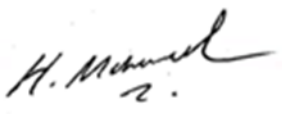


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Improving citizen experience	
REPORT OF Head of Customer & Registration Services Chief Experience & Information Officer	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee	DATE 16 th September 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report sets out the Council's ambitious vision to become a more relational organisation, our progress to date and the steps being undertaken to achieve this from a lens of citizen experience. It shows some of the challenges currently being faced in our Customer Service delivery and lays out our road map to addressing these concerns through development of our digital and analogue customer journeys and through the development of tools to standardise experience across the council. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No document(s) have been used in the preparation of this report: Contact Officer: Phil Quickenden, Head of Customer and Registration Services, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG, phil.quickenden@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATIONS For the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee to note the contents of the report.	
Signed:  Hanad Mohamed, Executive Director of Corporate Services Date: 8 th September 2025	

1. The journey so far

- 1.1. Citizen experience in Camden is a shared responsibility across the whole Council. All of the services our residents, visitors and businesses interact with have a role to play, as the way citizens experience these is determined heavily by operational processes, the way services interact with one another, and ultimately the overall service design. In recent years Contact Camden have become established as the champion for citizen experience excellence within the Council. Contact Camden's position as one of the main front doors into the Council, handling over half a million citizen interactions per year, means that the service is able to act as the voice of the citizen, sharing our data and insight across services to understand where Camden is providing great citizen experience as well as where we can do more to improve.
- 1.2. Over the last two years, Contact Camden has undergone root and branch transformation, including a new target operating model, to ensure the contact centre is able to deliver an excellent citizen experience in an ever-changing landscape of need. Contact Camden acts as the front door for approximately 28 Council services, excluding Housing Repairs who manage their own dedicated contact centre. Prior to May 2024, services in Contact Camden were grouped by type; for example, all housing related services, such as Rents, Housing Needs and Leaseholder Services, were dealt with by a single team of agents. The changing nature of demand meant that this structure was beginning to create performance imbalances across the service. Teams were overspecialised, leading to strong performance within small teams dealing mostly with transactional queries (e.g. renewing a parking permit, checking the status of a planning application), and worsening performance for teams such as that dealing with housing queries, where demand was increasing and calls were becoming lengthier and more complex. By the end of 2023, this meant that the service were only able to answer around 50% of calls for Council Tax and 55% of calls related to housing matters.
- 1.3. As well as changes to the demand profile, the contact centre also began to see shifts in the nature of the calls being received. Post-Covid, the emerging cost of living crisis meant services had to swiftly pivot to providing support to residents needing help with financial pressures, including paying their energy bills and rising food costs. Demand for the Welfare Support team grew, along with the need to address these types of queries and provide more in-depth support, in line with the Council's corporate level strategy and emerging missions, one of which being to address food inequality within the borough.
- 1.4. Demand from residents in deeper financial need began to spread into other areas of the contact centre. This saw increasing crossover between specialised teams – for example those calling Welfare Support with general financial concerns would often need to speak to Housing colleagues to discuss the specifics of their rent arrears. Double handling these calls increased operating pressures on the contact centre, while being passed to multiple members of staff created a poorer customer experience for these citizens, with customer journeys becoming increasingly disjointed. With calls becoming more complex and

residents presenting with deeper and more varied vulnerabilities, the need for a new skill set for contact centre staff began to emerge, in order to consider need more holistically and provide wrap around support.

- 1.5. Another emerging challenge to providing excellent citizen experience was Contact Camden's aging telephony system. This system was introduced in 2011 at the inception of the contact centre and was beginning to become unstable as it approached end of life, with increasing reports of calls with no audio or getting cut off. Horizon scanning exercises across the industry as well as detailed research and engagement within Camden communities told us that residents wanted to contact us via their channel of choice as best suited their needs; however, Camden's platform limited Contact Camden's ability to provide wider channel choice. Although Camden managed both telephony and email contact for certain services, the system gave little visibility over the email demand and performance via this channel, meaning that it wasn't being utilised effectively. Benchmarking exercises within the industry, including engagement with other local authority contact centres, showed that they were increasingly using tools such as webchat to manage transactional demand. Camden were not able to leverage this using the existing platform, limiting our ability to manage this type of demand more efficiently.

