

Overview & Scrutiny Committee**On 24 October 2006**

Report Title: **Members' enquiries: progress in implementing the Executive decisions arising from the scrutiny review**

Report of: **Chief Executive**

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: Non key decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1 As a result of a scrutiny review, the Executive agreed that a new corporate procedure be implemented for dealing with members' enquiries. This became fully operational on 1 October 2005.
- 1.2 This report details progress to date in implementing the action plan arising from the review.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That progress in implementing the action plan be noted. (Section 5 and Appendix)
- 2.2 That the Committee endorse the bid for a replacement for the Respond database to ensure the facility for speedy and accurate reports. (Paragraph 5.11)
- 2.3 That improvements arising from the operation of the new procedures be noted. (Paragraph 6.1)
- 2.4 That it be noted that the results of the first annual audit will be used to improve the handling of enquiries. (Paragraph 6.2)
- 2.5 That the proposal for a survey of members on the handling of enquiries be approved. (Paragraph 6.3)
- 2.6 That members offer comments or suggestions on the handling of enquiries and operation of the procedures.

Report Authorised by: **Dr Ita O'Donovan, Chief Executive**

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3. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

3.1 The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Serving the community better: a scrutiny review of member enquiries – Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 8 February 2005
- Executive response to the scrutiny review of members' enquiries – The Executive, 22 March 2005

4. Background

4.1 The scrutiny review of members' enquiries was proposed because some Members felt that the way in which enquiries that they made to departments were dealt with could be made more responsive and more effective. This was important because it reflects directly upon the effectiveness of Members as representatives of the community they serve in dealing with enquiries and complaints about Council services, as well as their ability to make informed decisions on Council policy. At the end of the review, members made a series of recommendations aimed at improving the consistency and performance in dealing with enquiries, and put forward proposals for how resources to improve the administration of enquiries might be used to best effect.

4.2 On 8 February 2005, the Committee considered and agreed the conclusions of the review, and the Executive agreed their response on 22 March 2005. The resulting new procedures were then developed, and were fully implemented across the Council on 1 October 2005.

5. Progress in implementing the action plan

5.1 The action plan for the implementation of the Executive decisions on the review is attached at the Appendix. It can be seen that almost all of the Executive decisions have been implemented. Progress is summarised below.

Recommendation 1: a corporate procedure

5.2 The corporate procedure has been produced and fully implemented across the Council from 1 October 2005. Its key features are:

- A member's enquiry is defined as 'any enquiry from an elected member requesting information about an individual or community group, and/or in relation to a council policy, where the member is entitled to that information'
- Enquiries can be sent by any preferred method to CE's Management Board members or designated contact officers
- An acknowledgement is sent on receipt of enquiries to the member, and constituent where appropriate
- A full response, or explanatory holding response if a full response is not possible, sent within 10 working days by a CE's Management Board member or business unit head

5.3 The target is to respond to 90% of enquiries within 10 working days. Performance to timescale was 85% in 2005-06 against a 90% target, and the same target was retained for 2006-07.

Recommendation 2: a protocol

5.4 A protocol has been produced and issued to members in the form of a leaflet that outlines the definition of a members' enquiry and the main elements of the procedure.

Recommendation 3: revision of the constitution

5.5 The constitution has been amended to reflect the 10 day timescale. A further amendment to include the definition of a member's enquiry and brief details of the procedure will be brought forward as part of the current review of the constitution or as soon as possible afterwards.

Recommendation 4: a designated contact officer in each directorate

5.6 Designated contact officers have been appointed in each directorate to receive members' enquiries. Details have been notified to members.

Recommendation 5: electronic mailboxes

5.7 Electronic mailboxes have been set up in each directorate for receipt of enquiries by email.

Recommendation 6: contacts card/leaflet

5.8 A leaflet has been supplied to all members. It gives the details of all contact officers, the definition of a member's enquiry, and details of the procedure. A separate pocket guide has also been issued, giving the contact details. Updates are issued as required (one to date), and details appear regularly in the Members' Briefing.

Recommendation 7: corporate monitoring of performance

5.9 The Central Feedback Team is now responsible for the corporate procedure. Their work includes support for members in tracking progress of cases weekly; ensuring effective use of the database for recording enquiries; performance monitoring as part of the corporate processes; and production of reports on management information. A Members' Enquiries Officer has been appointed to the Team to carry out much of this work.

Recommendation 8: use of Respond database for enquiry logging

5.10 The Respond database has been used for all logging since 1 October 2005, and has been amended to provide effective handling of enquires. Staff guidance on use of the database has been produced and issued to all contact officers.

