

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL Agenda

Place

Committee Rooms 4 & 5, Town Hall, Wellington Street,
Woolwich SE18 6PW

Date

Thursday, 13 March 2025

Time

6.30 pm

This meeting is open to the press and public and they are entitled to take photographs, film or record the proceedings.

Councillors

Ivis Williams (Chair)	Labour and Co-operative
Peter Baker	Labour and Co-operative
Jo van den Broek	Labour and Co-operative
Cathy Dowse	Labour and Co-operative
Asli Mohammed	Labour and Co-operative
'Lade Hephzibah Olugbemi	Labour and Co-operative
Lakshan Saldin	Labour and Co-operative
Matt Hartley	Conservative

If you require further information about this meeting please contact the Scrutiny Officer:

Maya Yasunaga

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Email: scrutiny@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Members are reminded that officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and they are welcome to raise questions in advance with the appropriate officer. This does not prevent further questioning at the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies from Members of the Panel.

2. Urgent Business

The Chair to announce any items of urgent business circulated separately from the main agenda.

3. Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any personal and financial interests in items on the agenda. Attention is drawn to the Council's Constitution; the Council's Code of Conduct and associated advice.

4. Minutes

Members are requested to confirm as an accurate record the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024.

No motion or discussion may take place upon the Minutes except as to their accuracy, and any question on this point will be determined by a majority of the Members of the body attending who were present when the matter in question was decided. Once confirmed, with or without amendment, the person presiding will sign the Minutes

5. Customer Services Performance

To consider the Customer Services Performance Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.

6. Digital Strategy

To consider the Digital Strategy Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.

7. Electoral Services annual report 2024

To consider the Electoral Services Annual Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.

8. Freedom of Information Monitoring Report

To consider the Statutory Scrutiny of the Freedom of Information Monitoring Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.

Filming and Recording Meetings

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Safety

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When you hear the continuous ringing of the fire alarm bells, please make your way out of the building in an orderly manner. The nearest exit from the Council Chamber and the Committee Rooms is through the main exit leading to Wellington Street (at the front of the building). Do not use the lift and do not stop to collect personal belongings. Once outside the Town Hall please make your way to the Assembly Point between Sainsbury's and The Vista via Market Street or Polytechnic Street.

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	
TITLE	ITEM NO
Declarations of Interests	3
CHIEF OFFICER	
Chief Executive	

1. Decisions Required

The Panel is requested to:

- 1.1 Note the list of Councillors' memberships (as Council appointed representatives) on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies.
- 1.2 Request that Members orally declare any personal or financial interests, including those detailed, in specific items listed on the agenda as they relate to matters under discussion.

2. Members' Interests

- 2.1 Appended to this report is a list of the outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies that each member of Council has been appointed to by the Council or the Leader. The list does not include bodies with which a Member is involved in a personal or private capacity.

Personal interests

- 2.2 A Member has a personal interest where any business is likely to affect:

- (a) them, or
- (b) a relevant person or a relevant body (where the Member is aware that they have the interest);

more than a majority of those in the ward you represent.

A **relevant person** is defined as the member's spouse or civil partner, a person who they are living with as husband and wife or as civil partners, or a person with whom they have a close association.¹

¹ See the guidance in Annex I of the Code of Conduct

A **relevant body** is defined as (a) any organisation, school governing body or outside committee or trust which they have been appointed to by the Royal Borough or by the Leader, or (b) any other voluntary organisation, school governing body or commercial organisation where you are a management committee member, school governor, trustee or director.

- 2.3 Members must declare the existence and nature of any personal interest at the start of the meeting, or when the interest becomes apparent. Members must say which item their interest relates to.
- 2.4 A Member who has a personal interest may stay, speak and vote, except where the business:
- (a) affects the financial position of the Member or any person or body described in paragraph 2.2 above, or
 - (b) relates to an interest that would be affected financially or relates to the determining to any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the Member or any person or body described in paragraph 2.2 above

Financial Interests

- 2.5 A Member has a financial interest where any business relates to or is likely to affect an interest set out in paragraph 18 of the Code of Conduct, and which is the Member's interest or the interest of a person described in paragraph 2.2(a) above.
- 2.6 Members must declare the existence and nature of any financial interest at the start of the meeting, or when the interest becomes apparent. Members must say which item their interest relates to.
- 2.7 A Member who has a financial interest must leave the meeting, but may attend to make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the business, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, and provided they leave the meeting immediately after doing so. The Member must not participate in the discussion nor the vote.

General

- 2.8 The Code also requires Members to declare interests in relation to relevant bodies for six months after ceasing from being a member and take the appropriate action in relation to financial interests.

Background Papers

Agenda and Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council – 22 May 2024

Report Author: Maya Yasunaga – Scrutiny Officer
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Councillor	Organisation	Role	Governorship
Dowse	Greenwich Service Solutions	Member	Montbelle School
Greenwell	Reserves Forces & Cadets Association	Member	Haimo Primary
Mohammed	Clockhouse & New Charlton Community Centre	Member	
Mohammed	Greenwich Leisure Ltd	Member	
Mohammed	Woolwich Creative District Trust (Woolwich Works)	Member	
Olugbemi	LGA General Assembly	Member	
Olugbemi	London City Airport Consultative Committee	Deputy	
Olugbemi	Overview and Scrutiny Joint Health Committee	Deputy	
Saldin	Charlton Triangle Homes	Member	
Saldin	Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust	Member	
Van Den Broek	Charlton Triangle Homes	Member	
	Destination Greenwich Tourism Management Company (A	Member	
	Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust	Member	
Williams	Woodlands Farm Trust	Member	Nightingale Primary

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ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH
ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
THURSDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2024 AT 6.30 PM
MINUTES

Present:

Councillors Councillor Ivis Williams (Chair), Jo van dan Broek, Cathy Dowse and Asli Mohammed

Officers:

Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Democratic Services and Legal Practice Management, Assistant Chief Executive (Change and Development) and Head of Human Resources

Item

No.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lakshan Saldin and Matt Hartley

2 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3 Declarations of Interest

Resolved –

That the list of Councillors' memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies is noted.

4 Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 18 July 2024 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

5 Legal Services Performance Update

The Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic Services and Legal Practice Management presented an update on Legal Services, covering performance, staffing, and operational changes since the last meeting. The report focused on developments since April 2024, highlighting that Legal Services comprised 49 established posts, including lawyers and admin support. They highlighted that demand for legal services continued to rise, particularly in housing disrepair cases, which had led to recruitment challenges, especially for planning and contracts lawyers.

The Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services stated that the service was exceeding its target of 40,000 chargeable hours by approximately 15% and detailed that In 2023/24, 2,700 new legal matters were opened; for 2024/25 to date, 2,031 matters have been opened. She added The service processed 653 committee reports in 2023/24; as of April 2024, 401 reports had been processed.

The Head of Democratic Services and Legal Practice Management provided details of the Operational Partnership Agreement (OPA), which was launched on 01 October 2024, and outlined services provided by Legal Services, performance standards, costs, and expectations from client departments. She highlighted the Key performance indicators (KPIs), which included:

- Billable hours targets for lawyers
- Completion of matters within 12 months (target: 60%)
- Advice provided within 10 working days
- Decision report comments within 5 working days
- Client satisfaction target of 90% or above in annual surveys.

There was a discussion on the three Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Proposals for the service:

- Redesigning the Service Level Agreement with schools to generate approximately £50,000 per annum.

- Reducing reliance on external counsel for safeguarding children proceedings, projected to save £375,000 annually.
- Increasing the recharge rate for regeneration legal work from £175 to £220 per hour in line with full cost recovery.

In response to questions, The Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that staff morale was improving due to efforts to convert locum staff to fixed-term contracts and support from client departments. She explained that the department also had apprenticeships and secondment opportunities to develop in-house talent. She added that regular engagement with staff was encouraged to maintain a supportive culture.

In response to a question, the Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the directorate worked closely with HR on employment matters and tribunal cases, with established procedures for roles and responsibilities. She advised that regular debriefs were held to identify lessons learned from tribunal outcomes.

In terms of outsourcing, the Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that it was necessary due to expertise shortages in-house; however, the in-house team remained involved in monitoring outsourced work. She stated that decisions regarding whether to defend cases were made after thorough review of evidence and risks.

Members requested a breakdown of the client survey responses once the re-launched survey was completed.

Action: Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Members suggested that the wording in the OPA regarding technology use be amended to "effective and appropriate use of technology." Officers agreed to make the amendment.

Action: Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services

The Panel thanked the Legal Services team for their comprehensive update.

Resolved -

That the update on Legal Services Performance be noted.

6 HR update report

The Head of HR presented an update on HR performance for 2023/24. She provided details of the Key Performance Metrics and highlighted that the report followed a new format aligned with the council's draft Workforce Strategy and its ambitions. She highlighted that the Workforce Strategy was in its final consultation stages, with principles already being embedded across directorates. The report was structured around five pillars: attracting talent, strengthening diversity and inclusion, supporting staff development, promoting wellbeing, and leading change.

In response to a question on agency use, The Head of HR confirmed that the areas with high agency staff usage include Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and DRES, due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals. She stated that the overall agency worker headcount had slightly decreased, but costs had increased due to higher-skilled roles being filled. She added that a strategic resourcing review is underway to address skills shortages and explore options like "grow your own" talent programs.

Sickness Absence and Wellbeing

In response to questions, The Head of HR highlighted that stress, depression, and mental health issues were the leading causes of sickness absence. She confirmed that a staff health and wellbeing strategy is being developed to address these issues. She advised that DSE assessments and training have been updated to include remote working considerations.

Members noted that detailed EDI dashboards breaking down workforce metrics by ethnicity are available but had not included in this report. The Head of HR agreed to provide more comprehensive EDI data, including information on disciplinary and grievance cases, in future reports.

In response to a question, the Head of HR confirmed that the number of employment tribunal cases remains consistent, but there was a need to understand underlying causes. She highlighted the close partnership with Legal Services which helped assess the merits and value for money of tribunal cases. She stated that efforts were being made to improve internal processes and upskill managers in handling employee relations issues.

In response to questions, The Head of HR responded that DSE assessments have been reviewed, with mandatory training rolled out and that guidance for remote working is provided to ensure staff have appropriate equipment. She highlighted the draft health and well-being strategy which aimed to address concerns workload and job satisfaction. She added that a review of the flexible

working policy had been completed and that plans were in place to incorporate flexibility into recruitment procedures.

The Panel requested that future reports include:

- Continued monitoring of agency staff usage and spend.
- More detailed EDI data, especially on disciplinary and grievance cases.
- A comprehensive breakdown of employment tribunal cases.
- Information on culture change initiatives.
- Details on promoting flexible working in recruitment strategies.

Action: Head of HR

The Panel noted the progress on workforce development initiatives and emphasised the importance of addressing recruitment challenges and promoting staff wellbeing.

Resolved -

That the report Human Resources Update 2023/24 be noted.

7 Commissioning of Future Reports

The report was presented by the Chair.

Resolved -

That the work items that are scheduled to be presented to the meeting of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel taking place on 15th January 2025 be noted

The meeting closed at 20.03.

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 5
SUBJECT Customer Services Performance	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Director of Resources	CABINET MEMBER Finance, Resources & Social Value	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Customer Services Performance Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed missions as follows:

- - People's health supports them in living their best life – Our telecare service supports people to continue to live independently and receive support when they need it.
- Those in financial need can access the right support, advice and opportunities to improve their situation - residents are able to contact our service to get advice and support with their individual situation
- We design our services around the needs of our residents – the customer service strategy is designed around our residents and needs. Channel shift is one of our top priorities.

- Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible – we are designing services so that customers are able to self serve, where customer need support it will be offered in the form of digital champions– highly skilled officers who are able to guide customers through online processes. at the same time, we will retain traditional channels to support customers with more complex queries or needs.
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver - the customer service team is fully representative of the borough

3. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the Customer Services Performance

3.2 The commissioned brief for the report was as follows:

- An update on the Customer Services Performance (telephone call handling / website / social media)
- An update/progress report on the Customer Services Review Monitoring/Action plan.

SECTION 2

4. Introduction and Background

4.1 Context and performance update

In December 2023 we signed off a restructure that was the first step to modernising the service and adding additional channels for customers to use. Since then, it has been an extremely busy year for customer services. This report covers our business-as-usual activities and key measures, as well as several projects we have delivered during the year.

