Update on the New Members' Enquiries Process

Committee name	Finance and Corporate Services Select Committee

Officer reporting	Ian Anderson - Business Manager, Complaints and Enquiries

Papers with report	None

Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide the Committee with an update on the first three months use of the Members Portal for Members Enquiries (MEs) and Service Requests (SRs).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate.

Implications on related Council policies

A key role of Select Committees is to monitor the performance of Council services within their remit. Select Committees may also make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

This report seeks to provide an update.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Please see Appendix A.

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

1.   On Thursday 17 November 2022, the full Council ratified changes to the Councils Constitution requiring all Elected Members, as of 1 January 2023, to submit their Members Enquiries and Service Requests through a Members Portal, provided by GOSS, to support automation of the Members Enquiry process.

2.   In addition to this new Portal, clear definitions of a 'Member Enquiry' and 'Service Request' were introduced. This distinction supported further automation for Elected Member Service Requests, as it enabled the use of resident-facing 'Report It' forms by Elected Members to submit Service Requests directly to responsible service areas, thereby negating the need for manual triage.

3.   Definition of a Members Enquiry is *'A clear question has been asked that requires investigation by Council Officers, or the supply of information from a Council department'*

4.   Definition of a Service Request is *'A request for a one-off action to be taken, that requires action by an Officer and not investigative activities or supply of information'*

Historic Members Enquiries process

5.   Prior to the implementation of the Members' Portal, Elected Members were required to submit enquiries and requests via email. However, such a process was inefficient, both for Officers (management of unstructured communications, lengthy email chains which had to be manually tracked, manual logging and creation of reference numbers, delays caused by manual triage) and Elected Members (unstructured communications prompting follow-up clarification questions, manual tracking of due dates and breaches, complex email chains).

New Members Enquiries process

6.   The Members' Portal has gone some way to addressing these issues. For Officers, all Member Enquiries are now funnelled through the Officer-facing 'Staff Portal', a case management system to oversee the receipt, management and response to Elected Member enquiries and Service Requests.

7.   For Elected Members, they now have a dedicated digital space to:
   - Submit Member Enquiries and Service Requests ("Submit a Member Enquiry"/ "Submit a Service Request")
   - Respond to clarification questions and Officer queries ("Outstanding questions")
   - Track breached cases and request action ("Breached cases")
   - View performance responses ("My Member Enquiry Dashboard" / "My Service Requests and Enquiries Dashboard")

8.   In terms of general benefits, Elected Members are now required to use a structured form to submit Member Enquiries and Service Requests. This ensures that the required

information is collected at the point of submission, foregoing email exchanges to capture required information, creating an overall more efficient process for resolution. Elected Members also receive a reference number as soon as an enquiry or request is submitted, negating the need and waiting time for Member Liaison Officers to manually create such identifier.

9. In terms of dashboards and reporting, Elected Members also have access to dashboard and high-level data tables on open and closed Member Enquiries, dynamic charts which can be manipulated by Elected Members to focus on enquiries by type e.g.: Adult Social Care, Parking Services etc. in addition to access to tracking information and case details.

10. However, it should also be noted that continual development and improvement of the Members Portal is ongoing as part of an iterative improvement process. Improvements to the Elected Member experience made to date can be found in table four, with planned improvements details in table five of this paper, respectively.

FAMILIARISATION SESSIONS

Elected Members

11. Officers followed a 'familiarisation-then-integration' approach to support Elected Members to use the Members Portal. Prior to being given access to the Members Portal, each Elected Member was invited to a presentation to explain the rationale for change, the new definitions for 'Members Enquiries' and 'Service Requests' and to outline the benefits to Members of using the Portal. This was in addition to a demonstration of the Portal, concluding with a questions and answers section.

12. Prior to integration, Elected Members were phased into multiple waves or groups. However, to familiarise Elected Members, Officers also completed additional sessions to support the efficient integration of Elected Members, including events specifically for Elected Members involved in testing ('testers') and additional sessions for Elected Members who were unable to attend scheduled sessions (table one).

TABLE ONE: Overview of completed and planned familiarisation sessions for Elected Members

Familiarisation session	Date	Elected Members involved	Actual go-live
Group 1 - Cabinet	22nd November	7	30th November
Tester events (4)	Varied	6	30th November
Group 2	1st December	12	7th December
Group 3	7th December	5	
Additional session 1	12th December	4	13th December
Group 4	14th December	6	21st December
Additional session 2	15th December	1	21st December

Additional session 3	29th December	5	29th December
Additional session 4	3rd January	3	1st January
One-to-one sessions	Various	4	
TOTAL		**53**	

13. Further to this, additional optional 'refresher' sessions were held (table two) to support Elected Members and provide an opportunity to discuss any queries or concerns they were having. All elected Members were invited to attend a session of their choosing (table two).