5.11 Internal and external costs for supporting Respond are increasing significantly as a result of changes in supplier charging policies and the age of this system which is based on old technology. As a result, a bid is being made in the business

planning process for a replacement system. The prime requirement will be the facility to easily produce the comprehensive range of reports necessary to meet members' needs, facilitate the progress chasing of outstanding cases to assist in the meeting of performance targets, and produce detailed analyses of complaints and members' enquiries to assist service improvement. The Committee are asked to endorse the bid.

Recommendation 9: purchase of Respond software to enable members to review progress of enquiries

5.12 The Executive decided that use of the database for this purpose should be considered in conjunction with proposals for its integration with the CRM database. This is currently under review in conjunction with proposals for the possible replacement of the Respond database. The Head of IT Services' comments amplify the current position.

Recommendation 10: learning from member enquiries

5.13 Quarterly reports are now provided for Executive members. They include details of performance, corrective action being taken, issues raised, and distribution of cases by ward.

Recommendation 11: training

5.14 Member briefings were provided for members of the new administration in May, and remain available on request. A staff training programme has also been implemented, both formally and informally, including detailed written guidance.

6. Improving the handling of members' enquiries

6.1 Improvements arising from the operation of the new procedure include:

- Increase in number of enquiries recorded and responded to: 20% more enquiries were recorded in the second half of the 2005-06 year than the first, one of the previous concerns having been that no action was taken on a significant number of enquiries
- 85% of enquiries responded to on time, compared with an estimated 74% reported in the scrutiny review
- More holding replies sent where enquiry responses could not be sent on time
- Regular analysis and reporting of enquiries and their subject matter
- Consistency of practice in dealing with enquiries

6.2 The Central Feedback Team is currently conducting a first annual audit of the handling of enquiries, drawn on their experience of similar work in relation to complaints. A random sample of enquiries from the database, covering all directorates, are being assessed against a range of criteria, including:

- Sending of acknowledgements on time
- Sending of holding replies where response not ready on time
- Quality of the response
- Adherence to the procedures through the process
- Correct use of the database

The results will be written up both corporately and by directorate, and the findings will be used to improve the handling of enquiries in the future.

- 6.3 To check whether they are satisfied with the operation of the procedures and the quality of the responses they receive, it is suggested that members be invited to participate in a survey of the handling of their enquiries. Any concerns and suggestions for improvement can then be addressed. It is proposed that the review be conducted in early spring 2007. Appropriate officers will also be asked for their views at that time.

7. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

- 7.1 The Head of Legal Services notes that amendments will be required to the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations in Part C.3 of the Council Constitution if the recommendations in this report are agreed. These will either be considered as part of the current review of the Constitution or as soon as possible afterwards.

8. Comments of the Director of Finance

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

9. Equalities comments

- 9.1 There are no specific equalities implications in this report.

10. Comments of the Head of Members' Services

- 10.1 The Head of Members' Services has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

11. Comments of the Head of IT Services

- 11.1 Longer term IT options for the management of corporate feedback, including members' enquiries, are currently under review for suitability and cost effectiveness. These options include the use of the Siebel customer relationship management system. The solution will include the capability of providing the necessary level of Member access.

12. Appendix

- 12.1 There is one appendix:

Action plan for implementation of the Executive decisions.

Appendix: SCRUTINY REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ENQUIRIES – ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Scrutiny recommendation and Executive decision	Target implementation date	Responsibilities Who and what	Implemented? Yes/no	Service or performance improvement measurable outcomes
Recommendation 1: A corporate procedure				
<p><i>That the approach taken in dealing with Member enquiries should follow a standard corporate procedure across all directorates of the council. The designated procedures for dealing with Member enquiries should include the requirement for an acknowledgement on receipt of the enquiry, a holding letter for enquiries that take more than 10 working days to respond to and a letter of reply. If a holding letter is necessary, it should give an update on the current status of the enquiry, progress to date and a new response time (within a further 10 working days). The final response should include all information requested, an explanation where information requested is not available and describe actions arising from an enquiry. The Executive should consider if it is possible to adopt the 7 days standard response time learning from the best practice observed in the Environmental Services directorate.</i></p>	9-05	1. Draft corporate procedure (IMC/AH/KT)	Yes	1. Not applicable
	End 9-05	2. Consult on draft (IMC/AH/KT)	Yes	2. Not applicable
	End 10-05	3. Issue procedure (IMC/AH/KT)	Yes	3. Not applicable
	11-05	4. Publish procedure (& protocol – see 2 below) in leaflet for members and for members and officers on Harinet (AH/KT)	Yes	4. Not applicable
<p>(Amended) Executive Decision</p> <p>A standard corporate procedure be implemented across all services, including:</p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An acknowledgement to the member on receipt of an enquiry 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A holding letter to the member by the 10th working day for enquiries that are not replied to by then, including progress update & new response time (within further 10 working days) 	Ongoing	5. Review timescales annually (IMC/AH/KT)	Yes	5. Survey findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The final response to include all information requested, or an explanation where it is not available, and actions arising from the enquiry 	Ongoing	6. Monitor performance to timescale (AH/KT)	Yes	6. Performance to timescale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target of responding to 90% of enquiries within 10 working 				

<p>days for all services in 2005-06.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance to be monitored monthly Consideration be given to a future timescale reduction when there is consistent achievement of performance to 10 day standard full compliance with new corporate procedure, including quality of reply. 				
Recommendation 2: A protocol				
<p><i>That the main elements of the corporate procedures for Member enquiries should be outlined in a corporate protocol for use by Members and officers.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision That a protocol be produced, outlining the main elements of the procedure including a corporate definition of what constitutes a member enquiry.</p>	<p>9-05</p> <p>10-05</p> <p>11-05</p>	<p>1. Draft protocol (IMC/AH/KT)</p> <p>2. Consult on draft (IMC/AH/KT)</p> <p>3. Issue protocol (IMC/AH/KT)</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>1. Not applicable</p> <p>2. CE/Exec approval</p> <p>3. Leaflet issue</p>
Recommendation 3: Revision of the Constitution				
<p><i>The review recommended that the section referring to Member Enquiries within the Haringey Council Constitution be revised to clarify the definition of a Member Enquiry, standardise the 10-day standard for all elected Members (delete section 12.20, Part C3) and to incorporate recommendations arising from this Review.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision That the Constitution be amended to accurately reflect the revised procedures, including the definition of an enquiry and the standard 10-day response time for all elected members.</p>	<p>6-05</p> <p>Part of review of constitution</p>	<p>1. Amend for response time (IMC/AH/Legal)</p> <p>2. Amend to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of ME Brief detail of procedure (IMC/AH/Legal) 	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>1. Approval by Council</p> <p>2. Approval by Council</p>
Recommendation 4: A designated contact officer in each directorate				
<p>That a named lead contact (link) officer be assigned in each directorate to receive Members' enquiries. This officer's responsibilities will include progress chasing and ensuring that the directorate adheres to the relevant timescales.</p>	<p>End 9-05</p> <p>10-05</p>	<p>1. Compile details of contact names (AH/KT)</p> <p>2. Advise members (with mailbox details – see recs. 5.2 & 6.2) (AH/KT)</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>1. Not applicable</p> <p>2. Not applicable</p>

<p>(Amended) Executive Decision A named lead contact (link) officer be assigned in each directorate to receive Members' enquiries. This officer's responsibilities will include progress chasing and ensuring that the directorate adheres to the relevant timescales. There may also be additional business unit contacts where appropriate.</p>	11-05	3. Publish in members' briefing – see rec. 6) (AH/KT)	Yes	3. Not applicable
Recommendation 5: electronic mailboxes				
<p><i>The review recommended that each department use an electronic mailbox system for receiving Member enquiries by e-mail, be reserved for the purpose of receiving Member enquiries.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision Each department to use an electronic mailbox system reserved for the purpose of receiving Member enquiries by e-mail, with an option of additional business unit mailboxes where appropriate.</p>	End 9-05 10-05 11-05	1. Ensure mailboxes are set up(AH/KT/link officers) 2. Inform members (with contacts see recs. 4.1 & 6.2) (AH/KT) 3. Publish with protocol & procedure (AH/KT)	Yes Yes Yes	1. Not applicable 2. Not applicable 3. Not applicable
Recommendation 6: contacts card for members				
<p><i>The review recommended that a Member enquiries contacts card with all contacts for Member enquiries by directorate is produced and available to each Member of the Council. This is envisaged as a credit card sized card showing the telephone contact and the Member Enquiries mailbox e-mail address for each service.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision A leaflet be produced containing all Members' Enquiries directorate, and additional business unit, contacts including telephone contacts and the Member Enquiries mailbox e-mail addresses, and be updated regularly as part of the Members' Briefing. A credit card-sized contact card, necessarily containing less detail, could also be produced.</p>	9-05 End 10-05 11-05 12-05 Ongoing	1. Draft pocket guide & leaflet (IMC/AH/KT) 2. Consult on draft (IMC/AH/KT) 3. Design & print of pocket guide & leaflet (AH/KT) 4. Issue card/leaflet (AH/KT) 5. Update both as required (AH/KT)	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	1. Not applicable 2. CE/Exec approval 3. Not applicable 4. Guide & leaflet issue 5. 2 nd issues 5-06
Recommendation 7: Corporate monitoring of performance				
<p><i>The review recommended that the Members' Support Officer Sc 5/6 (Members' and Democratic Services) be deleted and a half time post of Member Enquiry Officer (provisionally graded SO1) be established within the Corporate Complaints team. This post would be responsible for the centralised monitoring of Member</i></p>				

<p><i>enquiries and collating management information to be fed into service review and development. Member enquiry performance should be monitored by the Executive at least quarterly. Casework and policy information requests should be categorised in such a way as to enable greater analysis of issues and blockages.</i></p>				
<p>(Amended) Executive Decision A new post be established, provisionally graded at SO1, in the Corporate Complaints [now Central Feedback] Team in the Improvement and Performance Team. This post will provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development, implementation and maintenance of the new corporate procedure and protocol • monitoring of members' enquiries and collating management information as proposed • tracking of progress of outstanding members' enquiries, ensuring in particular that cross directorate enquiries are effectively handled within timescale • support for members in tracking progress of case enquiries • effective use of the Respond database in accordance with the procedure • performance monitoring and data analysis in conjunction with directorates • learning from enquiries to improve services • production of performance reports, including monthly reporting of performance to timescale as part of the corporate performance framework. 	<p>5-05 6-05 7-05 9-05 10-05</p>	<p>1. Agree job description & evaluation (IMC/EP/AH) 2. Advertise post (IMC) 3. Interview and appoint (IMC/AH/YS) 4. Appointee to start in post (IMC/AH) 5. Inform members of start date with brief details of timescale to roll out action plan (IMC/AH/KT)</p>	<p>Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</p>	<p>1. Not applicable 2. Not applicable 3. Not applicable 4. Start in post 5. Details provided to members</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: Use of Respond database for enquiry logging</p>				
<p>That the Respond software system be used across the Council in all directorates and be used in a standardised way to log and monitor enquiries.</p>	<p>9-05</p>	<p>1. Review set up of Respond database for handling enquiries (AH/KT/link officers)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>1. Not applicable</p>

<p>(Agreed) Executive Decision The Respond system is already used for this purpose in the majority of services, and it will be extended to all services.</p>	<p>10-05 10-05</p>	<p>2. Complete roll out of Respond to all contact staff (AH/KT) 3. Write staff guidance on use of database (AH) 4. Implement required database changes (AH/KT)</p>	<p>Yes Yes Yes</p>	<p>2. Not applicable 3. Issue of guidance 4. Not applicable</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Purchase of Respond software to enable members to view progress of enquiries</p>				
<p><i>That the council purchase the RESPOND 'Netpoint' enquiry tracking software for internal usage to allow Member access to the Respond database to view the progress of their enquiries.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision The Respond software system currently available meets all requirements recommended by the review except for the facility for individual members to track progress of cases. The new post will facilitate the tracking of outstanding cases. The use of Respond could be considered at a later stage in conjunction with proposals for the integration of the CRM with the complaints/members' enquiries database.</p>	<p>When proposals made for CRM integration</p>	<p>1. Review and consult members on possible use of software in conjunction with proposals for integration of CRM and complaints/ enquiries database (IMC/AH)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>1. Member decision</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: Learning from member enquiries</p>				
<p><i>That Executive Members receive a summary report of salient issues and analysis at least quarterly and review the adequacy of response times. This would probably accompany the other quarterly reported performance information. Directors and Executive Members should also receive reports on the progress of ongoing enquiries (e.g. ongoing for more than 2 months), along with corrective action being taken.</i></p> <p>(Agreed) Executive Decision unchanged</p>	<p>3-06 Ongoing</p>	<p>1. Consult members on requirements for content /frequency of reports (IMC/AH/KT) 2. Produce quarterly reports on performance and salient issues (AH/IMC)</p>	<p>Yes Yes</p>	<p>1. Exec member approval of content 2. Quarterly reports produced</p>

Recommendation 11: Training				
<p><i>That the administration of Member Enquiries be incorporated into training for staff dealing with Member Enquiries. The procedures for submitting Member Enquiries should also be incorporated into the Member training programme.</i></p> <p>(Amended) Executive Decision That appropriate training be established for both members and staff.</p>	12-05	1. Develop and implement staff training programme (AH/KT)	Yes	1. Training delivered
	4-06	2. Develop member training programme in conjunction with Members' Services (AH/ IMC)	Yes	2. Not applicable
	5-06	3. Implement member training for new administration (AH/ IMC)	Yes	3. Training delivered