



**SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE C – FREEDOM PASS RENEWAL**

MINUTES of the meeting of the SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE C – Freedom Pass Renewal held on THURSDAY JULY 24 2008 at 7.00 P.M. at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

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**PRESENT:**

Councillor Toby Eckersley (Chair)  
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle,  
Councillor Aubyn Graham,  
Councillor Richard Livingstone,  
Councillor Jane Salmon,  
Councillor James Barber – reserve member

**OTHER MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

Councillor David Noakes  
Councillor Susan Elan James  
Councillor Danny McCarthy

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Eleanor Kelly – Dept Chief Exec - Corporate.  
Dominic Cain- Head of CSC Client Services – Corporate  
Rod Craig – Director of Client Group Commissioning –  
(Adult Care)  
Philip Wood  
Douglas Taylor  
Anne-Marie Hayden  
Patrick Horan  
Jonathan Kraut  
Norma Lawrence  
Laurence Dalligan  
Eileen Smith  
Anita Five  
J Skinner on behalf of M Wakeman  
Francis Harriott

**OFFICER  
SUPPORT:**

Nikki Fashola – Legal Services  
Sally Masson– Scrutiny Project Manager  
Georgina Conaghan – Scrutiny Project Manager

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mackie Sheik

## **NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMED URGENT**

### **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

None disclosed

#### **1 Co-opted member request from the Disabilities Forum**

- 1.1 Councillor Eckersley, as Chair, introduced the first meeting of the Freedom Pass Renewal Review, stating that this topic may be concluded at the next meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> September. However, to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the review, the sub-committee would take as many meetings as required. Councillor Eckersley set out the purpose of the first part of this meeting; to gather the evidence from those affected by the Freedom Pass renewal in Southwark. The second part of the meeting would discuss the initial officer's report; inviting committee members to ask questions and seek further clarification on the report.
- 1.2 Councillor Livingstone requested that item 3 on the agenda 'Co-opted member request from Disabilities Forum' to be moved to the start of the meeting so that a co-opted member can take full part in the meeting. The Chair agreed.
- 1.3 The legal representative said that the constitution requires that those co-opted by the Sub-committees are recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be ratified. If the Overview and Scrutiny committee accepts the co-optee nomination, the co-optee will join the sub-committee. The Chair noted that the committee would not be able to do this as OSC would not be meeting till the 15<sup>th</sup> September so the issue of co-opting should be 'parked' until the next Freedom Pass Renewal meeting. If those chosen as co-optees on the 8<sup>th</sup> are ratified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their next committee on 15<sup>th</sup> September, they will be taken on for all meetings thereafter. The Chair concluded no motion on Floor for point 3 of the agenda.
- 1.4 Councillor Livingstone responded that the Chair had stated earlier in proceedings that the Freedom Pass Renewal committee may conclude on 8<sup>th</sup> September and said that the bureaucracy of the constitution creates a nonsense. After a discussion a vote was called to leave the issue of co-opting members until the next meeting. The vote went 4 in favour, 3 against. This item will be discussed at the next meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> September. Councillor Barber stated that he would take the issue to the constitutional working group, as all members felt there was a lack of clarity in the constitution for scrutiny co-optees.

**RESOLVED: That co-opting member requests for the Freedom Pass Renewal sub-committee will be adjourned until the next meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> September.**

#### **2. Submissions from Individuals, Organisations and GPs**

*Due to a request from the Chair; the committee clerks have attempted to record verbatim the accounts of those making submissions. This differs from the usual style of scrutiny minuting which aims to reflect ideas and summarise conversations.*

**2.1 Philip Wood made the following verbal submission:**

2.2 Two years ago, the first time we had to re-apply, there was a delay of at least a week and no information about what we should do. Polite enquiries were dealt with in a very terse manner by the Disability Service.

2.3 Just before Christmas, I received a letter, from Susanna White, Strategic Director of Health and Community Services, as 'part of a programme of planned improvements.' We were told: these changes 'will help reduce waiting times for entitlements' and that we should 'notice the benefits of these changes shortly'. A further letter was promised in the new year, about the 'service improvements' - but did not appear.

2.4 This year, the Freedom Pass Application forms were not sent out until the end of February, arriving during the first week of March, with less than a month to go. **Why?** A week before the 31 March, having heard nothing further, I tried to get through on the Disability Service telephone number, but it was permanently engaged.

When I called the main switchboard [which had been overwhelmed by callers seeking information] I was told by a very pleasant woman that 'they are in the process of moving offices and the Freedom Pass would be valid until 31 May'. We had been told, in Susanna White's letter, in December, that they had moved last November.....all part of the 'improved services'!

