



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD AGENDA

7.00 pm

**Thursday
3 July 2025**

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

Members 12: Quorum 5

COUNCILLORS:

Conservative Group (3)

Dilip Patel
Keith Prince
David Taylor

Labour Group (2)

Mandy Anderson
Matthew Stanton

Residents' Association Independent Group (1)

Philip Ruck

Havering Residents' Group (5)

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

East Havering Residents (1)

Martin Goode

For information about the meeting please contact:

**Anthony Clements 01708 433065
anthony.clements@oneSource.co.uk**

Please would all Members and officers attending ensure they sit in their allocated seats as this will enable correct identification of participants on the meeting webcast.

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.

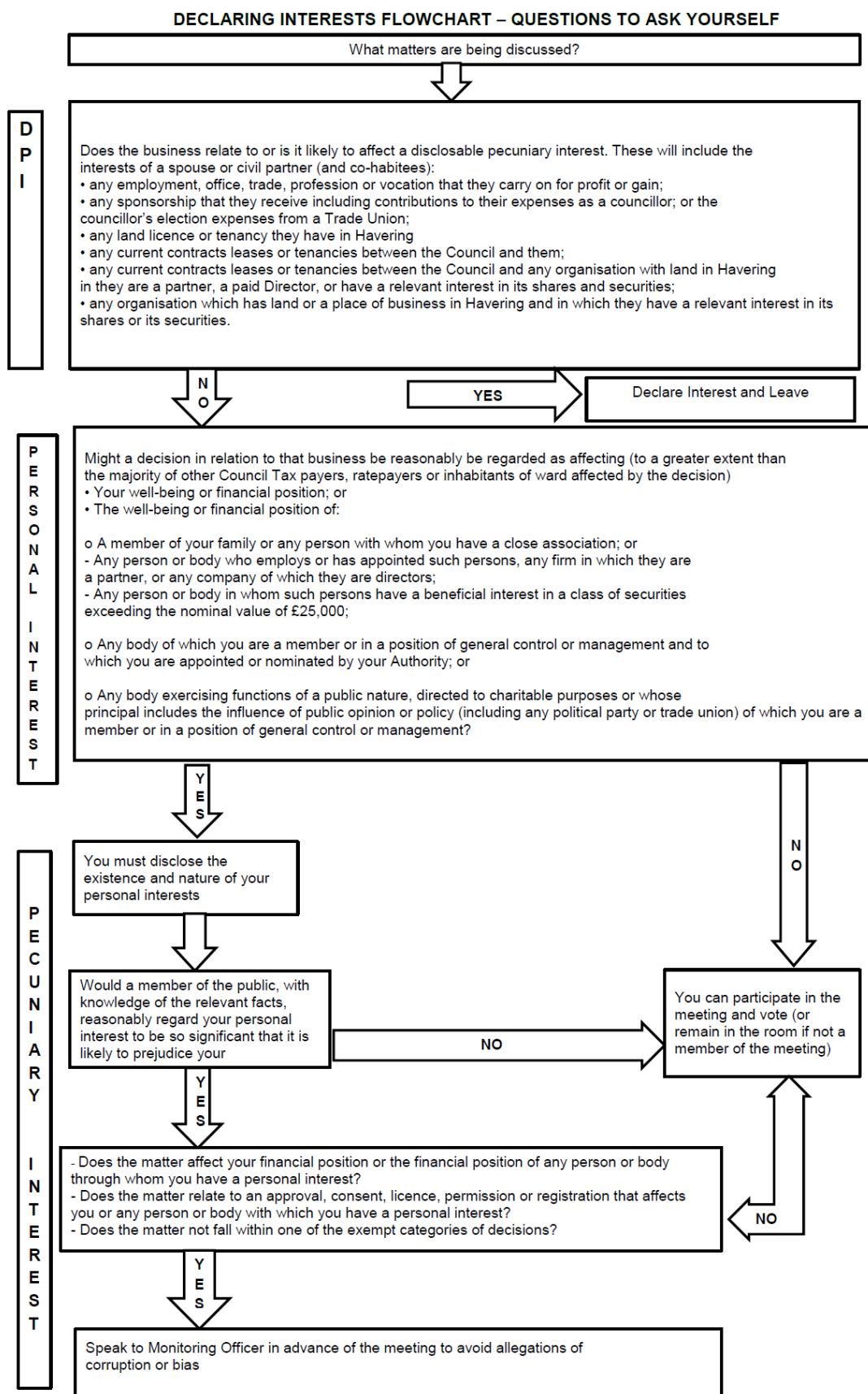
The Overview and Scrutiny Board acts as a vehicle by which the effectiveness of scrutiny is monitored and where work undertaken by themed sub-committees can be coordinated to avoid duplication and to ensure that areas of priority are being reviewed. The Board also scrutinises general management matters 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
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Principles of conduct in public office

In accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, when acting in the capacity of a Member, they are committed to behaving in a manner that is consistent with the following principles to achieve best value for the Borough's residents and to maintain public confidence in the Council.

SELFLESSNESS: Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

INTEGRITY: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

OBJECTIVITY: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

OPENNESS: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

HONESTY: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

LEADERSHIP: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

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

Apologies have been received from Councillors Mandy Anderson and Laurance Garrard.

To receive any other apologies for absence.

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 - 14)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 16 April 2025 (attached) and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

5 SAVINGS PROGRESS UPDATE (Pages 15 - 26)

Report attached.

6 CORPORATE HR METRICS - AGENCY WORKERS AND SICKNESS ABSENCE (Pages 27 - 52)

Report attached.

7 UPDATE - CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY (Pages 53 - 62)

Report attached.

8 ANNUAL REPORT 2024/45 (Pages 63 - 70)

Report attached.

Zena Smith
Head of Committee and Election Services

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
16 April 2025 (7.00 - 9.40 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Dilip Patel, Keith Prince and David Taylor
Havering Residents' Group	Laurance Garrard (Chairman), David Godwin, Christine Smith, Bryan Vincent and Julie Wilkes (Vice-Chair)
Labour Group	Jane Keane and Matthew Stanton
East Havering Residents' Group	Martin Goode
Residents' Association	Philip Ruck
Independent Group	

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

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillors Mandy Anderson (Jane Keane substituting) and Philippa Crowder (Christine Smith substituting).

31 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

5. HAVERING VOLUNTEER CENTRE.

Councillor Christine Smith, Personal, Former volunteer with Havering Volunteer Centre.

5. HAVERING VOLUNTEER CENTRE.

Councillor Jane Keane, Personal, Trustee of beneficiary of volunteers from Havering Volunteer Centre - Havering Museum.

32 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 29 January 2025 and 13 February 2025 were before the Committee for approval.

It was noted that apologies on 29 January were received from Councillor Dilip Patel rather than Councillor Nisha Patel.

A misspelling in the name of Councillor Jane Keane in the minutes of 13 February was also noted.

Other than the items above, the minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33 HAVERING VOLUNTEER CENTRE

The Head of Communities explained that no other organisation in the borough covered the work of the Havering Volunteer Centre (HVC). Many volunteers at the Wennington fires had been from the HVC and the current £56k Council funding was a relatively small amount. It was important that Havering had a sufficient number of volunteers.

The Chief Executive Officer of the HVC felt that the organisation did represent value for money. The HVC was careful with its resources and in 2024/25 had in excess of 7,000 volunteers on its books. A food bank was also operated. The volunteer hours supplied also constituted a cost saving to the borough. The volunteers supplied at the new St George's Medical Hub in Hornchurch had been recognised as a UK flagship model of volunteering.

The provision of the existing Havering grant also helped the HVC to attract further external funding. The HVC's current reserves were £86k with income of £160k and expenditure of £179k. The shortfall was being covered by reserves.

Should the Council funding end, HVC officers felt that its services would likely have to cease, putting pressure on other services. There would also be a loss of community cohesion. The proposed Council Giving Scheme would also be unlikely to succeed without support from the HVC.

The HVC was the only such organisation in Havering and only the HVC was able to produce this standard and capacity of volunteering.

It was clarified that the HVC did not have a lease on its premises, operating instead under a tenancy at will. The level of rent was approximately £12k per year. A Member felt that HVC should be given a longer lease on its premises.

There had not been any approach from the Council for HVC to assess social value in planning applications although HVC officers were keen to explore this in more detail.

Officers explained that the most vulnerable in the community – the elderly and the young would be affected if HVC reduced its services. Some people volunteered in order to boost their health and wellbeing and around 500 people had entered employment as a direct result of volunteering. If the Council grant was to be withdrawn, there was a possibility that the HVC could be wound up within six months.

Members felt that further information should be provided on the level of rent that HVC would be charged and whether this was likely to increase. Officers added that the rent charged by the Council had not increased since 2015 and the Head of Property Services was looking at alternative properties for the HVC.

A Member felt that the work the HVC had undertaken during the pandemic had been vital and that resources should not be taken away from the organisation. The HVC did a lot of outreach work in the community and recruited many skilled volunteers at job fairs etc. This could not take place if Council funding was withdrawn. If further funding was available, more people or organisations could be reached and health inequalities could also be addressed.

The current HVC location generated a lot of footfall and the premises also allowed the Carers Hub, Age UK and a Ukraine refugees group to operate in the borough. These tenants generated around £20k in room hire charges but the premises outgoings exceeded this at around £28.5k. The HVC would prefer a longer grant funding arrangement which would give more security to its operation. It was noted that the overall local government finance settlement was itself only for one year.

The HVC did receive some NHS funding for its volunteers at the St George's Health Hub. Match funding had also been used in the past. It was clarified that the HVC was registered for gift aid but that donations received were not of the type that qualified for gift aid.

The proposed rent increase was in line with market levels but a Member felt that a discount on this should be given to the HVC. Council funding for the HVC had previously come from underspends in other areas but officers felt this would be more difficult to achieve this year. Members recorded their thanks to the Council's Head of Communities for ensuring continuity of funding to the HVC. Members therefore felt that any underspend in other community engagement areas should be given to the HVC.

A Member was disappointed that funding had been released to Havering Citizens Advice without the information the Board had requested from the organisation having been supplied. Officers clarified that the HVC was not sub-letting its premises but allowing some of its rooms to be used by other charities. The HVC offered a referral rather than signposting service.

Members thought there should be more clarity from the Cabinet regarding where the HVC sat within the Council's voluntary sector strategy. HVC officers felt that the continuing of funding from the Council showed commitment and would encourage further funding from other organisations. It was also suggested that the Council should champion the role of the HVC and use its connections with local businesses to contribute to voluntary sector funding.

It was clarified that the HVC had not been informed of the rent level for their proposed alternative premises and had not yet seen inside the site. There would be costs associated with the move and the HVC did not have any funding for this. Some Members questioned whether the HVC needed a High Street location.

Members felt full details of any alternative site and the associated costs should be provided to the HVC as soon as possible. Members also expressed disappointment that the Cabinet Member was not present at the meeting and felt that Cabinet Members should be present at future scrutiny meetings. Cabinet should also commit to continuing its funding for the HVC and make clear its vision for volunteering in Havering.

HVC were happy to explore the potential donation of land for their premises by large developers as part of social responsibilities. The HVC did already engage with local businesses for the recruitment of volunteers. The presence of the other organisations such as Age UK and the Carers Hub on the same site did allow synergies and more effective engagement of volunteers. The uncertainty over funding meant the HVC could only offer one year contracts to staff, making recruitment difficult.

Around 20 walk-ins were received by the HVC each week looking for volunteering opportunities. People also called in to engage with the other services on the site.

The HVC had originally been given four weeks to pay an increased level of rent or leave the premises. Members felt that the treatment of the HVC during this period had been unacceptable but noted that the position had now been addressed. The Board felt that any rent charged to HVC be at less than market levels. It was also felt that, if possible, funding should be confirmed to the HVC over a longer time period. It was accepted however that this would require a longer term settlement for the Council from Central Government. The Council could also investigate alternative funding methods such as use of Neighbourhood Levies or the Community Infrastructure Levies. The introduction of a Neighbourhood Plan for Romford could facilitate support to the overall voluntary sector.

The Board agreed that the HVC offered value for money and that there were not any alternative organisations that could undertake the HVC's role.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board **AGREED** the following recommendations:

- 1. That the HVC be given a longer term lease on their current location.**
- 2. The Council should not ask the HVC to leave their current premises for a period of at least 18 months.**
- 3. Whilst noting the remedial action taken by senior officers, the Board condemns as unacceptable the previous poor treatment**

and language used by some Council officers when communicating with HVC staff.

