

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ADULTS & HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2025 6.30 - 10.25pm**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Pippa Connor (Chair), Cathy Brennan, Thayahlan Iyngkaran, Sean O'Donovan and Felicia Opoku**

### **36. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

### **37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Helena Kania.

### **38. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

### **39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Pippa Connor declared an interest by virtue of her membership of the Royal College of Nursing.

Cllr Pippa Connor declared an interest by virtue of her sister working as a GP in Tottenham.

Cllr Opoku placed on record that she worked closely with the NCL ICB in a professional capacity.

Cllr das Neves declared an interest as a member of the governing board of the North London NHS Foundation Trust.

### **40. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/ PRESENTATIONS/ QUESTIONS**

A deputation was received from Nazarella Scianguetta and a group of residents on the subject of disabled accessibility and public toilets. It was noted that the applicants for the deputation had been sent details of the new draft Public Toilets Strategy & Action Plan which had been presented to the Health & Wellbeing Board in September 2025.

This document was expected to be presented to the Cabinet for approval in February 2026.

In introducing the deputation, Nazarella Scianguetta explained that she was attending the meeting to advocate for those living with disabilities and impairments in Haringey and made the following points:

- That the availability of accessible public toilets was not a luxury but a basic human right essential to the dignity, independence and inclusion of people with disabilities and impairments.
- That the social model of disability should be used when looking at how the Council's policies impacted on people with disabilities and impairments. Therefore, when public toilets were not accessible, it was not the impairment that excluded people but the environment and the policies that failed to accommodate everyone.
- Only 40% of public toilets in Haringey were fully accessible, with the remaining 60% lacking basic facilities such as step-free access and grab rails.
- As a consequence of this, people with disabilities and impairments in Haringey were forced to plan outings around the availability of accessible public toilets or to avoid some public spaces altogether. People impacted included elderly residents and families with autistic children.
- The Council had a particular responsibility to ensure that leaseholders to buildings that it owned provided accessible public toilets. This should include active monitoring and enforcement.
- The Council should also emphasise the importance of businesses to meet legal obligations on accessible public toilets in relation to buildings that the Council does not own.

Cllr das Neves, Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care & Wellbeing, responded to the deputation, commenting that the new draft Public Toilets Strategy & Action Plan had been co-produced with a campaign group called Loos for Haringey who also worked on the Toilets Strategy for London. As part of the preparation of the draft strategy, there had been engagement with a range of groups and a public survey. She said that the observations from the deputation would be fed into the co-production work with Loos for Haringey and that there would be a further opportunity for public comment when the draft strategy was put to Cabinet in early 2026. Cllr das Neves added that there were three 'Changing Places' accessible toilets in the Borough and the aspiration was to increase the number of these.

Members of the Panel then asked questions about the presentation from the deputation:

- Cllr O'Donovan asked about the community toilet scheme which involved private businesses such as cafes and restaurants allowing non-customers to use their toilets. Nazarella Scianguetta responded that the disabled and impaired community had lost trust in service providers to allow them to use their facilities.

- Cllr Connor asked what influence the Council had on this issue as landlords of leasehold businesses. Will Maimaris, Director for Public Health, noted that there were different types of arrangements with both community and commercial relationships. He explained that licensing arrangements allowed for inspections but that the Council's influence and resources was limited. The draft strategy acknowledged that there was an overall lack of toilet provision in the Borough but also a lack of accessible toilets and so it was necessary to work with partners to improve this.
- Cllr das Neves commented that this was a challenging environment and that the Council did not have extensive legal powers or a large resource to address this issue, but that the new strategy had a multi-pronged approach to tackle the different ways that residents could access public toilets.
- Cllr Peacock spoke about the lack of accessible toilets at Tottenham Retail Park and said that the management of the Retail Park had not responded to her attempts to engage with them on this matter. Cllr das Neves said that there had been discussions about future planning policies for new developments in the Borough that would have accessibility built into the plans.
- Nazarella Scianguetta emphasised the importance of valuing inclusion across society and of the Council using its powers and influences to improve accessibility in the Borough.