There was no information on the website. We were all left in the dark and **very** concerned.

2.5 My application was declined, mid-May. I immediately dealt with the Appeal form and posted it the same day, in the envelope provided. I hand delivered a letter to my GP asking for his support. There was some delay with this aspect, but I posted it, 1<sup>st</sup> class, to the correct address. To this day, I have received no formal acknowledgement, from the Disabilities Services.

2.6 I e-mailed the Department at the beginning of June and received an email from Theresa Itabor. She acknowledged the distress this was causing me and asked for my telephone number saying she would get the team to review my case and then call me. She didn't.

2.7 I traced her, the following week, and she told me that my GP's initial report was the reason my application had been refused. At my request, she agreed to send a copy of this report to me, by email, the following day. She didn't.

2.8 Ms Itabor told me that my GP's second report had not been received and I sent her a scanned copy, which she passed to Heather Rodney, the Freedom Pass Team leader, telling me that Ms Rodney would keep me informed on the progress of my Appeal.

I also wrote separately to Heather Rodney, again asking for a copy of my GP's report – but did not receive a response of any kind.

The Appeals procedure states that a written acknowledgment will be sent within 5 working days. I sent mine on 15 May and my Doctor's letter of support on 9 June.

2.10 Following publicity in the local newspapers, about the renewal delays, I wrote to the CEO, Annie Shepperd – but received no response. She had already made a public apology.

I approached the Southwark Disablement Association, and an emailed letter was sent to Ms Rodney on 8 July, in the form of a formal complaint. Ms Rodney didn't respond. I was told, by the experienced Advocacy Worker, that 'they usually do not take it kindly when a complaint is made'!

However, last week, I received a new authorisation for a Freedom Pass! There was no other documentation attached. It was issued under the Discretionary Criteria.

2.11 I wrote to thank Ms Rodney and asked her for an explanation about the lack of acknowledgment regarding my Appeal and information about receiving reimbursement, for the £64 I had expended in fares, during the Appeal period. Only after I emailed her again, yesterday, did I receive a response, telling me she was looking into why I hadn't received an acknowledgment for my Appeal.

2.12 I believe that the Disabilities Department has behaved disgracefully, throughout this whole process, not only for my Appeal but for clearly being completely unprepared for the lengthy Freedom Pass renewal process. More so than any other local authority in the United Kingdom, according to the information I have been given. The lack of communication and misinformation is endless and well catalogued.

2.13 I also believe that London Councils have shown that they have no real knowledge regarding the adverse affects of poor Mental Health, on a person's ability to be 'mobile'. There are no walking sticks or wheelchairs for those in considerable emotional pain – nor are we all able to receive help from the Community Mental Health Team.

The combination of these facts has caused immense distress to vulnerable people, who look to this department for help. It is wholly unacceptable.

Philip Wood thanked the Chair and the sub-committee for hearing his account.

## **2.14 Questions and answers from the Committee to Philip Wood**

2.15 Q: Have you now received your authorisation letter?

- 2.16 A: Mr Wood has now received the London wide pass from Borough Post Office (which closed today). However he did not know why he received this pass and not the national Freedom Pass. Mr Wood commented that the lack of communication during the whole process 'floored me and made me depressed and angered'.
- 2.17 Q: Why were you turned down?
- 2.18 A: Mr Wood stated that a lot of people were apparently turned down due to the lack of an enhanced care programme according to Mind. It is very hard to quantify the numbers
- 2.19 Q: Were there any improvements in the dealings you had with the pass during the renewal process?
- 2.20 A: There was no improvement in dealings with the pass. Mr Wood referred to his previous verbal submission
- 2.21 Q: How did this compare to the renewal process 2 years ago?
- 2.22 A: Two years ago was the first time people had to apply for the pass and as with this year, there was a lack of communication. For example when Mr Wood checked to see if he could use his pass past May 31<sup>st</sup> 2006 the response he received was 'Of course you can' but there was no way that he could have known that.
- 2.23 A: However this time was much worse. In particular he cited the role of the officer twice not doing what she had promised and giving no explanation
- 2.24 Q: How long do you think you have spent on the renewal of your Freedom Pass?
- 2.25 A: Mr Wood spent 8 hours today (preparing for the committee) and about 2 working days and many sleepless nights in total as this has caused 'considerable distress'.
- 2.26 Q: Did you not receive your Freedom Pass through your appeal?
- 2.27 A: There was no letter of explanation as to why it turned up. It could have been from his appeal, it could have just been delayed from his original application. - Member notes that there also appear to be problems with the appeal process as well.
- 2.28 Verbal submission**
- 2.29 Douglas Taylor made the following verbal submission**
- 2.30 Mr Taylor got his Freedom Pass stolen in November 2007. After going to the Police to complete the paperwork and get his crime number, he was informed that his claim would be verified as he had recently moved house and they requested medical reports to ensure that he was still entitled to one. They said the process would take two months and all being right he should receive his pass in January

