



# ISLINGTON

**LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON**  
**10<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEMBERS' SURVEY 2010**  
**COMMENTARY ON RESPONSES**

**25/48 returns = 52 %**  
**21 named**  
**4 anonymous**

**How long have you been a Councillor?**

<b>0-1 year</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2-4 years</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>More than 4 years</b>	<b>7</b>

## **MEMBERS' INDUCTION AND TRAINING**

### **1. How do you rate the Members' Induction that took place over the weekend of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May?**

<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>No response</b>	<b>Total no. of responses</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>25%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

### **2. How could this be improved?**

- “I was present in the morning session and I have all the paper work. Maybe more presentations about the different departments in the council would be helpful. I think it will be useful if we could have the name and picture of the main officers”.
- “Less noise from existing Councillors during the briefing”.
- “A bit less on licensing and planning and a bit more on other council responsibilities and functions”.
- “More follow-ups with sessions on specific topics e.g. safeguarding, mental health services, finance etc”. The session itself was good, and although there was a lot to take in, the mock planning and licensing was particularly helpful in understanding how those committees work”.
- “Would have been helpful to have been forwarded any presentations or materials from the weekend – I never really found out what had been covered, so don't know what I may have missed out on”.
- “By not having myself and one other Lib Dem member sitting in front of a million Labour members saying how we were soft on guns and knives in clubs and bars. That aside I thought too much time was spent on the detail of licensing and not enough on what will happen in a hearing”.
- “I think it was just right to be honest. I think it would be useful to have a Councillor there to talk about ‘becoming a Councillor’ and the changes and differences to your normal life, the pressures faced and the immediate demands that will come your way, the difference from those involved in local community, how to manage the whole process and how to manage and access any support networks for those that found it daunting or overwhelming at first”.
- “Offer more dates for training events, not always possible to find time at short notice”.
- “More basic stuff (i.e. start from what we need to do on a day by day basis)”.
- “The practice sessions of committees were more useful than some of the ‘passive’ presentations so putting them earlier in the session would be good”.
- “Some of the presentations were too long and I did feel my time would have been better spent just reading the presentations”.
- “More time”.
- “More role play; fewer presentations”.

**3. How did you rate the Corporate Induction Evening with departmental stands that took place on the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> May?**

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
3	10	3	-	-	9	16
19%	62%	19%	-	-	-	-

**4. How could this be improved?**

- “I couldn’t attend this”.
- “I would like to know more about the corporate department”.
- “Some departments had a sign up list for members to receive reports etc by post or email rather than taking them away with them on the evening. This was helpful as we came away from the event with rather a lot of paper”.
- “Less brochures and paper to take away. These things get left aside and forgotten”.
- “It wasn’t entirely clear that it would be an informal event – I expected a sit-down talk and had to miss another event to ensure I got there on time – in retrospect, I could have done both, but it wasn’t clear what the nature of the event was”.
- “There was far too much information at the initial fair with all departments pushing too much information but no-one there to say how the council worked, what systems were in place to support members with their duties or the types of support that should be available. Also a straight forward person map of the whole council or a booklet listing all the key people under their departmental headings, would’ve been extremely helpful. More in depth and detailed ward maps would be a help and one showing the whole borough split into the various wards”.
- “It was fine as it was”.
- “Too much information too quickly (maybe stagger it)”.
- “More time to talk to some of the officers etc”.
- “More inductions are needed as there was a huge amount of information to take in and digest”.

**5. How do you rate the packs of essential information you were given by staff from Democratic Services? (Guides to Services, Member Support Info, IDeA Councillors Guide etc)**

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no of responses
8	11	5	1	-	-	25
32%	44%	20%	4%	-	-	100%

**6. How could this information be improved for the future?**

- “Need more time to discuss the content of the pack at the session”.
- “This was very thorough and helpful”.
- “To be honest, we got so much information and I then moved house, that I’m hoping to find it again some time in the next few weeks – at the time, the IDeA stuff and the London Councils little booklets were quite helpful”.
- “Would be helpful to have an organogram of staff in Democratic Services and what they do. Many people were mentioned if they are the contact person for a particular area, but there are others who I have been in touch with subsequently and I’m not quite sure where they fit in”.
- “My main criticism would be that there is a huge amount of new written material thrust into Councillors hands on the evening. This needs to be dramatically reduced. By all means have a session where we can meet senior staff but keep it to that, not all the gumph”.
- “Reduce the amount of paper to a basic minimum”.
- “Electronic is better, stacks of paper are difficult to carry and get lost, especially in the aftermath of an election”.
- “More help with identifying the right people to contact and structure of departments in the form of listings for quick reference. The Councillors Guide contains too much info to be useful when having to work quickly. Having to combine my council work with running my own business I find I can’t spend the hours needed to research the information I require”.
- “It is very good and concise, however there is too much of the same stuff. Can you cut down on paperwork for new Councillors”?
- “Consider disability issues, access issues”.

