the proposed changes to the contact centre service were described.

Background

3. Since opening on 1 June 2013, the council's Contact Centre has been almost unique among London Authorities in operating a Housing Repairs service that allowed residents to report repairs, whether urgent or not, 24 hours per day, 365 days a year. Most local authority housing providers deliver only an emergency telephone service for customers phoning outside of normal office hours.
4. From 1 April 2015 the Contact Centre changed its core opening times to 9AM – 5PM, Monday to Friday. An emergency service is available at all other times. This has brought it in line with other contact centre services in the borough (e.g. the Revenues and Benefits telephone service) and follows the launch of housing self-serve in October last year, where customers can raise and track repairs online via their personalised MySouthwark account.
5. Furthermore, the council's electronic service delivery offering has improved significantly in the last couple of years. Most council services can be accessed on-line. Customers can obtain information and make service requests on-line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The MySouthwark personalised account now has well over 100,000 customers, clearly demonstrating a great deal of appetite for on-line services. This is very much in-line with customers' experiences and expectations of accessing goods and services on-line, with many people shopping, accessing their bank account, booking tickets etc., all on-line. Over 600 customers now choose to email the contact centre each working day instead of picking up the phone.
6. The drivers for the change in service delivery were threefold:
 - A reduction in call volumes Out of Hours
 - An improvement in service performance for residents calling Out of Hours
 - A reduction in the overall cost of delivering the OOH service

In addition, the service is seeking to prompt even more customers to access services on-line and in particular, sign up for their own My Southwark account.

Budget Setting 2015/16

7. Departments commenced their budget planning processes for 2015/16 in the summer of 2014. The Contact Centre is funded through the Council's General Fund. Targets for savings were agreed and proposals for meeting the targets were developed. The council is keen to protect frontline services and therefore savings were sought which would have the minimum impact on customers whilst at the same time achieving the desired savings.
8. Changing the operating hours of the Contact Centre would fit the criteria. Customers can report their repair by telephone, Monday to Friday, between 9 AM and 5PM. An emergency telephone service is available at all other times, 365 days each year. Customers can also report matters on-line and through their MySouthwark account 24 hours a day.
9. Many customers would only telephone the Contact Centre out of hours for an emergency in any event, believing that this was what the service was for.
10. The budget setting process continued throughout 2014, being subject to peer review and member challenge. The final agreed budget went to Cabinet on 10 February 2015. Within the budget paper, all savings proposals were itemised; the Contact Centre operating hours were shown as item no. 145 on page 90 of appendix H. The Cabinet papers were published at least five working days prior to the meeting.

“Contact centre will move to a 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday daytime service, the Out of Hours emergency only service will operate at all other times, resulting in lower operating costs.”

11. Paragraphs 81-91 of the main report set out the consultation process used on the budget. Community conversations took place in November and December 2014, giving residents, Community Councils and local voluntary organisations the opportunity to consider where they would prefer to see services protected, make savings or increase expenditure. It was clear that a number of respondents indicated that they would wish to see savings in the area of Customer Experience (see page 33 of the Community Conversation report).

Resident Consultation

12. In addition to the consultation involved directly with the budget setting process, a significant amount of resident consultation took place once an indication had been received that the proposal would be accepted by the council. The consultation took place with tenants and residents groups as well as the Contact Centre Working Party, made up of tenants and home owners representatives.
13. The following list includes all occasions when the matter was discussed as an agenda item. There were also other less formal consultation exercises; for example the

service had a stall at the Tenants Conference at the William Booth College on 8th November 2014.

27TH Nov 2014: Nunhead & Peckham Rye AHF
9TH Dec 2014: Rotherhithe AHF
15TH Dec 2014: Peckham AHF
2ND Feb 2015: Buchan Road TRA
18th Feb 2015: Camberwell West AHF
23rd Feb 2015: Camberwell East AHF & Peckham AHF
24TH Feb 2015: Contact Centre Working Party
25th Feb 2015: Bermondsey West AHF
26th Feb 2015: Nunhead and Peckham AHF
26TH Feb 2015: Dulwich AHF
26th Feb 2015: Walworth West AHF
25th Mar 2015: Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGT0)
25th March 2015: Albrighton AGM
16th March 2015: Tenant Council

14. At each of the meetings a similar presentation was given.

The key messages were –

- On-line services are proving more and more popular with customers. Recent enhancements to on-line service delivery, in particular the new housing portal, makes it easier to view rent and service charge accounts on-line and report and monitor repairs.
- The MySouthwark account is very well subscribed and customers are keen to use their account to manage their transactions with the council.
- Customers, who do not have access to on-line services or lack the skills to use the internet, will still be able to telephone to make their service requests.
- The proposal brings Southwark in step with most other local authorities which do not provide a 24 hour telephone services.
- A telephone service will still be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for those who require and emergency response.
- The new service allows us to focus resources on the core hours and provide an improved service.
- The proposals will result in significant savings to the General Fund and help the council achieve its savings targets in 2015/16 and beyond.

Feedback

15. The experience of officers was that the feedback from those consulted was generally positive. Customers welcomed the improvements made to on-line service delivery. Many are used to accessing goods and services on-line, whether that be on-line banking or shopping on Amazon.

16. Some customers were seeking assurances that those without access to the internet would still be able to telephone and access services. Officers were able to provide those assurances; customers would still be able to telephone the council to access services and raise repairs. An emergency service would be available 24 hours per day.

17. There were comments from some members of the Tenant Council about accessibility to services for those residents without computers and access to on-line services. There were others who said they would prefer the convenience of being able to report anything 24 hours each day. Officers were able to provide Tenant Council assurances that customers would be able to continue to raise emergencies by phone 24/7.