

Overview & Scrutiny Committee
The Executive**On 12 September 2006**
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Report Title: **Annual report for 2005-06 on the Council's handling of complaints and members' enquiries**

Forward Plan reference number: **40**

Report of: **Executive Members for Organisational Development & Performance Management, and Community Involvement**
Chief Executive

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: Non key decision

1. Purpose

1.1 To receive the annual report on the operation of the Council's handling of complaints, compliments and suggestions, and members' enquiries

2. Introduction by Executive Member for Organisational Development & Performance Management (Cllr Dhiren Basu)

2.1 This report outlines how far the council has come in the last year in terms of handling complaints, compliments, suggestions and members enquiries.

2.2 While there has been a national increase in complaints to the Ombudsman in some sectors, we have actually seen a decline. Additionally, the average time taken by the council to reply to first written enquiries on complaints to the Ombudsman has improved once more and now stands at 18 days, against a target of 28 days.

2.3 In sum, the report highlights a council wide improvement in performance and it is my hope and wish that the Council continues to move in the right direction.

3. Introduction by Executive Member for Community Involvement (Cllr Lorna Reith)

3.1 One of the key roles of members is taking up issues of concern to local residents. Ensuring members get full and timely responses to their enquiries is fundamental to local democracy. This is the first time that members' enquiries have been included in the Annual Report.

3.2 The operation of members' enquiries was the subject of a Scrutiny Review in 2005. This report details the progress made in implementing new procedures which arose from the Scrutiny Review and also sets out the performance for responses to

members' enquiries across directorates.

3.3 The new system is straightforward for members to use and allows for regular monitoring and performance management. The appointment of a dedicated Members Enquiries Office in the Central Feedback Team has ensured that all directorates follow procedures and are chased if they fail to meet deadlines or if responses are inadequate.

4. Recommendations

The Executive and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:

4.1 Receive the annual report.

4.2 Note performance in 2005-06. (See section 2 for complaints and paragraphs 5.5/6 for members' enquiries)

4.3 Note progress in implementing the improvements to the Council's customer feedback arrangements. (See section 4)

4.4 Note the Local Government Ombudsman's annual letter and the Council's response. (See appendix 3)

4.5 Note progress in implementing and administering the new procedures for members' enquiries. (See section 5)

4.6 Indicate any issues relating to customer feedback and members' enquiries that need to be addressed.

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4 Executive Summary

4.1 Attached is the annual report on the operation of the Council's corporate feedback and members' enquiries procedures. It details the Council's performance in 2005-06, and sets out progress in improving the operation of customer feedback scheme, and in implementing new procedures for the handling of members' enquiries.

4.2 The report includes the Local Government Ombudsman's annual letter on complaints he received against the Council in the year, and the Council's response to the issues raised.

4.3 Key achievements over the last year include:

- overall performance improvement in handling complaints within the target timescales, and reduction in the number of complaints escalating from one stage of the complaints procedure to the next;

- reducing the number of complaints about Haringey received by the Local Government Ombudsman, and the time taken to respond to his enquiries;
- independent survey results indicating that improvements in complaints handling are being noticed by customers, and that the organisation is developing a positive focus to complainants
- implementation of new corporate procedures for the handling of members' enquiries, and performance monitoring as part of the corporate system

5 Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

5.1 There have been no policy developments in customer feedback. However new procedures have been implemented for the handling of members' enquiries, giving effect to the Executive's decisions arising from a scrutiny review.

6 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

6.1 The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:

- Annual report on the Council's handling of complaints, compliments and suggestions 2004-05 – Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 25 July 2005 and The Executive, 26 July 2005
- Executive response to the scrutiny review of members' enquiries – The Executive, 22 March 2005

8. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

8.1 In many instances it will be easier to resolve complaints at an early date if frontline services seek legal advice promptly. Legal Services are therefore proactive in assisting complaint investigations. Otherwise, the Head of Legal Services has no specific comments on this report.

9. Comments of the Director of Finance

9.1 The Director of Finance has no additional comments on this report.

10. Equalities comments

10.1 Section 11 of this report comprehensively covers all equalities issues. It is helpful that the service has carried out an Equalities Impact Assessment this year and has target actions to redress imbalances.

11. Report and appendices

11.1 The Annual Report is attached.

11.2 The Annual Report contains the following appendices:

- Appendix 1: Complaints handling performance to timescale
- Appendix 2: Complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman
- Appendix 3: The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter and the Council's response letter
- Appendix 4: Why people complained, what they wanted, and how they made contact
- Appendix 5: Gender and ethnicity of complainants