

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 42
Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: **ESTATES SERVICE REVIEW:**
Cleaning service for general needs council housing

Date of Meeting: **4 November 2008**

Report of: **Director of Adult Social Care and Housing**

Contact Officer: **Name: Hilary Edgar** **Tel: 293354**
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Key Decision: **No**

Wards Affected: **All**

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to make changes to the cleaning service in the communal areas of council flats (excluding sheltered accommodation), following recommendations made by the Estates Service Focus Group to the Housing Management Sub Committee on 15 January 2008.
- 1.2 The report also includes a review of the service charges that residents who live in flats pay for this service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Housing Management Consultative Committee recommend that the Housing Cabinet Member meeting:
- (1) Note the proposed changes to the cleaning service outlined in this report.
 - (2) Approve the proposed service charges for communal cleaning, as shown in Table 1 in paragraph 5.4.3 with effect from 6 April 2009.
 - (3) Approve that the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing implements the new charges, but with the power to make any minor amendments which may appear to be appropriate in particular cases.
 - (4) Note the proposal to carry out benchmarking of the cleaning service in 2009/10 so that a value for money assessment can be made of the restructured service.

3. **CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR CLEANING COMMUNAL AREAS**

- 3.1 The Estates Service was set up in 2005 to provide a citywide cleaning, community and mobile warden service. It was introduced after consultation with staff and residents and replaced an uneven service made up of residential caretakers and mobile wardens, where only some blocks in the city were regularly cleaned.
- 3.2 The cleaning arm of the Estates Service is provided by six mobile teams of cleaners. These teams are responsible for carrying out a range of cleaning tasks in the communal areas of flats, to frequencies determined by the type of block. Each team has one cleaner who is paid an allowance to be a Team Leader and is managed by an Estates Service Manager.
- 3.3 Last autumn, the Chairman of Housing established a short-term, resident led, focus group to review the Estates Service.
- 3.4 The work of the focus group was reported to Housing Management Sub Committee in January this year, together with recommendations for service improvements. Since January, officers and residents have worked together to develop these recommendations. A report outlining this work, which covers the two other arms of the Estates Service – Community and Mobile Wardens – was presented to residents at the October/November cycle of Area Panels.

4. **PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CLEANING SERVICE**

4.1 **Focus Group Concern: Limited supervision within the cleaning service**

4.1.1 **How this is being addressed:** A draft structure is in place, subject to staff consultation following the outcome of this report, to change two of the existing Estates Service Manager posts, into the posts of Cleaning Managers. The Cleaning Managers will be fully responsible for managing the cleaning service and will spend at least 60-70% of their time inspecting the work of their staff, making the decisions needed to ensure cleaning schedules are met, liaising with residents' associations and other service providers eg City Clean and the local Housing Offices.

4.1.2 This change will achieve a far greater amount of 'on site' supervision and quality checking than the current arrangements, where the requirements of the Estates Service Manager post mean these officers play a wider role in the Estates Service and are often office based.

4.2 **Focus Group Concern: Insufficient time to clean blocks thoroughly**

4.2.1. **How this is being addressed:**

The focus group requested that officers investigate whether high and low rise cleaning could be separated, with fixed location staff for groups of high rises.

- 4.2.2 Over the past six to eight months, six cleaners have been taken out of the mobile teams, and set up as 'dedicated' cleaners, each responsible for a group of properties. The trial areas are listed in Appendix 1.
- 4.2.3 Because the cleaners are not covering large areas they start and end their working day in the blocks they clean, rather than at Hollingdean Depot. The time they save by not having to travel and stock up with water for the day, is turned into time available for cleaning.
- 4.2.4 This way of working has received positive feedback from residents. They advise they have:
- enjoyed building up a relationship with 'their' cleaners
 - found response times to emergencies to be quicker
 - found that the standard of cleaning in their buildings has improved
 - noticed that the cleaners have appeared less 'rushed' in their approach to work

Cleaners taking part in the trial have said they prefer working this way as it allows them to take more responsibility for their work, and to get to know the residents in the buildings they are working in.

- 4.2.5 Because of the success of the trials and the improvements it has brought to cleaning standards, it is proposed to extend this way of working across the city, with smaller mobile teams covering properties that can't easily be fitted into a 'dedicated' patch.

4.3 Focus Group Concern: Poor communication between staff and residents

4.3.1 How this is being addressed:

At a local level the trial 'dedicated' cleaners have helped to bridge this gap – they are an immediate link to the Estates Service and report back on repairs that are needed in the blocks they work in, including the removal of graffiti and bulk refuse. They have also become part of the building's community and a familiar 'face' to residents. If the role of Cleaning Manager is introduced, these post holders will also be meeting residents on a daily basis and asking their opinion about the service.

- 4.3.2 The Estates Service Monitoring Group will continue with a stronger role for residents' to play in monitoring the cleaning service. Resident feedback on cleaning will be fed into the performance reports that are presented to Area Panels and this committee, so that qualitative information is available along with the quantitative data that is already provided.