2. Transforming customer experience

- 2.1. Contact Camden's journey to transform the citizen experience took a significant step forward with the launch of our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This project saw Contact Camden working with CTDS in a multi-disciplinary team for the first time and began the journey of closer working relationships between digital and customer centric colleagues, leading to meaningful changes to the citizen experience through technology. The introduction of the CRM opened the door to more connected customer journeys, allowing Customer Relationship Officers (CROs) to look back across the contact history of a resident to better inform their conversation. This meant that customers no longer needed to repeat their story in the event they needed to contact Camden multiple times and allowed CROs to join the dots of past contact to make informed recommendations for additional support. For example, if contact history evidenced increasing dependency on Council services, visibility of this allows CRO to act more holistically and recommend deeper support from services like Adult Social Care or Accessible Transport. Introduction of the CRM also enables the future development of case management, supporting more efficient cross-service working.
- 2.2. May 2024 was a month of seismic change for Contact Camden. On 8 May the service introduced a new target operating model responding to the changing nature of citizen contact and driven by a desire to operate in a relational way. The service was configured address citizen need, rather than arbitrarily by service, delivering a new capability to address complex demand whilst also tackling the issue of overspecialised teams and unbalanced performance. The service introduced a Relational team who have the skills to interact more holistically with citizens, spending longer understanding their needs and looking

beneath the issue presenting to the need below. Relational call takers are skilled in services such as Adult Social Care, Homelessness and Welfare Support, in recognition of the crossover between these services and enabling more support to be offered within a single contact. In contrast, Transactional call takers handle a wide range of more straightforward, easy to resolve interactions, such as renewing parking permits or getting a copy of a rent statement. Development of supportive tools including our Knowledge Hub (an AI powered online knowledge repository which proactively presents relevant content to staff) has enabled this team to be more generalised, again improving the customer experience by boosting the number of enquiries able to be dealt with within a single contact. This has also given us the service the capability to flex resources across services to meet demand, something which was impossible in the previous model.

2.3. May 2024 also saw the introduction of our new omnichannel platform (services telephone, email, social media and webchat enquiries through a single interface), Liberty Converse, with immediate and wide-reaching effects. Vastly improved functionality means the service can now deploy more channels to better meet customer needs, with staff able to handle interactions dynamically across channels to improve experience and productivity. The inclusion of functions such as callbacks, voice forms and automation options have provided more tools to tackle periods of higher demand. Live-view dashboards mean that both staff and managers can easily monitor and manage incoming contact demand. A nominated manager now takes on the role of 'Intraday' which is a responsibility to monitor incoming demand and make quick decisions to support live performance, such as moving staff between queues or adding messaging in reaction to live events. The system also provides much more granular data, increasing understanding of contact demand. This means it is now possible to report on crossover demand between services rather than relying on anecdotal feedback. Converse functionality can be controlled within the customer service team, giving the significant benefit of increased reactivity – for example in the case of the Coombe House emergency, Contact Camden a dedicated line for affected residents. More recently, Camden has almost instantaneously been able to pick up call demand relating to the changing position for the social care equipment contract.

2.4. Recognising that contact is only a small part of creating consistent and high quality experiences, Contact Camden have worked closely with Service Design colleagues to design and implement the Citizen Experience Framework, a toolkit through which to assess and improve citizen experience within services. The framework was developed in recognition of the fact that citizen experience is a Council-wide responsibility, and a multi-service response is often required to meaningfully target improvements. It was shaped through citizen research to develop six key principles based on what our residents feel a good experience means to them, such as transparency and empathy. A suite of tools have been tested and piloted and are due to be launched alongside a coaching offer through the council's 'The Way We Work' programme this month.

