



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy & Service Transformation

Cabinet - 15 October 2020

Housing Commissioning Review Update

Purpose:	This report seeks approval to implement changes to the District Housing Office service model following a statutory tenant consultation process.
Policy Framework:	Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The proposed changes to the future model of the District Housing Office Service are approved and scheduled for implementation by April 2021.
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Legal Officer:	Lyndsay Thomas
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2019, Cabinet considered the findings of the Housing Commissioning review. This detailed how services can be improved and modernised so they are sustainable for the future and contribute to the Council's Transformation and Future Council development priority. The review adopted the principles of the Council's Commissioning review programme with the aim to transform and reshape service delivery to meet the needs of service users now and in the future whilst reinvesting savings into the Housing Revenue Account. A link to the original Cabinet report can be found at the end of this report.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved the implementation of the key findings of the review and a number of these have already been implemented. The proposed change to the future model of the District Housing Office service was the subject of a formal tenant consultation exercise which was due to be considered by Cabinet on 23rd April 2020, however the Covid-19 emergency response affected this reporting timeline.

- 1.3 A key part of the Housing Commissioning review was to modernise and improve the District Housing Office (DHO) service model. The Covid-19 emergency response has further evidenced the need to implement new and modern ways of working that are sustainable for the future and ensure effective communication with service users.
- 1.4 The emergency response has also highlighted the extensive contribution Housing services make to support the wellbeing of individuals and communities as concerns about health and vulnerability have been amplified during this time. The service has faced significant challenges as a result of Covid-19 and further information on its impact and how it has responded is included in Section 3.

2. Background – Changes to the Future Model of the District Housing Office service

- 2.1 The review acknowledged that much of the structure of the service has been in place for a number of years and the way in which service users wish to communicate with organisations and businesses is changing whilst demand on services continues to increase. The review recognised the service needs to adapt to meet that challenge.
- 2.2 Data was collected on changes in service user access, preference towards more contact over the phone/online and falling numbers of face to face callers. This information, in conjunction with plans to introduce new ways of agile/mobile working for staff and investment needed to maintain and improve offices, suggested that the number of offices should be reduced from 9 to 6 with proposals to close Penlan, Eastside and West Cross. Offices that would remain open include Townhill, Morriston, Sketty, Town Centre and Blaenymaes. In addition, a planned move to co-locate the Gorseinon Housing Office into the nearby library has been implemented.
- 2.3 The statutory consultation exercise to gather feedback on the proposals took place earlier this year via a questionnaire sent out to all tenants and drop in events held at DHOs. (Details of the findings are attached at Appendix A & C). Whilst the overall response rate to the consultation was low, i.e. 858 responses were received from a total of 15,236 (this figure takes into account the housing stock, vacant properties and any joint tenants), the feedback did identify both positive comments and common concerns as follows;
- Of those who agreed with the proposals, positive comments included understanding the need to save money, reinvest the savings from maintaining underutilised offices, more modern ways of using services, happy if services are still provided from the nearest offices and there are home/estate visits/surgeries and services are accessible online and standards maintained.
 - The main comments from those who disagreed with the closures included concerns for the elderly, disabled, vulnerable, housebound, those with small children who don't want to travel far/those with no transport, don't have computer skills or access to the internet, no staff job losses, the potential loss to the community and value of local knowledge. In order to mitigate these concerns, emphasis is placed on officers increasing home visits, their

face to face community presence on estates and enhancing working relationships with PCSOs and LACs. In addition, the service will set up regular housing advice/rent surgeries following Ward Member consultation to identify suitable local community buildings.

2.4 The new DHO model will have a positive impact and deliver significant improvements to ensure the service is sustainable for the future in order to meet increasing demand, redirect resources and reinvest savings.

These improvements include:

- Increasing the amount of contact and support to service users especially those who are vulnerable, elderly and housebound.
- The service increasing its 'face to face' community presence and accessibility across the vast geographical spread of estates as not all District Housing Offices are conveniently located. This will be achieved via services continuing to be provided from the nearest housing offices, an increased officer presence on estates, home visits and holding housing/rent surgeries in community buildings for those who may not want a home visit.
- Tenants would still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other DHOs or the Civic Centre.
- Redirecting resources to meet the ongoing increase in demand in key service areas, i.e. the impact of Universal Credit for the Rents team and Anti-social behaviour, etc.
- Local knowledge will be retained as officers will continue to cover their existing areas and their relationships with the Police Community Support officers (PCSOs) and Local Area Coordinators (LACs) will continue to be enhanced.
- IT improvements will enhance the service being delivered for those who choose to contact the service in this way.
- Implementing better online facilities, a housing customer portal for service users to access services and make online transactions via a mobile device. The upgrade of the Council's payment system will also make paying online/via a mobile phone much easier and quicker to use.
- Developing a mobile solution for staff to increase the time they spend with tenants in homes and estates. Tenants having direct mobile and email access to Neighbourhood Officers.
- Investing in new technology will result in greater service efficiencies and reduce heavy reliance on paper and form filling for service users.

3. Impact of and response to Covid-19 on housing services

3.1 Whilst all housing reception areas closed to the public and most face to face contact stopped during the emergency response, the majority of housing functions continued to operate to ensure support and services remained in place for tenants, leaseholders and residents. We have seen a significant shift in tenants accessing the service in different ways.

