

Report for: Councillor Williams – Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning (Deputy Leader) 15.1.2026

Item number:

Title: Repurpose Customer Services Space for Homelessness Prevention Hub

Report authorised by: Maddie Watkins. Sara Sutton. Taryn Eves (Section 151 Officer)

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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non-Key Decision: Key Decision**

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1. This report seeks approval for the relocation of back office and customer facing provision through the repurposing of the Customer Services space in Tottenham Green Leisure Centre for use as a 'Homelessness Prevention Hub', providing an in-person, appointment-based assessment space for residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- 1.2. The Customer Services face to face offer will formally consolidate into the Wood Green Customer Service Centre.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

3. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning is asked to:

- 3.1. To approve the repurposing of the Customer Services space within Tottenham Green Leisure Centre for use as a dedicated Homelessness Prevention Hub, including co-location of a voluntary sector advice and advocacy service.

- 3.2. To formalise the consolidation of the Customer Services Operation at the Wood Green Customer Services Centre, following the earlier relocation of the service due to operational pressures.
- 3.3. To approve the creation of a new back-office workspace within the adjacent area of Tottenham Green Leisure Centre, ensuring sufficient operational capacity to support the delivery of the Homelessness Prevention Hub.

4. Reasons for decision

- 4.1. The council is obligated under the Homelessness Code of Guidance (S. 11.14-11.15) to provide 'at least one face to face interview' for homelessness assessments in 'most circumstances'. This is supplementary guidance to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the government requires that local housing authorities must have regard to this guidance when exercising functions related to homelessness.
- 4.2. An options analysis was undertaken, to understand potential options on where to best accommodate the Homelessness Prevention Hub, in collaboration with Capital Projects and Property, The Customer Services space at Marcus Garvey Library, with a 'back office' in Tottenham Green Leisure Centre, was identified as the most viable, cost-effective and practical option.
- 4.3. The benefits of this option include:
 - Demand for the Housing Needs service comes primarily from the east of the borough, situating the Hub in closest proximity to many of its users.
 - Repurposing the space will improve the experience of residents facing homelessness and allow the service to comply with the Homelessness Code of Guidance requirement for face-to-face appointments.
 - The capacity for parking at Marcus Garvey Library/Tottenham Green Leisure Centre offers a much better resident experience for residents homeless on the day, who may have belongings with them. Being able to access the space via car where possible will assist with this.
 - The Housing Needs Service, Citizens Advice Haringey and other relevant teams will jointly use the vacated space, creating a single, accessible point for residents to receive housing assessments and specialist advice. By bringing services together, this approach enhances partnership working, strengthens early intervention, and delivers a more coordinated and resident focused service.
 - This space is already set up as a customer service space, meaning that minimal capital works are required, limiting cost and disruption to service users.

- 4.4. Consolidating face to face Customer Service into the Wood Green Customer Services centre ensures a more resilient service model for staff and residents, at a time when the council's finances are under severe strain. It creates economies of scale that enable more consistent service levels when there are unplanned staff shortages and peaks in demand.
- 4.5. Historically the Wood Green Customer Services site has attracted around 50% more footfall than Marcus Garvey Library/Tottenham Green Customer Services site because it is centrally located, well connected by public transport, and offers proximity to other council services and amenities.
- 4.6. Marcus Garvey Customer Services had to shut temporarily due to staff shortages on 3 October 2026, and the footfall fully transferred to Wood Green Customer Centre with minimal disruption. Wait times for customers to be seen have reduced and both customers and staff have experienced the benefits of a bigger team all in one location.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1. Do nothing – This option would mean continuing with the current Housing Needs service model in the reception at 48 Station Road, relying on online and telephone-based support without a dedicated face-to-face offer. The current facilities are not sufficient to support compliance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance, which sets out the requirement that customers should receive face-to-face interviews. This option was therefore discounted.
- 5.2. Alternative locations - several alternative locations were considered as part of the options appraisal for this project, including other configurations of the space at Marcus Garvey Library. Other location options were discounted on the basis of their location, insufficient space to accommodate the Hub, and where building works were deemed excessively costly or disruptive.

6. Background information

Context

- 6.1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Housing Needs service moved to full remote working, having previously operated from a dedicated appointment centre. The loss of face-to-face work had implications on some customers, for example, where a household is presently homeless on the day.
- 6.2. Remote working has since been supplemented with a very limited face-to-face offer from the reception space in 48 Station Road, but this does not offer the capacity nor the sensitivity of experience that should be provided to vulnerable residents.

