



September 2023

Customer Experience

Customer Experience Scrutiny Review – Final Report

Members of the review group

Cllr Samir Sumaria – Chair (Conservative)

Cllr Rekha Shah (Labour)

Cllr Amir Moshenson (Conservative)

Cllr Graham Henson (Labour)

Cllr Chetna Halai (Conservative)

Cllr Yogesh Teli (Conservative)

Cllr Stephen Hickman (Labour)

Cllr Nicola Blackman (Conservative)

Cllr Matthew Goodwin-Freeman (Conservative)



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1 Background

At the Cabinet meeting on 24th May 2022, Cabinet agreed that one their key priority was to put residents first and treat both residents and businesses as valued customers. In practice this means ensuring that any interaction is a positive one with the Council being approachable, accessible, responsive, and informative through the best use of technology. The Council provides hundreds of different services to residents and businesses with tens of millions of interactions taking place each year and they therefore ‘*experience*’ customer service through many different routes.

1.1 Purpose of the review

- i. To investigate how we might use all the Council’s policies and strategies to help improve the customer experience through monitoring the progress of the customer experience action plan agreed at Cabinet and considering future customer needs, modern customer service delivery models and technology and the best outcomes for the Borough.



- ii. To ascertain how the council can fulfil its corporate objective of “Putting Residents First.” With the closure of the civic centre and changes in the way the council delivers services, it was necessary to develop a larger understanding of what residents require and the best way to deliver this as a council.

1.2 Objectives of the review

- To monitor the progress on more intuitive digital access for residents e.g., refined search options on webpage
- To better understand digital exclusion and those affected by it
- Review how services are delivered (*such as the front door to Adult Social care and Council Tax*) and key customer journeys (*such as subscribing to Garden Waste, reporting bin issues and ordering a parking permit*)
- To ensure an improvement in the council's complaints process and interaction with elected members
- To ensure an improvement in the customer journey using the webpage and phone lines

1.3 Scope of the review¹

- Provide alternative channels where required – support people to self-serve or provide an alternative means of contact for more complex issues.
- Reduce the need for contact – get things right first time and be proactive when there is a problem.
- Services are the best that they can be – ensure that services are built around the customer and identifying where the key problems are.

2 Methodology and Approach

Members were clear from the outset that to improve the customer experience, the customer journey across all channels and products must be understood. A focus on identifying and understanding the customer journey – the end-to-end experience that customers have with the council – was a priority.

Members therefore undertook site visits to Greenhill Library and Gayton Road – the councils new front-doors post the closure of the Civic Centre. This was to ensure that enquiries could be followed from initial point of contact (Customer Services) to other Departments. During a

¹ See full scope of the Customer Experience Scrutiny Review agreed in March 2023 in Appendix 1



site visit, Members would observe and participate in following a customer enquiry from beginning to end and see systems in action.

Site visits took place at the following departments:

- Customer Services (Greenhill Library)
- Emergency Services including Homelessness, Adults/Children Safeguarding (Gayton Road)

Members also reviewed existing data available such as:

- Residents Survey 2023
- Customer Experience Staff Survey 2023
- Greenhill Library Satisfaction Survey 2023
- Greenhill Library/Gayton Road footfall
- Webform Satisfaction Survey
- Access Harrow Call Volume
- Email Volume by Department

The members also carried out a Challenge Panel which was designed as a way for the scrutiny group to discuss key findings from the Customer Experience review and to make recommendations for the further development of the policy.

The session was attended by Jonathan Milbourn (Head of Customer Services and Business Support), Ben Jones (Head of Digital Services), Vinal Chauhan (Business Support Manager) and Cllr Stephen Greek (Portfolio Holder).

Councillors on the scrutiny review who attended the session were Cllr Samir Sumaria (Chair), Cllr Rekha Shah (Co-chair), Cllr Amir Moshenson, Cllr Yogesh Teli, Cllr Stephen Hickman, Cllr Graham Henson.

Corporate Policy Officers who attended the session were Mira Chauhan, Anthony Ilesanmi, Sudheesh Bhasi and Nahreen Matlib.

3. Customer Experience

3.1 Challenge Panel



The challenge panel was designed as a way for the scrutiny group to discuss key findings from the Customer Experience review and to make recommendations for the further development of the policy.

The objectives of this scrutiny challenge panel were to:

- Examine the efficiency of customer services through various channels.
- Further develop understanding of complaint management and its contribution to improvement of service delivery
- Make recommendations for the further development of the policy.

