

Serving the Community Better: A Scrutiny Review of Member Enquiries

January 2005

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Report of the Members' Enquiries Scrutiny Review (sub-committee), London Borough of Haringey Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

For enquiries or further copies of this document, please contact:

*Overview & Scrutiny
Civic Centre
Wood Green
London
N22 8LE*

Telephone: 020 8489 2933

E Mail: michael.carr@haringey.gov.uk

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction	5
2. The Administration of Member Enquiries	6
3. Member Enquiries Performance	10
4. Conclusion & Recommendations	13

Appendix

Appendix One – Member Enquiries Contact Officers by Department.....	21
Appendix Two – New RESPOND Software Business Case.....	23
Appendix Three – Arrangements for the Administration of Member Enquiries in Each Directorate.....	25
Appendix Four – Member Enquiries Performance by Department.....	27
Appendix Five – Member Enquiries Questionnaire.....	28
Appendix Six – Proposed Member Enquiries Procedure.....	29
Appendix Seven – Member Enquiries Contacts Card.....	30

Executive Summary

The Review of Member enquiries was established to investigate whether the administration and procedures in place are working effectively and to see if there is any room for improvement. The Review has considered the performance of the council in dealing with different types of enquiry to try to understand where there may be delays in responding to Members and how these might be overcome. It has considered the procedures in place for dealing with Member enquiries and how enquiries are dealt with in different departments. It has also heard the views of a wide range of elected Members, as well as the views of senior officers, to find out where the systems in place work well and where there are perceived problems.

An integral consideration of the Review has been the deployment of the Members' Support Officer post (in Members' and Democratic Services) that had been established following a resolution by Majority Group to deal with disquiet around general Member enquiry performance. The post to date had not been recruited to as it was not clear what the issues were and how this resource could be best used to improve service to members.

At the end of the Review Members have 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 may be used to best effect. This includes proposals to delete the Members' Support Officer post referred to above, establish a new part time resource within the Corporate Complaints team to provide a corporate monitoring and reporting service on Member enquiry performance as well as enhancing software provision to enable Members to check directly how well their enquiries are progressing.

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations have been put forward by this Review and are discussed further in Chapter 4, *Conclusions and Recommendations*.

Recommendation One

A Corporate Procedure for Member Enquiries - It is recommended 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.

Recommendation Two

A Protocol for Member Enquiries - It is recommended that the main elements of the corporate procedures for Member enquiries should be outlined in a corporate protocol for use by Members and officers.

Recommendation Three

Revision of the Haringey Council Constitution - It is 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.

Recommendation Four

A Designated Contact Officer for Member Enquiries in Each Directorate - It is recommended 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.

Recommendation Five

Member Enquires Electronic Mailboxes for Each Department - It is 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.

Recommendation Six

Member Enquiries Contacts Card for Each Member of the Council - It is 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. (Cost estimate per print run: 100 cards printed & laminated £60 + Typesetting £22.50 = £85.)

Recommendation Seven

Corporate Monitoring of Member Enquiries Performance - It is recommended that the Members' Support Officer Sc 5/6 (Members' and Democratic Services) be deleted and a new 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 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.

Recommendation Eight

RESPOND Software Used Across the Council - It is recommended that the RESPOND software system should be used across the Council in all directorates and be used in a standardised way to log and monitor enquiries.

Recommendation Nine

Additional Respond software - It is recommended 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. *Cost estimate:*

Software [unlimited access]	£15,000
Installation	£6,300
Annual telephone support fee	<u>£3,000</u>
TOTAL COST	£24,300

Recommendation Ten

Learning From Member Enquiries - It is recommended 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.

Recommendation Eleven

Member Enquiries Training - It is recommended 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.

Recommendation Twelve

Member Enquiries Referencing - It is recommended that each Member enquiry be allocated a unique reference number to be quoted on all related correspondence and telephone queries. This should allow convenient referencing of all enquiries logged and help to avoid duplication.

1. Introduction

1.1. *Membership of the Review*

Cllr Takki Sulaiman (Chair)

Cllr Jean Brown

Cllr Gideon Bull

Cllr Quincy Prescott

Cllr Wayne Hoban

Cllr Liz Santry

Cllr Melanie Simpson

1.2. *Scope and Aims of the Review*

Aim

To review the procedures for dealing with Members enquiries.

Objectives

1. To investigate perceived difficulties with Member's enquiries and identify underlying problems
2. To identify current standards laid down and performance against these
3. To investigate Member Enquiry performance issues within and across different departments
4. To find out if different kinds of Member enquiries have different performance issues

1.3. This Review was proposed because some Members felt that the way in which enquiries that they make to departments are dealt with could be made more responsive and more effective. This is 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.

1.4. In Haringey, there are 57 elected Members of the Council, three Members elected to each ward. Their role is to govern the Council through policy making and to represent the interests of their constituents both individually and collectively. Members are the lynchpin of local democratic accountability, the link between the users of community services and the Council. In fulfilling their role as policy makers and community representatives, Members need to interact with Council departments to find out information about services, to make enquiries on behalf of their constituents and to report problems with services on the ground. Members also represent the Council back to the community and their responsiveness in dealing with the concerns of their constituents reflects upon the responsiveness of the Council to its customers.

1.5. Although the Review was instigated by the concerns of some Members that enquiries are not always dealt with as effectively as they might be, these perceptions are by no means universal and it was recognised that most enquiries

by elected Members to services are dealt with effectively. The Review was set up to find out if concerns about Member enquiries were widespread and supported by evidence or whether perception was distorted by a relatively small number of instances of delayed caseworker enquiries. It also sought to understand where potential problems might lie and to identify possible solutions.

1.6. The Review sought to investigate the following specific issues:

- What is and what is not working effectively in responding to Members enquiries to council departments.
- Are there delays caused by an excessive volume of enquiries logged? Are there delays in instances where it is not clear how to proceed with queries?
- What are the standards currently laid down, are we meeting these?
- Member enquiries performance – including the effectiveness of mechanisms to measure performance
- Is the performance of all of the council departments the same or are there issues for certain departments?
- Are complex problems (eg involving more than one department) more of a problem?
- The role of contact person or "link officer" in each department
- The IT systems used to administrate and monitor Member enquiries
- Progress since the previous Review of Member Enquiries
- The resources available to deal with Members enquiries and how these are best allocated

2. Administration of Member Enquiries

2.1. When a Member places an enquiry about a service, the relevant directorate will receive and record the enquiry, pass the query to the appropriate council officer or service to deal with and then respond to the Member with an answer. All services have support staff for dealing with enquiries from Members and designated "link officers", which are named staff whose contact details are known to Members as a channel to receive their queries. It is the role of the link officer to act as a go-between between the department and the Member on behalf of the head of service, they receive enquiries, log them and chase up the responses as necessary on behalf of Members.