See Appendix A for the latest performance figures: unless otherwise stated, figures are for the period: 01/04/2024- 31/12/2024

Included are:

- **Telephony Performance**, including for services we don't manage
- **Email Handling Performance**
- **Fix My Street** allows customers to report specific environment related issues, in real time, via their mobile device.
- **The Woolwich Service Centre** – this is the face-to-face service provided by customer service. In addition to the services provided on the phones we carry out Tenancy Sign Ups, carry out tenancy terminations, resolve queries relating to fobs, handle parking permit enquiries, and deal with Housing Benefit and Council Tax enquiries.
- **The Eltham Service Centre** – this is the smaller face to face service in the south of the borough. The full range of customer service transactions are available.
- **Mobility** - this team administers blue badges and other concessions for disabled people such as taxi cards and Freedom passes.
- **Telecare** - the Telecare team support vulnerable residents in the borough by monitoring triggers from the Emergency Alarm and peripherals such as smoke alarms or door exit sensors.
- **Royal Greenwich Interpretation Service:** The interpretation service provides interpretation and translation service in 102 different languages. The list of available languages is growing as the needs of our diverse borough are changing. Additionally, we offer a face to face British Sign Language facility in the Woolwich Centre on a Friday morning. Sign video which is a video sign language interpretation tool is available to our residents via the website and in the Woolwich and Eltham Centres.

Our total contacts continues to increase; as a team we are on track to have had around 1m contacts with residents this financial year. In the contact centre alone we took nearly 430,000 calls, with an average wait time of just over 6 minutes for our core services.

Some of our performance metrics have worsened in telephony services versus last year. This is due to the contribution we have made as a team to our MTFs, which has led to us reducing our staffing in order to make cashable savings while continuing to handle more contacts. These savings have been achieved. This year, we will focus on efficiency in the contact centre through digital opportunities (see below) with the aim of bringing performance back in line with our expectations without increasing staffing.

Projects completed this year

4.2 In line with the Customer Service Strategy we have extended the opening hours of the corporate contact centre to 8am – 6pm, allowing us to serve more residents in a more convenient way for them.

4.3 We have started to use WhatsApp in the Contact Centre. Initially we restricted access to this service to people using Facebook but have recently started to advertise this to a wider audience. As well as giving residents more choice over service access, an extra benefit of this is that an agent can manage more than one transaction at a time. Among other uses, this will allow customers to report repairs via WhatsApp. To aid accurate diagnostics, customers are able to add photographs to their WhatsApp conversation, which will reduce failure demand for operatives when they attend a property.

4.4 We have procured and are implementing an upgrade to our Avaya system, which supports our telephony. A workforce management system was also procured as a part the telephony procurement process, as well as an automated quality monitoring module. This will quality monitor 100% of the calls that come through the Avaya system and provide comprehensive feedback to the management team. Any calls that raise concerns will alert a manager to take action and provide feedback.

4.5 We have achieved a Silver rating in our accreditation to the United Kingdom Contact Centre Forum (UKCCF) and will now start to work towards the gold standard.

4.6 We procured, installed and are using a new Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) for telecare. This will smooth the transition for the digital switchover and support the ATEC Service (due to go live 31/03/2025). The digital switchover meant that our current ARC was obsolete because it could not handle digital calls; the new system allows us to continue to migrate our customers onto a digital alarm but protects those customers who we have not yet switched over.

4.7 We have entered into a 3-year contract with Bromley Council to monitor their Telecare service. We were approached by Bromley Borough to monitor the calls to their ARC as they were looking for a new partner. In addition, we have entered into a short-term contract with Bexley borough to manage their telecare response service.

4.8 We are in the process of a consultation for Telecare to transition the team into the ATEC monitoring and response service. The telecare team are the team that will need to undergo a major transformation as a result of the ATEC service. We have rewritten the job descriptions to accurately reflect the requirements of the role which will include monitoring and response to alarm calls, undertake welfare calls, additionally they will monitor and respond, where necessary, to data from basic clinical equipment, including blood pressure and oxygen monitors. They will also be working much more closely with JET (our integrated Joint Emergency Team).

4.9 In summer 2024 we took over the responsibility of the Responsive repairs service. Whilst this is still quite new, we have been able to achieve some savings by transferring staff from Agency to FTC, with HRA savings circa £60k. Other improvements include creating a more transparent escalation process, the result of which is that we have reduced escalations by 50%. We intend to make this process a digital process and believe that we can achieve a further 25% reduction in escalations as a result of this.

4.10 We have procured a new system for the Interpretation and translation team. The system used by the Interpretation and translation team was not fit for purpose. A new solution was identified that is easier to use and offers excellent value for money.

4.11 Our Customer Service Transformation Team are working on a range of upgrades to existing systems including Symology, Whitespace and ECINS.

4.12 Our Customer Service Technical Support and Development Team have, among other improvement:

- Made changes to the process of Housing and Safer Communities complaints.
- Made changes to the Ombudsman complaints process
- Created a social media enquiries line
- Completed a Dynamics user license audit to support Casework Review
- Delivered a staff sign in application
- Delivered a TOIL logging app for customer service

Next year's priorities

4.13 The Customer Service Strategy needs to be refreshed, and we are planning to use the information gained over the last 3 years to identify new workstream based on our missions and improving the customer experience. We also plan to forge ahead with seeking out new digital opportunities for customers to improve the customer experience and increase unmediated transactions. This will allow us to better manage the demand in the contact centre, improving performance and allowing us the time to respond to clients who are not digitally enabled.

4.14 Implement additional modules of the Avaya system, taking full advantage of the upgrade.

4.15 Embed the Monitoring and Response team into the ATEC service.

4.16 Continue to prepare for the digital switchover: we are on track to complete this work ahead of the timeframe.

5. Consultation

N/A

6. Next Steps

6.1 The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

7. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is to provide updates on Customer Services Performance and on the Customer Services Review Monitoring/Action plan. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.	Davidaire Horsford, Interim Head of Legal Services, 26/02/2025
Finance and other resources	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery of the digital strategy. As such there are no financial implications arising from this report.	Margaret Barrow, Accountancy Business Change Manager 24/02/25
Equalities	<p><i>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</i></p> <p><i>The digital strategy contributes to Council's Equality and Equity Charter and the Council's Equality Objectives 2020-2024 by reducing the digital divide that our residents experience. Specifically, all our digital services are built in an accessible way; and our digital inclusion works increases access to the internet for some of our most excluded groups.</i></p>	Kit Collingwood AD, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25
Climate change	This report makes no contribution to Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan	Kit Collingwood

	agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020	Assistant Director, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25
Community Engagement	We frequently engage with our residents in our day to day duties. In addition, we invite residents to complete surveys to give feedback on performance.	Kit Collingwood Assistant Director, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25

8. **Report Appendices**

8.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Performance across Customer Service
- Appendix B – Performance across other services

8.2 The following documents will be published after the meeting:-

- *Appendix (): Recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*
- *Appendix (): Response to the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*

9. **Background Papers**

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Chief Officer: Damon Cook – Director of Resources
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Appendix A

Table 1: Contact Centre performance this year

Contact Centre	Total Calls Offered	Total Calls Abandoned	% Abandoned	%Handled	Average Wait to Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
01/04/2024 – 31/12/2024	429,202	89,104	21%	79%	6.18	01:30:08
Last Month (December 2024)	39,440	6,638	16.8%	83.2%	4:51	38:48

Table 2: Contact Centre performance last year

Contact Centre	Total Calls Offered	Total Calls Abandoned	% Abandoned	%Handled	Average Wait to Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
01/04/2023 – 31/12/2023	403,474	43,045	10.7	89.3	02:06	00:53:55
Last Month (December 2023)	35,834	2,671	7.5	92.5	01:33	00:43:30

Table 3. Out of Hours performance - This Year

Out of Hours	Total Calls	Total Abandoned	%. Abandoned	% Handled	Ave Wait to Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
Year to date (01/04/2024– 30/12/2024)	49,314	2020	4.1	95.9	00:21	00:32:14
Last Month (December 2024)	6172	279	4.5	95.5	00:28	18:00

Table 4 : Out of hours performance - Last year

Out of Hours	Total Calls	Total Abandoned	%. Abandoned	% Handled	Ave Wait To Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
Year to date	48,089	2,250	4.7	95.3	00:22	00:53:40
Last Month (December 2023)	5,925	347	5.9	94.1	00:32	00:53:40

Table 5: Responsive Repairs performance – This year 01/04/2024 – 31/12/2024

Responsive Repairs	Total Calls	Total Abandoned	%. Abandoned	% Handled	Ave Wait To Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
Year to date	50,503	6,257	12.4%	87.6%	04:31	00:57:51
Last Month (December 2024)	4,954	973	19.6%	80.4%	07:46	00:39:24

Table 6: Responsive Repairs Performance - Last year 01/04/2023 - 31/12/2023

Responsive Repairs	Total Calls	Total Abandoned	%. Abandoned	% Handled	Ave Wait To Answer	Maximum Wait to answer
Year to date	51,931	9,784	18.8%	81.2%	7:04	01:11:36
Last Month (December 2023)	5,152	1,102	21.4%	78.6%	8:25	00:36:02

Table 7: Average call handling time by type of call (skill) - This year (01/04/2024 - 30/11/2024)

	Total calls	Average wait to answer
Switchboard	157,472	03:03
Council Tax	79,371	09:28

Housing repairs	61,783	07:46
Waste	34,105	08:24
Registrars	22,953	08:30
Benefits	18,101	11:58
Parking	16,582	07:55
Mobility Duty	9,598	02:06
MASH (children's social service line)	8,777	02:17
Electoral	6,360	04:17
Schools Admissions	5,778	06:06
Pupil Benefits	3,672	05:04
Highways	2,403	07:49
Chief Executive Line	1,218	03:34
Parks and Open Spaces	1,026	06:08
ASB	3	21:11

Table 8: Average call handling time by type of call (skill) - Last year (01/04/2023 - 31/12/2023)

Average call handling time per skill	Total calls	Average wait to answer
Switchboard	147,677	01:11
Council Tax	69,800	03:01

Housing repairs	56,274	02:38
Waste	36,843	02:04
Registrars	20,616	02:21
Parking	15,677	02:14
Benefits	17,352	05:13
MASH (children's social service line)	8,962	01:03
Mobility	7933	01:57
Schools Admissions	7,915	02:01
Electoral	3,078	01:39
Pupil Benefits	3,005	01:53
Anti-social behaviour	2,504	02:28
Highways	2,878	01:48
Waste Enforce and Complaints	1,294	02:29
Park and Open Spaces	961	01:15
Chief Exec Line	538	00:13
Waste Graffiti	153	01:35
Customer Services	14	00:32

Table 9: Email Handling Performance from (01/04/2024 - date)

This covers general enquiries, waste, and repairs. This table covers the period from April 2024

Month	Emails completed	Ave Days to complete
Apr-24	2,485	3.03
May-24	2,785	7.92
Jun-24	2,773	9.76
Jul-24	3,250	7.08
Aug-24	2,964	9.63
Sep-24	3,166	6.64
Oct-24	3,305	7.12
Nov-24	2,894	6.26
Dec-24	2,329	8.66
Total (Apr - Dec 24)	25,951	7.34

Table 10 - Fix my street

	Total	Closed	Percentage Closed
Abandoned vehicles	950	60	6

Blocked Drain	152	142	93
Car Park Cleansing	34	4	12
Dead Animal	439	435	99
Dog Fouling	155	121	78
Fly Tipping Service	7219	7104	98
Graffiti	478	372	78
Litter Bin	615	116	19
Parks/landscapes	266	25	9
Pavements/Footpaths Repairs	552	203	37
Potholes	227	91	40
Road traffic signs	110	56	51
Roads/highways	402	161	40
Street lighting	207	111	54
Street Spillage	228	57	25
Trees	362	81	22
Weeding Request	184	158	86

Table 11 - The Woolwich Centre - (01/04/2024 - 30/12/2024)

Service	Number of Visitors	Average Wait
General Customer Service	23,714	04:55
Housing Inclusion	1,583	13:50

Table 12 - The Eltham Centre 01/04/2024 - 31/12/2024

Service	Number of Visitors	Average Wait
General Customer Service	3052	2:16

Table 13 - Telecare

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Emergency calls	5530	5440	4808	5495	5179	5254	5665	5801	5943
Installs and Repairs	110	95	94	87	79	73	74	68	61
Emergency Visits	209	234	247	261	262	239	256	333	290

Table 14 Mobility

	Blue Badge Apps (DFT)	No Of Enquiries	BB Issued	Freedom Passes Issued	Taxi Cards - Issued	Disabled Persons Parking Bays	Request Docs	Medical Assessment Appt/ Screen	Appts.	Payments Req
Apr-24	500	1811	273	5	5	3	371	146	19	572
May-24	468	1803	359	8	17	3	345	125	35	647
Jun-24	449	1585	332	12	5	4	277	94	26	555
Jul-24	474	1484	292	7	5	1	286	121	43	446
Aug-24	443	1468	282	7	9	6	261	115	37	510
Sep-24	484	1867	347	5	14	4	356	138	21	682
Oct-24	457	2076	405	5	8	5	446	156	37	761
Nov-24	455	1722	340	3	5	5	346	131	34	600
Dec-24	342	1176	268	1	8	1	191	83	15	398

Table 15 Royal Greenwich Interpretation Service - This year (Service Merged into Customer Service 01/01/2024)

Dates	Number of jobs completed
01/04/2024 - 31/12/2024	10786

Appendix B - Average call handling time by type of call (skill) - This year (01/04/2024 - 30/11/2024) - Services that do not go through the contact centre but use the contact centre telephony.