4. Further detail should be given on the specific level of the rent increase to be applied. This should be at a lower level than current market rents.
5. Details of the proposed alternative site for the HVC that has been identified by the Council, including levels of associated costs, should be supplied to the HVC as a matter of urgency. The Board finds it unacceptable that the HVC should have been given four weeks notice to leave without a costed alternative being provided. The Board notes that this position has now been addressed.
6. The possibility of a charitable donation of premises to HVC should be explored.
7. Any underspend in the community engagement budget should be passed to the HVC.
8. Cabinet should make clear its vision for volunteering/the voluntary sector in Havering and where the HVC sits within this.
9. The Council should make proactive efforts to obtain increased funding and support for the voluntary sector from local businesses and partner organisations.
10. Cabinet should commit to continue current funding (as a minimum) for the HVC.
11. Information should be provided as to whether any other tenancies of voluntary organisations are at risk due to the position with the HVC premises.
12. If Council funding arrangements allow, certainty of funding for the HVC should be given for a period of at least three years.
13. The Council should explore the introduction of a neighbourhood plan for Romford as this would allow a Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy to fund the HVC.
14. Cabinet is asked to support the view of the Board that the HVC provides good value for money.

34 **REVIEW OF BOARD'S WORK AND CONSIDERATION OF WORK PROGRAMME**

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer asked the Board to look back at its performance over the previous year and begin to consider its work programme for the coming year. Good scrutiny from elsewhere could be identified from the recent survey undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Key issues for scrutiny to address had been identified as resource constraints, level of community engagement and the difficulty of measuring the impact of scrutiny. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness of scrutiny could include holding meetings away from the Town Hall and seeking to ensure increased levels of attendance and participation from the public. It was suggested that a young people's scrutiny session could take place, perhaps meeting in a school during the day.

Responses from the Cabinet to scrutiny recommendations could be reported to scrutiny at a future meeting. It was felt important that Cabinet Members should attend scrutiny meetings if scrutiny was to be effective. Members also that the scrutiny work plans and associated scopes should be set as early as possible.

Feedback was needed from Cabinet on what scrutiny recommendations would be taken forward. Members felt it would also assist if the Board or OSSC Chair and Vice-Chair could present scrutiny recommendations at scrutiny meetings. Cabinet responses to call-in comments should also be circulated to all members of the Board and other signatories.

Discussions on improving the scrutiny process had taken place between the Statutory Scrutiny Officer and the Chair of the Board with for example pre-meets being introduced as a result of these discussions. Members felt it would assist if reports could reach them say, two weeks before a meeting in order that papers could be reviewed in more detail.

The Board **AGREED** the following recommendations for response by Cabinet:

1. **The relevant Cabinet Member should be required to attend each meeting of the Board or Sub-Committees where there is an item relevant to their portfolios.**
2. **All Cabinet responses to scrutiny recommendations or comments should be included as an agenda item at the next scrutiny meeting.**
3. **Comments and recommendations to Cabinet should be presented at the Cabinet meeting by the Chairman and Vice-Chair of the Board or relevant Sub-Committee.**

4. Cabinet responses to scrutiny comments on called-in decisions should be circulated to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board as well as other Members supporting the call-in.
5. Cabinet supports the Board's request for scrutiny reports to be received two weeks ahead of publication as this will facilitate earlier pre-meets and general consideration of the material.
6. That Cabinet supports the Board reviewing its work programme and its ongoing efforts to make the scrutiny process as effective as possible.
7. That a protocol be developed for working practices between Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Board including, but not limited to, the issues outlined in the recommendations above.

Chairman

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD, 3 JULY 2025

Subject Heading:	Update on delivery of 2025/26 Savings and final position on 2024/25 savings
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chris Wilkins (Cabinet Member for Finance)
ELT Lead:	Kathy Freeman Strategic Director of Resources
Report Author and contact details:	Richard Tyler Head of Financial Strategy and Business Intelligence 01708 433 957 Richard.Tyler@Havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	The report provides an update on the progress towards delivering the Savings set out in the 2025/26 budget
Financial summary:	This report includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirmation of the final position on 2024/25 savings• Update on the 2025/26 budget Savings• Tables setting out progress on each saving for 2025/26
Is this a Key Decision?	No

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on progress towards delivering the savings agreed at Council in February 2025 when setting the 2025/26 budget. The budget for 25/26 included £10.254m of savings to be delivered in 25/26. The Council however was unable to balance its budget in the normal way even with this level of savings, a 4.99% Council Tax increase and increased government grant. The budget was balanced using a £88.0m capitalisation direction provisionally agreed with the Government in February 2025.
- 1.2 The Council is doing everything it can to minimise costs despite years of underfunding from central Government. The Government are committed to funding reform and multi year settlements from 2026/27 onwards and whilst it is hoped that this will help the Council's financial position delivery of the savings included in the current budget is essential to help close the Council's financial gap. This report sets out progress on the delivery of the savings to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Overview and Scrutiny members are asked to note the progress towards delivering the 2025/26 savings as set out in this report and tables

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Havering is an efficient Council with low unit costs for most services compared to its neighbours. The Council has in recent years experienced financial difficulties due to underfunding from central Government in comparison to the pressures the Council is facing. It is nationally recognised that national funding for Social Care has fallen significantly behind the rising demand and costs local authorities are experiencing. For Havering this is compounded by the failure of the previous Government to update its distribution formula resulting in Havering receiving up to £10m less grant a year than it should have received with a fairer distribution
- 3.2 This position has developed over a number of years and has resulted in Havering setting its 2025/26 budget including a £88m capitalisation directive. As part of the budget process the Council reviewed all its services to identify efficiencies, savings and areas where increased fees could be applied. This process produced savings totalling £10.250m which were applied to the budget to reduce the gap to the level agreed in the capitalisation order
- 3.3 These savings underpin the 2025/26 budget and will be closely monitored throughout the year as part of the budget monitoring process. The Council's budget position is reported to cabinet on a quarterly basis including progress on savings. This report provides an initial view on those savings for review at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. REVIEW OF 2024/25 SAVINGS - OUTTURN

- 4.1. In setting the 2024/25 budget the Council included £15.3m of revenue savings to be delivered. The majority of these savings were fully delivered as can be seen in the table below.

Table 1: Savings Delivery

Directorate	Savings Delivered (£m)	Savings Delayed (£m)	Savings not achieved (£m)	Total (£m)
Resources	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.9
People	2.8	2.0	1.5	6.3
Place	1.7	0.7	0.5	2.9
Corporate	4.9	0.3	0.0	5.2
TOTAL	10.3	3.0	2.0	15.3

- 4.2. A number of savings however were not achieved and the resultant overspend was included within the revenue outturn position. Some of these savings proposals are simply delayed and will be achieved in 2025/26 whilst others will not be delivered. The savings which will not be delivered have been written out of the 2025/26 budget with departments asked to contain spend in a sustainable fashion within their assigned budgets in order to achieve this. The table below sets out the savings have not been achieved together with the reasons behind this

Table 2: Savings not achieved 2024/25

Saving	Saving £m	Reason
Full review of Early Help Provision	0.420	One of the recommendations of the OFSTED report was further investment in Early Help and prevention. As such this saving was not actioned
Acquisition of property jointly to relieve Temporary Accommodation Pressures	0.300	The Council is still progressing the acquisition of properties and has a further savings target in 2025/26. It is recognised however that this saving was not achieved in 2024/25 and should not be added to the target for 25/26
Alternate Weekly Collections & Containerisation	0.150	The Council has not progressed AWC at this stage. It is fully recognised that the benefits of recycling and waste minimisation will directly impact the disposal levy from 2028 onwards and as

		such all options to help achieve this will be considered moving forward
Better Living	0.360	The better living programme uses a strength based approach when reviewing care to increase independence and reduce reliance on care and has delivered considerable savings over the last few years. The total saving for 2024/25 was £1m of which £635k was achieved. There is a further savings target in 2025/26 and it is recognised that adding the shortfall to future years is unrealistic.
Review of social care provider services (Adults)	0.500	This was linked to building/buying residential care settings and commissioning a provider to deliver services. The Council continues to look at ways to provide care for Adults but it is recognised that this saving will not be delivered
Targetted Reviews	0.270	The savings target for 2024/25 was £1.1m of which £830k has been delivered. This relates to a review of high cost placements across both living and ageing well. There is a further savings target in 2025/26 and it is recognised that adding the shortfall to future years is unrealistic.
Savings Unachieved and written out	2.000	

5. UPDATE ON THE 2025/26 SAVINGS

- 5.1. The Council agreed £10.254m of savings for 2025/26 as part of the budget setting process in February 2025. The table's attached to this report provide an update on the current status of all those savings. The table below summarises this by department. It should be noted that many savings particularly in People Services are Amber not because they won't be delivered but rather as they are dependent on actions during the year to full achieve the saving.

Table 3: Summary Savings Position

Savings Delivery	Green (£m)	Amber (£m)	Red (£m)	Total (£m)
Resources	0.730	0.070	0.000	0.800
People	0.520	3.473	1.346	5.339
Place	0.070	0.100	0.000	0.170
Corporate	3.445	0.500	0.000	3.945
TOTAL	4.765	4.143	1.346	10.254

- 5.2. The savings are classified as Green Amber or Red. These classifications are based on the following positions

Green Savings are either already delivered or fully on track with no anticipated complications to full delivery

Amber savings are not yet fully delivered but it is still possible that the saving will be fully delivered. These savings generally require further work during the course year to deliver and so have an element of doubt as to whether they will be fully delivered.

- Red Savings are not on track or delayed and unlikely to be delivered in 2025/26

Officers will make every effort to deliver all of the savings and these categorisations will change as plans are developed during the year. Where savings will not be delivered departments will firstly look to identify alternative measures to keep within budget but will also report through the monitoring process any shortfall in savings. This will then be picked up and included in both the Councils projected outturn position and also medium term planning moving forwards

- 5.3. Whilst the table shows £4.8m rated as green at the moment the full expectation is that the amber savings will be largely delivered as well. The Council will work hard to achieve as many of these savings as possible. Some savings will be through cost avoidance by reducing pressures in the service via moving users to alternative provision which is better financially for the Council.
- 5.4 The Council is currently reviewing its 2026-2030 medium term financial strategy. An update to this strategy will be reported to cabinet in the autumn and will include both a further update on the implications of any non delivery of 2025/26 savings together with new efficiencies and proposals for both 2026/27 and future years

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF NON DELIVERY OF SAVINGS

- 6.1. Non delivery of savings will lead to an in year overspend and where the saving is stopped a pressure to be built into the following years MTFS. If savings are identified as unachievable during the year Departments will be expected to form action plans to reduce spend and identify efficiencies to mitigate the saving.