- 6.3. The Housing Needs service recognises that the restricted face-to-face offer affects residents' experience of the service, as in-person assessments play a key role in supporting households at risk of homelessness.
- 6.4. Changes in homelessness legislation introduced in 2018, and the increase in local provision regarding services for single people, have led to a change in customer demographic and around 60% of approaches for assistance come from single people or couples with no dependents. Whilst a proportion of these customers benefit from the wrap-around support services provided by Mulberry Junction, the majority have no vulnerability or support needs above housing.
- 6.5. Prior to the pandemic, single people (except for those under 18 and over 50 years of age) were directed to Mulberry Junction where they were able to make a statutory homelessness application as well as access the other services available. The demand on the smaller space at Mulberry Junction was disproportionate to that at 48 Station Road and many single households did not require or want the additional support. Therefore, a future hub needs to allow for a provision that can accommodate a mixture of single people and households with children in one Hub, with the option to co-locate alongside partners such as Citizens Advice Haringey and the ability to ensure that our most vulnerable single residents can still be supported at Mulberry Junction.
- 6.6. The creation of a Homelessness Prevention Hub is a priority for the service, responding to shifts in resident need and the continuing increase in demand for homelessness support.
- 6.7. The temporary unplanned closure of Marcus Garvey Customer Services on 3 October 2025 was caused by staff shortages due to sickness, and the loss of resilience caused by the reduction in overall workforce size in 2025 and previous years.
- 6.8. Whilst the closure of the Marcus Garvey Customer Service Centre was unplanned, it has enabled us to test this proposal for its permanent closure and evaluate its impact, which has had some benefits for both staff and customers. It has created a more resilient cohesive service and enabled more consistent service levels when there are unplanned staff shortages and peaks in demand.

Proposal Development and approval process

- 6.9. An options appraisal was undertaken by colleagues across Housing and Capital Projects and Property and a proposal developed in consultation with Customer services and Leisure services, which set out the reason for the recommendations, estimated budgetary impacts, identified and mitigated risks and scoped the activities needed to relocate the Housing Needs Service and create the Homelessness Prevention Hub and back office, including co-location of a voluntary sector advice and advocacy service.
- 6.10. The proposal was considered at Capital Projects Steering Group (CPSG 15.5.25) and Strategic Capital Board (SCB 9.6.25), with each agreeing the proposal could

be progressed and noting the assumed budgetary impacts and estimated costs of works.

- 6.11. The cost for implementing the recommended option was agreed to be met by the Corporate Property Budget at SCB. The most up to date information provides an estimate of £338,186.
- 6.12. Procurement of works will be subject to a tender exercise in accordance with the Councils Contract Standing Orders.
- 6.13. A project group has been mobilised with a view to overseeing progress of the various activities required to implement the proposal, including but not limited to the formal tender process for the works required and to ensure alignment with a parallel project being undertaken by Leisure services.
- 6.14. The proposal provides an improved face to face offer for Housing Needs customers, supporting improved compliance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance.
- 6.15. In scoping the various options for the Homelessness Prevention Hub, existing arrangements with a nursery and the Friends of Marcus Garvey Library and the space occupied, were noted. The recommended option does not result in any changes to existing agreements.
- 6.16. The construction of a 'back office' space in the multi-function room in Tottenham Green Leisure centre interacts with a proposal to turn this space into an extension of the existing gym provision within the Leisure Centre. The construction of a back office will reduce the space in the multi-function room by approximately a third, reducing the potential annual income generation possible from the use of this space as a gym by approximately £225,000. This income generation impact was discussed during the planning stage of the project, and noted and agreed by Strategic Capital Board on 9th June 2025.
- 6.17. This proposal repurposes the Customer Services space within Marcus Garvey Library for a Homelessness Prevention Hub. It does not propose closing the library or altering library services and therefore does not trigger the statutory consultation duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.
- 6.18. However, Officers met with the Friends of Marcus Garvey group in November 2025 to discuss the proposal. The Friends group raised a number of questions and concerns which were responded to as comprehensively as possible. A follow up discussion took place with the Assistant Director of Housing Demand on the 18th of November 2025.
- 6.19. The change represents an operational consolidation of Customer Services into a single location at Wood Green, where face-to-face provision continues.
- 6.20. There is no general duty to consult on this operational change; however, an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to ensure reasonable access

and compliance with equality duties, and a summary of this is provided below in section 9.4.

6.21. The overall service provision remains unchanged, with Customer Services continuing at Wood Green. There is clear signposting within Marcus Garvey Library directing residents to the Wood Green site.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

7.1. Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026

The current Corporate Delivery Plan contains a commitment to the development of a new Homelessness Strategy. The commitment to establish a Homelessness Prevention Hub in the borough is included in the draft Homelessness Strategy, which is currently undergoing public consultation. This strategy was produced through engagement with key resident stakeholder groups.