3.2 During Covid-19 the service continued to deliver the majority of services which included;

- Maintaining a 24 hour presence on estates and responding to emergencies including repairs and rehousing requests.
- Dealing with complaints about anti-social behaviour.

- Supporting individuals and families via the work of local Neighbourhood Officers, Rents Officers, Homelessness Caseworkers and the Tenancy Support Unit.
 - Responding to emergencies in sheltered complexes.
 - Making welfare phone calls to those identified as vulnerable.
 - Carrying out Rent surgery interviews with individuals via the phone/online.
 - Working closely with PCSOs and LACs to help respond to local issues and support individuals and families.
 - Providing tenants, leaseholders and residents with updates via social media and the delivery of an Open House newsletter.
- 3.3 During this time, service users were able to access all services via the phone and online. This included paying rent and getting financial advice, reporting repairs, housing/homelessness advice, leaseholder enquiries, tenancy support, reporting ASB and estate management issues. Demand on other local services such as supply of recycling bags was met by making them available in local shops/facilities or by request tags put out on bin collection days.
- 3.4 In relation to rent payments, there were initial concerns that income would be substantially impacted by office closures, as in 2019/20, 20% of the total rental income was collected via DHO rent counters. However, this hasn't been the case and tenants have in the main continued to pay their rent using a number of payment methods including over the phone, online, direct debit, Post Office, local pay zone shops, or by direct payments for Universal Credit. Rent payment data has shown a significant shift in the amount of rent taken over the internet from April to June this year, i.e. 17% compared to 11% collected in 2019/20 and an increase in payments over the phone from 34% compared to 24% in 2019/20. This is despite tenant feedback during the review process advising they find the current online payment system cumbersome. The planned upgrade to the Council's Civica online payment system will make it quicker and much easier for tenants to use.
- 3.5 Direct access to individual officer's mobile phones and email addresses is promoted so service users have a quicker route for assistance as opposed to the previous practice of contacting the main housing switchboard telephone numbers. In cases where it was deemed essential, face to face meetings were arranged and tenants were also able to hand in keys or vital documents at the DHOs which were staffed with an officer presence. The geographical spread of these offices did not seem to present a difficulty in terms of tenants' ability to access them. It was also reassuring that whilst demand on services continued, complaints did not rise during this period and there were no reported difficulties with accessing services. It is recognised that the loss of face to face contact was difficult in certain situations and for some service users. However home visits and face to face appointments restarted in September.
- 3.6 Work has also commenced on IT and communication improvements to aid remote working and customer access. This included:
- Upgrading older telephone systems by rolling out a system called JABBA. This enables service users to call existing DHO numbers which connects

them to an officer's laptop. This allows more officers to answer phone calls remotely.

- Proceeding with plans to order a new online customer portal that can be linked to the Council's upgraded Civica payment system.
- Purchasing new software systems for rollout to business critical services, i.e. Tenancy Support and Homelessness.
- Improving the reception areas at Sketty and Townhill DHOs by carrying out painting works and laying new flooring.
- Identifying what's needed in offices to enable an agile working environment.

3.7 In partnership with IT and Finance, the intention is to implement the IT proposals/improvements by April 2021.

4. Summary and Conclusion

4.1 The overall experience and change in the behaviour of service users in accessing services over the last few months has demonstrated the benefits of proceeding with the recommendations to implement a new DHO model. This will future proof the service, improve communication and accessibility.

4.2 Remote working has enabled officers to continue to provide valuable services and additional IT improvements will further enable service users and officers to interact efficiently without face to face contact always being a necessity. It is recognised that face to face contact is valuable and necessary in some circumstances. While social distancing guidelines remain in place, face to face appointments will be held where individual circumstances dictate it and/or there is no other alternative. Phone and online contact/digital rent surgeries will remain the default method of customer contact.

4.3 It is clear that Covid -19 will challenge the service and our tenants for some considerable time to come. Employment issues and financial difficulties will arise and our services need to adapt to meet these challenges.

4.4 To enable the service to respond to these challenges it is critical that implementation of the new DHO service model is expedited so resources can be redirected to Rent and ASB teams and to increase 'face to face' contact across all Council estates.

4.5 An implementation plan and project will be developed to support the new service model. This will address how the changes will be communicated to service users and what support mechanisms will be in place to help users access services. A list of key actions to be included in the plan are detailed in Appendix D. These will be finalised and agreed with the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy & Service Transformation.

4.6 A key part of the implementation plan will be to reorganise the new DHO service model to operate across 4 core area bases covering the North, West, East and Central parts of the city and reduce the numbers of offices from 9 to 6. The service would operate from Blaenymaes DHO for the North (including Penlan housing stock), Morryston DHO would cover the East (including Eastside housing stock), Sketty DHO and Gorseinon DHO would cover the West (including West Cross housing stock) and the Central area

would be covered from Townhill DHO with a sub office at Town Centre. As part of this reorganisation, it is also proposed to change the opening hours of the Town Centre DHO. Local Ward Member views have been sought on this proposal and any changes would be subject to further consultation with all stakeholders. Any reduction in hours won't adversely affect the Housing service provided to tenants, i.e. the back office won't be reduced as a result it's only a reduction of the accessibility of the front desk.