Cllr Connor thanked Nazarella Scianguetta for her presentation and to the officers and Cabinet Member for taking these comments for consideration ahead of the new draft Public Toilets Strategy & Action Plan being brought forward to the Cabinet in early 2026.

#### **41. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

**RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025 be approved as an accurate record.**

#### **42. HARINGEY SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

Natalie Cowland, Independent Chair of the Haringey Safeguarding Adults Board (HSAB), introduced the Board's annual report for 2024/25 by highlighting some key points:

- A Person in a Position of Trust (PIPOT) framework had been introduced which had resulted in a number of cases being reported and responded to.
- The approach to Missing Persons had been reviewed.
- The Board's strategic priorities would run until 2028 and had been developed in consultation with the Joint Partnership Board.
- Processes on safeguarding and multi-agency collaboration around homelessness had been strengthened.

- Following a review, a revised version of the Board's Multi-Agency Escalation Protocol had been approved.
- Ongoing challenges included oversight of data which required strengthening.
- The Board was strengthening its relationship with the Joint Partnership Board because of the importance of co-production and understanding of lived experience.
- Further partnership working, including through joint meetings, would be taking place with the Community Safety Partnership and the Haringey Safeguarding Children Partnership board.
- The Board was conscious of the need to maintain the strength of safeguarding structures given the nature of the pressures and restructuring that local agencies were subject to.
- An independent review was ongoing in relation to adult social care and safeguarding, including the structure and resourcing of the HSAB.
- A review of the Board's Delivery Plan would be carried out to ensure that resources were being focused in the right places.

Natalie Cowland then responded to questions from the Panel:

- Cllr Brennan raised concerns about the difficulties in achieving effective multi-agency communications. Natalie Cowland emphasised the importance of partnership working and building relationships to establish a shared understanding. She acknowledged that there was a risk of relying on individual relationships and so coordination needed to operate at a system level to make sure that pathways were understood with clear guidance in use.
- Asked by Cllr Connor for further details about system-based working, Natalie Cowland said that this was an area where improvement was constantly being sought and that it was working better in some areas than others. She cited the example of close working with the Police as part of their current restructuring and reconfiguration of resources to ensure that the pathways, resources and support on safeguarding issues were available in a timely way when needed. This involved a review of these processes to ensure that the framework was effective.
- Cllr Connor referred to the section of the report on the Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) and the importance of embedding learning. She requested clarification on the relevance of the following points relating to the 'Victoria' SAR:
  - Ensuring feedback is given when safeguarding concerns are referred.
  - Ensuring concerns raised about a care provider are shared with the relevant commissioning team.

Natalie Cowland said that a common concern in safeguarding was when people raised concerns but then did not hear anything further about the action taken. Jo Baty, Director of Adult Social Services explained that these issues had previously been raised by the CQC and so a meeting with providers had been organised by the Commissioning team to understand how communications with the team could be improved. This also included collaboration such as integrated workforce development, training support and

ensuring understanding of escalation protocols. She added that another issue for adult social care was having more AI to help manage the high levels of demand, including in safeguarding.

- With regard to the 'Eleanor' SAR, Cllr Connor noted the reference to reviewing arrangements for authorising urgent packages of social care and queried why this hadn't been triggered in this case. Natalie Cowland said that she hadn't been in post during this case but would obtain further details for the Panel. **(ACTION)** She added that work to implement the recommendations from the SARs were underway. Cllr Connor also referred to the concerns raised through the "Rosemary and Mearl" SAR and recommended that the next HSAB annual report should include details of how the processes highlighted by SAR reports were being tightened. **(ACTION)**
- Cllr Connor referred to the section on the SAR Implementation Subgroup on page 49 of the report which described "*an improved approach to quality assurance of local care provision, guided by the Quality Assurance and Contract Management Framework*". She contrasted this with information that 68 care homes in Haringey had not been inspected by the CQC for at least five to six years raising serious concerns about oversight, risk and resident safety. Natalie Cowland said that the backlog of inspections had been brought to the attention of the Board and these concerns had been escalated to the CQC. The CQC had brought additional resourcing to support this area and had asked to work with the commissioning team on the prioritisation of inspections. Sara Sutton, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health, added that the Council had its own internal quality assurance processes which it had made improvements to. However, she acknowledged that there was a linked issue within the wider quality assurance landscape. Cllr Connor noted that the CQC were due to attend the next meeting of the Panel in February and so this could be raised with them directly. **(ACTION)**
- Referring to the Engagement & Prevention Subgroup, Cllr O'Donovan requested further details about the prevention of financial abuse and a recent workshop on the issue. Natalie Cowland said that the workshop had taken place before her appointment but that she understood it to have been successful. She explained that issues relating to financial abuse was reported to the Board but no significant rise had been seen in this area. Cllr O'Donovan expressed concern that financial scams could be an under-reported issue and asked if national agencies reported data on this issue. Natalie Cowland said that she was not aware of such reporting but would be happy to consider what more could be done to strengthen prevention and engagement. **(ACTION)** Sara Sutton added that there was a role for Trading Standards on this issue and Cllr O'Donovan noted the role of the banks. Jo Baty commented that the other aspect to be aware of was transitional safeguarding as young people could be vulnerable to financial abuse when moving into independent/semi-independent living. She noted that Disability Action Haringey (DAH) was keen to do more work on this issue.
- Asked by Cllr O'Donovan about work to support people who had issues with hoarding, Natalie Cowland noted that the aim of a recent event on this topic had been to start a conversation, to build on this with the Engagement &

Prevention Subgroup and bring the key agencies together on this. Cllr Brennan reported examples from casework where residents with hoarding issues would not allow access to their properties. She suggested that a gentle, supportive approach was needed to help people in such circumstances. Natalie Cowland said that there were support agencies active in this area and that she could provide details of these. **(ACTION)**

- Cllr das Neves commented that a session for Councillors on safeguarding, including practical information and advice on how to support residents who were experiencing some of the issues that had been discussed was planned for later in the year. Sara Sutton noted that this was relevant to different portfolio areas, including Housing and Fire Safety.
- Referring to the SARs and how risk could be managed, Cllr lyngkaran noted that all the individuals in the cases referred to were women and typically had complex medical histories. Natalie Cowland noted that the two SARs since she had been appointed had both been related to men but that all cases were examined in detail to understand what system-wide learning was relevant. Sara Sutton added that one of the ambitions of the multi-agency care coordination team (MACCT) was to expand working with people with multiple morbidity issues, complex needs and/or frailty. Cllr Connor noted that it would be useful for the Panel to receive an update about this approach at a future meeting including the funding mechanisms for this. **(ACTION)** Jo Baty added that the arrangements for the Panels that supported residents with more complex needs were being reviewed. There was also a forthcoming workshop with Housing colleagues on collaboration after hospital discharge, particularly in relation to residents who live alone.
- Cllr Connor referred to recent media reports on concerns about 'grooming gangs' and asked about the safeguarding arrangements in place and whether it fit within the transitions work or under Objective 3.2 in the report (Working with other partnerships to address safeguarding issues). Natalie Cowland responded that this sat more within the transitions space because the focus with the grooming gangs issue was typically on young people, but that abuse did not necessarily stop after the age of 18. She had sought assurance on this issue and there was no evidence that there were currently grooming gangs active in Haringey. Safeguarding Adults Boards had all had the opportunity to feed into Baroness Casey's work in this area through the national chairs' network. Cllr Connor commented that the recent media reports had referred to concerns about grooming gangs in the Haringey area and queried whether cases such as this could have been misidentified. Natalie Cowland said that the categorisation of any such incidents would be a question for the Police. Sara Sutton added that there was some significant work ongoing in Haringey in relation to issues of modern day slavery, sex work and sexual exploitation of adults which was linked in with the HSAB, Community Safety Partnership and with the Council's multi-agency work on the prevention of VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls). Further information on this work could be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Panel if required. Cllr Connor proposed a recommendation to approach the Police to respond to further questions on this issue. **(ACTION)**

