

MEETING	Democratic Services Committee
DATE	12 April 2018
SUBJECT	Responding to enquiries
PURPOSE	Update the Committee of the developments to date with regards to responding to members' enquiries
AUTHOR	Geraint Owen, Head of Democratic Services
RELEVANT OFFICER	Vera Jones, Democratic Services Manager

1. In my role as the Head of Democratic Services for the Council, I endeavour to ensure that the provision you have to fulfil your work is fit for purpose.
2. At the beginning of the year, I contacted all Members to attempt to understand the concerns and obstacles you have, and to ask for any evidence on two specific areas (technical provision and response from officers)
3. This report examines one of the areas - 'officers' response to enquiries from Members'. Some members had mentioned verbally that sometimes there was a lack of response, and I promised at the Full Council meeting on 14/12/2017 to contact all members to request evidence of a lack of response.
4. As noted in the previous report, a good response was received in general, with 27 Councillors responding in total. However, only 13 members responded to the responding to enquiries element - two noted that they had experienced no problems, some noted only one example, and others gave a number of specific examples.
5. As could be expected, responses varied from reporting general satisfaction with timely responses, to problems with identifying the appropriate officer to contact and others identifying specific Departments and individuals where they had not received responses.
6. In the cases of identifying specific Departments and officers, discussions have been held with relevant officers in order for them to respond to the situation. In addition, when considering observations regarding which officers to contact, work has been undertaken by the members' porth sub-group to improve information on the members' porth to make it more convenient to be able to identify key officers.
7. At the same time, the Standards Committee is reviewing the Council's protocol on Member/Officer relations. See the separate report on the protocol.
8. Hand in hand with the review of the protocol, a brief guideline for officers on how to respond to enquiries from members has also been developed. See Appendix a. **The Committee's observations on the above are invited**

APPENDIX A

RESPONSES TO ENQUIRIES BY ELECTED MEMBERS

Simple principles:

- *Dealt with respectfully*
- *Respond as promptly as possible*
- *Full response within 5 working days of receiving the enquiry, or*
- *Respond within 5 working days acknowledging that the enquiry has been received and explain what is happening with the enquiry*
- *Members to receive a timely update of what is happening (don't leave them in the dark)*

Enquiry on the phone/face to face chat

Enquiry via email/or any other means

Timetable: Respond as soon as possible, or at least 5 working days of receiving the enquiry:

Acknowledge the enquiry (and keep a written record if received verbally) and RESPOND FULLY

Acknowledge the enquiry (and keep a written record if received verbally) and explain what is happening and when they should expect a response

An update of the progress to the Member if it's taking longer than expected

RESPOND FULLY

Review within the Service – can something be done so that there is not a similar enquiry in the future.