- 2.31 As required Mr Taylor's GP wrote to state that in their view Mr Taylor was still entitled to the Freedom Pass. By February My Taylor had still not heard anything from the Freedom Pass team when he did manage to get through they said that they had not received a letter from his GP. This caused Mr Taylor great distress as he was not sure who appeared to be lying, the council/disability unit? or his GP. After further chasing the council said that only Heather Rodney was able to help him as the Freedom Pass department was in limbo because the new renewal process had come into effect, but she was on leave. Mr Taylor continued to chase them after receiving no phone calls, e-mails or letters but to no avail.
- 2.32 In March/ April of 2008 Mr. Taylor involved his local Councillor, Councillor Gurling to help him claim back his travel costs for his travel from January/ February to 19<sup>th</sup> May, which was when he finally received his London-wide pass. (Mr Taylor had previously been entitled to a Nation-wide freedom pass) Councillor Gurling contacted Theresa Itabor to make sure she was aware of the situation. Mr Taylor also received compensation for his travel fares, which he believes was due to Councillor Gurling's intervention but again there was no letter or communication as means of explanation.
- 2.33 Prior to receiving the pass Mr Taylor's social worker also rang the council to enquire about the Freedom Pass and was told that there were delays in the processing of the passes due to the training of new staff and all of the old and new pass applications were being processed together creating further delay to Mr Taylor's Freedom Pass.
- 2.34 Questions and answers from the Committee to Douglas Taylor**
- 2.35 Q: Was your travel restricted during the six months that you had to pay for it?
- 2.36 Yes, Mr Taylor said that he could only travel when he had money to do so.
- 2.37 Q: Was there any reason you can think of why you may not have been given your pass?
- 2.38 A: No, there was no reason why he should not have his pass.
- 2.39 Q: Were the problems of your Freedom Pass renewal because of your change of address?
- 2.40 A: No, Councils do cross check when people move, the wrong address does not wash as an excuse.
- 2.41 Q: Why did you receive only a London-wide pass from an 'all zones' travel pass
- 2.42 A: Mr Taylor replied that he had no answer – he was issued only with a London Pass and not a National pass and suggested it seemed to be pot luck
- 2.43 Member noted that there appeared to be no clear process as to how or why one would receive either the London or National pass. Committee should be made aware of the criteria for the processing of freedom pass applications.
- 2.44 Anne-Marie Hayden made the following verbal submission;**

- 2.45 Ms Hayden introduced herself and said that she worked in the Council Welfare Rights Unit helping the public with Welfare Rights issues and offering benefits support and advice. This includes helping to fill in forms, gather evidence and make applications for her clients. Ms Hayden had observed that there were an increasingly large number of clients coming to her, to complain about not receiving their Freedom Passes on time.
- 2.46 What clients had told her – and was the most frustrating aspect of the process - was that they had received no communication of their application progress. Things seemed to be happening in isolation and with no information as to what had and had not been received or what was still required to process the applications; the delays increased and it became harder to rectify. This had a big financial impact on her clients most of whom are reliant on benefits therefore they were faced with missing medical appointments or having their shopping budgets compromised to pay for travel to and from the shops.
- 2.47 The Freedom Pass renewal process also put a significant strain on the GPs. GPs were inundated with requests for medical reports in a one month period creating a sizeable backlog. The forms required information that was not always readily available to the GPs. Questions related to complex medical matters, leading to patient consultations for further information. This was not considered by the GPs or the clients as a good use of either of their time.
- 2.48 In some instances GP/patients relations suffered as a result of the new renewal process; the GP's report was cited as the reason for the Freedom Pass refusal. However the GPs were not aware of the criteria that they had to meet and in all cases they were acting in their patient's best interests. This created an atmosphere of mistrust as many people felt they were being lied to by their GPs or that they were purposefully hindering the process which was not the case.
- 2.49 Ms Hayden observed that changes from the previous renewal process to the new discretionary procedure did not provide much support for clients during the transition. Those that had been accepted for Freedom Passes for years previously now found that they were no longer eligible. This left them feeling very upset and angry. Many of the people affected are not very able to cope with these sudden and significant changes to their daily lives.
- 2.50 Another problem GPs and officers encountered when helping clients with their applications, is that without knowledge of the criteria required it could be difficult to manage some patients' unrealistic expectations. The transition process may have been a smoother experience for all if clients were prepared by GPs for refusal where it was to be expected. Ms Hayden did not believe that GPs and Officers knowledge of the criteria would negatively impact upon the effectiveness of the new renewal process.
- 2.51 Ms Hayden also noticed many glaring admin errors whilst helping her clients these included clients who were sent back their applications for not including their photos but their photos were inside the envelope when they were sent back. Others were told that their forms had not been received although they had been completed and sent. This meant Ms Hayden's clients had to start the lengthy application process again which was very frustrating for them.