The Definition of a Member Enquiry.

2.2. There is no formal definition of a Member enquiry. In practice, Member Enquiries are enquiries by an elected Member of the Council or by Members of Parliament for information from a council department. This includes requests for general policy and performance information, ward casework enquiries and fault reporting.

2.3. Members place different kinds of enquiries to departments. Broadly, enquiries may be categorised into casework enquiries, information requests and policy research, budget enquiries and fault reporting and service complaints. Some enquiries are also crosscutting, involving more than one service. Different kinds of enquiries will be more complex and difficult to respond to than others. The Constitution distinguishes between an enquiry and a complaint made on behalf of a constituent and specifies that complaints should be handled through the official complaints procedure¹

- 2.4. A report to Policy and Strategy Committee 19th June 2001 "A new approach to customer complaints and Members' enquiries"² proposed a change in the definition of a Member enquiry to distinguish between casework enquiries and information requests. Members of this Review would like to see the same standard response times and procedures for both casework enquiries and information requests. It would therefore seem unnecessary to have a different protocol and procedure for dealing with these different kinds of enquiries, although they should be categorised differently for the purposes of monitoring performance.

Corporate Standards for Member Enquiries

- 2.5. The corporate standard is that all Member enquiries should be responded to within 10 working days³. According to the Constitution, the timescale for dealing with enquiries from a Member of the Executive, the Chair of Scrutiny or Lead Members is 7 days, although this is due to be revised.
- 2.6. Environmental Services standards employ their own standards within the corporate standard. This includes an acknowledgement for an enquiry, a 7-day response time and a holding letter where a response requires more time.

Member Enquiries Support

- 2.7. During the Review, Members gave consideration to various possible solutions to this, including the suggestion of appointing a permanent Members' support officer with specific responsibilities for logging and progress chasing enquiries on behalf of Members.
- 2.8. Although a designated Member enquiries support officer would help Members in chasing enquiries and would also provide a central point of contact for enquiries, the Review has concluded that this proposal would not provide desired improvement to the administration of enquiries and would not be a good value for money investment. Therefore the existing resources allocated for this should be deleted and invested more effectively elsewhere to enhance the Member enquiries services. Members of the Review have instead proposed measures to provide a more corporate administrative approach and better regulation of standards, so that systems are in place to ensure that Members can rely upon a response within the corporate standard timeframe of 10 working days. This includes the proposal to introduce responsibility for a corporate overview of Member enquiries alongside the monitoring of corporate complaints and to standardise and upgrade the use of the software systems used to administrate enquiries.
- 2.9. It is the role of the link officer within each directorate to provide the support to Members and the head of service in progress chasing enquiries and feeding information back to Members.

The RESPOND Database

- 2.10. A software package known as RESPOND is used in most departments of the Council to log and monitor Members enquiries, although in practice the extent to which the program is used varies in different directorates. The software is also used to log and monitor complaints and enables the corporate complaints team to monitor complaints performance, as well as to keep a running log of the progress of

individual complaints. The software enables enquiries and complaints to be logged and reviewed by the relevant officers and flags up individual cases so that they can be dealt with according to the timescales laid down. It allows individual ongoing cases to be updated with information logged on the progress in dealing with the query and communications made. It also allows the generation of performance reports to show how enquiries are being responded to against the corporate standard.

- 2.11. In evidence to the Review, Members received a presentation on how the RESPOND system operates and what it is able to do to improve the management of Member enquiries. It was demonstrated that this software package already operates effectively in the management of corporate complaints and is fit for the purpose of managing Member enquiries in a similar way. However, it was found that not all the features of the software are currently fully utilised in the administration of Member enquiries in all departments and that better use of these facilities could be made in logging and monitoring both individual case work and Member enquiries performance.
- 2.12. Members also considered an additional module of the RESPOND software package called Netpoint, which would allow tracking the progress of ongoing casework enquiries by Members themselves from a remote computer independently over the intranet without contacting the designated link officer. This option entails significant resource implications, so Members received a business case to consider the costs and benefits of an enhanced software system.

RESPOND Netpoint Business Case

- 2.13. The business case set out the options for standardising and improving the use of the RESPOND complaints database for Members enquiries, to enable councillors to access the RESPOND database via Harinet to track the progress of their own enquiries. Two main options were considered, either purchasing additional software (NetPoint Employee Self Service Module) that will allow access to RESPOND via Harinet, or using the RESPOND database as it currently is, but consistently across the board and with documented procedures and training.
- 2.14. Using the existing RESPOND Centerpoint software, without the additional package, Members would still be able to get all the information they need through contacting a nominated officer, once an agreed procedure is put in place. The existing database can provide performance reports, standard letters (eg acknowledgement letters), case management facilities with reminders to ensure timely response and generate reports with analysis of trends.
- 2.15. The software module currently used by staff, Respond Centerpoint, is however, complex and requires detailed training. Because of its complexity, is unsuitable for anyone not using it extensively on a daily basis and is therefore not suitable for use by Members for tracking enquiries.
- 2.16. The Netpoint module can be configured specifically for Members and would be suitable and easy to use to track enquiries. The additional software package would enable Members to track the progress of their own enquiries without contacting council officers. Members would be able to log their enquiries, check whether their enquiries are on the database and identify which officer is dealing with them. They

would also be able to check whether the matter had already been raised as a Member enquiry or as a complaint, thereby avoiding some unnecessary duplication.

- 2.17. The additional software would entail an estimated purchase cost of £24,300, including £15,000 to purchase the software and £6,300 for installation. A resource would also need to be identified for developing and maintaining procedures and refining the database. Additionally, IT resources need to be allocated to ensure the software is compatible with Haringey's IT systems and there would need to be early discussions with IT services and Northgate to ensure that Netpoint fits in with the Council's overall strategies.
- 2.18. There is currently no budget provision for improving the RESPOND database and this and it would need to be identified as part of the budget planning process, although this Review has identified £27,000 worth of revenue spending would be better spent in improving Member enquiries support systems. The resources saved from the deletion of the support officer post in Democratic Services should provide part of the funding for new this new software infrastructure, a growth bid would then have to be prepared to find the remaining resources. Using the existing RESPOND software as it is would entail no additional funding otherwise required for purchasing software, but resources would need to be identified for refining the database and developing and maintaining procedures.