5. Equality and Engagement Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 5.2 Feedback on services has been sought from Tenants and Leaseholders as part of the review process and the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy.
- 5.3 The Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) puts a specific requirement on us to undertake equality impact assessments (EIA) as a way of examining whether a new or existing function, service, policy, procedure, strategy, plan or project affects any person or group of persons adversely. The EIA screening was carried out in July 2019 as an integral part of the commissioning review process and as a way of examining whether the proposals affected any person or group of persons disproportionately.
- 5.4 It was identified that a further EIA screening was required on the new DHO service model following the consultation process in January 2020. The EIA screening showed that a full EIA on the overall new model was not required. However full EIAs were undertaken on each of the proposed closures. The findings have highlighted that there will be some impact on elderly and disabled service users, but we were able to mitigate this with our plans for the service to continue to increase its 'face to face' community presence, the amount of contact, support and home visits to service users especially those who are vulnerable, elderly and housebound, along with other measures to support tenants. The Covid-19 emergency response has highlighted the extensive contribution Housing services make to support the wellbeing of individuals and communities as concerns about health and vulnerability have been amplified during this time and it is reassuring there have been no reported difficulties with accessing services. The EIA reports have recently been updated in light of the Covid-19 emergency response and will remain subject to ongoing review to ensure any further responses and mitigation measures are put in place. The screening is at Appendix E together with 3 EIA reports which have been completed for the individual office closures.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 A formal consultation process was undertaken in accordance with Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to inform and consider any representations made by secure tenants on the proposed changes to the future model of the District Housing Office service.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Savings in revenue/office running costs of approximately £100k per annum will be reinvested in improving front line service delivery.

Background papers:

- Progress report to Scrutiny Programme Committee 1st August 2019
<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=188&MId=8749&Ver=4&LLL=0>
- Report to Cabinet 21st November 2019
(<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MId=8585&Ver=4&LLL=0>)

Appendices:

- Appendix A – Tenant feedback from statutory consultation exercise
- Appendix B - Letter and questionnaire sent to all tenants
- Appendix C - Questionnaire results and comments
- Appendix D - List of actions to include in Implementation plan
- Appendix E - EIA and About You monitoring information available via this link
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/staffnet/HCREIAreport>

Appendix A – Tenant feedback from statutory consultation exercise

1. The Statutory Tenant Consultation process

- 1.1 A statutory consultation process commenced on 6th January 2020, in accordance with Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985. The purpose of the consultation was to inform and consider any representations made by tenants on the proposed changes to the future model of the District Housing Office service. The consultation period ended on 12th February 2020.
- 1.2 During this period;
- A copy of the consultation letter and questionnaire which is attached at Appendix B was sent out to 15,236 tenants (this figure takes into account the housing stock, vacant properties and any joint tenants). The questionnaire was also available to complete online.
 - A separate 'About You' equality monitoring form was included with the questionnaire which was optional for tenants to complete. This data is utilised as part of an Equality Impact Assessment (at Appendix E).
 - A series of events were held in each DHO to offer tenants the opportunity to discuss the proposals with staff. The events were widely publicised in DHOs, on-line and in the letter/questionnaire sent to each tenant.
 - Flyers detailing 'Frequently Asked Questions' were also made available to help inform tenants/residents who use the offices.
 - Information was included on the Council website/facebook pages.
 - Tenants were advised they could contact the Participation Officer to feedback their views via the phone.
 - A Tenant Consultative Panel meeting was held.
 - A letter was sent to all 632 of the Authority's leaseholders to advise them of the proposals. Whilst it is not a formal requirement to consult leaseholders they were invited to provide their comments as potential DHO service users.
- 1.3 The aim of the statutory consultation process was to gauge opinion on:
- The proposal to close Penlan, Eastside and West Cross DHOs.
 - Staff using new mobile technology in tenants' homes and for estate visits.
 - Whether improvements should be made to the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone.
 - Other options the Council should consider to improve the delivery of the frontline face to face housing services.

2. Tenant feedback from consultation process

- 2.1 The following information highlights data captured from the 858 responses to the questionnaire (which represents just under a 6% return rate). Results of the questionnaire are attached at Appendix C.
- 2.2 Tenants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposed closure of 3 DHOs, i.e. Penlan, Eastside and West Cross. A total of 790 responded and of these 336 (42.6%) agreed/strongly agreed with the proposal and 454 (57.4%) disagreed/strongly disagreed. The number of tenants who responded and disagreed with the proposal equates to 3% of the total number of tenants, i.e.15,236. The majority of responses from those living directly in the 3

areas affected disagreed with the proposals and totalled 224. However response rates were surprisingly low in relation to the total number of stock in those areas.