	Total calls	Average wait to answer	Maximum wait to answer
AOPS	10,217	3:35	01:05:06
Business Rates	3,324	1:29	00:51:51
Central Enforcement (Tenancy)	5,563	5:43	01:27:05
Community Participation (tenancy)	247	4:13	00:24:57
Corporate Debt Team	4,829	03:37	01:01:13
Council Tax Enforcement	742	01:38	00:54:03
Disability and Home improvement team	865	6:38	01:36:47
East Enforcement (Tenancy)	3,698	4:48	01:02:25
HACTRAC	1,210	1:28	00:52:15
Handy Person	3,186	09:04	03:12:39*
Allocations (Housing)	17,153	06:53	01:29:46
Housing Inclusion (Housing)	14,794	07:07	01:00:54

ICT Service Desk	10,922	00:34	00:28:08
Sheltered Housing (Tenancy)	2,626	5:48	01:01:59
South Enforcement (tenancy)	4271	5:20	01:08:15
Temporary Accommodation (Housing)	9,958	09:00	02:43:14
Tenancy Support	1,434	06:32	00:55:39
Universal Support Team (Welfare Rights)	1,331	0028	00:25:33
Welfare Rights Duty (Welfare Rights)	2,474	10:21	01:41:10

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 6
SUBJECT Digital Strategy	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Director of Resources	CABINET MEMBER Finance, Resources & Social Value	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Digital Strategy Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

- 2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed missions as follows:
 - We design our services around the needs of our residents – reference to development of new digital products
 - Our Council is an adaptive organisation, enabling it to navigate the increasing number of challenges it faces while remaining financially sustainable – reference to service design and digital savings

- Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible – reference to internal digital products such as the new intranet
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver – reference to digital restructure.

3. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the Council's Digital Strategy.

3.2 The commissioned brief for the report was as follows:

- An update on ICT and progress of the Digital Improvement Programme

SECTION 2

4. The Report

Overview

4.1 The council's digital strategy was published in November 2020, with funding approved at the end of February 2021 and a restructure approved in March 2021 to allow growth and significant development from a traditional technology support team to a full in-house digital team. The digital strategy outlined 6 workstreams:

- New online services for residents, with support for those who can't get online
- Better tools for staff
- Get better with data
- Modernise our infrastructure
- Build digital capability
- Support innovation across the borough

4.2 As the sixth workstream is largely led by Digital Greenwich, this report focuses on the first 5 workstreams.

- 4.3 This is the last year of the lifecycle of the strategy, which runs until April. We are writing a new strategy which will be published in spring; we outline some of the major themes to be included in the strategy at the end of this report.
- 4.4 The actions outlined in the digital strategy have largely been realised; a line-by-line review of delivery will be published as part of the next strategy. We are proud of everything that has been achieved since the strategy was written; this report focuses on the most recent year of work.
- 4.5 The work of the digital team has far outstripped what was envisaged in the strategy. Since 2021 the team has built partnerships across the organisation and borough to not only meet the aims of the digital strategy, but also to build large-scale change programmes which enable holistic change in a number of our critical service areas. We have undertaken activities relating to each of the 5 major workstreams of the digital strategy, and have begun several others. In addition, with the digital team now being over 3 years old, we are now in a position where we run considerable BAU services. We have mentioned some of these in the update below.
- 4.6 The core digital team is around 100, with additional teams in housing and IT and financial system support. This makes the total headcount of the digital team 140-150.

Delivery this year

- 4.7 The main 2024/25 deliverables so far are broken down here by workstream.

Workstream 1: new services for residents

4.8 Council Tax online: Our online council tax service, launched in 2021, allows residents to create an online council tax account linked to their property. From this account, residents can set up and amend direct debits, check their balance, make payments, view and download their bills. Around 48,000 properties now have an online account registered. In early February we launched paperless billing, which saves nearly £1 per paper bill avoided. Around

1000 residents have already chosen paperless billing, with major promotional work still to come.

4.9 New website: In 2024, we relaunched the council's website to make it more usable, more accessible and easier to navigate. The new site is organised around resident-facing services, which paves the way for us to make more services available to residents online and improve the quality of those that already exist.

4.10 The redesigned site has been optimised for use on mobile devices, and tested with residents who have disabilities to improve the accessibility of information and services to the public. In parallel, we have transformed the content to make it easier to find and understand. We have reduced the average reading age from age 13 to age 9, rewritten content to meet user needs, and removed 37% of the total content where information was outdated or superfluous.

4.11 The new website uses an open-source content management system, LocalGovDrupal, which is designed specifically to build and run local council websites. This will reduce running costs by enabling us to exit contracts for the old content management system, and has made it quicker and easier for staff to keep information up to date for residents.

4.12 GCD: Last summer we launched a new version of the Greenwich Community Directory (greenwichcommunitydirectory.org.uk), which helps residents access community support services and advice content, for adults, children and families, and children and young people with SEND. The site was redesigned with residents, to reflect the services and content residents are seeking. We've made it easier to find relevant services and crucially, keep service listings up-to-date for residents. The new design is also more accessible to residents with disabilities, with a reduced average reading age across the site from 15 to 12 years. As a result, residents' use of the directory has steadily increased, with service listing views nearly doubling in Q3 compared to Q1. Provider engagement has also grown, with more service providers creating accounts. The new Greenwich Community Directory uses open-source software (Outpost and LocalGovDrupal), which enables us to deliver better quality products for residents at lower cost, saving approximately £38k in annual costs.

4.13 Street Services: In the last few months we've developed 2 new transactions for the Street Services team. These enable businesses to get an instant online quote for commercial waste collections and take the first step in signing up to the service (<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/forms/request-call-back-for-business-waste-collections#no-back>). Business waste collections currently generate ~£1.2m a year. These new transactional services will help us to retain our existing customers and attract new customers as new legislation comes in in April requiring businesses to have separate food waste collections. Next, we'll be continuing to work with the Street Services team on a new resident-facing online service: sign up for garden waste collections.

4.14 Housing Support Finder: We launched a new tool in August 2024 (<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/housing-support-finder>) to increase visibility of social housing availability and help residents understand the quickest route to a settled home for their situation.

Most residents who approach the council for support with homelessness expect to obtain a social housing tenancy. However, demand vastly outstrips supply, with more than 27,000 households on our housing register, but only around 1,000 homes available each year. Residents can now access an estimated social housing waiting time online, and see alternative options at a glance.

More than 7,500 people have used the service since launch. Research with residents has shown that households appreciate the increased visibility, enabling their housing needs to be met more quickly. It has also freed up time for housing staff, enabling them to focus on supporting residents rather than discussing waiting times.

4.15 Repairs programme: The Repairs Transformation Programme is over two years through its four-year lifespan. Since its inception the programme has delivered on a series of technology, data, people, processes and organisational change. Highlights include improvements to residents' experience, such as:

- Launched two new, user-friendly webforms to report a new repair or request an update, which capture better information for us and enable residents to upload a photo of their repair.

- Launched 36 pages of new and improved web content to set clearer expectations about what we can and can't repair, including new guidance and information about damp and mould.
- A new diagnosis and triage process for cases of damp, mould and condensation so residents get a faster, targeted triage that meets their needs. Since its launch over 700 cases have been raised using new our new guidance and call scripts and over 220 high priority cases have been sent directly to the DMC specialist team via our new webform pathway and over 300 urgent jobs have been flagged or raised using new codes.
- A series of pilots to reduce communication gaps with residents, including setting up a dedicated follow on line for staff in Plumbing, Carpentry and Plaster (over 50% of all repairs jobs). Staff do not leave the resident's home until a mutually convenient follow on appointment is made, so far resulting in ~5,000 residents now knowing what is happening next with their repair that didn't otherwise.
- Merging the housing repairs contact centre into the corporate contact centre, leading to improved, easier to use services for residents with new operational escalation processes to ensure residents get a timely response, financial savings of 60k and increased satisfaction of staff through new cross skilling and training opportunities.
- Improvements to data and performance management, including: a new data tool to help managers and leaders make informed decisions, in real time, and manage performance effectively.
- Re-designing, restructuring and mobilising teams to improve productivity, efficiency and ensure we are responding to increased pressures, including:
- A new specialist damp, mould and condensation team made up of 7 staff guided by an ambitious new damp, mould and condensation service offer which was co-designed with staff and residents.
- Multiple restructures and team changes. All job descriptions and specifications have been refreshed including Greenwich Council values and a resident focus, with expectations and responsibilities outlined clearly.
- Closing costly ineffective areas with savings of £368,000 to the HRA

4.16 Assistive technology-enabled care: We are preparing to launch a groundbreaking integrated new digital and health and care service. From April 2025, residents in Greenwich will be able to access digital health and care technology solutions, to support them to live more independent, safer and empowered lives. This service has been coproduced with residents over 2 years, and is delivering in an integrated way across RBG HAS, Oxleas and SEL ICS. The service will provide more choice for people in how they achieve their best outcomes and goals, support digital inclusion and connectivity, and be the platform for an aspirational offer that supports both people and the Greenwich health and care system. We will use data to help people upstream where we can, to improve individual lives and population health.

4.17 Greenwich Supports Strategy (formerly known as anti-poverty strategy) This year we have worked with front-line staff, community leads and residents to inform how we can best prevent residents from falling, or falling more deeply, into poverty. This strategic work has led to a forthcoming pilot where a multi-disciplinary team made up of officers from across the council will focus on a group of residents to work with, to try to make positive impacts through offering holistic support.

Workstream 2: better tools for staff

4.18 Street Services: We co-designed and built a rostering product to improve efficiency in the council's streets and waste service, which launched in March 2024. The app brings together real-time information about staff availability. By making the shift from paper-based staff allocation to digital shift management, it has become quicker and less-error prone to manage daily staffing for waste collection and street cleansing rounds across the borough. These changes freed up an average of 82 minutes of time per shift for each supervisor in the service, enabling staff to focus on the quality of the service we deliver, instead of collating information about staff availability.

4.19 Temporary Accommodation Cost Reduction programme: In September 2023, Royal Borough of Greenwich, along with councils across London and the country, was facing a homelessness and Temporary Accommodation (TA) crisis. There was an unprecedented number of households in TA, a worrying increase in the use of hotels as temporary

accommodation (from 5 hotel rooms per night in September 2022, to 269 a year later), and a forecast overspend of ~£14 million.

The Temporary Accommodation Cost Reduction Programme brought together more than 50 staff from a dozen teams to take a hypothesis-led response to the crisis. Since September 2023, 31 hypotheses have been tested, many of which have been scaled up and successfully implemented. We led on the implementation of:

- A data tool that made hotel pricing data available to housing staff, so they could book the most cost-effective rooms for residents who required temporary accommodation. In the 15 months since the tool has been used, it has led to a ~20% reduction in hotel net cost compared to the same period last year. This equates to a cost avoidance of ~£1.3 million in that time
- An improved new-build mobilisation process, which allowed the 133 new units across Sandy Hill Road and Greenwich Millenium Village to be let twice as quickly as would previously have been possible. Mobilising the units twice as quickly allowed 116 families and 17 single people to begin their new lives in high quality, settled accommodation as quickly and smoothly as possible
- A discovery into TA prevention and move-on best practice which has generated a number of insights that will inform future service design

In spite of a continuous increase in the number of homeless approaches we receive, the combined impact of all interventions implemented by the programme so far has:

- Led to a positive impact on the council's financial position
- Supported hundreds of families and dozens of single households into better quality social and or temporary accommodation. Including reducing the number of households in unsuitable hotel accommodation from a peak of 289 down to under 100.

4.20 Intranet: From April to October 2024, we worked closely with HR Policy team to update guidance and processes following legislation to Flexible Working and are continuing to support the team with further legislation updates into 2025. We have collaborated with Procurement to implement improved guidance and new processes in anticipation of the Procurement Act. This enables staff to initially self-serve their procurement requests and improve

the information collected for the procurement team that support throughout the process. Throughout 2024, we helped staff find information through search using promoted search results, increasing the use of meta data to make content easier to find, which has reduced abandoned searches from 60% down to 48%.

4.21 Rethinking Recruitment: In 2024 we went out to tender for a new applicant tracking system. From reviewing bids, we selected Tribepad to replace Giant, initiating our implementation from mid-February 2025 with a target launch date of 27 May 2025.