**2.52 Questions and answers from the Committee to Anne-Marie Hayden**

- 2.53 Q: Referring to p29 of the agenda, the letter to the Head of Overview and Scrutiny from the Chair of Southwark Local Medical Committee: Did the GPs get a fee for writing these reports?
- 2.54 A: Ms Hayden said that GPs have raised this question. Usually GPs do get a fee for reports. Generally they charge to limit the number of reports they have to fill in as it is very time consuming.
- 2.55 Q: what is the protocol of GPs getting paid fees? Are they supplied by Southwark Council, Transport agencies/ departments or by some other organisation?
- 2.56 A: Not aware of the protocol on this from any governing body paying fees.
- 2.57 Q: Did you manage to obtain any information on discretionary powers which formed part of the application process?
- 2.58 A: Ms Hayden said that she had requested copies of the guidance on discretionary powers but had not received them. The move of the Disability Unit made it difficult. Before it happened I knew people there that I could contact for help. Now that the Disability unit had closed, it was difficult to chase or find out what was happening.
- 2.59 Q: Were the forms clear if GPs were not always able to answer the questions?
- 2.60 A: The forms were clear. For instance the form asked, 'how far can the person walk?' If the person couldn't walk 50 metres then the GP would say so on the form but sometimes these people would still be refused a Freedom Pass. The patients would go back to the doctors disappointed but their GP did their best to ensure that their patients fitted the criteria. The current lack of dialogue between the team who deal with Freedom Passes and the GPs meant some GPs were very surprised at some of the refusals but as they do not have access to the criteria they could not do anything about it.
- 2.61 Q: Members said that it is important not to throw out what IS working and were there any good things to come out of this process?
- 2.62 A: Ms Hayden said that she wanted to know if there were plans to make the team bigger and if Officers have access to Social Services databases? Would there be information on benefits and disability allowances to streamline the process. She went on to say that she hoped the team would be better resourced but she was concerned that the social services data bases were adequate enough to cope with this process.
- 2.63 Q: Members wanted to know if there had there been any improvement over the past few weeks.
- 2.64 A: Ms Hayden did not believe she could objectively answer this question, as her role was to deal solely with problems that concerned people who had not received their pass.
- 2.65 Q: The sub-committee asked if she had been aware of any new problems that had emerged?



2.66 A: Ms Hayden said that problems did seem to be on the decline; that some people still did not have their passes but there were no new problems as such. Ms Hayden also went on to say that she couldn't understand why there had not been any dialogue initiated by Council officers with herself. It appeared that Executive Officers had sent letters out but had not followed up, to find out what had actually happened.

**2.67 Patrick Horan made a written submission (p39, supplemental agenda 2) and the following verbal submission;**

2.68 Mr Horan said that he had 4 points to raise:

The first: No matter how Southwark Council spin it, someone in the Freedom Pass renewals office made a huge mistake which resulted in thousands of people (including myself) who were on the higher rate of mobility allowance and who were entitled to automatic renewal being wrongly classified as requiring GP evidence. Someone had to provide this wrong guidance, who was it?

2.69 The second: Some of our members who are deaf were not able to come along tonight due to no sign language interpreter being available. In the Walworth one Stop Shop you have a signer box but there are no directions to it as you come in the door, which just leaves deaf people confused and frustrated. Our deaf advocate had to spend 2 days at the Walworth One Stop Shop helping out. While those that were clients of the Southwark Disablement Association and anyone else got help, what happened to those who were not and who went to the Walworth One Stop Shop when the SDA advocate was not present? Your greeter unless he can sign cannot direct them.

