



# Havering

L O N D O N   B O R O U G H

## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD AGENDA

**7.00 pm**

**Tuesday  
30 July 2024**

**Havering Town Hall,  
Main Road, Romford**

Members 12: Quorum 5

### **COUNCILLORS:**

#### **Conservative Group (3)**

Keith Prince  
Timothy Ryan  
David Taylor

#### **Labour Group (1)**

Mandy Anderson

#### **Residents' Association Independent Group (1)**

Philip Ruck

#### **Havering Residents' Group (5)**

Philippa Crowder  
Laurance Garrard (Chairman)  
David Godwin  
Bryan Vincent  
Julie Wilkes

#### **East Havering Residents (1)**

Martin Goode

---

**For information about the meeting please contact:  
Anthony Clements 01708 433065  
anthony.clements@oneSource.co.uk**

***Under the Committee Procedure Rules within the Council's Constitution the Chairman of the meeting may exercise the powers conferred upon the Mayor in relation to the conduct of full Council meetings. As such, should any member of the public interrupt proceedings, the Chairman will warn the person concerned. If they continue to interrupt, the Chairman will order their removal from the meeting room and may adjourn the meeting while this takes place.***

***Excessive noise and talking should also be kept to a minimum whilst the meeting is in progress in order that the scheduled business may proceed as planned.***

#### **Protocol for members of the public wishing to report on meetings of the London Borough of Havering**

Members of the public are entitled to report on meetings of Council, Committees and Cabinet, except in circumstances where the public have been excluded as permitted by law.

Reporting means: -

- filming, photographing or making an audio recording of the proceedings of the meeting;
- using any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later; or
- reporting or providing commentary on proceedings at a meeting, orally or in writing, so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later if the person is not present.

Anyone present at a meeting as it takes place is not permitted to carry out an oral commentary or report. This is to prevent the business of the meeting being disrupted.

Anyone attending a meeting is asked to advise Democratic Services staff on 01708 433076 that they wish to report on the meeting and how they wish to do so. This is to enable employees to guide anyone choosing to report on proceedings to an appropriate place from which to be able to report effectively.

Members of the public are asked to remain seated throughout the meeting as standing up and walking around could distract from the business in hand.

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Under the Localism Act 2011 (s. 9F) each local authority is required by law to establish an overview and scrutiny function to support and scrutinise the Council's executive arrangements.

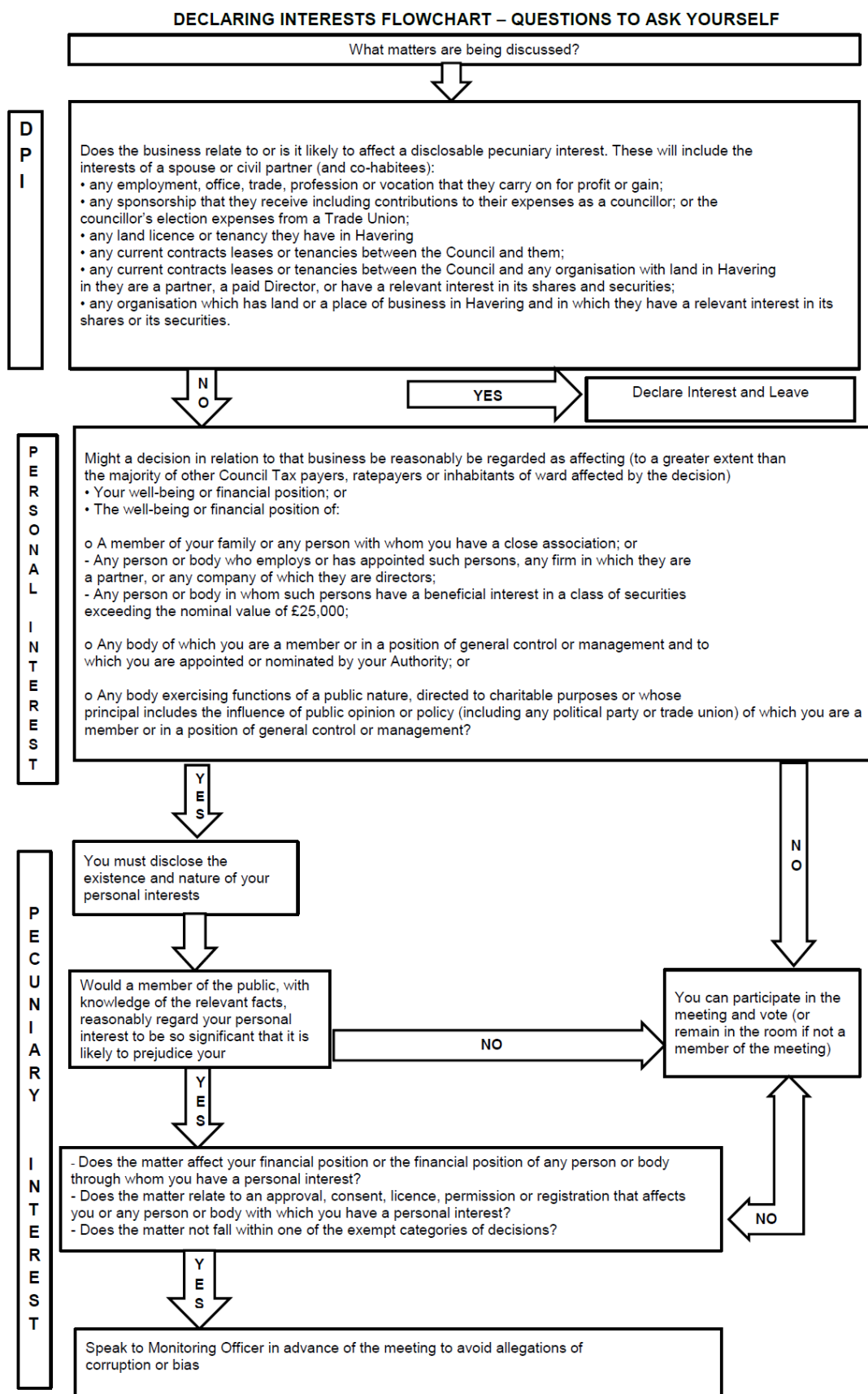
The Overview and Scrutiny Board acts as a vehicle by which the effectiveness of scrutiny is monitored and where work undertaken by themed sub-committees can be coordinated to avoid duplication and to ensure that areas of priority are being reviewed. The Board also scrutinises general management matters relating to the Council and further details are given in the terms of reference below. The Overview and Scrutiny Board has oversight of performance information submitted to the Council's executive and also leads on scrutiny of the Council budget and associated information. All requisitions or 'call-ins' of executive decisions are dealt with by the Board.

