



Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 16 July 2025 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Esme Hicks (Chair)
Councillor Maggie Browning
Councillor David Parton
Councillor Leo Pollak

OTHER MEMBERS Councillor Stephanie Cryan – Cabinet Member for Equalities, Democracy & Finance
PRESENT:

OFFICER SUPPORT: Dominic Cain – Director of Customer & Exchequer
Eugene Nixon – Head of Strategy & Compliance
Ade Aderemi – Head of Customer Services
Toni Ainge – Director of Leisure
Tara Quin – Head of Parks and Natural Environment
Julie Timbrell, Project Manager , scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Leo Pollak gave apologies for lateness.

1. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

4. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PLAN

The Chair welcomed attendees and introduced the purpose of the session: to scrutinise the draft Customer Experience Plan (CEP), which is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in September 2025.

Attendees:

- Cllr Stephanie Cryan – Cabinet Member for Equalities, Democracy & Finance
- Dominic Cain – Director of Customer & Exchequer
- Eugene Nixon – Head of Strategy & Compliance
- Ade Aderemi – Head of Customer Services

Presentation:

Officers presented the draft CEP, outlining its aims to improve customer service standards across the council. The plan is a public document and sets out clear expectations for staff and services.

Organisational Development is embedding the CEP into every officer's workplan, with director-level leadership to ensure accountability.

Member Questions and Discussion

Communication and Clarity:

Members raised concerns about jargon in the document, such as "customer journey," and recommended using Plain English.

Members highlighted gaps in communication regarding capital projects (e.g., scaffolding on estates, playground investments) and requested explicit commitments to regular resident updates.

Complaints and Member Enquiries:

Members noted that informational requests are sometimes misclassified as complaints.

Officers confirmed targets exist for reducing complaints and that most departments aim to respond within 8 working days (housing takes longer).

Members asked whether a target could be introduced to reduce the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2.

Digital Strategy and AI:

Officers are exploring the use of AI in repairs but are cautious about implementation. The digital strategy aligns with the CEP and includes

consideration of AI.

Contact Centre Operations:

The contact centre has reduced telephone enquiries from one million to 600,000 through the promotion of e-forms.

Ade Aderemi reported average queue times of 3 minutes, with an automated callback option at 4 minutes.

All calls are answered, and voice recognition is used to streamline processes.

Resident Feedback and Apps:

Members praised the “Fix My Street” app but noted issues when faults occur on private land, where responses are on occasions lacking or dismissive.

Officers acknowledged this feedback and committed to follow up with Environment colleagues.

Cross-Council Consistency and Implementation:

Members raised concerns about inconsistent responses from different teams (e.g., parking services).

Officers emphasised the importance of culture and the “One Council” vision to ensure consistency.

Members welcomed the planned 18-month survey and asked about resource allocation to support it.

Officers confirmed that training, development, and contact management are key components of the CEP’s delivery.

Cleaner Greener Safer Funding:

Members raised issues with communication and updates related to this funding stream.

The Chair summarised the following recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet Member and officers:

RESOLVED

Recommendations to the Cabinet Member and Officers:

- Be explicit in the CEP that this will include capital projects, with particular attention paid to resident communication and progress updates.
- Revisit the categorisation of members' enquiries being assigned as 'complaints'.
- Consider having a target focused on reducing the number of complaints that go to Stage 2 or beyond.
- Resident communication of the plan to be in Plain English and avoid jargon.

5. STREETS FOR PEOPLE - ZONING CONSULTATION

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

6. PLAYGROUNDS

The Chair opened the session by explaining that this item was requested to support the proposed scrutiny review on **Playscapes**, with the scope circulated as part of the work programme.

The Chair welcomed the following officers, who provided a verbal summary of the report circulated in the supplemental agenda:

Attendees:

- Toni Ainge – Director of Leisure
- Tara Quin – Head of Parks and Natural Environment

Presentation:

Officers outlined the strategic background to the playgrounds programme:

- The work is aligned with the **Council Delivery Plan Target #55**, which commits to providing high-quality playgrounds accessible to all children, including those with disabilities.
- Play is additionally recognised in a number of other strategic plans including Streets for People which focuses on small play spaces in localised areas, the Climate Resilience Action plan in relation to creating play spaces for the future taking into account hotter temperatures.
- The programme supports the **Good Start for Life** goal under **Southwark 2030** and is being delivered through a One Council approach, with collaboration across departments including Housing, Parks, Planning, Cleaner Greener Safer, and Health.
- A **Play Working Group** has been convened, meeting quarterly to

coordinate efforts across departments and improve asset management and service delivery.

