

Committee Overview & Scrutiny	Date 7th October 2008	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 8.1
Report of Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): John S Williams/Beverley McKenzie		Title Members' Enquiries Wards affected: All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee have been kept advised of progress on the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement (BPI) project. This report updates Members on further progress in taking forward the project and sets out current performance data in relation to Members' Enquiries.
- 1.2 Implementation of the BPI project activities began in May 2007 and a number of key milestones have been achieved. These include:
- The Members' Enquiries Guide – a detailed guide providing policy, protocol and best practice has been developed and distributed to all Members and Officers that are required to process Members Enquiries. This includes guidance on what should be raised as a Members Enquiry, standard policy and process for Members to raise enquiries and Officers to respond, standard format/template to initiate enquiries and expectations for quality monitoring.
 - The Members' Hotline has been piloted and will be moving forward to a full implementation for all Members to utilize for Streetline enquiries as of 7 October 2008.
 - Modifications have been made to the Siebel system to enhance the record keeping and reporting functions. Further modifications to report generation is anticipated in November 2008.
 - Information on the Members Intranet has been refreshed and Directorates are encouraged to utilize this method to provide additional information to all Members
 - Work has begun with the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to encourage their adherence to the Council's Members Enquiries Guide
 - Regular quality surveys are provided to Members to validate satisfaction with responses
 - A Members Enquiries Quality Forum has been established with representatives from Directorates to share best practice and improve communications between Members' Support and directorates
- 1.3 As many of the milestones in the original project have been achieved, to continue the focus on the process improvement, during the month of October, there will be a review conducted of the Members Enquiries processes to determine further activities that can

be carried out that would positively impact on the quality and timeliness of the responses to the Members.

- 1.4 In relation to response times, the performance target of 85% of enquiries responded to within 10 working days has been identified as 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.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the current activities and progress made in the Members' Enquiries Business Process Improvement project.
- 2.2 That the improvement in timeliness of responding to Members' Enquiries is noted but that further work will be undertaken to ensure early achievement of the 85% performance target across all services.
- 2.3 That a further progress report and performance data be submitted in March 2009.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE DRAFTING OF THIS REPORT	
Brief description of background papers: None	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection:

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members' Enquiries are the formal requests for information from a Councillor and are logged onto the Siebel IT system and distributed to the relevant Directorate or external body for response. Raising an enquiry is one way in which Members can act for their ward constituents and provides a valuable opportunity for local issues to be brought to the attention of officers delivering services.
- 1.2 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
- 1.3 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 the Siebel IT system and related processes to allow for quicker responses and improved tracking.

2. PROGRESS UPDATE

- 2.1 Implementation of the Improvement Action Plan began in May 2007 and regular activity has been taking place since then. While the project activities have been delivered and some improvements in both quality and speed of response have been secured, it is noted that overall performance is still falling short of the target of 85% of enquiries responded to within 10 working days.

Quality Process

- 2.2 In terms of the quality of response to Members' Enquiries, officers are advised to respond in full in accordance with the required timescales. Where a complete response is not possible within the 10 working day deadline, 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).

- 2.3 Regular meetings of the Directorates Members' Enquiries Officers have been held to share best practice and develop quality guidelines for processing Members Enquiries. This has resulted in the Members' Enquiries Guide which was implemented in June 2008. The document provides specific direction to Officers on the timeliness, format, accuracy and quality of the responses for Members Enquiries.
- 2.4 A meeting was held with the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Executive on 24 September 2008 to raise the profile of Members' Enquiries and explain the position of the Council. Copies of the Members Enquiries Guide was distributed to those in attendance. It was agreed that a specific protocol for the RSLs, inline with the Council's guidance be developed. Further, RSLs indicated a willingness to cooperate with the Council in responding to Members Enquiries. The contacts for the RSLs will be refreshed and enquiries that are not responded to will be escalated within the RSL. The Executive highlighted a common problem of Members approaching them directly and requested that Members be encouraged to use Members' Support. It was also agreed that the RSLs would be provided with regular updates on open Members Enquiries; and that the performance results would be shared with the RSLs and with the Housing Corporation and Audit Commission to demonstrate partnership working.

Members' Hotline

- 2.4 The Members' Hotline is a restricted telephone number into the Customer Contact Centre (CCC) for the exclusive use of 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. All enquiries are tracked on the Siebel systems and reports are generated to reflect enquiries completed by the CCC, in addition to those processed by Members Support. Members will receive an automated e-mail advising them when the service requested has been completed.
- 2.5 The pilot of the Members' Hotline has been concluded and implementation of availability to all members will take place from 7th October 2008.
- 2.6 A phased approach has been taken to implementation with initially Street Services being the primary service supported by the Contact Centre.

Siebel upgrade

- 2.7 The Members' Enquiries (ME) Process Improvement Support Team and Members Support staff have identified a number of enhancements to the Siebel IT system that are required to better support the processing of enquiries. The Siebel team has dedicated time to the enhancements and these were completed in April 2008.
- 2.8 Further enhancements to provide better management information reports and allow for more in-depth performance management are underway and it is expected that this will be available in November 2008. Tracking reports are now available to Members to support them in managing their casework.

3. PERFORMANCE DATA

- 3.1 Performance is monitored by the volume (by percentage) of enquiries completed within the target of 10 working days.
- 3.2 The figures from April to August 2008 indicate that there has been a gradual improvement in performance. However, further improvement is still required and it is expected that this will be achieved in the coming months as the impact of the actions outlined in this report are increasingly felt. The summary monthly performance figures for 2008/09 to August, the last month for which final figures are available at the time of writing, are set out below and the full analysis by directorate is attached at Appendix 1.

	2008			2007	
Month	Closed	% within 10 WD		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%

4. CONFIDENTIALITY OF MEMBERS' ENQUIRIES

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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. Members Enquiries and/or responses should not be copied on to other Members for information at officers' instigation, but only at the enquiring Member's specific request.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Members' Enquiries system seeks to ensure that all local 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.

6. COMMENTS FROM THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

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

7. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASST. CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

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

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 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 via the Members' Hotline will support the Council's Living Safely and Cleaner, Greener objectives. The movement of these enquiries to the Hotline will allow for more of a paper-free process, which is environmentally desirable.

9. ANTI POVERTY COMMENTS

- 9.1 The Members' Enquiries system seeks to ensure that all local residents are provided advocacy or support from their elected Member to access Council services and information. Improving the process will support our anti-poverty activity.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.