Summary of savings projected delivery - CORPORATE

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
Redirection of Agency Levy	1.300 Green 0.200 Amber	An agency levy has been applied to staffing costs for a number of years. This was historically passed to the pension fund but is now re-directed to support the general fund position. The Council has reduced its agency numbers significantly in the last year and as such there is a risk this will result in a slightly lower value for the saving
Business Rate Pool with Thurrock and LBBD	0.900 Green 0.300 Amber	This saving is through the pool resulting in a £4m saving in Government levy costs across the three boroughs. Havering's share was originally estimated at £1.2m based on the boroughs NNDR estimates. The Outturn position for 2024/25 has identified that through reliefs and Appeals Thurrocks business rate yield is lower which reduces the levy value offset by the pool. The knock on effect is a reduced benefit for Havering and LBBD which is estimated at £0.9m. It is possible that a greater yield in 2025/26 will recover this position
Increase empty homes premium	0.048 Green	This was implemented in April and was reflected in the Council's taxbase assumption. A review of those who received the additional charge showed the majority have paid with others returning the property to occupation

Reduce Capital Spend on roads by £1.5m in 2024/25	0.097 Green	The Council reduced its spend on roads in 2024/25 and as a result borrowed less money than it otherwise would have. The full year effect of this is a treasury saving on both borrowing and repayment which is already fully achieved in 2025/26
Review of Taxbase, Freedom pass eligibility and SPD	1.100 Green	The Council annually reviews all those entitled to single person discounts on Council Tax and also those who qualify for freedom passes to ensure these concessions are given to the write people. This saving also reflects growth in the taxbase and is fully achieved through reductions to the concessionary fares settlement in December 2024 and the agreed taxbase in the budget
Total of Budgeted Savings - CORPORATE	3.945	

Summary of savings projected delivery - RESOURCES

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
Restructure of Resources Department	0.560 Green	The restructure was fully completed in the latter part of 2024/25 and has delivered £560k of staffing savings. The new structure is fully operational and permanent recruitment has taken place to fill senior management posts which has had the additional benefit of substantially reducing the department's agency spend
Communications income and procurement initiatives	0.170 Green	Communications have significantly increased income through the JCDecaux advertising contract and a number of smaller advertising projects which have increased income including roundabouts, lampposts, street bins and carparks
Review income from advertising opportunities stretch target	0.070 Amber	A corporate review of all advertising hoardings across the borough is underway which it is hoped will generate more income opportunities. The value of this is unknown so the saving is classified as amber at the moment
Total of Budgeted Savings RESOURCES	0.800	

Summary of projected savings delivery - PEOPLE

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
Home to school transport	Green 0.500	This saving is fully on track to be delivered. There are over 150 users now on the direct payment scheme. The differential in annual cost between a direct payment and a taxi is over 10k per year. It should be noted that this is cost avoidance as the overall cost of home to school transport continues to rise through the increasing number of EHCP's
Reduction to book fund	Green 0.020	This saving is fully achieved. The book fund was subject to a one off reduction of £160k in 2024/25 but that budget has been restored and replaced with a smaller ongoing reduction
Grow shared lives	Amber 0.150	This saving is on track but is rated amber as further work is still needed over the course of the year to fully realise the saving
Reablement	Amber 0.300	This saving is on track to be delivered but actions will continue through the year so rated amber at this early stage
Increase internal fostering	Amber 0.120	This will require a net 10 placements to transfer from agency to internal. Advertising and other marketing is ongoing to attract new fostering placements
Mawney Close	Amber 0.058	8 units to support independent living which will be fully operational in the 2 nd quarter at which point there will be cost avoidance in the leaving care budget
Mowbrays Close	Amber 0.240	Development of former garage site to support independent living which will be operational this summer resulting in cost avoidance in the leaving care budget

Summary of projected savings delivery - PEOPLE

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
Better Living	Amber 1.000	This is a challenging savings target as significant Better Living savings have been delivered during the preceding two financial years. Better Living is an approach to assessing and identifying need working from a strengths-based premise. The better living approach is now considered business as usual.
Targeted Reviews - Adult Services	Amber 1.100	This target will be difficult to realise and achieve without securing the additional resources put forward as part of the adult social care restructure growth bid. Having additional capacity to intervene at an earlier stage pre the age of 18 would make this saving more achievable.
Pay to stay – paying families to keep people in their homes	Amber 0.055	This scheme will generate savings through cost avoidance in temporary accommodation. The scheme is in place and will be reviewed through the year to monitor the costs avoided
Acquisition of property jointly to relieve Temporary Accommodation Pressures	Amber 0.300	This scheme will generate savings through cost avoidance in temporary accommodation. The scheme is in place and will be reviewed through the year to monitor the costs avoided
Consult on principle of reducing the number of public libraries in the Borough – based on review of public need and change in usage	Amber 0.150	The library saving has been actioned. Ongoing work is underway across all three sites to agree next steps and any meanwhile use. The saving is achieved but there could be oneoff costs whilst future plans for the sites are agreed
Family Welcome Centre	Red 0.466	The Family Welcome centre will consist of 74 self contained units which will deliver much needed accommodation. The centre is scheduled to open in April 2026 so the saving will be delayed to 2026/27
Housing Demand	Red 0.180	This saving relates to modular units which are now unlikely to be onsite until Jan 2026 at the earliest as such the saving will be delayed to 2026/27

Summary of projected savings delivery - PEOPLE

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
In sourcing family support	Red 0.200	There are delays to the implementation of this move to an inhouse service. When recruitment is completed the cost to the external provider will cease. This saving is likely to part slip into 2026/27
Transition savings (Adults)	Red 0.500	This target will be difficult to realise and achieve without securing the additional resources put forward as part of the adult social care restructure growth bid. Having additional capacity to intervene at an earlier stage pre the age of 18 would make this saving more achievable.
Total of Budgeted Savings - PEOPLE	5.339	

Summary of projected savings delivery - PLACE

Saving	Saving £m	Actions Taken/Required
Traffic Schemes Reductions, only essential Health and Safety to be completed	Green 0.050	This is a full year effect of a saving which was successfully introduced in 2024/25
Reduce street lighting on main roads by 30%, after midnight to 5am (invest in automation)	Green 0.020	This is a full year effect of a saving which was successfully introduced in 2024/25
Encourage VCS to bear a higher proportion of their rental costs	Amber 0.027	This saving is yet to be delivered. Work is ongoing with Voluntary Organisations to review their rents moving forward
Acquisition of land and buildings from Notting Hill JV	Amber 0.073	This process is ongoing and will result in cost avoidance on temporary accommodation
Total of Budgeted Savings - PLACE	0.170	

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

3rd July 2025

Subject Heading:	Corporate HR Metrics – Agency Workers and Sickness Absence
ELT Lead:	Andrew Blake Herbert – Chief Executive
Report Author and contact details:	Joanne Budden joanne.budden@haverling.gov.uk +441708434343
Policy context:	This report provides an update on the level of spend on agency staff engaged by the Council, and levels of sickness absences for the directly employed staff in the corporate workforce.

An update from HR, following the O&S meetings held on 22nd October 2024 and 12th December 2024.

HR Metrics

(This is Havering only data – London Councils data for 2024/25 is currently being collated and will not be available until December 2025)

Matrix Agency Workers

The percentage of Matrix ¹Agency Workers in the Total Corporate Workforce has continued to fall from 17.3% (547) on 31st October 2024, to 15.4% (489) on 31st March 2025. This has since reduced to 14.7% (466) on 30th April 2025.

The spend on Matrix Agency Workers has risen over the last 3 months, mainly due to the uplift in pay rates in line with the 2024/25 pay award. Directors have been asked to review all their agency workers.

It is recognised across the directorates that agency workers have been reducing however it needs to be noted that Starting Well has seen an increase in agency workers because of the Ofsted inspection recommendations which now links to the continued improvement plan.

¹ Matrix is a neutral vendor managed service provider that helps organisations streamline and automate the process of engaging agency, temporary, and contingent staff, offering services like technology, processes, and people.

A breakdown of the Matrix agency workers over the rolling 12 months is attached.
See **Appendix 1**

Following the subsequent discussion at the January Cabinet meeting regarding the extent to which “cover for Long Term Sickness Absence” was a driver for the engagement of Matrix Agency Workers, HR&OD were asked to provide a report identifying the engagement reasons for all those current Matrix Agency Workers across the Council.

As at the end of February 2025, there were 488 Agency Workers engaged via the Council’s Agency Worker supplier (Matrix). A breakdown of the reasons for their engagement is shown in the table below.

Engagement Reason	Number	%
Cover for Long Term Sickness	2	0.4
Cover for Acting Up	1	0.2
Cover for Secondment	13	2.7
Cover of Other Long Term Absence	5	1.0
Filling a Vacancy (i.e. no substantive post holder)	256	52.5
Other	211	43.2
Total	488	100.0

From managers’ additional comments re the 211 “Other” engagement reasons it would appear that an additional 178 engagement reasons related to “Filling a Vacancy” (i.e. where there was no substantive post holder).

Using that information, a revised breakdown of the reasons for the engagement of the 488 Agency Workers as at the end of February is shown in the table below.

Engagement Reason	Number	%
Cover for Long Term Sickness	4	0.8
Cover for Acting Up	1	0.2
Cover for Secondment	13	2.7
Cover of Other Long Term Absence	5	1.0
Filling a Vacancy (i.e. no substantive postholder)	434	88.9
Other	31	6.4
Total	488	100.0

Conclusion

It is clear from the information provided by managers that:

- cover for long term sickness absence is a very minor driver for the engagement of Agency Workers
- the most significant driver for the engagement of Agency Workers is cover for a vacant post (where there is no substantive post holder)

Off-Framework Agency Workers

Colleagues in Finance and Procurement ran a transaction listing and purchase order (PO) report from Fusion that captured the 2024/25 spend against the agency and consultancy fees subjective codes. This resulted in a very small number (8) of off-framework contingent workers being identified. However, it was apparent that there were other off-framework contingent workers who could not be identified due to a lack of detail in the description entered on the PO.

In order to drilldown deeper, a task has been included in the 2025/26 STAR CHAMBERS process whereby each Director must review the spend in relation to agency and consultancy fees and ensure that every PO includes a meaningful description of what service is being provided, by whom, the duration and projected value of the contract etc. and attach all relevant invoices and approvals.

Once that exercise has been completed, the information will be shared to HR to include those off-framework contingent workers in future workforce data reports.

Sickness Absences

Sickness Absences

Sickness has continued to reduce over the past 12 months, with the average number of sick days per employee falling from 10.8 days at 31st March 2024, to 10.2 days at 31st March 2025. It has fallen further to 9.9 days at 30th April 2025. We are hopeful that this will continue to fall as focus and proactive interventions are now in place.

*A breakdown of this is provided in **Appendix 2***

Sickness Reasons

In response to a request from members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, for more granular information to explain sickness absences, a review of the sickness reasons was undertaken and subsequently a revised list of sickness reasons was implemented on 1st April 2025. These new sickness reasons provide that more granular information, whilst making it easier for managers to more accurately record sickness absences and focus the right proactive interventions to support team individuals with absent management. This information is provided in **Appendix 2a**

Cost of Sickness

After identifying an issue with the Fusion calculation of the cost of sickness, the re-calibrated cost for the rolling 12 months ending 31st October 2024 was circa £3.2m (down from the original figure of circa £5.1m). The cost of sickness has remained

within £3.1m to £3.3m in the last 6 months. The 2024/25 pay award was implemented in Q3 hence why there was a slight increase in the cost. Please see **Appendix 2b**