The Challenge Session was structured as follows:

- Welcome and Introduction by Chair (Cllr Samir Sumaria, Scrutiny Lead - Resources)
- Presentation on findings from Customer Experience Review (Mira Chauhan – Policy Officer)
- Questions and Discussion

Key Discussion Points:

For further improvement of the complaints management, it was highlighted that the council needed to:

- Find better ways of following ongoing and multi-faceted problems.
- Determine when to escalate residents' concerns.
- Ensure officers make regular contact to update residents and offer reassurance that the matter is progressing.

Suggested improvements included:

- Improved liaison with residents for all complaints (minimum contact of phone call/email). There should be a response from the council when something has changed in their case, resolved or if a certain number of days have passed and the case is still open, a response should still be sent to the customer to inform them their query is not lost, and we are still working on resolving it. Regular communication needs to be introduced from the time the council receives the query to when it has been resolved.
- Resolving simple matters ahead of target
- Measures for scoping multi-faceted issues and managing expectations.
- Measures for coordinating complex and multi-faceted issues.



3.2 Site Visits

The council aims to put the customer at the heart of everything it does. It strives to ensure that all sections of the community accessing the councils' services will experience consistently excellent customer service. The council receives contact from customers in a variety of ways for all services. Table 1 below shows the overall numbers of contacts for each method for 2021-2022 and 2022 – 2023.

Table 1

	2021 -2022	2022 – 2023	Comment
Visitors to our Offices	30,069	19,878	34 % decrease
Number of Calls received	905,250	801,492	11% decrease
Emails	78,192	73,342	6% decrease
MyHarrow Account	640,197	743,626	16% increase
Webforms	709,935	741,700	4% increase

Table 1 shows the proportion of people visiting our offices has reduced significantly (- 34%) and more customers are using MyHarrow account and webforms.

Customer Service Staff:

The first point of contact for most council services will be with a customer services officer. These officers deal with all aspects of the councils' services including:

- Providing a central call centre (Access Harrow) which deals with enquires for all services and providing a switchboard facility for services outside of Customer Services
- Manning the reception at Greenhill Library and Gayton Road
-

3.3 Greenhill Library Site Visit

Site visits to, and resident feedback on, customer services has highlighted that the first point of contact for members of the public is very professional and helpful. Staff are friendly and engaged and go out of their way to ensure enquires are handled efficiently as possible. This is highlighted below in Table 2 which shows the face-to-face satisfaction survey completed by customers who have come to Greenhill Library – with over 70% of customers having a positive experience.



Table 2

SATISFACTION	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied		% Positive
Overall Satisfaction	55%	18%	5%	12%	11%		73%
Satisfied with the time taken	57%	22%	5%	7%	9%		79%
Clear how it was explained	62%	21%	5%	2%	10%		83%
Satisfied with resolution	52%	22%	10%	6%	10%		74%

It was apparent, however, that the current system does not always enable Customer Service staff to know if an issue or complaint has already been dealt with or which member of staff it has been passed to. During the site visit to Greenhill Library, members observed first-hand the difficulties with linking to other back offices. Links to the back office are poor and in most cases the Customer Service staff were only able to send an email to the relevant department with the contact details of the customer requesting for a call back. In these cases, there is no way of knowing whether this query was dealt with or not and for those departments that do not have a shared mailbox, it is difficult to determine who the nominated contact is in order to escalate queries. These aforementioned issues can cause a duplication of work and cause confusion around how an issue is being taken forward.

Table 3

GREENHILL LIBRARY	TOTAL
Council Tax/Benefit Enquiries	988
Citizenship/Registrars	50
Housing/Homeless	306
Residents/Visitors Permit/PCN	94
Payment Enquiry	22
Documents	438
Other	590
TOTAL	2488

This was particularly apparent when the queries were regarding Council Tax / Benefits which make up nearly 50% of all queries received at Greenhill Library (see Table 3). Members also witnessed that customers were coming to Greenhill Library with their Council Tax bills or letters regarding their benefits and required clarification or further explanation as to what was required from them. Unfortunately, as this is a specialist area, Customer Service staff were unable to assist customers with their queries directly and instead had to forward on the queries via email to back-office staff. Thus, resulting in the customer leaving Greenhill Library with their query unresolved.



