

Wednesday, 13 November 2024

Report of the Leader of the Council / Monitoring Officer

Member Enquiries Update

Exempt Information

None

Purpose

This report provides an overview of member enquiries received by the Information Governance team for the period 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024. It aims to update members on the member enquiry process, the types of enquiries received, the response times and the future developments identified to improve the process.

Recommendations

It is recommended that committee:

1. Endorse the contents of the report.
2. Approve the activities detailed in the future developments section of this report for implementation.

Introduction

Member Enquiry Process

The council uses the member enquiry process to facilitate issues raised by elected members. This process involves several stages, which may vary depending on the nature of the enquiry received. The stages are as follows:

1. **Enquiry Submission:** An elected member raises an enquiry.
2. **Initial Review:** The Information Governance team reviews the enquiry to ensure it is sent to the relevant team and meets data protection requirements. This includes adherence to the [Authority to Release process](#), which was reviewed and endorsed by the Cabinet in 2023.
3. **Logging and Acknowledgement by central team:** Enquiries are logged, and an acknowledgement sent to the elected member within 5 working days.
4. **Forwarding to Relevant Service Area:** The enquiry is sent to the appropriate service area for further review and to provide a response to the elected member within 10 working days.
5. **Response:** The relevant service area is requested to provide a direct response to the elected member, with a copy sent to the Information Governance team for records.
6. **Closure:** When a response is received, the record is closed.

Consent from constituents

A local authority generally does not need an individual's consent to share their personal information with an elected member, provided the Authority to Release (ATR) requirements are satisfied. However, both the Elected Member and the Council must demonstrate compliance with Data Protection principles. As a local authority, we are responsible for the

information we provide to Elected Members and for ensuring they understand how it can be used.

Obtaining consent provides evidence of compliance and supports lawful data practices, ensuring data minimisation. Relying solely on implied or verbal consent could expose the Council or the Elected Member to complaints of inadequate data handling, potentially initiating an ICO investigation.

When an enquiry is received and additional information is needed, this is communicated to the Elected Member. For instance, if personal information about a constituent is requested, the Information Governance team will verify the following:

- The elected member represents the ward where the individual resides.
- The elected member clearly states they are representing the individual in any request for their personal information to the local authority and
- The information is necessary to address the individual’s complaint.

All requests received by Elected Members are forwarded to the relevant service area. If data protection requirements have not been met (e.g. the team is waiting for the authority to release form), a more generic response is provided to prevent delays in supporting our customers, residents, and tenants.

Enquiries which fall under another process

When enquiries are received that should follow a different process, the Elected Member is informed accordingly. For example, if the Information Governance team receives a report of fly-tipping they will forward the request to the Customer Service team for recording and a reference number provided to the Elected Member. The Elected Member’s enquiry is closed, and the fly-tipping process is initiated and followed.

Benefits of a centralised process

Centralising the process has created a single point of contact for Elected Members to raise issues. This ensures that all issues are recorded, forwarded to the relevant team, and monitored until completion. This approach supports Elected Members by ensuring that requests are addressed in a timely manner.

Data Analysis

For the period 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024 the Information Governance team recorded 293 member enquiries, a summary of which can be found below.

TEAM	Count
Adaptions	3
ASB	10
Assembly Rooms	1
Car Parks	1
Castle	4
CCTV	2
Commercial Assets	8
Council Tax & Revenues	1
Customer Services	5
Democratic Services	1

Environmental Health	15
Housing Repairs	21
Housing Repairs Gas	1
Housing Repairs Planned	3
Housing Solutions	38
ICT	2
Joint Waste	8
Land Charges / Legal (Right to Buy)	1
Partnerships	4
Planning & Development	5
Private Sector	4
SCC	16
Street Scene	121
Tenancy Management	18
TOTAL	293

The service areas which received the highest amount of member enquires is Street Scene. This followed by Housing Solutions, Housing Repairs, Tenancy Management and enquires relating to a service within the remit of Staffordshire County Council.

Of the 293 enquires received, 292 were passed to the relevant service area within 5 working days, this equates to a percentage of 99.66%, and 231 of the member enquiries received are recorded as closed. This equates to a percentage of 78.84%.

Future development

Having a centralised team to manage member enquiries enables effective data analysis and the identification of potential improvements. While the process generally functions well, it is acknowledged and the Information Governance team have identified several areas for enhancement, and these include, but are not limited to:

- Reviewing the process to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- Conducting a questionnaire for members and officers to gather feedback on the process and understand their needs.
- Evaluating the ICT system to better support the case management of member enquiries.
- Introducing guidance for both members and officers.
- Recording reasons for member enquiries enabling service improvements to be identified for recurring themes.

Resource Implications

There are no finance or human resource implications as a result of this report.

Legal/Risk Implications

There are no direct risks from this report.

Equalities Implications

A CIA has been completed and is available at **Appendix 1**

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

There are no environmental or sustainability implications as a result of this report.

Report Author

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List of Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Community Impact Assessment (CIA)