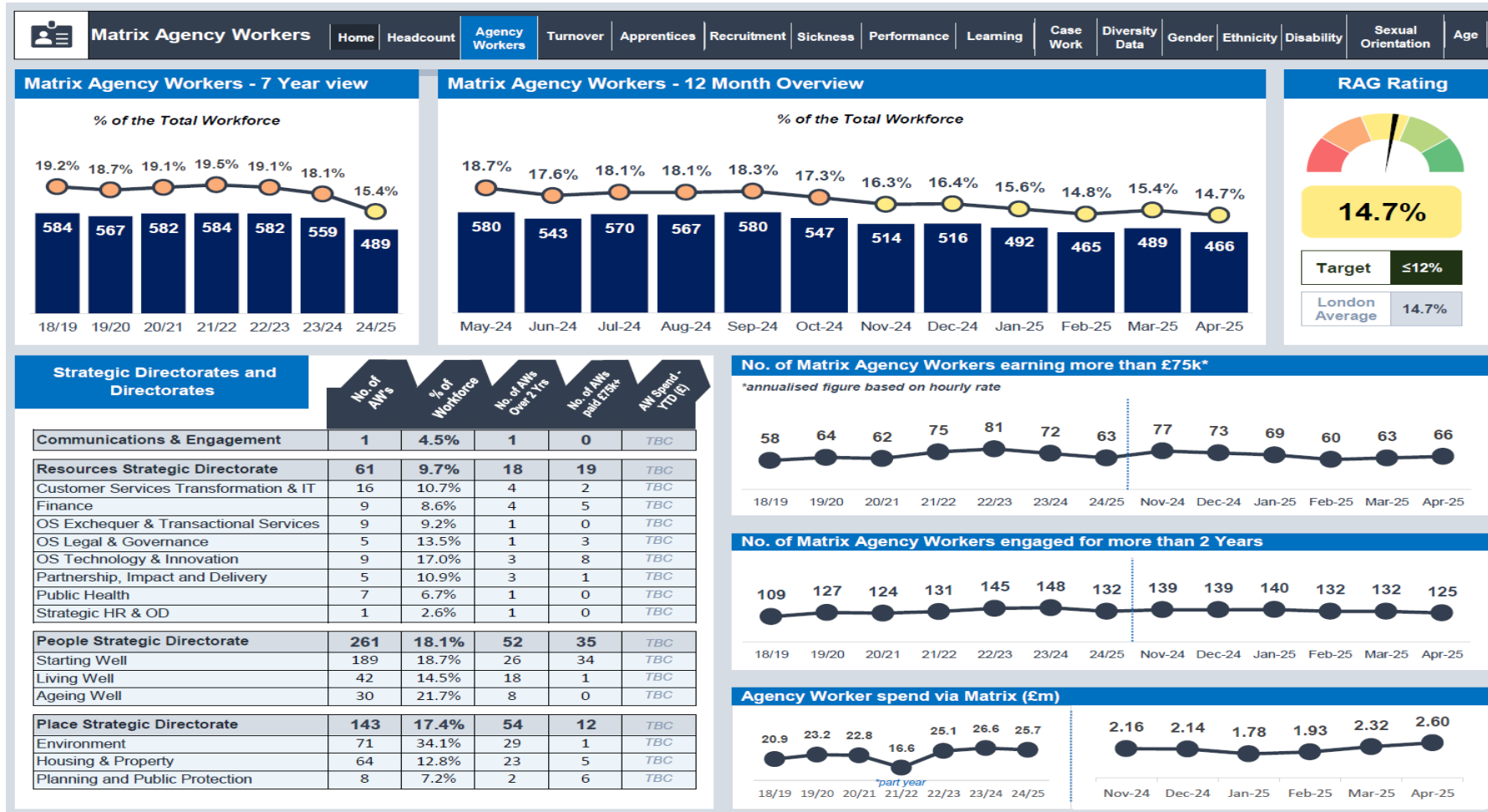
Additional information

It was also requested that a detailed analysis of sickness absence trends, benchmarking comparisons with peer councils (including Bexley), and recommendations for improvements are provided in the full Sickness Absence Benchmarking Reports – see **Appendix 3**

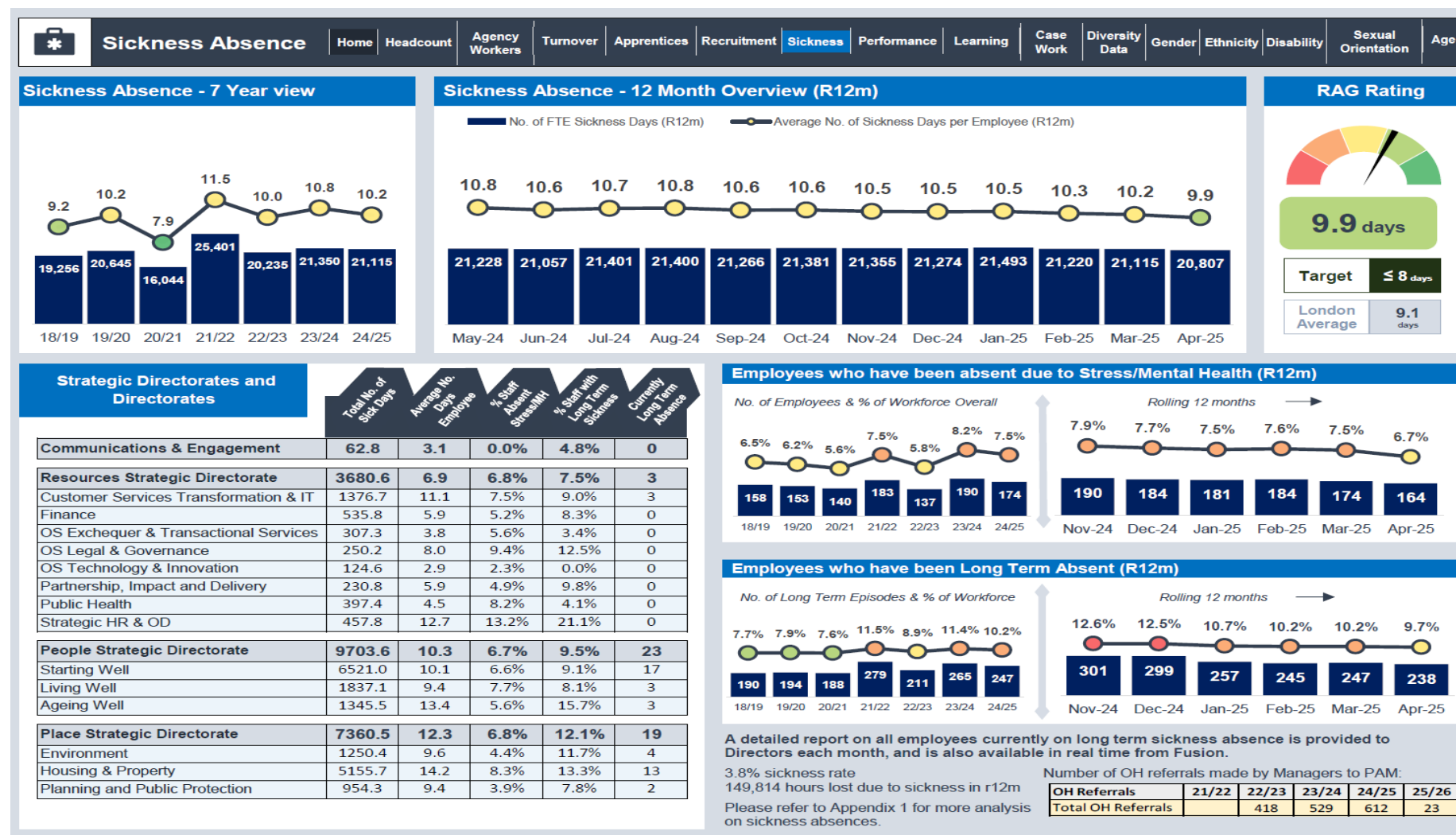
As part of the wider strategic wellbeing framework at Havering which encompasses psychological, physical, social and financial support measures, along with recent enhancements and future initiatives our wellbeing offer report is also provided– see **Appendix 4**

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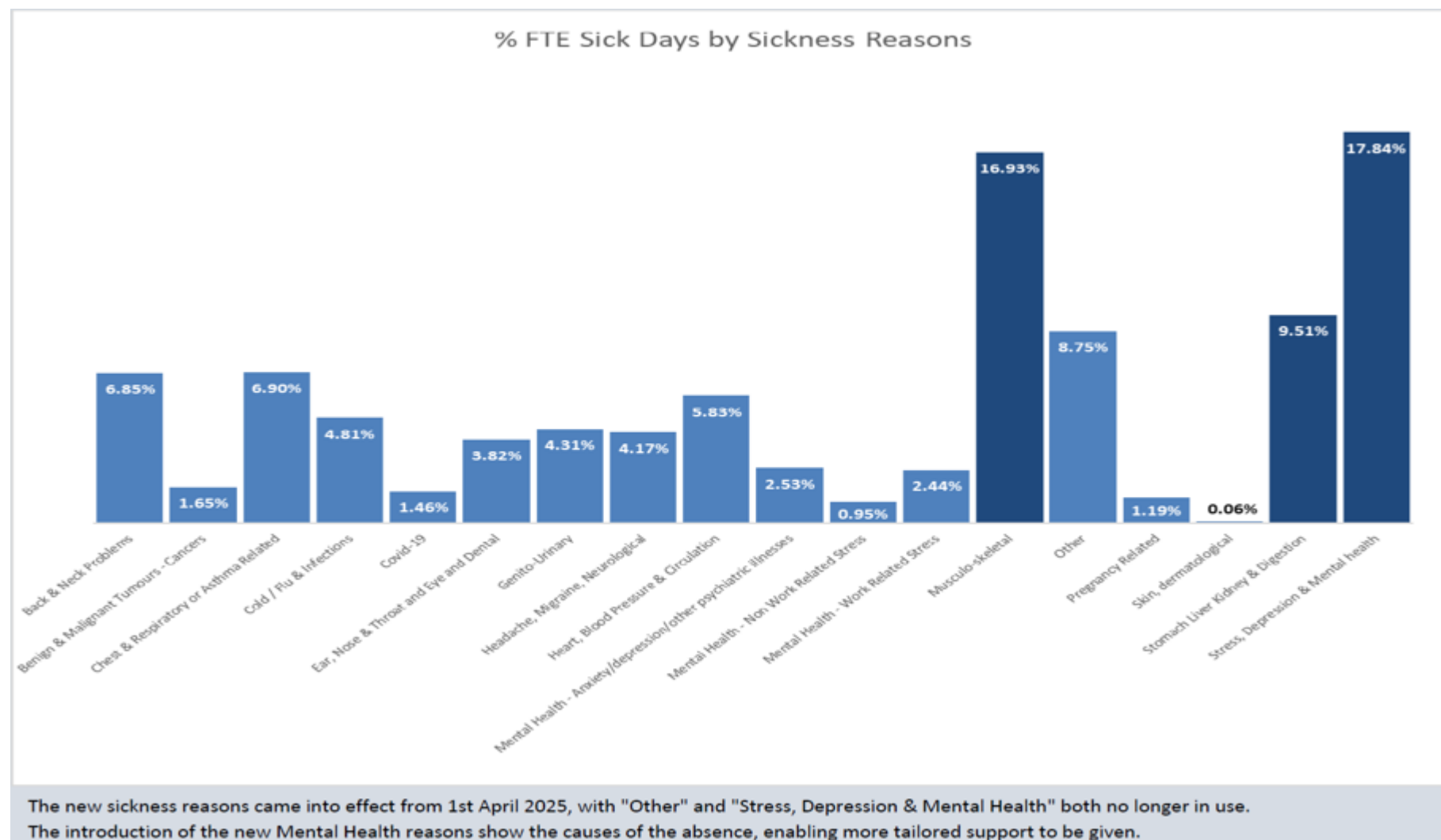
Appendix 1 – Matrix Agency Workers



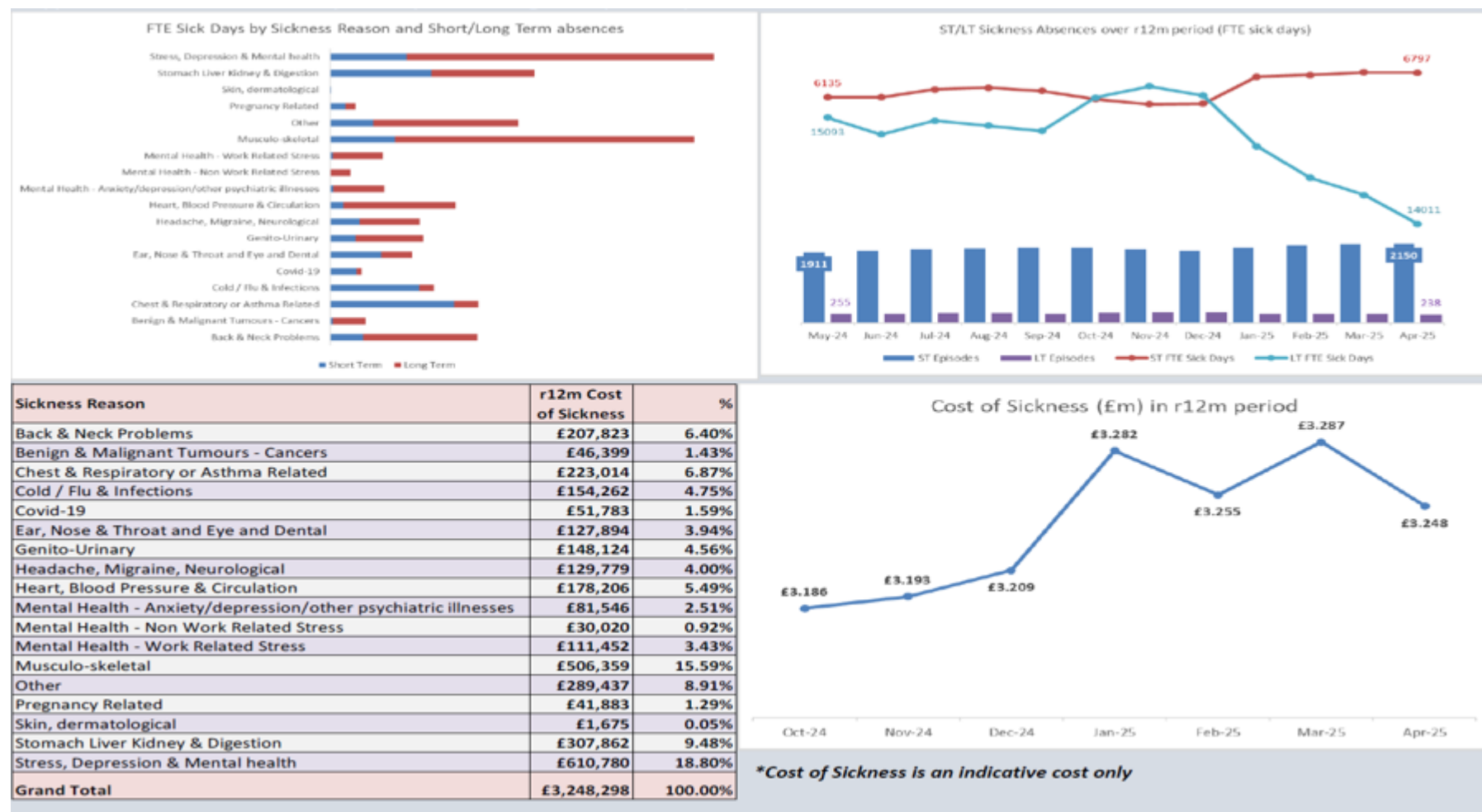
Appendix 2 – Sickness Absences



Appendix 2a – Sickness Absences (in rolling 12 month period ending 30 April 2025)



Appendix 2b – Sickness Absences (in rolling 12 month period ending 30 April 2025)



Appendix 3

Sickness Absence Benchmarking Report undertaken for Overview and Scrutiny Meeting 03 July 2025

Purpose: To identify underlying issues and provide recommendations for implementing effective methods for reducing overall sickness absence cost.

