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Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 11 March 2015 at 7.00 pm
Boardrooms 3, 4 and 5 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members
Councillors:

A Choudry (Chair)
Colwill (Vice-Chair)
Allie
Daly
W Mitchell Murray
Oladapo
Shahzad
Southwood

Substitute Members
Councillors:

Agha, J Mitchell Murray, Nerva, RS Patel, Ketan Sheth, Stopp and Thomas

Councillors:

Kansagra

Co-opted Members
Ms Christine Cargill
Mr Alloysius Frederick
Mrs Hawra Imame
Dr J Levison
Vacancy
Vacancy

Observers
Ms J Cooper
Mrs L Gouldbourne
Ms C Jolinon
Brent Youth Parliament representatives

For further information contact: Toby Howes, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

8 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan 27 - 28

The Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan is attached.

9 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Democratic Services Manager or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 64.

Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 31 March 2015

- Please remember to ***SWITCH OFF*** your mobile phone during the meeting.
- The meeting room is accessible by lift and seats will be provided for members of the public.

Scrutiny Committee
11 March 2015

Report from Operational Director Brent Customer Services

For Information

Update on Community Access Strategy

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides Scrutiny Members with a summary of the Community Access Strategy agreed by Cabinet on 15 October 2014 and the progress that has been made in implementing this.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 To note the progress that is being made in implementing the aims of the new Community Access Strategy.

3.0 Detail

3.1 A new Community Access Strategy was agreed by Cabinet on 15 October 2014, setting out plans for fundamentally changing the way in which residents access services and information from Brent. The Community Access Strategy sets out Brent's vision for transforming the way in which residents are able to access information, advice and services. It builds on the work already undertaken through the Future of Customer Services project and seeks to create modern and relevant access arrangements that are tailored to meet the needs of differing demographic groups, help us to respond positively to the financial pressures we face and to target our most personalised contact arrangements to those who are most vulnerable and have more complex needs. The strategy is attached as Appendix A.

3.2 The Customer Access strategy has been designed to support the wider aims of the Brent Borough plan and corporate strategic objectives. This includes aims to:

- *prevent demand for public services occurring in the first place*.

- *ensure early intervention and a more personalised approach to meeting needs*

- *doing more to support independence and resilience*

- *integrating services around individuals*

- *building partnerships between local services providers and local services- to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs*.

3.3 The key aims of the strategy are to:

- Develop a consistent and excellent experience for our customers whenever and however they make contact with us

- Develop customer access arrangements that are designed to meet the differing needs of our customers and are focused on our customers needs not our internal service boundaries

- Develop an improved digital offer, better customer confidence in digital access channels and significantly increase take up and use of digital access channels

- Improve the efficiency of customer access arrangements so as to better manage demand, remove duplication and failure and prevent demand arising in the first place

3.4 Underpinning the delivery of the strategy are key design principles which set out the framework within which access arrangements will be reshaped. These are:

- Access arrangements will be designed using customer and performance insight –to ensure that they are effective in meeting customer needs
- They will be easy to access, simple to use and responsive to residents' needs
- They will enable customers to "Tell us once" – allowing information provided to be used many times to meet customers' needs
- Enquiries will be resolved at first point of contact wherever possible
- Residents will be able to expect consistently high standards which ever service they contact- Brent's Customer promise to them.
- Access arrangements will be designed so that, wherever possible, residents can access them digitally.

3.5 The demographics in Brent have changed significantly over recent years, with areas of the borough becoming gentrified and large parts of the Borough now populated by those who are well educated, enjoying middle to upper incomes and with good employment skills. There are however pockets of deprivation, particularly in the south of the borough where the demographic breakdown of residents has remained stubbornly static. This is seen particularly in high density social housing where there are high levels of deprivation; inter generational unemployment and complex needs. The Customer Access strategy reflects the need to target our resources to those with most complex needs by reducing the requirement for more expensive contacts methods for those who are willing and able to self serve. Central to this aim is the need to ensure that residents are able to self serve through digital channels such as on line services or mobile applications, to enable them to manage their interactions with the Council and access services without the need to use more traditional channels such as telephone, face to face visits or writing in.

3.6 Currently telephone contact is the most widely used channel by our residents with an estimated 3.2 M calls per annum[1]. The Community Access Strategy aims to ensure that residents do not have to rely on telephone contact to access services or seek resolution of enquiries. Over time we expect to see reductions to telephone contact and a shift to digital access to services. We know that improvements to our website have resulted in increased visits however we also know that we need to improve our on line offer in order to make it easier and more convenient to use. Although there are a large range of services available on line, these can be cumbersome to access as residents have to log on to each one separately with a separate password for each one.

3.7 We also know that most Brent services are currently designed to reflect the Departmental boundaries that define our management structures. This means that residents generally have to navigate each service separately, which can be time consuming and inconvenient for them but also inefficient for Brent. The Strategy aims to change the way in which we design services, so that these better meet the needs of differing groups and involve residents in co designing them. The strategy also aims to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs, in particular by commissioning the Voluntary and Community sector to meet needs. These are long term aims which will require strong leadership and engagement with all staff, but which form one of the most important strands of the strategy.

3.8 The delivery of the Community Access Strategy is being achieved through a programme of projects that are being overseen by the One Council Board. There are 4 major working streams in progress and these are:

[1] There are 90,000 calls handled every month through the automated call distribution system, this includes parking enquiries managed by Serco. It is estimated that there are a further 180,000 calls handled outside of the ACD however this figure may include some internal calls.

