

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2025, 7.00 - 9.55pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Matt White (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair), Makbule Gunes, Anna Lawton and Adam Small

35. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to Agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda front sheet, in respect of filming at meetings, and Members noted the information therein.

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

37. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

39. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

Responses had been received from officers following questions about disabled accessibility at the previous meeting from Nazarella Scianguetta. This included a response from the Inclusive Response Service about a series of accessibility studies that had recently been carried out for the main high streets in Wood Green, Crouch End, Muswell Hill and Bruce Grove. A list of recommendations from the studies had been produced and shared with relevant departments to ensure that accessibility was embedded in policy going forward.

Cllr Connor highlighted the extensive scrutiny work carried out by the Adults & Health Scrutiny Panel on improvements to aids and adaptations in people's homes. She also noted that the most recent report on this issue from officers had stated that a new OT Aids & Adaptations Policy that reflected improved processes and practices was being finalised with the aim for completion by June 2025. Cllr Connor requested that details of the Policy be provided to the Committee. **(ACTION)**

Cllr Connor noted that information provided following the query about support from Adult Social Care for disabled people linked to a page on the Council's website.

However, while this provided information about some disabilities, it did not cover some conditions including physical disabilities.

Nazarella Scianguetta raised further concerns about housing for disabled people and reiterated some of the accessibility issues that disabled people experience in the Borough.

Cllr White proposed that further specific queries in these areas could be taken forward by the appropriate Scrutiny Panels.

40. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 18th September 2025 be approved as an accurate record

41. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

The minutes of the following meetings were noted:

- 23rd June 2025 – Housing, Planning & Development Scrutiny Panel
- 30th June 2025 – Adult & Health Scrutiny Panel
- 14th July 2025 – Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel
- 28th July 2025 – Culture, Community Safety & Environment Scrutiny Panel

42. ANNUAL FEEDBACK & RESOLUTION REPORT 2024/25

Cllr Seema Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Resident Services & Tackling Inequality, introduced the report for this item. She acknowledged the high number of complaints recorded in the report, but reminded the Committee that the figures could not be easily compared with other Councils, for example if they had lower levels of housing stock compared to Haringey. Her main focus was on the content of the complaints. She also noted that some complaints received sometimes included factors which were not in the control of the Council.

Kirsten Webb, Feedback & Resolutions Manager, informed the Committee that the report provided a comprehensive summary of positive and negative feedback received by the Council between April 2024 and March 2025. It also reflected how resident feedback had driven service improvement and provided details of progress in specific areas. In Housing, there had been a high compliance rate of 99% for completion of orders issued by the Housing Ombudsman by the target date. However, there had been a significant rise in the number of Stage 2 escalations across the Council, with a 44% rise compared to the previous year. This placed greater pressure on Council resources as these cases tended to be more complex and time-intensive. Of the determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman, a higher rate of maladministration was attributed to Haringey Council when compared with the national average. In response to this, the Council was investing in additional staffing, a new case management system and the strengthening of internal monitoring.

Cllr Chandwani, Kirsten Webb and other officers then responded to questions from the Committee:

- Cllr White expressed concern about the deterioration over the last five years in the number of cases responded to on time. He asked if the Complaints team had the resources to deal with the volume of cases received. Cllr Chandwani highlighted specific changes such as the new case management system which would streamline the working of the team and ensure quicker responses. She also highlighted the emphasis on using complaints to inform improvements rather than adopting a defensive stance. Claire McCarthy, Director of Strategy, Communications & Collaboration, agreed that the new case management system would help with managing demand, including by reducing the amount of manual input required and freeing up more time to work with services on driving improvements.
- Cllr White asked what was going wrong with the Stage 1 complaints that was leading to so many cases reaching Stage 2. Claire McCarthy noted that some additional staff resources had been secured to deal with the increase in Stage 2 cases. She also reiterated the need to reduce defensiveness and to acknowledge mistakes at an earlier stage which would help to prevent the unnecessary escalation of complaints.
- Cllr Connor referred to the annual review letter from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in July which stated that the Council's timely compliance with recommendations remained poor, as it had the year before. She expressed concerns about the generally poor trajectory of performance in this area and noted that, according to the report, the Council would be developing a refreshed improvement plan to address these concerns. Cllr Chandwani accepted these concerns and said that her focus was on changing the way the team was working and to free up and increase resources available to deal with cases. In relation to Adult Social Care, Jo Baty, Director of Adult Social Services, emphasised the need for cultural change, including addressing the culture of defensiveness, a change in tone, including more compassion in responses and reducing the over-reliance on emails. She added that there had been some improvement in the last quarter of last year due to the establishment of a lead coordinator responding to cases within the service. She felt that a good start had been made but acknowledged that there was a lot further to go. In relation to the improvement plan, Claire McCarthy said that this involved targeted work with particular services in the Council to deal with root causes. She added that the Committee could be updated on this in future as this piece of work developed. **(ACTION)**
- Cllr Gunes welcomed the positive areas in the report including feedback about individual staff members. She noted that housing-related concerns always formed the majority of complaints and Councillor casework and that drastic improvements were needed. Cllr White noted that no-one from the Housing Department had been available to attend the meeting. Cllr Chandwani acknowledged that there was an issue with the state of housing and the age of some estates in the Borough which were a major cause of complaints and needed investment. She described some initiatives such as a weekly 'repair surgery' on the Broadwater Farm estate which reduced the need for residents to contact the Council by phone. Kirsten Webb commented that the issues with the housing stock could be complex, such as tracing leaks for example, which impacted on multiple residents and also required follow-up work. The team was

now working on defining those type of complaints at the triage stage so that the service was clear about what it needed to respond to. The new case management system was better able to track future commitments made in response to complaints so that these were implemented. The Housing team had also been working on greater engagement with residents on Stage 1 complaints to increase resolutions and prevent complaints from escalating.

- Asked by Cllr Gunes whether 'repair surgeries' would be implemented on other estates, Cllr Chandwani acknowledged that something different had been attempted on the Broadwater Farm but that, if this model was working, this could be done elsewhere. She was aware that this had been tried as one-off events in other estates but was not aware of any that took place on a weekly basis. Cllr Connor proposed a recommendation from the Committee that the Housing team look into wider implementation of regular 'repair surgeries' on housing estates. **(ACTION)**
- While accepting the need for an honest approach and a less defensive culture, Cllr Small commented that a new approach of acknowledging mistakes needed to guard against becoming tolerant of maladministration. He also requested clarification on the responsibility for delayed responses between the complaints team and the service itself. Cllr Chandwani responded that there was a difference between accepting maladministration and creating a culture where people could learn and not feel defensive when mistakes had been made. Irrespective of the scale of a complaint, it was important to the resident to be properly heard and for action to then be taken. However, sometimes circumstances, such as a lack of resources or a lack of supervision could lead to a poor response. This was why unlocking resources by streamlining administrative tasks was so important. Claire McCarthy noted that there were different complaints processes for different services and could provide some additional written information to the Committee about these processes. **(ACTION)** She also suggested that the Scrutiny Panels could do a more detailed piece of scrutiny on specific service complaints procedures. **(ACTION)** Cllr White proposed that the quality control of responses to complaints should sit with complaints team with the appropriate resource allocated to enable this. Claire McCarthy said that realistically this would be a significant journey in terms of resources and being able to perform quality controls for over 4,000 complaints per year. Cllr Connor proposed that Service Directors should have oversight of complaints for their service area. Cllr Lawton expressed concerns about responsibilities for oversight being overcomplicated and split between different areas. Cllr Chandwani acknowledged that there was a need to bridge the skills of the complaints team, for example in terms of the approach to complaints responses, with the specialist knowledge of the service teams. Kirsten Webb cited the partnership with Adult Social Care as an example of effective collaboration with subject matter experts in the service team and a level of resilience in the feedback team.
- Referring to the graph on page 77 of the agenda pack, Cllr Lawton requested an explanation of the significant fall in the percentage of Member Enquiries responded to on time with a rate of 64% in 2024/25 against a corporate target of 95%. Cllr Chandwani agreed with these concerns from her perspective as a Ward Councillor who submitted regular Member Enquiries requests. She spoke about the volume of Member Enquiries and how it could sometimes be easier, for example in an area like Broadwater Farm, for Ward Councillors and housing