The Board is politically balanced and includes among its membership the Chairmen of the six themed Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees.

### **Terms of Reference:**

The areas scrutinised by the Board are:

- Strategy and commissioning
  - Partnerships with Business
  - Customer access
  - E-government and ICT
  - Finance (although each committee is responsible for budget processes that affect its area of oversight)
  - Human resources
  - Asset Management
  - Property resources
  - Facilities Management
  - Communications
  - Democratic Services
  - Social inclusion
  - Councillor Call for Action
-



## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **1 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman will announce details of the arrangements in case of fire or other events that might require the meeting room or building's evacuation.

### **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

(if any) - receive.

### **3 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Members are invited to disclose any interest in any of the items on the agenda at this point of the meeting.

*Members may still disclose any interest in an item at any time prior to the consideration of the matter.*

### **4 MINUTES** (Pages 7 - 12)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 7 May 2024 (attached) and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

### **5 CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY UPDATE** (Pages 13 - 34)

Report attached.

### **6 TARGET OPERATING MODEL**

Report to follow.

### **7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RULES: EXCEPTIONS TO THE CALL-IN (REQUISITION) PROCEDURE** (Pages 35 - 38)

Report attached.

**Zena Smith**  
**Head of Committee and Election Services**

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD  
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford  
7 May 2024 (7.00 - 9.02 pm)**

**Present:**

**COUNCILLORS**

<b>Conservative Group</b>	Judith Holt, Dilip Patel, Keith Prince and David Taylor
<b>Havering Residents' Group</b>	Laurance Garrard (Vice-Chair), Gerry O'Sullivan (Chairman), Natasha Summers and Bryan Vincent
<b>Labour Group East Havering Residents' Group</b>	Trevor McKeever and Matthew Stanton Martin Goode

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

**31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mandy Anderson (Trevor McKeever substituting) and Tim Ryan (Judith Holt substituting).

**32 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**33 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**34 CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

Officers gave a response to each of the call-in grounds in turn, explaining that both decisions related to the asset disposal programme and also related to earlier Cabinet decisions.

Implications of disposal of the sites to MLH

The rationale for the site disposals was given in the report presented to Cabinet in February 2023. There would be a lower capital receipt to the Council if disposed of on the open market due to the uncertainty of

timescales. Disposal to Mercury Land Holdings would allow a 2-stage payment to the Council aligning with the Council's Capital Programme. Properties would be leased back to the Council, enabling a revenue stream to continue as long as possible. This arrangement may not be possible on the open market.

#### Potential missed revenue opportunities

Two of the sites were involved were not car parks. The Angel Way car park only produced nominal parking revenue and was in poor condition. There were other Council car parks in Hornchurch that could absorb the demand and mitigate loss of revenue should the Dorrington Way and Keswick Avenue car parks be closed.

#### Contribution towards housing needs

Planning applications for the sites to be disposed of had not yet been determined. These could potentially include social housing from Mercury Land Holdings.

#### Land ownership

Officers confirmed that the Council did own the freehold of all the sites in question. There was a boundary dispute concerning the edge of the Angel Way car park and work was in progress to resolve this.

#### Alternative use of funds

It was clarified that the Council funded Mercury Land Holdings via the General Fund and it was not possible to use these funds for different purposes.

#### Questions and discussion

A Member asked why no detail of the business case or likely profit from the proposals had been provided. He felt that an individual business case should be provided for each site to ascertain if the £8m loan to Mercury Land Holdings was viable. Officers responded that a breakdown of the sites was given in the exempt appendix but the final unit housing numbers could not be given at this stage.

Cash would not be changing hands in the first phase of the programme, this would be done via equity. There would be a longer term dividend to the Council but it was not to be specific about returns at this stage. The Strategic Director of Finance could give a written response on the likely level of returns. The Council's capital accountant had confirmed that the proposed transactions were acceptable and standard practice for Local Authorities.



It was confirmed that there would be a 2-stage transaction with receipts received shortly after each stage had been completed. The peppercorn rent by which the sites were leased back to the Council was a temporary arrangement to allow the maintaining of car parks until the development works started. One planning consent was granted, a further receipt would be received by the Council.

The Council would provide to Mercury Land Holdings (MLH) a sum in equity equivalent to the value of the site. The Council would charge MLH for this funding and receive interest. It was not possible to complete a detailed business case until planning permission had been granted. The Council would be offered any section 106 affordable housing included in the developments in addition to receiving interest on the loan from MLH.

A detailed business case on developing the sites could be brought to the Board in due course. Members asked who would be paying the interest on the initial payment. Officers responded that this would be included in the second phase of the agreement. MLH was owned by the Council and was not structured to make large profits. Its aim was to make returns to the Council.

It was accepted that the market could fluctuate but MLH had a good record. It was not however possible to avoid these risks entirely – this was the nature of a development company. Members felt that the proposal was more of an accounting exercise but officers emphasised that they were just asking for the site disposals to be agreed, not the overall building scheme at this stage. Members also felt that it was not necessary to wait for the granting of planning permission to decide the business case.

Concerns were also raised that the income generated by MLH would struggle to meet the level of debt repayments. The proposals did not include a business case, an indication of the likely returns nor the number of homes to be built. Members therefore felt that it was not advisable for the Council to spend £8m on this basis. Concerns were also raised that the proposals did not explore how the borough's housing situation would be addressed.

MLH was effectively developing the car park sites for the Council but Members felt that the Council should do this directly itself. The Council had however agreed the approach that MLH should develop the sites itself. As stated in section 6.9 of the MLH business plan, only equity funding would be requested from the Council initially. A diagram showing the business process could be provided although Members felt it would have been useful to provide this prior to the meeting.

A Member asked who had qualified the value of the £8.9m loan and where were the investment strategy and cash transaction. It was clarified that the votes on the requisitions had to be held at the meeting and could not be deferred pending receipt of the business case.

The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that it was not possible to take any more debt into the Housing Revenue Account. The taking on of a further scheme would breach the overall Housing Revenue Account debt limits. A Member responded that the Housing Revenue Account did not necessarily have to develop all six sites.

The requisition of the decision re Authorisation to provide additional equity funding to Mercury Land Holdings Ltd to enable the purchase of sites in accordance with the approved 2023-26 MLH business plan was **UPHELD** by 10 votes to 0 with 1 abstention. Councillors O'Sullivan, Garrard, Vincent, Patel, Prince, Holt, Taylor, Anderson, Stanton and Goode voted to uphold the requisition and Councillors Summers abstained.