- Improving telephony- to ensure that residents experience a consistently good response
- Channel shift – improving our digital offer to residents so that where they can self serve, it is easy and convenient to do so
- Modernising face to face contact- so that this supports our changing access arrangements, in particular providing assistance to residents who may need help to self serve.
- Thematic reviews- to redesign the way in which services, working with partners and the VCS and joining up service delivery so that individual and community needs are better met.

A small project team has been established to work with services across the Council to deliver each work stream and detailed progress is monitored by the Community Access Board which is chaired by the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Growth, the sponsor for the programme.

3.9 The scope and progress for each work stream is as follows:

3.10 **Improving telephony**

The key aims of this work stream are to:
-improve residents' experience when they telephone us
-reduce the number of published numbers on the web to make it easier to identify the correct number to ring
-centralising the management of call handling where appropriate to enable resources to be better aligned to manage peaks and troughs in demand.
- develop our telephone offer so that it can support residents to use on line self service facilities

3.11 **Achievements and progress to date**

- Call answering rates have been increased from an average of 80% to 90% for high volume services using Automated Call Distribution (ACD) These include Council Tax, Benefits, Registration and Nationality, Environment and Neighbourhoods, Parking , initial Adult social Care enquiries and some Housing enquiries. Total monthly calls received via Automated Call Distribution are circa 90,000 including switchboard calls. There are an estimated 180,000 calls that are handled outside the ACD system on a monthly and call answering vary greatly from team to team. Average answer rates for non ACD calls are around 60%.

- Automated call distribution has been implemented for a number of services to facilitate improved management of call handling and drive performance improvements. These include 3 teams in Brent Integrated

Business Support (licensing, housing, and planning), Transportation and the new Private Landlord licensing scheme. Work is now underway to extend use of ACD technology in Brent Housing Partnership, followed by other services with high volumes of telephone contact currently managed through hunt groups.

- Handsets have been rolled out to all desks in the Civic Centre to enable staff handling high volumes of customer calls to have access to these from any desk in the Civic Centre. (Handsets provide greater functionality for managing and covering high volumes of calls).
- We have migrated the majority of staff to one single voicemail service, to ensure that messages do no get overlooked because of the availability of two voice mail systems (Voda phone and the Corporate voicemail system).
- All 2500 staff across the Council have been briefed on the Council's Customer Promise to resident's and their responsibility in ensuring that our promise to answer all calls is met. Work is in progress to develop detailed reporting for calls managed outside ACD systems (we have extensive management information available for calls managed through the ACD system)
- A schedule of telephone reviews is planned for 2015/16 that will seek to address issues impacting on residents' experience and centralise call handling where this will support improvements and deliver efficiencies.

3.12 **Channel Shift**

The aim of this work stream is to:

- Significantly improve residents experience when they use digital channels to access services and information
- Increase the range of services available through digital channels
- Increase take up and use of digital channels by residents to access services and information and in so doing reduce telephone demand.

3.13 **Achievements and progress to date**

- Redesigned home page based on feedback from residents, members and staff- to ensure that this signposts key services, updates and information
- Improved search and navigations on Brent web site – so that residents can find what they want quickly and easily without having to navigate through different web pages
- Improved access to web site from mobile devices to ensure that on line services can be accessed easily from any device
- Procured a new Customer Portal that will enable residents to create their own personalised " My Brent " account enabling them to log in

and authenticate once and then be able to access a range of on line services without having to log in separately to each service.

3.14 **Modernising Face to face contact arrangements**

The key aims are to:

- Significantly increase the availability of self service facilities so that residents who do not have access to the internet or need help to use self service, can still access on line services with assistance
- Integrate enquiry handling for residents so that wherever possible their enquiries can be resolved by one officer
- Reduce waiting time to be seen by an officer by resolving quick enquiries on the ground floor of the Civic Centre without the need for the resident to take a ticket and wait for an interview booth to become free.
- Develop a more rounded offer for residents that incorporates the Voluntary sector and other key partners such as the Job Centre Plus
- Develop a greater employment focus for residents visiting the Customer Services centre by promoting help and opportunities available via plasma screens, incorporating surgeries for Brent Start (adult education) and promoting information and help available from libraries.

3.15 **Achievements and progress to date**

- The Customer Services Centre at the Civic Centre has been physically reconfigured so as to increase space available on the ground floor to provide more facilities at the first point of entry and to enable the reception to be relocated from the mezzanine floor. The number of self service computers has increased from 8 to 28 and 3 new information points have been installed providing visitors with signposting, assistance and help.
- A new triage service is being piloted with a team of seven officers from housing, benefits and customer services cross trained to be enabling them to handle a range of enquiries covering housing, council tax, benefits and employment. The pilot has been running for about 8 weeks and early results are really encouraging with 50% of enquiries resolved at this first point of contact without the need for the resident to see an officer in a booth. The pilot will run for a further 4 weeks before full evaluation and decisions will then be made about how to develop this approach further.
- Plasma screens now display information about employment opportunities and help, including courses available via Brent Start,

information and help available from libraries and support available from the employment team. As the triage pilot is developed, this will also incorporate proactive signposting to employment help.

