

Committee Overview & Scrutiny	Date 10 <sup>th</sup> March 2009	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. <b>9.1</b>
Report of Assistant Chief Executive  Originating Officer(s): John S Williams/Beverley McKenzie	Title <b>Members' Enquiries</b>  Wards affected: All			

## 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Overview & Scrutiny Committee have been kept advised of the progress on the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement (BPI) project. This report updates Members on further progress in finalizing the project and sets out current performance data in relation to Members' Enquiries.
- 1.2** The majority of the key milestones on the BPI project have been completed as advised in the October report. The focus has now moved towards continuing improvement on the timely responses to Members and strengthening the improvements in the quality of the responses. Initiatives are under development for Quality Assurance of the responses to Members Enquiries, and these will be presented to the Performance Review Group in April 2009.
- 1.3** In relation to response times, the performance target of 85% of enquiries responded to within the 10 working days is a strategic performance indicator. The corporate results are reported to LAB/CMT on a bi-monthly basis and the specific performance of each directorate is shared amongst the CMT on a monthly basis.
- 1.4** The performance indicator is inclusive of both the Council and external bodies (such as RSLs and Metropolitan Police).

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** That the Committee notes the current activities and progress made in the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement project and the movement to continuous improvement.
- 2.2** That the improvement in timeliness of responding to Members' Enquiries is noted and that all Council departments are now achieving the performance target of 85%. Further work will be undertaken to ensure early achievement of the target across external bodies.
- 2.3** That a further progress report and performance data be submitted in October 2009.

### 3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Members' Enquiries are the formal requests for information from a Councillor and are logged onto the Siebel ICT system and distributed to the relevant Directorates or external body for response. The Members' Enquiries system has been developed to support this and enhance the Community Leadership activities of the elected Members. This support is extended to the elected Tower Hamlets' Members of Parliament. The Members' enquiries system enables these members to ask questions of the Council Officers.
- 3.2 A BPI project for Members' Enquiries was initiated following concern amongst some Members regarding variable speed and quality of responses to enquiries. The aims of the project can be summarized as follows:
- To increase Members' satisfaction with responses;
  - To increase the proportion of enquiries answered within the target time; and
  - To reduce the amount of staff time spent dealing with enquiries.
- 3.3 The project comprises delivery of an improvement action plan with three themes:
- (i) **Providing information to Members** through briefings, improvements to the intranet, etc. to help reduce the number of enquiries raised.
  - (ii) **Improving the Quality of Responses** – including the development of Best Practice Guidance and implementation of quality monitoring at the Directorate level to ensure the quality of responses received are to the satisfaction of Members.
  - (iii) **Streamlining the end-to-end process** – including the introduction of a Members' Hotline and improvements to Siebel ICT system and related processes to allow for quicker responses and improved tracking.

### 4 PROGRESS UPDATE

- 4.1 Implementation of the Improvement Action Plan began in May 2007 and regular activities have taken place since. The project activities have delivered some improvements in both quality and speed of response, with Council directorates presently achieving the target of 85% of enquiries responded to within 10 working days, it is noted that overall speed of response and quality has scope for further improvement. Many of the milestones within the project have now been completed and attention is now focused on sustaining the improvement in response time, continued improvement and measuring the quality of responses and working with external bodies that have not yet achieved the target.

#### Quality Process

- 4.2 In terms of quality of response to Members' Enquiries, Officers are advised to respond in full in accordance within the required timescales. Where a complete response is not possible within the 10 working day deadlines, Officers are advised to send an interim response, to be followed by a full response as soon as possible. The target for responding to Members' enquiries is also set out clearly in the Constitution (Member Officer Protocol –

paragraph 10.5).

- 4.3** Regular meetings of the Directorates Members' Enquiries officers continue to be held to share best practice and develop quality guidelines for processing Members' Enquiries. As previously advised, this has resulted in the Members' Enquiries Guide which was implemented in June 2008. More recently the forum has shared best practice to enable better internal monitoring on the timeliness of responses and has focused discussions on quality control measures and the development of a quality assurance performance indicator.
- 4.4** The RSLs have been made aware of the Council's targets with regards to timely and quality responses to Members' Enquiries. The Chief Executive sent correspondence to each of the RSLs regarding this in November 2008. The RSLs have formulated a Tower Hamlets Housing Forum draft Protocol for Members' Enquiries which affirms their support that the minimum standard of response will aim to set similar timescale as responses expected from Council Officers. It is expected that the RSLs will ratify their protocol at their meeting on 25 February 2009.
- 4.5** Further work with the RSLs on the performance management of Members' Enquiries has been delayed due to the delays in the implementation of the Business Objects Reporting tool. This reporting tool enables the Council to generate reports, and will allow targeted information on outstanding enquiries and performance results to be shared with the outside bodies. Unfortunately, the full implementation was delayed to 31 March 2009 and due to data security, there has not been an alternative mechanism to pro-actively disseminate the information to outside bodies.

