Report to: Executive Board 8th July 02

Customer Services - Improving access to services

	WARDS AFFECTED
Report of: Customer Services Business Manager	
	All
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Lead Member	
Responsible: Councillor Richard Tarver	
Key Decision: Yes	

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to a proposal to set up local services shops at Cowley and Wood Farm the Executive Board, at its meeting on the 12th March 2002, recommended to Council not to include funding in the 2002/3 budget for this purpose and requested a report on options to improve access to and the image of Council Services in these areas.

This report provides information on the "one-stop" public enquiry facilities that the Customer Services Business Unit provided to 68,000 customers last year from the four existing shops and identifies that service take up is growing and that satisfaction levels are high both from customers and external inspection. Details on activity in each service shop are provided.

The service enables the front-line delivery of a "joined-up" solution to enquiries relating to key services at the point of contact to customers who are frequently from the most needy and disadvantaged sections of the community.

Details of service development are provided including contributing to better housing advice through dealing with all initial homeless presentations and applications for assistance, extending services to Blackbird Leys residents, assisting Oxford Building Solutions with repairs activity by logging repairs and dealing with enquiries, enabling improved services to ethnic minorities through the take-up of more responsive interpreting services and general service improvements. These include the redesign of the St Aldates Service Shop to provide a better environment for the 40,000 customers that use it each year. Options for extending the service to Wood Farm and Cowley such as the provision of surgeries, working in partnership with Oxford Citizens Housing Association, an additional shop in the Cowley centre and likely costs and resources required are discussed.

Choices about increasing staffing levels or reducing service delivery from existing outlets to free resources to cater for demands at new sites

are also considered.

The report provides a brief note on the fact that new technology will enable further opportunities to engage and interact with the public in order to meet their needs.

The Executive Board is asked to discuss the report and its options and indicate its views on

- a) partnership proposals to provide one-stop services from a site provided by OCHA
- b) how services should be provided from Wood Farm and Cowley
- c) how those services should be resourced, and
- d) to note that further reports and recommendations on new contact approaches will be provided at an appropriate time.

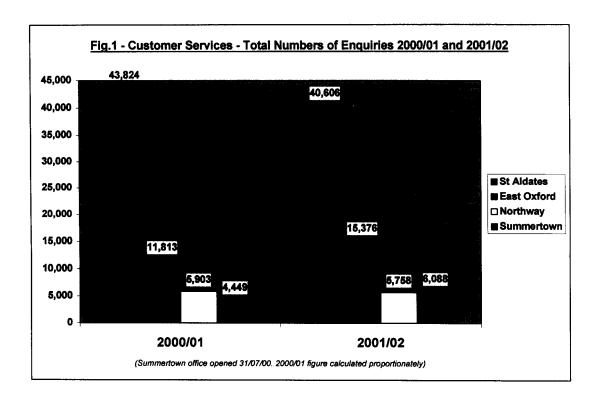
1 Background

1.1 Executive Board on the 12th March asked for a report on options to improve access to Council Services at Cowley and Wood Farm. The permanent service provided by Wood Farm Local Housing Office ended on 1st July as part of the restructuring of the Housing Management Business Unit and the Cowley Shopping Centre area is poorly served. Currently, the nearest access points are a service limited to Council Housing issues from Blackbird Leys Local Housing Office or a "one-stop" service at East Oxford Local Services Shop in Bullingdon Road.

2 Customer Services - Existing service provision

- 2.1 The aim of the Customer Services business unit is to provide comprehensive public enquiry facilities that meet the demands of Oxford City Council's customers and maximise access to the Council and other local services.
- 2.2 Customer Services is a cross-cutting service providing problem resolution, information and advice to the public relating to most City Council services as well as other public information on matters such as local plans, committee agenda, county services, government agencies, health promotion and energy efficiency. It also acts as a signpost for other specialist agencies such as the Night Shelter, Age Concern and Oxfordshire Housing Rights and regular surgeries from the Legal Services Tenancy Liaison Officer and the CAB take place. In the customer's perception the shops are "the Council". Services range from a comprehensive Housing Benefits service, helping people to deal with their indebtedness to the council and general housing advice through to the provision of concessionary bus passes and the sale of green refuse sacks. Details of activity across the shops for the previous 3 months are to be found at Appendix 1