Current Practice and Procedures

- 2.19. The definition of how Member Enquiries are dealt with is provided in Part 3.c 12.17 – 12.24 of the Haringey Council Constitution. It places responsibility for dealing with Members enquiries with the director of the relevant service and states that Members should normally place enquiries either through the appropriate senior service manager or through the specially designated officers.
- 2.20. Evidence received during the Review revealed that the operational arrangements for handling Members' enquiries differ from Directorate to Directorate within the Council, although they all operate similar systems. There is currently no department within the Council with overall responsibility for Member enquiries. There is a nominated officer(s) in each directorate who receives the enquiries, logs them and arranges for the relevant service officer to draft a response.
- 2.21. Although performance data is collected for Member enquiries, the data may not always be comparable, because of the different ways in which different departments work and because of the different ways in which Members pursue their enquiries from departments. It does however provide indications of how different services are performing against the corporate standard (10 working days response time). It may also be the case that a small number of Members can create a disproportionate number of enquiries for a particular section or department, or that different departments have different kinds of enquiries, which might be more difficult to resolve.
- 2.22. Members of the Review have received evidence on how each of the different Directorates currently deal with Member Enquiries. The administration, handling and monitoring of Member enquiries are currently managed within each council directorate and there is no corporate overview. Different directorates also suffer

different volumes of Member enquiries and different types of enquiry, some of which take longer to process than others.

2.23. Each directorate has designated link officers that receive Members' enquiries as a first port of call, although the process for dealing with enquiries varies in each directorate. Enquiries are logged and monitored on computer using software known as RESPOND, which enables operatives to track individual enquiries and to monitor overall performance in dealing with enquiries. Outlined in Appendix X is a broad description of the arrangements in each directorate.

2.24. The chart below summarises the arrangements for in each directorate.

Directorate	Logged onto RESPOND?	Performance Reports produced?	Responses	
			Via the Director?	From responding service officer to Member?
Chief Executive's	No.	No	✓	
Access	Yes.	No		✓
Legal	No.	Yes		✓
Education	Yes.	No.		✓
Environmental	Yes.	Yes.		✓
Finance	Yes.	No	✓	
Housing	Yes.	Yes	✓	
Social Services	Yes.	Yes	✓	

3. Member Enquiries Performance

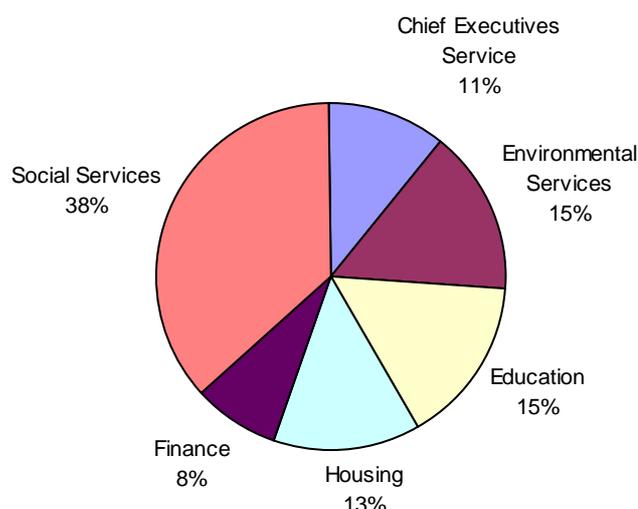
3.1. The corporate standard for dealing with Member enquiries is that enquiries should be dealt with within 10 working days of being received. Environmental Services operates a 7-day standard within the corporate standard.

3.2. The RESPOND software used to log and monitor Member enquiries is designed to produce performance reports that show the amount of enquiries that have been processed and the number that have not been answered within the corporate 10 day standard. However, not all Member enquiries are currently entered onto the RESPOND system and because there is no corporate management of the system, some departments may operate RESPOND slightly differently to others. As the way in which the RESPOND system is used differs slightly from department to department, the performance reports may not give a completely accurate overview.

3.3. Each department of the council was asked to provide the number of Member enquiries dealt with over the past year, the number dealt with within the corporate 10-day standard and the number not dealt with within 10 working days. The chart below illustrates that performance in meeting the 10-day response time varies across council directorates. What it cannot show is that performance within directorates will differ from service to service and may reflect inherent administrative difficulties for particular service areas.

% Member Enquiries Responded to Outside of 10 Days

3.4.



Directorates were also asked to provide a breakdown of the last quarter of responses made later than 10 days according to policy type. The table below shows that the majority of these are casework enquiries.

Directorate	sub-sample	Policy	Casework	Fault reporting	Budget	Cross-cutting
Chief Executives Service	10	3	6	1	0	0
Environmental Services	40	8	14	20	0	8
Education	7	0	7	0	0	0
Housing	15	0	14	1	0	0
Finance	4	0	4	0	0	0
Social Services	25	2	22	1	0	0
Total	101	13	67	23	0	8

3.5. Directorates also provided a breakdown with reasons for delay. The biggest reason for delay in responding is shown to be complexity of the request or problem resolution.

Directorate	complexity	unclear request	info not available	process failure
Chief Executives Service	4	0	0	6
Environmental Services	43	0	1	6
Education	2	0	1	3
Housing	4	1	4	5
Finance	0	0	0	4
Social Services	9	2	1	13
Total	62	3	7	37

3.6. The evidence suggests that performance in responding to Member enquiries varies between departments and that some kinds of enquiries are likely to suffer more

delays than others. The volume of Member enquiries being put through departments varies considerably and in some services will have higher numbers of more complex case enquiries. Improving performance on responding to Member enquiries is important and progress needs to be made, particularly in some departments. Members of the Review were pleased to note that performance on Members enquiries is already included as a standing item on directors' performance appraisals.

Survey of Members 2004.