In conjunction, members felt the space at Greenhill Library was not appropriate for private discussions with customers when dealing with confidential matters. With one desk and two computers at Greenhill Library, members felt that more than supported self-service was needed and that some residents will want and need a listening ear and more face-to-face interaction. Additionally, it was highlighted that the town centre presence is good, but security and privacy measures need to be looked at as members believed, in the current layout, you can feel very 'observed'.

Members highlighted the importance of introducing the below:

1. A dedicated officer on-site to deal with Council Tax/Benefits enquiries as they have the required knowledge to resolve any queries first-hand. This would ensure customers leave Greenhill Library with their query resolved whilst reducing the need for customers to return or to escalate the issue in case of a non-response.
2. A more appropriate space for Customer Service staff to deal with customer queries. It was noted that the area is very small and there is no sufficient/private space for discussions with customers and that when a queue does build up, there is no appropriate waiting area (only 2 chairs) and that the queue then blocks the staircase to the 1st floor of the library.

3.4 Gayton Road Site Visit

Gayton Road is the emergency front door for Housing and Social Services. During the site visits, members felt that the space at Gayton Road was more appropriate compared to Greenhill Library. Gayton Road has a waiting area for customers, appropriate desk space for three Customer Service Officers on-site, private, and confidential booths for discussions with customers, a security presence, and a back-office for officers to work from. However, members felt the building was not being used to its full potential. There was adequate space to deliver a reception service and yet the building was empty on the many occasions that it was visited. Members raised the question around whether Gayton Road would be a more appropriate venue to host the boroughs front-door service.

In addition, members raised the issue that there was inadequate signage to Gayton Road, and it was more difficult to find if you did not know the area very well. In addition to this, members witnessed customers having trouble with knowing which front-door site to visit for their particular query which caused a lot of back and forth as customers were sent from Greenhill Library to Gayton Road or vice versa. Members highlighted the potential issues and frustrations this can cause customers especially those with vulnerabilities.



Members highlighted the importance of introducing the below:

1. Improved signage in the town centre to direct customers to the correct building for their query. At present, there are no signs in the town centre directing customers to Greenhill Library or Gayton road. With both sites being newly built in the borough, it is imperative that better signage is introduced within Harrow Town Centre.
2. A review of the services offered at both Greenhill Library and Gayton Road and whether both sites are necessary and whether there is potential for one location to act as a front-door for customers.

3.5 Residents Survey

Between 30th January to 11th March 2023 a resident's survey was conducted using a stratified random sample of Harrow Residents. The aim was to understand resident's priorities and concerns. The survey gives a general overview of how residents perceive the council and its services and is a fundamental part of the customer service review due to the nature of the customer interaction:

Key Results:

- The residents survey of 2023 conducted by partners MEL Research showed that satisfaction with the council over time is increasingly positive with a figure of 60% in March of 2023
- Six in ten (60%) are satisfied with how Harrow Council runs things, compared to 23% who are dissatisfied. In July 2017, 49% were satisfied.
- The most commonly provided suggestions related to the maintenance / repairs of public facilities such as roads, potholes and tree trimming (17%), followed by cleaning streets (13%). 9% would like better communication.
- The most common method by which residents receive information about the Council's services is the Harrow Council website, although this is more commonly used by residents aged 25 to 44, and less used among those aged 65+. Leaflets/letters through the door, Harrow People magazine and MyHarrow email newsletter are the next most commonly cited methods.

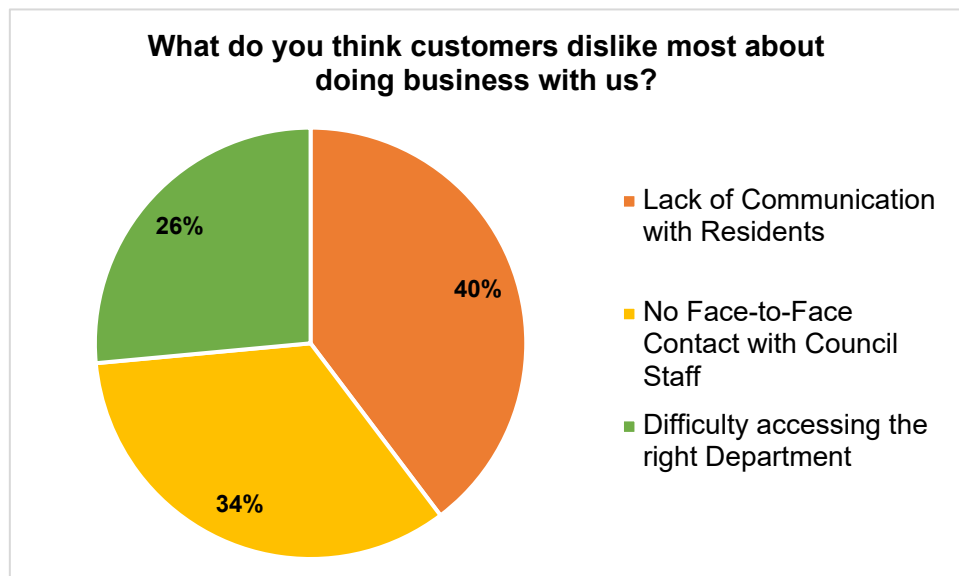
The Councillors highlighted that the Council team have won a number of awards for their migration of services to online, with other councils coming to Harrow to learn what works well. The Customer Services team are delivering an award-winning service through online channels with most transactions with residents now taking place electronically.