- 2.3 Service is provided through four Local Services Shops located at St Aldate's Chambers, East Oxford, Northway and Summertown. They also provide the personal customer interface on behalf of the Northway and Carfax Local Housing Offices. The service is customer focused and if the answer to an enquiry is not known the officer will put the customer in touch with the appropriate agency or make enquiries on their behalf.
- 2.4 Customers are seeking immediate resolution to their enquiry at an accessible point of contact in a confidential and safe environment. They need authoritative advice, available without prior appointment. Many have multiple enquiries covering a range of services and Customer Services Officers (CSO's) can provide a seamless "joined-up" response. Customers are often from the most needy or disadvantaged sections of the community. In the majority of cases the answer to the enquiry is provided at the point of contact and a typed note of action to be taken is given to the customer.
- 2.5 The team concerned with local services shops within the Customer Services business unit consist of one operations manager, two supervisors, 22.5 FTE CSO's and one full time and four part time receptionists. CSO's are not earmarked to particular sites and this ensures that a consistent approach to service provision is maintained across all the shops and the staff themselves do not become isolated. It also means that there is flexibility in the allocation of resources to ensure sites are adequately staffed particularly at times when staffing levels are low.
- 2.6 The staff are fully trained via individual training plans and spend time in placements with service business units to gain a better understanding of their work. In recruitment and selection an accent is placed on demonstrating customer focus and social awareness and the staff are keenly aware that in the eyes of the customer the front line service is the Council. CSO's have access to the main housing and revenues systems and can view customers personal files for benefits and local taxation via document imaging.
- 2.7 The existing shops dealt with 67,828 enquiries in the last financial year (a 4.5% increase on the previous year) with a 30% growth in take up at East Oxford to 15,376 customers and a 36% growth in Summertown to 6,088. St Aldates dealt with 40,606 and Northway 5,758. (see fig 1) A slight fall in the numbers attending St Aldates against increases at East and Summertown suggests that customers are finding bringing services nearer to them more convenient. There is no growth evident at Northway. Customer satisfaction levels are high for this kind of service with an average of 87.3% for 2001/2 and this is supported by previous Talkback surveys, best value surveys and positive reports from the Best Value Inspectorate and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate.



2.8 Although this is very much a frontline service, accounting regulations treat it as a support service requiring it to be recharged back to end services such as Housing Benefits and the Housing Revenue Account.

3 Current Service Developments

- 3.1 The provision of general housing advice has always been integral to the service. However, from the beginning of June, CSO's have been undertaking initial presentations by homeless persons at St Aldate's Chambers to provide a more customer focused service and enable homelessness officers to concentrate on processing applications. It is intended that this will improve service quality and reduce the amount of time people need to spend in homeless accommodation.
- 3.2 CSO's can access the internet and provide a range of information to deal with a variety of enquiries. For example, they can now assist customers to search the new planning website to find out about planning applications in their area.
- 3.3 It is intended that during the course of this year application will be made for external accreditation via the Community Legal Service Quality Mark for general help and advice.
- 3.4 Providing the customer interface for Northway and Carfax Local Housing Offices has proved successful. Following staffing adjustments from Housing Management and as soon as staff training will allow, this model will be extended to Blackbird Leys Local Housing office, the busiest LHO, on a permanent basis. This will provide all residents in

the area with better access to Council services within their local community, and reduce the need for travelling to the city centre to have their enquiries dealt with. The cost in terms of the relationship between the HRA and the general fund is expected to be neutral in that any increase in the recharge to the HRA for this service is offset by the transfer of the staff costs to the General Fund.

- 3.5 CSO's are logging repairs and dealing with associated enquiries to assist Oxford Building Solutions with peaks of activity and provide tenants with a choice as to how they notify the Council of their needs.
- 3.6 There are a variety of general service improvements being progressed including a fast tracking service at St Aldates to reduce waiting times, immediate updating of system information to speed up services and a redesign of the St Aldate's service shop to improve access, facilitate improved processing of enquiries and provide a more welcoming environment for all users of the building.
- 3.7 The provision of information to members of ethnic groups will be enhanced by our ability to access instant interpreting services via the Language Line service recently adopted corporately. Training in the use of this is in the process of being delivered.
- There are no national performance indicators directly applicable to the service, but local Pl's have been reviewed to be more challenging in the light of established activity in the previous financial year.

 Performance and revised targets can be found at Appendix 2.