- Cllr Iyngkaran referred to the reported decrease of police deployments to health-related calls in Haringey on page 62 of the agenda pack. He queried what feedback there had been on this from local health services. Natalie Cowland noted that this pre-dated her appointment, but that the Board had received an update on the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) initiative and it was on the forward plan for the joint Adults and Children's Safeguarding Boards to seek further assurances on this and the associated pressures. Sara Sutton commented that this was an area of concern due to pressures on the capacity of health services, including the Mental Health Trust. The Mental Health Trust had introduced a community single point of access and there was also now a mental health option on the NHS 111 phone service. She added that some investment from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) on assertive outreach support was forthcoming, but that the details of the plans were being awaited. She also highlighted that the focus on community mental health support would need to be linked into the wider area of multi-agency work on neighbourhoods. Cllr das Neves also expressed her concerns about the gaps in community mental health.
- Cllr Connor referred to the performance data, noting the 78% increase in safeguarding referrals from 2023/24 to 2024/25. Natalie Cowland explained that part of the increase related to the standardised safeguarding referral templates used across agencies which were directed to a dedicated inbox. There had also been more training on the thresholds for safeguarding reporting. She also noted post-pandemic vulnerabilities and the cost of living as contributory factors to issues such as financial abuse and neglect. Jo Baty added that, with financial pressures across all public agencies, this inevitably led to a pushing of safeguarding referrals to adult social care, with significant increases in referrals from the Police and NHS. This was a huge issue for adult social care which would need to be tackled with an improved digital response, more work with SAB in what constituted safeguarding, and the establishment of an early intervention and prevention officer to signpost people to. Cllr Connor referred to a recent issue where a large number of emails to adult social care were found to be unread and queried whether adult social care had the capacity to respond to a large increase in safeguarding referrals. Natalie Cowland acknowledged that this was recognised as an area that required strengthening, including improvement to the front door and triaging. Jo Baty was reporting into the HSAB on the improvement plan in this area.
- Given the increase in safeguarding referrals, Cllr Iyngkaran asked what proportion of these were not appropriate and how feedback on this was provided. Jo Baty explained that there were statutory definitions of what constituted safeguarding issues, but that this had become broader over time. She added that there was sometimes a perception that, by making an issue a safeguarding concern, it would be dealt with more quickly. With an increased level of referrals, it was necessary to look at each referral carefully and ensure that the team was triaging and managing risk appropriately. Sara Sutton added that a high proportion of the additional safeguarding referrals did not meet the definition of a Section 42 inquiry and may sometimes be relevant to other areas such as housing legislation. The Panel requested that the data on the number

- of safeguarding referrals that did not meet the necessary thresholds be provided to the Panel and also how they were triaged. **(ACTION)**
- Cllr Peacock raised an item of local casework and it was agreed that she would refer this to the Director of Adult Social Care.
  - Referring to the graph on the source of safeguarding referrals on page 65 of the agenda pack, Cllr Opoku asked about the sources in the 'Other' column. Natalie Cowland agreed to look into this and provide a written response. **(ACTION)**
  - Referring to the graph on the age bands for referrals on page 69 of the agenda pack, Cllr Opoku asked if a more detailed breakdown was available for the 18-64 age group. Natalie Cowland agreed to look into this and provide a written response. **(ACTION)**
  - Referring to the graph on the locations for abuse on page 67 of the agenda pack, Cllr Iyngkaran queried why the numbers had significantly reduced even though the number of safeguarding referrals had increased. Jo Baty said that it was difficult to give a definite reason but that this chart reflected only one dimension of information that was known about incidences of abuse and did not reflect the overall picture.
  - Referring to page 69 of the agenda pack, Cllr Connor queried why the proportion of Section 42 safeguarding enquiries with a fully achieved outcome had declined from 82% in 2023/24 to 72% in 2024/25. Natalie Cowland cited the complexity of cases and the challenges in person-centred planning which had impacted on this. This would be monitored and reported on in the next annual report. Jo Baty added that a lot of work had been done on advocacy and that performance in this area had improved since this time. Further scrutiny of advocacy from the service was included in the work plan for next year.