The requisition of the decision re the disposal of sites to Mercury Land Holdings was **UPHELD** by 10 votes to 0 with 1 abstention. Councillors O'Sullivan, Garrard, Vincent, Patel, Prince, Holt, Taylor, Anderson, Stanton and Goode voted to uphold the requisition and Councillors Summers abstained.

## 35 **CUSTOMER CRM DIGITAL PLATFORM PROGRAMME**

Officers advised that the CRM programme covered a number of services. The Council's aim was to offer a high quality, convenient service for residents accessible both on line and by phone via the contact centre. It had been necessary to replace the previous out of date system. Microsoft applications had been built into the new platform which would save around £50k per year compared to the previous system. Officers were aware that Microsoft support may end in 2026 but alternative products were also available.

It was accepted that issues such as flytipping could be dealt with by several different Council departments. Refinements to simplify how CRM dealt with these types of issues could be implemented over the next 12 months. It was planned to build a consolidated report covering different types of enquiries. A Member suggested it would be helpful if the e-mail giving confirmation of the enquiry number confirmed what address the enquiry related to.

The value for money of the agency staff employed was raised. Officers responded that the numbers of contractors on the team had been reduced but it was necessary to look at the grades of post compared to the private sector.

Security work on the system was now complete and officers were reasonably confident that the more difficult work on the project had been completed. There were 100 licenses used by staff on the current system and this would not be altered. Most staff would however use a version of the web form for which the licenses were much cheaper. If rates of digital usage increased, there would not be a need for any additional licenses.

Customer feedback for areas such as registrars which were on the new system had been broadly very good. The renewal process for green waste collection had also received good feedback. It was clarified that the introduction of the nw waste contract had not impacted on the CRM project.

The Board **NOTED** the report.

**36 REPORT OF PARKING ENFORCEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

The Board considered the report of the Parking Enforcement Task and Finish Group and the Chairman recorded his thanks to all Councillors and officers who were involved with the review. It was agreed that a recommendation concerning the 30 minutes free parking in some areas of Havering should be added to the report.

The Board **AGREED** the report and that the report should be referred to Cabinet for consideration and response.

**37 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

On the motion of the Chairman, it was **AGREED** that the public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public were present during these items there would disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

**38 EXEMPT MINUTES OF MEETING, 31 JANUARY 2024**

The exempt minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 31 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

---

**Chairman**

This page is intentionally left blank



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD, 30 JULY 2024

**Subject Heading:**

Customer Service Strategy Update

**SLT Lead:**

Kathy Freeman, Strategic Director,  
Resources

**Report Author and contact details:**

Paul Fisher, Director of Customer  
Services

[paul.fisher@haverling.gov.uk](mailto:paul.fisher@haverling.gov.uk)

Tel: 01708 433 654

**Policy context:**

To provide the Committee with an update  
on the council's new Customer Service  
Strategy

### SUMMARY

1. The Council is committed to delivering excellent customer service for the Borough's residents, service users and customers and this is set out in the Corporate Plan for 24/25.
2. The new Customer Service Strategy sets out how the council will achieve this ambition over the next three years. The Strategy also sets out – for the first time – the customer service standards (including speed of response times) residents can expect when they interact with the council's employees.
3. The strategy also provides the proposed Roadmap of planned activities, organised under three missions, that will help the council become much more customer centric, whilst living within its limited financial resources, to drive up customer satisfaction levels.
4. Achieving excellent customer service will take time and effort from the whole organisation, and if we get this right, will reduce unnecessary rework, improve staff engagement and resident trust and confidence in the organisation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- Note for information the contents of the new Customer Service Strategy;
  - Invite to comment on the new customer service standards; and
  - Provide a view on how the Committee would like to be kept informed on progress delivering the new strategy, and specifically any role the Committee may wish to have regarding performance against these service standards.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

### **Introduction**

6. The new Customer Service Strategy sets out what we are going to do to become recognised for delivering excellent customer service in everything we do by 2026/27. We want the Council to be an organisation where:
- We meet our customers' needs;
  - Our customers and service users are always treated politely, professionally and with understanding;
  - Our people have the skills and modern tools to provide excellent customer service;
  - We foster a culture of curiosity, learning and openness to acting on feedback from our customers and service users;
  - We strive to continually improve the quality of customer experience for all our services; and
  - We are open and transparent about our performance.
7. This Customer Service Strategy builds on the modernisation ambitions set out in the Havering Way, Transformation work programme and our Digital Strategy and underpins delivery of the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.
8. Providing excellent customer service to residents, businesses and stakeholders is central to the council's modernisation and transformation agenda. Getting this right will help us both reduce our costs, through reducing failure demand (e.g. chase up calls from customers) whilst also improving the customer experience for our residents.

### **Background**

9. Over the last few years, we have seen rising demand for our services, especially for adult and children's social care, along with higher demand for

temporary housing accommodation, factors which place significant strain on the council's finances.

10. Like residents' budgets, the increases in the cost of living continue to impact the Council financially and our income falls short of the total cost of running all our services. The means we must spend our money even more wisely and ensure every penny counts.
11. Most of all, we recognise that our residents, businesses and stakeholders expect more from us than ever before. With limited resources, it is hard to meet everyone's expectations of the council which is why we also understand it is now more important than ever to make sure we get things right first time, every time and make every interaction count.
12. For these reasons, our refreshed Customer Services Strategy clarifies our ambitions for customer service over the next three years and explains what residents and businesses can expect from us in such a difficult financial context.
13. It also sets out at a high level how we will deliver our customer experience improvement agenda with limited resources - led by the Customer Services Directorate - between now and 2026/27.
18. Over time, the actions set out in this strategy will drive up the quality of our services as experienced by customers and service users, and we expect to see increases in customer satisfaction rates. Our customers' satisfaction, along with improved business outcomes, will be our ultimate measures of success.

## **Our missions**

19. To achieve our ambitious vision, we have set ourselves three supporting missions:
  - To embed a customer-centric culture across the whole Council;
  - To modernise how we deliver our services; and
  - To provide an improved customer experience to all Council services, information and advice.
20. We will ensure that modern, customer-focused services, enabled by digital technology - where possible - are at the core of everything we do as a Council. It will become part of our DNA and "*how we do things*" at Havering. We will make the most of the latest IT and digital developments, embedding them in how we deliver modern services to all our customers, ensuring support to those who are unable to use digital channels.

## **Embed a customer-centric culture**

21. Our first mission is to embed a customer-centric culture across the whole Council, ensuring that customer satisfaction is at the heart of all our operations, interactions, and decision-making processes. We need to become much better

at thinking about service delivery from the perspective of our customers, rather than the service delivering them. The new engagement strategy being developed by the communications team sets out how we will do this.