4 Wood Farm

- 4.1 Until its closure Wood Farm Local Housing Office was the main focus for residents in the immediate area to access Council services. However, by definition these were generally limited to Council tenancy issues and for other information customers were directed either to the East Oxford LSS or St Aldates. It could be argued that Wood Farm is a classic case of a situation where there is a demand, but that demand is insufficient to warrant a viable permanent presence. Visitor numbers have historically been far lower than any of the other LHO's or Local Services Shops as evidenced by information supplied to the tenants Monitoring Panel. (See Appendix 3) With this in mind Tenancy Management will be providing surgeries from the existing site on Wednesdays and Fridays and access to systems and communications are being retained for that purpose.
- 4.2 However, this service will be limited in the main to Council tenant issues and it would be useful to extend this to CSO surgeries in order to broaden the range of information and advice that could be offered. It is obviously important from the customer's perspective to ensure that

such a commitment is maintained and that officers are always available at the advertised times, but current staffing levels are unlikely to allow that to be certain unless services are reduced at other outlets. To install one-stop services at Wood Farm within existing resources will involve a reduction in services at other sites.

5 Cowley

- Oxford LSS which is now used to full capacity, there is no equivalent access to advice and information in the Cowley Centre area. An obvious solution would be to open another Local Services Shop in the Centre itself. Such a site could attract significant numbers of customers being well served by public transport and car parking and a natural venue for customers to visit for other purposes. However, rental costs would be higher than the sites at East Oxford and Summertown ranging from £20,000 per year for a small double unit in Upper Barr to £29,000 for a fairly standard sized unit in Pound Way. Annual running costs including rent and additional staff would probably be around £125,000. One-off set up costs in the region of £85,000 for fitting out the unit would also be incurred
- 5.2 As an alternative, some initial discussions have been had with the Operations Director of Oxford Citizens Housing Association which has recently purchased its offices located in Barns Road adjacent to the Cowley Centre. OCHA are planning to refurbish their reception area and are suggesting that it would be possible for the City Council to provide one-stop services not limited to OCHA tenants from that site. While details and figures have not been discussed yet this could be regarded as an attractive option given that the main refurbishment costs would be funded by OCHA and the annual rent would be expected to be significantly lower than any standard commercial rent. This could be operated on a surgery basis or as a permanent arrangement with secure links to the Councils information systems being established. Additional budget would be required to cover the agreed rent, supplies and services and communications links and equipment purchase. Time scales are not yet clear, but design work is likely to start in the early autumn.
- For the first services apply as to Wood Farm in relation to staffing resources and current levels could not provide cover for this additional access point without adjustments being made elsewhere. To install one-stop services in Cowley within existing resources will involve reduction in services at other shops.

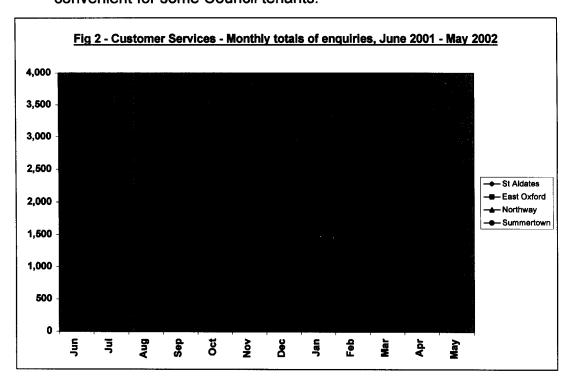
6 Options

- 6.1 One option is to simply apply additional resources. Half a full time equivalent (FTE) CSO should be sufficient to provide a two day a week service at Wood Farm. Resources required for Cowley would depend upon the level of service provided but would probably range from one CSO for a three day service to 3 FTE CSO's to provide a service similar to that at East Oxford to provide the service and an element of contingency for training, leave and sickness. CSO's are link graded at ACT5/6/SO1 and the cost including on costs of each at the top of the grade is £25,000. Having regard to cost, as an absolute minimum, one additional FTE could enable the provision of a one day surgery at Wood Farm and three days at Cowley. For health and safety reasons the surgery at Wood farm would need to coincide with proposed Housing Officer surgeries. This would not allow for any growth if demand at Cowley proved to be more than could be provided by one CSO.
- 6.2 The alternative is to reduce staffing levels or opening times at other sites and transfer resources. However, both St Aldates Chambers and East Oxford are generally too busy to reduce staffing significantly and there is a danger that waiting times for customers would escalate to unreasonable levels. This places an emphasis on reducing opening times at the less busy offices at Summertown and Northway. In practice there is usually one CSO at Northway and one at Summertown with a part-time receptionist.
- 6.3 Bearing in mind that Housing management are proposing to provide a surgery two days a week at Wood Farm, a reasonable starting point, might be to provide a surgery of one day a week at Wood Farm and three days at Cowley. Provided the CSO presence at each site was limited to one FTE for each surgery we could:
 - a) Reduce Northway to a one day per week surgery with no change to Summertown
 - b) Reduce Northway to two days per week and Summertown to four days
 - c) Reduce Northway to three days per week and Summertown to three days.

