

Item No:	Classification: OPEN	Date: 16 December 2003	Meeting Name: EXECUTIVE
Report Title:		Call-In: Modernising Face-to-face Services for Customers	
Ward(s) or Group affected:		All	
From:		Overview & Scrutiny Committee	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Executive clearly sets out the current position on consultation with regard to the Housing Management Best Value Review and how it relates to the reviews of face-to-face services and cash offices, and the Executive reports back specifically on these questions to Overview & Scrutiny's January meeting;
2. That the Executive separates the cash offices from the other aspects of the report and subjects the proposals on cash offices to urgent consultation through the housing consultation process; and
3. That the Executive considers how it briefs Members on sensitive issues affecting their wards.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. On 25 November 2003 the Executive considered report 7 from the Assistant Chief Executive (Improvement & Development) and the Strategic Director of Housing in respect of modernising face-to-face services for customers. The Executive agreed the following:
 - That commitment be given to a radical transformation of how services are delivered in Southwark and that the modernisation of face-to-face service delivery as outlined in paragraphs 38 to 43 of the report be agreed;
 - That the recommendations outlined in the "Best Value Review of Income Management" in Appendix 3 of the report be agreed in principle. That the following in particular be welcomed:
 - i. The extension of choice of payment options
 - ii. The opportunity to put more business in local post offices
 - iii. The efficiency savings of up to £495,000;
 - That Tenants Council be invited to give its views of the proposals at its meeting on 15 December 2003 and that these views be brought back to the Executive on 16 December 2003 and, until such time, Executive instructs that no cash offices be closed;

- That the impact of these proposals on the implementation of the Best Value Review of Housing Management as outlined in paragraphs 24 to 26 of the report be noted;
 - That a programme of communication for both customers and staff be launched;
 - That a project to deliver a temporary one-stop shop at 19 Spa Road be undertaken; and
 - That a detailed implementation plan be brought back to the Executive on 3 February 2003.
5. On 26 November 2003 the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Kim Humphreys, and three members of the Committee (Councillors John Friary, Barrie Hargrove and Andy Simmons) requested a call-in of this decision. The reason given for the call-in was as follows:
- “Inadequate consultation”.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in request at their meeting on 4 December 2003. The Committee received deputations from the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO) and from Taplow Tenants Organisation. The key concerns of the deputations were lack of consultation over closure of cash offices and that a decision had already been taken as to the future number of housing offices. The deputations felt that a knock on effect of closing cash offices would be a reduction in the level of rent collection. The deputations stated that no consultation had taken place on the second issue of housing offices.
7. Members who had requested the call-in expressed concern that the Executive seemed to have taken an in principle decision and to be consulting only on the implementation of that decision. The role of Overview & Scrutiny Committee was to ensure that existing consultation processes were fully used. The call-in focused on the lack of consultation, not on the merits or demerits of the case.
8. The Executive Member for Communications & Performance Improvement responded that the report sought to draw together a range of disparate issues around improving services to customers, office accommodation for staff and IT facilities. It took a long-term view of the need for IT capable of supporting modern functions. The report was based on research into people’s real use of services, and he agreed that it should now go to consultation.
9. The Director of Housing responded that the review of face-to-face services was running in parallel to the best value review of housing management. It had not been practical to consult on forum areas and office arrangements in one exercise, and forums had therefore been dealt with first. The report (paragraph 26) made it clear that further consultation was planned, and paragraphs 40 and 42 both addressed some specific proposals currently subject to consultation. The changes at Taplow had brought another manager in, thus improving support to the Aylesbury Estate

New Deal for Communities (NDC). He confirmed that there was no Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) or Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in place on the Aylesbury Estate, and that no one had made an application for ALMO status since December 2002.

10. The Assistant Chief Executive (Improvement and Development) responded that there had been 1850 face-to-face interviews with customers since December 2002, a significant sample, and that there would be a continuing need to talk to more people as the process continued. The issue was how to widen access to services. The report set out what was practical and possible.
11. Members asked why the idea of developing multi agency accommodation in recognition of users' needs had not been followed through.
12. The Assistant Chief Executive responded that the Council was talking to the health service and the police, but needed to have a picture of its own provision first. The package was flexible and would not stop another agency joining a One Stop Shop, for example. The research indicated that the Council currently ran a variety of services of differing quality and that it was better to run a wider range of services from a fewer points. The research had mapped usage data against transport routes.
13. Members asked whether the current administration had changed existing policy on briefing Ward Members on changes affecting their wards. The Executive Member for Communications & Performance Improvement was not aware of any change in instructions to Officers regarding briefing Ward Members.
14. Members asked about the proposed new process for acknowledging receipt of rent payments. Some tenants were extremely concerned about moving away from having a rent card stamped. There must be some compromise possible. The Director of Housing pointed out that tenants would be issued with a wallet in which to keep receipts and would receive a monthly rent statement through the post.
15. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the above in reaching its decisions as set out at paragraphs 1 – 3. Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 19.5 requires that decisions referred back to the decision making body be considered within seven clear days of the date on which the decision to refer back was taken.

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Executive 25 November 2003 – Agenda and Minutes	Town Hall, Peckham Road, London, SE5 8UB	Ian Millichap Constitutional Support 020 7525 7225
Overview & Scrutiny 4 December 2003 – Agenda and Minutes		Lucas Lundgren Scrutiny Team 020 7525 7224

APPENDIX A

Audit Trail

Lead Officer	Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny	
Report Author	Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Team	
Version	Draft	
Dated	10 December 2003	
Key Decision?		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Chief Officer	No	
Executive Member	No	
Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services		