- A networking event has been scheduled for 12 March between the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) and Brent staff. A range of VCS organisations will be participating to promote the services they offer and enable Brent staff to find out more about these. The aim of the event is to build greater awareness of the VCS offer amongst Brent staff and to build contacts and links with them.

3.16 **Thematic Reviews**

The key aims are to:

- Review and redesign services to better meet the needs of differing resident groups
- To ensure that planned reviews and projects instigated outside the Community Access strategy, fully incorporate the design principles and aims of the strategy
- To engage residents in the co design of services
- To identify and deliver efficiencies in service delivery arrangements
- To identify opportunities for sharing data between services so that our residents only need to " Tell us once " and to develop a more joined up approach to meeting the needs of differing groups of residents

3.17 **Achievement and progress to date**

- The Community Access Board has endorsed the broad approach to thematic reviews and an indicative schedule for the prioritised delivery of these.
- Community Access leads will form part of project boards for planned reviews for Regulatory services, Parking and Homelessness. These reviews are all either now in progress or about to commence.
- A review of care leavers and isolated elderly residents has been agreed and work is commencing on both in March 2015.
- Telephone handling for all services will be covered by these reviews, either as part of planned review e.g. Regulatory services and care leavers or as a specific review of telephony.

3.18 A detailed Project Initiation document has been developed and agreed by the One Council programme board along with a detailed project plan with all actions that are planned for the next 18 months to ensure successfully delivery of the strategy.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The Community Access strategy aims to deliver annual savings of £1.5M by March 2017. The cost of the project including procurement of the new customer portal is £ 1.185M.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal implications

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 Equality impact assessments have been completed for the overall strategy and for specific work streams within this. There are no adverse impacts identified at this stage because all contact channels remain open to residents and thus the improvements to on line services offer enhancements to our existing offer.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 There are no staffing implications identified at this stage. Full impact assessments will be undertaken to review equalities impacts for proposed staff changes as soon as these are identified.

Background Papers

Community Access Strategy (Appendix A)

Contact Officers

Margaret Read

Operational Director Brent Customer Services

Community Access Strategy

1. Introduction and aims of strategy

1.1 This Community Access Strategy sets out Brent's vision for transforming the way in which residents are able to access information, advice and services. It builds on the work already undertaken through the Future of Customer Services project and seeks to create modern and relevant access arrangements that are tailored to meet the needs of differing demographic groups, help us to respond positively to the financial pressures we face and to target our most personalised contact arrangements to those who are most vulnerable and have more complex needs.

1.2 The Community Access strategy has been designed to support the wider aims of the Brent Borough plan and Corporate strategic objectives. This includes aims to

- *prevent demand for public services occurring in the first place*.
- *ensure early intervention and a more personalised approach to meeting needs*
- *doing more to support independence and resilience*
- *integrating services around individuals*
- *exploring the potential of different structures of delivery and governance to establish new and more effective and efficient ways of working.*

1.3 The overall aims of the strategy are to :

- Develop a consistent and excellent experience for our customers whenever and however they make contact with us
- Develop customer access arrangements that are designed to meet the differing needs of our customers , and focused on the customer not internal service boundaries

- Develop an improved digital offer, better customer confidence in digital access channels and significantly increase take up and use of digital access channels
- Improve the efficiency of customer access arrangements so as to better manage demand, remove duplication and failure and prevent demand arising in the first place

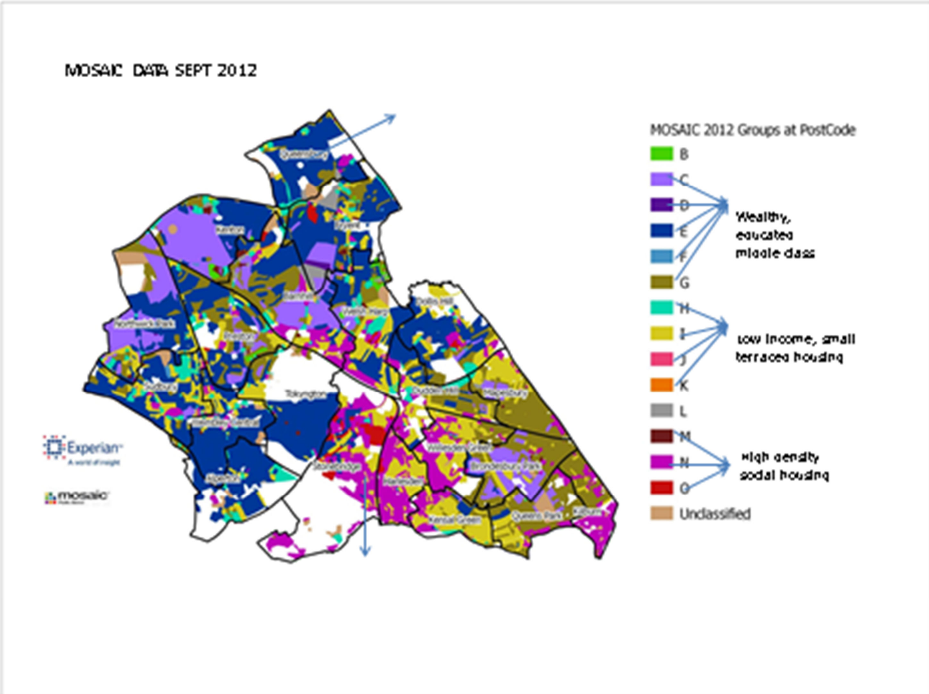
1.4 Our current customer access offer is still fragmented and inconsistent. It reflects our internal structural boundaries and is not tailored to meet the differing needs of customer groups. Too often customers are asked to provide information that the Council already holds because we do not widely share data or they have to make separate contact for each service they use, rather than one contact which resolves related enquiries.