- officers to meet with residents on a monthly basis to discuss issues of common concern (e.g. the district heating network). However, she acknowledged that some Member Enquiries related to individual casework and that the rise in Member Enquiries pressures coincided with the rise in complaints.
- Referring to the graph on page 86 of the agenda pack, Cllr Lawton expressed concerns about the very low rates of Stage 1 responses sent on time in 2024/25 in the SEND service. Ann Graham, Corporate Director of Children's Services, explained that the reasons for the timeliness of responses was partly to do with the issues that had already been discussed, but also due to the complex nature of the complaints received in this service area. These complaints could sometimes relate to partner agencies, but Children's Services would still try to respond and be as helpful as possible. As these responses would often involve correspondence with other agencies, this often led to delays. However, Children's Services would often still be working with the family in the meantime and trying to resolve the issue.
 - Cllr Connor referred to Table L on page 87 of the agenda pack which recorded 46 responses to statutory children's complaints compared to 28 the previous year with a low percentage of responses sent on time. Kirsten Webb said that triaging over statutory complaints had been more effective but reiterated that the complexity of the cases could mean that meeting the statutory deadlines was very challenging.
 - Referring to page 69 of the agenda pack, Cllr Small noted the significant increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints in recent years and asked what impact this was having on the Stage 2 workload the following year and the timeliness of responses. Claire McCarthy said that there was no data to evidence this as the relationship between Stage 1 and Stage 2 was not always straightforward, but she acknowledged that this may be the case.
 - Referring to page 61 of the agenda pack, Cllr Small requested further details on the benefits of the monthly performance reviews with the Housing Services Leadership Team. Kirsten Webb explained that these meetings previously occurred on a quarterly basis but it was recognised that a monthly meeting may be more valuable. She added that this forum was particularly useful to discuss challenges with timeliness, quality and maladministration findings and to understand some of the technical difficulties that the Housing team faced in responding.

43. CUSTOMER SERVICES - EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENTS IN CONTACTING THE COUNCIL

Cllr Seema Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Resident Services & Tackling Inequality, introduced the report for this item. She noted that Customer Services was a conduit to the Council's main services and wished to acknowledge that it included some very hard-working frontline staff who were dealing with a range of difficult and diverse issues with a relentless level of demand.

Elaine Prado, Head of Customer Experience & Operations, then presented slides to the Committee which included the following points:

- Performance levels were acknowledged to be at an all-time low both in terms of the percentage of calls answered (58% in September against a

target of 90%) and the percentage of visitors seen in 20 minutes (61% in September against a target of 70%).

- A key reason for the change in the performance statistics was the removal of the call capping from the telephony system. Previously, there had been two types of call capping:
 - A limit on the number of calls that could come into the system at any one point.
 - A limit on the number of callers that could join a queue on each line.
- Since the removal of call capping, any number of people could join a queue and many would tend to wait until their call was answered.
- There had been successive years of reduced budgets which inevitably led to reduced staffing.
- The volume of calls to the contact centre was relatively steady. However, when the demand was matched to the budget and staffing available, this led to difficult figures. Ideally there would be 22.5 FTE posts to take calls against current actual staffing levels of 13.5 FTE posts on the phone lines.

Nathan Pierce, Chief Digital & Innovation Officer, then presented slides to the Committee which included the following points:

- The Digital & Change team was involved in service modernisation through the digital transformation programme which would lead to improvements in the customer contact centre, primarily by reducing demand.
- There was a new Digital Policy and a Digital governance structure that oversaw all digital and technology implementations.
- Haringey's internal team of developers were able to redesign entire processes in the Council from the first interaction with a resident to the end resolution being realised. The whole journey could be automated from beginning to end.
- The service modernisation programme was configured to be a savings programme so much of this work would have an impact on reducing demand to the customer contact centre.
- The Service Modernisation Portfolio Board was overseen by Cllr Dana Carlin, Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services, chaired by Taryn Eves, Director of Finance, and included all members of the Corporate Leadership Team.
- The Board used a prioritisation framework to drive the business processes being worked on. This was primarily based on savings.
- The Portfolio had been launched in May 2025 with work prioritised in Adults, Housing & Health and Children's Services. There were around 25-30 live projects at any given time. There were at least 60 more of these projects in the pipeline and it was up to the Board which of these were prioritised next.
- The guaranteed savings for next year were approximately £2.5m with more speculative savings possible on top of that.
- A large piece of work was underway with Housing, looking at housing repairs and damp & mould which cause a lot of demand to the Customer

Contact Centre. These areas were being redesigned so that it was fully automated and online.