These service reductions would not be necessary until and if the proposed service at Cowley began. However, a further consideration is that reducing opening hours will mean that the same number of customers will be accessing services over shorter opening hours and this will have an effect on the resources required when the shops are open.

6.4 To assist members with choices a graph showing activity at the shops for the last 12 months appears at Fig2. This shows a gradual widening of the gap in numbers between Summertown and Northway. Appendix

1 gives an indication of the types of enquiry showing that Northway enquiries tend to be more housing oriented while Summertown has a greater variety of questions and a larger share of the more complex benefits and local taxation enquiries. Summertown is also more convenient for some Council tenants.



7 Surgeries

7.1 Members may find it useful to know that in the future there is potential to offer surgeries at a variety of suitable locations such as Community Centres and Leisure Centres to meet customer demand. Clearly health and safety of staff would be paramount and venues would need to be appropriate to the numbers of expected enquiries. The main physical limitation would be access to relevant computer systems and investment in remote access technology to allow connection via laptop computers and telephone either mobile or land line would be necessary.

8 Technology

- 8.1 The scope of this report has been limited to the delivery of advice and information in person albeit supported by technology. There are several ways in which that support can be extended to assist frontline staff to deliver a broader range of information through access to more systems and the provision of scripts to answer frequently asked questions for instance.
- 8.2 It is likely that there will always be a demand for face to face contact particularly for the most vulnerable or disadvantaged but use of

technology through the website, kiosks, Digital TV and call centres should also be considered when thinking about how the Council should be interacting with the people it serves. This will be the subject of the Council's E Govt. and IT strategies and further reports and recommendations at an appropriate stage.

9 Recommendations

- 9.1 It is hoped that this report will stimulate debate on how the City Council should deliver these types of services to the public. The Executive Board is recommended to discuss the report and indicate;
 - a) Whether it supports further investigation into proposals to provide one-stop services from a site provided by OCHA
 - b) Which, if any, of the options given in Section 6.above are agreed.
 - c) How to finance additional staffing if an enhanced level of service above that involved in the options in Section 6.3 is required.
 - d) That further reports and recommendations on the contact approaches described in sections 7 and 8 should be provided at the appropriate time.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LOCAL SERVICES AND THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR HOUSING HEALTH AND COMMUNITY

	JATOT	3550	1382	512	671	6115
	лои - ОСС	157	43	25	104	329
	Human Resources	22	0	1	0	23
	Corporate Strategy	47	4	2	15	89
	Strategic Policy & Research	15	0	0	0	12
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	Neighbourhood Renewal	6	0	0	0	6
	enoituloS gnibliuB brofxO	49	9	36	15	106
	Homeless	22	15	2	4	8
	Customer Services	12	-	7	7	12
	City Works	18	45	22	113	231
	Рапка & Green Spaces	9	1	8	5	19
	Leisure & Culture	18	0	_	12	31
	Transport & Parking	279	9	1	10	296
	City Centre Management	2	0	0	0	2
	QuinnsIq	20	0	0	9	26
	Juemnonkn3 tilu8	8	0	0	0	3
	Property Investment	17	0	0	0	4
	emeteyS noteme	56	0	0	0	5 6
	Legal Services	2	6	7	-	19
	jibuA Ismejni	9	0	0	0	9
	Financial Mgmt	9	0	0	0	9
	JATOT	2384	1088	166	268	3906
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Revenues & Benefits	Business Rates	6	က	0	0	12
Revenue	хатэ	512	144	23	81	760
	ан	1846	941	143	186	3116
ent.	JATOT	412	149	199	71	831
nageme	Тепапсу	99	19	99	26	177
Housing Management	Applications & Allocation	280	109	06	32	511
Ĭ	Rent	99	21	43	13	143
		SAC	EOLSS	NLSS	SESS	TOTAL