#### **Members' Hotline**

- 4.6** The Members' Hotline is a restricted telephone number into the Customer Contact Centre (CCC) for the exclusive use of the Members. The calls receive a very high priority level, second only to race & hate crime reporting, and the Hotline therefore represents an opportunity for Members to obtain a quicker response than through the traditional Members' Enquiry process. Regrettably, the Members' Hotline has not been well utilised. The volume of calls to the hotline remains minimal (60 calls from April 2008 to February 2009). This service is being continued to support Members with a view to streamlining the process, in addition to the usual ME provision.

### **5 PERFORMANCE DATA**

- 5.1** Performance is monitored by the volume (by percentage) of enquiries completed within the target of 10 working days.
- 5.2** The figures from September 2008 through January 2009 indicate that there has been a measurable improvement in performance. Further improvement is still required, particularly as it pertains to the external partners. The Council Directorates have met and consistently exceeded the performance target since October 2008. However, as the external partners are responsible for approximately 60% of the responses to Members' Enquiries, their lack of performance has impacted on the overall performance indicator. The summary monthly performance figures for 2008/09 to January, the last month

for which final figures are available at the time of writing, follow and the full analysis by directorate is attached at Appendix 1.

Month	2008-09			2007-08	
	MEs closed	% within 10 WD		MEs closed	% within 10 WD
April	557	64.09%		394	61.68%
May	424	60.85%		480	56.04%
June	509	69.16%		453	72.63%
July	597	74.37%		455	74.51%
August	509	68.17%		526	71.48%
September	602	78.90%		436	71.56%
October	603	82.26%		425	71.76%
November	496	86.09%		522	66.28%
December	361	88.37%		321	73.83%
January	452	83.19%		445	68.36%
February				494	65.69%
March				443	67.27%

## 6 CONFIDENTIALITY OF MEMBERS' ENQUIRIES

- 6.1 Confidentiality and trust is central to an effective Members' Enquiries process and the Council's Constitution includes a Member/Officer Protocol which sets out the key requirements in this regard.
- 6.2 This message has been reinforced in the guidance that has been distributed to ensure that responses to Members' Enquiries are timely and of high quality, but that answers should be sent only to the Member who made the enquiry and to anyone they have specifically asked to be copied in. Breaches of this have been taken seriously and are addressed with responsible Officers. Action is being taken to amend the wording of the enquiry to ensure that each enquiry includes a clear instruction to respond only to the Member that has initiated the enquiry.

## 7 COMMENTS FROM THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

## 8 CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

- 8.1 There are no immediate legal implications relating to the recommendations contained in this report.

## 9 ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The Members' Enquiries system seeks to ensure that all Tower Hamlets residents, including those who require advocacy or support from their elected

representatives, have access to the Council's services and information. Improving the process is therefore key to ensuring equal access for all.

## 10 SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

10.1 Many of the Members' enquiries relate to reports of environmental issues such as dumped rubbish or conditions of street and estates. The rapid resolution of these issues supports the Council's Living Safely and Cleaner, Greener objectives.

## 11 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

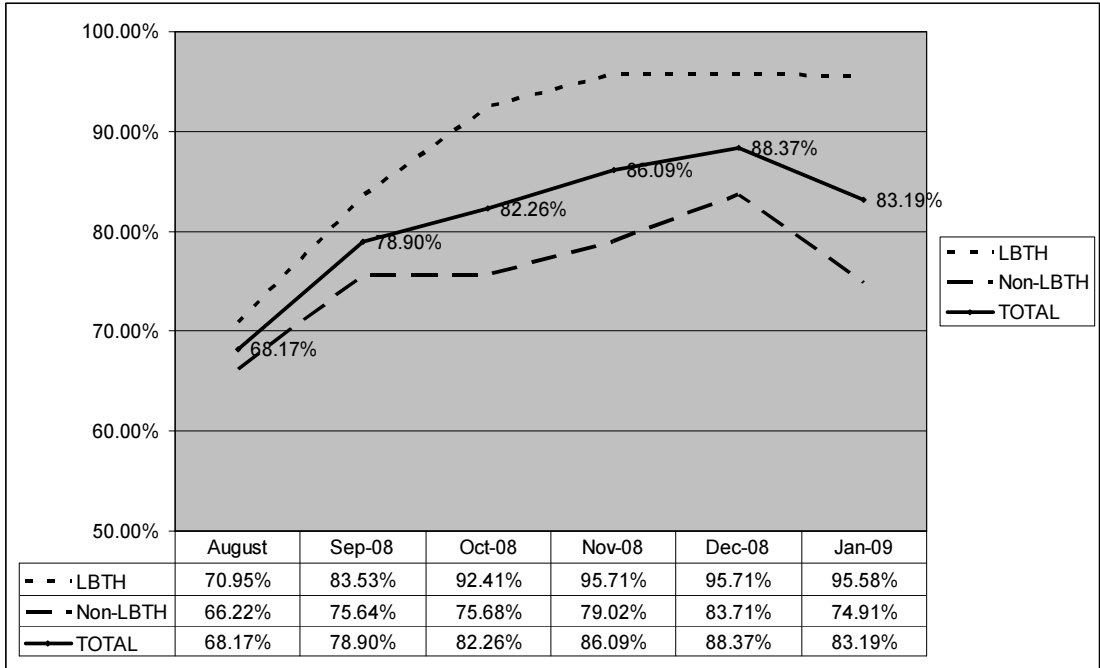
11.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

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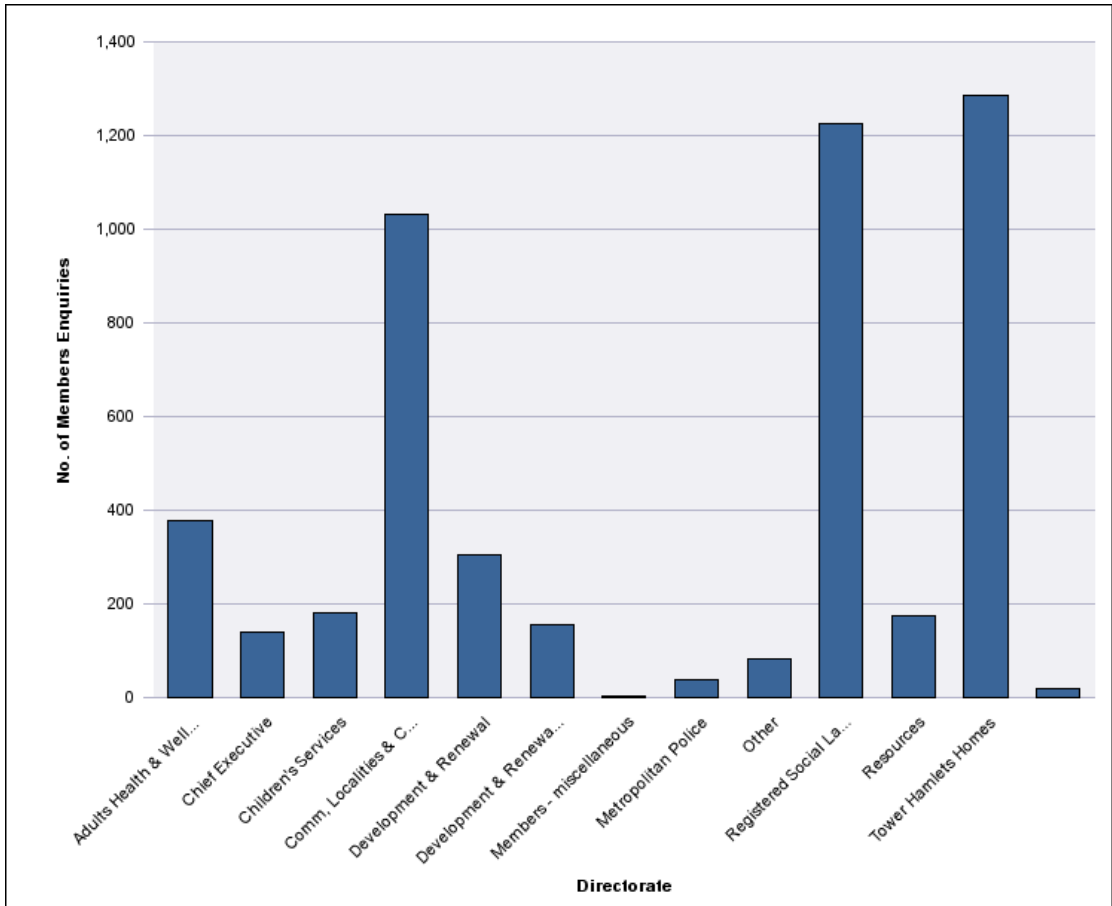
### Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended) List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report

Brief description of "back ground papers"	Name and telephone number of holder And address where open to inspection.
None	

Performance Results – September 2008 to January 2009



Volume of Enquiries by Directorate – April 2008 to Feb. 2009



**Members' Enquiries - Performance by Directorate**  
 From 01-Jan-09 To 31-Jan-09

	0-10 Working		11-20 Working		21-30 Working		31-40 Working		41-50 Working		51+ Working		Average Days to completed in	MEs completed in	% of total MEs
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%			
<b>Adults Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	38	97.44%	1	2.56%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6	39	8.63%
Chief Executive	13	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	4	13	2.88%
Children's Services	18	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6	18	3.98%
Comm, Localities & Culture	69	94.52%	4	5.48%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	7	73	16.15%
Development & Renewal	18	85.71%	3	14.29%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	7	21	4.65%
Resources	17	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	5	17	3.76%
LBTH	173	95.58%	8	4.42%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%		181	40.04%
<b>Metropolitan Police</b>	0	0.00%	1	33.33%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	88	3	0.66%
Other	1	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	1	0.22%
<b>Registered Social Landlord</b>	53	60.23%	16	18.18%	0	0.00%	6	6.82%	5	5.68%	8	9.09%	20	88	19.47%
Tower Hamlets Homes	149	83.24%	15	8.38%	9	5.03%	3	1.68%	1	0.56%	2	1.12%	9	179	39.60%
Non-LBTH	203	74.91%	32	11.81%	9	3.32%	9	3.32%	6	2.21%	12	4.43%		271	59.96%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>83.19%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8.85%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1.99%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1.99%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.33%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2.65%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Data Extract: 5/2/09 - 2:49 pm