22. We also want all our people to think about how they best serve their ‘customer’ whether that is a resident, service user or indeed internal stakeholder, so that we are much more responsive to meeting the needs of our end users whoever they may be. This is what we mean when we refer to a ‘customer centric council’ – putting the needs of customers ahead of any other consideration when we design, deliver and/or operate our services.

23. A service should not require an understanding of how local government works for it to be accessed; we want all our services to be simple and easy to use, so that the resident or service user gets the support or assistance they need for a particular issue.

24. The strategy sets out in more detail the activities we are taking as part of this mission including for example:

- Joining the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) in February 2024 to help support our journey to becoming a customer centric organisation;
- Publish and promote the commitments we have made in our new Customer Service Strategy for our organisation;
- Publish and promote the commitments we have made in our new Customer Service Strategy for our organisation;
- Establish a panel of residents and representatives from business with whom we can work to design, test and learn when developing new products or services, putting the voice of our users central to all our change delivery activity; and
- Put in place with services mechanisms for receiving regular customer feedback, specifically using existing tools (like CitizenSpace) for measuring our customers’ satisfaction with the quality of all our front facing services and using feedback to understand how best we can improve the service.

### **Modernising service delivery**

25. Our customers should be able to access our services when they are needed, at a time appropriate to them, rather than when it suits the council. Too many of our services are only available during office working hours, making it difficult for some people to access those services. We also tend to rely on telephony as the primary mode of communication for residents, as well as issuing formal letters from the council, which are both costly channels to maintain.

26. We can use and deploy the latest developments in digital, data and other technologies (including artificial intelligence) that will help us better serve our customers and better meet their needs. When we provide a service online it is available 24 hours 7 days a week and when designed well can help resident interact with us simply and easily, allowing them to get on with their lives.



27. We also want to invest in our people so that they have the skills and confidence to know what 'excellent customer service' looks like and how it can be delivered. This will take time and investment, but it has the added benefit that it will also contribute to developing our workforce with the skills we all need for the future.

28. The strategy sets out in more detail the activities we intend to take for this mission including for example:

- Ensure every service is accessible to all customers via relevant channels including with text, chat, as well as online;
- Rollout CaseTracker as a solution for all complaints and for member enquiries, allowing us to track our performance against internal SLAs;
- Develop a hybrid contact centre model, and support Town Hall reception with face-to-face service;
- Deploy automated call handling and virtual agents for simple transactions; and
- Invest in a modern corporate telephony platform so that we can track and monitor phone calls and provide feedback to staff when things go wrong.

### **Improving the customer experience and access to information**

29. Too much of our current information is hard to find on our website or is written in a very technical, jargon-filled way that is not easy for customers to understand or use. That is why we have refreshed our corporate website with a new, fresher look and feel, making it easier for users to navigate. We also need to remove old and out of date content which is not helpful to users of our website. We want our customers to be able to find the right information on our website easily and contact us only when they really need to do so.

30. We need to move away from internal speak in all our customer facing material and spend more time publishing content from a customer's perspective. We also need to have one tone of voice when interacting with customers and drive up the quality of our written communications to customers.

31. The strategy sets out in more detail the activities we intend to take for this mission including for example:

- Refresh our corporate website, moving to a new, modern template for the council, acting as a "single front door" for our core services;
- Provide advice and guidance to colleagues about how to write customer friendly letters and content for the website;
- Produce regular lessons learned and insight from our Complaints team, and put in place improvements for customers based on the feedback;
- Professionalise our customer service roles, with a clear career pathway and recognise their skills as a dedicated profession within the Council; and

- Encourage more services to test their services with end users on a regular basis, ensuring anything that is customer facing has been through some form of user testing to check for accessibility, ease of understanding and simplicity.

### **Benefits of the Customer Service Strategy**

32. The new strategy will take three years to deliver. We recognise it will need to be deployed against a backdrop of an ever tighter financial situation for the council and where we must make every penny count.
33. However, we believe getting customer service right first time, every time will bring significant benefits to both our residents and staff delivering services across the Borough. Our key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the Corporate Plan will also measure how we are performing against the missions set out in this strategy.
34. We will regularly review our planned activities and publish our progress in delivering this strategy, learning from experience about what works, and adjusting our plans if our context changes. We remain committed, however, to providing excellent customer service levels to all our residents, businesses and stakeholders for the lifetime of this strategy and beyond.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

None for Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Supporting papers:

1. Customer Service Strategy
2. Customer service standards (see Appendix 1)
3. Roadmap (see Appendix 2)



# Customer Service Strategy



**Enabling a resident-focused  
Council**



**Havering**  
LONDON BOROUGH

Page 19





**In refreshing our Customer Service Strategy our motivation as a Council is simple: we want to make sure all our services deliver what our residents and service users really need, when they need it, and can access those services that best meets those needs. For us, this is central to providing excellent customer service.**

We are already a very efficient and productive Council, and we do not take this for granted. But despite our best efforts, we also recognise the quality of our service doesn't always meet the standards we set for ourselves or want to see for our residents, businesses or stakeholders.

So this strategy restates our ambition to provide excellent customer service in everything we do, and in time, become known for the high quality of our service delivery. We understand this is a bold ambition, and rightly so, because we are ambitious for our Borough and the people we serve.

But we are also under no illusions, it will take time, effort and commitment from all of us at the council – including members, officers, and our delivery partners - for the Council to achieve this outcome. It will be a team effort, and we want residents to be part of this journey.

It will also be challenging in our current context of increasing demand for our services including adult and children's social care and higher demands for housing and temporary accommodation for vulnerable people and families. But we know we can protect delivery of core statutory services and raise customer satisfaction levels for residents. We are committed to do both, as reflected in this Administration's priorities for the Council and our new Corporate Plan 2024.

To help us on our journey, we will be introducing a new Customer Charter for the Council. It will set out our promises to you as a resident and the service levels you can expect when you interact with us. We need to use the latest in digital online technologies to make it simple and easy for you to do business with us, at a time that is suitable for you, rather than when the Town Hall is open to the public. We will of course ensure we make other ways of contacting us available for those that need additional assistance.

Our journey does not stop here: the strategy will adapt and evolve as we learn about what works well and where we need to do better, in a spirit of collaboration and partnership with all our residents. We invite you to be part of this journey, to take part in our survey work, where possible, to give us feedback and help us understand what we do well and what improvements we need to make.

If we get this right, we can become even more efficient and effective organisation, focused squarely on serving our residents and helping the Borough thrive in the years to come.