3. Citizen experience today

- 3.1. 2024 saw a 1% increase in overall contact demand reinforces the conclusion that the pattern and nature of contact from our citizens is changing, noting previous years have seen decreases in contact. It must be noted that whilst overall contact demand has increased slightly, this looks very different reviewed by service. Transactional services have seen the biggest changes which can be credited to channel shift; Parking permits demand has decreased by 24% as customers are increasingly able to self-serve independently and services such as Pest Control, Leaseholder Services and Planning have also seen notable declines. On the other hand, Council Tax demand remained stable year on year – this was despite evidence of significant channel shift success in this area and reduction of failure demand through callbacks. Discussing arrears has become the second most frequent reason for contact, up from eighth most frequent the previous year, suggesting that customers are increasingly contacting us seeking financial support and thus explaining why overall demand has remained stable. The swing towards more complex conversations has also been seen in the Relational area, with a 164% increase in Community Safety calls year on year, predominantly relating to reports of antisocial behaviour. This is despite us now handling more services within a single call as shown by increasing call durations – for example, the Relational average call duration has increased by 1 minute and 24 seconds over the past year as the staff spend longer with citizens to better understand their needs.
- 3.2. Some year-on-year changes have been due to technology improvements and call routing alterations since the introduction of the Liberty Converse system. The introduction of an 'Auto-attendant' at the beginning of the customer journey has meant that fewer callers are spending long periods of time navigating complex menu structures to speak to the service they need. The Auto-Attendant allows citizens to say the name of the service or individual they wish to speak to and will route the call appropriately. Contact Camden has also a dedicated Switchboard resource to support where a citizen is unable to use the Auto-Attendant, enabling them to maintain an average time to answer of under 2 minutes for these calls. This ensures a good citizen experience whether customers are connected to our services via Switchboard or via the Auto-Attendant.
- 3.3. Contact Camden has made significant improvements to the citizen experience through the shift to relational working. The new operating structure centres around this model, and since the change of operating model there have been many examples of deeper, more holistic support that has been provided to citizens. One case study highlights a gentleman who was unable to renew his Blue Badge online. The member of staff recognised his difficulty and was able to support him to complete his renewal over the phone. Noticing that he was struggling with his hearing and was partially blind, the staff member referred him for support through the Sensory Needs team, and made him aware of other services such as Careline, Taxi Card and Occupational Therapy. By looking beyond the presenting need of the Blue Badge renewal, the member of staff was able to treat the issue holistically and drastically improve this resident's wellbeing and independence. Feedback from Contact Camden's customer satisfaction

survey echoes the success of this approach, referencing agents who “helped and guided and even gave me more information regarding my call”, and who “tried to solve all of my questions and helped me with my work online application”.

- 3.4. It is important to recognise that while not every contact is relational, every contact has the potential to become relational. Contact Camden have taken learnings from this new model and have developed a comprehensive training package on relational contact skills, ensuring that Camden’s citizen facing agents are equipped with the right skills and behaviours to approach a relational call. Skills such as professional curiosity, asking probing questions in an appropriate way and handling sensitive conversations are being developed universally. This training is delivered to all new starters in the service as part of a newly designed and comprehensive induction programme.
- 3.5. Citizen experience has also been positively impacted by performance improvements resulting from the new target operating model. Year on year, there has been a decrease in the overall average time to answer within the contact centre of 18%. The percentage of calls that have been answered overall has risen by 14% providing reassurance that resource is now in the right place to meet incoming demand.
- 3.6. Performance improvements become starker at a queue level. As previously mentioned, housing services were facing the largest performance challenges under our old operating structure, with both demand and complexity of calls increasing. During our first year in the new operating structure, answer rates improved by 28% for Housing Management, 26% for Benefits, and 24% for Housing Needs. It’s also now much easier for citizens to reach our Council Tax service, with a 55% reduction in the average time to answer and a 41% improvement in the percentage of calls answered. In total, within the first twelve months of the new model, the service answered 30,000 more calls, whilst doing so 18% and faster and with a significantly improved experience through the auto-attendant.
- 3.7. Despite the internal changes Contact Camden has made to improve the experience of navigating our front door, Contact Camden continues to face some challenges in managing demand. One of the biggest impacts on the citizen experience is outward communication from services either by text or letter as this generates significant ‘spike’ of contact. For example, a recent text message relating to rent payments generated over 100 calls to the contact centre in a 15 minute period. The contact centre leadership team are working closely with services to manage these spikes effectively, including the staggering of communications likely to drive demand, however there is more work to do to optimise this.
- 3.8. The main billing period from March to April each year sees the contact centre face annual performance challenges due to steeply increased demand as a result of the sending of council tax bills, benefit statements and rent statements, with residents often facing increased financial pressures due to council tax and