- Another large area was the transformation of the digital platform for customers with a whole range of new channels including web bots and AI as an alternative to using the Customer Contact Centre.
- There would be a new digital forms platform and CRM (Customer Relationships Management) to manage customer information and data which should be running by the end of the year.

Responses were then provided to questions from the Committee Members:

- Cllr White commented that previous savings rounds had attributed cost reductions to residents moving to digital self-service and expressed concerns that staff numbers had been reduced before the savings and reductions had been achieved. He queried whether information about previous savings proposals in this area could be brought to the Committee to establish what had actually been achieved. Discussion followed on a number of points:
 - Cllr Chandwani commented that multi-year savings may have been agreed previously that were only now being implemented.
 - Cllr Carlin highlighted the establishment of the new digital team and said that this investment had not previously been put in to implement new programmes and ways of delivering. New processes that enabled people to, for example, change appointments by smartphone rather than phoning the Customer Contact Centre, would reduce the overall demand on customer services.
 - Taryn Eves emphasised the need to get much tighter at making sure that delivery plans were clearly formulated before the money was taken out of the budget at the start of the year. With this programme, she explained that savings were built into the current year and future years, but these sat corporately with no savings allocated to services from 2026/27 onwards. A process had been established where all identified savings were agreed between Digital and the relevant service area.
 - Barry Francis, Corporate Director of Environment & Resident Experience, concurred that some budget decisions pre-dated savings actually being made due to the multi-year approach. He added that the work of the Digital team in making information easier to find online was helping with the channel shift and reducing demand on the telephony system. This tended to mean that the calls that were still coming through were more complex cases and this led to longer average call times. Around 40% of contacts related to housing and so the work that Nathan Pierce had spoken about would release some of the burden on the customer contact centre and face-to-face. Also, as the demand was driven by the services themselves and so a preventative approach would help to underpin savings.
- Asked about call-capping, Barry Francis explained that this had previously been used to help manage demand but the office was now overwhelmed by what was coming through so change options were

being examined. Elaine Prado said that bespoke messaging could be used for the calls that could not get through depending on the service areas as opposed to an engaged tone that would have been heard under the old system. Nathan Pierce added that, in addition to the new telephony system, other channels would include AI chatbots which could deal with certain tasks and binary questions.

- Cllr Small commented that some residents would prefer to have a long call waiting time rather than not being able to get through at all. Cllr Chandwani felt that both options were frustrating for residents and so it was necessary to consider why nearly a quarter of a million phone calls were made each year and how a proportion of these could be avoided. An example could be an online tracker for housing repair visits so that residents did not need to call for an update if a visit was running late.
- Cllr Small observed that some previous savings had been forced due to the budget position and that reducing budgets and staffing levels was not a service delivery point but a cut that was putting too much pressure on the customer services staff. Cllr Chandwani responded that most Councils across the country were having to make savings but acknowledged that savings had to be made in the right way so that they were not counter-productive. However, even if more funding was available, it would still be necessary to modernise customer services as, for example, phoning up to change an appointment was out of date compared to other methods such as apps that were now available with other services. It was also necessary to ensure that the solution actually dealt with the problem and met people's needs. She added that closer working between teams (including the physical location of teams) could improve the flow of information, for example by moving the staff responsible for housing calls into the repairs office.
- Cllr White asked whether the starting point of these solutions was the direct experience of residents rather than what worked for the Council. Nathan Pierce said that the service user was at the core of a modern digital service and that the team followed the government's digital design standards and user centre design methodology. He added that part of the new digital team included user design experts.
- Cllr Gunes asked how people who were digitally excluded or found the technology frustrating would be able to access the new system. Cllr Chandwani commented that a balance needed to be struck because many residents were able to use technology but couldn't access the Council's services in the ways that they wanted to. The aim was therefore to remove some people from the queue who could access services in other ways, but others could still use the phone if required.
- Acknowledging the high levels of pressure on staff and high rates of staff sickness, Cllr Connor asked what would be done to relieve this pressure in the interim period before new digital channels were up and running. Cllr Chandwani said that the distinction between Customer Services and Digital was that Digital was an enabling service that worked across all areas of the Council to create technological solutions. While this may create more channels for residents to contact the Council, the other Departments would still need to deliver services effectively in order to resolve the issues and prevent the need for repeat contacts. Barry

Francis commented that there was an ongoing recruitment campaign to fill existing vacancies within the Customer Contact Centre. In addition, by managing 'net call' as had previously been discussed, this could improve the customer waiting period and the experience for people calling. He added that, while some of the Digital work was longer term, some aspects could be expected to have an impact quite quickly.