Audit, Investment, Planning

- A high-level audit was conducted to map playground locations, assess conditions, and clarify management responsibilities. It identified playgrounds in both parks and across the Council's housing estate.
- This informed a more strategic approach to investment and collaboration.
- In October 2024, a further £3 million was allocated for play investment across parks, with details outlined in the report.
- The London Plan advises that each authority has a Play strategy. Southwark does not currently have one, although play will feature in the new Leisure Strategy (2026).

Member Questions and Discussion:

Discussion on specific playgrounds, with reference to upgrades, consultation, funding and delays:

Peckham Rye Adventure Playground:

- Closed due to equipment reaching end-of-life (rotted timber).
- Scheduled for completion in December 2025.
- The original CGS money contributed a small pot between 5-10K , but consultation led to higher expectations with a scheme costing closer to 100k. Officer spoke about master plans that are generated to help secure external funding but there may only be a proportion available at a time and acknowledged that, when a master plan has been developed but is not fully funded, this could be better communicated to residents.
- Officers acknowledged that there is sometimes a long gap between identifying the first small amount of investment, and the scheme being completed, and cited planning challenges, levels of consultation required, and partial funds /

funding constraints as contributing factors.

Mint Street Adventure Playground:

- Reopened in Spring 2024 following investment.
- Reported as a huge success, with high popularity and strong feedback from Youth Services.

Bethwin and Dog Kennel Hill Adventure Playgrounds:

- Managed through partnership arrangements.
- Officers are exploring opportunities for further investment and community involvement with the Trusts that manage the sites.

Alexa Street, South Bermondsey

- Members raised concerns about delays in projects funded through local CIL money, citing examples such as Alexa Street, South Bermondsey, with delays of up to 1600 days.
- Officers clarified that the current paper covers only this year's projects, and longer-term projects are listed in a separate 3-year plan (to follow).

Members requested better communication with residents regarding phased funding and masterplans.

Inclusive and Environmental Play:

- Members advocated for play in the public realm, such as walking on walls and tree climbing.
- Officers confirmed links with the **Streets for People** programme to support this.
- Staffed adventure playgrounds were highlighted as crucial, especially for children with special needs.

Community Involvement and Maintenance:

- Suggestions were made to involve **volunteer labour** and **trusts** in playground development.
- Officers expressed a preference to keep maintenance in-house to ensure safety and standards but acknowledged the role of community groups.

Policy and Strategy:

- A request was made that the council consider the removal/rethinking of “**No Ball Games**” signs in an attempt to allow more young people to play in their local area and participate in physical activity. Leisure Officers agreed to discuss this request with Housing colleagues given that the signs tended to be in Estates. Members suggested signs pointing to places where ball games were welcomed and better suited.
- A **Leisure Strategy** is under development, likely to be completed by **2026/7**, and will aim to incorporate play and integrate findings from the scrutiny review.

Design and Standards:

- Officers confirmed adherence to **national play standards**, with both external audits and internal expectations.
- Design processes vary depending on funding. For large capital projects, the **Policy and Programmes Team** and a **Project Manager** are involved, with consultation and community feedback.
- Projects may involve **Friends of Parks** groups.
- Officers aim to improve inclusivity, particularly for **girls and disabled children**, and are identifying three playgrounds to enhance accessibility, with a long-term goal of improved universal access.

Funding Collaboration:

- Members asked about collaboration with other funding sources, including housing.
- Officers confirmed that conversations are ongoing across teams and committed to officers providing further updates.

The Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions and confirmed that the insights from this session will inform the upcoming **Playscapes Scrutiny Review**.

RESOLVED

A follow up briefing will be requested seeking further clarity on spending and service provision by Housing and Environment to enable comparison.

7. BIODIVERSITY SCRUTINY REVIEW - CABINET RESPONSE

Members commented that it was good to see a thoughtful and detailed response by officers and the cabinet to all 34 recommendations, and that all of the recommendations had been either accepted, or partially accepted.

RESOLVED

A follow up briefing on implementation will be requested in 12 months time.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The following proposals for additions to the work programme were discussed:

- It was noted that the Thames super sewer, the Thames Tideway Tunnel, is being switched on soon, and this will radically change the water quality. The Thames is one of the largest bodies of water and repository of London wildlife, and so this is a very significant development. There are authorities and community groups such as the Port of London, river related charities, and Marinas that scrutiny could engage with to explore how the expected increases to biodiversity and opportunities to increase the amenity value of the Thames could be maximised.
- There was a proposal to look at what further could be done to reduce light pollution and bring forward a dark sky borough, given the negative impact on wildlife.
- An independent Community Safety Review, alongside other anti-social behaviour concerns, may come to the commission in November, following an item at OSC in October.