**7. Is there any training or development that you would like to receive now that has not yet been offered? If so, can you say what this is?**

- “Any ICT training which is available and members are entitled to will be very helpful”.
- “I think inductions on specific topics would be helpful. I attended the finance induction and found it really helpful, but it was 15 minutes late starting, because until then, I was the only Councillor in attendance”.
- “I don’t really feel that I have had any training to help me settle in to my role. For me the biggest challenge has been casework – knowing who to go to, what response we can expect, how to take things further if we are not happy with the response, to what extent we can get help from officers/group office etc. This has been discussed within the Group”.
- “Support for members to understand the basics of local government structures/legislation/finance would also be helpful”.
- “I’d like a one hour session on local government finance. LBC couldn’t manage this, can you? Also, when will the casework tracking system come into use and when will a directive go out that the 10 working day

limit to answering Councillors e-mails is actually the maximum time, rather than either the ideal or the minimum”?

- “How to access funding and grant bodies for local community groups, how to scrutinise effectively”.
- “Facilitation training within my role as chair of Lib Dem group. It would also help me work with stakeholders within my ward too”.
- “Committee Chair training”.
- “Maybe pair new Councillors up with more experienced ones so we can feel more comfortable and confident”.
- “Possibly more help/ aftercare with technical issues ie the computer”.
- “Planning training and casework training”.
- “Yes, more stuff to do with IT/especially the internet systems like Izzy etc”.
- “Record leads through HFI”.
- “I would like training on casework manager”.
- “Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) training. Disability equality training”.

**8. Is there any support that you require in your role as a Councillor that is not currently being met? If so can you say what this is?**

- “Not at the time being”.
- “It would be useful to be able to access council email and e-systems via the internet from any computer, not having to use just one laptop, and then only at home”.
- “A corporate parenting event for all Councillors”.
- “The casework tracking system”.
- “I find the whole email system very unhelpful, as I can’t really access the email during the day, which is when people send emails. I’m then at meetings in the evening, so can’t read them then either. It doesn’t help that my office has no phone reception so I have to go outside during work hours to access email on my blackberry. No webmail makes life difficult. In general, a lack of understanding that Councillors can work full-time and so a meeting held at 2pm on a Thursday isn’t very helpful. Also, meetings that start at 4.30 or 5pm do not constitute ‘evening meetings’ particularly when you finish work at 5.30pm, and that’s doing a job I can leave at 5.30pm most days. Support for members does seem to be good, but I often don’t have the time to ask for help – that’s the problem really”.
- “IT continues to make life more difficult than it needs to be. Only being able to log in at home – and the length of time it takes to log in – means that I can check my emails less regularly than I would like, and am not providing as good a service to residents as I could. I am not prepared to pay for a blackberry out of my own money. It is unfair that Councillors who served during the last term have auto-forwarding and new Councillors do not”.
- “Personally, I wouldn’t mind having Janet have access to my outlook calendar to check availability for meetings. All of the team at work have access to each others calendars and when people (officers, Local

Sergeant, HFI or Ec1) ring up to go through dates for meetings or email us dates, it would be useful if they had one person to contact to check my availability and agree a timeslot. Whilst work is very supportive and encouraging of my role as Councillor, sometimes getting calls whilst at work to arrange meeting dates impedes on the good will of my managers and also equally I don't want any resident or officer think that I am slow at responding or important meetings/council business been delayed".

