

	<p>Performance and Contract Management Committee</p> <p>1 September 2015</p>
Title	Members' Enquiries service a review
Report of	Customer Services Operations Director
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	Appendix A - Members' Enquiries Action Plan. Appendix B - Number of enquiries by delivery unit and service level achieved.
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<h2>Summary</h2>
<p>CSG Customer Services provide and manage a Members' Enquires service as part of the Customer Services contract. As a result of some Members receiving an inconsistent service, a review of the service was requested by Members of this Committee to ensure that the service standards were understood and to identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>This report attempts to address these concerns by providing an overview of the service, examples of poor quality service provided, the analysis of the root causes of the issues and the improvements being made by the Customer Services management team to address the issues. It also provides information on a new process for Members to escalate enquiries which they believe have not been handled effectively.</p>

Recommendations

- 1. That the Committee consider and comment on the improvements described in this report and the action plan attached as Appendix A.**
- 2. That the Committee note that feedback regarding the Members' Enquiries Service is welcomed at any time by CSG Customer Services Operations and will always be reviewed with the aim of improving the service further.**
- 3. That the Committee agree that a follow up progress report will be provided for the Committee meeting on 17 November 2015.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The Members' Enquires service provides a front end service for all Members of the Council. The service ensures that all enquiries are logged, tracked, and resolved either by them or sent to the appropriate team to be resolved. Although the Customer Services contact centre at Coventry operates the Members' Enquiries service, it is important that all parts of the council manage Members' enquiries consistently and meet Member expectations.
- 1.2 The Members' Enquiries service is for any enquiry a Member has about the council. An enquiry is not the same as a service request, but the Members' Enquiries service can be used for occasions where a service request has not been managed correctly or delivered on time, or where a Member has evidence that the council is not following its own policies and processes. Enquiries typically include escalated issues such as, where a service has not responded to a customer request within service level or where the response to the resident has been inadequate.
- 1.3 The Members' Enquiries service is not intended to be a parallel or priority channel for customers or Members to request council services or for customers to make formal complaints about quality of service received from the Council. These matters have separate channels.
- 1.4 Customer Services handles emails and calls from Members regarding enquiries about services for which it is responsible for and those which are managed by the council's retained delivery units and council partners. It is the responsibility of the Members' Enquiries team to distribute the enquiries to the correct team, ensure responses are received in a timely manner and confirm the enquiry is resolved to the Member's satisfaction so the case can be closed.
- 1.5 All Members can send an enquiry to Customer Services, where it is logged and sent to the appropriate officer for the service. A resolution and response is due after 5 working days. However, if a resolution is not possible then a holding email should be sent explaining the delay.

The contact centre has a target of responding to 95% of Members' enquiries within 5 days of receipt. The 5 days starts from the date and time the email is received by the contact centre. In recognition of concerns about timely response to Members' enquiries and aligning to the council's other

communications routes, the target for providing a response to Members' enquiries was reduced from 10 to 5 days in September 2014.

- 1.6 Customer Services has handled 1989 Members' enquiries between 1 January 2015 and 30 June 2015. 1874 (94.2%) of these have been responded to within the agreed Service Level of 5 days and 1328 (66.7%) were resolved (or closed) within 5 days.

Since the target was changed from a 10 day to a 5 day SLA, Customer Services has continued to drive improvement in the level of cases resolved within 5 days with the delivery units, and the action plan attached as Appendix A contains actions to specifically target the reduction in the number of cases closed outside of 5 days.

- 1.7 There is no standard target for cases which cannot be resolved within 5 days because different enquiries have different levels of complexity.

With regards to services which are carried out by Re with the exception of emergency repairs, most non-urgent reactive repairs will take up to 28 days. In bad weather conditions, they will take longer. This is due to volume, contractor capacity and budget constraints. For enquiries that relate to traffic related schemes, if they are not part of the planned programme, they are unlikely to be completed in 2015 and will be added to a list to be considered as part of a future year's programme. Therefore, while the service should be able to assess the enquiry and explain what is going to happen in 5 days, it is unlikely that the actual work will be carried out. In general, the case can only be closed in 5 days when it is an emergency repair or Re is responding to confirm the case is not a priority and will be included in a future year's programme.

Appendix B provides more detail about the volume of enquiries and the numbers responded to and resolved within 5 days.

- 1.8 The Customer Services team was made aware of concerns from some Members and council officers that the Members' Enquiries service was not meeting expectations. In particular the following cases were escalated by Members for Customer Services to investigate:

- A damaged road sign which had not been repaired
- A request for information from the Highways Department which was incorrectly forwarded as a Freedom of Information request
- A bollard lying on a pavement which had not been removed after it had been replaced due to damage caused by a road accident
- Protruding kerb stones which took 28 days to repair and required the contractor to review the quality of the work that had been completed
- Rats in a communal housing area had been reported, but took 20 days to resolve.

These specific cases were investigated and prompted a wider review which identified that:

- Enquiries were not always sent to the right service or contact
- Enquiries were not always closed within agreed timescales
- Delays were not always clearly communicated to the Member
- Enquiries were not always correctly categorised – e.g. assigning it as a new service request, when there was evidence the case had been previously raised by a customer
- Incomplete or partial resolution of enquiries, especially where more than one delivery unit was involved
- Incorrect use of terms, for example, cases being reported as 'suspended' when the service was waiting for a response from a third party
- Poor quality of written English and inappropriate tone
- Inconsistency in the ownership of the tracking process
- Lack of awareness of urgency of enquiries based on the priority of the issue and impact on customers– a 'one size fits all' procedure
- Members' enquiries which had not been fulfilled within agreed timescales were not escalated in an effective way to lead to the ultimate resolution of the enquiry.

Appendix A details an action plan that sets out a number of actions which are expected to improve performance in relation to these issues.

1.9 There were two key issues that were identified as root causes of these concerns:

- Failure to adequately track complex enquiries in all cases, and;
- Training of Customer Service Advisors and council staff who receive enquires to answer.

Improvements required to track complex complaints

- Re receives the highest volume (over 50%) of enquiries from Members and this has increased by approximately 25% in quarter 1 2015/16 against the same quarter in 2014. It should be noted that the resources to manage these enquiries have not increased.
- There is often an overlap in services, as with the example regarding a broken road sign, which involved both Street Scene and Highways. Overlapping enquiries require additional communication to ensure the case is fully addressed and co-ordinated and this can cause a delay to resolving the request.
- While it is possible in some cases to provide an initial response in 5 days, many cases- especially those raised to Re as noted above, will not meet the 'intervention level criteria' and therefore resolution in 5 days is not possible. Some traffic related cases may never be resolved if they are not included in the annual programme of works agreed by Environment Committee or referred to Area Committees (who may be able to use their delegated budgets to progress schemes). Re is reviewing the response to cases where resolution is not possible due to the 'intervention level' not being reached.

- While Re places the works order, the work is generally carried out by either the DSO (Direct Service Organisation) or another contractor. In some of the cases investigated works orders were raised correctly but the work was not completed to the satisfaction of the resident and the work had to be reviewed.
- It was identified in some cases that where the service level of 5 days was not being met, the escalation step was ineffective and had simply been acting as a reminder to the case officer, rather than escalating the outstanding query to the case officer's line management.

Training of Customer Services Advisors and council staff to ensure correct processes followed

- Many Members' enquiries are service requests, and these need to be managed as such unless there is evidence that the request has already been made and not managed effectively. Further work and training is required to ensure that service requests are raised through the correct process.
- In some cases the Delivery Unit had responded directly to the Member without routing back or copying their response to the Member's Enquiries team. In most cases this does not cause an issue. However, if an enquiry requires multiple inputs then the Member may sometimes receive fragmented information and more than one email response.
- There have been cases of a Delivery Unit responding to the Member on behalf of another Delivery Unit without the correct sign off or input.

The following should be noted:

- The Members' Enquiries team will not respond to emails where they are just copied in, so if a Member requires a response they should ensure the Members' Enquiries team is included in the 'To' field of an email.
- The Members' Enquiries team often has to split an enquiry into its component parts. In order that each service area receives its component part and it can be tracked, each part will receive a separate case number. This avoids confusion in the event there are subsequent queries in relation to the enquiries raised.
- In the event an enquiry is misdirected or handled incorrectly, all Members of the Members' Enquiries team receive coaching and briefing as soon as possible.

1.10 It was noted Members may need to escalate enquiries or service requests which have not been dealt with fully or correctly. In response to this need for a clear escalation point a new Members' Escalations process has been introduced for Members to:

- Request updates or escalate enquiries which they do not feel are being managed within the agreed timeframe of 5 days; or

- Where an enquiry has not been, managed to the standard that is expected.

The new process was effective from 6 July 2015 and has been tested. The new process will be fully communicated in September.

Although there is a 5 day SLA when dealing with Members' Enquiries and Escalated Members' Enquiries, where the enquiry is clearly urgent or involves a safeguarding issue this will be prioritised and addressed as quickly as possible.

- 1.11 Customer Services are committed to carrying out regular internal due diligence to ensure that Members' Enquiries are being handled in accordance with expectations of Members. The examples provided already, and referred to above, will be used to develop internal review materials. These will be supplemented with lessons learnt from enquiries which have been escalated.
- 1.12 A new quality management system is being implemented within Customer Services, and this system includes more robust and more regular monitoring of emails, telephone calls and the correct usage of systems. The process for monitoring email responses includes ensuring that:
 - All questions have been answered
 - Emails are broken down into parts and given separate case numbers where appropriate (for example, where one email contains a request for Street Scene and Parking and two separate cases need to be raised for the service areas)
 - Responses have the appropriate tone, are grammatically correct and are spelt correctly
 - Referrals are made back to the delivery unity where an incomplete response has been provided by them.
- 1.13 Customer Services welcomes a visit from Members to the Coventry site to meet with the Members' Enquiries team. This would be an opportunity to deepen understanding about the issues faced by Members and also for the team to explain the processes that they follow.
- 1.14 As a result of the investigation, an action plan (attached as Appendix A with action owners and dates) is being delivered by the Customer Services management team. The action plan has already addressed the escalation process and improvements continue to be identified and made.

Actions already taken include:

- Training to ensure that the processes are correctly understood across delivery units.

- The use of systems across Customer Services and the delivery units is being reviewed.
- Increased quality monitoring of responses sent to Members is being carried out, and the output from this monitoring identifies root causes from which additional actions can be identified.
- Improved escalation processes have been implemented both with the delivery units and for Members.

1.15 For the November Committee Customer Services will report against its objective to respond to more than 95% of Members' enquiries within 5 days. It will also report on the percentage of cases resolved within 5 days and the actions taken by Customer Services to improve the resolution rate. A report will also be delivered against the action plan in Appendix A.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To respond comprehensively and effectively to concerns raised about the Members' Enquiries service and ensure Members receive a quality service.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

3.1 Not applicable.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Many of the improvements described have already been implemented. The improvements described will be fully implemented by 30 August 2015

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

5.1.1 Customer Services is a corporate priority for Barnet as described in the Corporate Plan, and the design principles and customer.

5.1.2 The Corporate Plan explains that Customer services will be intuitive and flexible, with increased user satisfaction

- By 2020, the majority of customer interaction with the council will be via the web and other self-service channels which will be quicker and more flexible.
- Customers will experience a consistently high quality personalised service, focussed on achieving fast and effective resolution of queries and requests.
- Customer services will be intuitive, recognising the interests of users and sign-posting them to other services they might require.
- Resolution of issues raised at the first point of contact with the council will occur over 80% of the time and satisfaction with the services people receive will consistently exceed 90%.

- The Performance Indicator for responding to Member Enquiries is 95% within 5 days, where respond includes advising of delay. Customer Services is responsible for reporting to delivery units' outstanding enquiries where delay is advised.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.2.1 The action plan utilises existing resources within Customer Services, there are no additional resource implications, and no requirement for additional IT investment. There are a few minor configuration changes to the email & Lagan CRM (customer relationship management) system resulting from the action plan the costs of these will be managed within existing resources.

5.3 Social Value

Improvements to the Members' Enquiries process will ensure Members receive quicker and more accurate responses to enquiries which are raised in response to concerns from residents, or are raised for the benefit of residents.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

5.4.1 Council's Constitution, Responsibility for Functions, Annex A details the functions of the Performance and Contract Management Committee which include:

- (1) Overall responsibility for quarterly budget monitoring, including monitoring trading position and financial strategy of Council Delivery Units.
- (2) Monitoring of Performance against targets by Delivery Units and Support Groups including Customer Support Group; Re; the Barnet Group Ltd (including Barnet Homes and Your Choice Barnet); HB Public Law; NSL; Adults and Communities; Family Services; Education and Skills; Street Scene; Public Health; Commissioning Group; and Assurance.
- (3) Receive and scrutinise contract variations and change requests in respect of external delivery units.
- (4) To make recommendations to Policy and Resources and Theme Committees on relevant policy and commissioning implications arising from the scrutiny of performance of Delivery Units and External Providers.

5.5 Risk Management

Customer Services maintains a risk register. There have been no new risks identified as result of the implementation of the improvements from the action plan. However, the process review and the improvements being made will reduce the risk of Members' enquiries not being resolved within a timely manner.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

The improvements described in this report support Members in their advocacy for all Barnet residents. Improved processes ensure that all residents have their cases managed effectively and that any protected characteristics are taken into account appropriately.

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

Not applicable.

5.8 Insight

Not applicable.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable.