
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Members Enquiry Service Update

Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Democratic Services Committee of the current performance of Member Enquiries System (MES) and the progress being made to develop the use of the system in advance of the 2022 Local Government Elections.

Background

Role of the Democratic Services Committee

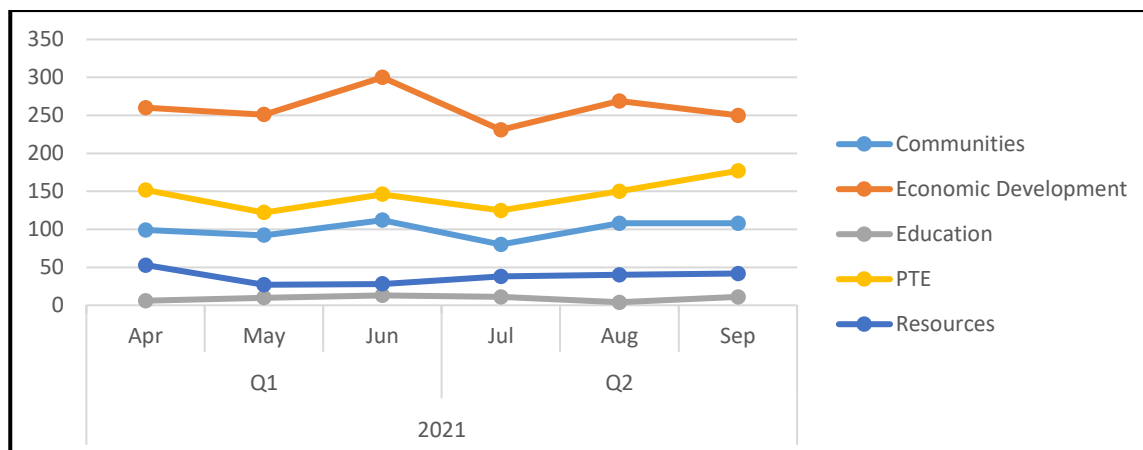
2. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, Chapter 2, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/part/1/chapter/2> requires local authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the Democratic Services functions of the Council, ensure that the work is adequately resourced and report to the full Council accordingly. The Democratic Services functions include Members' Services, Committee Services and Scrutiny Services, but not Cabinet Support Services.
3. In 2016 the Nethelpdesk software was introduced for use with Elected Members Enquiries. This was not bespoke software and was the same software used by C2C for handling the calls from the public. With the volume of Elected Members enquiries additional funding was sourced and a dedicated team was established in 2017 to support Elected Member Enquiries using Nethelpdesk.
4. The Members Enquiry System (MES) is an important tool to effectively manage the issues raised by residents with their Councillor as part of their ward casework. Issues raised may include:
 - Request for Service
 - Complex housing cases
 - Social services issues
 - Requests for residents/disabled parking
 - Failed/repeated requests for service queries
 - Road Safety / Traffic calming
 - Council Tax / benefits queries
5. A Service level agreement was established to provide a full response to member enquiries within 10 working days although with many of the complex case that are received this is not always possible.

6. Members Services team have operational responsibility for the Members Enquiry System (MES) which includes logging enquiries and to escalate issues to managers and provide Senior Managers with monthly performance updates.
7. It was agreed with Community Councils, following the adoption by Cabinet of the Community Council Charter on 13 December 2018, that Member Services would continue to provide the MES service to the six Clerks Community Councils and that this would be reviewed annually.
8. The Nethelpdesk software used to support the MES was upgraded at the end of October 2020. The Members Services Team who provide the operational support for the MES received initial training and minor implementation issues were quickly addressed. Following this the upgrade the nethelpdesk system became HALO and provided additional functionality which offered the opportunity to improve the facilities provided to Elected Members including:
 - a. Enhancing the ease of recording by updating the “capture form” process for enquiries and enable elected members to easily record and update their enquiries.
 - b. Developing the data collected for an enquiry to enable meaningful local intelligence to be gathered.
 - c. Enhancement of the monitoring and reporting functionality to enable the team to identify surges in enquiries with specific services.
9. Some of the underspend in 2020-21 was used to fund additional support from the HALO team to better utilise the functionality of the system and the improve to support for Elected Members. I