Cllr Paul Middleton, Cabinet Member for Digital, Transformation and Customer Services

This strategy sets out what we are going to do to become recognised for delivering excellent customer service in everything we do by 2026/27.

**We want the Council to be an organisation where:**

- We meet our customers' needs;
- Our customers and service users are always treated politely, professionally and with understanding;
- Our people have the skills and modern tools to provide excellent customer service;
- We foster a culture of curiosity, learning and openness to acting on feedback from our customers and service users; and
- We strive to continually improve the quality of customer experience for all our services.

**This Customer Service Strategy builds on the modernisation ambitions set out in the Havering Way, Transformation work programme and our Digital Strategy and underpins delivery of the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.**

***Providing excellent customer service to residents, businesses and stakeholders is central to the council's modernisation and transformation agenda.***

Getting this right will help us both reduce our costs, through reducing failure demand (e.g. chase up calls from customers) whilst also improving the customer experience for our residents.

Building on existing good practice, we want to bring the voice of our customers into the centre of how we design our services in the future, ensuring more consistency, ease of access and timeliness in how we deliver our services.

The work to improve the quality of all our services continues beyond the life of this strategy. It will help us shape our organisational culture in line with our ICARE values and Choose Havering principles and behaviours.

## 1.2 Background

**Over the last few years, we have seen rising demand for our services, especially for adult and children's social care, along with higher demand for temporary housing accommodation, factors which place significant strain on the council's finances.**

Like residents' budgets, the increases in the cost of living continue to impact the Council financially and our income falls short of the total cost of running all our services. The means we have to spend our money even more wisely and ensure every penny counts.

Most of all, we recognise that our residents, businesses and stakeholders expect more from us than ever before. With limited resources, it is hard to meet everyone's expectations of the council which is why we also understand it's now more important than ever to make sure we get things right first time, every time and make every interaction count.

For these reasons, our refreshed Customer Services Strategy clarifies our ambitions for customer service over the next three years, and explains what residents and businesses can expect from us in such a difficult financial context.

It also sets out at a high level how we will deliver our customer experience improvement agenda with limited resources - led by the customer services directorate - between now and 2026/27.

Over time, the actions set out in this strategy will drive up the quality of our services as experienced by customers and service users, and we expect to see increases in customer satisfaction rates.

Our customers' satisfaction, along with improved business outcomes, will be our ultimate measures of success.

### 1.3 About our Borough

The London Borough of Havering has an increasing diverse population.



Historically one of the highest proportion of older people in London, since 2011 it has experienced the highest increase of children aged 0-14 (19.7% in London) and the second highest in the UK.

We have also seen a 26.5% growth in 25 – 39 year olds. This mix of customers and communities create both challenges and opportunities all needing or wanting to engage with us,

through a range of means.

Over 80% of households living in Havering are considered “internet savvy”<sup>2</sup> and therefore we want to ensure we provide a digital first model for customers and service users needing to contact us at a time that is convenient to them.



### 1.4 Our service channels

**We aim to provide our customers with the best possible experience 24 hours a day, seven days a week which an efficient digital offer will provide.** We want our online services to be so brilliant that our customers will want to use them. We will also upgrade our corporate website to the highest (AAA) accessibility standard, where possible.

***We want our online services to be so brilliant that our customers will want to use them.***

However for those customers that are not familiar with or do not have access to the internet and need to speak to someone in person, we will continue to support these customers through an efficient telephone service or in person for routine transactional services at one of our local libraries or at the Town Hall. For those with a hearing impairment, we will continue to provide a text relay service for callers to our customer contact centre.



Services will also continue to be available in person at our Crematorium and at Langton's House for registration and wedding event services. More specialist type meetings can be arranged at our Appointment Centre at the Town Hall.

[https://www.havering.gov.uk/info/20007/council\\_and\\_democracy/654/the\\_havering\\_vision](https://www.havering.gov.uk/info/20007/council_and_democracy/654/the_havering_vision)



***We aspire to deliver excellent customer service in every interaction we have with our residents, businesses and other stakeholders.***

### 2.1 Where we want to be

**Our vision is to be an award winning organisation for customer service.**

We are one of the most efficient and productive councils in the country and we want to match that reputation by also being known for the quality of our service delivery.

We aspire to deliver excellent customer service in every interaction we have with our residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

We want our customers to be satisfied with the services they receive from us. By customers, we mean our residents, service users and people from businesses who access our services.

### 2.2 Havering 2030

**We will ensure that modern, customer-focused services, enabled by digital technology - where possible - are at the core of everything we do as a Council. So much so that it will become part of our DNA and “how we do things” at Havering.**

We will ensure that all new services are digital first, supported by other channels, where necessary. This means all digitally confident residents can access them online, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, interacting with us when it best suits them rather than when we are ‘open for business’. Digital services, once developed, are also more efficient and cheaper for the Council to run, helping us manage our limited resources.

At the same time, customers who struggle to get online or who are less digitally confident, will have our help to use services, through modern telephony and, where available, face to face provision e.g. at our Appointment Centre at the Town Hall and at our Libraries. .

When interacting with us, we want to offer our residents, businesses and stakeholders a seamless journey that is simple and easy to access, and provides the right information, at the right time to address the enquiry and get it right first time.

We will reduce complexity and remove jargon from our letters and communications. We will speak with one tone of voice, politely and professionally when we interact with our customers.

We will make the most of the latest technological and digital developments, embedding them in how we deliver modern services to all our customers.

This ‘channel shift’ approach will help us deliver cost-effective services for routine/ transactional type services, and free up other resources to concentrate on more complex cases. It should also improve our expected business outcomes.





### 2.3 Our missions

**To achieve our ambitious vision we have set ourselves three supporting missions:**

1. To embed a customer centric culture across the whole Council;
2. To modernise how we deliver our services; and
3. To provide an improved customer experience to all Council services, information and advice.

By achieving these missions, and implementing the associated programme of work effectively, we expect to improve the customer's experience of our services. This will be captured by an expected increase customer satisfaction rates.

In time, we will become recognised as a leader in customer service in local government and start winning awards for the delivery of excellent customer service.



### 3.1 Where we are now

Currently, there are multiple teams across the council running first-point-of-contact services using a combination of post, phone, email and face to face interactions with a customer.

We have a Customer Contact Centre that handles the majority of first line telephone calls for services including Council Tax & Benefits, Housing Services, Environment Services including Waste and Street Cleaning, Public Protection, Planning & Building Control and Blue Badges.