1.5 Telephone contact represents the most widely and frequently used method of contact with an estimated 3.2 M calls per annum. Although the number of published telephone numbers has been reduced, customers still have to navigate 89 published numbers and 87 published email addresses. Our telephone answer rates vary significantly from service area to service area and we are not optimising use of technology such as Automated Call Distribution, to better manage this.

1.6 With am estimated 3.8M visits to our website per year, there are real opportunities to develop our digital offer to better meet the contact needs of our customers. There are however different 20 microsites, 8 separate log in arrangements and feedback from our customers indicates that it can be difficult to search and find the information they are looking for.

2.0 Customer Insight

The demographics in Brent have changed significantly over recent years, with areas of the borough becoming gentrified and large parts of the Borough being populated by those who are well educated, enjoying middle to upper incomes and good employment skills. There are however pockets of deprivation in the south of the borough where the demographic breakdown of residents has remained stubbornly static, typically in high rise social housing with high levels of deprivation, inter generational unemployment and complex needs. The Community Access strategy reflects the need to target our resources to those with most complex needs by reducing the requirement for more expensive contacts methods, from those who are willing and able to self serve. There is more work that needs to be carried out to better understand the differing needs of customer groups within the borough and to ensure that these inform the design and access arrangements for the services they use.



Mosaic Customer Segments

Group	Group Description
A	Residents of isolated rural communities
B	Residents of small and mid-sized towns with strong local roots
C	Wealthy people living in the most sought after neighbourhoods
D	Successful professionals living in suburban or semi-rural homes
E	Middle income families living in moderate suburban semis
F	Couples with young children in comfortable modern housing
G	Young, well-educated city dwellers
H	Couples and young singles in small modern starter homes
I	Lower income workers in urban terraces in often diverse areas
J	Owner occupiers in older-style housing in ex-industrial areas
K	Residents with sufficient incomes in right-to-buy social houses
L	Active elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations
M	Elderly people reliant on state support
N	Young people renting flats in high density social housing
O	Families in low-rise social housing with high levels of benefit need
Unclassified	Not matched to Mosaic property list
	Total Households in Brent

Brent one council

Customer Segmentation

Well Off (54%)	Moderate Means (21%)	Deprived (24%)
Working professionals Well educated Independent	Lower income workers Mix of independent and partial independence	Social housing Furthest from job market Complex needs
Access universal services :Council Tax, Electoral registration, parking, schools admissions	Access universal services and support services (benefits, social care)	Access complex services and universal services
Services lend themselves well to digital access	Services mix of universal and personalised	Services complex and universal
Customer propensity and preference for digital access- likelihood to Self serve very high	Customer propensity for digital access with support- Likelihood to self serve high	More personalised support required- likelihood to self serve very low

Brent one council

Demographic make up Brent : 2014

2%	Cafés and Catchments	Affluent families with growing children living in upmarket housing in city environs
2%	World-Class Wealth	Global high flyers and families of privilege living luxurious lifestyles in London's most exclusive boroughs
15%	Community Elders	Established older households owning city homes in diverse neighbourhoods
1%	Ageing Access	Older residents owning small inner suburban properties with good access to amenities
10%	Metro High-Flyers	Ambitious 20 and 30-somethings renting expensive apartments in highly commutable areas of major cities
9%	Crowded Kaleidoscope	Multi-cultural households with children renting social flats in over-crowded conditions
8%	Inner City Stalwarts	Long-term renters of inner city social flats who have witnessed many changes
20%	Cultural Comfort	Thriving families with good incomes in multi-cultural urban communities
20%	Flexible Workforce	Self-starting young renters ready to move to follow worthwhile incomes from service sector jobs
7%	Uptown Elite	High status households owning elegant homes in accessible inner suburbs where they enjoy city life in comfort