Executive Summary:

This report analyses Havering Council's sickness absence data and trends against other local authorities, revealing a current sickness absence rate of 10.8 days per employee (based on InfiniStats¹ data for 23/24) which is in the 4th Quartile of all London Boroughs and is an 8% increase from the previous financial year.

The absence rate at Havering can be further broken down to 2 parts

- Short term sickness absence rate of 2.9 days per employee
- Long term sickness absence rate 7.9 days per employee.

Havering's absence rate over the last 5 years has consistently remained at 10.02 days per employee whilst the target is to achieve a minimum of 25% reduction in the sickness absence rate (absence rate less than or equal to 8 days per employee)

Key Findings of Sickness Absence data in Havering

- Overall Sickness Absence Rate: 4.1% as at April 2024²
- Average Days Sickness per Employee: 10.8 (the London average is 9.3 days)
- Highest Absence Rate Departments: Environment, Ageing Well, Housing & Property and Starting Well directorates.

Trends in Havering Sickness:

- Long term absences contribute to the highest amount of FTE sick days.
- Stress/Depression & Mental Health account for the highest % of sickness reasons at 21.8 % (three quarters of which is long term absence)
- 2nd highest sickness absence reason is 'Other' which is split equally over short term and long-term absences.
- Musculoskeletal accounts for 15.7% of FTE sick days.

Benchmarking Analysis

Based on data from Infinistats, 16 council's (6 inner London and 10 outer London Council's) sickness absence rate was identified as being in line with the London average of 9 days per employee.

¹InfiniStats is a web-based tool used by local authorities to collect, benchmark, and report on various HR metrics supported via London Councils

Councils with lower absence rates generally tend to have smaller headcounts. When Havering's sickness absence rate is compared only with local councils that have a similar workforce size, the range narrows down to 5 councils.

A benchmarking exercise to identify key areas of sickness management policy and procedure and best practices was undertaken, and we have collated responses from 8 other local authorities (3 inner London & 5 outer London) who responded to information sharing requests.

Analysis of Key Factors in benchmarking

- Sickness Triggers – Havering's sickness triggers that initiate management of sickness absence is very comparable to other LA's and balances our duty of care with timely intervention.
- Stages of sickness absence – Havering has a more tolerant sickness absence procedural stage format (Informal, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3) with flexibility of extending stages if needed, before a final absence hearing is triggered, but this is balanced overall with the monitoring review periods.
- Policy and Procedure documentation – compared to other LA's, Havering has a more wordy and lengthy policy and procedure documentation which could be difficult to comprehend and digest.
- Phased Return to Work – Havering has the highest offer of phased return to work period (up to 12 weeks).
- OH referrals – Havering has a better OH offer and referrals than other councils in the peer group

Recommendations:

Following the benchmarking exercise on sickness policies across various councils, it was found that the key benchmarking factors and principles remain consistent across the peer group. An in-depth review of sickness trends and data in Havering along with a review of internal practices has been used to identify the following additional steps to enhance sickness management, ensuring a more effective and supportive approach.

1. Policy Review - Simplifying Policy & Procedure

- Drafting a simpler and clearer sickness absence policy and procedure documentation to ensure clarity and efficiency alongside improving communications to distribute this information.
- Incorporating a flowchart on triggers and stages of sickness absence to help managers identify and understand information

2. Increased Manager Training on sickness management

- New sickness absence e-learning module to be developed designed to enhance manager awareness and confidence in handling sickness absence.

- Sickness drop-in surgery sessions offered by HR Advice and consultancy team to provide clear guidance and practical management tools.

3. Improved Sickness reporting and monitoring using AI tools

- Improve sickness reporting and monitoring by replacing vague and broad sickness categories on fusion
 - With effect from 1st April 2025, sickness categories on fusion have been reviewed and redrafted. As part of this, 2 categories 'Other' and 'Stress Depression & Mental Health' have been removed.
 - Stress and Mental Health has been categorised into 3 sub-groups: work related, non-work related and anxiety/depression categories to enable targeted support and interventions.
- New automated absence alert system
 - It was identified that our absence data was exaggerated due to some absence entries not being closed in a timely manner. To rectify this and encourage accurate reporting of sickness data, HR has collaborated with the fusion team to introduce a new automated alert system, which sends reminder alerts to all managers who have staff with an open dated long term sickness absence (over 28 days). The alerts aim to prompt managers to rectify any system errors, close absences if no longer valid and also initiate the sickness management process promptly and support the employee to return to work.
- HR Policy team is also collaborating with the transactional team to implement a sickness absence AI agent. This tool will provide easy access to information and guide managers through the absence management process ensuring consistency, reducing administrative burden and enabling timely interventions.

4. Additional Wellbeing Support

- With effect 02nd May 2025, new OH provider has been engaged to deliver a range of wellbeing support options.
- Implement comprehensive wellbeing program, focusing on high sickness absence categories
 - HR team has already initiated a pro-active stream of well-being initiatives with focus on the high sickness absence reasons (via new sessions on chiropractor support and stress management workshops). There is also a stronger emphasis on increasing staff awareness and to ensure wellbeing initiatives are widely advertised to all staff. Improving health education, stress management workshops and using clinical tool results with employee and manager, and on-site fitness initiatives.

5. Preventative Measures and Targeted Interventions

- Conducting focused analysis of high-absence departments to identify root causes and implement tailored interventions

- Review and optimise workload distribution across teams and improve resilience in teams.
- Promote a culture of open communication regarding health concerns.

Action Plan

The recommendations are proposed to be implemented over the course of this year with actions to be split into Short, Medium and Long Term Goals.

Short-Term (Next Quarter):

- Review, update and republish revised sickness absence policy to align with current best practices
- Launch employee survey to assess wellbeing and identify areas for improvement.
- Conduct training sessions for line managers on managing employee absences effectively.
- Improved reporting procedures

Medium-Term (Next 6 Months):

- Implement targeted wellbeing interventions in high-absence departments.
- Monitor absence trends closely and adjust strategies or review policy application as needed.

Long-Term (Next Year):

- Establish a regular benchmarking process to track progress and identify further improvement opportunities.

Additional Note

Since the data was captured for this benchmarking exercise, short term improvements identified above were already initiated by the HR team to improve recording and managing sickness absence with the following findings:

- Average sick days per employee at Havering dropped to 9.9 days as of 30th April 2025, which is slightly above the London average of 9.1 days, placing us broadly in line with regional trends.

This highlights the opportunity to build on recent initiatives aimed at strengthening employee wellbeing and absence management.

Table 1 – Benchmarking Factors (data collated as of 01.04.25)

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Appendix 4

Wellbeing Offer at Havering Council report for Overview and Scrutiny Meeting 03 July 2025

The wellbeing offer to Havering employees is designed to ensure that staff feel supported and valued in their roles. It includes a range of initiatives such as mental health support, fitness programs, and flexible working arrangements. These measures aim to create a positive work environment that promotes both physical and emotional health, allowing employees to contribute effectively to the community they serve.

The four pillars of wellbeing that underpin this offer are:

- **Psychological Wellbeing:** Providing resources and support to help employees manage stress and mental health challenges.
- **Physical Wellbeing:** Encouraging fitness and healthy lifestyle choices through various programs and resources.
- **Social Wellbeing:** Fostering a sense of community and belonging through team-building activities and social events.
- **Financial Wellbeing:** Offering financial planning assistance and education to empower employees in managing their finances and securing their future.

Together, these dimensions create a holistic approach to employee wellness, promoting a balanced and thriving work environment that leads to increased productivity and job satisfaction.

Havering could establish a standalone wellbeing budget specifically allocated to initiatives that support the four pillars of wellbeing for employees. This dedicated budget will allow for the implementation of specialised programs, workshops, and resources tailored to employee needs, without affecting other operational funds.

By investing directly in comprehensive wellbeing initiatives, Havering can proactively address potential health issues, reduce absenteeism, and enhance overall employee engagement and retention.

The current wellbeing offer encompasses a range of initiatives aimed at supporting the physical, mental, financial, and social wellbeing of employees.

Psychological support – employees have access to a range of mental health and counselling support services such as:

- **Mental Health First Aiders** – Currently we have over 50 trained Mental Health First Aiders who have all completed 2 days Mental Health First Aid England training. Mental Health First Aiders are available for employees to contact if they are feeling emotionally overwhelmed, stressed, or depressed.
- **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)*** - currently powered by PAM ASSIST, who provide a professional independent service that offers support, guidance and counselling for a wide range of issues and concerns

employees may have. The service is confidential, available 24/7, and free to employees and dependents living at home. Employees are also able to seek support in dealing with Relationships, Legal, Domestic Abuse, Work Related Stress and many other life events.

- **Webinars** – As part of the Wellbeing Calendar of events to mark key awareness days throughout the year, webinars will be delivered to support employees in gaining knowledge and awareness of issues such as Stress, Burnout and Work/Life balance.
- **Communication** – regular mental health communication is shared via the 'All Company (LBH)' community page on Viva Engage, key mental health messages are posted via the intranet to the 'Big News' and 'News From Around The Council' sections.

*Following a procurement tender exercise, a new Employee Assistance Programme provider has been established. Optima Health commenced EAP support in May 2025 – data relating the the services and engagement will be accessible from quarter 1 (August 2025).

A series of webinars have been provided by our internal Wellbeing Consultant and an example of some of these are:

1. Burnout Awareness
2. Stress Management
3. Stress Management & Positive Mindset
4. Achieving Work/Life Balance
5. Anxiety & Stress
6. Wellbeing@Christmas
7. Wellbeing is Wealth.

The average cost for a webinar/speaker can range between £250 - £3000, therefore potentially savings to Havering range between £1,750 - £21,000.

Physical support – employees have access to a range of physical support and employee benefits such as:

- **York Test** - With 40 years' experience in food intolerance and food allergy testing, and as a leading home health test provider, York Test works with employees to optimise their diet and help take control of their health and wellbeing. By partnering with York Test, Havering employees receive a 40% discount.
- **Staff Badminton** - Every Monday, between 6pm – 7pm employees can take part in an hour-long badminton session held at Barking & Dagenham College.
- **Simplyhealth** - Havering partner with Simplyhealth to offer employee Health Plans. Employees can take advantage of discounted rates, extra benefits and start claiming money back towards everyday health treatments and access to virtual health services. The Simplyhealth health plan allows employees to claim their money back towards everyday health treatments such as optician appointments and glasses, dental treatments and body maintenance such as physiotherapy, podiatry and much more.