#### **43. COMMUNITY EQUIPMENT - LEARNING FROM PROVIDER FAILURE**

Sara Sutton introduced the report for this item by putting on record her thanks to Council officers for their response to a significant provider failure which had required a collaborative cross-Council effort and ensured a safe and effective transition to the new arrangements.

Cllr Connor requested an explanation of what learning there had been from the provider failure. Rebecca Cribb, Head of Adult Social Care Commissioning & Quality Assurance highlighted some key points about the actions taken after NRS Healthcare Ltd ceased trading:

- There had been a direct award of a contract given the circumstances. This was made to Provide Care Solutions Ltd as a three-year contract with the option to break the contract after two years based on performance.
- An eight-Borough partnership, called the North London Equipment Partnership, had been formed to benefit from economies of scales and operate from one warehousing space. The London Borough of Camden was leading on commissioning and contract management with regular meetings between the partners.



- Earlier financial insight into providers was highlighted as a key learning point.
- There was also an aim for longer-term efficiencies to be achieved through partnership arrangements. The current low levels of recycling of equipment was an area that could be improved in the future.

Rebecca Cribb then responded to questions from the Panel:

- Cllr Brennan highlighted a case of a resident who had been waiting for an accessibility adaptation to her home for three years and this was now going ahead which was a positive sign.
- Cllr Iyngkaran commented that there could be unintended consequences of awarding a direct contract and asked how agreement was reached between the Boroughs on this. Rebecca Cribb explained that the decision needed to be made quickly and that the immediate response was supported by ADASS, the LGA and the London Consortium. This was part of the efforts to scout the market and approach the large providers and also smaller providers in the London area. As many as 42 Boroughs across the country had been impacted by this provider failure so this involved a major call to action to bring about the conversations, negotiations and due diligence. Cllr das Neves commented that she had seen the significant impact on the team and the time spent on various conversations to explore different options on providers and working with different Boroughs.
- Taryn Eves, Corporate Director of Finance & Resources, added that the challenge had been getting assurance that due diligence had been carried out and that value for money was being achieved while also protecting a service being provided to some of the Borough's most vulnerable residents. While there hadn't been time to fully test the market, it was also the case that the market was relatively small so there was a sense of realism. She added that resources were shared between Boroughs to carry out the financial due diligence checks so this had been carried out even though it may have been done quicker than usual. Bobbi Virgo, Head of Supply Chain (Health & Care), emphasised the limited provider choice that was available in terms of equipment and warehousing but also the fleet to move the equipment.
- Asked by Cllr Iyngkaran about the procurement process at the end of this two or three-year contract, Bobbi Virgo confirmed that, while the recent process had involved the minimum procurement requirements due to the urgency of the situation, any future procurement would involve the full usual processes.
- Cllr O'Donovan noted that there had been very few resident complaints and requested further details on this. Jo Baty said that there had only been 3 or 4 complaints received early on which was unusual as other Boroughs had been inundated with complaints. There had been some proactive communication to residents and an email helpline had been established but there had been little traffic.
- Noting that there were not many providers in the market, Cllr Connor asked about the work being carried out in procurement to manage risk to the Council in future and embed learning. Taryn Eves explained that, with all open market tenders, financial assessments were undertaken as part of that process and

that financial standing was considered at the outset and also on at least an annual basis. She acknowledged the importance of testing providers, particularly in quite fragile markets and one of the lessons was to consider whether doing this on an annual basis was sufficient. Higher risk and higher value contracts involved monthly monitoring in order to get alerts on red flags as quickly as possible. There was therefore a collective organisational action plan that would be assembled on this.