CAPITA 3

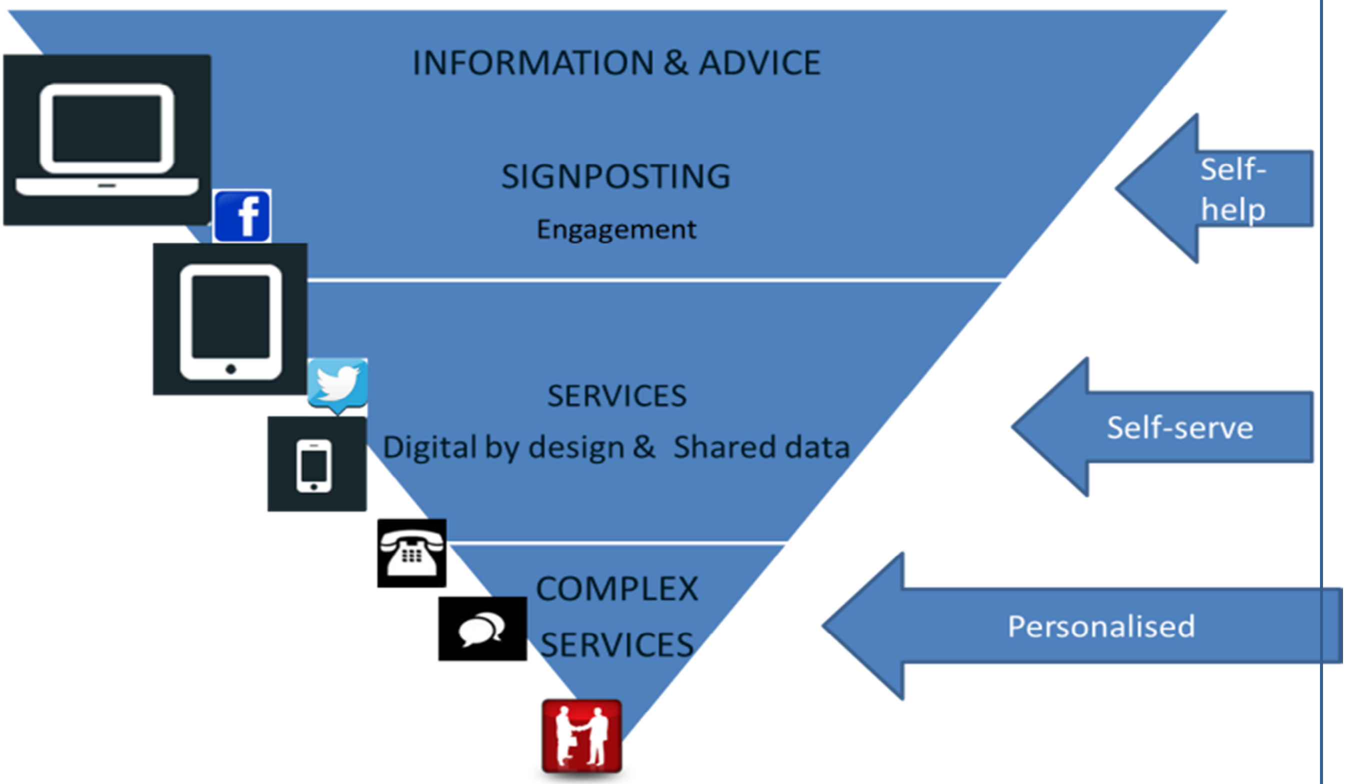
3.0 Design Principles

The Future of Customer Services project set out a number of high level design principles for customer contact, to create a consistent customer ethos for all services and support the delivery of excellent customer service. These design principles are embedded in the new Community Access Strategy and will underpin the work streams forming part of the overall delivery plan.

The design principles are as follows:

- Customer and performance insight – designed to meet customer needs
- Easy to access & simple to use, responsive
- Tell us once- information provided once used many times
- Enquiries resolved at first point of contact
- Consistent look and feel & standards across all services
- Digital by design

4.0 High level Model



5.0 Community Access Strategy: themes

The delivery of the new Community Access Strategy covers 5 key themes.

- Better Customer and Performance Insight
- Better Customer Experience
- Better confidence digital channels
- Better and more consistent service standards
- Better targeting of resources and value for money

These themes will determine the delivery plans for the strategy.

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6.0 Indicative High Level Delivery Plan				
High level work streams	**Short term 0-3 months**	**Short to medium term 3-6 months**	**Medium term 6-12 months**	**Long term 12 months+**
Customer and performance Insight	Demographic and service take up mapping	Demographic and service take up mapping	Redesign based on customer segmentation	Review and improve
Telephone improvement	Short term telephone improvements	Rationalise telephone numbers Review hunt groups and extend use ACD Telephone reporting	Review Extend calls handled by contact centre- implementation of PWC recommendations	Review and improve
Improved face to face customer experience	Improve visitor management at CC	Extend and increase self service take up Cross skilling of staff	Review customer for Willesden library centre	
Improve Customer service standards	Review and relaunch customer promise	Develop standards score cards. Develop customer network of customer champions New induction module	Embed customer standards in Business planning and appraisals	Review and improve performance
Tell us once use many times		Identify potential opportunities for data sharing	Review client index Process review and redesign	Process review and redesign
Improve digital offer		Improve home page and	Customer portal	E mail alerts

and increase channel shift		search facilities Social media strategy	Channel shift	Channel shift Analytics Personalisation
Refocus and prioritise resources		Review and prioritise digital projects (customer related) Cross skilling to support one touch resolution	Cross skilling to support one touch resolution	Redesign roles and structures to support one touch resolution
Develop consistent look and feel for access arrangements	Review and launch standards Review and relaunch web governance	Social media strategy and governance	Review and identify improvements to web microsites	

Brent	**Scrutiny Committee** **11 March 2015** **Report from the Director of Regeneration and Growth**
For information	Wards affected: ALL
Housing Pressures in Brent	

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the housing pressures impacting on the borough, drawing on the Housing Strategy 2014-19 and other information, with particular regard to homelessness and wider housing supply and demand issues.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note this report and consider any recommendations for further action.

3.0 Background

3.1 In common with the rest of London, Brent's population grew significantly between the 2001 and 2011 Census exercises, with a marked increase in average family size and the numbers of children. This is driven by both natural increase through new births and longer life expectancy and by national and international in-migration. Demand for homes is rising in consequence, accompanied by rising rents and prices, with demand for larger homes in particular above the London norm. As has been well-documented and recognised across the political spectrum, there has not been a concurrent increase in new supply of market or affordable housing to keep pace with demographic and market changes. Rather, the main consequence of rising demand has been a shift in tenure, with owner occupation falling, private renting rising and social housing supply remaining static as a proportion of the total, at least in part due to loss from Right to Buy.