- "The IT service – Having to log in through three different log in screens using a wire connection and an enormous council laptop is a pain – I should be able to access my council email anywhere, anytime".
- "Explanations of motions to Council etc and how to raise them would be useful".
- "I would have liked things like headed notepaper and envelopes supplied as a matter of course. It would be very helpful. I appreciated the business cards".
- "Transport support is vital given my limited mobility. I have to fulfil my duties as a Councillor while attending meetings in my local communities, my ward and at the Town Hall. This is what being a Councillor is all about. The taxi card scheme provides limited trips and for this year all my trips have already run out, so how can I do my job and attend meetings and do my job properly as a Councillor? The dial-a-ride scheme is not fit for purpose as well, leaving me with one option which is to use mini cabs to perform my duties as a Councillor and this is very expensive and hitting my Councillor's allowance. I really need more support and the Benefits Agency should pay attention and provide support. It is depressing"!

## 9. How do you rate the service provided to Members from the following teams?

### Mayor and Backbench Office

(Sue Goss and Janet Eacott)

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
19	5	-	-	-	1	24
80%	20%	-	-	-	-	

- "Superstars – absolutely brilliant"!
- "Sue and Jan are very good".
- "But I'd like a weekly update on the mayor and their visits and more info as to how I can get the mayor involved in my ward".

### Secretariat

(Patricia Niclas and her team)

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
17	3	-	-	-	5	20
85%	15%	-	-	-	-	

### Area Team

(Nodlaig Stoddart, Rachel Stern, Zoe Crane and Heather Scowby)

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
13	12	-	-	-		25
52%	48%	-	-	-		

### Scrutiny Team

(Peter Murphy, Peter Moore, Zoe Crane, Rachel Stern and Heather Scowby)

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
12	5	1	-	-	7	18
66%	28%	6%	-	-		

- “I haven’t worked with these as a Councillor but have worked with Peter and Peter before and rate them very highly”.

### Executive Team

(Nodlaig Stoddart, Mary Green and Jackie Tunstall)

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
12	7	1	-	-	5	20
60%	35%	5%	-	-		

## 10. What have you found particularly valuable?

- “Their readiness and sometimes their pro-activity to help”.
- “At this stage the backbench office”.
- “Close support for the Fairness Commission from Peter Murphy and Peter Moore. John Lynch’s ‘can do’, helpful attitude”.
- “Excellent casework support”.
- “Janet’s understanding of where casework should go, and reminders to chase things”.
- “Having been a Councillor before, albeit not in LBI, the most valuable thing has been to know not to panic”.
- “Helpfulness and flexibility of staff”.
- “Janet Eacot”.
- “Backbench support”.
- “Having a PA – it makes work much more productive and mine is excellent”.
- “Easy access to information”.
- “I have found Jackie Tunstall invaluable in my role as a new Councillor on the Licensing Committee. The email contact is a great boon”.
- Support from officers. Team work. Collaboration. Co-ordination”.
- “Knowledge, contacts and advice from members of the Secretariat”.

**11. What could be improved for the future?**

- “My understanding of what is possible”.
- “It might be better if this survey was online – it would make your analysis easier”.
- “I don’t really know what lots of these people do – so more info on this would be helpful!”
- “Less info but better info”.
- “The IT issues were a bit poor. It would have been nice to have it all set up and ready for the week after the election especially wireless as we are always mobile. I had quite a high amount of emails in my inbox when I got set up and this was overwhelming. Had I not have had a lot of local knowledge and understood the processes gained from being on Ec1, I wouldn’t have known where to start. The blackberry is very useful but limited to what it can offer and for the amount we are paying”.
- “IT – would be great to have blackberries or something similar”.
- “Just IT”.
- Communication (IT equipment) to be improved. Need for a printer and a fax machine. Improved co-ordination for swift responses in dealing with Council issues”.

**12. MEMBERS’ ACCOMMODATION**

**How do you rate the facilities provided in the Members’ Room (Room 107), kitchen and meeting room (Room 108) and the Group Offices?**

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
2	12	5	2	-	4	21
9.5%	57%	24%	9.5%	-	-	

**How could this be improved?**

- “Not at the time being”.
- “The computers in the Members Room are very slow and glitchy”.
- “Had problems logging on to the computers when first elected – as this was the only way I could possibly check my emails it was rather frustrating. Kitchen facilities haven’t been explained – can we make a cup of tea for example”?
- “The computers are old and frankly knocked about a bit. There is no privacy.
- Councillors are not provided with a telephone/internet connection for the job and a printer/scanner would make communicating with constituents easier – it’s no wonder people feel cut off from the democratic process if the Council takes such little care in making it easy to contact them”.