- Cllr Connor queried what data would be available to be able to track the impact that new digital channels were having on reducing demand to other parts of customer services. Barry Francis said that, in terms of governance and oversight, there was a Service Modernisation Board chaired by Taryn Eves which had been covered in Nathan Pierce's presentation. There was also a Resident Experience Board which he and Taryn Eves co-Chaired and this looked at a combination of the digital enablers to examine what impact they were having and how this could be measured. In the longer-term there was a wider issue about managing demand, particularly in housing. Nathan Pierce explained that the previous telephony system had been in place for at least 15 years and the new modern system would enable the measurement of a whole range of ways that people accessed the Council, including details of what they called about, what the issue was and whether it was resolved. It would also record what other channels they had accessed the Council through. With a richer collection of data and integrated platforms there would be a better view of how individuals interact with Council services. This new system would take a while to be fully implemented with some information generated within the next couple of months but the wider single view of customer data likely to take a couple of years to be fully realised. Jenna Scott-Brining, Head of Digital, added that the new system would give Customer Services a richer data set on what was happening operationally in terms of performance which would assist them in coming up with a range of improvements.
- Cllr Connor agreed that the changes seemed to be positive but queried whether the reductions in staff were cost effective, particularly in view of the high level of staff sickness with the remaining staff. Asked by Cllr Connor whether this partly related to stress, Elaine Prado acknowledged that a lot of sickness was due to the pressure and demands of the job itself.

44. SCOPING DOCUMENTS - SCRUTINY REVIEWS

This item was for the Committee to consider and approve the terms of reference for two proposed Scrutiny Reviews.

Cllr Lawton introduced the scoping document for a Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Services for Under 1's and Delivery of Outcomes by the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel. She explained that the aim was to look at provision particularly for babies and that there had been more evidence and information about what a crucial time this was for early intervention. The Review would therefore look at what services were available in Haringey in comparison to other Boroughs, including the new Family Hubs, whether these services could keep up with demand and the difference between families that could pay for various types of private services and those that couldn't.

Cllr Gunes introduced the scoping document for a Scrutiny Review on Cycling Safety and the Walking & Cycling Action Plan by the Culture, Community Safety & Environment Scrutiny Panel. She explained that the Review would look specifically at the Walking & Cycling Action Plan including a detailed look at the safety of roads for cyclists, cycling routes and how more people could be encouraged to cycle safely. Asked by Cllr Connor whether electric bikes would be included, given their speed and a number of accidents, Cllr Gunes confirmed that this would be covered in the scope of the Review.

The Committee welcomed the proposals for both Scrutiny Reviews and approved both of the scoping documents without any amendments.

RESOLVED – That scoping documents for the following Scrutiny Reviews be approved:

- **A Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Services for Under 1's and Delivery of Outcomes by the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel.**
- **A Scrutiny Review on Cycling Safety and the Walking & Cycling Action Plan by the Culture, Community Safety & Environment Scrutiny Panel.**

45. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Cllr White reported that the next meeting of the Committee on 27th November 2025 would be to scrutinise the areas of the 2026/27 Budget and MTFS that specifically related to the remit of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The next meeting shortly after this on 10th December 2025 would include the Quarter 2 Finance update. The Quarter 2 Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP) update had also been pencilled in for this meeting but it was now understood that the next update would not be until Quarter 3 in March. This would enable an opportunity to scrutinise any areas that emerged from the Quarter 1 CDP update that had not yet been covered by the Scrutiny Panels. It would be necessary to specify in advance any areas for scrutiny so that the relevant Directors and Cabinet Members could be invited. Members were asked to send any requests for this by email. **(ACTION)**

46. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- Thurs 27th Nov 2025 (7pm)
- Wed 10th Dec 2025 (7pm)
- Mon 19th Jan 2026 (7pm)
- Thurs 12th Feb 2026 (7pm)
- Wed 11th Mar 2026 (7pm)

CHAIR: Councillor Matt White

Signed by Chair

Date