

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **RESOURCES AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 23RD MARCH, 2021** at 7.30 pm as a Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams.

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Councillors Andrew Parkinson (Chair), Thomas Gardiner, Alison Kelly, Jenny Mulholland, Lazzaro Pietragnoli, Luisa Porritt and Abdul Quadir

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT**

Councillors Ranjit Singh

**The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.**

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. GUIDANCE ON THE REMOTE MEETINGS HELD DURING THE CORONAVIRUS NATIONAL EMERGENCY**

##### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the remote meeting procedures set out in the agenda be agreed.

#### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Luisa Porritt.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PECUNIARY, NON-PECUNIARY AND ANY OTHER INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

No declarations were made.

#### **4. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

##### **Broadcast of the meeting**

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for six months after the meeting.

After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available upon request. Those who had asked to address the meeting were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

### **Adjournment of meeting for minute's silence**

The Chair announced that the Marie Curie 'Shine a light' one minute silence would be happening at 8.00pm. He said that, in order to allow the members to participate, the meeting would be adjourned for five minutes at this time.

### **5. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

There were no deputations.

### **6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no such business.

### **7. LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2019/2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor.

In his introduction of the report, the Borough Solicitor outlined to Members that he and the Service Manager Business Support were involved from a corporate complaints aspect, their role was to look after, monitor, and record data concerning complaints and to advise on procedure. He continued that it would be more appropriate to raise specific questions about individual service's complaints to the service areas directly and suggested this could be done at the relevant scrutiny committee.

The Service Manager reminded Members that the report covered the 2019/2020 municipal year and would not include data from during the pandemic period. He said that the pandemic had had an impact on bringing the report to the Committee, as there had been the intention to bring complaints reports to the Committee earlier in the municipal year.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Borough Solicitor and Service Manager made the following comments:

- Where it said in the report that it took 20 days for a response to given to a complaint, it did not mean that the resident would hear nothing for those 20

days. The service handling the complaint would be in contact with the resident throughout the process.

- The timescale for responding to complaints was important but not at the expense of quality.
- Members wanted to know what were the reasons for longer waiting times for complaint resolution. The Service Manager agreed to look at providing the mean wait times for complaints in future reports. The amount of complaints resolved between 21 and 40 days could be found in Appendix 2.
  - **Action by: Service Manager – Business Support**
- Different departments tended to receive complaints of differing complexity; this was reflected in the varying response times.
- Members asked why there had been a change to the complaint response timescales. Officers told the committee that in April 2019 the complaints policy and process was changed to a 10-day timescale for handling complaints. Before this, the timescale varied across services, the update standardised the process.
- There was a new complaints computer system being implemented that would allow for more complex breakdowns of the data on complaints. Members were interested in learning more about complaints through richer data metrics.
- A Member of the Committee acknowledged that complaints take many forms. Officers agreed with a Member suggestion, which in any event reflected current plans, of gathering and using all forms of complaints (complaints, member enquiries, freedom of information requests and legal claims) to understand trends in complaints and possible areas for improvement.
- In response to concern from a Member that complainants the process of further escalation was difficult. The Service Manager said that officers had been conducting more robust stage 1 investigations and discussing solutions with the complainant before the complaint reached stage 2. This meant that whilst there were fewer stage 2 complaints, it was generally the more complex cases that reached that stage and, as a result, there was an increased rate of them being upheld.
- The Service Manager Business Support would follow up on any awards made by the Ombudsman with individual directorates; however, it was the responsibility of the relevant directors to implement any changes and recommendations.
- Members agreed that it was important to learn from complaints. The complaints report was taken to Camden Management Team (CMT) but also the Service Manager attended Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings quarterly to capture lessons that have been learned from complaints.
- There would be a review of the Member Enquiry system after it had been running for six months. This would provide an opportunity for users to feedback and improve the service.
- The Borough Solicitor felt that the organisation was more prepared to learn from complaints than it had been in previous decades. He attributed this, in

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part to, the Chief Executive and her willingness to address areas where the Council did not get it right.

- The Borough Solicitor agreed with Members that sharing this report and minutes of this meeting with the Chairs of other scrutiny committees would be beneficial.

**Action by: Principal Committee Officer**

- There were differences in the volume of complaints received by different directorates and as a result, directorates allocated varied levels of resources to handling complaints.
- Referring to 4.1.3 Stage 1 complaints received by month, the Service Manager informed the Committee that, after some investigating, the increased number of complaints from January 2020 to March 2020 could be attributed to increased seasonal pressures on Housing Repairs in Operations. He said this increase was not uncommon for that time of year.
- It would be unrealistic for an organisation not to receive any complaints; the role of officers was to ensure that complaints were learned from.
- Whilst there was no legal requirement to do so, Councils could opt to publish complaints data as Camden did, though after a search the Service Manger could only find two local authorities who had published complaints data for the 2019/ 2020 municipal year.
- Complaints figures for the 2020/ 2021 municipal year would be prepared in May 2021.

In response to a Member question about why resources were not increased during seasonal surges in the Housing Repairs and Operations service, the Borough Solicitor said that it was definitely an area suited for Housing Scrutiny to explore. The complaints report did not include whether more work was being carried out and generating more complaints as a result. He agreed that it would be an interesting area to be examined.

Officers thanked Members for their continued input and feedback on the processes and recording of complaints.

Members of the committee also made the following comments:

- It would be helpful to see how many complaints were assigned to different officers to help identify any bottlenecks in the system.
- Feedback from residents was that the complaints process seemed overly bureaucratic.
- Members thanked officers for the report, that they said improved year on year.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted

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**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no such business.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**