Issues

Performance Update

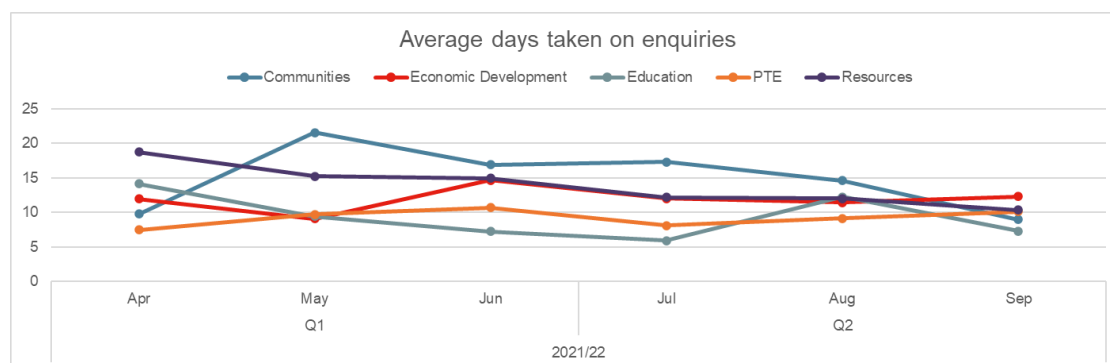
10. Between 01 April and 30 September 2021 there were 3315 Member Enquiries logged with the team. The following tables shows the number of enquiries logged in Q1 and Q2 by directorate.



Total Number of Enquiries Logged

	Communities	Economic Development	Education	PTE	Resources	Grand Total
2021	599	1561	55	872	228	3315
Q1	303	811	29	420	108	1671
Apr	99	260	6	152	53	570
May	92	251	10	122	27	502
Jun	112	300	13	146	28	599
Q2	296	750	26	452	120	1644
Jul	80	231	11	125	38	485
Aug	108	269	4	150	40	571
Sep	108	250	11	177	42	588
Grand Total	599	1561	55	872	228	3315

11. The following chart and table show the average number of days taken to close enquiries during the Q1 and Q2 periods.



Average of Working days taken

	Communities	Economic Development	Education	PTE	Resources	Grand Total
2021/22	14.65	11.99	8.49	9.24	14.04	11.83
Q1	15.99	12.06	9.41	9.23	16.88	12.32
Apr	9.78	11.94	14.16	7.44	18.75	11.02
May	21.54	9.07	9.40	9.70	15.22	11.84
Jun	16.91	14.66	7.231	10.69	14.91	13.97
Q2	13.28	11.91	7.46	9.25	11.49	11.33
Jul	17.31	12.02	5.91	8.10	12.18	11.76
Aug	14.59	11.45	12.25	9.15	12.02	11.49
Sep	8.99	12.32	7.27	10.14	10.35	10.82
Grand Total	14.65	11.99	8.49	9.24	14.05	11.83

12. Of the Member Enquiries that were recorded in the period between 01 April and 30 September 2021, 1488 (44.89%) were recorded by individual members using the capture form.

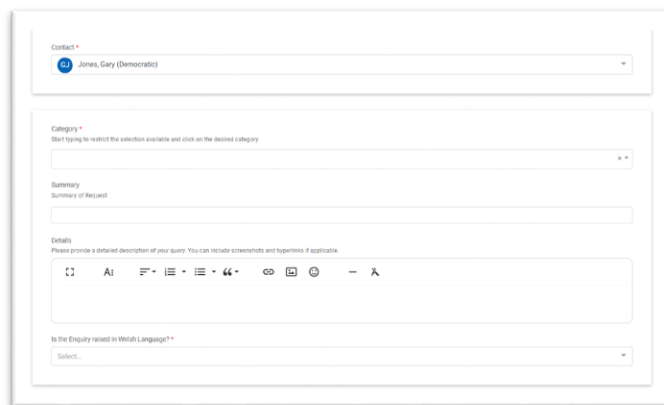
Submitted by	Number	Percentage
Self-serve	1488	44.89%
Officer	1827	55.11%
Grand Total	3315	100.00%

13. The self-service enquiries were submitted by 34 (45%) Elected Members although some of them recorded enquiries using the self-serve and officer submission routes.

Development of HALO

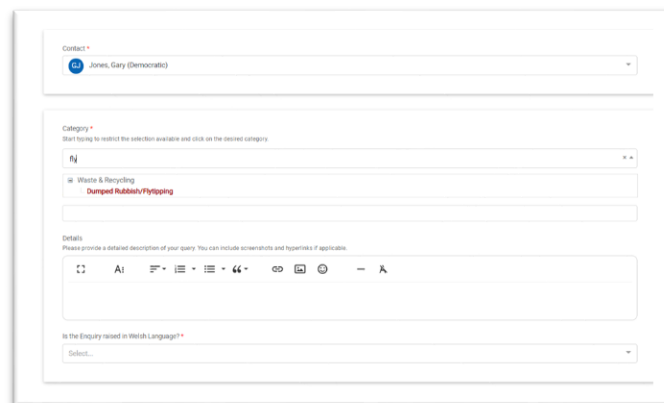
14. Following initial discussion with HALO it was identified that to achieve the key improvements it would be necessary to work with the ICT department to enhance the processes the software used to support the user interface.
15. To prevent the navigation of the arduous trail for the relevant service on the existing "Member Enquiries Capture form, the Member Services Team mapped each services i.e. fly tipping, backwards from the service to the directorate and cabinet portfolio. This data was then imported into HALO and a new capture form developed by HALO which was planned to replace the existing form on the intranet once the testing was completed.
16. This enabled new capture form to be simplified and for enquiries to identified by the output. The following images show the simple steps to complete and enquiry:

- a. when you access the form it automatically identifies the user from the intranet logon



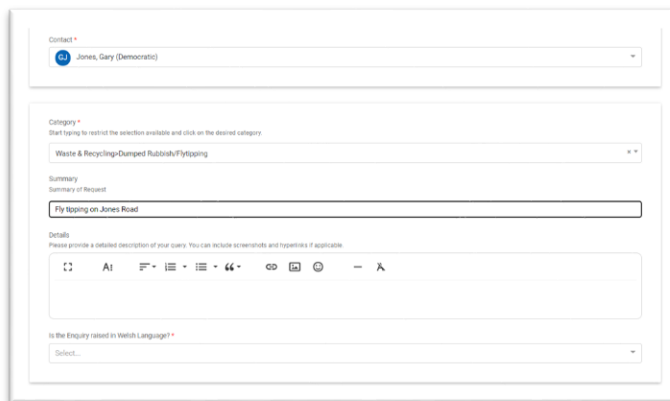
The screenshot shows the top section of the HALO enquiry form. At the top, there is a 'Contact' dropdown menu with a blue profile icon and the text 'Jones, Gary (Democratic)'. Below this is a 'Category' dropdown menu with the placeholder text 'Start typing to restrict the selection available and click on the desired category'. Underneath the category menu is a 'Summary' section with a 'Summary of Request' text area. Below that is a 'Details' section with a rich text editor containing various icons for text formatting and a 'Details' text area. At the bottom, there is a dropdown menu for 'Is the Enquiry raised in Welsh Language?' with the option 'Select...' visible.

- b. When you click on the category field and start typing it search the most likely category and identifies it in red text for you to select.



The screenshot shows the same HALO enquiry form as in image (a), but with the 'Category' dropdown menu open. The dropdown list shows two options: 'Waste & Recycling' and 'Dumped Rubbish/Flytipping'. The text 'Dumped Rubbish/Flytipping' is highlighted in red, indicating it is the most likely category suggested by the system. The rest of the form, including the 'Contact' dropdown, 'Summary' section, 'Details' section, and 'Is the Enquiry raised in Welsh Language?' dropdown, remains the same as in image (a).

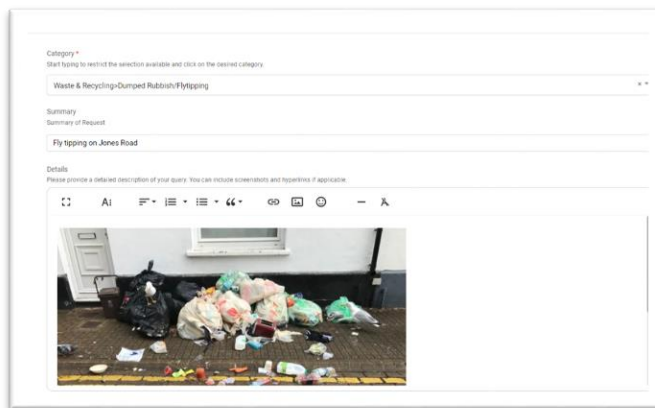
- c. You can then type in a simple summary for ease of reference for the recipients of the enquiry:



The screenshot shows a web form with the following fields:

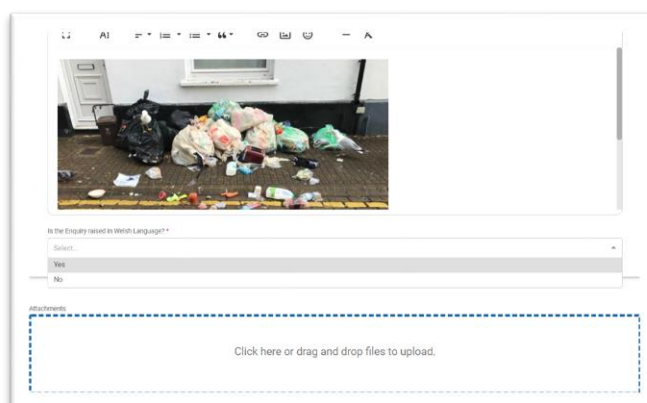
- Contact:** A dropdown menu with "Jones, Gary (Democratic)" selected.
- Category:** A dropdown menu with "Waste & Recycling-Dumped Rubbish/Flytipping" selected.
- Summary:** A text input field containing "Fly tipping on Jones Road".
- Details:** A rich text editor with a toolbar containing icons for undo, redo, bold, italic, underline, link, unlink, list, and image.
- Language:** A dropdown menu with "Select..." selected.

