

10.00am, Thursday 14 March 2013

Property Conservation Service Re-design – Service Review Update

Item number	8.5
Report number	
Wards	Citywide

Links

Coalition pledges	P40
Council outcomes	CO19
Single Outcome Agreement	SOA4

Mark Turley

Director of Services for Communities

Contact: Libby Strong, Service Re-design Manager

E-mail: libby.strong@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 5563

Executive summary

Property Conservation Service Re-design – Service Review Update

Summary

The Property Conservation Service transferred to Services for Communities (SfC) in March 2011. Following various investigations and associated follow up work, a new 'Shared Repairs Service' will begin on 2 April 2013.

The need to establish a new service to replace Property Conservation has been acknowledged in several previous reports to Committee. A report to the Policy and Strategy Committee on 7 August 2012 included a commitment to end the existing service and launch a replacement by April 2013.

Development of an immediate replacement for the Property Conservation service is well advanced following a public consultation exercise and discussions at the Property Sub-Committee on 12 November 2012 and a further informal meeting with members on 21 December 2012.

The initial service model will focus on the provision of advice and information to homeowners and an Emergency Statutory Notice response/out of hours service, thus retaining the Council's statutory powers.

The public consultation also suggested that demand remains significant for the Council to undertake larger scale projects on behalf of owners. The Council will continue to develop an approach with the aim of supporting projects of this nature. Any such proposals will be based on carrying out essential works only, and will incorporate financial systems and charging arrangements which minimise any risks to the Council. Proposals for additions to the service will be reported to the appropriate committee for approval.

This report provides an update on the service review and preparation towards the launch of the new service on 2 April 2013.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

1. Notes the establishment of the new service as described in this report.
2. Calls for a progress report after one year of operation of the new service.

Financial impact

The new service costs have been factored into the Council's budget setting process. The administration charge will be reviewed to ensure the service is financially viable. There may be potential to develop new income streams during the first year of operation.

Equalities impact

The service review will see a number of staff in scope of the review displaced following a reduction of posts within the new service. Staff displaced by the review will be managed in line with the Council's Redeployment procedures.

Sustainability impact

There is no adverse environment impact arising from this report.

Consultation and engagement

These proposals reflect feedback from the substantial public consultation exercise held last autumn.

A formal service review was initiated via a meeting with representatives from UNISON and Human Resources on 17 January 2013.

A period of staff consultation on new draft job descriptions was concluded and officially closed by UNISON on 8 February 2013.

The affected staff have been offered training sessions on completing a Profile Application and competency based interview techniques to ensure officers have ability to participate fully in the review process.

Background reading / external references

Property Conservation Service Re-design Consultation Findings – Report to Property Sub Committee 23/11/12.

Property Conservation Service Re-design – Service Review Update

1. Background

- 1.1 The Property Conservation Service transferred to Services for Communities (SfC) in March 2011 in light of significant service and financial concerns. External consultants were employed to investigate a range of matters relating to this service and the wider property function and this was reported back to the Council in March 2012.

In light of the findings of that independent investigation a number of major workstreams were established as summarised below and a Property Sub-Committee (of the Finance and Budget Committee) was established to oversee that work. The main workstreams have been as follows;

- (a) Service Re-design – which is the subject of this report
- (b) Financial – with the aim of identifying the precise nature of the financial concerns identified and putting in place arrangements to resolve them (eg recovery of outstanding monies from owners)
- (c) Complaint Resolution – the Council approved a bespoke 2 stage process for complaints from owners and progress in this area has been considered by the sub Committee. All complaints will have received initial consideration by the end of March and those where the Council considers there may be a case to answer will be the subject of mediation over the summer months.
- (d) Staff Disciplinaries – 30 cases have been investigated and only two remain to be heard. The two remaining cases will be heard shortly.
- (e) Contractors – the sub-Committee has considered concerns relating to a number of contractors and taken appropriate action
- (f) Processes – the old service suffered from poor working practises in areas such as procurement, relationships with contractors, communication with owners, customer service, performance management, ICT etc. These need to be resolved as the service moves forward.