- 3.7. During the Review a survey of Members was carried out. The survey revealed that the experiences of Members of the administration of their enquiries vary considerably. Some Members felt that the current system is quite adequate and have no complaints over the way in which their queries are dealt with and responded to, whilst others have expressed a range of concerns. It showed that some Members make a high number of enquiries and others very few. It also revealed that some Members use informal means of making enquiries outside of the designated contact officer. It also shows that some Members make the majority of their enquiries to particular services and it may be that some services have particular difficulties in responding to Members purely because of the nature of the service in question or because they receive a large number of queries on the same subject. One Member told the Review, "I probably make an average of one (enquiry) per week, to a variety of departments but predominantly Environment or Housing. Most of those originating at surgery are housing related".
- 3.8. Members were asked if there were any examples where the administration of Member enquiries was working well. There were a number of very positive comments. One Member told the Review, "The contact numbers for Members queries are very helpful and one can always get through".
- 3.9. "An excellent example was a noise complaint from a constituent, passed on to me through the residents association. The Noise Abatement team put together a comprehensive cross-departmental and police enforcement package when it became clear that this was a trespass and illegal "rave" situation. It was dealt with very thoroughly, efficiently and quietly. I was kept constantly informed of progress and was able to keep the resident and the chair of the residents association fully informed as the situation unfolded. The trespassers were evicted and 27 pieces of equipment confiscated. Residents were very grateful and complimentary. This was responsive action at its best, and in rather difficult circumstances, which could have gone badly wrong if it had been mishandled". *Member of Haringey Council.*
- 3.10. Members were asked if they think that Member Enquiries services have improved over the last year. Generally, Members felt that either that the support they receive has either improved or stayed the same. Positive feedback was received about improvements in Housing Services and particularly Environmental Services. One Member responded to the question, "Yes"... "Housing is much improved with a very swift service and generally comprehensive replies".
- 3.11. Members were asked if they had any ideas for service improvement. Generally, Member's want to see a system in place to improve the way in which responses are fed back from departments, so that they can rely on the fact that they will either receive a response within a certain period of time or that they will be kept informed,

without having to chase the department themselves. Some Members suggested that the system for responding to Member enquiries needs to include more detail of the outcomes of their query, eg in casework or fault reporting enquiries. One Member commented, "Environmental Services are very prompt at acknowledging enquiries with an enquiry number, however, what I really want to know is when the problem will be addressed". A tracking system for Members' enquiries was also suggested, so that the progress of case enquiries could be traced when Members want to know the outcome of a casework enquiry previously logged.

Review of Customer Complaints and Member Enquiries 2001.

- 3.12. A Review was previously carried out which encompassed arrangements for dealing with Members enquiries during 2000 – 2001. The Policy and Strategy Committee 19th June 2001 agreed 14 recommendations arising from this review⁴.
- 3.13. In evidence to the current Review, the Assistant Chief Executive provided an update on progress on the implementation of the recommendations. Most of the recommendations were now implemented, although some recommendations were not implemented fully for various reasons, some because of operational difficulties, some because of resource constraints. The current Review provided an opportunity to review and renew the relevant recommendations, taking consideration of the feasibility and resource constraints encountered with some of the previous recommendations.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

- 4.1. During the Review, Members have investigated how Members enquiries are currently managed in each of the departments, received oral and written evidence from elected Members of the Council, looked at software systems currently used for managing and monitoring Member enquiries and corporate complaints and examined the performance of Member enquiries administration across the authority. Key evidence considered has been outlined in this report and the conclusions of the Review are summarised below, along with 12 recommendations for consideration by the Executive.

Summary Conclusions

- 4.2. The Review has arrived at the following conclusions:

- There is much good practice in departments of the council, particularly in Environmental Services, but there is not a consistent approach across the council and there seems to be no corporate procedure available to all directorates.
- Members' views of the service they receive in processing their enquiries vary widely and in part varies according to the service involved and the type of enquiry. Some Members expressed high satisfaction with the current arrangements, others were dissatisfied.
- There is no central corporate responsibility for monitoring Member enquiries performance, as there is with complaints. The system for handling complaints seems to work well and is compatible with Member enquiries handling.
- The RESPOND database, which is already used for complaints handling, is fit for purpose and provides a good administrative system for recording, handling and

monitoring Member enquiries, but it needs to be used consistently across all directorates of the Council.

- There are different ways of handling Member enquiries in different departments of the Council, including different definitions on the ground as to what might constitute a Members Enquiry and different ways of recording them. Not all departments use the RESPOND software system in the same way.
- Administration of Member Enquiries handling, including use of the RESPOND database, does not appear to be incorporated into training for new staff dealing with Member enquiries, which might give rise to an inconsistent operational approach.
- There is no system by which Council services are able to learn from the recurrent problems reported through Member enquiries, which would contribute to the Council's improvement and performance framework.

4.3. During the Review, Members gave consideration to the appointment of a permanent centrally based Members' support officer with specific responsibilities for logging and progress chasing enquiries on behalf of Members. Although a designated support officer would increase capacity to the support for Members in chasing enquiries, the Review concluded that this proposal would not provide desired improvement and does not offer value for money.

Recommendations

4.4. The Review is putting forward the following recommendations to the Executive:

Recommendation One

A Corporate Procedure for Member Enquiries

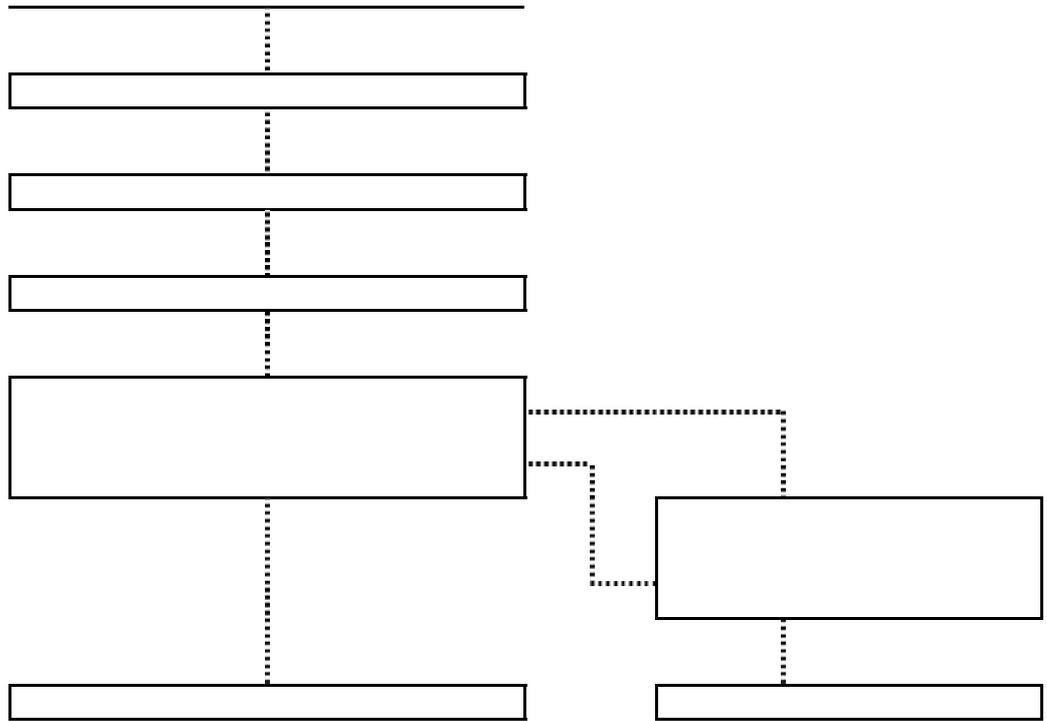
Description

It is recommended 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.

