EXETER CIT COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMUNITY
18 JANUARY 2011

EXECUTIVE
25 JANUARY 2011

IMPLEMENTATION OF MOBILE WORKING IN HOUSING

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   To seek Members' approval for the implementation of new mobile working systems within Housing Services in order to streamline existing processes and improve overall value for money.

2.   BACKGROUND

2.1   During 2007 the Council set up a number of pilot projects to assess the costs and benefits of introducing mobile working into front line service delivery. Housing Services had already started to consider this idea and were keen to be included in the pilot. In particular, the responsive repairs service was a prime candidate for such technology, where officers regularly visit tenants in their homes to assess repairs work, raise job orders and agree appointments for the work to be completed.

2.2   Throughout 2008 members of staff from the Repairs and Technical Services section worked with an external consultant to process map the repairs reporting and ordering service as it currently operates and seek ways to streamline these processes to improve efficiency. The proposed new process requires the use of mobile technology in order to be implemented.

2.3   The project focussed on the client side of the responsive repairs process from the moment a repair request is received from the tenant to the time the order is passed to the relevant contractor. This would include any diagnosis of the repairs, pre-inspections and the arrangement of appointments with tenants.

2.4   The findings show that the implementation of mobile working for technical staff working in the responsive maintenance section (both for the Council's own housing stock and temporary accommodation) would not only help to streamline existing processes but provide a more responsive and flexible service to tenants and make year on year savings for the Housing Revenue Account . Financial details are provided in Appendix I of this report.

2.5   Indeed, taking account of the initial costs of the project, investment in hardware and software and training for staff it is estimated that by year two an on-going saving of some £24,500 per annum would be made by adopting this approach.

2.6   The most significant cost of the project – the investment in the software – also has other benefits as once it has been installed it can be used to roll out mobile working to other sections within Housing Services thereby helping to improve efficiency in those areas and spreading the cost of the initial investment further.

2.7   Following the work by the project team benefits to the Council and its customers of implementing mobile working within the responsive maintenance section can be summarised as:

- Significant savings of over £24,500 per annum to the Housing Revenue Account once the initial investment has been made

- Streamlined processes for reporting repairs

- The use of mobile devices will:

    o Prevent double input of data
    o Allow works orders to be raised directly from site
    o Allow appointments to be made with tenants whilst in their home
    o Improve appointment scheduling for Technical Officers
    o Reduce travelling time and mileage expenses – officers will pick up their appointments at home and drive straight to site without having to come into the offices first
    o Allow inspection data to be downloaded into the Academy computer system without the need to input the data manually

- Staff involvement with the process will aid successful implementation

3   PROPOSALS

3.1   Housing managers were keen to pursue these recommendations given the improvements to customer services and the on-going budget savings. However, the decision to retender the Responsive Maintenance Contract in 2009 meant any implementation had to be delayed.

3.2   Following a comprehensive procurement process the new contractor was selected in May 2010. The successful implementation of this new contract has been the top priority for both the Council and its tenants and any move to implement client side mobile working, as outlined in this report, was delayed until the new contract was operating. We are now in a position to take this forward and a draft timetable for implementation is outlined below.

3.3   Throughout the mobilisation process, agreement has been reached with Mears on how the client/contractor service will be structured and how repairs orders will be transferred electronically between both parties. All client side inspections will remain with the Council and all repairs orders, appointments and inspections will be logged through the Academy system. Therefore, the need to implement a mobile working solution remains. Managers, staff and our contractor are keen for mobile working to be implemented as quickly as possible in order to fully modernise the repairs process and improve overall efficiency.

