

Subject:	Lessons taken from the experience of relocating Manor Place Housing Office		
Date of meeting:	1 April 2014		
Report of:	Executive Director – Environment, Development & Housing		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 This report provides Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee with information on how the experience and learning from the relocation of the Manor Place Housing Office has informed work to close the Selsfield Drive Housing Office.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the sub committee notes the learning taken from Manor Place and applied to the planning of the Selsfield Drive Housing Office.

3.1 RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1.1 The Manor Place Housing Office closed on 31 March 2012 with services being relocated to the Whitehawk Hub. The cash office did not transfer, however, and closed when the office shut.

3.1.2 The Selsfield Drive Housing Office is due to close on 28 March 2014 and all remaining cash desks across the city will close this year following the decision made at Housing Committee on 13 November 2013.

3.1.3 This paper outlines the lessons that have been taken from the Manor Place move and closure of the cash desk and applied to the work being undertaken to close the Selsfield Drive Housing Office.

3.2 Communications and support

3.2.1 Our approach to supporting customers to change the way they pay their rent and other charges as a result of Selsfield Drive closing has been targeted, based on records of who currently use the office.

- 3.2.2 Leading up to the Manor Place closure we wrote to all residents in Whitehawk and Manor Farm, and carried out surveys with residents who came into the office during the weeks preceding the close date. The mass communication approach did alert residents to the relocation of services; however the message could have been stronger if followed up by more personal contact with tenants who did not call into the office during that period. This time we have written to all residents who have used Selsfield Drive Housing Office in the past six months and offered further advice in person when these residents have come into the housing office. We are also telephoning those customers who have not visited the office since we first contacted them.
- 3.2.3 As with Manor Place, this has meant that we have been able to provide specific information and support to help with the switch to alternative service access and payment methods. We have also asked residents more questions about access to the internet, financial inclusion and, where appropriate, their support networks. This has helped us better identify the need for financial inclusion and other support.
- 3.2.4 We have taken a more thorough and systematic approach than we did at Manor Place, using the knowledge of local staff to also carry out home visits to older and vulnerable residents. This has formed part of our targeted approach to help residents plan for the change in service provision and to address concerns raised that some residents who visit housing offices do so to combat issues such as loneliness or isolation. Through our one to one visits we have been able to provide information on local groups and activities that may be of interest, and in some cases also established links with residents' family and carers.
- 3.2.5 We will complete this detailed work by the end of March as we want to have as much knowledge and contact as possible with residents before Selsfield Drive closes.
- 3.2.6 We have also used posters to advertise the closure in housing offices, local sheltered schemes, community venues, and at Moulsecoomb Library.
- 3.2.7 As with Manor Place, officers have attended Tenant and Resident Associations meetings, briefed ward councillors and advertised the closure on the council's website. Other council services that residents can access through housing offices (ie Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Homemove) have also been notified. As the date for the closure approaches, we will use social media to reiterate the message.
- 3.2.8 During March, Housing staff are working with colleagues in the Moulsecoomb Library to promote this venue as a place where customers can visit to access information about council services and to learn new skills, such as accessing the internet.

3.3 Payment methods

- 3.3.1 A further lesson we have learned from the Manor Place closure is that while many tenants used Paypoint as an alternative payment method, there were some tenants who preferred to pay at another housing office. For the Selsfield Drive closure, while tenants will be able to make their payments at a different housing office in the short term because cash desk closures will be staggered, we are making additional efforts to encourage alternatives that will be more sustainable in the longer term. This will also enable us to support those tenants who are able to, to set up standing orders or direct debit arrangements in readiness for when Universal Credit comes in.
- 3.3.2 We are in much more communication with residents now, than we were for the Manor Place closure. For example, tenants who have expressed a wish to pay by Paypoint are currently being contacted to ensure their payments cards (which are ordered from an external supplier) have arrived.
- 3.3.3 We will analyse switches in payment methods and trends across the city and are working with colleagues in the Corporate Banking and ICT teams to take a more proactive approach to contacting residents whose accounts show delayed activity in April.

3.4 The office location

- 3.4.1 We are aware that the work to redevelop the site at Manor Place has taken longer than expected, with demolition planned for spring 2014. The lesson we have taken this time around is that our Property & Investment Team has already made assessments of the Selsfield Drive site so that decommissioning of services to the site and consultation around its future use can begin earlier than at Manor Place.
- 3.4.2 All learning from the Selsfield Drive closure will be taken forward to the next part of our office accommodation project, Victoria Road, which is due to be relocated to the Portslade Town Hall during the summer 2014.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION:

- 4.1 Tenants have been consulted at Area Panels prior to decisions regarding the Selsfield Drive office and cash desk closures being taken at Housing Committee in November 2013.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The financial implications relating to the closure of the Selsfield Drive office were considered as part of the report to Housing Committee on 13th November 2013. Any costs associated with communication of the closure to residents will be met from existing budgets within the HRA.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date 12/03/14:

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley

Date: 11/03/14

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 There are no direct risk and opportunity implications arising from this report.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 There are no direct public health implications arising from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 There are no direct corporate or citywide implications arising from this report. However, the quality of our communications lies at the foundation of ensuring that residents have the information they need, and are therefore able to fulfil their service needs or meet their obligations.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents in Members' Rooms:

1. None

Background Documents:

1. None