2.70 The Chair responded by saying that the scrutiny team had no requests for this facility but there would be a signer available for the next meeting.

2.71 The third point Mr Horan made was: As some of our deaf clients have received the London only pass – can you tell me what the criteria is?

2.72 Mr Horan's fourth point was: How many Freedom Passes are still outstanding? And what is being done about it as my office is getting daily complaints. Please do not reply with words to appease this crowd and let them go away with false expectations

2.73 Mr Horan would aid that he would like to commend members of the public, such as Janet Yatak who had been trying to assist those affected by the situation. Members echoed his thanks to all those living in the community who had assisted people during these difficulties.

**2.74 Questions and answers from the Committee to Patrick Horan**

2.75 Members suggested that an awful lot of people had gone through a process where they should have automatically qualified. The automatic qualification issue should have been raised at the consultation regarding the Cotton Centre transfer by Council Officers.

2.76 Mr Horan agreed that he should not have had to go through this process. That he should have automatically qualified because he requires a mobility scooter and this is one of the criteria for Freedom Pass qualification.

- 2.77 Members mentioned that it must have been very frustrating, with the process seeming like a game of tennis between GPs and Council Officers. Members also said that it was unfortunate that the whole process seemed to rely heavily on the post and that it was a pity that some of the assessments couldn't have been done one to one.
- 2.78 The Southwark Disablement Association supports all facilitations by post. Mr Horan observed that the Southwark Disablement Association should have been consulted throughout the setting up of the new renewal process.
- 2.78 Q: Members wanted to know if Mr Horan's experience was similar to that of Mr Taylor and others; was there a lot of frustration with the GPs filling in medical reports in this process?
- 2.79 A: Mr Horan replied; yes, GPs had said that they had returned the medical reports but according to the Southwark Disablement Association, the Freedom Pass issuers had said that they had not received them.
- 2.80 Jonathan Kraut made a written submission (submission 16 p37 of supplemental agenda 2) and the following verbal submission**
- 2.81 Mr Kraut said that he was a patient advocate at the Maudsley and went on to say that the Freedom Pass renewal process was a significant issue for many other service users he knew and had assisted.
- 2.82 Mr Kraut went to Walworth One Stop Shop to obtain his Freedom Pass and he found the service team very helpful, swift and fair. They ensured Mr Kraut obtained all of the correct forms and explained all of the different parts that were to be filled in. However Mr Kraut was not aware why, after filling in all of the forms in the way he was told, he was issued with a London freedom pass when he had previously had the nation-wide pass.
- 2.83 The person that had advised Mr Kraut informed him that six Post Offices in Southwark had run out of freedom passes.
- 2.84 Mr Kraut stated that the service he received had been very good but he felt it was the system that was broken. It had been set up with no consultation and his experiences were very similar to those described by Ms Anne-Marie Hayden. He went on to say that the criteria for obtaining Freedom Passes were not clear.
- 2.85 Mr Kraut observed clients with mental health problems who had found the process an ordeal and were very upset. They felt that they had been played with and made fun of and that it damaged their own self regard and confidence.
- 2.86 Questions and answers from the Committee to Jonathan Kraut**
- 2.87 Q: You mentioned that you went to the One Stop Shop to complete your form, was this after experiencing delays in sending it?
- 2.88 A: I was never sent a form to complete and return. I was still eligible for the freedom pass and had received one previously so I had to go to the One Stop Shop to fill out a form.

- 2.89 Q: To be clear, you were not sent the original letter about the Freedom Pass renewal in the first place?
- 2.90 A: No, I never received the further information which was alluded to in the letter from Susannah White, disabilities service, to assist with re-applying for my Freedom Pass. (letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007). I applied in May with a worker from Southwark Reach assisting me but didn't hear anything more.
- 2.91 Q: How did you learn about the Post Offices having run out of passes?
- 2.92 A: I was told at the One Stop Shop that six Post Offices had run out of forms on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June.
- 2.93 Q: Do you now have your Freedom Pass.
- 2.94 A: No I am still waiting for my pass for nationwide travel. I am still using my old pass although I do have the new pass for London wide travel only.
- 2.95 The Chair remarked that he wondered if TFL were aware that people were still using their old passes.