3.2 Change to the tenure pattern in London is even more pronounced in Brent, where the private rented sector grew from just over 17% of the stock in 2001 to 28.8% by the 2011Census and around 32% now, making it a larger source of supply than the social sector. This growth is principally through a shift from owner occupation to renting, not any increase in new supply. The proportion of social housing has remained broadly unchanged and the majority (around 16,000 homes) is owned and managed by RPs, while the council owns just fewer than 9,000 rented and 3,000 leasehold homes, managed by Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). Following increases to discount rates (with further change possible following the General Election), Right to Buy applications have increased: for example, there were four sales in 2008/09, compared to 92 in 2013/14 and 55 in the current year (as at November 2014).

3.3 While the picture in Brent resembles that in London in many respects, there are also significant differences. This report presents the key characteristics and highlights factors that are particularly important for Brent.

4. Detail

4.1 Housing Market and Affordability

4.1.1 House prices in Brent have risen steadily: between December 2013 and December 2014, the average house price in Brent rose 15.4% to £415,000, compared to a London average of £461,453. While this appears to indicate that Brent is relatively affordable, the London figure is distorted by very high values in the centre, so it may be more helpful to consider the affordability in other ways. Gross annual earnings in Brent are £28,111 (London £32800), giving an average price to income ratio of 14.7, while the London Housing Strategy states that eighty per cent of new market housing is affordable to only twenty per cent of working households. Median private sector rents are £1250 a month, just below the London average of £1300.

4.1.2 The disparity between earnings and housing costs suggests a dysfunctional market. At the same time, the local economy is not delivering the jobs or salaries that might allow residents to enter the market locally or elsewhere in London. The emerging Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy is therefore as important as new housing development in meeting demand.

4.1.3 The most striking change in patterns of need and demand has been the impact on low or middle income households, who might once have met their own needs quite readily but are increasingly unable to afford private purchase or renting and have no access affordable housing. To some extent, this demand is being absorbed by the rapid expansion of the private rented sector, but high rental costs are also driving an increase in sharing, overcrowding and poor quality housing.

4.2 Homelessness

4.2.1 Homeless applications and acceptances have been rising across London and this trend is expected to continue, at least in the short term; Brent currently sees around fifty new applications a week and it is anticipated that the council will accept around 700 homelessness applications in the current year. There are a number of reasons for this rise but the most notable feature is that eviction from private rented housing is now the single largest cause of homelessness and it is anticipated that around 450 (65%) of the 700 expected acceptances will be from this source. In part, this reflects a growing shift away from renting to households claiming Housing Benefit by some landlords, including those affected by the benefit cap (see below), as demand from other household types increases and landlords see Housing Benefit and Universal Credit as risk factors. At the same time, the number of Housing Benefit claims in the sector is increasing as even households in work struggle to meet high rents.

4.2.2 As a result of past high levels of homelessness and the limited supply of social housing Brent has more households in temporary accommodation than any other authority, currently totalling 3,400, of whom 2,600 were accepted before 9th November 2012, when the Localism Act introduced the ability to discharge permanent housing duties through the private rented sector.

Housing Benefit restrictions and rising rents have limited the council's ability to secure temporary accommodation in Brent, leading to increased reliance on properties elsewhere in London and further afield.

4.2.3 In response, the Housing Strategy sets targets to reduce the number of homeless applications to below the London average by 2019 and to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation to the London average by the same date. In particular, the emphasis will be on prevention, advice and support. The council will work with landlords individually and collectively to sustain tenancies and use discretionary housing payments where appropriate to secure the accommodation of those affected by the overall benefit cap. Where this is not possible and households are threatened with homelessness the council will provide advice and assistance to secure a private let. Since November 2012 the council has been able to discharge its permanent housing duties by securing private rented housing for homeless households and it is acknowledged that affordability and supply issues will result in a higher number out-of-borough placements.

4.2.4 A fundamental review of temporary accommodation in Brent aims to reduce reliance on it over the lifetime of the strategy. New temporary accommodation options are being developed, such as the facility at Knowles House, and a permanent hostel to provide emergency and short-term accommodation will be established. Increased access to private sector properties is being explored, including conversion of existing temporary accommodation to private rented accommodation available for let at Local Housing Allowance (LHA)-compatible rents and the possibility of acquisition, either directly or through an investor partner, of a portfolio of private rented properties.

4.2.5 In the short term, a higher proportion of social lettings are targeted for homeless households and the scope to maximise transfers within social housing, thus increasing the overall capacity to meet housing need is being explored. A revised incentive policy was approved in April 2013 to mitigate the impact of the social sector size criteria and encourage down-size moves, which will also assist in making larger homes available for letting.

4.3 Private Rented Sector

4.3.1 The private rented sector is a valuable resource but its growth is also a symptom of excessive demand and standards of management and maintenance are variable. Access to much of the sector is increasingly restricted by high rents, leading to two main effects. First, a shift in the demographic of private renters, in particular due to movement of both higher income households and those claiming housing benefit out of central London. Second, there has been a parallel growth in the number of houses in multiple occupation, in sharing, in overcrowding and, at the extreme, the phenomenon of “beds in sheds”. While the market has grown in response to demand, there is evidence that it is increasingly polarised, while shifting market conditions have also driven the rise in homelessness noted above. The local policy response therefore focusses on the key objectives of raising the quality of management and maintenance and facilitating access to the sector.