- Andrew Meek, Head of Resilience, FM & Safety, said that some initial workshopping had been done with some detail of this shared in the agenda papers. The report on this was expected to be finalised in the New Year. He added that the Emergency Planning & Resilience team did a lot of work to support individual services to identify risks, including on supply chain issues. This could be a particular concern for Adult Social Care services and this would be monitored closely going forward. This issue had been particularly difficult because of the scale of the contract which had made it difficult for other providers to step in. A lesson to learn from this was therefore to consider the characteristics of different markets and the mix of suppliers to inform risk assessment and contingency planning.
- Katie Fisher, Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager reported that the Council was currently reviewing business continuity plans and these would identify risks and immediate mitigations.
- Asked by Cllr Lyngkaran about the difference between the recent events with social care equipment and the NHS supply chain, Cllr das Neves said that some of the same providers also supplied the NHS and that these issues reflected the marketplace for this type of equipment. Bobbi Virgo added that there were only three viable providers with sufficient warehousing and logistics.
- Cllr Connor requested that the final action plan be provided to the Panel when it was available and noted that they would be particularly interested to see how this would impact on the Council's policies and practices during 'business as usual' periods. **(ACTION)**

Cllr Connor expressed the Panel's recognition of the hard work of officers during this period and looked forward to seeing further details of progress through the action plan.

#### **44. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN - UPHELD COMPLAINTS**

Cllr Connor explained that this item would be heard in two parts:

PART A – To consider a public report by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) following an investigation into an Adult Social Care complaint.

PART B – To consider an overall overview of Adult Social Care complaints.

##### Part A

In relation to Part A, Cllr das Neves noted that this item had been reported to Cabinet in November 2025 and summarised the key points as follows:

- The Council recognised the seriousness of the LGSCO's finding in this case, accepted responsibility for the errors and apologised unreservedly for this.
- The issues reflected historic practices in the Council that had changed since the events that were investigated.
- The backlog of emails had been cleared and the Council now seeks to triage all concerns that come into the inbox within 48 hours.
- Additional staff training on the handling of complaints had taken place.
- An Adult Social Care Improvement Plan was in place which responded to separate issues raised by the CQC.
- A recent letter had been provided by the LGSCO following the Council's response to them which confirmed the LGSCO's view that the remedy had been satisfied on time. A redacted version of the letter could be provided to the Panel if required.
- An external review had been commissioned which would verify that the Council's practice had now improved.

Cllr das Neves, Sara Sutton and Jo Baty then responded to questions from the Panel:

- Cllr Connor requested further details about the current triaging of safeguarding emails, the involvement of social workers and timescales for follow up actions. Jo Baty explained that a short-term solution was currently in place until the safeguarding review reported in January. At present, any safeguarding email that came in was triaged, risk assessed and referred to the most relevant team. Where concern related to a specific resident, this may be directed to the locality team where the resident lives. Other concerns may be related to a service provider.
- Asked about capacity in the locality teams to take on the volume of safeguarding referrals, Sara Sutton said that there was an important distinction to make between safeguarding concerns and care and support needs. The latter would be allocated to a locality team and this could, for example, involve a review of the care and support plan for the resident. If a genuine safeguarding concern had been raised, relating to abuse or neglect for example, then immediate protective measures would be put in place. In some cases, further work would be required to establish the facts. Jo Baty commented that adult social care involved the constant assessment of risk. In terms of capacity, she said that this was a real pressure, particularly in relation to additional demand in the east of the Borough. The service had been fortunate to have been allocated additional funding for staffing and there were new posts to manage risk, including a post on forensic mental health. More training had been put in place and new governance arrangements included a weekly safeguarding team meeting. She added that the new internal review may provide further evidence on capacity issues and all of the priorities identified through the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan were relevant to safeguarding.
- Cllr Connor asked further about capacity to deal with changing care and support needs, pointing out that a review could be urgent to prevent harm if a resident's needs had changed. Jo Baty said that extra capacity had recently been built in to support carers, including the Care Act Assessments. She added

that increased future use of AI to support Care Act Assessments was relevant to freeing up capacity.