7.2. The Haringey Deal

The Haringey Deal includes a commitment to 'getting the basics right', including making resident interactions with the council as easy, effective, and supportive as possible, in order to build trust. The establishment of a Homelessness Prevention Hub, and the provision of a face-to-face service, will enable some of Haringey's most vulnerable residents to access more direct and supportive interactions with the council, aligning with the principles of the Haringey Deal.

7.3. Haringey Borough Vision 2035

The first call to action in Haringey's Borough Vision is 'safe and affordable housing in Haringey', including a greater availability of high-quality advice. The establishment of a Homelessness Prevention Hub will ensure that residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness can access support and advice around housing more effectively.

8. Carbon and Climate Change

8.1. In line with Haringey's Carbon Management Policy, the repurposing of the existing Customer Service Centre into a Homelessness Prevention Hub prioritises sustainable practices to minimise environmental impact. Key mitigations include the reuse of the current reception area to avoid unnecessary construction, and the repurposing of existing office furniture and fixtures wherever suitable. These measures reduce waste generation, limit embodied carbon associated with new materials, and support the borough's commitment to resource efficiency and carbon reduction.

9. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

9.1. Finance

The cost of the implementation of the proposals in this report, estimated at £388,000, will be funded from the approved General Fund capital programme, scheme 316 Asset Management of Council Buildings. In addition, the loss of income of £0.,225m to the Leisure Service has been included in the proposed budget for 2026/27.

9.2. Procurement

Strategic Procurement note the contents of this report (including the pending procurement exercise), and confirm there are no procurement related matters preventing the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning approving the recommendations stated in paragraph 3 above.

9.3 Head of Legal & Governance [Fiona Alderman, Director of Legal & Governance]

There is no legal impediment to this decision being taken.

9.4 Equality

9.4.1 The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty. Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

9.4.2 EQIAs conducted on the recommendation to create the Hub and the closure of Marcus Garvey Customer Services Centre were completed.

9.4.3 For the creation of the hub the EQIA demonstrates that it is likely to have a positive impact for residents whose protected characteristics are disproportionately affected by homelessness. This includes residents identifying as from a Black or "Other" ethnic background, children and young adults, residents living in the east of the borough, as well as those on low incomes or experiencing multiple disadvantage.

- 9.4.3 The choice of location at Tottenham Green is likely to have a positive impact for residents living in the east of the borough since the greatest proportion of residents threatened with or experiencing homelessness live there. It may, however, provide a barrier for residents living in the west of the borough compared to a more central location.
- 9.4.4 Mitigating actions for customers who would be disadvantaged by attending a face-to-face appointment at the Tottenham location include utilising existing home visit, digital, outreach and remote service offers for customers.
- 9.4.5 Ongoing service usage data monitoring and an EQIA refresh within the first 12 months of operation will be completed to identify any emerging barriers and any further mitigations required.
- 9.4.6 The EQIA for the closure of Marcus Garvey Customer Services highlights a slightly less accessible face-to-face customer service offer for residents living in the east of the borough. This will particularly affect residents identifying as from a Black ethnic background, those with the protected characteristic of disability and those on lower incomes and those experiencing pregnancy and maternity. No negative or positive impact on other protected characteristics is expected.
- 9.4.7 The mitigations for the loss of access in Marcus Garvey include improving the accessibility of the Customer Services telephone service, improving the digital offer via the council's Service Modernisation programme, and the new Digital Inclusion Policy and Roadmap being brought to Cabinet in March 2026.
- 9.4.8 Everything that Customer Services supports residents with can be done over the phone, except for two very low-volume tasks. Attending a customer centre in person is therefore chosen by residents who prefer it, or those who struggle to communicate over the phone. Customer Services has been given temporary additional budget to recruit four staff in our telephony contact centre team who will start in early 2026 and reduce the long telephone wait times that customers have been experiencing over the last six months and make the phone a more accessible access channel for residents. This in turn should reduce the number of residents who choose to visit us in person.
- 9.4.9 The opening of the Homelessness Prevention Hub is also a mitigation for those residents facing homelessness.
- 9.4.10 Finally, staffing at the Wood Green Customer Centre has been increased by four in late December 2025, with two more staff due to be recruited in early 2026, to boost the quality and performance of the service we can offer, and

create more capacity for staff training and development, which is essential as the team will be adopting a brand new CRM system in 2026 and will start offering more support for residents who need help to access online services.

10. Use of Appendices

- 10.1. Equality Impact Assessment: Customer Services
- 10.2. Equality Impact Assessment: Homelessness Prevention Hub

11. Background papers

None