However, our service delivery structure has evolved over time, in response to different pressures, and this has led to an increase in service-specific email addresses, mailboxes and dedicated telephone numbers that are managed locally by an individual service or team. When these are not managed effectively, it causes delays in responding to residents and that leads to dissatisfaction with the quality of our service.

For example, the council has one central number (**01708 434343**) but also publishes a number of direct telephone numbers for services making it more complicated for residents than it needs to be.

Also, standards of service and service-level performance varies between teams, which can lead to confusion and dissatisfaction for our residents. It is also difficult to track and monitor performance and the service residents are receiving.

With some notable exceptions - like the recent budget consultation with young people - it is also unclear as to what extent we regularly involve our customers in how we co-design and deliver our new services, or indeed test them before they go-live.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that we do not always put the customer at the centre of our thinking, preferring instead to design things around how currently we organise ourselves. This makes little sense to our residents or service users.

Automated emails are also issued without any specific contact details – often just signed as ‘Havering Council’ - which means it is then difficult for residents or service users to escalate an issue when the problem isn’t resolved.

Elected members and residents also complain when an email says the issue has been resolved and the case closed down, but the necessary work has yet to take place. Again, this causes unnecessary chasing emails and rework, frustration and reflects poorly on the Council as an organisation.

### 3.2 Where we want to be

We need to become much better at thinking about service delivery from the perspective of our customers, rather than the service delivery them.

We also want all our people to think about how they best serve their ‘customer’ whether that’s a resident, service user or indeed internal stakeholder, so that we are much more responsive to meeting the needs of our end users whoever they may be.

***This is what we mean when we refer to a ‘customer centric council’ – putting the needs of customers ahead of any other consideration when we design, deliver or operate our services.***

### 3. Embedding a customer centric culture across the whole Council

#### Customer Service Strategy

A service should not require an understanding of how local government works for it to be accessed; we want all our services to be simple and easy to use, so that the resident or service user gets the support or assistance they need for a particular issue.



#### 3.3 How we will get there

**To help us achieve this goal, in 2024/25 we plan to take the following actions:**

- Publish and promote the commitments we have made in our new Customer Service Strategy for our organisation;
- Conduct an external benchmarking exercise to understand our strengths and weaknesses as an organisation, and provide a baseline upon which we can build;
- Join the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) in 2024 to help support our journey to becoming a customer centric organisation;
- Establish a panel of residents and representatives from business with whom we can work to design, test and learn when developing new products or services, putting the voice of our users central to all our change delivery activity;
- Review and better understand the current set of standards and service levels offered between different services, then work with Directorates to put in place changes so that residents receive a consistent service regardless of how they contact us;
- Internally recognise and celebrate high quality customer service provided by our staff, contributing to embedding a culture of excellent customer services across the whole organisation;
- Regularly reporting key measures of performance of our customer services across the whole organisation to our Performance Theme Board for constructive feedback and challenge from our elected Members;
- Review our Customer Service Standards and publish a new Customer Charter, setting out what residents, businesses and stakeholders can expect from us when they contact us regardless of channel or service (see Appendix 1).





**In the longer term by 2026/27, we plan to:**

- Standardise our non-specialist services across the council, creating a single front door for mostly low value, high volume transactional type activity. These are paper, telephone and email-based contact;
- Review our shared telephone numbers and voicemail, making sure that residents have clear and simple access to services, rationalising where possible to reduce complexity;
- Audit the number of shared email addresses/inboxes with a view to ensure they are managed consistently and appropriately, so that emails are responded to effectively;
- Introduce ‘mystery shopping’ exercises to give us feedback on how we’re doing so that we can respond and improve on things when they fall short of our agreed standards;
- Provide professional training, learning and support to all our workforce who interact with customers members of the public, helping us to professionalise and recognise this as a dedicated profession at the council;
- Review our major contracts with suppliers and ensure commissioned services are managing customer service outcomes effectively;
- Work towards achieving ServiceMark accreditation with The Institute of Customer Service (ICS);
- Put in place with services mechanisms for receiving regular customer feedback, specifically using existing tools (like CitizenSpace) for measuring our customers’ satisfaction with the quality of all our front facing services and using feedback to understand how best we can improve the service.



### 4.1 Where we are now

Our customers should be able to access our services when they are needed, at a time appropriate to them, rather than when it suits the council.

Too many of our services are only available during office working hours, making it difficult for some people to access those services.

We also tend to rely on telephony as the primary mode of communication for residents, as well as issuing formal letters from the council, which are both costly channels to maintain.

Residents too often need to navigate how the council is organised to speak to the right person, when ideally the information should be readily available on our website, organised by specific need rather than the service that delivers it.

### 4.2 Where we want to be

We can use and deploy the latest developments in digital, data and other technologies (including artificial intelligence) that will help us better serve our customers and better meet their needs.

When we provide a service online it is available 24 hours 7 days a week and when designed well can help resident interact with us simply and easily, allowing them to get on with their lives.

***We also want to invest in our people so that they have the skills and confidence to know what ‘excellent customer service’ looks like and how it can be delivered.***

This will take time and investment, but it has the added benefit that it will also contribute to developing our workforce with the skills we all need for the future.

### 4.3 How we will get there

**To help us achieve this goal, in 2024/25 we plan to take the following actions:**

- Explore how to introduce new channels, including text and online chat, as well as video support for customers;
- Ensure every service is accessible to all customers via relevant channels including with text, chat, as well as online;
- Where our services are face to face, provide excellent accessible facilities and maintain our buildings and grounds to the best standards possible;





- Explore the introduction of regular notifications for customers e.g. text and email reminders, information about appointments, progress updates and more for all services;
- Review the services we deliver at our Reception Centre at the Town Hall for those who need it most;
- Decommission Skype for Business as our current telephony solution and migrate to MS Teams telephony for the organisation;
- Rollout CaseTracker as a solution for all complaints and for member enquiries, allowing us to track our performance against internal SLAs;
- Develop a hybrid contact centre model, and support Town Hall reception with F2F service;
- Promote the safe use and adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and techniques, within a recognised ethical framework, that will enhance staff work productivity and creativity, especially for routine tasks like writing plain English letters and other communications.

### **In the longer term by 2026/27, we plan to:**

- Invest in a modern corporate telephony platform so that we can track and monitor phone calls, and provide feedback to staff when things go wrong;
- Deploy automated call handling and virtual agents for simple transactions;
- Explore options for leveraging our investment in our Microsoft Dynamics D365 platform so that increase the availability of self-service channels e.g. promote online booking and payment services, helping us reduce internal administration costs;
- Publish our performance data openly, ensuring we can be accountable to the public and the rest of the Council;
- Automate more of our routine service requests and processes so that they are simple and easy to use, and they reduce the volume of calls to our Customer Contact Centre;
- Make our response levels clear to residents so that they know the service performance levels they can expect for the channel they are using.