The Review has concluded that the administrative support and performance in dealing with Member enquiries could be improved and managed more effectively if there was a single corporate approach. This would enable Members to better understand how enquiries should be placed and how they are dealt with, even if they are not familiar with a particular department's procedures. It would also make it easier to outline the process to Members and officers for information and for training, for departments to check that the procedures are being followed and to amend the process where further improvements can be made.

An outline proposal for the corporate procedure in Appendix Six.





Recommendation Two
A Protocol for Member Enquiries

Description

It is recommended that the main elements of the corporate procedures for Member enquiries should be outlined in a corporate protocol for use by Members and officers.

It is recommended that the protocol defines the way in which Member enquiries are placed, administered and logged. This should include the corporate definition as to what constitutes a Member enquiry and standardised ways of recording and responding to them.

The definition of a Member enquiry should include everything from a policy question to a casework enquiry. Members of the Council should log their enquiries through the designated Member enquiries contact (link) officer for the respective department if they expect their enquiry to be processed within the 10-day corporate standard.

Recommendation Three
Revision of the Haringey Council Constitution

Description

It is 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.

The definition of how Member enquiries are dealt with and the corporate standard response time is included in Part C3 of the Haringey Council Constitution (Members of the Council, Protocol on Member/Officer Relations). This section of the Constitution needs to

be updated in line with the recommendations agreed from this Review and to add greater clarification. In particular the section relating to the corporate standard response time currently provides for a 7-day response time in the case of the Leader, any Executive Member, the Chair of Scrutiny or Lead Members of political groups. This gives undue priority to those Members of the Council and adds extra burden upon departments with a very short maximum time frame in which to respond.

The introduction of the new procedures, as outlined in this report will allow for a more consistent approach and a more reliable framework for responses to be made in line with the corporate 10 working day standard. The Constitution should also be amended to clarify that the corporate standard response time is 10 working days (2 weeks), as the present text (12.12 – 12.23) allows 10 days.

Recommendation Four

A Designated Contact Officer for Member Enquiries in Each Directorate

Description

It is recommended 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.

This recommendation is based upon the current good practice observed during the Review and is close to the system currently operating. It is proposed that a lead officer is identified within each service, so that there is an identified person responsible for making sure that enquiries are responded to on time, that the standard is adhered to and to facilitate an effective single point of contact. This role may fit within a team of support officers or may be handled by a director's personal assistant, depending on the staffing arrangements in each service, but should be deputised where the officer responsible is absent to ensure continuity of service.

Recommendation Five

Member Enquiries Electronic Mailboxes for Each Department

Description

It is 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.

The electronic mailbox system for receiving enquiries is already in operation in some services and has been noted during the Review as current good practice in Environmental Services. For most Members, e-mail provides the most effective way of placing an enquiry, as it is quick, accessible and automatically provides a record of correspondence. In order to make enquiries by e-mail more accessible, it is anticipated that e-mail addresses will follow a corporate format for each service, e.g. (service name).members@haringey.gov.uk. The format should be an easy to remember email address for each service. The mailbox should be checked at least daily and serviced even when the designated Member enquiries link officer is on leave or absent and feature an automated response to show that the e-mail is received.

Recommendation Six

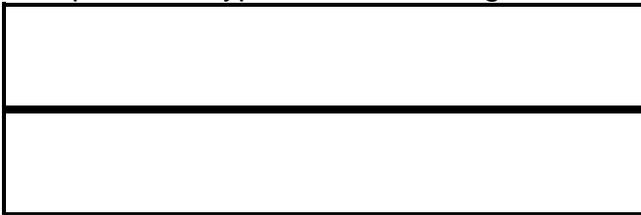
Member Enquiries Contacts Card for Each Member of the Council

Description

It is 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. (Cost estimate per print run: 100 cards printed & laminated £60 + Typesetting £22.50 = £85.)

Members need to be able to contact the appropriate Member enquiries link officer within each department easily and the credit card sized contacts card is one way of achieving this. It should contain the generic contacts for Member enquiries within each service and yet be small enough to fit into a wallet for convenience so that councillors can vary this around with them. The contacts on the card need to be simple and generic so that they are easy to remember and do not change often over time.

The contacts card should be made cheaply and at negligible cost, e.g. on laminated card and should be issued to Members each year and upon request. Appendix Six provides an example of the type of card envisaged.



Recommendation Seven

Corporate Monitoring of Member Enquiries Performance

Description

It is recommended that the Members' Support Officer Sc 5/6 (Members' and Democratic Services) be deleted and a new 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 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.

Member enquiries performance should be considered by the Executive at least quarterly, it is envisaged that performance in responding to enquiries to timescale be reported monthly to CEMB and the Executive, as with complaints performance. It is envisaged that the corporate responsibility for monitoring Member enquiry performance should sit within the Improvement and Performance service in the Chief Executives department, which already has responsibility for collating and monitoring customer complaints.

It is suggested that a part time post (0.5 FTE, grade SO1) be established within the Improvement and Performance service of the Chief Executives department (located in Corporate Complaints) with responsibility to oversee the performance of Member enquiries. The deletion of the current provision for a Members support post with

Democratic Services should allow for resources to be available for increased staffing provision in Improvement and Performance.

Recommendation Eight

New RESPOND Software Used Across the Council

Description

It is recommended that the RESPOND software system should be used across the Council in all directorates and be used in a standardised way to log and monitor enquiries.

The Review has considered the use of the RESPOND database system for administrating Member enquiries, both the current software used in some departments of the council and upgrading this software to allow a more interactive service, where Members are able to trace the progress of their enquiries themselves from a remote computer without going through the designated link officer.

The Review has found that the RESPOND system, which already used effectively to administrate corporate complaints, offers a very effective way of logging and monitoring enquiries, but that not all services utilise the software fully. It is being recommended that the software is fully utilised in all directorates across the council in a standardised way. It is anticipated that the outline procedure for logging and monitoring enquiries using RESPOND will be co-ordinated by the Improvement and Performance section of the Chief Executive's Service.