We streamlined the recruitment form, splitting it between agency and direct recruitment, removed finance comments and delegated approvals to AD. This has saved up to 28% of Finance officer's time each week and speeding up completion time for a recruitment form from an average of 2 weeks down to 1 week or less, with 64% of recruiting managers saying that it takes less time to fill out the new form.

4.22 Adult social care transformation: We continue to partner in depth with HAS colleagues to bring about wholesale change to ways of working. This year we undertook operational trials to test and learn new ways of working to address operational challenges including long resident waiting time for review and inefficiency of hand-overs and resident information gathering.

We also partnered with the reablement team to expand service capacity and achieve cost savings by supporting more residents to regain independence after illness or hospital stays. Recent improvements, including better NHS system access, staff rotation redesign, and a new online referral process, have already led to higher number of accepted referrals, with ongoing impact assessments underway.

We are currently in the process of co-designing a new Adult Social care operating model and reorganisation with the aim to bring strength-based practice to life, enable important cultural and ways of working change, and make the service more resilient to future demand and rising complexity.

Workstream 3: get better with data

4.23 Data Analytics in Temporary Accommodation: Fragmented data across multiple systems made it difficult to track family numbers and overall costs. To address this, our data team extracted, amalgamated and cleansed the data, built a dashboard to highlight key trends, costs, and locations for TA. Information provided by this work helped inform transformation work that has reduced the cost of hotel nightly costs (see above).

4.24 Corporate Dashboard: To track and communicate progress against our 'Our Greenwich' corporate plan effectively, the data team has developed an externally accessible, user-friendly corporate dashboard. This dashboard allows users to drill down and highlight key milestones across all of our missions. It enables both residents and elected members to explore progress in detail, ensuring transparency and accountability.

4.25 HR Process Automation: We have developed a streamlined system for tracking new starter appointments, monitoring pre-employment checks, and managing the recruitment team's workload using a SharePoint List for logging new starters, and Power Automate for creating automations. This system acts as an end-to-end tracker for the onboarding process, automates communication with hiring managers and applicants, and ensure timely processing through alerts. It also reduces the manual workload, provides consistent workflows for recruitment officers and allow for easy management reporting of KPIs, improving overall efficiency and service delivery.

This provides a centralised system to manage and monitor the new starter process, reducing manual tasks and improving consistency across the recruitment team.

4.26 Financial System Assessment & Procurement: An assessment of our current financial system was conducted in June 2024 as part of the Rethinking Finance programme. It was deemed that the system was not suitable for future advancements in our financial processes and performance monitoring. We have undertaken a procurement exercise to find an alternative provider with the migration project beginning in April 2025.

4.27 Parking Dashboards: In October 2023 we integrated our systems to be able to extract data from our parking system. Over the last year we have been working to provide analytics information on parking to the service to

improve parking performance. Following improvements to the service we have also provided tools to monitor performance.

Workstream 4: modernise our infrastructure

4.28 Hosting: We have continued to shrink our on-premise hosting. The reduction in servers and the introduction of newer technologies has reduced the space from 5 cabinets to one, which in turn has reduced the carbon footprint of RBG's servers and computing.

Network improvements this year have delivered faster internet connections to RBG locations, at a reduced cost. This was delivered using DG Connect services; a joint venture between the DG Cities (a council-owned company) and ITS, who are installing services across the council area. 20+ sites are being migrated.

4.29 Review of staff devices. Our remote working portfolio is complete with the 'deskphone' now being on staff laptops, and physical handsets removed. Many staff no longer need a corporate smartphone, and devices that are no longer essential have been reclaimed and redeployed (often to replace out of support equipment) with a cost avoidance saving of over £250,000 across the organisation. Where staff still want the convenience offered by a smart phone, they are able to use their personal smartphone if it meets the necessary standards. This is known as BYOD - Bring Your Own Device, and is being actively promoted.

4.30 PSTN Switch Off – the analogue telephone network will end by next year. We are working with BT to identify and convert those lines that require work; about 300 are in scope with a similar number that are already digital. Telecare resident services have a deadline of Jan 2027 and Customer Services is leading on this element of the work, keeping their service users safe throughout the transition period.

Workstream 5: improve our digital capability

4.31 Devices - We refreshed the IT suite at the Clockhouse Community Centre (office desktops) and gifted 5 laptops to the Woolwich Common Community Centre (bought with the grant money) that are used for training and by residents who come to the centre to use devices

4.32 Retired devices – nearly 1300 corporate mobile phones that are out of service were wiped and recycled or reused; we will use the credit we receive to buy appropriate devices for residents or community centres. We have also collected devices we used for our loan and learn scheme in 2021 and we will look for ways to redistribute them sustainably.

4.33 Digital Champions: we have developed and delivered training for digital champions at two community Centres – Woolwich Common Community Centre and Clockhouse Community Centre - as part of the grant we have received. It's focused on using Learn My Way – a free platform to learn digital skills. We're now looking to establish a network of Digital Champions across the borough and we've started a Digital Inclusion Community of Practice for local authorities in the UK.

4.34 Digital training: we have delivered drop-in sessions and online safety workshops to residents as part of the Get Online Week (Woolwich Library, Slade Centre, Woolwich Common Community Centre and Clockhouse Community Centre)

4.35 Corporate Training – we've launched Cyber Awareness training in March 2024. We also ran some in person and online training sessions on OneDrive and SharePoint, focusing mostly on storing documents, collaborating online, etc.

4.36 Policy and Guidance: we have produced updated guidance and a range of digital policies this year. These range from supporting BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) – using personal smartphones for work, where a corporate phone is not justified, and AI (Artificial Intelligence) to promote responsible use of tools such as ChatGPT.

Digital investment

- 4.37 The 4-year digital investment agreed as part of MTFS in February 2021 provided for an annual resource uplift in the digital team by £5m over the MTFS period, plus a one-off capital investment. The investment aimed to enable modernisation of internal and front facing services, improving resident outcomes and generating savings. In the 2024/25 MTFS the digital investment directly contributes £1.63m of savings to the General Fund (with HRA savings calculated separately), and enables a further £2.1m in other MTFS proposals.
- 4.38 The overall investment plan aimed for £17.7m of savings by the end of year 4 (2024/25). This target will have slipped by 1 year by the end of the strategy but is now forecast to be achieved in 2025/26.

Potential – next digital strategy

4.39 We are in the process of drafting our next digital strategy. The next strategy will include a review of the last four years, and set strategic intent for the next 4 years. The context has changed a huge amount over the last few years, and the new strategy will highlight what has changed for our residents as well as what has changed for us as a team and an organisation.

5. Consultation

N/A

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

7. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Councils Digital Strategy and Cyber Security. There are no Legal or Human Rights implications arising from this report.	Davidaire Horsford, Interim Head of Legal Services 27.02/2025
Finance and other resources	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery of the digital strategy. As such there are no financial implications arising from this report.	Margaret Barrow, Accountancy Business Change Manager 24/02/25
Equalities	<p><i>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</i></p> <p><i>The digital strategy contributes to Council's Equality and Equity Charter and the Council's Equality Objectives 2020-2024 by reducing the digital divide that our residents experience. Specifically, all our digital services are built in an accessible way; and our digital inclusion works increases access to the internet for some of our most excluded groups.</i></p>	Kit Collingwood AD, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25

<p>Climate change</p>	<p>This report makes no contribution to Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020</p>	<p>Kit Collingwood Assistant Director, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25</p>
<p>Community Engagement</p>	<p>Housing repairs transformation programme: We combine analysing systems data, policy and literature with pop up research, interviews, shadowing and ideation sessions with residents, staff and other social housing providers. By triangulating findings from different sources, we distil our user research into actionable insights that enable data-driven decision-making in housing repairs. So far we have involved ~250 residents.</p> <p>Housing tenancy: The team have explored the tenant experience through focus groups and attending meetings. To understand the different operational model options, we have run interviews and site visits with other social landlords.</p> <p>Greenwich Supports Strategy (formerly known as anti-poverty strategy): Using a trauma-informed approach we worked with front-line staff, community leads and residents to inform how best our strategy can prevent those from falling further into poverty. Inspiring conversations with residents around ‘what a good life looks like’ helped us conceptualise how to design good help and create core principles around real people’s lives.</p> <p>Website: We combine Google Analytics data with regular qualitative research with website users (including those with access needs) to explore how we should design and write content tailored to help people access our council services. Through manual and automatic checks we ensure we’re compliant with WCAG 2.2 guidelines, ensuring everybody can use our website.</p> <p>Greenwich Community Directory:</p>	

	We've been co-designing the GCD with residents, front-line staff and community leads since the start which has allowed us to understand how best the GCD can support front-line staff and those with SEND by working closely with the ACE Group young people and parents.	
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8 . **Report Appendices**

8.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

N/A

8.2 The following documents will be published after the meeting:-

- *Appendix (): Recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*
- *Appendix (): Response to the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*

9. **Background Papers**

N/A

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ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 7
SUBJECT Electoral Services Annual Report 2024	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Stuart Godfrey		
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Electoral Services Annual Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

- The Electoral Services Department is the operational unit of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer and operates independently to the Council in order to remain politically neutral as required by law. On an operational basis and in terms of the services provided these link to the Councils missions as follows:
- We design our services around the needs of our residents – reference to the accessibility of the service
- Our Council is an adaptive organisation, enabling it to navigate the increasing number of challenges it faces while remaining financially sustainable – reference to service design

- Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible – reference to internal digital products such as the new intranet
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver –

3 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the performance of the Electoral Services Performance.
- a. This is the report on the activities and outcomes of the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer appointed by the Royal Borough of Greenwich during 2024 including the Mayor of London and Greater London Authority Elections; the General Election and five other electoral events and the electoral registration function supporting those electoral events.
 - b. In summary, 2024 was one of the busiest years in electoral administration due to the number of electoral events, the significant changes to electoral law and potential impact on voters as well as boundary and polling arrangements.
 - c. The year started with the implementation of the review of polling districts and polling places which was a statutory periodic review of all electoral arrangements which impacted on the electoral register that would be used though the year and the places at which in person voters would vote. In summary, the work undertaken by the team ensured that all electors were placed in the correct electoral areas and there were minimal issues with the places that were chosen for voting during the year.
 - d. The most significant change to the voting procedure in many years occurred in 2024 with the requirement for all in person voters to show photographic identification in order to obtain their ballot paper. The team worked closely with the communications team to prepare a project to ensure public engagement and minimise the numbers adversely affected by the change.
 - e. The team worked with partners including in customer services and RBG libraries to allow electors that needed the new free voter ID document to be able apply in person and locally if they did not use or have access to the internet. In summary, the numbers of voters who attended the

polling station without the required ID and the numbers who did not return and did not vote were very low and did not affect the outcome of any electoral event. The public engagement project can be seen as successful based on the numbers applying for the new ID document and the absence of electors making complaints that they were unable to vote due to this change.

- f. The Mayor of London and London Assembly elections otherwise the Greater London Assembly election took place on May 2024. These are completed elections due to several factors. The first is the electoral system needing three ballot papers, Mayor, local Constituency Member and then London wide Assembly Members to be elected. The most challenging is that the election is organised by several different Returning Officers with different levels of directional power. The Greater London Returning Officer is the Chief executive of the Greater London Authority and has overall responsibility for the election. The Constituency Returning Officer for our Greenwich and Lewisham Constituency is the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham and has responsibility for the election in our area. However actual delivery of the election in Royal Greenwich was undertaken by our team and by the Royal Greenwich Returning Officer under deputy powers. These separate responsibility points did cause some issues, most importantly the decision to count at Excel London at a later point than originally planned which led to reduced time to plan the count process than would have been ideal. The final major challenge was the move to a manual count, the first time since the Mayor of London position had been created that an electronic count was not used. In summary, the team worked well with our counterparts at the London Borough of Lewisham and we delivered a successful electoral event.
- g. As parliament entered the new year, 2024 was the year in which parliament was most likely to be dissolved and a General Election called by the Prime Minister (January 2025 being possibly but unlikely). However it was a surprising decision to call the election when it was and therefore the General Election can be classed as a snap election meaning that there was very limited time to complete the preparations required such as booking polling stations and recruiting the large numbers of staff and obtaining the contractors for equipment and services required. In all, there was just 30 working days for all arrangements to be made before polling day. For the General Election there were many factors that complicated the successful organisation of the poll. While many voters had now voted in person showing their photo-ID, the numbers voting at

a General Election are always significantly higher and include those who don't normally vote and would be affected by the photo-ID rules and therefore another public engagement project was undertaken with the Communications team and work with partners undertaken. A review by the Boundary Commission for England had changed the parliamentary boundaries for most constituencies. In our area we moved from being responsible for two constituencies to three and rather than 'giving away' a part of the north-eastern part of the borough to our neighbour we now 'took in' parts of Bexley and Bromley to form the three constituencies we were now responsible for which was the largest electorate the borough had run and led to the largest count we had run. The need to work closely and successfully with our neighbours and the logistics of the significantly larger count were notable challenges. The sheer number of staff required to be recruited was a significant challenge especially as an overnight count, as required by law, meant that staff could not be used as polling stations and then the count as was the case at the GLA election there was also a complication of significant numbers of staff agreeing and then pulling out for different reasons and having to be replaced. In summary, the General Election appeared to be successfully run with minimal issues or complaints.