## 5. Providing an improved customer experience to all Council services, information and advice

### 5.1 Where we are now

Too much of our current information is hard to find on our website or is written in a very technical, jargon-filled way that is not easy for customers to understand or use.

Our website is now looking dated and is very heavy on the written word. It is overdue a refresh and would benefit from a fresh look and feel for the new administration. We also need to remove old and out of date content which is not helpful to users of our website.

### 5.2 Where we want to be

We need to move away from internal speak in all our customer facing material and spend more time publishing content from a customer's perspective. We also need to have one tone of voice when interacting with customers and drive up the quality of our written communications to customers.

***We want our customers to be able to find the right information on our website easily and quickly, and only contact us when they really need to do.***

### 5.3 How we will get there

**To achieve this goal, in 2024/25 we plan to take the following actions:**

- Remove old and out of date content from our website;
- Refresh our corporate website, moving to a new, modern template for the council, acting as a “single front door” for our core services;
- Provide advice and guidance to colleagues about how to write customer friendly letters and content for the website;
- Encourage more services to test their services with end users on a regular basis, ensuring anything that is customer facing has been through some form of user testing to check for accessibility, ease of understanding and simplicity;
- Bring together our customer contact centre team and our social media teams so that we provide a better, more joined up response to feedback given to us through a wider range of channels;
- Update our style guide – setting out our communication standards, branding and tone of voice for the council - and ensure this is adopted/embedded across the whole organisation;
- Produce regular lessons learned and insight from our Complaints team, and put in place improvements for customers based on the feedback;
- Establish a new customer experience and enhancement team (CEET) to help drive forward improvements across the Council.

**In the longer term by 2026/27, we plan to:**

- Introduce a ‘single front-door’ for all customer facing services, reducing the need for service led teams to manage telephone lines or deal with initial enquiries, freeing up staff to concentrate on more complex cases;
- Professionalise our customer service roles, with a clear career pathway and recognise their skills as a dedicated profession within the Council;
- As we conduct Service Reviews, look at simplifying how residents can access our services, using digital channels where possible, and designing them around the needs of service users.



**This strategy will take three years to deliver. We recognise it will need to be deployed against a backdrop of an ever tighter financial situation for the council and where we have to make every penny count.**

***However, we believe getting customer service right first time, every time will bring significant benefits to both our residents and staff delivering services across the Borough.***

Our key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the Corporate Plan will also measure how we are performing against the missions set out in this strategy.

### 6.1 What success looks like

**If successfully implemented, the strategy should deliver the following benefits:**

- Improved customer service levels to residents, indicated by improved customer satisfaction;
- Happier, more productive and engaged staff;
- Reduced failure demand across the council - which is costly and time consuming to administer - caused by double or triple contact to us which is avoidable had we got it right first time;
- Make the organisation an attractive place to work, helping us become an employer of choice for new recruits;
- Improve trust and confidence in what the Council delivers for local taxpayers and service users; and
- Raise the profile of our organisation so that we become known as the best local authority for providing excellent customer service.

We will regularly review our planned activities and publish our progress in delivering this strategy, learning from experience about what works, and adjusting our plans if our context changes.



We remain committed, however, to providing excellent customer service levels to all our residents, businesses and stakeholders for the lifetime of this strategy and beyond.

### Customer Service Standards

All our staff commit to delivering excellent standards of customer service and meeting customer expectations.

#### Our service

When you contact us we aim to:

- treat you in a friendly, fair and professional manner
- provide well trained and knowledgeable staff
- provide accurate and clear information in response to your enquiries
- deliver what we promise, dealing with any problems that may arise and keep you informed of any delay
- use plain language and not use jargon
- respect your rights to confidentiality, privacy and safety and provide a private area for confidential enquiries
- provide you with easy access to our services
- actively listen to our customers and use feedback to improve the services and products we provide now and in the future

#### Contacting us online

You can access most of our services and products online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When you self-serve we aim to:

- make sure all information on our website is up to date
- ensure our website and online processes are clear, quick and easy to use
- provide you with information on how long it will take to resolve your query
- use your feedback to improve our website



### Contacting us by email or letter

#### When you write to us, we aim to:

- provide an acknowledgement within 2 working day for emails
- give you details of who is dealing with your enquiry
- respond to your enquiry within 10 working days.
- tell you when we cannot respond fully within 10 working days and tell you when we will be able to respond

### Contacting us by telephone

#### If you need to contact us by phone, we aim to:

- resolve your enquiry or service request the first time you contact us. When this is not possible, we will inform you of the service that will help you and how long it will take to resolve your query
- advise you how and when you can access services online
- provide you with the name and department you are speaking to
- answer your call within 60 seconds