Recommendation Nine

Additional Respond software

Description

It is recommended 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. *Cost estimate:*

Software [unlimited access]	£15,000
Installation	£6,300
Annual telephone support fee	<u>£3,000</u>
TOTAL COST	£24,300

The Review has also recommended that the Netpoint upgrade to the RESPOND software is also purchased to allow Members to access the progress of the enquiries from a remote computer. It is suggested that this be funded in part by the savings remaining from the deletion of the Members support post and part as a growth bid.

Recommendation Ten

Learning From Member Enquiries

Description

It is recommended 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.

Member casework enquiries and fault reporting often highlight issues that may be useful as management information for service improvement. Many of these enquiries record reported problems at the coal face of service delivery and recurring problems can signal the need for management intervention or policy change. Individual Member enquiries may also give rise to management review for service improvement and it is recommended that, where appropriate, these are automatically referred by the designated Member enquiries link officer to the appropriate level of service management. The Review received preliminary legal advice on this recommendation and it should be noted that details of individuals would need to be obscured in these reports in order to protect client confidentiality.

Recommendation Eleven **Member Enquiries Training**

Description

It is recommended 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.

With the introduction of a more corporate approach to Member enquiries administration, it should become possible to improve the training arrangements for staff dealing with these enquiries. The introduction of new software facilities will also make training more important in order to realise the full benefits of the RESPOND program. Integration of Member enquiries administration within staff training should improve the administration and consistency of service and allow for the effective implementation of the new corporate procedures recommended by this Review.

In order that Members understand the new protocol and process for placing enquiries and so that there is a more consistent way of place enquiries in line with the corporate procedure, it is recommended that the new corporate procedures for Member enquiries are also integrated into Member training.

Recommendation Twelve **Member Enquiries Referencing**

Description

It is recommended that each Member enquiry be allocated a unique reference number to be quoted on all related correspondence and telephone queries. This should allow convenient referencing of all enquiries logged and help to avoid duplication.

So that Members are able to trace the progress of their queries, it is proposed that all directorates use a corporate referencing system for enquiries, so that Members can be given a unique number reference when they place the enquiry, which can be used to track the progress of the enquiry (especially casework and fault reporting enquiries). This should enable Members to retrieve enquiries they have made in the past and help to avoid

duplication, where the same enquiry may be placed more than once. The referencing system is compatible with the RESPOND database.

References

1. *The Constitution of the London Borough of Haringey, January 2005.*
2. *A New Approach to Customer Complaints and Members' Enquiries – report to the Policy and Strategy Committee 19th June 2001*
3. *12.19 The Constitution of the London Borough of Haringey, January 2005.*
4. *PS 12, Minutes Policy and Strategy Committee 19th June 2001*
5. *Minutes Policy and Strategy Committee 19th June 2001*

APPENDIX ONE

Member Enquiries

<p>Chief Executives Jan McNicholas jan.mcnicholas@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 2648</p> <p>Franca Fortunato franca.fortunato@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 1952</p> <p>Alison Crookendale alison.crookendale@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 5934</p>	<p>General, Organisational Development, Strategy</p> <p>Access Services</p> <p>Legal Services</p>
<p>Education members.education.enquiries@haringey.gov.uk Deborah Bolt deborah.bolt@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 3883</p>	<p>General</p>
<p>Environmental Services Streetscene.Members@haringey.gov.uk Marian Cooney Address: Hornsey Town Hall, The Broadway, Crouch End, N8 Tel: 020 8489 1786 Fax: 020 8489 1770</p>	<p>for Waste Management, Highways (incl. Traffic management, CPZs, etc.) & Parking.</p>
<p>Planning.Members@haringey.gov.uk Mailbox owner: Tay Makoon Address: 639 High Road, Tottenham N17 8BD Tel: 020 8489 5603 Fax: 020 8489 5220</p>	<p>for Planning Policy, Development Control (Planning permissions & refusals), Transportation Policy & Building Control.</p>
<p>Enforcement.Members@haringey.gov.uk Mailbox owner: Claire Amsbury/Kamud Joshi Address: 639 High Road, Tottenham N17 8BD Tel: 020 8489 5523 Fax: 020 8489 5553</p>	<p>for Waste Enforcement, Licensing, Food & Infectious Disease, Health & Safety, Mortuary, Noise nuisance, Animal Warden, Private housing inspections, Houses in Multiple Occupation, Air Quality & Contaminated Land.</p>
<p>Recreation.Members@haringey.gov.uk Mailbox owner: Tim Pyall Address: Ashley Road Depot, Tottenham N17 9LN Tel: 020 8489 5662 Fax: 020 8489 5642</p>	<p>for Parks, Trees, Allotments, Conservation, Grounds Maintenance, Cemeteries, Football Pitches, Leisure Centres.</p>
<p>Environment.Members@haringey.gov.uk Mailbox owner: Rachel Parr/ Cheryl Carnegie Address: Tottenham Town Hall, Town Hall Approach Road, Tottenham N15 4RY Tel: 020 8489 4505 Fax: 020 8489 4591</p>	<p>We have set up this general e-mail address for Members that are not sure which Service to send their enquiry to, or in the case the enquiry concerns more than one service and needs co-ordination of response).</p>
<p>Finance Dee Swaby dee.swaby@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 3823</p> <p>Finance cont.. Mark Couchman mark.couchman@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 2845</p>	<p>General</p> <p>Benefits</p>

Housing Services housing.complaints@haringey.gov.uk Andy James andy.james@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 4321	General
Social Services Sue Evans sue.evans@haringey.gov.uk Tel: 020 8489 3385	General

APPENDIX TWO

Business Case Pro Forma

Using RESPOND System for Members' Enquiries

1 PROJECT DEFINITION	
Description	To consider options for standardising and improving the use of the RESPOND complaints database for Members Enquiries.
Objectives	To develop clear procedures for logging and tracking Members Enquiries. To enable councillors to access the RESPOND database via Harinet to track progress of their own enquires.
2 COSTS AND BENEFITS	
Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the RESPOND database as it currently is, but consistently across the board and with properly documented procedures and training. 2. Purchasing additional software (NetPoint Employee Self Service Module) that will allow access to RESPOND via Harinet.
Benefits	<p>Option 1 No additional funding required for purchasing software. Members should be able to get all the information they need through contacting a nominated officer once an agreed procedure is put in place. The existing database can provide the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance reports could be run at an agreed frequency. • Standard letters eg acknowledgements letters • Case management facility with reminders to ensure timely response • Full details of cases can be logged to enable analysis of trends • Tracking of cases through appropriate officers <p>Option 2 The additional software package would enable members to track progress of their own enquiries without contacting officers. They would be able to log member enquiries, check whether their enquiries are on the database and identify which officer is dealing with their enquiries. They would also be able to check whether the matter had already been raised as a member enquiry or as a complaint, thereby avoiding duplication.</p>