**2.98 Norma Lawrence made the following verbal submission**

- 2.99 Ms Lawrence is the full time carer of her daughter. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May Ms Lawrence discovered that the office she went to for her Freedom Pass had closed and no-one seemed to know anything about it. Councillors, the Southwark Disablement Association and the service users were not aware that the Disability office had closed. Ms Lawrence could not believe that there was no-one there in an emergency to deal with lost or stolen passes. They could now only be renewed via post.
- 2.100 On Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May there were about 40 people in the Walworth One Stop Shop enquiring about the whereabouts of their Freedom Passes. The response they received was that if they had not received their pass yet it was because their GPs had not sent back their medical reports.
- 2.101 On Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May those who were still waiting to find out what happened to their passes at the Walworth One Stop Shop were told either to go home and we will ring you or that people would get it in the post tomorrow or yet again, apparently the GP's had not sent the forms back. When some people refused to leave security was asked to intervene.
- 2.102 On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 10am there were about 200 people sat on the pavement in the rain outside the Walworth One Stop Shop. Some people were too old or ill to get up off the pavement and there was no provision for those who found it hard to stand. At 3.30pm the queue had grown and was stretching down the Walworth Road. Ms Lawrence saw people crying, there were diabetics who had not eaten for hours and many people were desperate for the toilet but were afraid to leave the queue in case their place was taken. Later on Officers brought round biscuits and water. Ms Lawrence stated that she handed out Councillor Noakes' phone number to those waiting in the queue as she believed that he was the Councillor responsible for the Freedom Pass problems.

- 2.103 On Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June it was the same sight as the day before. There were still large queues but by this time Walworth One Stop Shop had put more chairs out for people. Inside the building the corridors were full of people so there was no way for people to be seen who were there for housing benefit or reasons other than the Freedom Pass. People also seemed to receive similar information to the day before; that they were waiting on GP's reports or that staff were not qualified to help.
- 2.104 On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June there had been a marked improvement at the Walworth One Stop Shop. There were lots of chairs laid out and staff appeared to be working. Ms Lawrence expressed concern that the lack of action for so long played to the Council's advantage, because the service users were too old or ill to make more of a stand. She believes that young people would not have put up with that kind of treatment and would have been more active in forcing a response from the Council.
- 2.105 In some cases people were made to queue up to five times but each time it resulted in them being told that they would have to reapply; often with reasons that had not initially been explained to them. Ms Lawrence said that she had queued for people who could no longer queue for themselves. She went on to say that many of the people who did receive their passes did not know why they had only received a London pass whereas previously they had been issued with a nation wide pass.

**2.106 Questions and answers from the Committee to Norma Lawrence**

- 2.107 Q: The sub-committee wanted to know if, in Ms Lawrence's opinion, had everyone now got their Freedom Pass?
- 2.108 A: No, every day I meet more people who have still not received their passes. Today alone I know of five new people who are still waiting from my daughter's day centre.
- 2.109 Q: Is it always as many as that?
- 2.110 A: No today was higher than usual.
- 2.111 Q: On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 3.30pm there were still no chairs - could you identify who the management were and what they were doing?
- 2.112 A: There were still no chairs or provisions made at this time. You could not get close to any staff or management as they were rushing about. Ms Lawrence likened it to a busy airport; you could not even get close to anyone that may have been able to help due to the chaos. On the Tuesday there had obviously been some attempt to find chairs from within the One Stop Shop for the service users who may have needed them.
- 2.113 Q: Was there improvement on the Wednesday?
- 2.114 A: There was obviously more senior management around and the situation seemed to be more under control.
- 2.115 Q: Were the staff not helpful on the Monday or Tuesday?

- 2.116 A: The staff were overwhelmed by the numbers of people. They did not know what to do. There appeared to be no contingency in place and so the staff were left to 'tell lies', for example blaming GPs for the delays as they were at a loss of what else to do. Ms Lawrence said that the queuing system was orderly and everyone respected other people's places in the line. One woman hadn't eaten since 11am that morning. Eventually, by late afternoon staff, did bring out some biscuits.
- 2.117 Q: Were all of the booths at the One Stop Shop just dealing with Freedom Pass renewal problems or were other users still being helped at this point?
- 2.118 A: There were no set booths, people would be dealing with Freedom Pass complaints wherever there was any space, which made it feel even more chaotic. Other non-Freedom Pass, One Stop Shop users were still being assisted by staff who were not trained to deal with the Freedom Passes.
- 2.119 Laurence Dalligan made the following verbal submission:**
- 2.120 On the 8<sup>th</sup> June Mr Dalligan rang to enquire about why he still had not received his Freedom Pass. The number he was given was 0207 525 2141, which took him straight through to an answer phone message that said 'press 2 for Blue badge renewal, press 3 for Freedom Pass' etc. but Mr Dalligan was repeatedly cut off as soon as he pressed 3 for Freedom Passes.
- 2.121 Mr Dalligan got through to the complaints department to appeal against his refusal for a freedom pass on 13<sup>th</sup> June. Mr Dalligan received confirmation that his appeal had been unsuccessful on the 10<sup>th</sup> July (verified by the postal stamp), but the letter was dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June so Mr Dalligan had missed the 10 days required to make a second appeal by the time the letter had reached him.
- 2.123 Mr Dalligan should have had automatic qualification without the need for a GP report as he suffers from severe breathing and walking difficulties and on the higher level of disability. The GP letter cost Mr Dalligan £11.50 and he did not hear whether his GP's letter was received in time for the appeal case. As there is only 10 days to appeal between the first and second appeal Mr Dalligan was unsure as to whether his appeal would be successful as the doctors letter and his appeal were not sent together and there was no confirmation that they had even received the GP report.

### **3 Officer Report – Points for clarification.**

- 3.1 The Chair introduced Eleanor Kelly – Deputy Chief Executive and invited her to speak to the officer's report.
- 3.2 The Deputy Chief Executive said that officers had apologised at Council Assembly for this matter and that she and officers regretted the distress that had been caused. The department welcomed the scrutiny review which was seeking to identify the issues arising from the submissions heard at this meeting. She went on to say that she could not give any definitive answers at this stage. That this was an area of complex rules and procedures but officers would be looking to learn lessons on how to improve the service for the future.

- 3.3 Member said that it would be helpful that if, before the next meeting, the Report Officers would provide the criteria of who is eligible for Freedom Passes; - who is given the London wide passes and who is eligible for the national Freedom Pass? What are the criteria that need to be met for automatic qualification? All of the criteria options need to be made clear.
- 3.4 P30 paragraph 4 - Rod Craig, Director of Client Group Commissioning explained that due to Blue Badge Fraud in 2005, the last Freedom Pass renewal date in 2006 had already begun to implement some application renewal procedures to limit it. This was not to the same extent as the renewal process in 2008. What happened here needed more clarity and Members said that it would be useful to have the information tabulated.
- 3.5 Members said that they wanted to have a simple guide to what information was given to the Council by TFL and London Councils.
- 3.6 Members wanted to know when the responsibility had passed to Vangent, when it came back to the Council and why.
- 3.7 P31 paragraph 5 – referring to the distinction between automatic and non-automatic qualification for Freedom Passes – Members enquired as to whether Southwark’s apparent poor implementation on automatic qualification made it more difficult than other areas to renew passes?
- Members wanted background information on the justification for moving to the Carefirst System and what consultation had taken place.
- 3.8 P31 paragraph 5 – grammatical error on Officer’s report ‘those who qualified automatically received the national pass’ – It should have read ‘those that qualified automatically receive the national pass’.
- 3.9 P31 paragraph 6 – The explanations referring to software changes and how that may have affected the Freedom Pass renewal process need to be spelled out. It is not clear what the Helix or the Carefirst system are or what went wrong with the transfer of data. Members were interested to find out what officers had anticipated would happen during the transfer.
- 3.10 P31 paragraph 6 – Member asks whether any simple checks were made between the old and new database systems which may have thrown up any problems. For instance a check on the numbers of people on both systems, which should have been very similar, may have given a more accurate picture of how many Freedom Passes needed to be processed in total so the relevant departments were prepared.
- 3.11 P31 paragraph 7 – Despite 5325 out of 6033 applications for Freedom Passes successfully made by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> May, however Members wanted to know how painful this process had been for those that had managed to receive their passes by the deadline?