- **Everyone Active** - Everyone Active operate the leisure facilities owned by Havering Council, as part of the contract with Everyone Active, employees have access to discounted membership at the various leisure centres across the borough, discount will depend on the leisure centre employees choose to join.
- **Eye Care Scheme** – employees are able to claim £25 toward the cost of an eye test and £55 towards the cost of glasses for VDU. If the eye test or glasses are less than the maximum amount quoted, only the expenditure incurred will be reimbursed against receipts.
- **YMCA Romford** – Havering based employees who have been diagnosed with, or are receiving treatment for, cancer you are eligible for a free 10-week programme, subject to funding being available and instructor availability.
- **Occupational Health*** - Our provider for Occupational Health (OH) is People Asset Management Group Limited (PAM). PAM's approach focuses on supporting the physiological & psychological wellbeing of individuals from both a proactive and reactive perspective, which means a collaborative approach within PAM to work together to support you. PAM Occupational Health is a nursed led service and it aims to prevent illness and supporting the management of sickness absence.*
- **Communication** – regular health related communication is shared via the 'All Company (LBH)' community page on Viva Engage, key health messages are posted via the intranet to the 'Big News' and 'News From Around the Council' sections.

*Following a procurement tender exercise a new Occupation Health provider has been established. Optima Health commenced OH support in May 2025 – data relating to engagement and access will be available from August 2025

Social support – employees have access to a range social support available to them:

- **Staff forums** - employees can join staff forums that provide a platform for employees to discuss concerns, share ideas, and receive support from colleagues. These forums are designed to foster a sense of community and collaboration, helping to build strong professional relationships and encouraging open communication within the organisation.
- **Current Staff Forums:**
 - Women's Forum
 - Men's Forum
 - RISE Forum
 - Ability Forum
 - Faith Forum
 - Young Professionals Forum
 - LGBTQ+ Forum
 - Climate Change Forum
 - Neurodiversity Forum.

- **Learning Roulette** – Employees can join in the Learning Roulette, where they are randomly paired with another employee in the organisation once a month for a brief discussion.
- **Mentor Connect** - Mentor Connect provides tailored Mentor and Mentee matches. It supports career development with the added search criterion of protected characteristics, and it also formalises and facilitates the learning and sharing of knowledge across boroughs.
- **Havering Libraries** - free activities in libraries like regular Reading Groups, Knit and Natter meetings, Baby Bounce sessions, Games Clubs, Poetry Groups and Author events.

Financial support – employees have access to financial support and employee benefits such as:

- **Salary Finance** - Salary Finance are trusted by Havering Council to offer you the option to borrow fairly and securely through your salary fix rate is 13.9% however they provide afford loans between 5.9% - 29.9% APR. On average, Salary Finance are saving employees over £100 per month when consolidating their debts, that's a yearly saving of over £1,200. The 'price promise', guarantees to offer the lowest APR in the market for loans of £5,000 or less.
- Vivup Discount Platform - Vivup is the provider of our staff benefits and health and wellbeing initiatives. From groceries to clothing and discounts local to your place of work, save more on the items you need and want!
 - **Home & Electronics Salary Sacrifice** - budgeting household essentials and appliance breakdowns is expensive. With the Home and Electronics salary sacrifice scheme, employees can access the must-haves in a more manageable way.
 - **Cycle to Work** - enables employees to save up to 42% on the latest bikes, high-vis clothing and safety accessories for their commute to and from work.
- **CSSC Membership** – a not-for-profit, membership, organisation for over 140,000 colleagues from the civil service and public sector provide free days out, fantastic sports, and health and wellbeing benefits, together with savings, discounts and offers on a huge range of retail and leisure opportunities.
- **Boundless Membership** - is an exclusive membership club for public sector and civil service staff, delivering amazing experiences, days out and a range of savings and discounts on visits to top UK attractions with Kids Pass, as well as superb dining and coffee discounts with Tastecard and Coffee Club.
- **Stc Payroll Giving** – a tax-free, secure, and flexible way for employees to give to their favourite causes and charities.
- **Havering Libraries** – employees who live, work or study in Havering can have a Havering Libraries card and this can save them money, giving them access to free physical books from any of our ten libraries but also access to

thousands of free eBooks, audiobooks and bestselling magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Gardeners' World, Hello!, Men's Health, The Photographer, Radio Times etc.

By offering a comprehensive wellbeing package, Havering not only demonstrates a commitment to the health and happiness of its workforce, but also reaps tangible benefits. Investing in employee wellbeing results in a healthier, more engaged, and motivated workforce, which in turn leads to increased productivity and creativity.

Furthermore, it helps to reduce absenteeism and turnover rates, ensuring that valuable skills and knowledge are retained within the organisation.

By Havering establishing a dedicated wellbeing budget, this would be proactive approach that not only addresses existing health concerns but also prevents potential issues from arising, creating a positive and supportive work environment where employees can thrive.

Proactive wellbeing initiatives:

In October 2024, in collaboration with our Occupational Health provider, People Asset Management (PAM), and Health Champion from My Health Matters, HR Wellbeing Consultant organised Blood Pressure Screening events at the Town Hall. These events provided professional advice on maintaining healthy blood pressure levels and early detection of potential health issues. The event had a 74% attendance rate (39 colleagues).

Recently, in partnership with The Chiro Collection and Romford & Ilford Chiropractic Centre, we held Spine & Nervous System talks and free Spinal Analysis Assessments. These sessions included a health talk on stress, posture, and the relationship between the spine and the nervous system, followed by individual spinal analysis assessments.

Participants received an 80% discount voucher, extended to the entire organisation and family members. Events took place at the Town Hall and Langtons House. Over the course of the 3 events, 90 employees attended, with 51 utilising the voucher offer so far.

Our HR Wellbeing Consultant ensured these events were cost-neutral to Havering, saving £885.

By accessing the corporate discount provided employees have saved collectively £10,710 and £210 individually.

In addition to these events, in collaboration with our LGBTQ+ Staff Forum and Public Health colleagues, an HIV testing event and awareness sessions to mark HIV/STI Awareness Week was held in February. These sessions provided crucial

information on the prevention, testing, and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Free and confidential HIV testing was available to both employees and members of the public, fostering a greater understanding of the importance of regular health checks and promoting a stigma-free approach to sexual health.

These initiatives have set a positive precedent for future wellbeing programs and demonstrate a keen interest from employees in proactively managing their physical wellbeing.

A new provider for our Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme has been identified who will be able to support our efforts to reduce sickness absence linked to MSK, Stress, and Mental Health:

Musculoskeletal (MSK):

- Mitigate issues by reviewing role risk matrices
- Using mobile screening units and onsite assessments to monitor and address concerns.

Stress and mental health:

- Discussing issues using clinical tool results with employee and Manager.
- Use case conferences to manage and effectively resolve issues.

Stress Strategy, Risk Assessment and Standard.

HR L&OD colleagues are collaborating with Health & Safety colleagues to review the Stress strategy and Stress Risk Assessment information and proactively promote this support mechanism with potential training and targeted communications for Managers.

Havering also has a Stress Management Standard, the Standard describes the Council's commitment to identifying the sources of work-related stress and the arrangements put in place to minimise, as far as is reasonably practicable, the effects they may have on employees.

Council's Commitment to Stress Management

The London Borough of Havering is fully committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of its employees. It acknowledges its responsibility to identify sources of work-related stress and as far as it is reasonably practicable to minimise the effects they may have on their employees.

These include both pro- active and reactive measures to manage work related stress and the support available to staff.

The standard clearly sets out responsibilities for the following:

- General Management
- Directors
- Line Managers
- HR
- H&S
- Trade Unions
- Employees

Occupational Health Reports

Efforts have been made to ensure Occupational Health reports from People Asset Management are clear, concise, and supportive for Managers in addressing stress and knowing the next steps.

Over time, these proactive approaches have the potential to reduce costs associated with sickness absence related to back, neck, and musculoskeletal problems, as well as the impact of stress and mental health on the body.

Sickness reporting.

The Council's overview and scrutiny committee raised concerns about the high levels of sickness absences in Havering, and the high use of "Other" as the must used reason for the sickness absence.

With a view to know how best to support employees through Health & Wellbeing initiatives, the following changes will be applied as of 1st April 2025:

- 1) Remove "Other" and "Stress, Depression & Mental Health" as valid sickness reasons – i.e. end date these reasons at close of business on 31st March 2025 so they no longer appear as sickness reasons in the dropdown list effective 1st April 2025.
- 2) Add 6 new sickness reasons to the dropdown list (under Sickness absence type), effective from 1st April 2025:
 - a. Benign & Malignant Tumours - Cancers
 - b. Endocrine & Glandular
 - c. Mental Health - Anxiety/depression/other psychiatric illnesses
 - d. Mental Health - Non Work Related Stress
 - e. Mental Health - Work Related Stress
 - f. Skin, dermatological
- 3) Rename 4 existing sickness reasons as per below, effective 1st April 2025:
 - a. Chest & Respiratory to be updated to "Chest & Respiratory or Asthma Related"
 - b. Eye, Ear, Nose & Mouth/Dental to be updated to "Ear, Nose & Throat and Eye and Dental"
 - c. Infections to be updated to "Cold / Flu & Infections"
 - d. Neurological to be updated to "Headache, Migraine, Neurological"

Communications were issued to all managers impacted by these changes and work was carried out to ensure all categories were updated to reflect these amendments. It is expected to provide more well rounded workforce data reports.

Learning Experience Platform (LXP)

Based on extensive feedback from the Council, the LXP Support Team, in collaboration with the HR L&OD team, is introducing new streamlined and simpler processes for PDRs and monthly 1:1 Check-ins on the LXP.

The focus will be on employee wellbeing, which will now be a key component of check-ins, with employees being asked to rate their current levels of wellbeing. This implementation will allow the L&OD Team to export reports from the LXP on employees' wellbeing ratings, enabling the HR Wellbeing Consult and HR&OD Team to monitor the wellbeing of employees.

We believe Havering will be the only London Local Authority with this ability and shows how HR L&OD are being both innovative and proactive in its approach to employee wellbeing.

Stats Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme - April 2024 – March 2025.

Employee Assistance Programme:

- During the reporting period 69 individuals made 99 calls, of those 85 calls were for counselling, 14 legal calls with 84% identifying a Female at birth and 16% as Male a birth.
- 45 % of those calls were made by those born between 1980 – 1994 (Millennials)
- Top 3 reason were: Mental Health, Relationships and Anxiety.
- Of the 99 calls, 28 were referred for structured therapy which resulted in 131 therapy sessions being delivered.
- Following this therapy improvements were seen in generalised anxiety (45.0% improvement in GAD-7) and depression (48.2% improvement in PHQ-9)

Condensed Call Reason													
YEAR	2024												Total
Call Category	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
Mental Health	1	8	4	4	2	5	3	3	5	5	7	6	53
Work		3			1	2		2	2	1	3		14
Relationships	1		1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3			12
Financial						1	1	1		3	2		7
Legal					1	2	1			3			7
Health	1			2				1					4
Trauma	1							1					2
Total	4	11	5	8	5	10	6	9	8	15	12	6	99

Referral Type													
YEAR	2024												Total
Referral Type	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
In The Moment Support	2	10	4	3	5	6	3	8	6	11	9	4	71
Telephone Counselling	1	1	1	2			2	1		2	1	1	12
Video Counselling						2	1		2	2	1		8
Remote CBT				3									3
Face-To-Face CBT	1					1							2
Face-To-Face Counselling						1						1	2
Online CBT											1		1
Total	4	11	5	8	5	10	6	9	8	15	12	6	99