- “Not enough machines and they don’t log you on properly, and if they don’t there’s no one around to help. I think a decent coffee machine would be nice, given the amount of time certain members have to spend there, but given the financial situation I suppose it’s off the agenda”.
- “It would be more efficient if there were more than two computers available at any one time to Councillors to use”.
- “The Members’ Room can sometimes be overcrowded by members - need to find a solution when this happens.

### 13. IT

- **How do you rate the support provided by TSG to you with regard to your IT equipment and software?**

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
3	11	6	3	1	1	24
12.5%	46%	25%	12.5%	4%	-	

#### How could this be improved?

- “Encryption makes the computers very clunky”.
- “I think, within the frustrating restrictions imposed by security concerns, they’ve been fine. I did ask Nitin for a mouse and a carry-case for my laptop, but haven’t received them...”
- “I have yet to find out how I can access any system support. The laptop connection system I have at home is cranky and disjointed. I’m very disappointed”.
- “The support is ok, except that I still can’t access the internet from the blackberry I pay for, and increasingly Council emails have web-links in them, which I can’t access. The IT itself is not exactly modern – I appreciate now isn’t exactly a good time to move to Office 2007 but to be honest, I was surprised it hadn’t happened before we took office. The laptop is very clunky to use, and not at all portable. The blackberry has pretty poor reception, and it is very difficult to read some of the emails that come through with attachments – particularly those that are related to planning”.
- “TSG staff have always been quick to respond and helpful, and have worked around us (for example coming to collect my laptop at 8am), but the equipment and software itself continues to be problematic”.
- “Personal support is very good, but it took ages for TSG to issue blackberries”.
- “I make my own provision”.
- “They are very friendly and normally quite quick but I have to say I wasn’t impressed that they could not repair something remotely. When my password didn’t work they had to come out to my home and fix it. Moreover, I wasn’t impressed when my home computer froze due to

Council based information and files pertaining to community organisations like Ec1 to which I am the appointed Councillor and TSG wouldn't assist with the "freezing" problem or advise what I needed to do after I defragmented it".

- "Use of webmail. Easy to use system".
- "The actual support is great, but access to Council email is poor".
- "By improving initial care, supplying items promised, I never did receive a printer or longer ethernet cable. My computer was set up wrongly at the start, I couldn't save files in any folder. Being new I assumed this is some security set-up rather than a fault".
- "Answer the telephone for a start"!
- "IT security is ridiculous. It would help me serve my role as a Councillor if I could access my emails remotely (not paying £15 a month for a Blackberry)"!
- "The support service is good but the system itself leaves a lot to be desired".
- "I have had repeated problems but the support has been great. I do think the laptops could be improved though".
- "Laptop needs to be speedy and support work because if the laptop is very slow we will not deliver properly. Need for a printer and fax machine to facilitate communication to Councillors.

**14. How would you rate the overall level of service provided to you by staff from Democratic Services?**

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory	No response	Total no. of responses
16	8	1	-	-	-	25
64%	32%	4%	-	-	-	

**15. Do you have any further comments you would like to make on any aspect of the services provided to you by Democratic Services?**

- "It's generally very good, for which I am grateful. Thanks, and keep it up"!
- "Not really – just that the survey might be more valuable if it was anonymous and that it would be better online".
- "I think proactive support to help us access our emails in the first few weeks would have been helpful. It took quite a few weeks to get laptops etc set up, so we should have been given step by step instructions about accessing our emails at the town hall. I know this caused new members quite a lot of concern at the time as we didn't know what we were missing by not having access to our emails".
- "I'd also like to have an officer dedicated to following up my casework. Of course one each is unreasonable but in Camden there are 12 b/benchers to an officer and three Exec members to an officer. If we can't actively pursue casework through the byzantine Council structures, there is little point in trying to help constituents with

casework and I don't think Councillors should have to be finding out who to send enquiries to and chasing them up for answers".

- "I didn't receive a set of papers for the Planning Sub I chair, but other than that it's been perfect".
- "It is sometimes difficult being a new Councillor and having to do casework or help residents with a range of problems and having to get to grips with new areas – housing, social care, and dementia services. I have found individual officers helpful in giving me information but a formal set-up where new Councillors could go for help and quick briefings would be useful".
- "I am very happy with the services provided by Democratic Services but more needs to be done. Thank you".