- h. There were four Royal Borough of Greenwich Council by-elections and one neighbourhood plan referendum during 2024. These events impacted the preparation and post poll procedure processes for the main electoral events, the GLA and General Elections.
- i. A significant theme in the Electoral Commission report on the General Election was concern about levels of abuse and intimidation of candidates and of postal votes not being able to be returned from those living outside the UK. Neither of these issues appeared to affect our elections but we have close liaison with the police and with all candidates to assist with the first point and we recommend proxy voting for such electors in relation to the latter.

SECTION 2

4 Report

Introduction

- a. The Electoral Registration Officer is appointed by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and is the Chief Executive. She then carries out the legal duties of electoral registration according to law and guidance from the Electoral Commission in a separate legal capacity to her role as Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Greenwich. She is responsible directly to court and is subject to performance standards from the Electoral Commission. Any reasonable costs and resources needed for the duty to make and maintain the electoral register must be paid by Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- b. The Returning Officer is the Electoral Registration Officer and also acts in a separate legal capacity to her role as Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- c. The separate legal position of the ERO and RO means that the role and delivery of Electoral Services is politically neutral and not subject to political direction.
- d. This report will present the work of the two functions that in reality are connected as a well-run election depends on the base of a good quality electoral register which is complete and accurate.
- e. 2024 was a significantly busy and difficult year for the Electoral Services team. There were no fewer than 7 electoral events including a new type of poll, a Greater London Authority election with significant later planning and delivery needs as well as the introduction of voter-ID as well as a snap General Election on all new electoral boundaries as well as four by-elections with minimum available planning time.
- f. The start of the year saw the conclusion and implementation as the statutory periodic review of polling districts and places and the end of the year saw the review of all EU national electors a process that will end on 1 February 2025 with the removal of newly unqualified nationals of EU nations from the register.
- g. The pressures on Electoral Services were many and significant both in electoral registration as well as the more visible electoral events but the team, both permanent staff and those working on a temporary and sessional basis delivered successful electoral events based on a high

quality electoral register and were successful in delivering the most significant change to the voting procedure, voter-ID, in generations with minimal barriers to those wishing to exercise their democratic right to vote.

The autumn 2023 annual canvass

- h. The annual canvass or audit of the register of electors in autumn 2023 required our contact by letter to every property in the borough. We matched our register with DWP and HMRC records to determine where there is likely to be change and only require those properties to actively respond to us.
- i. Those who do not respond must be personally canvassed. We used 26 canvassers to contact those properties door to door to assist the residents to complete the form. Reasons for non-completion range from English not a first language, disability affecting the ability to complete forms or returning them; not wishing to complete any forms for any reason; overlooking the need to return the form and other reasons. The canvassers provide an essential and legally required service to persuade completion and assist those who need it to ensure the register is as complete and accurate as possible.
- j. The start number, those who were required to respond but had not to our letters and emails, for personally canvassing was 20,407 properties. Of those, 8,584 properties responded which is a 44% return.

Electoral Registration

- k. During the 2024 electoral year as a whole there was a very large number of registration applications. The number of electoral registration application forms (unsolicited and responses to Invitations To Register - ITRs) was 38,914. Including those who applied completely unsolicited (the total applications were 39,911. In total we made 31,705 additions to the register. The difference being those who were not eligible or did not respond after being requested to provide more information regarding their incomplete applications. We also made 27,914 deletions to the register, those who moved internally or out of the borough and those who died during the year.

- i. In end of year statistics, the total Local Government electorate is now 192,050. Total registered for Parliamentary elections is 173,988. There are 277 17-year-olds who will become voting age before next republication. We have 1,353 Overseas Electors. The number of Crown Servants and Service voters is 76. There are 6 registered with a Local Connection to the borough (homeless or no fixed abode). We have 15 Anonymously registered electors and we work with domestic violence staff and refuges to offer this registration type as needed. There are 30,048 electors registered to vote by post.

The autumn 2024 annual canvass

- m. The 2024 annual canvass or audit of the register of electors was undertaken in autumn 2024 to January 2025. As there are no scheduled elections in 2025 we undertook a legal minimum personal canvass. The letters and emails encouraging return was the same as 2023 but the canvassers made one rather than a minimum of three door knocks (our usual standard) during the personal canvass stage.
- n. The number of canvassers used was 19 with a start number of outstanding properties being 20,856. The outcome was 5,520 responses which is a 25% return. This is a 19-point lower outcome based on our normal canvassing. This outcome should not be directly correlated to the completeness and accuracy of the register as many will register by other means. We conduct public engagement at other times of the year and we use data mining, for example by obtaining Council Tax records of new accounts and encourage new residents to register throughout the year. The autumn 2025 canvass will return to normal canvass processes.
- o. Personal canvassing remains difficult to undertake and is possibly more so every year. Difficulties include recruiting staff willing and able to go out in autumn and winter evenings and weekends and be willing to persuade residents to complete forms at the doorstep. They also find it increasingly difficult to gain entry to blocks and gated residential areas to do their duty. We have assisted by moving to tablet computer canvassing to avoid heavy paper forms that are affected by rain need to be kept in order and also by liaising with landlords and security staff to assist with getting the staff to doors.
- p. The 2024 canvass started with a data match process of the register against DWP/ HMRC records. Properties that match suggest there is no change and are designated for 'Route 1'. These get a single letter confirming the registration details at the property. 82,903 such

properties were in this route after the match and local data confirmation where we use Council Tax single person records to identify probable no change. There were 136,656 electors in these Route 1 properties.

- q. We tracked responses from these Route 1 properties and noted that we received 5,591 responses and a total of 2,096 major changes such as properties with new electors or an elector who was no longer resident and 1,724 minor changes such as name issues. A total of 4,010 additions and 6,330 deletions came from these Route 1 properties.
- r. We designate all other properties as 'Route 2' and these are subject to a similar canvass process as has been in place historically. They are required by law to respond and we send letters emails and a canvasser to knock on their door to obtain a response. There were 42,200 Route 2 properties and 41,906 electors in those properties.
- s. The Route 2 will include 'void' properties where there are no electors. Voids are most commonly where the residents are not eligible for electoral registration which is based on their nationality (British, Irish, qualifying EU or Commonwealth Countries only) and second homes which are mainly students who wish to be registered only at their family address. We do not ask and do not collect information on if a property is empty of residents, only empty of eligible electors. We will undertake the full process of encouraging a return to check if there is a change of residence or circumstance such as naturalisation.
- t. We received 26,545 responses from Route 2 properties which had 7,524 major changes and 4,509 minor ones and 14,512 reported no change. There were 4,783 additions to the register and 10,402 deletions from these properties this canvass.
- u. Route 3 properties are not standard properties and include care homes and block student accommodation. There were 474 such properties which our team process by special methods such as obtaining resident detail using the power to obtain any record held by any person, body or company. There were 8,851 additions and 17,109 deletions from these Route 3 properties.

Polling place and polling district review

- v. Electoral law requires a periodic review of all polling districts and polling places. That was required to be undertaken in late 2023 to late 2024. Due to the upcoming General Election, it was decided to undertake that review in late 2023 for implementation in early 2024 in order that the arrangements were in place for that General Election, especially as the parliamentary boundaries had changed.
- w. The review covered the 120 polling places that are used in the borough and considerations of their continued suitability and availability into the future.
- x. We also considered the polling district lines to match the buildings available for polling and the polling district divisions and naming to reflect the new parliamentary constituencies that were incoming. For the previous review, many small polling districts were required to be made as no decision had been made on the boundaries but now that the review of the Boundary Commission was complete, only those areas with divisions of wards across old and or new constituency lines needed to retain small polling districts.
- y. The review was a significant task, requiring appropriate consultation with interested parties and the public with the public consultation requiring consideration of representation before a final report could be put before full council.
- z. The approval of the review then led to the implementation phase with the new venues chosen being booked for future elections and the amendments to the register using specific mapping technology being required. A quality check was then undertaken to ensure that all properties and electors were placed in the correct new polling districts.
- aa. The register was then republished in February 2024 to reflect the new polling districts and renumbered polling numbers for all electors.
- bb. The result was successful in that we received no complaints from voters unhappy at their new polling stations being inconvenient for them or inaccessible / difficult to use due to mobility issues and there were no reports of electors in the incorrect electoral area.

Neighbourhood plan referendum

- cc. We conducted our first neighbourhood plan referendum in February 2024 after a local forum, the Lee Neighbourhood forum had proposed a plan in accordance with legislation. Unusually for this legislation, the area crossed borough boundaries and so both RBG and London Borough of Lewisham were required to review the plan and work with an independent planner to ensure the plan met the relevant criteria. Once that was confirmed, a poll was set for 15 February 2024.
- dd. The area was cross boundary and as more of the electorate in that area was in Lewisham, they were the Counting Officer. Royal Greenwich acted as the Deputy Counting Officer and organised the poll in the RBG area.
- ee. This was the first poll in the borough to require photographic identification in order to receive a ballot paper. To reflect this, a public engagement project was undertaken with Communications to make electors aware of the new rules.

Mayor of London and Greater London Authority Election

- ff. The 2024 GLA elections were the first cross RBG election to have Voter-ID as a requirement for station voters. The planning for this and outcomes are detailed later in this paper.
- gg. This election saw a change in voting process for the Mayor to 'first past the post' from the alternative vote system used before. The other contests for the Assembly remained the same with, constituency first past the post and a modified d'Hondt used for the London wide Members.
- hh. The particular modification to the d'Hondt uses standard d'Hondt for electing a number of Members proportionally to the number of votes given on that ballot paper but modified by how successful the party was at the Constituency elections.
- ii. The change to the Mayoral voting process was mentioned in our public engagement but our focus was on Voter-ID as the ballot paper was arguably self-explanatory shown by the minimal number of rejections of papers for being incorrectly marked.
- jj. A major administrative change was from electronic counts as all previous GLA elections had been, to manual count. This change saw a similar

process to typical counting procedures however as the Count was the responsibility of the Constituency Returning Officer who was the Lewisham electoral team, we were required to follow their instructions of the count method. A decision on the 2028 election count system, manual or electronic will be made around June 2025.

- kk. Manual counts meant a move from very granular results where the computer, which identified each ballot paper's polling station and could output results in ward easily to manual counting where only a single Constituency result could be provided. There have been calls for manual counting to provide ward based results. This is possible if legislation is changed but it would result in a longer count. There would also be a need to consider postal votes which are currently verified in one borough wide block and then mixed with polling station ballots so that no postal vote or polling station only results can be obtained
- ll. As the London Borough of Lewisham was the Constituency Returning Officer (CRO) this led to the need for close and co-operative working between them and ourselves who operated under Deputy powers. The Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) was the GLA's Chief Executive who had direction powers over the CRO. There was a strong and co-operative working relationship between the two teams which ensured a successfully delivered election. However, the legal structure where one borough, in this case ourselves, operate in a legal grey area of Deputy Returning Officer under direction powers of both the GLRO and the CRO while in practical effect, being responsible for the election in our area creates risk. In this election the main one being the count venue which was decided by the GLRO should be a combined whole Constituency count. The preparations for this could only be started later in the planning which took significant planning resource during the project.
- mm. A significant issue we faced was the numbers of electoral staff who recruited but were subsequently unable to work at the election. We recruit early by asking existing staff that we wish to work for us again to save the date before firm recruitment much nearer the election. Others have to pull out due to other emergency issues and illness. In all 224 staff at polling stations alone pulled out and needed to be replaced. Replacements need to go through recruitment and identification checks, training and appointing to stations they can attend. This created a significant strain on the team's resource.

- nn. The count was undertaken at Excel London which was the venue for several other constituencies as well as no suitable single venue could be found available within the two boroughs.
- oo. The count was held over two days, Friday for the verification of ballot papers and Saturday for the sorting and counting. The count was successful and the two teams of Lewisham and Greenwich delivered an accurate count result faster than any other in London.