rent increases at this time of year. Demand is heavily influenced by when outward communications land – for example, this year Council Tax saw a 101% week-on-week demand increase when new bills arrived with residents, resulting in a 192% increase in our average time to answer the call. Month on month from February to March, Council Tax demand increased by 48%, Rents by 67%, and Benefits by 59%.

- 3.9. This year the service utilised the new functionality available through the Converse system in an effort to reduce the impact of annual billing on both citizens and our staff. A new 'callback' functionality was introduced to the Council Tax queue in early March to help manage longer wait times and the failure demand this generates. 14% of Council Tax demand was handled via callbacks in March, which resulted in much stronger performance than the previous year. Contact Camden were able to answer 85% more Council Tax calls, and the average time to answer decreased by 70%. The service also saw a slight decrease in demand year on year for March, which is likely as a result of improved performance stripping out failure demand from repeat callers.
- 3.10. As well as callbacks, the service employed channel shift pushes through our menu messaging to divert requests that need to be made via the website. This saw success in multiple areas, with the service able to successfully channel shift 79% of single person discount enquiries and 83% of refund enquiries, both of which moved to an online form.
- 3.11. For citizens requiring a copy of their bill however, this had less impact, with 153% increase in these enquiries year on year. This was likely as a knock-on effect of the second home premium that came into effect on 1 April 2025. This has highlighted accessing a copy of a bill as a more complex challenge in what should be a straightforward customer journey, with customers unable to access a copy of their current bill unless they have previously signed up to e-billing. Signing up to e-billing is not currently available as a self-serve journey and therefore 35% of customers who called during the week new bills arrived were called to update their details or request a copy of their bill, demonstrating that improving the online offer in this area would significantly improve the citizen experience for those who need to call us for more complex support.
- 3.12. Looking more widely across the services impacted by annual billing, citizen experience during this period is severely impacted by the fact that many customers who want to go online are unsuccessful. During March and April, 32% of survey respondents for Council Tax, Rents, Benefits and Leaseholders told us that they tried going online before calling.
- 3.13. As well as technological interventions, Contact Camden are also working closely with services like Benefits to improve outward communication such as bills and letters. 31% of Benefits demand in March and April 2025 was from customers querying a letter, often just requiring the reassurance of an agent to confirm the meaning of the letter. Using this insight as well as feedback from call listening, Contact Camden have been working with the service to ensure letters are in plain English and avoid Council jargon.
- 3.14. Improvements made leveraging the Liberty Converse system were approached methodically, taking a data-led approach. As an example, the

implementation of the Auto-Attendant was an iterative process. Until early June, The new configuration meant that where a citizen was unable to navigate the Auto-Attendant, their call was re-routed to the switchboard. Initially the service had not accounted for the re-routing which meant it took 6 minutes on average to answer calls taking this route. This wasn't a level of performance the service would accept and it was quickly identified through the data. Several options were identified and after some initial test and learn activity, calls were offered to the menu after failing the auto-attendant. This immediately halved the demand routed in this way, improved the answer rate to 82%, and halved the average time to answer. While this was a huge improvement, it was still felt it was possible to improve the citizen experience further. The service introduced two dedicated Switchboard agents to the structure, which had the impact of increasing the call answer rate to 94% and reducing the average time to answer to just around a minute.