4.3.2 While the council will support the use of voluntary accreditation schemes for both landlords and agents and encourage the dissemination of best practice, the introduction of licensing from January 2015 is a key element of the local response to the growth of the sector and its consequences in terms of standards of management and maintenance. An Additional Licensing Scheme now requires all properties let as HMOs to be licensed. A Selective Licensing Scheme, covering the three wards of Harlesden, Wembley Central and Willesden Green, requires all privately let accommodation to be licensed. A review of enforcement and grant making powers is also being undertaken, alongside work with Lakehouse, our partner in delivering energy efficiency programmes, to raise standards in the sector.

4.3.3 While the council has limited ability to influence the market, it is anticipated that licensing, in particular through the support and incentives that will be available to landlords in addition to its enforcement aspects, will assist in developing a more stable market over time, within which it may be possible to encourage landlords to follow best practice, including the offer of longer term tenancies. To assist further in this area, Brent Housing Partnership is working to establish a Lettings Agency that will provide letting and managing agent services to landlords and tenants. It will operate on a commercial footing but provide an exemplar of high standards within the market. A central objective will be to provide increased access for the council to private rented properties for those approaching as homeless or in need of housing assistance.

4.4 Welfare Reform

4.4.1 The welfare reform programme has been wide-ranging, affecting both social and private renters, with further changes in train or proposed and the council set up a joint team, involving staff from Housing Needs and Revenues and Benefits, working with Job Centre Plus and the CAB, at an early stage to support our approach to mitigation of the impact on Brent households, which has been among the highest in the country. Limits have been placed on

Housing Benefit through the LHA cap and the social sector size criteria (the so-called bedroom tax). The Overall Benefit Cap has imposed further constraints since August 2013, limiting overall income from benefits to £500 a week for families and £350 for single people, and phased (albeit delayed) introduction of Universal Credit (UC) will pose further challenges. Although the numbers change over time as claims end or begin, there were 1,173 live cases affected by the cap at the end of January 2015, 798 of which were private tenants and 271 were households in temporary accommodation. Worst affected are large families in high rent areas, with private rented housing simply unaffordable for most workless households requiring three bedroom or larger homes and even two bedroom homes at manageable rents are in very short supply.

4.4.2 The following figures give some idea of the impact of the LHA cap, where there is a significant gap between LHA levels (in the south of the borough) and actual rents:

- 1 bed LHA £258 - Brent average rent £315
- 2 bed LHA £299 - Brent average rent £395
- 3 bed LHA £351 - Brent average rent £575
- 4 bed LHA £413 - Brent average rent £850

This gap must be covered by the council if households are to sustain tenancies. As noted earlier, Brent will accept close to 700 households as homeless this year, with around 450 of these evicted from the private rented sector. In terms of their bedroom needs and the costs of supporting rent payments, the impact is:

- 350 two bedroom homes - £1,747,200 a year
- 175 three bedroom homes - £,2,038,400 a year
- 75 four bedroom homes - £,1,704,300
- Total - £5,489,900 a year

In this context, it will be essential to find alternative solutions, either in terms of the type or location of temporary accommodation.

4.4.3 In broad terms, finding employment is the most direct way for households to mitigate the impact of welfare reform and, to date, 351 of 966 cases where a solution has been found have been resolved in this way. This figure is in line with industry expectations for this household cohort. Other solutions include rehousing both within and outside the borough (77 households have moved out of Brent) and use of discretionary housing payments, which have been used in 508 cases.

4.4.4 The social sector size criteria mean that affected tenants unable to find employment will need to move to smaller homes or meet the cost from existing household budgets. The council is keen that under-occupiers should move to free up much-needed family housing and offers high priority and incentives to assist. Around 40 BHP tenants have downsized in 2013/14 and the current year combined.

4.4.5 Universal Credit went live in Brent on 2nd March for a small proportion of current claimants (all single people but with many exclusions that restrict the roll-out to straightforward cases). As the roll-out expands, it is anticipated that, broadly speaking, single people will be better off but a large proportion of lone parents will be adversely affected. At the national level, it is predicted that 3.1 million households will be better of and 2.8 million will be worse off.

4.4.6 Welfare reform has given further impetus to the council's effort to promote employment in the borough. The council has implemented a new employment offer, to be supported by the development of the Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy, which will be presented to Cabinet in April 2015.

5. Housing Need and Housing Supply

5.1 As noted above, demand is growing and supply has failed to keep pace, with access to all sectors increasingly restricted, either by price or by policy. Rising homelessness is the most severe symptom but needs to be seen in the context of wider housing demand. In the long term, a significant increase in supply across all sectors - owner occupation, private renting, affordable renting and mid-market options - is essential.