General Election

- pp. The prime minister announced on 22 May 2024 that a General Election would be held on 4 July 2024. This was a snap poll as shown by the period of 'wash-up' in parliament to complete business was the joint shortest since 1992 and only 31 working days in total from the announcement and polling day itself.
- qq. In the first few days of the planning we contacted all of our 123 polling places to book use of their venues as well as the Count Centre and secure the procurement of temporary polling stations including highways requirements for those and the equipment needed for polling day and the count. Also needed was immediate discussions with our colleagues in Bromley and Bexley on the implementation of our plans for the areas of their areas that we were running especially on venue bookings and staff availability.
- rr. The ceremonial Returning Officer at parliamentary elections is the Mayor of the Borough, Councillor Jit Ranabhat. The responsibility for delivering the election lies with the Acting Returning Officer, the Chief Executive, Debbie Warren. To ensure political neutrality, this is an independent role to that of Chief Executive and is not a Royal Borough function. Her role is covered by the legal requirement to deliver the election in accordance with law to avoid the electoral offence of breach of official duty. Her decision making can only be challenged in a special election court after an election petition. She can and did appoint Deputy Returning Officers to exercise her duties who also act impartially and are bound to deliver the process in accordance with law.
- ss. Working with Bromley and Bexley was required due to the recent review of parliamentary boundaries which had redrawn all the constituencies in the Royal Borough. Due to the electorate numbers and the new boundaries, we had been tasked by legislation to run three rather than the previous two constituencies. This created significantly

more administrative work with the largest electorate and largest count in the borough's history.

- tt. The boundaries meant that we acted as Acting Returning Officer for two Bromley wards and three Bexley wards. While we were responsible for the electoral process, the 'home' boroughs were still responsible for electoral registration for those wards. This meant that electoral registration, postal votes and proxies were made the home borough and the data from those applications needed to be sent to us to administer the polling stations and postal vote issue and opening.
- uu. We had organised several meetings with Bexley and Bromley over the period before the election was called and had a plan for dividing the tasks required such as how and when data would be supplied. We decided that there should be minimal variation between the constituency so we issued all poll cards and postal votes for the areas to our usual timetable and procedures. We also arranged for the home boroughs to use the staff who normally run and monitor the polling stations to continue to work there but they would be trained by us so that there was no variation between the constituency.
- vv. In all, there was very successful working between the three electoral teams with all three managers being very experienced and used to working well together which was key to a well run cross boundary election.
- ww. A General Election is a significant project in scope, variety and staffing needs. In all, around 1,000 staff were needed across the three constituencies in the 180 polling stations, postal vote issue and opening and the count of the votes. With the legal requirement to count overnight at General Elections, staff at polling stations could not work at the count to avoid them working for too long a period.
- xx. We created, proofed and sent poll cards to all of the 225,792 electors eligible to vote at the election.
- yy. We sent email polling station poll cards to 102,800 electors where we had collected their email address. This contained the important information from the posted poll card which they also received such as their polling station details, details on the new Voter-ID rules and how to get the free voter-ID or apply for a postal vote if they did not have the accepted ID documents.
- zz. There is a very large amount of electoral registration work during a General Election period which is required to be undertaken along with the election plan implementation. All of these applications require

manual processing by the team many of which require multiple manual processes such as matching applications to the correct address, identifying and resolving duplicate applications and requesting and dealing with documentary evidence requests when the provided information was entered incorrectly or not at all by the applicant or where there is no automated match.

Application type	General Election period applications
Registration	13,441
Postal vote	4,926
Overseas elector	692
Proxy	1,020
Voter-ID VAC	173

- aaa. This General Election was significantly different in that the level of applications is high as usual for the type of election but that the applications were mostly made by the new government online portal. While this did offer some practical benefits such as reduced typing from papers forms, the portal was not optimised for high numbers of applications and required scrolling and mouse clicking and manual checking of each application. In the future we hope to push the government digital service team to evolve the system to be more efficient to reduce the time required for each application.
- bbb. Another significant change due to the Election Act was the eligibility to be an Overseas Elector. Rather than needing to have been resident and on the register within the last 15 years, now any British Citizen could apply and register and vote no matter how long ago they had left the UK. Applicants needed to prove they last lived in our area to register here, for many this was difficult as they needed to provide documents from many decades in the past (some over 40 years) and we had many cases of return correspondence where applicants could not do so and needed to provide an attestation from another Overseas elector or a UK elector who can confirm they lived in the borough in the past.
- ccc. For the General Election and in a shorter period due to the snap nature of the poll, 177 polling station staff had to pull out for various issues and had to be replaced with new and inexperienced staff. Staff also had to be replaced at the count for similar reasons.

- ddd. The count was held at the Waterfront leisure centre. Electoral law requires an overnight count and we therefore planned the largest count using the largest area with the greatest number of counters in our history.
- eee. Our plan was to have maximum transparency with verified totals being immediately available after approval by the reconciliation team. It was not possible to provide a ward based count as so many wards are now split across constituency lines and the need to balance boxes from Bexley and Bromley that would arrive later due to travel time. In addition, postal votes are not divided into wards which means that a ward based sub result is not possible.
- fff. Postal votes do cause issues with getting a fast declaration. Voters are allowed to hand in postal votes at polling stations and many do so near the close of poll. We also receive a 'sweep' from Royal Mail who go through their delivery areas and look for postal votes and deliver them to us on polling day, just before the close of poll that would normally be delivered the next day. These postal votes must go through the same process as the others and be opened, batched, scanned and the signatures and dates of birth matched with the voter's application before the ballot paper can be counted into boxes and then brought to the count.
- ggg. The Royal Greenwich count process is designed to have maximum transparency and multiple levels of process to ensure accuracy with a maximum of speed while maintain that accuracy. All processes are undertaken in full view of the candidates and agents and staff double check each other's work before provisional totals are created with accountants or finance staff checking provided draft figures and checking the numbers for accuracy before a provisional result is concluded. The candidates and Election Agents have the opportunity to consider the provisional result before the Returning Officer makes the declaration of result.
- hhh. The count was successfully undertaken within a reasonable time especially considering there were three counts rather than the usual two and the candidates and agents expressed no doubts to the process undertaken during the night.

Voter-ID in stations and for postal voters

- iii. The most significant change to electoral law in some time saw the introduction of voter-ID being required for those voting in polling stations.
- jjj. Electoral Services worked closely with the Communications department to develop a plan that would inform the electorate of the new requirements and provide practical options for them to be able to vote.
- kkk. The campaign used a household notification letter in February to each household which both confirmed the electors in the property and informed them how to correct missing persons, where their polling station now was as some had changed and which new parliamentary constituency they now resided in subsequent to the changed parliamentary boundaries for Voter-ID the communication explain the new system and what documents were acceptable and how to obtain the free voter-ID document if they had none of those listed. It also suggested a postal vote as an alternative and for those away in May or when the General Election would be called.
- lll. The delivery of the plan also saw us work with the RBG contact centres so that electors could attend in person and make an online application. We were also pleased to work with GLL and libraries so that electors could attend major libraries to get their free voter-ID.
- mmm. We used other methods including large banners across the borough and an email poll card to electors that informed them of the new rule and link directly to the Voter Authority Certificate portal.
- nnn. The letter and other communications and work with partners meant that Greenwich had the highest number of Voter Authority Certificates applied for in London both as a total number, 173 (joint first) and as a percentage of the electorate (0.09%).
- ooo. Training was provided to election staff on top of their usual election training on how to deal with the new process. This was required as many staff had concerns of the impact in their stations and needed reassurance as well as making sure they took the same decision-making process such as flexibility where some photographs on IDs would be in excess of 10 years old and others would have significant appearance change and name changes. All matters were covered in training with the message that out of the ordinary cases could be referred to the Deputy

Returning Officer for advice so that all electors received equal treatment.

- ppp. The total number of electors who attended the polling stations, those who did not have the required ID, those who returned later with the required ID and those who unfortunately did not and shown here.

Election	Station voters	Issued ballot papers at stations	No Voter-ID	Returned with V-ID and voted	Attended with no V-ID and did not return
GLA 24	163,102	59,375	350 (0.6%)	247 (70.6%)	103 (0.2%)

General Election 24: Constituency	Station voters	Issued ballot papers at stations	No Voter-ID	Returned with V-ID and voted	Attended with no V-ID and did not return
Eltham and Chislehurst	60,053	33,340	175 (0.5%)	129 (73.7%)	46 (0.1%)
Erith and Thamesmead	66,715	32,108	189 (0.6%)	134 (70.9%)	55 (0.2%)
Greenwich and Woolwich	60,100	34,911	123 (0.4%)	73 (59.3%)	50 (0.1%)
Total	186,868	100,359	487 (0.5%)	336 (69%)	151 (0.15%)

- qqq. In their report on the election, the GLA Elections Review Working Group stated the “number of people who were turned away and did not return was low. However, anyone eligible and unable to vote due to voter ID is worrying for democratic participation. Moreover, the data likely underestimates the impact as we cannot know how many people did not attend polling stations in the first place as they did not hold a suitable form of ID.” We will continue to work with partners and build on the plans and outcomes of 2024 to minimise the impact of voter-ID for future electors at future elections.
- rrr. Postal voting also received a change to mirror the changes in station voting. New applicants needed to prove their identity by providing their national insurance number and date of birth when they applied. This was checked with the DWP database and non-matches required the applicant to provide documentary evidence of their identity to complete their postal vote application. This was accompanied by the introduction of an online portal for applicants to provide the new details and where they could take a photograph of their signature to attach to their online application. The signature would then be used during the election and paper forms were still available.

- sss. The new postal vote system created significant additional burden on the electoral team as all applications needed to be checked for their ID check success status and failed ID checks required an additional communication and immediate request to the applicant to provide the documentary evidence. In addition, paper forms needed to be scanned in by the team and all details manually entered in the online system.
- ttt. The government portal on which all postal vote applications must be processed required individual processing by the team through several steps including checking their linked electoral registration, the application details and the separate ID process and where the ID check failed, communication sent and later, the returned evidence matched to the application and considered for approval or rejection.
- uuu. A further new process and pressure on the team's resources was the new free voter ID paper for those without the 'accepted' ID documents. The Voter Authority Certificate process required the elector to go to an online portal or complete a paper application. The online portal appeared relatively simple but required the elector to provide their name, ID details including NINO and a passport like photograph that they could take by digital device such as their phone.
- vvv. Many applications did not have an acceptable photograph which required head and shoulders with plain background. Each application and photograph supplied had to be checked and approved by the team with the need for immediate request to the applicant to supply new photographs or identity documents to complete their application.

By-elections

- www. There were three Royal Greenwich Council by-elections during the year. The first due to the sad death of Cllr John Hills and then to due to the resignations of Cllrs Backon, Thorpe and Lloyd. Three of the four were in wards had a mix of party Cllrs. Two at the last local elections where voters had split their votes across party lines and one where the resigning councillor was now of a different political affiliation to the other in the ward. This meant that the elections were likely to be strongly contested and results could be close. This meant that while they were not of the level of organisation needed for a cross borough poll, the organisation and attention needed was high to ensure a well run electoral event with confidence in the result no matter how close the result would be.

xxx. We worked with the Communications department to ensure that there was appropriate public engagement with local residents on the upcoming polls and the key messages of how options for voting and continued need for Voter-ID.

yyy. The four by-elections were successfully run with no issues.

European Union Citizens Voter registration

zzz. The Election Act changed the franchise for voting at local government elections for those citizens from the European Union. The rules that allowed all citizens with a EU member state citizenship to vote in local elections (RBG and GLA) changed so that only those from certain nations and those from the other nations but who had lived in the UK before a certain date were to be eligible.

aaaa. Citizens of Cyprus and Malta (Commonwealth) and Ireland are unaffected and can vote in all elections. Those citizens, or those with dual citizenship of these or other Commonwealth nations, are excluded from this process as they will be registered with the nationality that provides them greater voting rights. They are not included in these statistics.

bbbb. The new rules are that citizens of those countries with reciprocating rights will be able to register as before. Those are where UK citizens living in that country can vote in their municipal elections so will have their citizens be able to vote in ours as part of unilateral agreements. This applies to: Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

cccc. In addition, those from the other EU member states and where before 31 December 2020 had permission to enter or stay in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man, or who did not need permission, and this has continued without a break are also eligible for electoral registration.

dddd. There are a significant number of EU citizens on the Royal Borough's register of electors. At February 2024 there were 21,984 such electors. During the busy 2024 election year with many new residents adding their names the project started with 22,519 such electors.

eeee. The electoral services team undertook the required process which was to confirm those citizens of the nations with reciprocating rights as eligible and contact them with that confirmation. We then undertook a historical check for the remainder, if the elector was registered continuously in RBG since 31 December 2020 we confirmed they were eligible and contacted them to confirm that.