- 3.15. One of the reasons for moving to the Liberty Converse system was to give citizens wider channel choice when contacting the Council. In early 2025 the service launched the webchat channel as a pilot for the Rents and Leaseholders services. Feedback via the customer survey shows that users value the ease of the webchat journey, with 80% rating this as very or fairly easy – an improvement of around 20% on the telephony channel. Although webchat is being received well by our citizens, uptake has remained slower than expected. Using website analytics, the service identified that this is because most online users access services via the Camden Account directly, without going through the website. Additionally the Camden account is more prominent when customers reach the website through a search engine. The service is working with colleagues from digital products and service to integrate webchat within the Account, however this is proving to be complex, and progress has been slow. Looking towards 2026, we hope to leverage further improvements to our webchat offer through upgrading to Liberty Converse CX, as this offers greater functionality and more instances of AI enhanced webchat.
- 3.16. Another channel available to our citizens is the provision of face to face services at 5 Pancras Square. Face to face demand, like telephony is a mixture of both transactional and relational demand. Predominantly queries relate to homelessness, with this making up 37% of enquiries received so far in 2025. Queries are often complex, with 69% so far this year related to existing homelessness applications requiring support from a specialist case worker. 67% of the face to face homelessness enquiries this year required escalation to the service and changes have been made to the service operating model to co-locate with Contact Camden to support this.
- 3.17. It is important to note that the face to face service was intentionally excluded from the implementation of the new target operating model for Contact Camden. This was in part due to ongoing pieces of work to review the way services operate within 5 Pancras Square, and partly as the council explored other potential face to face models. Further work in this area is ongoing, with the

service exploring best practice from other councils such as Islington who provide a face to face advice and support hub.

- 3.18. An important indicator of citizen experience is the customer satisfaction (CSAT) score, gathered through the post-contact customer survey. Camden's overall CSAT score for Contact Camden improved by 14% year on year, a positive indicator of the success of our new operating structure and technological changes. One of the key learnings since re-launching our satisfaction survey in July 2024 is the CSAT score isn't solely indicative of the contact centre experience, instead reflecting the entire customer journey. An example of this is out of hours Repairs queries. Although Contact Camden doesn't handle daytime Repairs calls, out of hours emergencies are dealt with by our Emergency Telephone Service (ETS) team. Out of hours Repairs is an area that has a comparably low CSAT score of 48%. Unpicking this through free text comments, customer dissatisfaction is often about a repair not being carried out as expected or delays to this occurring, as opposed to their experience with the contact centre. This speaks more widely to key reasons for lower CSAT scores being slow responses from services, missed deadlines or unmanaged expectations.
- 3.19. There is a strong correlation between CSAT and first contact resolution - typically, the council receive a higher CSAT score for services where the contact centre is able to resolve more of the end-to-end journey, for example in council tax. Council Tax received an 82% CSAT score last year, and this is likely because on average 75% of council tax enquiries can be resolved by contact centre staff. This learning is being used when looking to improve citizen experience in other areas, reviewing service offers through the lens of where the contact centre are able to add value and where more processes can be resolved at the point of contact. This is evident in the housing transformation programme and CTDS priority programme structure, through which CTDS, Housing and service design are working to redesign the Housing Front Door experience. The Contact Centre receive just over 25,000 calls per year into our Housing Management queue, with 79% of these about getting in touch with a Neighbourhood Housing Officer (NHO). Resolution for most queries sits with NHOs under current processes, and through this work the service aims to increase first contact resolution within the contact centre.
- 3.20. It's important to note that the approach of bringing more end-to-end processes within the contact centre isn't applicable to all services, recognising there is some requirement for specialist knowledge and skills which aren't practical to hold within a contact centre environment. As an example CSAT scores for Planning, Building Control and Licensing are generally lower, as these are all services where citizens need to be connected with officers who hold subject matter expertise. Whilst processes are regularly review to seek opportunities to improve first contact resolution for these services, inevitably a high proportion of enquiries will need to be escalated to a back-office team, requiring alternative approaches to improving the citizen experience in these areas.
- 3.21. Citizen experience has benefited from a dedicated focus through the CTDS Citizen Experience Strategy, launching in 2024 with several workstreams aimed at tackling particular pain points in the customer journey. Through this work, CTDS have taken a cross-service approach to making meaningful changes to

citizen experience. A key feature of this has been the nimble approach adopted, taking a test and learn approach to quickly implement new ideas and features and using data to understand the impact and iterating where needed. Through this, the programme has been able to implement callbacks across all three of the contact centre families, as well as launching webchat for Rents and Leaseholders. The strategy has also created much needed innovation space to drive further improvements – for example, the team were able to make great progress with the continued development of the CRM. As the team begin to launch case management elements of the system, the service will have greater visibility and accountability over the customer journey when it spans multiple services. Handovers between services is a frequently identified pain point for citizens and a recurring theme in customer journey analysis. For this reason the team are developing templates and patterns to address this widely across the Council. Customer journey analysis has formed a core part of the Citizen Experience Strategy work, ensuring projects are data-led from outset to evaluation. This has resulted in PCN journeys, for example challenging a PCN, becoming a focus area for the project team tasked with tackling more deep-rooted citizen experience challenges.

- 3.22. CTDS have taken meaningful steps to deliver an excellent citizen experience in terms of accessibility. Accessibility concerns form a large part of our drive to wider channel choice and the launch of channels such as webchat. Webchat is often preferred for those who don't speak English as a first language or for Deaf residents, as it can be used in conjunction with accessibility tools such as translators. Staff are also upskilled in communicating in an accessible way via the Relational contact training – an important element of this centres around awareness of different accessibility needs, such as factors that may cause customers to communicate more slowly or with less clear speech. The service have vastly improved access for Deaf residents over the last year; working with SignVideo to provide on call British Sign Language translators, changing the routing of these to the contact centre to ensure they are treated as a priority call. This has allowed translators to be connected with agents more quickly, facilitating quicker response times and a reduced cost to the service. Since this was implemented, the average time to answer a SignVideo call has been less than 2 minutes.

4. The future of citizen experience

- 4.1. The next significant development for citizen experience in Camden is the implementation of the Liberty Converse CX platform. This is a next generation system, providing the service with access to AI enhanced journeys which span voice and digital communications. Coupled with a wide range of additional functionality including Workforce Management capabilities, process automation and agent-facing AI assistants, the system will play a key role in supporting channel shift through choice. In addition to improving experience, this technology also provides more efficient ways of working, allowing the service to continue to invest in relational ways of working.
- 4.2. As the system develops so too does the data behind it. Using this data Camden is able to drive citizen experience improvements through insight and

personalisation. Using the rich insight in Contact Camden not only to analyse the customer journey and identify pain points, but also to identify predictors of need. This will drive citizen experience focussed conversations with services and partners, building on the success of the current Voice of the Customer programme which has gained momentum over the past 18 months having successfully created an appetite for experience insight at all levels of the organisation.

- 4.3. Acknowledging the large improvements across the contact centre in the last 18 months, the service is shifting now to focus on marginal gains when looking for continued improvement within the contact centre. Through this approach Contact Camden managers are empowered to make changes that will result in incremental improvements to the citizen experience. So far, this has involved improving the payment information prominence in our menu, making it quicker and easier to make a payment. A further initiative has improved first contact resolution for Rents queries by closing an inbox through removing unnecessary escalations from a service inbox. Although these have been minor changes from an operational perspective, these add up to make noticeable improvements on the citizen's end.
- 4.4. Contact Camden continues to tackle longer standing citizen experience challenges through cross service working, as has been described in relation to the Housing Front Door work and the various Citizen Experience Strategy workstreams. Many barriers to excellent citizen experience stem from legacy processes and ways of working that sit much wider than the contact centre.
- 4.5. The efforts of the last 18 months have cemented Contact Camden's position as a leader of customer service excellence, as demonstrated when we became the first local government contact centre to be accredited by the Contact Centre Management Association. The team received further recognition when they were recognised as finalists for four awards in the UK National Contact Centre Awards, the largest award scheme for contact centres in Europe. This included Emily Hillman, Performance and Improvement Manager receiving the Silver Award for Support Manager of the Year.
- 4.6. The service is now well placed in terms of people, technology and culture to face the rising challenges expected in relation to citizen experience. As expectations on the council continue to grow whilst funding remains challenging, Contact Camden is positioned well to adapt, driving co-ordinated improvements across the digital and analogue experience landscape.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS OF THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR

- 5.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no comments to add to this report.

6. FINANCE COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

- 6.1. The Director of Finance has been consulted on this report and has no additional comments.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are no proposals with environmental implications made in this report.

REPORT ENDS