5.2 Following changes to the Allocation Scheme, there are now 4424 households in bands A-C on housing register (including homeless cases) among a total of 15763 (including those with no recognised housing need). In 2013/14, 578 lettings were made (269 to homeless households) and 873 are projected for 2014/15 (520 to homeless households). Average waiting times for rehousing through the Locata choice-based lettings scheme for households accepted as homeless are:

- 1-bed 5 Years
- 2-bed 9 Years
- 3-bed 12 Years
- 4-bed 16 Years
- 5-bed 12 Years

5.3 The Allocation Scheme allows for direct offers to be made to households who have been waiting longer than the average and other measures, such as increased incentives for downsizing moves, are intended to increase availability of larger homes for letting.

5.4 Two other elements of demand are also worth noting. First, as noted earlier, there is increasing demand from households on middle or lower incomes who might have expected to meet their own needs through house purchase of private renting and are now struggling to do so as costs rise. This suggests a need for mid-market options such as low-cost home ownership or sub-market rented products and for new private rented sector provision that could provide better quality and longer-term security.

5.5 Second, there is an over-reliance on unsuitable and expensive residential care for older or disabled households that, along with homelessness, is a significant financial pressure for the council. There is therefore a requirement for new supported and Extra Care housing.

5.6 An additional source of pressure on the needs register is the drive by government and the Mayor to increase mobility among existing social housing tenants. While efforts to increase the opportunities for tenants to move within and between boroughs are welcome in principle and will benefit Brent residents, facilitating this adds an additional burden on available lettings, particularly in the case of the proposed top-slice of 5% of lettings to support the Mayor's pan-London mobility scheme.

5.7 The Affordable Rent programme, managed by the Mayor in London through his Housing Covenant, aims to maintain output while reducing subsidy by permitting rents up to 80% of market levels, although average actual rent levels in the current programme are below that maximum, with subsidy skewed towards larger homes. 2014/15 is the last year of the current programme and the 2015-18 version introduces variants on the Affordable Rent product: Capped and Discounted Rents, with rent levels respectively ranging from 50% to 80% of market rates.

5.8 Local planning policy projects development of at least 22,000 homes between 2007 and 2026 of which 11,000 (50%) will be affordable housing. Within this, the Housing Strategy sets a target of 5,000 Affordable Rent and Low-cost Home Ownership properties by 2019. 700 of these would be provided directly by the council through BHP. This will include affordable housing at Target, Affordable, Discounted and Capped rents, of which at least 35% would be three bedroom or larger, to align with profile of demand, mitigate the impact of benefit cap and tackle overcrowding. The majority of new homes will be delivered in the identified Growth Areas, while smaller sites (including land within the Housing Revenue Account) will also be identified.

5.9 Alongside new development, it will be essential to make best use of the existing stock. To some extent, this is a question of the allocation and lettings policies referred to earlier – for example support for down-sizing. As well as approaches to allocation, best use of stock will include reviewing e=existing stock holdings by the council and its partners and the development of asset management plans that will include options for remodelling existing stock and estate or disposing of some stock to support new development elsewhere.

5.10 In addition, the council will support provision of mid-market options, such as shared ownership and other low-cost home ownership products, LCHO products, and new build provision in the private rented sector, with 1000 build to rent homes delivered by 2019, at least 30% of which would be at Local Housing Allowance rates. This will support employment and the needs of local employers, with provision targeted at working households.

5.11 The New Accommodation for Independent Living (NAIL) programme, supported through Mayor's Covenant funding, aims to provide 390 extra-care and specialist supported housing units by end of 2017/18 to widen housing options and reduce reliance on residential care. This supply will be delivered within the council's own development programme and those of Registered Providers, with new accommodation at varying scales and sizes targeted at older people, people with physical or learning disabilities and people with mental health issues. Alongside new accommodation, this will also involve new approaches to support in line with the personalisation agenda in adult social care services.

5.12 Although the Mayor's Covenant programme will be the main source of funding, the council will also explore new partnerships and new funding sources, as well as ensuring that most effective use is made of S106 resources, Right to Buy receipts and the council's own borrowing capacity.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report but it should be noted that the serious financial pressures arising from homelessness, residential care costs and other factors have shaped the development of policy and have been detailed in various earlier reports.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 Diversity Implications

7.1 There are no diversity implications immediately arising from this report. However, it should be noted that full Equality Assessments have been carried out in relation to the policies and practices referred to above.

Background Papers

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Scrutiny Committee
Forward Plan 2015/16

Date of Committee	Agenda items	Responsible officers
Wednesday 11 March 2015	• Customer Access Strategy • Housing pressures within Brent. • Work programme providers and unemployment	Andy Donald, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Growth
Thursday 30 April 2015	• Annual report of Scrutiny Committee • Sustainability agenda – Recycling,CO2 emissions, cycling, congestion and air quality. • Clinical Commissioning Group – Future Commissioning Intentions • Equalities and HR practices • Report from the Pupil Premium Task Group	Cathy Tyson, Head of Policy and Scrutiny Sue Harper, Strategic Director Environment and Neighbourhoods. CCG – Sarah Mansuralli, Chief Operating Officer Christine Gilbert, Chief Executive Cara Davani, Director of HR

Date of Committee	Agenda items	Responsible officers
Tuesday 16 June 2015	• Access to affordable childcare. • Paediatric Services in Brent. • Public Health – priorities and progress. • Local Government ombudsman complaints and corporate complaints. • Report from the Access to GP services task group	Sara Williams, Operational Director Early Help and Education. Northwest London Hospitals Trust, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group. Melanie Smith, Director of Public Health
Wednesday 8 July 2015	• Licencing procedures including licenced premises and betting shops.	