- ffff. All others were then contacted by email and letter to request that they confirm if they met the new criteria or not. They could return a letter or complete an online portal. We made house to house visits to those that did not respond. Those who did not respond or responded that they did not meet the criteria were removed from the register.
- gggg. The conclusion of the main process was the publication of the 1 February 2025 annual revised register. After the removal of those who had not confirmed their eligibility to continue their registration there was 19,429 such EU citizens on the register. This is a decrease of 2,555 electors from the same time a year before. The preferred comparison is the year before as the start figure will include those who have moved and who naturally are removed as part of the canvass process although the larger number formed the numbers subject to the review process.
- hhhh. There will be opportunities for any residents who are qualified but failed to respond to the letters, emails and person contacts or who moved in from another address as a continuing qualified person to register before the elections in May 2026. There will be a further canvass in autumn 2025 and a public engagement process prior to those next scheduled elections.
- iiii. This review project was an additional financial burden to the Electoral Registration Officer but an allocation was made by the government in direct grant format to the Electoral Registration Officer for the process.

Costs and finance

- jjjj. Electoral events are paid by the Returning Officer and then the costs reclaimed by the organisation which is being elected. The GLA elections will be paid by the GLA and the General Election by the government consolidated fund in a claim process administered through the Elections Claims Unit, which is part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- kkkk. Electoral Registration is planned and delivered by the Electoral Registration Officer and any reasonable costs must be paid by the local authority. In an election year the increased costs of electoral registration and applications for postal and proxy voting must be paid by the Royal borough however an additional grant was provided to cover the additional burden of the Elections Act. The costs of public engagement for the Election Act burdens was covered by this additional grant funding.

Electoral Commission's General Election report

- llll. The Electoral Commission produced a report on the General Election as a whole and reported that the election across the country was overall well run. It stated that voters continue to have high levels of confidence and satisfaction in the polls.
- mmmm. Their main concerns were included electors not receiving postal votes in time to return them especially overseas electors. In the very short timescales of elections between the end of candidate nomination and polling day and with the time taken for international post to be delivered it is likely that postal votes will not be able to be sent and arrive in time. We advise all overseas electors to appoint a proxy to vote at their polling station or by post from within the UK.
- nnnn. Another concern they reported on was addressing the abuse and intimidation of candidates and campaigners. While robust debate and challenge is part of multiparty free and fair elections there is such concern regarding this issue at this, past and the possibility at future elections. We have a good relationship with all parties and campaigners at the elections and with the police locally and at Metropolitan Police HQ level. No such issues were apparent at these elections in our area.
- oooo. The Commission looked at the identity checking process at candidate nomination. We received a nomination from a person who had the same legal name at the point of nomination, as far as we were aware, as other people in 10 other constituencies. It was believed that some had recently changed their name ahead of this election. There was concern that voters may be confused by this action. The action we took in accepting the nomination was legally correct and in accordance with established case law. The Commission have suggested that candidates might be required to prove their identity. Such a process would be administratively unproblematic at General Elections but very burdensome for us and political parties at Local Elections with hundreds of candidates being nominated in a few days.
- pppp. The Commission also suggested improving the operation of the digital systems relied on by electoral administrators. With the sheer number of applications generally and specially at General Elections this is a suggestion we fully agree with.

5 Consultation

- a. No consultation was undertaken as part of this report/ and none is required.

6 Next Steps

- a. The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

7 Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is for the Panel to consider the Electoral Services Annual Report. The report meets the commissioned brief and there are no legal implications directly arising from this report.	<i>Azuka Onuorah Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services 4 March 2025</i>
Finance and other resources	<i>This is an information report to the Organisation & Communities Scrutiny Panel on Election activity and Performance, and as such there are no direct financial implications arising from it.</i>	<i>Joanne Stark Head of Accounting & Business Change 27/02/2025</i>
Equalities	<i>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>

Climate change	<i>This report does not cover issues relating to the Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>
Community Engagement	<i>As stated in the report, Electoral Services act independently to the Council and in accordance with legislation and lies outside the remit of the Community Engagement Pledge dated 24th July 2024.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>

8 Report Appendices

- a. There are no appendices for this report.

9 Background Papers

- a. There are no background papers for this report.

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ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 7
SUBJECT Freedom of Information Monitoring	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER		
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Statutory Scrutiny of the Freedom of Information Monitoring Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

- 2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed missions as follows:

Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible

- 2.2 Dealing with requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and responding to requests under Environmental Information Regulations are statutory requirements. This service links to the Council's strong commitment to FOI/EIR and this positive approach enables services to give the work the necessary priority to meet the requirements and provide an excellent service to requestors.

3. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the performance of the Council's response to Freedom of Information requests and requests under Environmental Information Regulations.

3.2 The commissioned brief for the report was as follows:

- To provide an update on Freedom of Information requests and requests under Environmental Information Regulations.

4. The Report

4.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act) requires local and central governmental organisations to disclose information that they hold, subject to the exemptions set out in the Act. Additionally, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) give people a right of access to information about the activities of public authorities that relate to or affect the environment, although these are also subject to a range of exemptions.

4.2 The right to access information under the Act and the EIR does not cover every organisation that receives public money, such as charities that receive grants. Additionally, some Council functions, such as the role of the Returning Officer, fall outside of the provisions of the Act.

4.3 The Act covers all recorded information held by the Council, regardless of whether the Council has created the information or has received it from an external source. It is not limited to official documents and it covers, for example, drafts, emails, notes, recordings of telephone conversations and CCTV recordings, as well as metadata associated with these documents. This list is not exhaustive and legal advice is available should officers require assistance in determining if something is considered 'information'.

- 4.4 The Freedom of Information Act is limited to recorded information; the Council is not required, under the provisions of the Act, to create information that it does not hold to comply with a request.
- 4.5 Disclosure of information under both FOI and EIR is subject to a number of exemptions or exceptions. Applying exemptions/exceptions can lead to withholding information from a requester and, in some cases, will allow the authority to refuse to confirm or deny whether the information is held. FOI/EIR favours disclosure unless there is a good reason not to disclose. This is sometimes described as a presumption or assumption in favour of disclosure. Many of the exemptions are not absolute, but require the application of a public interest test to determine whether the public interest in releasing the information is greater than the public interest in not releasing the information. For example, in relation to a request for a contract with a service provider, the public interest in disclosing how the Council spends public money must be balanced with the public interest in ensuring that the Council is able to seek the best value for money when negotiating contracts.
- 4.6 Some exemptions/exceptions are based on the harm that would arise or would be likely to arise from disclosure, for example, if disclosure would be likely to prejudice a criminal investigation or prejudice someone's commercial interests.
- 4.7 In order to ensure that all exemptions/exceptions are appropriately used applied, departmental FOI representatives must seek legal clearance when using exemptions/exceptions.
- 4.8 Under section 40(1) of the Act and Regulation 5(3) of the EIR, requesters are not able to make requests for their own personal information under the Act. When requests of this nature are received by the Council, the requester is advised of this restriction and the request passed to the Corporate Data Guardian to respond to under the Right of Access provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- 4.9 The Council is required to reply promptly to, and within 20 working days of, receipt of FOI requests although there are some limited circumstances when an extension can be applied, such as to allow consideration of a public interest test when applying an exemption. For requests made under the EIR, there is a similar 20 working day time limit

for responses, with the provision to extend the time limit to 40 working days if the request is complex or requires a large volume of information to be processed.

- 4.10 Should a requester be dissatisfied with the response that they have received to their request under FOI or EIR, they can request an Internal Review of the decision. The Internal Review process is carried out by an appropriate chief officer, typically the director of the service to which the request relates, who reconsiders the request in the light of the concerns raised by the requester, for example that not all information has been provided, or that an exemption/exception has been incorrectly applied. The chief officer will then make a decision as to whether to uphold the original response, partially uphold the response and release additional information, or to not uphold the response and release additional information.
- 4.11 If a requester remains dissatisfied following the Internal Review of their request, he/she has the right to complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO), which will investigate. The ICO may issue a Decision Notice confirming that there is no action to be taken or that additional information should be disclosed. Not all ICO complaints result in a Decision Notice, particularly where the complaint is not significant and the complaint can be resolved informally. In line with best practice, the Council informs all requesters of their right to an Internal Review, as part of the response to their request, and informs all requesters of their right to complain to the ICO as part of the response to both their initial request and their request for an Internal Review.

5. **FOI and EIR Performance**

- 5.1 The following table sets out the number of FOI and EIR requests received between 1st January 2022 and 31st December 2023.

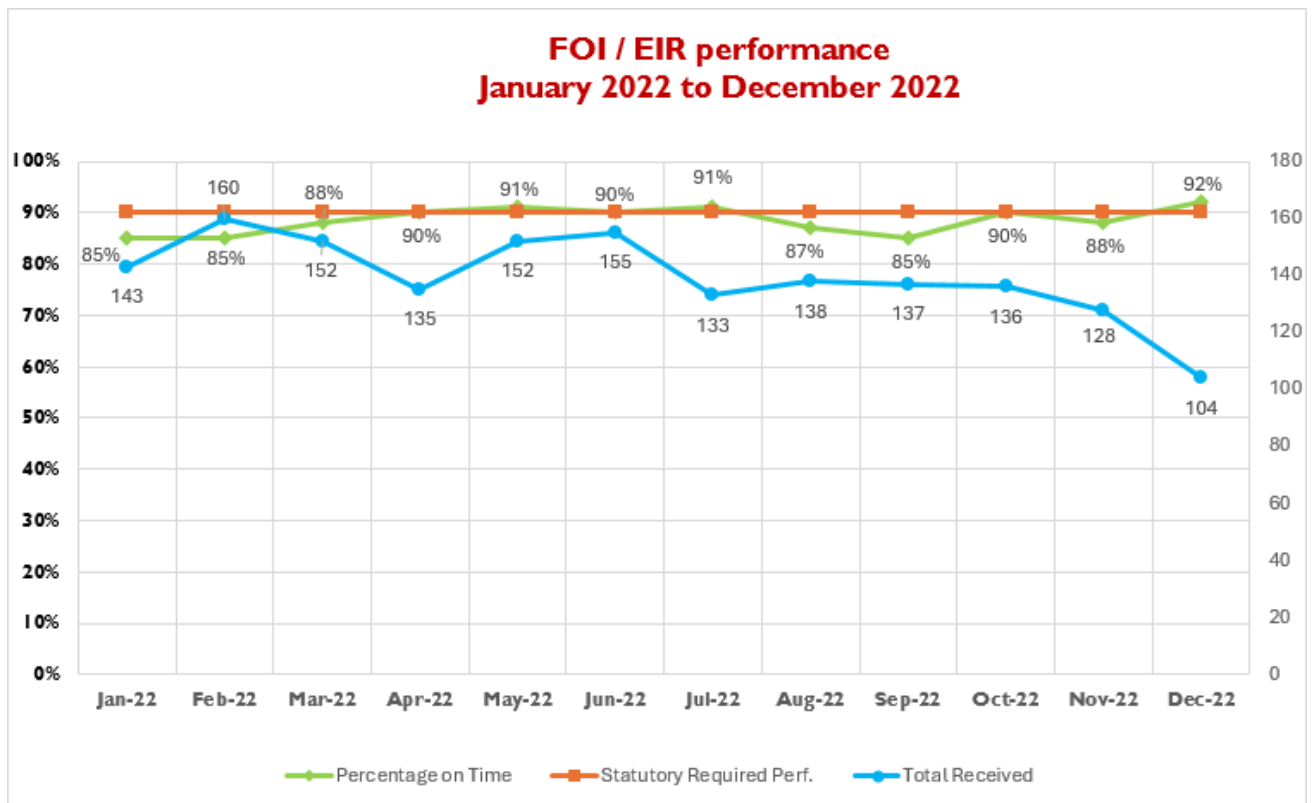
Request Type	Number of Requests Received In 2022	Percentage answered within Statutory Timescales	Number of Requests received in 2023	Percentage answered within Statutory Timescales