- 2.3 When tenants were asked about the specific proposal to close Penlan DHO, a total of 705 responded. Of these 287 (40.7%) agreed/strongly agreed and 418 (59.3%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the proposal. Of the 705 respondents, 143 lived in Penlan (against a stock size of 2054) and of these 35 (24.5%) agreed and 108 (75.5%) disagreed with the proposal.
- 2.4 A total of 658 tenants responded to the question specifically on the proposed closure of Eastside DHO. Of these 273 (41.5%) agreed/strongly agreed with the proposal and 385 (58.5%) disagreed/strongly disagreed. Of the 658 respondents 105 lived in Eastside (against a stock size of 1586) and of these 19 (18.1%) agreed and 86 (81.9%) disagreed.
- 2.5 A total of 656 tenants responded to the question specifically on the proposed closure of West Cross DHO. Of these 277 (42.2%) agreed/strongly agreed and 379 (57.8%) disagreed/strongly disagreed. Of the 656 respondents, 76 lived in West Cross (against a stock size of 601) and of these 14 (18.4%) agreed and 62 (81.6%) disagreed.
- 2.6 760 tenants responded to the question specifically on whether staff should spend more time on home and estate visits with the use of new mobile technology. Of these 522 (68.7%) agreed/strongly agreed and 238 (31.3%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- 2.7 746 tenants responded to the question specifically on whether improvements should be made to the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone. Of these 399 (53.5%) agreed/strongly agreed and 347 (46.5%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- 2.8 The final question asked tenants if there were any other options that they felt the Council should consider to improve the delivery of the frontline face to face housing service.
- 2.9 A number of comments were received as follows;
- Staff should know their areas well and identify any continuing problems or issues, e.g. fly-tipping etc.
 - There needs to be adequate staffing. Staff could spend more time in the community, i.e. mobile/weekly visits/regular surgeries.
 - Meet tenants more frequently especially if they are vulnerable and have greater needs.
 - Install a Freephone line and 24 hour reporting.
 - Improve telephone access as it's difficult to get through. Every property should have named contact for access by phone or email.
 - The website is too complicated to use for online transactions and completing forms.
 - Rent account information should be available online, the payment page should be easier to navigate and transfer faster payments.
 - More help to go online, use tablets, awareness courses, skype, video conferencing/ an online chat service/app/online portal/email.

- Help to fill in forms.

3. Headline comments collated from the questionnaire

3.1 The questionnaire identified both common concerns and positive comments to the proposals as follows.

- The main comments from those who disagreed with the closures included concerns for the elderly, disabled, vulnerable, housebound, those with small children who don't want to travel far/those with no transport, don't have computer skills or access to the internet, no job losses, the potential loss to the community and value of local knowledge.
- Of those who agreed with the proposals, positive comments included understanding the need to save money, reinvest the savings from maintaining underutilised offices, more modern ways of using services, happy if services are still provided from the nearest offices and there are home/estate visits and surgeries, transactions and information need to be accessible online and standards maintained.

4. Tenant feedback from DHO events

4.1 During the 28 day formal consultation period, a series of drop in sessions were held in each office over a one week period. Staff were present to discuss any concerns tenants/leaseholders had with the proposals and spoke to around 100 visitors. The majority of those visiting offices were carrying out their normal business i.e. paying rent/council tax and picking up recycling bags, very few called to specifically discuss the proposals. Tenants living in areas not affected by the proposals didn't have an opinion on the proposed closures. Those in areas potentially affected had concerns over the loss of face to face 'local' services provided by staff, accessibility for elderly/disabled tenants, travelling to alternative DHOs and inability to access IT/on-line services. Those tenants who visited the Gorseinon office supported the move to the nearby Library.

5. Feedback from the Tenant Consultative Panel

5.1 The Tenants Consultative Panel met on the 28th January 2020 to discuss the questionnaire and feedback their responses as a group with 17 attendees. The main issues raised were about how these closures would affect those not online or who cannot travel to their nearest office. The group felt that increasing the number of home visits and introducing local drop in surgeries would improve the service and make it more accessible as DHOs are not necessarily conveniently located for all. The group also acknowledged that redirecting resources and reinvesting the savings in the future service was positive and the majority agreed with the proposals to close the offices subject to the service improvements detailed in the report.

6. Leaseholder feedback

6.1 A letter was sent out to 632 leaseholders to seek their comments on the proposals as they are potential users of local DHOs. A total of 9 responses were received and the main comments raised were about the value of face to face contact, local knowledge, concerns for the elderly and those who don't

have computers. Suggestions for improving services included holding local surgeries and inviting other relevant stakeholders, e.g. the Police.

7. Tenant feedback via phone calls to the Participation Officer/Housing Facebook page

- 7.1 A total of 18 tenants contacted the Participation Officer to discuss the proposals. The main comments raised included concerns about the elderly, disabled and those unable to travel to other offices, the value of talking to someone face to face, that there should be no staff job losses and how to get recycling bags.
- 7.2 There was one post on the Housing Facebook page which raised a question on whether the Council would listen to tenants views and concern that services shouldn't be affected or see a reduction in Neighbourhood Officers.

