
**A Report of the
Democratic Services Committee**

Member Inquiry System



The City of Cardiff Council

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INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The aim of the enquiry was to review the use of the Member Enquiry System (MES) by Councillors and Service Area Co-ordinators. In doing so the Task and Finish Group will evaluate:

- the use of the MES by Members
- Understanding of enquiries and requests for service and the most effective channels for the reporting of each
- responses to MES enquiries from service areas
- Service improvement for the MES

KEY FINDINGS

Having received evidence from witnesses over two meetings and one case study, the Members identified the following key findings for the Inquiry:

- KF1. Members expressed both positive and negative experiences using MES. It was agreed that officers would conduct a case study of a Member's experiences using the system over the period of one week in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of MES.
- KF2. Evidence was received which suggested that the dedicated C2C telephone number (029 2087 2082) for Members should feature more prominently on the MES webpage. It was further considered that all elected Members should also be reminded that there are telephone numbers for some services outside office hours, which can be used in the case of emergencies.
- KF3. Members requested that a training session for Members on the benefits and the appropriate use of MES should be programmed into the Member Development Programme for 2015/16.
- KF4. Members considered that most of their peers would not be aware of the 'Report It' feature on the Council's website. Service requests made using this facility are referred directly to the service area concerned. The Task and Finish Group

suggested that the 'Report It' facility could feature more prominently on the Council's webpage.

KF5. Members welcomed the opportunity to meet the officers responsible for administering MES. A Member stated that it was 'good to put a face to a name'. Members suggested that a future edition of the Members Newsletter produced by Democratic Services should contain an article on the MES, to include a photograph, as a means of introducing the officers responsible to all Members. The article should also publicise the 'Report It' feature referred to in KF4 and include a hyperlink link to the MES User Guide.

KF6. Members considered that it would be helpful if a classification system could be introduced in order to assist service area to identify high priority or confidential enquiries. Officers agreed to investigate whether it would be possible to introduce a classification system for enquiries where Members could flag enquiries e.g. as 'confidential' or 'requiring an urgent response'.

KF7. Members reported there were occasions when they needed to log a Members Enquiry but they did not have access to the MES system. Officers stated that they were able to assist in those circumstances. Members asked whether it would be possible to inform all Councillors that MES officers are able to log enquiries on their behalf in the event the Councillor did not have access online to the MES system.

- KF8. Members provided evidence of instances when, after submitting an enquiry, they did not receive a holding response. Members considered that there were instances when holding responses would seem, not only useful but appropriate. Members were concerned that holding responses were not routinely being sent Members, when it seemed appropriate to do so. Members were advised that in those circumstances Members should contact MES officers, who will ask service area co-ordinators to provide a holding response, pending a full response to the enquiry.
- KF9. The Task and Finish Group felt that there was a need to raise awareness of MES and its benefits. Members requested that a briefing session for all elected Members be arranged to take place prior to a future meeting of the Council. Ideally, the briefing session will be held in conjunction with the article on MES featuring in the Members Newsletter.
- KF10. Members were advised a large proportion of enquiries recorded via the member enquiry system are actually 'requests for service'. Members noted that the response time for a request for service is generally much quicker than that of a member enquiry, which has a response deadline of 10 calendar days. The Task Group considered that it was important to reinforce the message that a member enquiry is a request for information that usually requires a detailed response which will include an in-depth investigation into a particular issue e.g. information about a person's housing

benefit claim or information regarding changes to waste collections and the impact this will have. Conversely, a request for service is a something that needs to be actioned quickly but would not require a response e.g. a request for items to be removed as a result of flytipping or for drains to be cleared.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the completion of this Inquiry, an analysis of the evidence gathered and an assessment of the key findings was undertaken. From this the Committee recommends that:

- R1. The dedicated C2C telephone number (029 2087 2082) for Members should feature more prominently on the MES webpage. All elected Members should also be reminded that there are telephone numbers for some services outside office hours, which can be used in the case of emergencies.

Supported by Key Finding KF2

- R2. A training session for Members on the benefits and the appropriate use of MES should be programmed into the Member Development Programme for 2015/16.

Supported by Key Finding KF3

- R3. The 'Report It' facility should feature more prominently on the Council's webpage.

Supported by Key Finding KF4

- R4. A future edition of the Members Newsletter produced by Democratic Services should contain an article on the MES, to include a photograph, as a means of introducing the

officers responsible to all Members. The article should also publicise the 'Report It' feature referred to in KF4 and include a hyperlink link to the MES User Guide.

- R5. A future edition of the Members Newsletter should contain an article on the MES, including a photograph, as a means of introducing the officers responsible to all Members. The article should publicise, the Member Inquiry telephone number (029 2087 2082), the 'Report It' feature on the Council's website and include a hyperlink link to the MES User Guide. Councillors should also be advised that MES officers were able to record enquiries via the telephone when Members were unable to access to the MES system. The article should also advise Councillors to contact MES officers if they have not received a holding response when one is required.

Supported by Key Findings KF2, KF4, KF5, KF7, KF8, KF9

- R6. A classification system should be introduced in order to assist service areas to identify high priority or confidential enquiries, or similar.

Supported by Key Finding KS6

- R7. MES officers to contact service area co-ordinators in order to reinforce the requirement that to provide a holding response, pending a full response to the enquiry.

Supported by Key Finding KS8

- R8. A briefing session for all elected Members be arranged to take place prior to a future meeting of the Council. The briefing session will be held in conjunction with the article on MES featuring in the Members Newsletter, referred to in Recommendation 5 above.

Supported by Key Findings KF9

- R9. The FAQs Page on the MES webpage be updated to reflect the recommendations set out above.

Supported by Key Findings KF2, KF4, KF5, KF7, KF8

The Committee is asked to note that a number of the actions proposed have been completed. These are detailed as follows:

- C2C Member Enquiry line and out of hours – 16 February 2015
- Urgent enquiry – added to the system 5 March 2015
- Email response – added to the system 5 March 2015
- Holding responses – reminded SAC's 17 February 2015

INQUIRY METHODOLOGY

1. This task group set out to review the practical use of the Member Enquiry System by Councillors.
2. Through the course of the inquiry Members received evidence from:

John Agnew, Corporate Customer Services Manager

Amy Collins, Senior Complaints and Enquiry Officer
3. Members also received evidence from elected Members.

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