		All Visitors	ittors		Appoli	Appointments	
	Av wait		% < 15	% < 10 % < 15 % < 30	Total	Av wait	% < 10
	(mins)	mins	mins	mins	Appts	(mins)	mins
SAC	8.52	70.6	75.1	86.0	222	4.07	88.3
EOLSS	4.86	83.0	89.9	97.6	75	2.41	94.7
NLSS	0.56	97.5	98.3	100	0	n/a	n/a
SLSS	69'0	97.5	98.2	99.9	9	0.00	100.0
TOTAL	6.17	78.8	83.1	91.5	303	3.58	90.1

Performance Indicators:
CSO1 "% of all customers seen <30 mins" = 80%
CSO2 "% of customers with appt seen <10 mins" = 90%

Page 1

	JATOT	3583	1486	485	704	6258
İ	ОО - noN	156	28	33	22	294
t	Human Resources	6	0	0	0	6
Ì	finU notissimeboM	T	0	0	0	-
İ	Corporate Strategy	29	5	0	14	48
	Strategic Policy & Research	6	0	0	0	6
	diteeH lstnemnorivn∃	13	30	4	25	72
I	Neighbourhood Renewal	11	_	0	-	13
Ì	enothulo2 gnibling brotxO	33	6	15	28	85
Ì	Homeless	18	7	-	3	29
	City Works	2	22	26	145	278
	Parks & Green Spaces	7	2	7	0	=
	Leisure & Culture	15	0	0	2	2
	gnixhaq & hoqenarī	315	11	0	20	346
I	gninneld	22	4	0	6	35
	Built Environment		0	0	-	4
	froperty investment	16	0	0	9	16
Ì	nformation Systems	23	°	0	°	23
	acilities Management	7	0	0	0	2
ı	egal Services	9	9	0	0	12
İ	tibuA lemetn	-	0	2	0	3
	inancial Management	6	0	-	0	10
	. JATOī	2438	1223	138	291	4090
ents	ncomes	16	7	0	0	18
200	sejas Rates	P	Θ	0	0	19
Revenues & Benefits	XATC	516	162	24	8	798
	81	1896	1053	114	195	3258
ĭ	JATO	432	103	228	85	848
падете	3n e 7	2	8	8	18	156
Housing Management	enancy	1/2	24	68	35	222
Į,	Applications & Allocation	288	71	62	32	470
		SAC	EOLSS	NLSS	SLSS	TOTAL

		All Visitors	itors		Appo	Appointments	
	Av wait	% < 10	% < 15	% < 10 % < 15 % < 30 Total	Total	Av wait % < 10	36 < 10
	(mins)	mins	mins	mins	Appts	(mins)	mins
SAC	28.6	72.1	76.9	87.1	239	3.77	84
EOLSS	5.96	80.4	85	95.2	104	3.23	92
NLSS	0.32	99.2	93.6	100	0	n/a	n/a
SELSS	98.0	97.3	98.3	99.4	12	6.83	88.3
TOTAL	06'9	6/	83.1	91.4	322	3.72	98

Performance Indicators:
CSO1 "% of all customers seen <30 mins" = 90%
CSO2 "% of customers with appt seen <10 mins" = 92%

	JATOT	3594	1621	504	681	6400
	OOC - noN	151	42	32	20	295
	Human Resources	2	1	7	0	6
	finU noitsaimeboM	1	0	0	~	8
	Corporate Strategy	41	0	_	17	29
	Strategic Policy & Research	2	0	0	0	7
	Environmental Health	12	13	11	9	46
	Neighbourhood Renewal	20	0	9	0	25
	snoitulo& gniblina brotxO	28	15	6	19	71
	Homeless	22	5	0	2	29
	City Works	14	44	86	172	328
	Parks & Green Spaces	7	-	6	0	12
	Leisure & Culture	13	0	1	9	20
	Transport & parking	278	ര	1	20	308
	gninnsl9	11	7	0	5	18
	Built Environment	l	0	0	-	2
	Property Investment	10	0	0	0	10
	Information Systems	13	0	0	0	13
	Facilities Management	9	0	0	0	2
	Legal Services	8	9	0	0	14
	ibuA Ismejri	4	0	က	0	7
	Financial Management	7	0	0	0	2
	JATOT	2514	1346	157	246	4263
	lucomes	10	4	0	0	14
& Benefits	seisR ssenisud	15	9	0	2	23
Revenues & Benefits	хатэ	573	199	19	74	865
	8Н	1916	1137	138	170	3361
nent	JATOT	430	137	176	106	849
Housing Management	jne?	22	18	44	20	159
l guisno	Tenancy	92	13	74	39	218
Ĭ	Applications & Allocation	261	106	89	47	472
		SAC	EOLSS	NLSS	SLSS	TOTAL