- d. The form then allows you to add more detail which could include contact details and photographs which would help officers to address the enquiry. There is a simple tool bar where there are a number of formatting options and you can easily add screenshots and hyperlinks



This screenshot shows the same form as above, but with a photograph of a pile of dumped rubbish (bags and loose trash) on a street. The photo is positioned below the rich text editor's toolbar.

- e. You can then select whether the enquiry has been made in Welsh to ensure that any response for the constituent in the correct language with the final area to drag and drop any relevant files from your device into the enquiry before submitting the form for processing.



This screenshot shows the form with the language selection dropdown set to "Yes" and a dashed blue box indicating an area for attachments. The text "Click here or drag and drop files to upload." is centered within this area.

17. This initial form is very basic and can be enhanced to add other fields which could be mandatory, conditional or optional and include:

- a. Date Enquiry Received
 - b. Method - How the enquiry was received from the constituent i.e. email, face-face, telephone etc
 - c. Constituent Contact details including:
 - Name
 - Title
 - Address
 - Postcode
 - Ward
 - Email Address
 - Phone Number
18. The committee are requested to identify up to 3 Members of the committee to undertake some basic testing of the capture form. The test form will only be used to initially assess if:
- a. the new capture form will work for Councillors.
 - b. If any additional fields need to be added to the basic form either from the list above or other fields which are available and which a councillor may find useful.
19. Additional work may also be needed to ensure that easy access to a consent form is provided and that confirmation of the need for a consent is included with in the enquiry. This may then require the provision of an additional field to upload the completed consent form.
20. Once the development work on the capture form has been completed it will be made live for a limited number of councillors to prove the processes in a live environment before making it available to all Elected Members for daily use. Access to the form will also include it being available to log enquiries from a mobile phone.

Reporting

21. Currently, we have a limited MES reporting capability. Using existing data fields and linking additional information to an enquiry will increase the range and scope of the performance report that can be generated. Report templates are still being developed with the intention of enabling any Member of the team to create easily understandable documents or graphic outputs. The ranges shown below will be used in conjunction when developing the types of reports to provide suitable performance data from the MES:
- a. Ranges:
 - Directorate - Service Area – Service - Cabinet Portfolio
 - Appropriate time periods – Week - Month – Quarter - Year
 - Provide comparative information from previous time period(s)
 - Location - Ward
 - b. Total Enquiries Logged:
 - c. The time taken to complete an enquiry
 - d. Overdue enquiries
 - e. Enquiry trends

f. Service dashboards

Continued development

22. Further development work may be needed and may require additional funding to be provided from the Democratic or Member Services budgets or reserves. The development work may also identify costs to provide additional enhancements to the system such as the development of an MES App or the inclusion of geotagging a location to an enquiry. A financial assessment will be undertaken when the costs of development and enhanced services is known.
23. The Committee is requested to identify any additional development which would improve the MES, the new capture form or the associated performance reporting requirements.

Financial Implications

24. The body of the report provides details of the requirements for and sources of funding in respect of Members Enquiries Service and the HALO system. Sources of funding include the Democratic and Members Services budgets and reserves, with the agreement of the Director of Governance and Legal Services.
25. All costs of the activities and services support are to be monitored and contained within the respective funding sources and budgets, and any new costs will require an identified source of funding.

Legal Implications

26. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for overseeing the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring this work is adequately resourced; and reporting to full Council accordingly.
27. The definition of 'Democratic Services functions' includes the provision of support and advice to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority.
28. In determining how to exercise its functions, the Committee must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: [https://gov.wales/local-government-measure-2011-guidance \(chapter 3\)](https://gov.wales/local-government-measure-2011-guidance-chapter-3)
29. Under the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018, anyone processing personal data (information about an identifiable living individual) must have a 'lawful basis' for processing. One of the potential lawful bases is the consent of the individual concerned. Members may be able to rely on implied consent for processing the personal data of their constituents for casework enquiries, but in certain circumstances, for example, when dealing with safeguarding matters, the explicit written consent of the individual/s will be required. A proforma consent form has been prepared to assist Members, along with advice on when explicit consent is required; and will need to be incorporated within the new MES forms and processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

30. The Committee is requested to:

- a. note the content of the report and the progress being made with the Members Enquiries Services
- b. identify up to 3 Members undertake some basic testing of the new MES capture form.
- c. identify any additional development which would improve the MES, the new capture form or the associated performance reporting requirements

GARY JONES
HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
23 November 2021

Background Papers: None