Costs	<p><u>1. Using existing RESPOND software</u> No purchase cost but resource needs to be identified for developing and maintaining procedures and refining the database.</p> <p><u>2. Employee Self Service</u> Software [unlimited number of users] £15,000 Installation £6,300 Annual telephone support fee <u>£3,000</u> TOTAL COST £24,300</p> <p>A resource needs to be identified for developing and maintaining procedures and refining the database as for Option 1. Additionally, IT resources need to be allocated to ensure the software is compatible with Haringey's IT systems.</p>
Budget	There is no current budget provision.
4	
Risk Log	<p>Option 1 No risks identified.</p> <p>Option 2 There would need to be early discussions with all the relevant people in IT and Northgate to ensure that Netpoint fits in with the Council's overall strategies. The work would also need to be prioritised within the overall IT development programme before it could go ahead.</p>
5 COMMENTS	
Financial	There is no current budget provision and this would need to be identified as part of the budget planning process.
Legal	There are no specific legal implications.
Equalities	There are no specific equalities implications.
6 AUTHORITY TO PROCEED	
Sign-off	

APPENDIX THREE

– Arrangements for the administration of Member Enquiries in each directorate

Chief Executive's Department

Member enquiries to the Chief Executive's department will be handled differently depending on the nature of the enquiry and how it is instigated. Broadly, enquiries are either dealt with through the Chief Executive's office, through the Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) – Access, or through Legal Services.

For the Chief Executive's office, the link officer is Chief Executive's PA, who passes the enquiry on to the relevant service officer or deal with. Sometimes, councillors approach the relevant service officer directly, in these cases, the enquiries are not logged. The RESPOND system is not currently used to log enquiries, a manual record is maintained instead and performance monitoring reports are not routinely produced. All responses to Members go out from the Chief Executive.

For ACE (Access) the link officer is PA to Assistant Chief Executive, who passes the enquiry on to the relevant service officer or deal with. Sometimes, councillors approach the relevant service officer directly, in these cases, the enquiries are not logged. The RESPOND database is used to log enquiries, but no performance monitoring report is routinely produced. The responses normally go out from a second tier officer in his or her name.

For Legal Services the link officer is Head of Service PA. Councillors usually approach the Head of Legal Services or one of the principal lawyers, who ensure that the handling officer is aware and has copies of all documents. Responses usually go out in the name of the Principal Lawyer who has responsibility for the subject of the enquiry, signed "on behalf of Head of Legal Services". Performance is monitored through a form, which is completed with details of enquiries made eg number Member Enquiries received, number completed etc., and this is reported to the Chief Executive very month.

Education Services

The PA to the Director of Education acts as the link officer in the Education Directorate. Member Enquires are logged using the RESPOND system after they have been completed, but RESPOND is not used for monitoring of enquiries in process. Councillors direct their query to the link officer, and she also picks up any queries that go straight to the Director. Where Member enquiries are sent directly to the service officer, that officer passes the details to the link officer to be logged. Responses to Member enquires are approved by a first or second tier officer and go out in their name. At present, performance reports are not produced, although the directorate are about to introduce a performance reporting system.

Environmental Services

There are several members of staff acting as the link officers, whose jobs are dedicated to dealing with enquiries by Members of the Council. All enquiries are logged onto the RESPOND system. Councillors usually contact the link officer directly, but they sometimes go directly to the relevant service officer, although the enquiry should still be logged onto RESPOND by an officer within the service team. Councillors may also enquire

directly to the Director of Environment and in these cases the query would usually be handled by the Director's PA and are logged onto RESPOND.

Responses to esquires are normally sent by the officer dealing with the enquiry directly to the Member. If the enquiry is cross-cutting or raises more than one issue, the receiving officer will co-ordinate, collate and send out the final and complete response. The Director's office can be approached for support and often deals with the more complex cases. Performance reports are run from RESPOND showing number of enquiries completed and the number of overdue case on a monthly base. Weekly reports are provided for the support of officer for open and overdue cases, which are reported to Complaints' Champions and DMT.

Financial Services

One member of staff acts as the link officer and deals with complaints and Member enquiries. Dealing with Member enquiries takes up approximately 25% of her workload. In cases where Members direct the query to the Director, they are passed on to the link officer to be processed. Members may also direct their emails directly to the service officer and the officer passes the details on to the link officer for the case to be logged onto RESPOND. All responses go through the Director of Finance and go out in his name. Enquiries are logged onto the RESPOND system, although no performance reports are produced or monitored on Member Enquiries.

Housing Services

In the Housing Directorate there is one member of staff acting as link officer whose job is dedicated to dealing with Member enquiries. The Housing Complaints Manager also assists. Members usually email the Housing Complaints and Enquiries team directly with their enquiries. Where the Councillor directs the query to the Director or Assistant Director, the details are passed on to the link officer to be processed. They may also go directly to the service officer and where this happens, the enquiry is not logged. Service officers draft the response and they are checked by Housing Complaints and Enquiries Team and signed by the Director. Enquiries are usually logged onto the RESPOND system. The Housing Complaints Manager produces monthly performance statistics from RESPOND and these are considered at the Housing Services DMT.

Social Services

There is one person within Social Services acting as link officer whose job is dedicated to processing Member enquiries. The Executive Assistant in the Director's Support Office also assists. Members usually email their enquiry directly to the link officer. They are also occasionally forwarded to the Director's Support Office from the Member's Support Team at the Civic Centre. Where the Member directs the query directly to the Director or Assistant Director, the details are passed on to the Member enquiries officer to be processed. Members may direct their e-mails directly to the service officer and where this happens, the enquiry is not logged or monitored. All responses to Member enquiries go through the Director of Social Services and go out in her name. Member enquiries are logged onto the RESPOND system and a performance report of outstanding Member enquiries and complaints is produced weekly.