- 3.12 P31 paragraph 7 – How many staff were deployed to deal with Freedom Passes? How much training had occurred regarding the forms in the application process? Had there been any training in customer care and/or dealing with service users with disabilities? Why didn't the 708 applicants meet the criteria; - what were the reasons for their rejection? How many have appealed the process - how many appeal letters have been sent out?
- 3.13 P31 paragraph 8 refers to a number of renewal forms still being processed and new applicants were still coming forward. What are the current figures for each? How was it that estimates were so wrong regarding the numbers of cases that still needed to be processed?
- 3.14 P31 paragraph 7, 8, 9 – Members said that it would be helpful for the Committee if we could have the actual numbers of applications, rejections, passes issued, passes outstanding etc. tabulated in chronological order.
- 3.15 P31 paragraph 11 – alludes to two other separate reviews in to the Freedom Pass renewal. Who commissioned these reports and what became of the outcomes?
- 3.16 P31 paragraph 11 - Eleanor Kelly, Deputy Chief Executive responded that the internal audit (management review) and the Value Added review are both separate from the Scrutiny Sub-Committee review. Jennifer Seeley is now tasked with undertaking the internal audit and her report will be available for the next meeting in September in conjunction with the Finance Director Duncan Whitfield. Ms. Seeley will be the report author. No other officer will have permission to edit the report.
- 3.17 Members enquired as to why there appeared to be such a lack of training on Southwark's corporate emergency procedures during the chaos at the Walworth One Stop Shop on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> June.
- 3.18 Member noted that after the renewal date was moved from March to May 2008 that that should have provided early warnings that they were not ready to deal with the renewal process.
- 3.19 Were any GPs consulted on their role in the renewal process? Why was this process so difficult? Why were there so many refusals; wasn't this a simple exercise of checking and cross checking?
- 3.20 The apparent problems with the phone systems and communication in general needs to be looked at. Electronic phone lines/services cutting out, answer phone machines that cut you off, letters sent out with the wrong contact number on are just some examples of communications failing. Members wanted to know what contingency planning had been undertaken and how the telephone service was now performing?
- 3.21 Does the process have to occur every two years? Could we not stagger the Freedom Pass renewal so that it is a less pressing burden on the service providers?

- 3.22 It wasn't fully understood as to why the process couldn't be streamlined. That is was probably unrealistic to expect GPs to fill in so many detailed forms. It was asked, why couldn't Southwark Council accept automatic qualification? What were the protocols between GP's and the Council?
- 3.23 What does the actual process of dealing with applications entail? Do the applications or GP's letters get scanned and what happens if passes get lost? Do clients receive confirmation when the Council has received the GP letter? Could officers document this whole process?
- 3.24 P35 paragraph 5 Appendix 1: Commends the action management took on the week of Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at the Walworth One Stop Shop – This was written before the full consequences of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> June were made evident. Was this a request from the Executive Member or by the Executive?
- 3.25 P35 paragraph 6 states that the outcome of the scrutiny committee will be an action plan for the 2010 renewal process. However the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-committee can not issue an action plan but it can make recommendations to the Executive. Cllr Noakes stated that the Executive would have an action plan 9 months before the 2010 freedom pass renewal to ensure the Executive feel confident that everything would run smoothly.
- 3.26 It was noted that P37 Appendix 2 was written by Stephen Gaskell in the Policy Unit.
- 3.27 P37 paragraph 8 states that those entitled to automatic renewal received their freedom passes 'much like before' however this was not always the case as Patrick Horan's case demonstrates.
- 3.28 Member requested that officers gather best practice from other London boroughs, in particular focusing on how Southwark's database changes affected the renewal process compared with other Boroughs.
- 3.29 P39 paragraph 18 – Member asks why the Local Authorities named were blanked out in the report. Eleanor Kelly responded that the information was not gathered officially so it had been made anonymous.
- 3.30 P39 paragraph 19 states that all existing freedom passes will be issued by 6<sup>th</sup> June 2008. However there are passes still outstanding over a month later. Member asks why is this is still the case?
- 3.31 P39 paragraph 19 – Have those freedom passes which were issued without a GP letter now been withdrawn (not validated by a GP's letter)? How many passes were issued this way?
- 3.32 Ms Lawrence confirmed that those who came to the One Stop Shop on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June for a freedom pass were issued a London wide pass on the spot if they had one previously. What is being done to help those who require national freedom passes as well as those who have been given passes illegitimately?
- 3.33 P40 paragraph 22 – 'Lessons to be learned' raises the question 'who by' in each case?



- 3.34 P40 paragraph 22 - bullet point 5 mentions using occupational therapists to assess mobility rather than GPs. Member asks who is on the panel for occupational therapists. Who would be accountable?
- 3.35 Members asked why did the Post Offices run out of the freedom passes. Who was responsible for this and what is the current situation?
- 3.36 Mr Douglas enquired as to what was the protocol for acknowledging GP's letters?
- 3.37 What was the notification of the freedom pass extension from March to May 2008? How was this communicated as there was no information in the packs?
- 3.38 A member of the public asked why did some people receive the letter from Susannah White about the Freedom Pass renewal date but did not then receive the application form?
- 3.39 Member enquired whether it would be possible for Care First to have sent out the forms part filled-in to be signed and returned to simplify the process.
- 3.40 Member of the public required clarification of what was the 'Care First' and 'Helix' database systems.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending, including the Executive Member and Officers.

The meeting Concluded at 10.45 pm.