- Asked by Cllr Connor about the current backlog of Care Act Assessments, Jo Baty responded that there would always be waiting lists in this area and that she could provide data on this to the Panel in writing. **(ACTION)**
- Cllr Connor queried whether any harm had been identified that had resulted for the delays from the unread emails. Jo Baty said that this had pre-dated her appointment to her role but that she was not aware of any cases being escalated as a consequence of the backlog.
- Cllr Brennan expressed concern about the difficulties with triaging complex cases accurately and said that this often required a high level of expertise. Jo Baty said that the Council used a case management system to track cases including complex cases in contact with other services. Sara Sutton added that there was a quality assurance process involving case file audits to further support this process.
- Cllr O'Donovan asked about the pressures that staff were under, given the high levels of demand and the need to meet defined safeguarding timeframes. Jo Baty agreed that this was an important point and that staff needed to feel protected so that difficult situations could be resolved by working together. Her view was that services without this level of support could involve greater risk of a culture of people hiding issues and concerns. The leadership of the service was working to encourage a culture of openness and honesty and to raise concerns with their managers.
- Sara Sutton commented that the issues investigated by the LGSCO had been an opportunity for learning and reflection. There had been extensive conversations about the case files and she also reported that the incident had resulted in some HR processes. There had also been conversations about the future shape of the service which had been informed by some work from an external organisation which had involved multiple engagement sessions with staff. This informed the ongoing work on front door transformation and digital improvements that was expected to be brought forward in Q1 of 2026/27 and was underpinned by the workforce development strategy.
- Cllr Iyngkaran queried what system was now used to ensure that emails were not missed. Jo Baty explained that there were clear email addresses for each team so that emails were not misdirected and delayed. A small working group had also been established to monitor how many emails were being received each week and how they were being managed. Sara Sutton added that a technology solution was being introduced that would enable the emails received to automatically interface with the case management system. Cllr das Neves commented that stronger oversight was important to act as a check and balance against human error while the external review would help improve understanding about what the service could do differently.
- Asked by Cllr Connor if there were any issues of concern on the LGSCO Action Plan Tracker, Sara Sutton reported that the only outstanding issue was the reporting of the external safeguarding policy review which would not be completed until early 2026. However, the LGSCO was satisfied that these arrangements were in place.
- Cllr Opoku queried why the final action on providing evidence to the LGSCO was still marked 'in progress'. Sara Sutton explained that this was because the

- report in the agenda pack was the report had been provided to Cabinet in November and pre-dated this action being completed.
- Cllr Connor requested that the Scrutiny Panel be informed at an earlier stage when issues of concern arose. Sara Sutton said that, on reflection, when the outcome of the LGSCO report outcome was known there was an opportunity to provide a briefing to the Panel which should have been taken. She added that the service dealt with many cases of complexity and so there was a judgement call to be made when there were wider issues of risk that would be within the remit of the Panel.

## Part B

Kirsten Webb, Resolutions & Feedback Manager introduced the report on Part B, highlighting the following points:

- The service was on a journey of improvement in managing and learning from complaints. While response times were important, it was equally important to resolve issues and not just to respond.
- The feedback team had a role to play in triaging complaints more effectively and to be part of a holistic approach to handling complaints.
- Historically, the service had worked to a 10-working day response timeframe, but trying to meet this deadline could mean that the complaint was not resolved so it was necessary to reflect on what service provision should look like.
- An increase in approaches to the LGSCO had been seen corporately and not just in relation to Adult Social Care so this had informed the improvement plan.

