



**Haringey** Council

Agenda item:

[No.]

**Cabinet**

**On 18 September 2007**

Report Title: **Annual report for 2006-07 on the handling of complaints and members' enquiries**

Forward Plan reference number: 15

Report of: **Interim Assistant Chief Executive – Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Communications**

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 customer feedback – complaints, compliments and suggestions – and members' enquiries.

### **2. Introduction by Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Involvement**

2.1 Our residents deserve excellent services. In order to achieve this we must be open to new suggestions and also to criticism. It is important that we make it easy for our residents to submit complaints, for those complaints to be dealt with swiftly and fairly and for us to learn from any mistakes. We also need to provide opportunities for residents to thank staff who have been particularly helpful.

2.2 This report outlines improvements made in the Council's handling of complaints, suggestions, compliments and members enquiries.

2.3 We are seeing a gradual improvement in the time taken to deal with complaints and although more people took their complaint to the Ombudsman he found us to be at fault in a smaller proportion of cases than last year. He also commented very positively on how prompt we were in responding to his enquiries – our average response time was the best in London.

2.4 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 report sets out the performance for 2006-7 for responses to member's enquiries across directorates and for Homes for Haringey.

- 2.5 Over the year performance was just below target in most directorates with more serious problems in Social Services and Homes for Haringey. Action has been taken to remedy this and figures for the current financial year to end July are showing improvements.
- 2.6 Finally, we completed a very successful pilot of the WOW awards and adopted it formally across the whole Council from May 2007. We are the first local authority to participate in this scheme which gives residents the opportunity to nominate members of staff who they feel have really delivered an excellent service. By the end of June 2007 we had received almost 300 WOW nominations.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the annual report be received.
- 3.2 That performance and the key achievements in the year be noted.
- 3.3 That the Local Government Ombudsman's annual letter and the Council's response be noted.
- 3.4 That Cabinet identify any specific issues relating to customer feedback and members' enquiries that need to be addressed.

Report Authorised by: **Tim Dauncey**  
**Interim Assistant Chief Executive**  
**Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Communications**

Contact Officer: **Ian Christie, Central Feedback Manager**  
**Tel: 020 8489 2557**

### **4. Director of Finance Comments**

- 4.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted on the contents of this report and has no further comments to make.

### **5. Head of Legal Services Comments**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications in this report.

### **6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

- 6.1 The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:
- Annual report for 2005-06 on the Council's handling of complaints and members' enquiries: Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Executive – 12 September 2006

## **7. Strategic Implications**

7.1 Performance in handling complaints and members' enquiries is monitored monthly as part of the Council's customer focus indicators. They are included in those indicators that are used to assess the Council in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

7.2 In addition to addressing the concerns of residents and service users, learning from complaints is an important tool for service improvement.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no specific financial implications in the report.

## **9. Legal Implications**

9.1 There are no specific legal implications in the report.

## **10. Equalities Implications**

10.1 Equalities issues are addressed in detail in section 14 of the report. On the whole, the statistics show a similar pattern to previous years. However, there is still some under and over reporting from different black and minority ethnic groups, and we will continue to work on our outreach programme as detailed in our Equalities Impact Assessment to redress imbalances.

## **11. Consultation**

11.1 All directorates have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **12. Background**

12.1 Attached is the annual report on the operation of the Council's corporate feedback and members' enquiries procedures. It details the Council's performance, key achievements and developments in 2006-07.

12.2 The Council was reshaped during the year. The directorate statistics in the report reflect the structure in place at the beginning of the year for ease of analysis. Recording according to the current structure took effect from 1 April 2007.

12.3 The report includes the Local Government Ombudsman's annual letter which summarises the complaints that he received against the Council in the year, and any lessons learned. It also includes the Council's response to the issues the Ombudsman raised.

12.4 Key achievements over the last year include:

- A reduction in the time taken to complete complaints at all three stages – by 3 days at stages 1 and 3, and 5 days at stage 2
- 77% of stage 1 complaints were completed in 10 working days – a good performance compared with 80% in 15 days in 2005-06
- 76% of stage 2 complaints were on time, 2% up on 2005-06
- 93% of stage 3s completed in reduced 20 day timescale
- 84% of member enquiries on time against 90% target, but numerous improvements made have now been reflected in above target performance in 2007-08 to date.
- The Ombudsman found us to be at fault in a smaller proportion of complaints than last year, and in more than seven per cent less cases than two years ago
- The Ombudsman commented on the promptness of our replies to his enquiries, which was ‘all the more creditable’ in view of the increased numbers. (Our timescale was the best in London.)
- A successful pilot of the WOW! Awards scheme resulted in its corporate adoption as the Council’s compliments scheme from 1 May 2007: Haringey is the first public sector organisation to participate in the scheme.

### **13. Conclusion**

13.1 There were a number of significant improvements made during the year, but the report also highlights some issues that need to be addressed to achieve corporate targets and further improvement in learning from feedback.

### **14. Report and appendices**

14.1 The Annual report is attached. It 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