TABLE TWO: Overview of completed and planned 'Drop In' sessions for Elected Members

Familiarisation session	Date	Elected Members in attendance
Session 1	Monday 20th March 2-3pm (virtual)	5
Session 2	Monday 20th March 7-8pm (virtual)	0
Session 3	Tuesday 21st March – 2-3pm (face-to-face)	8
Session 4	Tuesday 21st March – 6-7pm (face-to-face)	2
Session 5	Thursday 23rd March – 2-3pm (virtual)	3
Session 6	Thursday 23rd March – 7-8pm (virtual)	3
Session 7	Tuesday 11th April – 2-3pm (virtual)	TBC
Session 8	Tuesday 11th April – 7-8pm (virtual)	TBC

14. Elected Members were also given access to training and familiarisation materials (user guides and instructional videos), accessible via a dedicated 'Members Portal' page on the 'Democracy' section of the Council's intranet and will continue to receive support from Officers to ensure ongoing use of the Portal.

Officers

15. Officers also completed familiarisation training sessions (table three) and additional 1-2-1 and group sessions for PAs on request were given. In addition, officers were provided with written user guides and instructional videos, accessible via a dedicated 'Staff Portal' page on the 'Tools and Systems' section of the Council's intranet. Support continues to be provided by the Members Liaison Officers on request.

TABLE THREE: Overview of completed familiarisation training sessions for Officers

Familiarisation session	Date	Actual go-live
Session 1	Tuesday 8th November 2022 – 11-12	
Session 2	Thursday 10th November – 2-3	
Session 3	Thursday 17th November – 11-12	29th November 2022
Session 4	Thursday 17th November – 2-3	

STATISTICS AND MEMBERS' PORTAL UPTAKE

16. To date, all 53 Elected Members (and in addition enquiries from Members of Parliament) have submitted 1,349 Member Enquiries and 1,023 Service Requests between 17 November 2022 and 3 April 2023.

17. By way of comparison, between 17 November 2021 and 3 April 2022, 3,169 Members Enquiries were submitted for this period. More Members Enquiries were raised during this period as no distinction was made between a Members Enquiry and a Service Request at that point in time.

Members Enquiries

18. The highest number of Member Enquiries have been submitted under the Housing category (329), Waste (114), Planning (102), Anti-Social Behaviour (88) and Green Spaces (80). Relatively low numbers of enquiries have been for Council Tax (23), Housing Benefit (12), Education (10), Corporate Finance (6) and Transportation (3).

19. Of the 1,349 Member Enquiries raised, 1,127 have been raised by Councillors and 222 enquiries have been raised by 9 different Members of Parliament, which includes 6 out of Borough MP enquiries. Although MPs do not have access to GOSS, the Members Enquiry team uploads enquiries to the Portal on their behalf, negating the need to manage MP enquiries off-platform via email.

Service Requests

20. To date, 1,023 service requests have been raised using the Portal.

Response time

21. Of the 1,349 Member Enquiries submitted between 17 November 2022 and 3 April 2023, 1,214 of these have been responded to. Of the 1,214 closed enquiries 1,032 were closed within the 10 working days target (85%) and 182 breached (15%).

YOU SAID, WE DID

22. As referenced above, several Elected Members were involved in the testing of the Members Portal prior to its launch. As part of this, the project team created a "you said, we did" to demonstrate the impact of Elected Member feedback on its final design.

23. The below table (table four) outlines such revisions and denotes when they were introduced (prior to Members Portal launch or post Members Portal launch).

TABLE FOUR: Overview of the "you said, we did" amendments made to the Members Portal and/or supporting processes, prior- to or post-launch

Point of implementation	You said…	…we did
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**There are instances when I won't have all the constituent's details, but the form is making them 'mandatory' can this be changed?**	**This has been changed.** Member now asked to provide phone number and/or email address. Address no longer mandatory.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**There are instances when an enquiry is about a place or asset (school, park, pub) rather than an individual. The form doesn't allow me to raise such an enquiry**	**This has been changed.** Option now added for the Member to 'Enter location details' when the enquiry is about a location or asset, rather than on behalf of constituent or policy area.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**The subject title field is too short**	**This has been changed.** Increased from 50 to 65 characters
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**There are too many clicks on the user journey**	**This has been optimised.** Introduced use of radio buttons to navigate through different scenarios, rather than opting-out on a page-by-page basis.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**Members search and refer to enquiries with 'words' and not reference numbers. The portal doesn't support this**	**This has been introduced.** Development work undertaken with the supplier to ensure Subject Enquiry Titles are displayed at all possible locations in

Point of implementation	You said…	…we did
		the Member Portal, searchable using the 'CTRL+F' function on a keyboard.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**We need the ability to add more attachments. Three (3) isn't enough**	**This has been changed.** Increased from 3 to 7, with the ability to add more with the support of the Member Enquiry team.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**We need to be able to access the Portal quickly and easily. I can't see how accessing it will be easy**	**This has been introduced.** Single Sign On introduced for all Elected Members and Officers. Portal link included on the intranet, with support given to bookmark the Members Portal on your device.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**Enquiry types (Social Care, Tech Admin etc.) aren't clear and more need to be added**	**This has been changed.** Terms used for enquiry types were re-worded for user ease rather than reporting requirements. New types such as 'Education' introduced.
Prior to Members Portal Launch	**We need to be able to identify issues and follow-up on enquiries quickly and easily. We use Outlook to schedule reminders and Excel to track. We need enquiries which are breached to be easily identifiable.**	**This has been introduced.** Following Elected Member testing, new tiles introduced for responding to outstanding questions, easy reference for breached cases, and dashboards for Member Enquiries and Service Requests.
Post Members Portal Launch	**Elected Members need a copy of the final response(s) to Member Enquiries to be added to the case history**	A copy of the response(s) is now available in the 'case history' of each Member Enquiry. This is viewable in the Elected Members dashboard.
Post Members Portal Launch	**Elected Members being shown an error message on the google map overview when submitting a service request for**	Resolved. Configuration settings updated on the affected service request forms by ICT.

Point of implementation	You said…	…we did
	some (affected some ASBET and the 'Street Furniture and Road Markings' forms)	
Post Members Portal Launch	**Requirement to facilitate the submission of service requests for ASBET which do not meet the threshold of an ASBET Member Enquiry**	Additional service request forms for "ASBET – Noise" added to the Members Portal for use.
Post Members Portal Launch	**Insufficient options available to Elected Members when determining 'type of enquiry' for a Member Enquiry**	Additional options of 'Highways', 'Parking Services' and 'Transportation' added. These are also reflected in the Members Enquiries dashboard.
Post Members Portal Launch	**The reference number and enquiry title were not included in 'formal response' emails received by Elected Members**	All final responses submitted by Officers through now include the Member Enquiry reference number and enquiry title as standard. TO NOTE: this required a product upgrade.

24. In addition to those issues already addressed, several issues have also been raised which have been shortlisted for future development (table five).

TABLE FIVE: Overview of issues raised that have been shortlisted for future development to the Members Portal and/or supporting processes

Issue raised	Solution approach
Elected Members do not have sufficient time to review and respond to a Member Enquiry response before it is closed.	The previous Members Enquiry approach was to close an ME on response and if there was a follow up email, the Members Enquiry Team would log it as another Members Enquiry and link the earlier Members Enquiry. However, we have been working with colleagues in ICT and GOSS and are currently implementing a review period following the response to allow Councillors time to respond before an enquiry is closed. A communication will be sent to all Councillors during April to explain how this change in process will work.
Elected Members needed a clearer process for ASBET related enquiries.	In conjunction with ASBET, an analysis of incoming ASBET Member Enquiries/Service Requests has been completed. It shows that the vast majority of ASBET enquiries meet the definition of a service request. This will help to streamline the process and address the concerns raised by Councillors to ensure the efficient handling of ASBET enquiries.
Elected Members have reported being unable to upload images to certain service request forms. This specifically related to the 'street lighting' form	Depending on the enquiry type it is not always operationally necessary to have an image to action the request. This also lessens the demand on the Elected Member to take and upload images prior to submitting a service request. The ability to upload an image has been added to the street lighting form. The Service Requests forms are currently being reviewed and on receipt of feedback there will be a further review of where it will be beneficial to have image functionality available to assist with resolving the enquiry.
Sharing option for Elected Members – applies to Member Enquiries only	The legal advice we have received is that a Councillor will have implied consent of the resident to retain, disclose the resident's data to the Council and also receive personal data from the Council. Councillors representing an individual who has made a complaint will, in most cases, be able to rely on the Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) (elected Representatives) Order 2002 and exemptions under Schedule 1 of Data Protection Act 2018, when processing special category data (such as the health data of the resident). This means Councillors are not ordinarily required to obtain express written consent but that implied consent has been given to share information with their local Ward Councillor and

	not to Councillors outside their Ward. Officers have checked and the functionality exists within the Members Portal but it has not been tested internally to ensure technical needs are met. Once this has been tested Officers will advise Councillors on how it will operate. This is under development.
In complex cases, it can sometimes involve two or more services but the Members Portal does not allow Councillors to raise two or more linked issues in one Members Enquiry.	The Members Portal will allow a number of linked issues to be raised by Councillors in one Members Enquiry. Officers from the Members Enquiry team will triage all the issues to the relevant teams/services to investigate and either one person will be tasked to provide a single response to all the points raised or you will receive separate responses to each point from different officers.
Elected Members were only able to submit enquiries with a maximum length of 2000 characters.	The 'Details of Enquiry' field has now been increased to a maximum 4000 characters. This is the equivalent of approximately two sides of A4 in size 12 arial font. If an Elected Members enquiry exceeds this limit, a red advisory message will be shown.