

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	Appendix A – Background Information Appendix B – Service Request pages
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide the Committee with an update on the handling of Members Enquiries (MEs) and Service Requests (SRs) using the GOSS portal from 1 January to 15 September 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1) Note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate and;**
- 2) Endorses the change to the look and feel of the Service Request page by adding in icons – see Appendix B.**

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

NIL

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

1. On Thursday 17 November 2022, the full Council ratified changes to the Councils Constitution requiring all 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 Member Service Requests, as it enabled the use of resident-facing 'Report It' forms by 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, Members were required to submit enquiries and requests via email or telephone. 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 Members (unstructured communications prompting follow-up clarification questions, manual tracking of due dates and breaches, complex email chains).

New Members Enquiries process

6. All Member Enquiries are now funnelled through the Officer-facing 'Staff Portal', a case management system to oversee the receipt, management and response to Members Enquiries and Service Requests.
7. For 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, Members are now required to use a structured forms 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. 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 a reference number.

9. In terms of dashboards and reporting, Members also have access to dashboard and high-level data tables on open and closed Member Enquiries, charts which can be manipulated by 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 Member experience made to date can be found in table one, with planned improvements details in table two of this paper, respectively.

FAMILIARISATION SESSIONS

Elected Members

11. Officers followed a 'familiarisation-then-integration' approach to support Members to use the Members Portal. Prior to being given access to the Members Portal, each 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, Members were phased into multiple waves or groups. However, to familiarise Members, Officers also completed additional sessions to support the efficient integration of Members, including events specifically for Members involved in testing ('testers') and additional sessions for Members who were unable to attend scheduled sessions. 9 such sessions were delivered between 22 November 2022 and 3 January 2023
13. Further to this, additional optional 'refresher' sessions were held to support Members and provide an opportunity to discuss any queries or concerns they were having. All Members were invited to attend a session of their choosing. 8 sessions were delivered between 20 March to 11 April 2023.
14. 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. 4 familiarisation training sessions were provided for Officers and additional 1-2-1 and group sessions for PAs were provided on request. Officers were also 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.

STATISTICS AND MEMBERS' PORTAL UPTAKE

16. To date, 3,872 Member Enquiries and 3,450 Service Requests have been submitted between 1 January and 15 September 2023. This is a total of 7,322 for this period.
17. By way of comparison, between 1 January and 15 September 2022, 7,707 Members Enquiries were submitted for this period. 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 (865), Waste (411), Planning (102), Highways (372) and Anti-Social Behaviour (311). Relatively low numbers of enquiries have been received for Education (39), Housing Benefit (33), Transport and Projects (15) and Corporate Finance (13).
19. Of the 3,872 Member Enquiries raised, 3,242 were raised by Councillors and 630 enquiries were raised by 13 different Members of Parliament, which includes 10 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, 3,450 service requests have been raised using the Portal.
21. The highest number of Service Requests have been submitted under Fly tipping (766), Street Cleansing (729), Potholes (203), Rubbish accumulation (137) and signage (129).

Response time

22. Of the 3,872 Member Enquiries submitted between 17 November 2022 and 15 September 2023, 3,089 (80%) were responded to within 10 working days.
23. The soft close functionality was introduced on 5 May 2023 which allowed Members to send a follow up enquiry within 5 working days of a response being issued. Of the 3,242 Members Enquiries raised by Councillors only 29 enquiries were required to be re-opened for a follow up response to be provided (this is 0.9% of all Members Enquiries).

YOU SAID, WE DID

24. As referenced above, several 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 Member feedback on its final design.
25. The below table (one) outlines such revisions and denotes when they were introduced (prior to Members Portal launch or post Members Portal launch).

TABLE ONE: 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 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.

Point of implementation	You said...	...we did
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 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	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 Members dashboard.
Post Members Portal Launch	Members being shown an error message on the google map overview when submitting a service request for some enquiries (affected some ASBET and the 'Street Furniture and Road Markings' forms)	Resolved. Configuration settings updated on the affected service request forms by ICT.
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 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 Members	All final responses submitted by Officers through now include the Member Enquiry reference number and enquiry title as standard.

Point of implementation	You said...	...we did
		TO NOTE: this required a product upgrade.
Post Members Portal Launch	Members do not have sufficient time to review and respond to a Member Enquiry response before it is closed.	We worked with ICT and GOSS and on 5 May 2023 we introduced a 5-working day window for Members to review the response from the officer and raise a query via the MEs system, if required.
Post Members Portal Launch	Members needed a clearer process for ASBET related enquiries	The process was changed in which Members were asked to submit anti-social behaviour reports as a Service Request and this will be handled directly by the Anti-Social Behaviour Team. However, if an enquiry met the definition of an ME, as set out in the constitution then an ME should be submitted.
Post Members Portal Launch	Members reported difficulties in uploading photo's when using their mobile phones.	Depending on the enquiry type it is not always operationally necessary to have an image to action the request. However, Members who experienced such difficulties IT colleagues undertook 1-2-1 sessions and this offer is still open.
Post Members Portal Launch	Members have reported being unable to upload images to certain service request forms.	Councillor Bennett undertook a review of all the service request forms and this was fed back to Officers. Over the course of a number of months, Naveed Mohammed, worked with the owners of the forms and Alun Rees (Channel Migration Manager) to make changes to the forms. A number of the forms were amended but where valid reasons were given why a change could not be made or a form deleted/replaced, no or minor change(s) were made.
Post Members Portal Launch	Escalation of an enquiry that needs immediate attention	A new process was introduced where if a Member considered their enquiry to be urgent, that they submit the enquiry in the usual way and then sends an email to Ian Anderson and/or his team who will then alert the Director/Senior Manager of the urgency of the enquiry.
Post Members Portal Launch	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

Point of implementation	You said...	...we did
		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.

26. In addition to those issues already addressed, a number of issues have also been raised which have been shortlisted for future development.

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

Issue raised	Solution approach
Sharing option for Elected Members – applies to Member Enquiries only	<p>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).</p> <p>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. The functionality exists but it will need to be tested and developed. This is under review.</p>
Search functionality for Members	This requires development by GOSS (as it cannot be done by inhouse IT colleagues) and there is a cost implication of around £10k for them to develop this. This is under review.
Officers were asked to include the electronic Ward Budget form on the Members Portal.	It was recommended that a Ward Budget tab be included within the Member Portal that will enable Members to submit and track proposals. The inclusion of the Ward Budget form has been agreed in principle, and it is envisaged that it will be introduced as an additional tile to the Members Portal. This feature is currently being developed internally by the Channel Access Team and is currently in the design phase, and following user acceptance testing (UAT), this will then feature in the portal.

In the subject heading for Service Requests to contain the title given by Members when submitting the Service Request in addition to the reference number.	Channell Access Team to consider feasibility of amending every service request setup and the impact this will have. This request has been put forward for consideration and an update will be provided as soon as is possible.
Increase the size limit for photographs to be uploaded on Service Requests.	This has been set at 5 MB per photo – we are in discussion with GOSS regarding this point and the feasibility of increasing the picture size or whether it is necessary for a picture to be provided for each request.

APPENDIX B – Service Request pages

The Channel Migration Manager has worked with Councillor Bennett in developing the changes to the Service Request page by adding icons, which has been tested and is ready to be implemented. Please see below. The Committee are requested to endorse this change, and then officers will send a communication to Members before we go live.