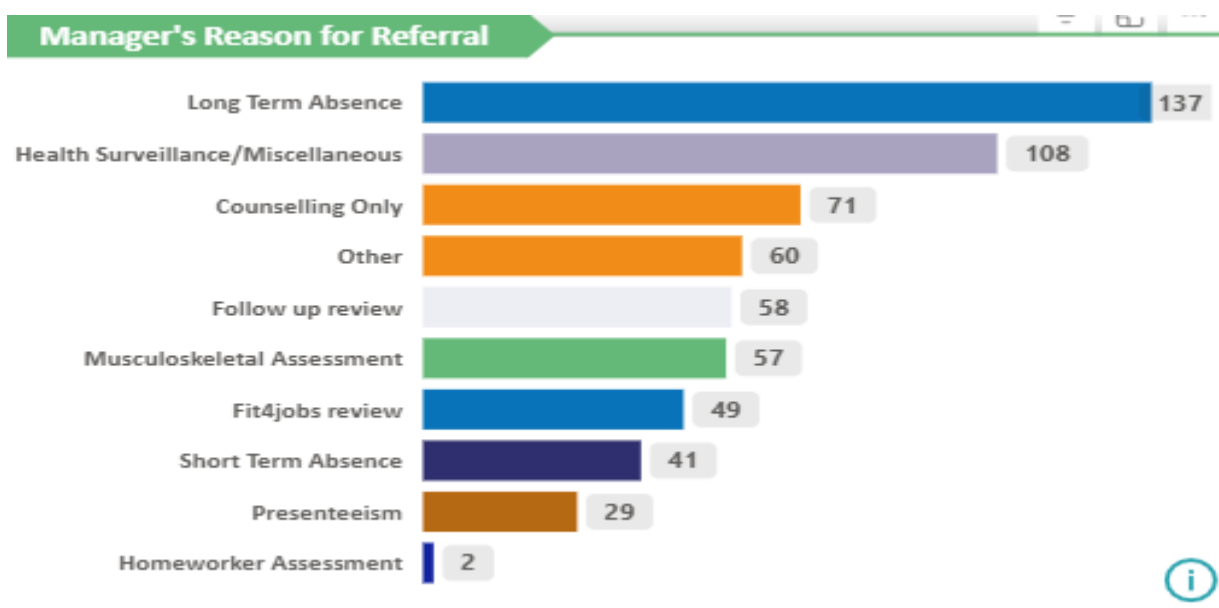
Counselling													
YEAR	2024										2025		
ReasonForCall	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Anxiety				1	1	2	1	1	2	4	2	2	16
Bereavement			1		1		2		2	1	1	1	9
Depression											1	1	2
Disciplinary					1			1	1				3
Domestic Abuse and Violence	1												1
General Family	1			1		1	1						4
Health - Mental	1	8	3	3									15
Health - Physical	1			1				1					3
Life Transitions						3			1		1		5
Lifestyle				1									1
Low Mood								2			2	2	6
Management Advice		1								1			2
Relationships			1	1	1			1	1	3			8
Traumatic Incident								1					1
Workplace Conflict									1		1		2
WRS - Change											1		1
WRS - Demands						1							1
WRS - Relationships						1					1		2
WRS - Role								1					1
WRS - Workload		2											2
Total	4	11	5	8	4	8	4	8	8	9	10	6	85

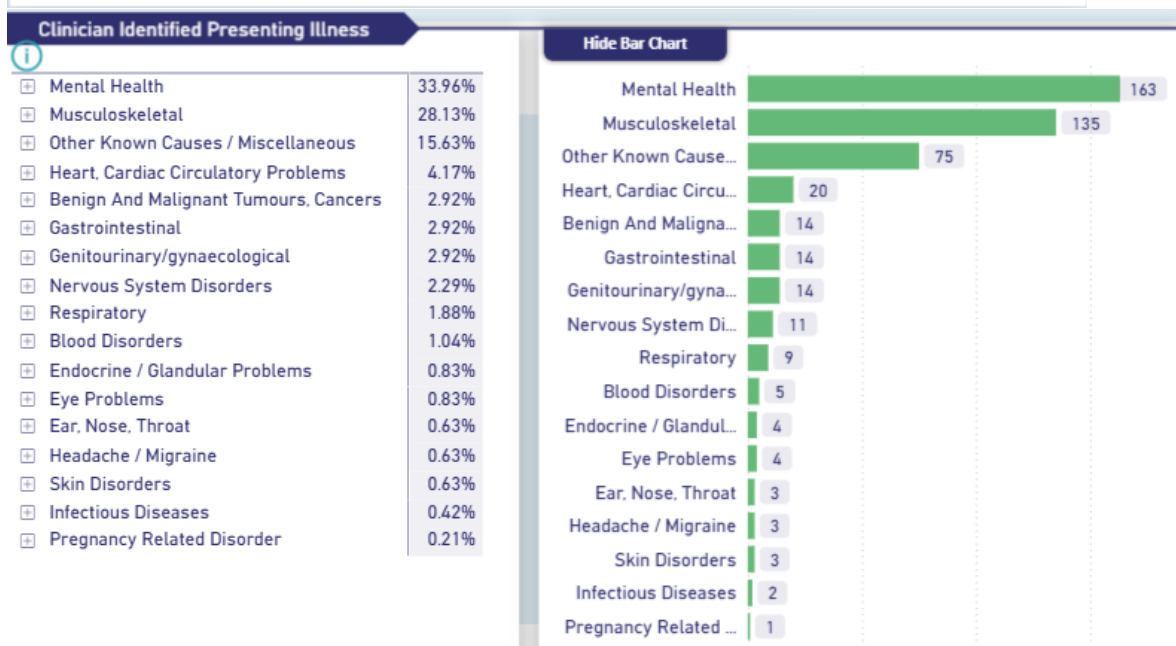
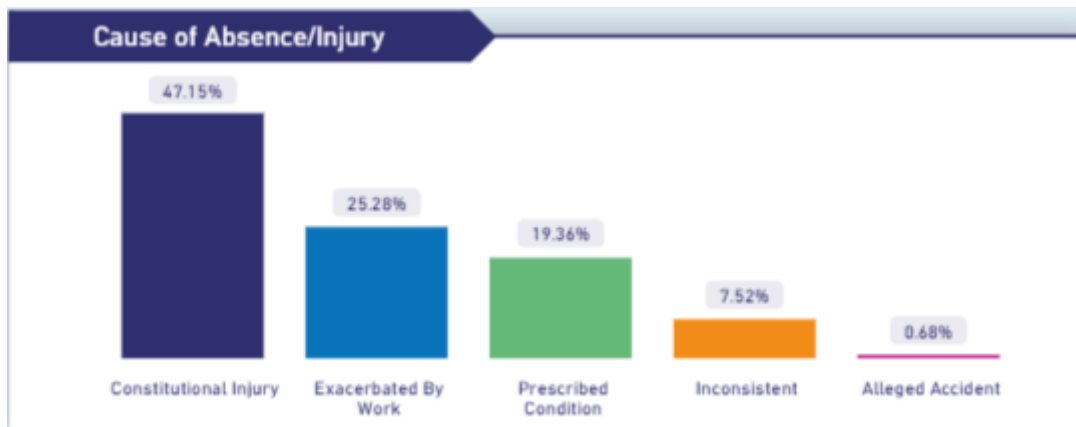
Average GAD-7 Scores			
Category	Start of Therapy	End of Therapy	Improvement (%)
Moderate Anxiety	12.8	5.0	60.9%
Mild Anxiety	7.8	6.5	16.1%
Severe Anxiety	18.5	10.5	43.2%
Total	13.0	7.2	45.0%

Average PHQ-9 Scores			
Category	Start of Therapy	End of Therapy	Improvement (%)
Mild Depression	7.5	3.0	60.0%
Moderately Severe Depression	16.8	5.2	69.0%
Moderate Depression	11.0	6.7	39.4%
Severe Depression	21.7	16.7	23.1%
Total	15.2	7.8	48.2%

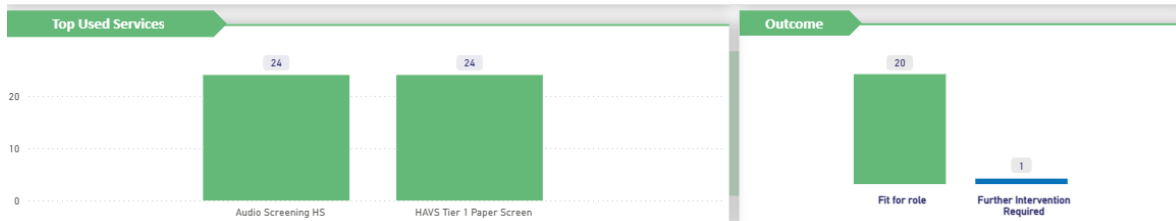
Occupational Health:

- During the reporting period, 612 referrals were made for 333 employees, with 658 appointments booked.
- Reasons for referral: case management 53.10%, MSK 17.48%, Wellbeing 11.76%, Health Surveillance 9.80%, vaccinations and boosts 6.37% and Neurodiversity 1.47%.
- Vaccinations administered 32.





Health Surveillance:



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD, 3 July 2025

Subject Heading:	Update - Customer Services Strategy
SLT Lead:	Mark Duff, Director of IT, Digital & Customer Services
Report Author and contact details:	Louise Roast, AD for Customer, Registration & Bereavement Services
Policy context:	The Board is asked to review the work that has taken place so far to implement the Customer Services Strategy

SUMMARY

In July 2024, a new Customer Service Strategy and set of Customer Service Standards was agreed by Cabinet. The Strategy set out a roadmap with actions that would be taken to ultimately, improve the Customer Service experience of our residents. This report seeks to update on this work, which is led by the AD for Customer, Registration & Bereavement Services, sitting within the IT, Digital & Customer Service Directorate. This reports sets the framework for this piece of work and details an update on the main actions taken so far.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board reviews the work undertaken so far to implement the Customer Services Strategy and makes any recommendations it considers appropriate.

REPORT DETAIL

The Customer Services Strategy sets out a roadmap / plan which aims to put the resident/customer at the heart of everything we do and ensure the best experience possible when people need to contact us.

The ethos of the strategy is to do everything we can to ensure the best experience possible when people need to contact us. The key principles being to deliver excellent customer service in every interaction with our residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Whilst we know there are excellent examples of customer service happening across the organisation, and a variety of projects that have already brought about a better customer experience, It is also recognised there is still some way to go and room for improvement, not helped by pressure on our existing resources and some changes in the way services are delivered since the Covid 19 pandemic. It is recognised that to be better at Customer Service, we need to review existing processes and procedures; existing functionality; and identify possible solutions within a challenging funding climate.

Paramount to this is the mission to embed a customer centric culture across the Council. It isn't just about processes and procedures but 'hearts & minds' too. We are working to develop a culture where delivering good customer service is engrained into our daily working lives, it is part of what we do naturally and a regular topic of conversation where we all share a common goal – to ensure we provide the best possible customer service experience. We want to embed a listening culture, and one where the customer experience is consistent no matter which service is contacted. This reports summarises the work we have been doing so far, and the journey we are on, to aim to achieve this.

The roadmap sets out a 4 year plan, consisting of a number of actions as set out in the table below, categorised into 3 main areas:

- 1) Embedding a Customer Centric Culture;
- 2) Modernise Service Delivery
- 3) Improve the Customer Experience:



Since the Strategy was agreed, work has commenced to implement the actions arising recognising that it is challenging, that this is a journey and direction of travel, and that it will take time to achieve the outcomes. With an ever changing landscape we also recognise that we will need to review the Strategy at regular intervals.

The work is led by Customer Services, sitting within the newly formed IT, Digital & Customer Services Directorate. Customer Services taking an approach to lead by example the principles and aims of the Strategy, already providing excellent frontline services with high performing teams via the Corporate Contact Centre, Town Hall Appointment Centre and other essential high contact frontline services (the Registration and Cemeteries & Crematorium Service).

The work is underpinned by support from the ICS (Institute of Customer Services), whom we joined, on a 3 year membership basis in 2024 and with whom we are working closely.

Since the publication of the Customer Services Strategy the following has been actioned or is underway under each of the three categories outlined in the 4 year plan:

M1 - Embed a Customer Centric Culture

Actions
<p><u>Promote New Strategy & Standards</u></p> <p>An Official launch took place during National Customer Services Week in October 2024, which included the launch of a new Intranet page dedicated to Customer Services, where both the Strategy and Standards can easily be found for staff reference. Customer Service standards. This was launched and followed up by printed material available for offices, so that awareness could start to be raised about this piece of work, the importance of Customer Service, and the standards which all staff should work to.</p>
<p><u>Develop Hybrid Contact Centre</u></p> <p>From August 24, all team members all present in the office (Town Hall) at least one day a week. This ensures the Appointment Centre can be resourced and fosters a 'team' environment to support good learning practises. Performance is robustly monitored.</p>
<p><u>Measure Customer Feedback</u></p> <p>Across our corporate Contact Centre Telephony solution a post call survey was introduced enabling customers to provide their experience and register their satisfaction, following their interaction with the Contact Centre, which also provides valuable insight and helping where necessary to make improvements.</p> <p>Customer Service / satisfaction surveys have also been introduced by other Services, including Registration & Bereavement Services and Housing Services with the aim to help shape service delivery and where identified make improvements.</p> <p>Where it is identified services are not capturing feedback, or the way they are capturing feedback needs improving, work is underway to action this via the Customer Champions group (see p6), utilising the corporate 'Citizenspace' platform.</p>
<p><u>Conduct External Benchmarking</u></p>

The Strategy sets out a commitment to carry out external benchmarking and in order to achieve this, we worked with the ICS in November 2024 and launched a resident satisfaction survey. The survey provided some useful data and insight, and is being used in service reviews to identify where customer service improvements need to be made.