8. Summary of Tenant and leaseholder feedback

- 8.1 Feedback from the consultation process highlighted the value tenants place on the frontline housing service provided in communities.
- 8.2 The overall response rate to the consultation was low and the statistics showed that a higher number of those who responded didn't want the service to change. However to ensure the service is sustainable for the future there is a pressing need to make significant improvements to the delivery of the housing service, modernise systems and adapt to the changes in how customers access services.
- 8.3 The 2017 Tenants survey identified that 75% of tenants usually contact the service via the phone/online.
- 8.4 In addition, a demand study undertaken in 2018 indicated that 74% of visitors to offices were Council tenants/leaseholders and 26% were residents. Around 60% of visitors used the offices to pay their rent/council tax, water rates and 28% used them to collect recycling bags. Whilst payments did account for around 60% of all office visitors at this time, more transactions were starting to take place via the phone, direct debit, online and many Universal Credit claimants have their rent paid direct to the Council. The remaining 12% of visitors called in to speak to their Neighbourhood officer about a number of tenancy and estate management issues such as antisocial behaviour, transfer application, mutual exchange, ending tenancy and to discuss repairs.
- 8.5 The feedback highlighted a number of concerns about the impact of the proposals around the elderly, disabled, vulnerable, housebound, those with no transport/don't want to travel far, don't have computer skills or access to the internet and value of local knowledge. However, the proposal to make changes to the delivery of the DHO service is intended to deliver significant improvements and increase accessibility.

Appendix B



HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH
Strategic Housing Division
Civic Centre, Oystermouth Road,
Swansea, SA1 3SN
www.swansea.gov.uk

Please ask for: Alison Winter
Direct Line: 01792 635043/07775 221453
E-Mail Alison.Winter@swansea.gov.uk
Our Ref: HCR
Your Ref:
Date: January 2020

Dear Tenant

District Housing Office Service and your views on proposed changes

We want you to have your say on our proposal to change the way we deliver the District Housing Office service. This letter is a follow up to the letter you should have received back in June 2019. We received 150 responses and feedback highlighted how much tenants value the housing service. The main concern was that any improvements to IT systems should not replace the face to face service being delivered. Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, we have a duty to inform and consult with you on any changes on 'matters of housing management'.

Why are we proposing to make changes?

The Housing Service has undertaken a review to look at how it can modernise the way it delivers the service. We also need to make sure the service has the right level of resources in place to address the increasing priorities and demands it's facing in relation to supporting tenants, the impact of Universal Credit, preventing homelessness, meeting housing need, improving Council houses and investing in building new homes to name but a few examples.

What changes are we proposing?

We are consulting on proposals to reduce the number of District Housing Offices. The reason we are proposing these changes is that the way tenants are contacting us is changing – far more are contacting the service by phone and online. This means the numbers calling into some local Housing Offices has fallen.

We looked at:

- How many people use the DHO's.
- The way tenants access our services (face-to-face or phone/online).
- The condition and investment needed to the building.

The proposals are to close 3 offices which include West Cross, Penlan and Eastside. Services will still be provided from the nearest housing offices and Neighbourhood officers will continue to make home and estate visits. They will also hold Housing advice/rent surgeries in local community buildings if tenants don't want a home visit. Tenants will still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other housing offices or the civic centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, ordered online, over the phone or by putting request tags out with recycling bags. A project is also taking place to co-locate the District Housing Office with the Library service in Gorseinon in 2020.

Our priority is to continue to deliver a frontline face to face housing service that tenants value but to improve the way we do it. We are looking to increase the amount of time staff spend on home and estate visits using new mobile technology, i.e. tablet, upgrade our telephone systems and reduce the amount of form filling that tenants have to complete by modernising our back office processes. We will also improve the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone.

We would like you to let us know your views by **12th February 2020**. You can do this by:

- Completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to us using the FREEPOST envelope OR completing it online at: www.swansea.gov.uk/dhosurvey
- Calling into any District Housing Office to speak to a member of staff or to hand in your completed questionnaire.
- E-mailing your comments to the housing inbox housing@swansea.gov.uk
- Calling the housing team to discuss on 01792 635043/07775 221453.
- Attending one of the drop in sessions see below for dates and times.

Drop in sessions – January 2020	
Townhill District Housing Office	Monday 20th January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Morrleston District Housing Office	Monday 20th January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Penlan District Housing Office	Tuesday 21st January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Sketty District Housing Office	Tuesday 21st January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
West Cross District Housing Office	Wednesday 22nd January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Eastside District Housing Office	Wednesday 22nd January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Town Centre District Housing Office	Thursday 23rd January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Gorseinon District Housing Office	Thursday 23rd January 2020 10-12noon & 2-4pm
Blaenymaes District Housing Office	Friday 24th January 2020 10-12noon & 2-3.30pm

Before making a final decision on this matter the Council will consider all representations made in response to this consultation exercise.

Yours faithfully



Mark Wade

Head of Housing and Public Health

To receive this information in alternative format, or in Welsh please contact the above.

I dderbyn yr wybodaeth hon mewn fformat arall neu yn Gymraeg, cysylltwch â'r person uchod.

We would welcome your views on the following. Please complete and return using the FREEPOST envelope provided.

Q1 Our proposal: Closure of 3 District Housing offices, i.e. Penlan, Eastside and West Cross. Services will still be provided from the nearest housing offices; along with Neighbourhood Officers continuing to make home and estate visits and local surgeries being held in community buildings. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal? Please tick one box.

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q2 Please explain your answer below

Q3 Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.

Closure of Penlan DHO

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q4 Please explain your answer below.

Q5 Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.

Closure of Eastside DHO

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q6 Please explain your answer below.

Q7 Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.

Closure of West Cross DHO

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q8 Please explain your answer below.