		All V	All Visitors		odd ∀	Appointments	
	Av wait	% < 10	Av wait % < 10 % < 15	% < 30	Total	Av wait	% < 10
	(mins)	mins	mins	mins	Appts	(mins)	mins
SAC	8.00	73.4	79.2	90.4	219	4.00	88
EOLSS	4.57	82.9	89.4	92	<u> </u>	2.64	90.5
NLSS	1.20	94.2	96.8	99.6	0	0	0
SLSS	9.0	97.8	99.1	100	8	0.00	100.0
TOTAL	62'9	80.1	85.3	92.6%	322	3.47	88.8%

Performance Indicators:

CSO1 "% of all customers seen <30 mins" = $\frac{90\%}{20\%}$ CSO2 "% of customers with appt seen <10 mins" = $\frac{92\%}{20\%}$

Appendix 2

<u>Customer Services – Local Performance Indicators</u>

P.I. number	1. Description	Target 2001/02	PI result 2001/02	Target 2002/3
1. CS01	% of customers with appointments interviewed within 10 minutes	90%	90.6%	92%
2. CS02	% of all customers interviewed within 30 minutes	80%	88.0%	90%
3. CS03	% of customers satisfied with time taken to see receptionist	95%	98.1%	99%
4. CS04	Customer Satisfaction	80%	87.26%	89%

APPENDIX 3

RECEPTION LOG STATISTICS (JULY 01 TO SEPT 01)(Actual no. of callers per month)

38Leys A 90 47	S 164 38	20 23	Wood Farm A 25 12	s 88 t≥	J 65 88	Barton A 148 54	S 167 52	- 49 280	St. Addates A 62 237	S 49 215	¬ £ \$	Northway A 81 48	S 88	J 65 83	E.Oxford A 14 88	S 11 2 8 2 5 1	- 82 82 S	Summertown A 34 37	S 23 S	2115 1823
¥		å ≩	\$ 5	5 5	2 88	8 8	£ %	32 88	R &	4 3	% 2	8 8	2 %	2 =	e 6	ωĘ	8 83	R = 1	1 2 1	1087
262		119	22	22	92	79	156	3129	3078	2825	197	265	232	1123	1172	-0 9 5	8	§	429	16631
889	_	280	136	777	532	438	485	3556	3477	3259	458	520	475	1248	1296	1210	497	3	523	22758

RECEPTION LOG STATISTICS (OCT 01 TO DEC 01) (Actual no. of callers per month)

TOTALS	_	2083		988			3 20944
CMM2	٥		\$	6 0		255	323
Summertown	z	8	ដ	ន	ď	38	484
	٥	31	5	g	1	204	621
	٥	12	62	æ	t	695	791
E.Oxford	Z	19	26	5	₽	1133	1274
	0	19	호	2	6 2	1178	1329
	٥	48	7	z	12	101	246
Northway	Northway	104	z	62	9	204	453
	0	96	5	8	87	96 1	572
	۵	47	159	75	42	1989	2271
St. Adates	z	25	207	78	S	3041	3431
	0	8	218	25	4	3442	3825
	۵	87	æ	25	£	22	278
Barton	z	124	8	g	8	ā	386
	۰	150	33	4	8	8	322
	۵	2	6	-	ţ	8	72
Wood Farm	z	67	4	9	×	8	196
	٥	2	ଷ	82	8	102	259
	٥	102	\$	47	107	218	517
BBLeys	z	212	92	Ľ	195	252	811
	0	52	88	25	\$	780	4
	٥	101	đ	g	5	991	392
Rose Hill	z	208	8	82	9/	280	657
	0	191	\$ 6	31	82	112	290
		Repairs	Allocations	Tenancy	Rent	ge	TOTAL

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