

Review of Homelessness and the Customer Journey: Witness Session 5

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Melissa Blower, Housing Project Manager
Papers with report	Scoping Report

HEADLINES

This item relating to the Committee's major review is the fifth witness session and Members will hear from representatives of the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Residents' Services Select Committee notes the evidence heard at the witness session and seeks clarification as necessary in the context of its review of Homelessness and the Customer Journey in Hillingdon.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At its meeting on 16 January 2024, the Residents' Services Select Committee agreed to undertake a major review of the Council's Housing Advice and Homelessness Service, with a particular focus on the residents' journey through the system and customer service. The scoping report for the review was subsequently approved at the Select Committee meeting on 13 February 2024.

At this fifth witness session, a representative of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (Jas Nagra – Citizen's Advice Service Manager) will be in attendance to outline their role and answer any questions that may arise.

Citizen's Advice Bureau

For 85 years, the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) has been helping people by giving them the knowledge and the confidence they need to find a way forward. Their network of independent charities offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free. The service is independent and totally impartial. People across the country can seek advice on a wide variety of matters including those relating to family, work, debt, immigration, health and housing.

CAB help millions of people every year. In 2022-23, this included:

- 42.7 million visits to their website
- 457,000 people helped face to face (more than double the previous year)
- 1.8 million people using their phone service
- 895,000 helped by email or webchat
- 79,000 witnesses supported through the Witness Service

Citizen's Advice provide support in approximately 1,600 locations across England and Wales with 14,000 volunteers and 8,843 staff. By helping people with the underlying cause of their problems and making sure they don't get worse, they save the Government and public services hundreds of millions of pounds every year.

Site Visits

As part of the review, on Wednesday 22 May 2024, four Members of the Select Committee visited B&Bs in the Borough accompanied by the Counter Fraud Team. On Friday 24 / 31 May 2024 some Members also visited the customer contact centre and the Housing Reception at the Civic Centre to listen to calls and observe proceedings.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were noted for this review, subject to any changes agreed by the Committee:

1. To gain a thorough understanding of the Council's Homeless Prevention Service and the resident's journey through this process.
2. To scrutinise the service delivery and review its effectiveness.
3. To review service users' feedback to explore the challenges faced by residents accessing the service.
4. To look at other local authorities that may have different models of service delivery for best practice, including research and findings from charities, housing bodies, regional bodies and organisations, e.g. GLA.
5. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose practical and deliverable actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Select Committees directly engage residents in shaping policy and recommendations from the Committees are presented to Cabinet to consider, and ultimately seek to improve the way the Council provides services to residents.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.