Q9 Do you agree or disagree that staff should spend more time on home and estate visits with the use of new mobile technology? Please tick one box.

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q10 Please explain your answer below.

Q11 Do you agree or disagree that improvements should be made to the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone? Please tick one box.

- Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree Strongly disagree

Q12 Are there any other options you feel the Council should consider to improve the delivery of the frontline face to face housing service? Please give your answer below

Q13 Which District Housing Office (DHO) is your 'local' office?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Penlan DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Blaenymaes DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Eastside DHO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Towncentre DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Townhill DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Gorseinon DHO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> West Cross DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Morriston DHO | <input type="checkbox"/> Sketty DHO |

To improve our services and service delivery to you and consider all your needs we hope you will complete the following questions. These questions are optional but will help us to understand how different groups may be affected by the proposal.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, any information requested on the following questions is held in the strictest confidence for data analysis purposes only. The information will enable us to determine whether or not our services are equally accessible by everyone.

Q14 Are you...?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Q15 Is your gender the same as that which you were assigned at birth?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q16 How old are you ...

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> 56 - 65 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16 - 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> 66 - 75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 26 - 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> 76 - 85 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36 - 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 85 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 46 - 55 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Q17 Would you describe yourself as...

Please mark all that apply

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> British | <input type="checkbox"/> Other British (please write in at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welsh | <input type="checkbox"/> Non British (please write in at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Gypsy/traveller |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> Refugee/Asylum Seeker (please write in current/last nationality at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scottish | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Write in here

Q18 To what 'ethnic' group do you consider

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White - British | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Any other White background (please write in at end) | <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Asian background (please write in at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - White & Black Caribbean | <input type="checkbox"/> Black or Black British - Caribbean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - White & Black African | <input type="checkbox"/> Black or Black British - African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - White & Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Black background (please write in at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Mixed background (please write in at end) | <input type="checkbox"/> Arab |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian British - Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ethnic group (please write in at end) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian British - Pakistani | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Write in here

Q19 What is your religion, even if you are not currently practicing?

Please mark one box or write in

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant, and all other Christian denominations) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sikh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish | |

Any other religion or philosophical belief (please write in)

Q20 Do you consider that you are actively practicing your religion?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q21 What is your sexual orientation

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Heterosexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay/ Lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Please write in

Q22 Can you understand, speak, read or write Welsh?

Please mark all that apply

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understand spoken Welsh | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Welsh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speak Welsh | <input type="checkbox"/> None of these |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read Welsh | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write Welsh | |

Q23 Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?

By long-standing we mean anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over time.

This could also be defined Under the Equality Act 2010 as: "Having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities."

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q24 Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Appendix C

District Housing Office Service and your views on proposed changes results

Q1	Our proposal: Closure of 3 District Housing offices, i.e. Penlan, Eastside and West Cross. Services will still be provided from the nearest housing offices; along with Neighbourhood Officers continuing to make home and estate visits and local surgeries being held in community buildings. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal? Please tick one box.	
	93 (11.8%)	Strongly agree
	243 (30.8%)	Tend to agree
	170 (21.5%)	Tend to disagree
	284 (35.9%)	Strongly disagree

Closure of 3 DHOs	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Total no. of responses 790	93 11.8%	243 30.8%	170 21.5%	284 35.9%
Responses by breakdown from District Housing Office area				
138 responses from Penlan DHO area (covers 2054 stock)	10 7.2%	31 22.5%	20 14.5%	77 55.8%
75 responses from Blaenymaes DHO area (covers 1315 stock)	12 16.0%	24 32.0%	19 25.3%	20 26.7%
100 responses from Eastside DHO area (covers 1586 stock)	12 12.0%	16 16.0%	13 13.0%	59 59.0%
45 responses from Town Centre DHO area (covers 782 stock)	7 15.6%	17 37.8%	10 22.2%	11 24.4%
87 responses from Townhill DHO area (covers 2446 stock)	12 13.8%	35 40.2%	20 23.0%	20 23.0%
68 responses from Gorseinon DHO area (covers 1712 stock)	8 11.8%	36 52.9%	14 20.6%	10 14.7%
74 responses from West Cross DHO area (covers 601 stock)	5 6.8%	14 18.9%	14 18.9%	41 55.4%
91 responses from Morryston DHO area (covers 2005 stock)	9 9.9%	35 38.5%	26 28.6%	21 23.1%
94 responses from Sketty DHO area (covers 1016 stock)	16 17.0%	32 34.0%	28 29.8%	18 19.1%
Unknown DHO – (18)	2 11.1%	3 16.7%	6 33.3%	7 38.9%

