

# Best practice for handling member enquiries

## Appendix 1



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## Best practice for handling member enquiries

Members routinely make enquiries to the corporate and operational teams on behalf of constituents and/or centred around issues relating to their wards, with an expectation that we reply in a timely and accurate manner. Whilst the range of enquiries vary in complexity and type, the nature of which we deal with these should be courtesy and consistent.

**Please note: member complaints will follow the corporate complaint route i.e. when normal service routes have failed.**

Service areas can still be flexible and have fluidity in relation to professional judgement along with system management, although it is an expectation that certain standards of best practice are adhered to. The guidance below is to be followed by all for all member enquiries across both authorities:

- Acknowledgement of member enquiry is undertaken within **2 working days** with clarity being provided on the next steps along with person dealing with enquiry.
- Full response to initial enquiry should be provided at the **earliest opportunity** and should be clear and concise to ensure that repeat demand or escalation is preventable. **Maximum response time for a full reply should be no more than 10 working days (10 working days should apply in exceptional or complex cases only).**
- Whilst having a consistent approach to replying should be paramount, some member enquiries will naturally fall within an 'urgent' and/\_\_\_\_ or 'high importance' level and immediacy of response will need to be applied in these cases.
- Any member enquiry received must adhere to GDPR standards and cautious to be given in relation to confidential or highly sensitive matters. If you have any doubts, then please check before replying.
- Where the enquiry is complex in nature, requires multiple or 3<sup>rd</sup> party response or will take a longer time period for reply, **members are to be kept informed of progress and timescales on a regular basis (frequency jointly agreed between officer and member) and lines of communication remain open and two-way.**
- Where the member enquiry requires escalation to assist in resolving the matter internally i.e. not satisfied with response, delays in acknowledgement or routine updates, then these will be forwarded to the PAs or external escalation mechanism (WRS) where this will be logged formally on the corporate complaints system (as a councillor complaint) and assigned to the relevant member of the corporate management team. **These escalations will be routinely reviewed by CMT as part of the quarterly monitoring.**
- Acknowledgement and full responses should be dealt with in a professional manner, ensuring the use of formal writing and correct use of language.
- To aid members in contacting the correct managers/officers when raising enquiries, contact information should be pro-actively and routinely shared with members (especially when changes to personnel or process occurs) via mod.gov and it is expected that ALL out of office replies are activated with signposting to alternative contact in their absence.
- You are encouraged to be proactive with your portfolio holders and members on service changes especially where you have identified potential impacts to local residents and businesses, so that thorough and clear responses and channels of communication directly to service areas are easily accessible.
- Political awareness training to be rolled out to **ALL** staff who deal with member enquiries.

The purpose of this guidance is to have a clear, consistent and courteous approach across both authorities to member enquiries and to build and maintain good working relationships. The corporate management team expect that member enquiries are dealt with promptly and professionally, with escalations being raised on a rare and exceptional basis.