Overall, the results of the resident’s survey indicate a strong level of customer satisfaction across the borough. However, it is important to note that this survey was conducted before the formal closing of the civic centre, this margin of error should be considered when looking at overall satisfaction and communication rates in the borough.

3.6 Staff Satisfaction Survey

A staff satisfaction survey was circulated to 131 members of staff within Customer Services and Business Support area of the council. These members of staff are all customer facing. Staff were asked what they think customers disliked most about doing business with the council, and similar to the response received in the resident’s survey, staff believed it was a lack of communication (see table 4). Staff also highlighted that residents require more face-to-face contact with the council.

Table 4



Members highlighted the following:

- With both the residents survey and staff survey highlighting the issue of ‘communication’, there needs to be a further assessment into the councils’ current methods of engagement with the residents of Harrow and potentially alternative methods of outreach. An example could be introducing a ‘conversation café’ mobile front door to reach communities that do not easily engage.



4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Participants of the challenge panel agreed with the necessity and importance of effective and efficient customer services to ensure customer satisfaction and accessibility. Front facing customer services was a main discussion point that was discussed at length and formed a large part of the customer experience conversation. Digital exclusion was also discussed for residents that struggle with internet access or usage and how the council can alleviate this using an array of accessibility measures. Despite the discussion on face-to-face services, there is still a strong sentiment amongst members to continue to invest in the borough's digital services.

4.1 Using one site for council services instead of two.

Members of the session questioned the use of two sites and if it is viable for council services to be amalgamated into one central site for all borough functions. This recommendation comes as a cost saving measure which ideally can be used to support council services further. Amalgamating all services to one site also helps with accessibility for residents, by having a central site for residents, this alleviates issues of finding the right location or knowing the right site to go to for your query. However, it is necessary to ascertain the short- and long-term consequences for this recommendation and if there is a positive effect for residents given this measure.

Also, it is recommended that at the central site there is a dedicated officer on-site to deal with Council Tax/Benefits enquiries as they have the required knowledge to resolve any queries first-hand. This would ensure customers leave Greenhill Library with their query resolved whilst reducing the need for customers to return or to escalate the issue in case of a non-response.

4.2 Improved signage to sites

An alternative to amalgamating the site may be a simple decision to improve signage in the local area so that residents can properly differentiate between the locations. This will attempt to improve the accessibility of the area and help residents make better informed decisions about the sites they are visiting to avoid disappointment. Additionally, to better signpost to Gayton Road across the website and electronic communication with residents.

4.3 Accessibility

Although Greenhill Library's central location is great. In addition to front door, the introduction of a moving support service at different libraries i.e., different libraries in different parts of the



borough on different days which could provide an alternative face-to-face service for residents who may be digitally excluded and have accessibility issues.

4.4 Better communication and engagement to the council

Ensure communication about the new front door sites are robust. The website still carries old information on procedures as well as outdated information on departments and relevant officers to contact.

Additionally, to introduce 'Conversation café' style programmes and other outreach events that target communities who are hard-to-reach.

4.5 Refined complaints process

Improved liaison with residents for all complaints (minimum contact of phone call/email). There should be a response from the council when something has changed in their case, resolved or if a certain number of days have passed and the case is still open. A response should be sent to the customer to inform them their query is not lost, and that we are still working on resolving it. Regular communication needs to be introduced from the time the council receives the query to when it has been resolved.