Review Telephony

Underway. The contract for the existing Corporate Contact Centre telephony solution (8x8) expires July 2026. This provides an opportunity to review existing functionality and consider what we would like from a new system going forward. A project board has been established and we are in the early stages of undergoing a procurement exercise, starting with a gathering requirements exercise.

The gathering exercise is to ensure, before going to the market, that we list our requirements in terms of the new Contact Centre solutions functionality. In carrying out this exercise however, we are looking at the wider organisations requirements too, to determine what other Services may benefit from the functionality on offer, being minded of the cost / benefits realisation of any other Services coming on board.

Discussions are being had with Services to assess the benefits of their calls going through the corporate call centre, where they do not already. This would be particularly relevant for high call traffic frontline services and would support the aim of consistency of service when customers interact us (an example of recent success in this area is the transfer of Parks call to the Call Centre in Feb 25 – see p8).

We are also including other key requirements, listing how we can harness the use of AI, virtual agents and intelligent chat bots, with any new solution. The aim to have this procured and installed for July 2026.

Additional actions:

- **Implementation of a Mandatory Customer Services Theme in all PDRs from 25/26:**

“Demonstrate how you have achieved excellent customer service in line with the [Customer Services Strategy](#) and [New Customer Standards](#)”

This has been Introduced to help encourage an environment where Customer Services is regularly discussed, to encourage staff ownership and investment into the delivery of good customer service.

- **Integration of Customer Services to the Corporate Induction for all new starters**

In place from July 25. To ensure all new starters from commencement of their employment are aware of the importance of good customer service; the strategy & standards.

Planned: Mandatory Customer Services training via the LXP corporate platform is currently being devised

M2: Modernise Service Delivery

Actions

Review Town Hall Services

Following a review with AM colleagues, there is now a regular customer service presence on the main Town Hall reception to provide an improved experience for those requiring face to face help or advice, but without an appointment (those with an appointment using the Town Hall Appointment Centre).

This will be further improved by a refurbishment planned for the space located next to the Town Hall reception, to provide a bank of extra workstations. When this is completed, (intended completion is October 25), it is intended Customer Services staff will use this space, being in a closer proximity to assist those requiring help at the Town Hall reception.

Roll out Case Tracker Complaints & Member enquiries

The Soft Launch of Case Tracker for Members Enquires was completed on schedule in May 2025.

9 Members participated and completed 115 enquires through the system. Full roll out is now underway, with 2 training sessions to be held in June for a further 11 Members. Additional training is scheduled for July and August, and potentially September (dependant on member's uptake of training).

Based on agreement by Senior Leaders, the project aims to complete the training and roll out for all members by the end of September.

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M3: Improve Customer Experience

Actions

Remove old web content & Refresh Website

In place from June 24. The refreshed website was enhanced to bring about a number of benefits, to the customer experience, including:

- Improved accessibility
- A translation tool
- Improved Search Engine Optimisation, design and layout making it easier for customers to navigate and use
- More efficient alert deployments and
- an improved customer feedback module

The customer feedback module has proved very useful in bringing to attention useful comments and observations that would sometimes go undetected, but are now fixed immediately, preventing a poor experience continuing for others

Establish Customer Experience Team

It is recognised that in order to achieve the desired outcomes that align with the Strategy, a commitment from the whole Council was required. For that reason, Directors were asked to nominate customer focussed staff members within their services to collectively commit to supporting the principles of the Strategy and form a 'Customer Champions Network/Experience Team'.

It is via this network of staff that work is now underway to review services, starting with Services with high volume customer contact but a comparatively lower satisfaction score (ICS) than others. Led by the AD for Customer, Registration & Bereavement Services, champions are or will be reviewing their service with a view of identifying short/medium and long term improvements. Officers with expertise in niche areas are supporting as 'advocates' in the following areas:

- Telephone/Digital Experience
- Complaint handling
- Feedback and training

The process of review of each service will take time, there is an aim to complete at least 4 service reviews by the end of the year.

Via these service reviews it is intended that shared learning and the capturing of insights will happen and be included as part of the feedback and outcomes,

Join up Social Media & CC Teams

With effect from 1st July 2024, Customer Services took over the administration of Social Media enquiries, from the Communications team, in order to be able to pick out and reply more effectively to any of the transactional enquiries received via this channel, from customers.

To date, over 500 social media enquiries have been received per month either through Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and LinkedIn. The team view each one, responding to those customers seeking advice / wishing to report / make a service request, which has led to an improved service for customers choosing this channel to interact with us. Any reputational type comments / statements made by customers are routed to the Communications team, for them to administer and respond too, if deemed appropriate.

Additional Actions: transfer of Parks calls to the Contact Centre:

In February 2025, the Customer Services Contact Centre took on the front line service for Parks enquiries/calls. Although quite small demand in comparison to the high volume service's the Centre is used to looking after, and although Parks had an online presence for its customers, it had very minimal resources available to take calls. Often, by their own admission, resulting in customers having to leave enquiries on an answerphone to be called back.

Taking over Parks calls has led to an improved customer journey and experience for those customers that don't have access to online services and would like to speak to someone.

In summary, it is intended to continue with the important work that is already underway, prioritising the service reviews initially. Further work streams are planned which include, amongst other things, the setting up of a resident panel; monitoring and reporting against the standards; mystery shopping; development of customer training; review use of AI and technology to improve the customer experience.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are none.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Overview & Scrutiny Board

3 July 2025

REPORT

Subject Heading:

Annual Report of Board, 2024/25

SLT Lead:

Sandy Hamberger, Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Report Author and contact details:

Anthony Clements, Committee Services Manager
anthony.clements@onesource.co.uk

Policy context:

The report deals with the statutory process of Overview and Scrutiny.

Financial summary:

There is no significant financial impact from the statutory processes as these requirements are being met by existing budgets.

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

People - Things that matter for residents

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place **X**

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to approve its Annual Report for submission to full Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board approves its Annual Report 2024/25 (attached) and agrees that it should be submitted for acceptance at full Council.

REPORT DETAIL

Under the Council's Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Board and its Sub-Committees are required to present an Annual Report of their activities to full Council.

A draft Annual Report of the Board's activities is attached and Members are invited to comment on or amend the draft and agree that it should be presented to Council. It should be noted that the annual reports of the People and Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees will be appended when the reports are presented at full Council.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks: None of this covering report.

Legal implications and risks: None of this covering report.

Human Resources implications and risks: None of this covering report.

Equalities implications and risks: None of this covering report.

Environmental and Climate Change implications and risks: None of this covering report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.



Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2024/2025

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to give this short introduction to the summary of the Board's work during the 2024-2025 municipal year. Details are given below of elements of the Board's work this year including call-ins and budget scrutiny.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the other members of the Board and all the Council officers who have supported the Board's work this year. The annual reports of the respective Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees are attached to this report for information.

I commend this annual report and am pleased to submit it to full Council.

REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Board has responsibility for hearing all requisitions ('call-ins') of Council decisions. The Board also leads on the pre-decision scrutiny of forthcoming Council plans and decisions.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board is also responsible for scrutiny of the following areas:

- Strategy and commissioning
- Partnerships with Business
- Customer access
- E-government and ICT
- Finance
- Human resources
- Asset Management
- Property resources
- Facilities Management
- Communications
- Democratic Services
- Social inclusion
- Councillor Call for Action

The Members who served on the Overview and Scrutiny Board during the year were:

Councillor Laurance Garrard (Chairman)

Councillor Julie Wilkes (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mandy Anderson

Councillor Philippa Crowder

Councillor David Godwin

Councillor Martin Goode

Councillor Dilip Patel

Councillor Keith Prince

Councillor Philip Ruck

Councillor Matt Stanton

Councillor David Taylor

Councillor Bryan Vincent

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD – REVIEW OF ACTIVITY, 2024/25 MUNICIPAL YEAR

1. Council Budget

Given the financial challenges facing the Council, the Board has prioritised scrutiny of the Council budget and related issues. The Board scrutinised in December the approach to consultation on the budget although options were limited as the consultation process under way by this point. The Board asked for next year's consultation to be brought before it at an earlier stage in order that suggestions for improvement could be made.

Formal scrutiny of the budget proposals took place in January when officers presented full budget papers including those covering regeneration joint ventures etc. Recommendations and comments made by the Board to Cabinet included for more detail on the social value aspects of Joint Venture work, the use of Mercury Land Holding homes for temporary accommodation and the importance of seeking to ensure further external grant funding for the Council.

2. Savings Delivery

In addition to the budget proposals, the Board has also sought to monitor the achievement of savings planned in the current year. Updates were given to the Board in October covering areas such as the review of parking charges and the likelihood of achieving all planned savings. Further reports and changes to format were requested and the area of scrutiny will continue in the new municipal year.

3. Performance Issues

The Board has also scrutinised the key performance indicators (KPIs) available to monitor performance. The Board requested further detail on the position with red-rated KPIs and next year's set of indicators should be brought before it for pre-decision scrutiny.

4. Improvement and Transformation Plan/Productivity Plan

In July the Board received the Improvement and Transformation Plan which was submitted to central government as part of the Capitalisation Direction process. The Productivity Plan was also reviewed which was required to be produced by all Councils.

The Board discussed areas such as the level of interest on the Capitalisation loan and the impact of the Council's Target Operating Model. The impact on the plans of the lack of affordable housing in the borough was also scrutinised.

5. Customer Services Strategy

Scrutiny of the Council's Customer Services Strategy covered included plans to embed a customer-centric culture, modernise service delivery and improve the customer experience. This included plans to establish a new resident panel and increase on-line take-up of Council services. The Board scrutinised how learning from poor customer service could be improved and suggested that external benchmarking should be included in any updates on this issue.

6. Target Operating Model

The Board received an update in July on progress with implementing the Target Operating Model. This has included a review of the senior management structure and the realignment of a number of a number of services. Staff turnover levels had also been reduced.

7. HR Issues

Throughout the year the Board has scrutinised a number of issues relating to the Council's human resources. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of agency and on sickness levels and Strategic Directors explained how they were addressing each of these areas. The Board scrutinised how levels of sickness were monitored in each area and if expenditure on agency staff could be reduced.

Further updates on HR issues will be given to the Board during the coming year.

8. Organisation receiving Council grants

The Board has scrutinised in detail the services provided by the two organisations to receive Council grant funding – the Citizens Advice Service (CAS) and the Havering Volunteer Centre (HVC).

The Board scrutinised areas of the CAS operations that grant funding was used for including advice on benefits, debt and housing. CAS was the only organisation in Havering providing specific services such as advocacy. Members recommended that, if possible, section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy funding be used to support the CAS.

The work of the HVC was explained to the Board and the cost saving to the borough was noted. The Board made a number of recommendations to Cabinet around assisting the HVC to find suitable new premises and establishing HVC's place in the Council's voluntary sector strategy.

9. Requisitions

In January, the Board heard a call-in of a Cabinet decision to convert offices to residential accommodation to accommodate homeless families at Chesham House. The requisition was upheld unanimously and a number of recommendations were made by the Board requiring further details of the scheme, developers and security arrangements etc.

A similar scheme at Eastgate House in Basildon was also requisitioned and heard by the Board in February. On this occasion the requisition was not upheld by 7 votes to 4 and the Board again made a number of comments to Cabinet covering areas such as flat size, the number of units and information to be provided to tenants on moving in.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Legal implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Human Resources implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Equalities implications and risks:

While the work of the Board can impact on all members of the community, there are no implications arising from this specific report which is a narrative of the Board's work over the past year.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications and Risks

None – narrative report only.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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