Risks

3.4   The following risks have been identified**:**

Risk	Mitigation/Solution
Costs of implementing software are higher than predicted resulting in a delay in the savings being made.	Cost of software and implementation consultancy has been obtained from Capita. Estimates for hardware identified.
Hardware fails to perform as expected – problems with mobile signal etc.	Use network supplier with best coverage of city. Devices automatically update/synchronise when signal becomes strong
Integration problems with Academy and/or the new contractor system	Mobilisation period has tested these systems prior to the 'go live' date
Staff find it difficult to operate new IT hardware and software	Training to be arranged as part of implementation process
New contractor performs poorly leading to staff time being focussed on service improvements rather than new enhancements	Mobilisation period has been sufficiently long to ensure a strong start from day one. Staff resources available for both projects

Timetable

3.5   Subject to Executive approval of the project the following timetable is proposed:

Establish project group to oversee implementation	February 2011
Staff consultation on new working practices	Feb/March 2011
Procure mobile working software and hardware	February 2011
Implementation and testing	March/April 2011
Staff training on new systems	March/April 2011
Testing of equipment and software	April 2011
Implementation of mobile working	**May 2011**
Impact assessment of project	October 2011

4   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The spreadsheet at Appendix I sets out the total project costs of implementing the mobile working solution. The total capital costs are between £44,000 and £48,225 depending on the type of mobile devices chosen. Of this, the consultancy costs of £14,400 have already been paid. The remaining £30,000 to £34,000 will be financed from within the Housing Revenue Account Capital Budget. A sum of £22,400 has already been identified in this year's budget. The residue will be financed from contingencies.

4.2   Mobile working will significantly reduce the amount of staff time spent inputting data into existing systems. This reduction in time provides the bulk of the £24,500 annual savings identified by the project. Because of this increased efficiency and overall improvement in staff productivity these savings should be realised through a reduction in staffing numbers within the Repairs and Technical Service section (essentially one full time post), or a reduction in hours of working. It is anticipated that this reduction can be achieved through natural wastage.

4.3   There will be on-going revenue expenditure of £2,960 to cover the cost of the software licences and mobile device data contracts.

5.   RECOMMENDED: that Scrutiny Committee Community supports and Executive approves:

1) the implementation of mobile working within Housing Services;
2) that a new capital budget is established within the Housing Capital Programme totalling £34,500 to purchase the necessary software and hardware to implement the system;
3) the project is funded by the £22,400 already identified in the Housing Repairs budget together with a sum of £12,100 from existing contingencies.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

S:PA/LP/Committee/111SCC3
7.1.11

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

Housing Landlord Services - Mobile Working Business Case   **Appendix I**

Capital Costs	Year1	Year2	Year3	Year4	Year5	Total
Capita Costs: Software (1000 per device)	8,000					8,000
Web Services	2,000					2,000
Implementation Services	8,525					8,525
Handheld Devices x 8 (max £1k per device)	8,000					8,000
Licence Costs (backup and SQL)	3,000					3,000
Contribution to VMWare infrastructure	2,000					2,000
Consultancy Costs (already paid)	14,400					14,400
IT Development Costs (6 days)	2,300					2,300
Total	48,225	0	0	0	0	48,225
Life Expectancy	5 years					

Revenue Costs	Year1	Year2	Year3	Year4	Year5	Total
Expenditure						
Supplies and Services						
Capita Mobile Working licence	1,600	1,600	1,600	1,600	1,600	8,000
Web Services	400	400	400	400	400	2,000
Mobile data contracts	960	960	960	960	960	4,800
Depreciation	9,645	9,645	9,645	9,645	9,645	48,225
Total Revenue Expenditure	12,605	12,605	12,605	12,605	12,605	63,025
Revenue Saving						
1 x post (Grade 6)	27,500	27,500	27,500	27,500	27,500	137,500
Total Revenue Saving	27,500	27,500	27,500	27,500	27,500	137,500

Net Revenue Cost / (Income)	(14,895)	(14,895)	(14,895)	(14,895)	(14,895)	(74,475)

Cumulative Cash Flow	23,685	(24,540)	(24,540)	(24,540)	(24,540)	(74,475)

Investment Return	30.9%	30.9%	30.9%	30.9%	30.9%	