Appendix 1 – Customer Experience Scope as agreed in March 2023



	SUBJECT	SCRUTINY REVIEW ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
	COMMITTEE	Overview & Scrutiny
	CHALLENGE PANEL MEMBERS	Cllr Sumaria – Chair (Conservative) Cllr Shah (Labour) Cllr Moshenson (Conservative) Cllr Henson (Labour) Cllr Halai (Conservative) Cllr Teli (Conservative) Cllr Hickman (Labour) Cllr Blackman (Conservative) Cllr Goodwin-Freeman (Conservative)
	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES/ OUTCOMES	Aim The purpose of the review is to investigate how we might use all of the Council's policies and strategies to help improve the customer experience through monitoring the progress of the customer experience action plan agreed at Cabinet and considering future customer needs, modern customer service delivery models and technology and the best outcomes for the Borough. Objectives: To monitor the progress on more intuitive digital access for residents e.g., refined search options on webpage



		<p>To better understand digital exclusion and those affected by it</p> <p>Review how services are delivered as a whole (<i>such as the front door to Adult Social care and Council Tax</i>) and key customer journeys (<i>such as subscribing to Garden Waste, reporting bin issues and ordering a parking permit</i>)</p> <p>To ensure an improvement in the council's complaints process and interaction with elected members</p> <p>To ensure an improvement in the customer journey using the webpage and phone lines</p>
	MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW	Better customer experience, as measured by resident satisfaction, fewer failure demand contacts, increased ratings for services
	SCOPE	<p>The following areas will be in scope of the review:</p> <p>Provide alternative channels where required – support people to self-serve or provide an alternative means of contact for more complex issues</p> <p>Reduce the need for contact – get things right first time and be proactive when there is a problem.</p> <p>Services are the best that they can be – ensure that services are built around the customer and identifying where the key problems are</p>
	SERVICE PRIORITIES	<p>Choose from the following:</p> <p>A council that puts residents first</p> <p>A borough that is clean and safe</p> <p>A place where those in need are supported</p>
	SPONSOR	Shumaila Dar



ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Rachel Gapp
SUPPORT OFFICER	Jonathan Milbourn
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	Mira Chauhan - Policy Team.
EXTERNAL INPUT	N/A
METHODOLOGY	<p>Desktop Research (system driven vs resident data)</p> <p>Residents Survey – telephone consultation</p> <p>Challenge Panel with Customer Service and Business Support owners</p> <p>Online Consultation via social media</p> <p>Resident Consultation</p> <p>Partner Consultation</p> <p>NB: The Challenge Panel can use outcomes from Peer Review which is due to take place</p>
EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	<p>The Challenge Panels will consider, during the course of its work, how equality implications have been considered in current policy and practice and consider the possible implications of any changes it recommends. In undertaking the Challenge Panels, members and officers will consider their practices and how it can ensure all relevant stakeholders in the borough to have their voices heard.</p>



	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	N/A
	TIMESCALE	<p>9th February 2023 – O&S meeting and sign-off</p> <p>February – First scrutiny review group meeting</p> <p>February – Officers prepare Desk Research</p> <p>March – Online Consultation</p> <p>March/April – Challenge Panels</p> <p>April – Officers to prepare final draft Scrutiny Report</p> <p>May – Report to be sent to members for comments</p> <p>May – Final report to be send to members</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>May – Legal clearance of Scrutiny Report</p> <p>May - Final Scrutiny Report submitted to O&S</p> <p>June 2023 (date tba) – Final Scrutiny Report presented to O&S</p> <p>Option 1 – June Cabinet</p>



		<p>May – Legal Clearance</p> <p>May – Cabinet briefing papers dispatched</p> <p>May – Report deadline</p> <p>June (date tba) – Cabinet briefing</p> <p>June (date tba) - Final deadline for Scrutiny Report</p> <p>June (date tba) – Final Scrutiny Report presented at Cabinet</p>
	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	<p>Policy team will provide a briefing and administrative support to the Challenge Panels. The Policy team will report recommendations to O&S; officers from the appropriate Service Area will provide a response to Cabinet and take forward any recommendations agreed by Cabinet.</p>
	REPORT AUTHOR	<p>Mira Chauhan</p>
	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	<p>Outline of formal reporting process:</p> <p>The relevant Divisional Director(s) and Portfolio Holder(s) will be consulted in the drafting of the final report and recommendations</p> <p>Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Report referred to Cabinet</p> <p>Officer response to Cabinet</p>
	FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)	<p>It is anticipated that Cabinet would consider any recommendations made (alongside the officers' response) at the Cabinet meeting in [insert month] and responded to in [insert month].</p>



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HARROW