4.4 Focus Group Concern: The service produces work of a varying quality

4.4.1. How this is being addressed:

The Focus Group said they wanted cleaners to be properly trained. In June, a group of fifteen cleaners and managers started an NVQ Level 2 in Cleaning which incorporates the British Institute of Cleaning Science Proficiency Certificate. This course lasts approximately six months, and includes training in a wide range of cleaning tasks, customer service and health and safety. Assessment is based on written tests and practical exercises. Staff will participate in this course on a rolling programme, with the aim of all staff receiving this accreditation.

4.4.2 This training is being provided through the national 'train to gain' scheme, at no cost to the council. The increased supervision and quality checking on work carried out by cleaners, will also ensure work across the city is of a consistent quality.

4.5 Summary of proposed changes

4.5.1 The changes to the cleaning service, set out above, will provide:

- More time available for cleaning and sustainable improvements in the service
- A management structure that is fully responsible for the cleaning service
- Quicker response to emergencies from on site cleaners
- Cleaners who take responsibility for an area and build up good working relationships with local residents
- Improved performance monitoring

4.5.2 Following approval from the Cabinet Member for Housing to the revised service charges set out below, officers will consult with staff and residents on the details of the new service, with a view to introducing it by April 2009.

5. SERVICE CHARGES

5.1 The cleaning function of the Estates Service is funded from service charges paid by tenants and leaseholders.

5.2 Regardless of whether the existing model of service is continued, or a new one introduced, it is necessary to review the level of service charges that are passed onto residents, to take account of the actual costs of providing the service. The Estates Service focus group was advised that if changes were going to be made to the way the cleaning service was provided, charges should also be reviewed to achieve a realignment of income with expenditure. The focus group requested that officers provide residents with two pieces of information:

- what level of service would be provided after the realignment exercise, if the charges were to remain at their current level
- how much service charges would need to increase to cover the costs of providing a service that met their recommendations

5.3 Current Service charges

- 5.3.1 The current cleaning service charge calculation is based on the estimated number of hours per year taken to clean an average Low, Medium and High rise block or House of Multiple Occupation (HMO). This average is then multiplied by the number of blocks in each category to arrive at the total number of cleaning hours and cost. The annual cost is then divided by the number of tenants and leaseholders in each type of block to arrive at a cost per tenant.
- 5.3.2 Since the service was set up the costs of providing it have exceeded the income from service charges, with the shortfall in funding met from the Housing Revenue Account. The current forecast shortfall of £241,300 for 2008/09 is mainly due to increased overheads and eight additional cleaners that were taken on, when a review of the first year of the service found the original number of cleaners, twenty eight, was insufficient to regularly complete all the work required to a consistent standard
- 5.3.3 The focus group requested information on the level of cleaning service that residents would receive if service charges remain at their current levels and are limited to an increase for inflation, in 2009/10. If the budget (£1,031,600) is limited to the current level of service charge (£790,300 per annum) this would mean that the current service provided would need to be scaled back by 20%. In practice this would mean removing the eight additional cleaners from the service and cutting back on the level of service provided to each block. It would be difficult to have a service based on 'dedicated' cleaners as the cleaners would have to cover a much wider area than has been used in the trial patches, and require vehicles to travel between sites.

5.4 Proposed service provision and service charges

- 5.4.1 Having piloted the dedicated cleaner service, there is now new data available which shows approximately how much time it takes to clean high rise, low rise and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs).
- 5.4.2 If the dedicated pilot model is spread across the city with the majority of cleaners starting and ending their day 'on site', it is possible to transform a considerable amount of unproductive travelling time into time available for cleaning which can then be allocated to blocks in line with the revised estimated timings. This means that an increase in the time available for cleaning can be provided within the existing budget (inflated for 2009/10) as the current service, by changing from a mobile to a predominately 'dedicated' service.

5.4.3 A similar methodology to the current service charge calculation has been used with the exception of the reclassification of medium rise blocks to either high rise or low rise. These blocks are listed in Appendix 2. Once the new service is up and running and data on every block is gathered, the aim is to move towards an actual charge per block. The proposed weekly charges at 2009/10 prices are set out in Table 1 below compared to the current charges also inflated to 2009/10 levels.

Table 1: Proposed Weekly Charges for 2009/10

	HMOs	Low Rise	Medium Rise		High Rise
2008/9 current charge	£0.38	£2.32	£1.90		£1.53
Current charge inflated to 2009/10 prices	£0.40	£2.42	£1.99		£1.60
2009/10 proposed charges based on new service	£0.50	£2.41	Low Rise	High Rise	£3.58
			£2.41	£3.58	
(Reduction) Increase in charges for 2009/10 from current service	£0.10	(£0.01)	£0.42	£1.59	£1.98
% Reduction / Increase in charges from 2008/09	31%	0%	27%	88%	134%

5.4.4 The increase to the service charges will be 'un-pooled' or taken out of individual tenant's rents. This means that any tenant seeing an increase in their individual cleaning charge for 2009/10 will see a decrease in their rent. The level of the decrease in their rent will be dependant on the rent restructuring calculation for 2009/10 as dictated nationally by central government. This formula is currently under review and the outcome of the consultation will be available during November. However, under the current rules, the tenant will then move in greater increases towards their target rent and eventually pay the target rent plus the service charge by 2011/12.