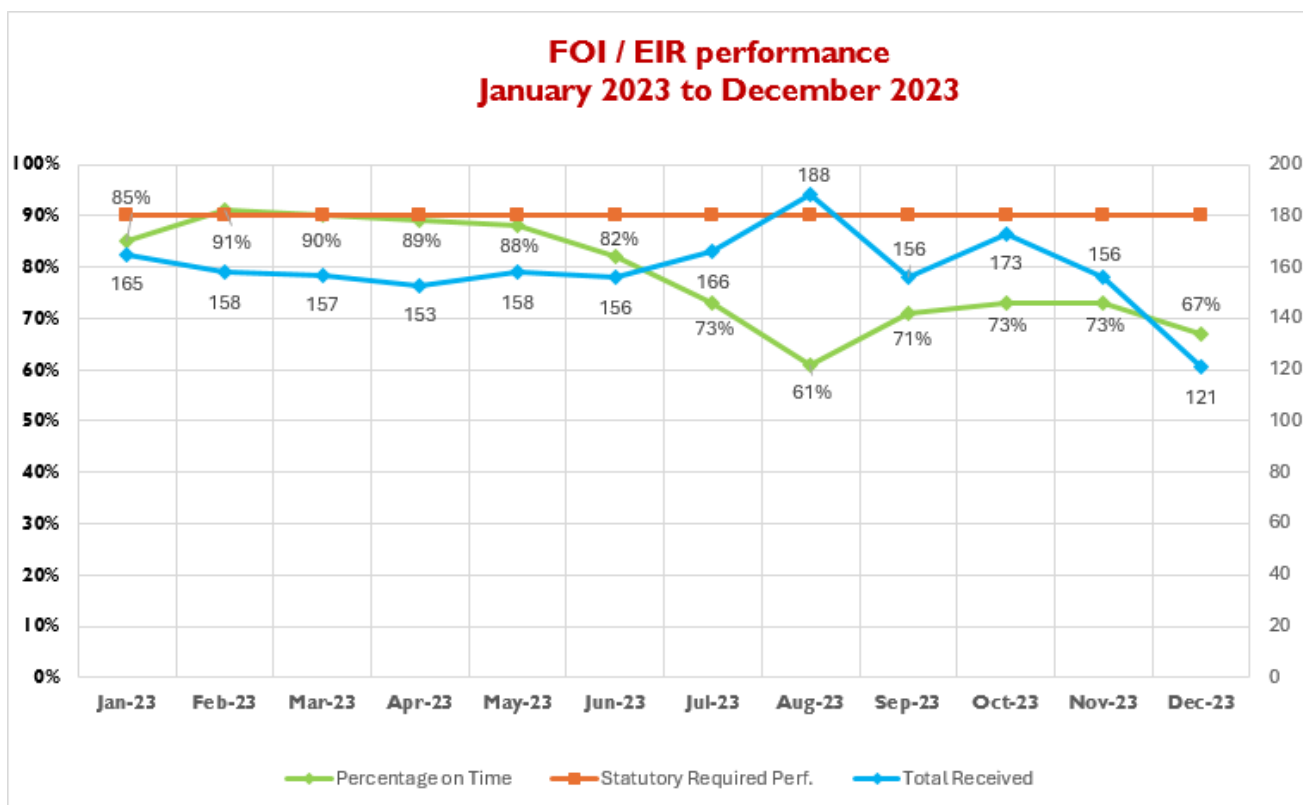
FOI	1,547	89%	1,660	78%
EIR	128	89%	261	74%
Total	1,675	89% <i>(Council's Overall Figure)</i>	1,921	77% <i>(Council's Overall Figure)</i>

- 5.2 In December 2022 the Council replaced its current casework system Pentana, with Microsoft Dynamics, a customer relationship management system. The Dynamics Casework App is being used for Cllrs, Leaders, Mayors and MP enquiries. Complaints, Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulation requests as well as Right of Access/SAR requests.
- 5.3 FOI and EIR request numbers for 2022 remained at relatively normal levels, down by 23 compared to 2021, when a total of 1,698 requests were received. Despite the difficulties presented by the Covid Pandemic and the challenges experienced by officers through the closure of premises, limited access to systems and information and staff absences, the Council maintained a notable performance rate of 89% in responding to requests within 20 working days. Only marginally below the ICO statutory timescales of 90%.
- 5.4 The number of FOI and EIR's received in 2023 significantly increased by 246 requests (15%) compared to 2022. The timeliness compliance rate however fell considerably short on the previous year, with only 77% of responses achieved within the 20 working day time limit, well below the ICO statutory timescales of 90%. This was mainly due to underperformance in handling FOI/EIR requests within Housing & Safer Communities and Communities & Environment, including a combination of other factors such administrative problems with the migration of FOI function to Dynamics, capacity related issues and a number of complex cases.
- 5.5 Whilst acknowledging the important role that people's information rights continue to have in regard transparency of decision making by public bodies, The Information Commissioner recognised that the pandemic created unprecedented operational challenges for public authorities and in particular the pressure on resources and staff.

Although they were unable to extend statutory timescales, they modified their approaches to enforcement of response timeliness. The regulatory approach taken by the ICO has now returned to pre-Covid arrangements.

5.6 The graphs below set out the Council’s overall, monthly performance as well as the number of requests received on a month-by-month basis for calendar years 2022 and 2023:





5.7 The following table sets out FOI and EIR performance by directorate. Where requests have been received jointly, it is included in both directorates' figures. As such, the number of requests shown on these tables is higher than the total number of requests received by the Council.

Directorate	Requests Received 2022	Percentage Completed within Statutory Timescales	Requests Received 2023	Percentage Completed within Statutory Timescales
Children's Services	247	99%	455	94%
Communities and Environment - (Overall)	398	89%	583	81%
Housing and Safer Communities	450	82%	563	65%

Finance & Legal Services - (Overall)	476	89%	421	90%
Health and Adults	192	100%	225	100%
Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills	228	96%	289	99%

6. Internal Reviews

6.1 The table below sets out the number of FOI and EIR Internal Reviews received by the Council in 2022 and 2023:

Internal Review Type	Number Received 2022	Percentage of Cases Resulting in Internal Review	Number Received 2023	Percentage of Cases Resulting in Internal Review
FOI	47	3%	48	3%
EIR	10	8%	20	8%
Total	57	3%	68	4%

6.3 These figures represent both increase in the number of Internal Reviews received compared to 2020/2021, when 51 and 53 Internal Reviews were received respectively.

6.5 The reasons for these Internal Reviews, as well as the outcomes of these cases, are set out in the tables below:

FOI/EIR Internal Reviews 2022				
	Reason for Internal Review			
Outcome	Insufficient Information	Non-Disclosure (Exemption)	Lateness	Multiple Reasons

	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR
Response Upheld	18	3	15	6	1	0	1	0
Response Part Upheld	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Response Not Upheld	4	0	4	1	0	0	0	0
Review Ongoing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	24	3	20	7	1	0	2	0

FOI/EIR Internal Reviews 2023								
	Reason for Internal Review							
Outcome	Insufficient Information		Non-Disclosure (Exemption)		Lateness		Multiple Reasons	
	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR	FOI	EIR
Response Upheld	20	10	11	5	0	0	2	0
Response Part Upheld	4	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Response Not Upheld	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Review Ongoing	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	0
Total	28	13	18	7	0	0	2	0

6.2 The following table sets out the number of FOI and EIR Internal Review cases by directorate. As with the breakdown of directorate FOI and EIR performance above, where an Internal Review has been conducted jointly, it is included in both directorates' figures, resulting in a higher total than the tables above.

Directorate	FOI Internal Reviews		EIR Internal Reviews	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Children's Services	11	3	-	-
Communities and Environment	4	10	2	23
Finance & Legal	5	1	-	-
Health and Adults	-	1	-	-
Housing and Safer Communities	13	19	1	1
Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills	12	1	3	8

7. ICO Complaints

7. ICO Complaints

7.1 Before reaching the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) complaint stage, a requester must exhaust the Council's internal FOI/EIR procedure. This consists of receiving a response to the original request and internal review. If the requester does not agree with the outcome of the Internal Review, they may apply directly to the ICO for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless the requester has exhausted the Internal Review procedure provided by the Council.

7.2 The following tables sets out the number of ICO complaints received between 1st January 2022 and 31st December 2023 in relation to FOI/EIR, Internal Reviews requests and the types of ICO complaints received during this period – whether it was for non-compliance or challenging the Council's use of an exemption/exception.

	Total ICO Complaints	As a Percentage of All FOI/EIR Requests	As a Percentage of all Internal Reviews
2022	11	0.65%	19%

2023	16	0.57%	16%
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	Total ICO complaints for <u>non-compliance with statutory deadline</u>	Total ICO complaints <u>challenging use of exemptions/exceptions</u>	Total ICO Complaints
2022	0	11	11
2023	11	5	16

7.3 Throughout 2023, the Council experienced a notable increase in the number of ICO complaints related to non-compliance with statutory compliance. These complaints were primarily concentrated within the Housing and Safer Communities (HSC) and Communities, Environment, and Central (CEC) directorates. Of the 11 complaints received for non-compliance with statutory deadlines, 6 pertained to HSC and 3 to Transport (CEC).

7.4 These figures above are significant because they demonstrate how non-compliance with statutory deadlines can form a basis on which the ICO can exercise its regulatory powers. This enables the ICO to monitor public authorities either formally or informally. In response to the Council's high figures for non-compliance, the ICO raised its concerns with the Council informally and arranged a meeting in August 2024 with the Council's DPO, FOI Team and Legal Services. After this meeting, the Council has implemented measures to address these concerns, resulting in significant improvements in compliance.

7.5 Following an investigation of a complaint, the ICO will reach a decision about the case. There is a range of potential outcomes that the ICO can reach in relation to a complaint. The tables below set out what the potential outcomes are, as well as the outcomes of the ICO complaints received by the Council.

Outcome	Meaning
No Decision Notice issued	The ICO has closed the case and declined to issue a Decision Notice.
No Decision Notice issued – Informal Resolution	The ICO has requested that the Council and the requester resolve

	the case informally, without issuing a Decision Notice.
Decision Notice – No Further Action Required	Decision Notices requiring no further action are typically issued where the ICO have found partially or fully in favour of the Council. This would include cases where the ICO has concluded that the Council has correctly applied an exemption or exception or is correct in stating that it does not hold information.
Decision Notice – Disclosure of Information Required	Following consideration of the case, the ICO has ordered the Council to release additional information to the requester.

Outcome*	2022	2023
No Decision Notice issued	2	0
No Decision Notice issued – Informal Resolution	2	8
Decision Notice – No Further Action Required	5	6
Decision Notice – Disclosure of Information Required	2	1
Case Ongoing	0	1

**This data has been cross-checked against the ICO's records.*

- 7.6 When the ICO determines a complaint through a formal decision notice, both parties have the right to appeal the decision to the First Tier Tribunal.
- 7.7 Since 2022, the Council had three First Tier Tribunal hearings. In two cases, the Council acted as a second respondent under the vexatious request exemption - section 14(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The outcome of both appeals is the appeals were dismissed.
- In the third appeal the Council acted as the appellant under Regulation 12(5)(b) - legal professional privilege exception under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The Council is currently awaiting the Tribunal's decision.

8. Service Delivery and Improvement

8.1 Since the previous report to this Scrutiny Panel, the Council's FOI service has continued to manage FOI and EIR requests efficiently. A range of measures has been implemented to monitor and maintain good FOI and EIR performance across the organisation. This includes:

- Raising Staff Awareness of the obligations placed on the authority by the Act, the Codes of Practice and Guidance, in respect of the rights of persons making requests and the application of any exemptions.
- Refresher training to departmental Freedom of information representatives on exemptions under Freedom of information and Environmental Information Regulations.
- Quarterly meetings with FOI representatives and ad-hoc meetings with Senior Management to discuss poor performance.
- Circulating weekly monitoring reports on FOI and EIR performance to FOI representatives and Service Managers informing them of cases that are approaching the deadline for response.
- Circulating monthly performance reports to directors and FOI representatives, providing information on the performance of their service for that month. Finally, annual FOI performance data is published on the Councils web site.
- Briefing new members on information governance (FOI, EIR and Data Protection) as part of their induction programme.
- Reducing the number of frequently asked requests by encouraging departments to proactively publish more information and datasets on the Council Website in response to hot topics, and signposting requesters to this to provide the information they have requested.

9. Next Steps

9.1 The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

10. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	<p>The law in relation to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), is set out in the body of the report.</p> <p>There are no legal implications arising from this report.</p>	<p><i>Andre De Freitas,</i> <i>Assistant Head</i> <i>of Legal &</i> <i>Democratic</i> <i>Services</i> 27/12/2024</p>
Finance and other resources	<p>This report requests the decision maker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To consider the Statutory Scrutiny of the Freedom of Information Monitoring Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary. - To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive. - To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel. 	<p>Joanne Stark Head of Accounting & Business Change 6th January 2025</p>

	<p>The report is for information purposes only and as such there are no financial implications arising from it.</p>	
Equalities	<p>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</p> <p>The Council is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all we do and want to eliminate barriers that prevent people accessing our services.</p> <p>The Freedom of Information Act contributes to the Council's Equality and Equity Charter and the Council's Equality Objectives 2020-2024 by enabling anyone, anywhere, to request any recorded information that Royal Greenwich hold.</p>	<p>David White- Head of Information, Safety and Community 13/12/2024</p>
Climate change	<p>This report does not affect the Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020.</p>	<p>David White- Head of Information, Safety and Community 13/12/2024</p>
Community Engagement	<p>The Freedom of Information Act 2000 aims to increase openness and accountability in local government by ensuring people have the right to access information.</p>	<p>David White - Head of Information, Safety and Community 13/12/2024</p>

	<p>The Council enables this transparency through the handling of FOI cases and engaging with the public.</p> <p>We also maintain a Publications Scheme that provides information which is readily accessible to the public through the Council's website.</p>	
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