Kirsten Webb, Jo Baty and Cllr das Neves then responded to questions from the Panel:

- Cllr Brennan agreed with the value of listening and learning from mistakes but noted that this was dependent on having a culture that enabled this. Asked if this was part of the staff training, Jo Baty said that front-line staff under pressure could be defensive and that it was important to acknowledge when the Council had got something wrong and to try and put that right. She added that there would be measures next year to introduce an informal Stage 2 for complaints to try to deescalate more cases as a larger number of residents were now resorting to contacting the LGSCO. Sara Sutton added that a new role of Complaints Manager was being introduced as part of the forthcoming capacity increase. Cllr das Neves emphasised the importance of speaking directly to residents in the complex cases where complaints were more likely to arise.

In accordance with the Committee Procedure Rules, the Panel agreed to suspend standing orders in order to allow the meeting to continue after 10pm.

Questions then continued from the Panel:

- Asked by Cllr Brennan about training, Kirsten Webb said it was understood that, as part of corporate induction and management training, there was a need for people joining the organisation to be clear about expectations in dealing with complaints. Sara Sutton added that this would include bespoke training for managers.
- Based on his experience working in the NHS, Cllr Iyngkaran considered that continuous learning was more valuable than one-off training. He added that

- duty of candour could achieve better responses when dealing with complaints. Jo Baty commented that one element of poor practice had included multiple people being copied into emails about complaints, leading to delays as it was not clear who was responsible for the response. Cllr O'Donovan spoke about the value of direct phone or face-to-face contact when responding to residents.
- Referring to page 120 of the agenda pack on Themes from Upheld Decisions, Cllr Connor commented that these included a lot of familiar issues that she had seen from cases over previous years. However, she noted that there was no detail in the report about how these issues were being addressed and requested that a response paper on this should be provided to the Panel. **(ACTION)** Sara Sutton highlighted that many of the issues were covered by actions in the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan.
  - Referred to the LGSCO performance benchmarking on page 122 of the agenda pack, Cllr Connor highlighted the poor figures for Haringey with high numbers of decisions issues and a high upheld rate. She suggested that the Panel would need to see the data on the monitoring of improvements in these areas in future reports. Updates on the themes from upheld decisions would also be relevant for future reports. **(ACTION)** Cllr das Neves said that she had previously emphasised to officers the importance of benchmarking against Boroughs which were statistical neighbours with similar demographics and challenges.
  - Cllr Connor referred to the external review that had been discussed earlier in the meeting and recommended that this report be provided to the Panel when it became available. **(ACTION)** Sara Sutton said that there would first be an internal process to engage with the outcome of the report, but agreed that discussions could take place with the Scrutiny Panel chair as part of agenda planning to determine the appropriate point to bring this to a meeting of the Panel.
  - While Cllr Connor welcomed the improvements to the safeguarding referrals backlog, she recommended that the Panel continue to monitor this area as concerns remained, including on waiting lists. Cllr das Neves said that it was important to distinguish between waiting lists, which were carried in adult social care by every local authority and managing risk well, which was being addressed through the improvement plan and the response to the findings of the LGSCO. Jo Baty added that monitoring reports would be provided to the Improvement Board and to Scrutiny as part of the improvement process, including on waiting times. Cllr Connor requested that the Panel's recommendation on receiving the data on waiting times be added to the Panel's action tracker. **(ACTION)**

#### **45. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Dominic O'Brien, Scrutiny Officer, reported that items for the next Panel meeting in February 2026 were the Q2 Finance Update and the annual item on Quality Assurance, with space for one further item.

Cllr Connor reported discussions with the chair of the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel regarding the concerns reported in recent media articles about the possibility of 'grooming gangs' in the Borough and that this issue had now been raised under the annual safeguarding item for both Panels. She proposed that a short

agenda item should be scheduled on this issue to which the Borough Commander could be invited to present information about the data that the Metropolitan Police held on sexual exploitation in the Borough. Councillors commented that it was be important to understand how the type of offences related to ‘grooming gangs’ were defined and recorded. It was agreed that this proposal for an agenda item on this topic should be raised with the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health and then an approach made to the Borough Commander. **(ACTION)**

**46. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (6.30pm)

CHAIR: Councillor Pippa Connor

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....

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