5.4.5 All cleaning charges for communal areas are eligible for Housing Benefit. For those on full Housing Benefit, the charge will be compensated in full. At the current time it is estimated that 71% of all groups of tenants receiving the cleaning service are in receipt of Housing Benefit.

5.5 Consideration of alternative options

5.5.1 The focus group did not consider alternative ways of providing the cleaning service - their aim was to improve the cleaning provided by the Estates Service.

- 5.5.2 It is therefore suggested that in 2009/10 a benchmarking exercise is carried out to allow the council to compare the cleaning provided by the Estates Service against that of other social housing landlords to assess the 'value for money' of the new structure. The outcome of that exercise will inform discussions with residents on communal cleaning in the next financial year.
- 5.5.3 Some benchmarking has already been carried out and the proposed service charges for communal cleaning in Brighton & Hove in 2009/10 have been found to be in line with the charges of other social housing providers in Sussex and in the South East. However, a more extensive benchmarking exercise will involve comparison not just of the final charges that are passed onto residents, but of the way cleaning services are provided and the work that is carried out.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Estates Service Focus Group met four times before reporting to the Housing Management Sub Committee in January. Since then a group of residents, made up of the focus group members, and the existing Estates Service Monitoring Group, has met regularly to oversee the work that has been taking place to develop the focus group's recommendations.
- 6.2 Staff, and their union representatives, have been invited to meetings to discuss changes to their particular service areas, and a regular newsletter has been produced for all staff in the Estates Service to keep them informed of the work that has been taking place.
- 6.3 Any changes required to individual job descriptions will go through the council's change management framework.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

7.1 Financial Implications:

The proposed service charges outlined in table 1 paragraph 5.4.3. will ensure recovery of the 2009/10 budget of £1,054,000. Therefore an extra £228,100 will be generated for use by the HRA. However, the un-pooling of these increases from tenants' rents mean that the charges are phased-in for tenants and so the income is also phased-in for the HRA.

If the Government's rent restructuring formula remains the same, it is estimated that £76,000 (i.e. one third) extra income will be received in 2009/10; a further £76,000 in 2010/11 with the full amount being available in 2011/12.

Any additional income will be included within the 2009/10 and future HRA budgets.

Finance Officer : Monica Brooks

Date: 9 Oct 2008

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Under the Council's standard secure tenancy agreements tenants are obliged to pay "rent and other charges". The proposed cleaning charges constitute "other charges" and the Council can make changes to the charges providing it gives at least 4 weeks notice of the change. Failure to pay the charges may amount to non performance of an obligation of the tenancy agreement which is a ground upon which the Council can take possession proceedings.

Lawyer consulted: Deborah Jones Date 21 October 2008

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 The changes proposed to the way the cleaning service is delivered will ensure greater consistency in cleaning standards in the common parts of council accommodation.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 There are no direct implications

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 There are no direct implications

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 There are no direct implications

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.7 There are no direct implications

8. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 8.1 This is contained within the body of the report in paragraphs 5.3.3 and 5.5.

9. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To advise residents and members of the proposed changes to the way the cleaning service is provided in council accommodation and changes to the charges for this service.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Trial sites for 'dedicated cleaners'.
2. Proposed reclassification of medium rise blocks

Documents in Members' Room

1. None

Background Documents

Chairman's Working Group (Estates Service) Housing Management Sub-Committee report 15 January 2008.

APPENDIX 1

Trial site based cleaners:

- Clarendon Estate – Clarendon House/Conway Court/Ellen House/Goldstone House/Livingstone House/Ellen Street (2 cleaners)
- Nettleton Court/Dudenev Lodge/Theobald House
- Essex Street/Essex Place/Oakley House/Garnet House
- Hereford Court/Wiltshire House/Malthouse Court
- Wellington Road/Morley Lodge/Parkmead/Park Crescent

APPENDIX 2

Proposed reclassification of medium rise blocks

Name of block	Proposed reclassification
Hollybank	Low rise
Johnson Bank	High rise
Napier House	High rise
Barcley House	High rise
Kingswood & Milner	High rise
Essex St (low rise flats)	Low rise
Highcroft Lodge	High rise
Park Royal	High rise
Holbrook	Low rise
Downford	Low rise
385 Kingsway	Low rise
Philip Court	High rise
Clarke Court	Low rise
Copperas Gap Court	Low rise