2. Main report

Service re-design

- 2.1 In relation to service re-design, a major public consultation took place during autumn 2012 and the sub-Committee has considered how best to respond to those findings. This report proposes the staged introduction of a new service based on the following principles;
- (i) Owners should be encouraged to take responsibility for their property wherever possible
 - (ii) Owners should be supported in the above through the provision of advice and information
 - (iii) Owners should be encouraged to participate in factoring services and the Council will consider ways to improve the options available in terms of such services
 - (iv) The Council should continue to provide a repairs service in response to urgent and emergency problems
 - (v) The Council will eventually move to a broader range of services subject to establishing satisfactory risk management and financial arrangements
 - (vi) The Council will generally only undertake the minimum work essential unless owners specifically request otherwise
- 2.2 Based on the feedback from the consultation the new service will continue to provide a much-valued emergency response service. Since 1 April 2012, some 807 Emergency Statutory Notices were served and work to the value of £400,000 undertaken. It is anticipated that this volume of work will continue into the future.
- 2.3 This emergency response will be available 365 days per year and 24/7. The costs of this work will continue to be recovered from owners and there is a good track record of cost recovery.
- 2.4 In addition to the emergency response service the Council will provide a new advice and information service. This will provide guidance to support owners in taking responsibility for maintaining their property. Signposting will be available on the services provided by property factors, property management agencies and also how to organise shared repairs using the Tenement Management Scheme (TMS). In addition, the signposting service will also include advice on mediation services where neighbours are unable to reach agreement and the options available to homeowners in finding the funds to meet their share of

repair costs. Homeowners will be able to access this information through the Council's website and the future development of a mobile application, their local Neighbourhood Office or library, leaflet material, the Council's Contact Centre or through face to face discussion with officers from the new service and wider SfC services.

- 2.5 The public consultation also suggested that demand remains significant for the Council to undertake larger scale projects (non-emergencies) on behalf of owners. The Council will continue to develop an approach with the aim of supporting projects of this nature. Any such proposals will be based on carrying out essential works only, and will incorporate financial systems and charging arrangements which minimise any risks to the Council. Proposals for additions to the service will be reported to the appropriate committee for approval.

Associated developments

- 2.6 Brand design has commenced on the homeowner advice material with focus group testing on a proposed new service name – 'Shared Repairs Service'.
- 2.7 A formal service review is underway and a period of staff consultation on new job descriptions concluded on 8 February. A new staffing structure will be implemented to support the new service. Recruitment to the new posts is currently underway in accordance with the Council's policies.
- 2.8 A training plan has been developed to prepare staff for the new service. The aim is to embed a customer centred approach to service delivery, supported with strong performance measurement and financial control. Training has also been scoped for wider Council services to ensure that there is a consistent approach towards the provision of this service. This training programme is scheduled to start mid March and continue post the launch of the new service.
- 2.9 The Shared Repairs Service will be located in Chesser House as an interim arrangement pending closure of Chesser House in Summer 2014.
- 2.10 An ICT strategy is in development which will support case management, record retention, performance reporting and mobile working.
- 2.11 Procurement arrangements are in hand to support the new service and these will be refined as the service develops and as the Council's procurement strategy for construction advances.
- 2.12 A communications strategy has been developed to launch the new service and promote continued awareness of the Shared Repairs Service.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- 3.1 Notes the establishment of the new service as described in this report.
- 3.2 Calls for a progress report after one year of operation of the new service.

Mark Turley

Director of Services for Communities

Links

Coalition pledges	P40 Work with Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and other stakeholders to conserve the city's built heritage
Council outcomes	CO19 Attractive Places and Well Maintained
Single Outcome Agreement	SOA4 Edinburgh's communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric