

Item No. 7.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 June 2023	Meeting Name: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee
Report title:		Member Enquiries review update	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Customer and Exchequer	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the audit, governance and standards committee note the update to member enquiries.
2. That the audit, governance and standards committee invite officers to attend in six months to update on the performance and progress of the review detailed in the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. This report is presented by Michelle Peake, Head of Specialist Services. Specialist Services are responsible for the logging and distribution of Member Enquiries and complaints. The team also assist where possible in ensuring enquiries are responded to on time. Within Specialist Services also sits the complaints team, who respond to stage 2 complaints and Ombudsman cases.
4. The Complaints Policy outlines the Council's approach to handling complaints including performance metrics and standards. This has recently been reviewed following the issue of guidance from the Housing Ombudsman to ensure we are adhering to their Complaint Handling Code.
5. The performance standard for Member Enquiries requires that enquiries are responded to within 10 working days. Work is underway to provide greater clarity on the process for Member Enquiries, review existing processes and associated supporting systems. This is outlined in further detail below.
6. The purpose of this report is to provide the panel with performance information on Member Enquiries and to update on the work taking place to improve the service.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Performance

7. Member Enquiries received

Department	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Chief Executive	320	335	350

Department	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Children & Adults	407	122	NA*
Environment, Neighbourhoods & Growth	2691	2880	2854
Finance & Governance	494	385	472
Housing	4980	4292	4042
Total	8892	8014	7717

* Due to a change in reporting we are unable to report on Children and adults member enquiries pre November 2021

8. Year on year there has been an increase in enquiries received. From 2021/22 to 2022/23 there has been a 10% increase. The increase has been attributed in the main to the current cost of living crisis, some residual delays due to ongoing Covid implications and service specific related issues such as repairs – impact of supply line reductions/reductions in trade resources.

9. Cases closed on time

Department	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
CE	71%	49%	51%
EN&G	83%	77%	76%
F&G	76%	91%	93%
H&M	76%	90%	91%
Total average	78%	84%	84%

10. Performance in 2022/23 has dropped and is below the 90% target. Where there are service-specific issues these are being addressed.

11. However, it is acknowledged that the performance of Member Enquiries is not at the required level. A number of wider actions are underway to improve performance, not only in Member enquiries but also complaints:

- All staff have been reminded that if a response to a member enquiry or complaint cannot be responded within time then a detailed holding must be sent, giving an update on the actions taken to date.
- Any overdue cases are being chased with the service to ensure that timely responses or updates are sent.
- Where there are service specific issues such as higher volumes of complaints within repairs – a review of capacity within existing teams and resources are underway to ensure improvements are made in the short term and maintained.
- Reporting at a high level has been adopted with reports now quarterly to CMT and lead member briefings.

12. A thorough review of complaints (incorporating Member Enquiries) is underway – this follows the Specialist Services team moving to the Customer and Exchequer Division within the Finance Directorate. The review will report its findings and recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Communities,

Democracy & Finance.

13. The full review will cover and ensure:
 - A corporate and consistent approach to complaints handling across the Council.
 - A review of existing processes to ensure they meet the needs of the Council.
 - Review of technology supporting the current complaints process.
 - Volumes and capacity of teams to deliver responses within agreed timelines, this also includes a high importance being put in to quality assurance.
14. To enable this the review will have a particular focus on quality and performance, ensuring not only are SLAs are achieved such as acknowledgements within 3 working days and responses within 10 working days, but also:
 - There is sufficient (increased) qualitative governance through quality checks.
 - Ensuring robust processes are in place to minimise response times.
 - ensuring holding responses with sufficient updates are sent,
 - Detailing clear workflows to escalate to senior management where appropriate.
15. As part of the review, it is anticipated learning from complaints will have more of an importance, including ensuring where appropriate measures are in place to prevent issues from reoccurring.
16. Communication across the department will also be reviewed ensuring effective corporate governance and shared knowledge is captured across the Council.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

17. This report is not considered to contain any proposals that would have a significant impact on any particular community or group.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

18. This report is not considered to contain any proposals that would have a significant equalities impact.

Health impact statement

19. This report is not considered to contain any proposals that would have a significant health impact.

Climate change implications

20. This report is not considered to contain any proposals that would have a significant impact on climate change.

Resource implications

21. There are no direct resource implications in this report.

Consultation

22. There has been no consultation on this report.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

23. None required.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
N/A		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
N/A	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Dominic Cain, Director of Customer and Exchequer	
Report Author	Michelle Peake, Head of Specialist Services	
Version	Final	
Dated	24 May 2023	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	No	N/A
Strategic Director of Finance	N/A	N/A
Cabinet Member	N/A	N/A
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	24 May 2023	