

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee



SCRUTINY



Portfolio: Housing and Community (Cllr H Whitbread)

Subject: Transfer of services from the Broadway Housing Office

Officer contact for further information: Deborah Fenton (07988 860412)

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564243)

Recommendations/Decisions Required

(1) That members agree to the proposed closure of the Broadway Housing office and agree on the reprovision of the service using a hub approach.

Executive Summary:

In 2019 officers reviewed the number of tenants visiting the Broadway Office to see housing staff. The review found that on average the number of tenants coming to the office to access housing staff was an average of 13 per week.

This is against a backdrop of a restructure in housing, which led to the creation of 3 specialist teams. One of the aspirations of the new teams was to take more of a hands-on approach, meaning that staff were able to spend time on our estates to ensure an active presence. In addition, officers wanted to take a more holistic approach, therefore, visiting tenants in their own homes. It was agreed to reduce the opening times of the office to facilitate the team spending more time on the estates.

Report:

Much has changed since the review was carried out in 2019, not least the impact of Covid and the move toward digital solutions. Officers have carried out a further review to understand the usage of the Broadway post Covid, also whether there was a better, more efficient way to carry on providing the service for those people who need it while allowing for the need to spend more time on the estates. This led to work being carried out to understand the opportunities for a collaborative way of working with partners. This would help support residents with a more holistic approach. In addition, help encourage more usage of the support on offer.

The following table shows the number of people who have visited the Broadway office to speak to a member of the housing team and for what reason, over 4 months.

Usage

Month	Total number of visits to housing office
Dec-21	29
Jan-22	44
Feb-22	43
Mar-22	41

Fob Request,
Tenancy Sign-Up
Rent Statement
Repairs
Tenancy Enquiry - Copy of Tenancy
Tenancy Sign-Up
Essex County Council - Bus Pass Enquiry
Rehousing Enquiry
Housing Benefit Enquiry

The visits to the office remain consistently low, with many of the visits for transactional reasons rather than one-to-one support from an officer. Provisions can be made to ensure the current reasons for visiting the office can be provided for:

Fobs – provision will be made at a central location
Sign-ups will be carried out at the time of viewing

The other functions can be provided at the hub

Alternatives

Officers have been in contact with a hub that is operated by the church and has several partners operating from it. The church is looking to join up and work in partnership with other professionals to give a much more joined-up service for tenants and residents alike.

It is therefore proposed that the service provided to tenants from the Broadway be moved to the Church Hub. This will act as a one-stop shop and provide a more meaningful service. Officers are proposing to close the current office in July

Following the closure of the office, the unit will be put on the market, and it is expected that rental income will be in the region of £22k per annum,

Reason for decision:

There is a need to review our current services and provide something more meaningful

Options considered and rejected:

The option was considered to carry on with the current service however this was rejected.

Consultation undertaken:

Residents have been consulted and are largely positive about a one hub approach

Resource implications:

Additional income of £22k per annum.

Legal and Governance Implications:

This proposal meets all requirements

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

Background Papers:

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management:

Officers will keep records of attendance to ensure an appropriate service is still being provided.