APPENDIX FOUR

- Member Enquiries Performance by department

A. Performance by department back from end of September 2004.

<i>Directorate</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Total No. Enquiries</i>	<i>No. responded to Within 10 Days</i>	<i>responded to Outside of 10 Days</i>
Chief Executives Service	January - September	227	81.9%	18.1%
Environmental Services	April - September	808	75.0%	25.0%
Education	January - September	105	75.2%	24.8%
Housing	April - September	269	78.4%	21.6%
Finance	January - September	107	86.9%	13.1%
Social Services	April - September	165	40.0%	60.0%
Total		1681	73.8%	26.2%

B. Breakdown of the last quarter of responses above (A) made later than 10 days according to policy type.

Directorate	<i>sub-sample</i>	Policy	Casework	Fault reporting	Budget	Cross-cutting
Chief Executives Service	10	3	6	1	0	0
Environmental Services	40	8	14	20	0	8
Education	7	0	7	0	0	0
Housing	15	0	14	1	0	0
Finance	4	0	4	0	0	0
Social Services	25	2	22	1	0	0
Total	101	13	67	23	0	8

C. Breakdown of responses above (A) made later than 10 days with reasons for delay

Directorate	complexity	unclear request	info not available	process failure
Chief Executives Service	4	0	0	6
Environmental Services	43	0	1	6
Education	2	0	1	3
Housing	4	1	4	5
Finance	0	0	0	4
Social Services	9	2	1	13
Total	62	3	7	37

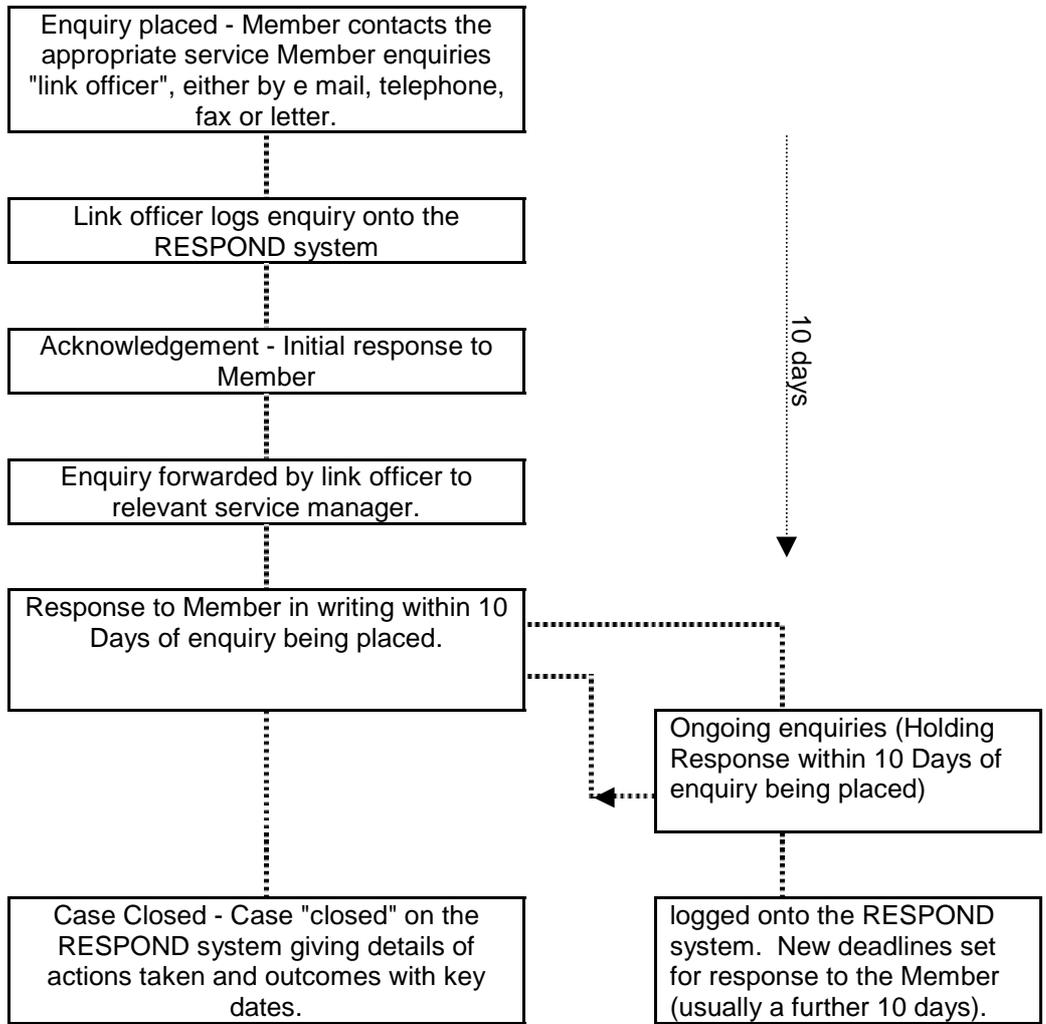
APPENDIX FIVE

MEMBER ENQUIRIES QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: ____	Do you give permission to use this as published evidence in the Scrutiny Review? YES / NO (<i>please delete as appropriate</i>)
Q1 Please can you tell us how many enquiries you make to departments a week and to which department / service?	
Q2 Do you think that Member Enquiries services have improved over the last year?	
Q3 Can you give any examples of good practice where it has worked well? Please describe a specific example.	
Q4 Can you give any examples of poor practice where it has not worked well? Please describe a specific example.	
Q5 Can you give any suggestions for service improvement?	

Please return to Cllr Sulaiman – Chair ODPM Scrutiny Panel
C/O Chris McLean – Head of Members and Democratic Services
in person

or C/O Michael Carr Principal Scrutiny Support Officer
Room G13, Civic Centre, Wood Green.



Proposed Member Enquiries Procedure – flow chart

**APPENDIX SEVEN
- Member Enquiries Contacts Card**

	
MEMBER ENQUIRY CONTACTS CARD	
Telephone 020 8489	
Chief Executives Service:	2648
Education Services:	3883
Environmental Services:	1786
Finance:	3823
Housing Services:	4321
Legal Services:	5934
Planning:	5603
Social Services.....	3385

Side A

	
MEMBER ENQUIRY CONTACTS CARD	
E-Mail	
corporate.members@haringey.gov.uk	
education.members@haringey.gov.uk	
environment.members@haringey.gov.uk	
finance.members@haringey.gov.uk	
housing.members@haringey.gov.uk	
legal.members@haringey.gov.uk	
planning.members@haringey.gov.uk	
socialservices.members@haringey.gov.uk	
streetscene.members@haringey.gov.uk	

Side B

Diagram X (Example only)