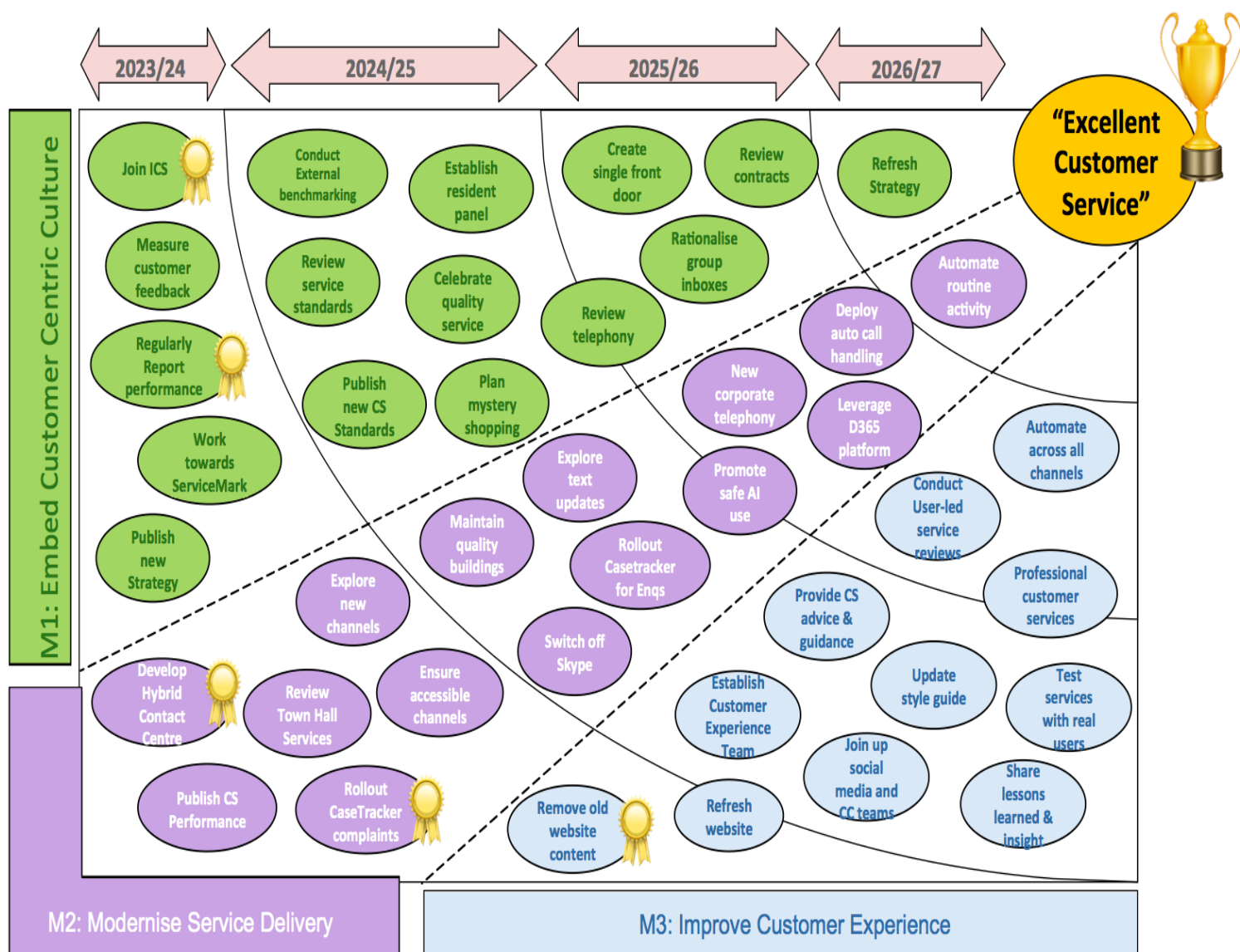
We record some calls for training and monitoring purposes.

### Contacting us in person

#### If you need to visit us, we aim to:

- direct you quickly and efficiently to the right person
  - ensure that our reception areas are accessible and welcoming at all times
  - make an appointment for you where appropriate
  - assist you if you have communication or access needs
- When we visit you we will keep to pre-arranged appointments and show you our identification.

# Customer Service Strategy Roadmap





## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD 30 July 2024

**Subject Heading:**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RULES –  
EXCEPTIONS TO THE CALL-IN  
(REQUISITION) PROCEDURE**

**ELT Lead:**

**Gavin Milnthorpe, Monitoring Officer**

**Report Author and contact details:**

**Jacqui Barr, Governance Officer**  
[Jacqui.barr@onesource.co.uk](mailto:Jacqui.barr@onesource.co.uk)

**Policy context:**

**Compliance and Transparency**

**Financial summary:**

While there were financial implications around the decisions described in this report, there are none directly associated with this report.

### **The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - Enabling a resident-focused and resilient Council      X

## SUMMARY

This report details Key Decisions that have been taken in the circumstances set out in Rule 18 (exemption to the call-in (requisition) procedure) for the six month period covering 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

- 1) Tithe Barn National Highways Company Funding Application
- 2) Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme Grant acceptance and Delivery Approval
- 3) To enter into the Mayor's Care & Support Fund Contract with the Greater London Authority to support the development of the Mawney Close and Mowbrays Close developments

This represents a significant decrease in the number of decisions taken under Urgency Provisions in comparison with the period from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023, when there were nine matters exempted from call-in.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the report be noted.

## REPORT DETAIL

- 1 Rule 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules provides that:
  - (a) **The call-in procedure shall not apply where a decision being taken by Cabinet or an individual Cabinet member, or a key decision made by a member of staff is urgent. A decision will be urgent if any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public interests. The record of the decision and notice by which it is made shall state whether in the opinion of the decision making person or body, the decision is an urgent one, and therefore not subject to call-in.**
  - (b) **The decision making person or body can only take an urgent decision under (a) above and avoid the call-in procedures after obtaining agreement from the Chairman of the Board that the decision be treated as urgent.**

2. On behalf of Cabinet, the Strategic Director of Place, sought agreement from the Chairman of the Board to exempt from call-in a key decision by the Leader of the Council concerning an application for £650,000 grant funding.
  - 2.1 The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board, Councillor Gerry O' Sullivan, gave his agreement to the exemption from call-in for the following reason:
  - 2.2 The National Highways Company offered the Council a grant for remedial works on the Tithe Barn in Upminster, a Scheduled Ancient Monument that is at high risk of deterioration. The terms of the grant required essential improvements to be complete by March 2025. In order to meet the tight work schedule and avoid further damage to the fabric of the building, call-in was waived so that spending could take place straightaway.
3. On behalf of Cabinet, the Assistant Director of Education, sought agreement from the Chairman of the Board to exempt from call-in a key decision by the S151 Officer concerning the acceptance of £1million grant funding from the Department for Education.
  - 3.1 The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board, Councillor Gerry O' Sullivan, gave his agreement to the exemption from call-in for the following reason:
  - 3.2 The Department for Education confirmed the award of grant funding by letter on the 24<sup>th</sup> November, with the requirement to accept and confirm the Memorandum of Understanding by the 30<sup>th</sup> November. As the decision to proceed contributed positively to the Council's financial position and presented a way to mitigate increasing costs on the SEND budget, call-in was waived in order to meet the deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> November.
4. On behalf of Cabinet, the Strategic Director of Place, sought agreement from the Chairman of the Board to exempt from call-in a key decision by the S151 Officer concerning the acceptance of £2.03million supported housing grant funding from the Greater London Assembly.
  - 4.1 The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board, Councillor Gerry O' Sullivan, gave his agreement to the exemption from call-in for the following reason:
  - 4.2 The Council was advised by The GLA on 13<sup>th</sup> March that the funding agreement must be accepted, and first grant claim made by 28<sup>th</sup> March, which was the last working day of the financial year 2023/24.

Failure to meet this deadline would result in the withdrawal of funding. Under normal governance arrangements, the decision was due to be made on 18<sup>th</sup> April. Since accepting the funding was in the Council's best interests, call-in was waived in order that the report could be expedited and meet the 28<sup>th</sup> March deadline.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:** There are no direct implications associated with this report.

**Legal implications and risks:** There are no immediate legal implications directly associated with this report.

**Human Resources implications and risks:** There are none directly associated with this report.

**Equalities implications and risks:** There are none directly associated with this report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

There are none directly associated with this report.