Q2	<p>Please explain your answer below</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals: Elderly disabled, vulnerable, housebound, those with small children can't/don't want to travel far/will find it difficult to travel. Those with mental health issues will feel uneasy with change. Concerns over isolation, difficulty accessing services and travelling to nearest alternative as no transport. Some don't want home visits. Other office is too far – people will struggle to get there. Value 'local' services, seen as another cut to services. DHO vital part of community, closures will be a loss to the communities. Will not improve the service to tenant, existing office is convenient/close/walking distance/local/easy to get to. Value the support and help. Need to stay open. Value 'face to face' service. Personal touch is important, like to talk to staff especially if tenants have support needs. Local knowledge. Always paid my rent at my local DHO as its easier, will be strange going somewhere else, I want a receipt for my cash, sometimes need help/make a complaint e.g. ASB, need to visit in person. Will have a negative impact – where will I get my recycling bags, send off paperwork, pay rent. Remaining offices will get too busy/cover too large an area, parking concerns. More information will get lost. Will the offices be able to cope with extra demand? Officers spread more thinly – difficult enough to get to speak to a Neighbourhood officer as it is. Council cost cutting exercise/government cut backs</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for agreeing with the proposals: Too many offices with too few staff. Happy that services will still be provided from nearest office. Trust that the Council will make the correct decision based on all information. Providing officers will make home and estate visits and standards are maintained. Proposal saves money/improves finance, happy to use nearby DHO as long as easily accessible and can still order things online. Waste of resources having so many, don't need them. Other offices are close-by. Alternative provision seems adequate and satisfactory. Makes sense happy that any savings (maintaining and running underutilised offices) will be reinvested e.g. building more homes, services for homeless. Makes sense to rationalise. Agree with streamlining. With modern ways of contact and if people are not using these offices I agree. Everything is available on-line these days. Logical direction to take. Understand need to save money. Can't comment: Can't say as don't live in any of the 3 areas affected. The proposals won't affect me, my DHO is not affected/makes no difference to me. Never use or have reason to visit the DHO as phone repairs or email, face to face contact rarely needed. As long as surgeries are held locally (confidential rooms).</p>
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Q3	Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.	
	Closure of Penlan DHO	
	76 (10.8%)	Strongly agree
	211 (29.9%)	Tend to agree
	169 (24.0%)	Tend to disagree
	249 (35.3%)	Strongly disagree

Closure of Penlan DHO	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Total no. of responses 705	76 10.8%	211 29.9%	169 24.0%	249 35.3%
No. of responses from Penlan DHO area 143	9 6.3%	26 18.2%	13 9.1%	95 66.4%

Q4	<p>Please explain your answer below</p> <p>**many of the reasons were the same as given for Q2**.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals: Inconvenience, isolating the vulnerable, disabled, elderly. Not everyone is physically and mentally able to visit another office – too far for some to walk, no access to public transport or own transport– local offices help such people. Too many families/people with support and complicated needs/situations – require a lot of help. Forced to travel further. Not everyone has access to a phone, computer, internet or no knowledge/computer illiterate. Staff are helpful, collect green bags, send off paperwork. Importance of local knowledge – fear problems on the estate will worsen. Penlan is a big estate covering a large area the office is the hub of the community. Many depend on 'local' services. Pressure it will put on other offices. People prefer to speak/see a person face to face with concerns or problems as they get an immediate response – valued means of communication. Telephone service for help not always easy. Fear other offices will close once some do. Some enjoy visiting the office.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for agreeing with the proposals: If it saves money it's a good thing as there will be more money for investing. If you don't need them anymore/not being used much makes sense. Nearby DHOs are close enough/just as easy to use/get to. As long as the alternative service is maintained. Only if we get easy access to the Housing Officer. Most things are done over the phone or Internet. Extra time and money could be spent solving problems on the estate. Investment is needed in the building (poor) makes sense to rationalise and merge to save money. Arrangements need to be made for certain groups - home visits should make things easier. As long as standards are maintained and tenants are not detrimentally affected. Providing no job losses. Penlan could be converted into flats, other uses.</p>
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Q5	<p>Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.</p> <p>Closure of Eastside DHO</p>
	66 (10.0%) Strongly agree
	207 (31.5%) Tend to agree
	162 (24.6%) Tend to disagree
	223 (33.9%) Strongly disagree

Closure of Eastside DHO	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Total no. of responses 658	66 10.0%	207 31.5%	162 24.6%	223 33.9%
No. of responses from the Eastside DHO area 105	8 7.6%	11 10.5%	14 13.3%	72 68.6%

Q6	Please explain your answer below
	<p>** many of the reasons were the same as given for Q2**.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals: Inconvenient for disabled, elderly, those who can't drive, no access to transport, have health problems - Morriston too far. Value face to face contact for problems, enquiries, information. Many people e.g. higher number of OAPs don't have access to computers, mobiles and Internet. Many not interested in using technology, some not able to. Some won't want home visits. Telephone service not always good e.g. repairs on hold for lengthy time. Sometimes difficult for people to pay rent weekly. Local people need easy access to services. Eastside is a large area – the office provides a valuable service to the community. Helpful/friendly staff. Convenient for green bags and paying bills. Other closures will likely follow. Accessing services would be more difficult for many.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals: If it saves money and they are not being used as much. Other offices are nearby/close enough. Changes have to happen. As long as standards are kept up. Providing home visits are offered. Good thing to rationalise. Providing it doesn't negatively affect tenants and problems are addressed. Tend to phone with problems.</p>

Q7	Do you agree or disagree with the following: Please tick one box.	
	Closure of West Cross DHO	
	64 (9.8%)	Strongly agree
	213 (32.5%)	Tend to agree
	167 (25.5%)	Tend to disagree
	212 (32.3%)	Strongly disagree

