

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny – September 2024

Briefing Note: Members enquiries Process

Purpose of the briefing note: To provide the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee with an overview of the current Members enquiries process and to seek Members views on a review of the service.

1. Overview

- 1.1 At the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee meeting on 30 July 2024, the Committee requested that the current Members enquiries process is reviewed and that there is a focus on service improvement for Members. This includes the possibility of resolving queries, rather than services requests in a more informal and timely manner. The current process is overseen by the Complaints Team.
- 1.2 A Q&A session is due to take place at the Corporate O&S Committee meeting on 17 September and this briefing note provides some background detail ahead of this engagement.

2. Current Members enquiries process.

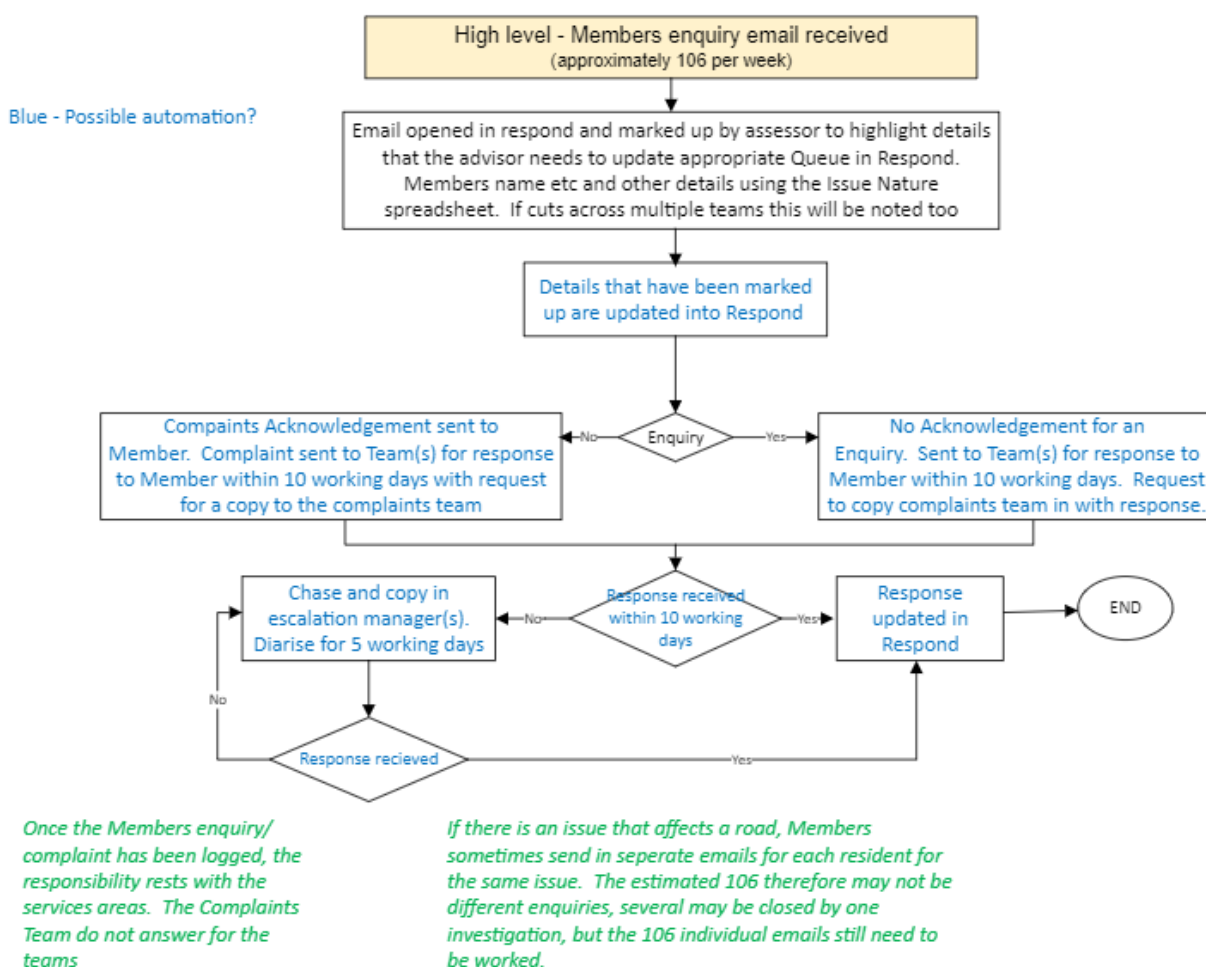
- 2.1 The current Members enquiries process consists of Members emailing MembersEnquiries@thurrock.gov.uk their information requests (often on the behalf of residents as part of casework) and detailing what information they are requesting and why. This is then logged on a case management system and assigned to the appropriate department for response.
- 2.2 An acknowledgement (generally via email) will be sent to the relevant Councillor within 48 hours, and a full response to the enquiry should be received within 10 working days of the date of receipt. If a response is unable to be provide within the 10 day timeframe, Members will be informed of this, along with the reasons why.
- 2.3 Officers will send their response directly to the Councillor who submitted the enquiry. For casework on behalf of residents, it is the Member's responsibility to inform the resident of the outcome of their enquiry.

- 2.4 There is a separate process for general service requests which can be made by a resident or a Councillor by emailing General.Enquiries@thurrock.gov.uk . This is an initial request made for a service, including wheelie bin replacement or housing repair. If the Council fails to respond to or deliver this service, this may be escalated into a complaint.

3. Review of the service

- 3.1 As part of ascertaining how the scrutiny function can have a tangible impact on the Members enquiries process, O&S Officers met with the Head of Customer Services on 15 August 2024 as responsibility of this function had recently moved across in July 2024.
- 3.2 There was a recent review of the case management systems used for Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, complaints and Members enquiries. A new system has been procured to replace 'Respond' (Infreemation) to support a more streamlined approach to logging and tracking these requests.
- 3.3 In addition, the service is beginning to review the existing Members enquiries process (outlined above), particularly in light of the digital innovations the Council is working towards.
- 3.4 The early engagement with the Corporate O&S Committee is to seek views on how the Members enquiries process could be improved. This may include various automation routes as the current system is based on emails received and sent.
- 3.5 Approximately 106 emails per week are received from Members, that the team manually acknowledge and deal with. In a 3 hour period on 25 July 2024, 33 emails were evaluated.
- 7 were replies to previous enquiries, which were updated into Respond.
 - 8 were interim responses and updates both to and from Members that required manual updating into Respond
 - 18 were new Member enquiries that needed to be processed and are broken down as follows.
 - 3 relating to overflowing litter bins
 - 3 related to weeds and overgrowth
 - 2 connected to building works and planning
 - 3 relating to highways
 - 2 connected to bins
 - 5 miscellaneous – Fly Tipping, Trading Standards, Letter re access to flats, Tree Preservation Order, Council Tax

The high level process for members enquiries is shown in the diagram below and notes have been made where the process could potentially be enhanced using digital technology



We have also carried out some benchmarking to see how other Councils close to us handle these enquiries and so far we have received 10 responses – details below. Although email is still an option in all except Croyden Council, most other local Council’s Members submit via a digital solution.

Council	Team who receive enquiries	System logged in	How Members submit their enquiries
Castlepoint	Democratic Services	Excel spreadsheet	Email
Braintree	Customer Services	Excel spreadsheet	Email
Epping Forest	Democratic Services	Granicus	Web Forms and Email
Colchester	Customer Services	Dynamics	Web Forms and Email
Chelmsford	Democratic Services	Dynamics	Web Forms and Email
Uttlesford	Each team - not central	Not confirmed	Web Forms and Email to relevant team
Basildon	Customer Services	Dynamics	Web Forms and Email
Croyden	Members Enquiry Team	Infreemation	Members self serve App that update directly into Infreemation
Redbridge	Complaints Team	iCasework	Members log enquiry themselves into iCasework or email
Hounslow	Members Enquiry Team	CXM	Members log themselves via online App or email

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