

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 02/03/21

Complaints and Members' Enquiries - Summary Report

Housing Feedback Team

The Housing Feedback Team was formed in 2018 in order to manage the volume of members' enquiries received by the Housing Needs and Strategy Directorate. The aim was to ensure consistency in the quality of responses, better response times and more robust data collection for the purposes of learning. It also freed up officer time within the services to enable them to carry out their roles and support more of the borough's residents and homeless clients. The service also investigates and responds to complaints about the service, offering objectivity in this regard. In December 2020, in line with the Homes and Communities restructure, members' enquiries and complaints relating to Homes and Communities were absorbed into this service.

Prior to the formation of the Housing Feedback Team, there were numerous entry points across the directorate for members to submit enquiries and for residents to submit complaints without a single point of oversight of either function. The Housing Feedback Team provides a dedicated, single point of contact for members and councillors who have enquiries in relation to any of the services provided by the Homes and Communities, Housing Needs and Strategy or New Build directorates, or who wish to address any issues raised by their constituents in relation to these service areas. The team is made up of experienced customer services officers, who will also investigate and address complaints submitted directly by residents or their representatives for these directorates, focussing on early resolution, learning and service improvement. The team is trained to identify urgent cases and to escalate these matters as appropriate.

Performance indicators and service targets

As with all teams within the council, the Housing Feedback Team works to the council's corporate procedures regarding complaints and members' enquiries. Target timeframes for responses are:

Members' enquiries: 10 working days
Stage 1 complaints: 15 working days
Stage 1 complaint reviews: 10 working days

The service does not currently work to any set KPIs. A benchmarking exercise is intended in Q1 of 2021/22 prior to proposing and implementing KPIs for the service.

Performance and satisfaction data

The Housing Feedback team is small, made up of four officers, and manages a very high volume of enquiries. Data for 2020 (calendar year) is set out below:

Complaints	Total received
Jan 2020	19
Feb 2020	27
Mar 2020	33
Apr 2020	14
May 2020	18
Jun 2020	30
Jul 2020	31
Aug 2020	27
Sep 2020	74
Oct 2020	84
Nov 2020	39
Dec 2020	20
Total	416

Members' Enquiries	Total received
Jan 2020	133
Feb 2020	141
Mar 2020	139
Apr 2020	113
May 2020	117
Jun 2020	140
Jul 2020	136
Aug 2020	133
Sep 2020	186
Oct 2020	154
Nov 2020	180
Dec 2020	111
Total	1683

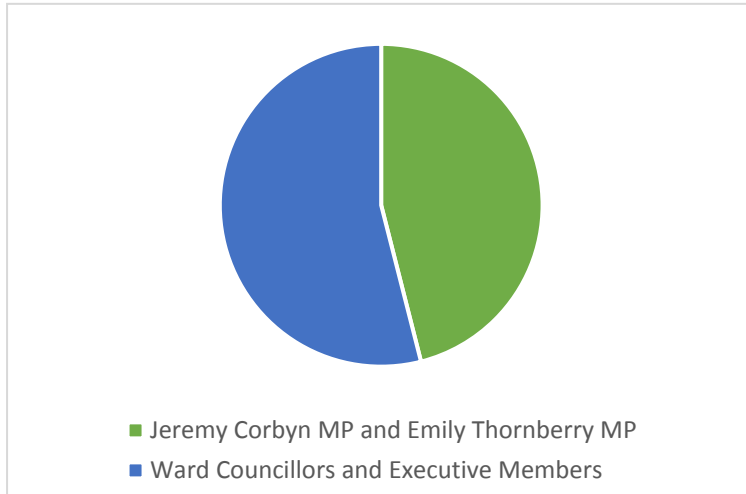
In the latter months of 2020, the service saw a considerable increase in both complaints and members' enquiries:

Complaints		
		Percentage increase
Average year to date	25	
Sep	74	196%
Oct	84	236%

Members' Enquires		
		Percentage increase
Average year to date	132	
Sep	186	41%
Oct	154	17%
Nov	180	36%

These increases, combined with staff shortages, led to a significant backlog of casework having built up in this period.

Despite this, the service overall receives very positive feedback, both from the support staff of the Executive Members and from Emily Thornberry MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP's offices, who are responsible for nearly 50% of enquiries submitted to the service:



Meetings are held bi-annually with staff from Emily Thornberry MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP's offices, the last one being held virtually in November 2020. At the meeting positive feedback was received for the service and the dedication of the team to positively resolving complaints.

In order to clear the backlog of outstanding casework and in recognition of the importance of maintaining the high level of service required in this area, temporary resources were brought in at the beginning of 2021. This has enabled the team to reduce the backlog of cases, whilst ensuring there is no decline in the quality and response times of new casework submitted to the service.

As of 18 February 2021, the team has cleared 71% of outstanding members' enquiries and 38% of outstanding complaints and is on target to clear all outstanding casework by the end of March 2021, at which point the temporary resource will be reduced and normal service will resume. The volume of casework will be closely monitored to ensure service levels are maintained and team resources will be reviewed in line with the level of complaints and members enquiries to ensure they are adequate.

Adding value

In addition to ensuring that members and residents have a single point of contact, that responses are of a consistently high quality and that we can improve services based on learning from complaints, the Housing Feedback Team can make a tangible positive difference to the lives of our residents. Unlike individual managers and services with many conflicting priorities, the Housing Feedback Team is always available to receive enquiries and to escalate where necessary. Common examples of this include imminent evictions and instances where families may be at risk due to harassment or domestic violence. In such situations, the team can escalate to the appropriate senior managers and liaise with all involved partners to bring about a swift resolution.