Closure of West Cross DHO	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Total no. of responses 656	64 9.8%	213 32.5%	167 25.5%	212 32.3%
No. of responses from the West Cross DHO area 76	2 2.6%	12 15.8%	8 10.5%	54 71.1%

Q8	Please explain your answer below
	<p>**Many of the reasons were the same as given for Q2**.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals: Concerns that the elderly, vulnerable, immobile will be detrimentally affected as they are less likely to have access to mobiles/Internet etc and may not wish to learn which could isolate them. Many still use cash to pay rent. Not everyone has cars and will be able to get to Sketty DHO which many felt was too far even with public transport. West Cross is convenient, it's a large part of the community and will be a loss. Large elderly population in West Cross, office covers a large rural area. Lots of people don't like change and modern technology. Value personal touch provided by local office, like face to face help/advice/service for enquiries. Local knowledge is important. Very helpful staff. Fear further closures would follow. Fear estate would diminish/more problems.</p> <p>Summary of reasons given for agreeing with the proposals: If it saves money (running the building etc) it's a good thing - money could be spent elsewhere with improvements to face to face contact, easy enough to use the other DHO or County Hall, if it's not being used much then makes sense, happy as long as tenants can easily access the alternative service and service standards maintained, good to have staff out of the office more seeing what's going on, providing no job losses and communication is not affected, home visits are a good idea.</p>

Q9	Do you agree or disagree that staff should spend more time on home and estate visits with the use of new mobile technology? Please tick one box.	
	229 (30.1%)	Strongly agree
	293 (38.6%)	Tend to agree
	119 (15.7%)	Tend to disagree
	119 (15.7%)	Strongly disagree

Q10	Please explain your answer below
	<p>Those that disagreed would rather see the DHO remain open preferring to be able to visit staff in one place. Other reasons for disagreeing: concern that this would generate more costs, mobile phone coverage in some areas being poor and affecting the ability of staff to work efficiently, demand for home visits could exceed resources, happy with current ways of working.</p> <p>Those that agreed gave the following reasons: enable tenants greater access to Council services, staff would gain a clearer understanding of the issues, enable problems to be sorted more efficiently as staff would be able to 'see for themselves', staff would be more visible, it would hopefully make tenants more responsible and respectful of their property. It would save time. Elderly and disabled would benefit from personal contact. Estate management issues could be addressed quicker and more easily – fly tipping, over grown trees etc with a view to improving estates. Staff would become more aware of wellbeing of tenant. It could improve interactions with housing officers.</p>

Q11	Do you agree or disagree that improvements should be made to the way tenants can make online transactions and access housing services via a computer, tablet or mobile phone? Please tick one box.	
	165 (22.1%)	Strongly agree
	234 (31.4%)	Tend to agree
	180 (24.1%)	Tend to disagree
	167 (22.4%)	Strongly disagree

Q12	Are there any other options you feel the Council should consider to improve the delivery of the frontline face to face housing service? Please give your answer below
	<p>A number of comments were received as follows; Staff should know their areas well and identify any continuing problems or issues, e.g. fly-tipping etc. There needs to be adequate staffing. Staff could spend more time in the community, i.e. mobile/weekly visits/regular surgeries. Meet tenants more frequently especially if they are vulnerable and have greater needs. Install a Freephone line and 24 hour reporting. Improve telephone access as it's difficult to get through. Every property should have named contact for access by phone or email. The website is too complicated to use for online transactions and fill in forms. Rent account information should be available online, the payment page should be easier to navigate and transfer faster payments. More help to go online, use tablets, awareness courses, skype, video conferencing/ an online chat service/app/online portal/email. Help to fill in forms.</p>

Q13	Which District Housing Office (DHO) is your 'local' office?	
	144 (16.8%)	Penlan DHO
	78 (9.1%)	Blaenymaes DHO
	110 (12.8%)	Eastside DHO
	48 (5.6%)	Town Centre DHO
	95 (11.1%)	Townhill DHO
	82 (9.5%)	Gorseinon DHO
	78 (9.1%)	West Cross DHO
	98 (11.4%)	Morrison DHO
	98 (11.48%)	Sketty DHO
	27 (3.3%)	No DHO indicated

Appendix D

The following key actions will be included in the implementation plan to deliver the new ways of working by April 2021.

• Launch the Housing customer portal (this will enable tenants and applicants to access personalised rent account information/repairs/waiting list data etc).
• Develop and hold tenant awareness events to support tenants to use the Housing portal and updated Corporate Civica payment system.
• Advise Councillors, tenants and residents on plans regarding closures.
• Liaise with internal and external partners on changes to the District Housing Office service.
• Agree location of advice surgeries in consultation with Ward Members.
• Develop and implement a communication plan for tenants/service users to inform them how to access services, including housing surgeries/home visits/neighbourhood officer contact information, etc.
• Undertake staff/union consultation process for those affected by office closures/potential job role changes.
• Allocate resources to the Rents and ASB teams.
• Programme staff development training for role/team changes.
• Undertake staff training sessions on Housing customer portal.
• Finalise work plan for reconfiguration of office space to enable relocation of staff into an agile working environment, telephone system upgrade and any improvements needed to public areas.

Appendix E EIA and About You monitoring information available via this link
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/staffnet/HCREIAreport>