

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

28 January 2021

Subject:	Council Enquiries – relating to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference
Director:	Director – Housing and Communities Alan Caddick
Contact Officer:	Democratic Services Officer Alex Goddard alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considers the information presented to the meeting and determines if there are any recommendations it wishes to make.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Board has requested information on enquiries the Council receives from members of the public and councillors in relation to matters within the terms of reference for this Scrutiny Board.
- 2.2 Members will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the information that is presented to determine any potential recommendations the Scrutiny Board may wish to make.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	People live well and age well - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	Strong resilient communities - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	A strong and inclusive economy - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	A connected and accessible Sandwell - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Officers will present to the meeting information relating to enquiries the Council receives from members of the public and councillors in relation to matters within the terms of reference for this Scrutiny Board. The terms of reference are attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The information requested has is shown in three separate tables; Councillor Enquiries, MP enquiries and general enquires. The data demonstrates the volume of responses between 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 and the subsequent response times.



4.3 Councillor Enquiry information:

Member enquiries and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. Cllr. Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
2029	1963 (97%)	12 (0.5%)	7 (0.5%)	47 (2%)

4.4 MP enquiry information:

MP enquiries and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. MP Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
361	209 (58%)	21 (6%)	16 (4%)	115 (32%)

4.5 General Public enquiry information:

Public enquires and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. Public Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
142,908	140,208 (98%)	900 (0.6%)	450 (0.3%)	1350 (1%)

4.6 During the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of enquiries being received and dealt with by the council. Throughout the pandemic we have continued to deal with enquiries even with reduced resources where employees were redeployed into covid-19 priorities such as the food hub.

Cllr. enquiries were up by 13.7% in 2020 compared with 2019 and MP enquiries were up by 16.8% over the same reporting period.

4.7 It is our priority to deal with customer enquiries and feedback and we are continually looking at ways to improve. This includes:



- A Service Redesign Project Group has been set up with officers from both Neighbourhoods and the Contact Centre to initially look at all tenancy management enquiries. The group initially looked at 58 processes. The processes were reviewed to reduce duplication, double-handling and simplify the customer journey and improve the customer experience.
- Work has commenced on digitising many of the services and including them on MySandwell. The first phase of work has seen 34 forms are now accessible online. Further processes will come online over the next 12 months.
- A review of our existing processes against the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice has highlighted our compliance.
- We are currently reviewing our customer feedback ICT system to provide more detailed information, performance analysis and trend data to allow us to understand customer feedback and identify not only resolutions but preventative interventions.
- A working group is currently working on 'avoidable contacts' looking across housing management at the types of contacts that should be dealt with at first point of contact. Although in its infancy this work will identify actions such as additional training, improved processes and increased digitisation of services.
- The contact centre regularly meets with services including repairs, housing options, Serco and Children's Services to identify service failure and resolutions and enable customer service to improve.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 If the Scrutiny Board doesn't consider the information at the meeting on this matter then the opportunity to identify any recommendations would be lost.



6 Implications

Resources:	Enquiries are investigated and responded to by the Council within existing resources. The customer feedback team consists of 2 Customer Feedback Managers and 4 customer service officers dealing with all council feedback except Adult Services.
Legal and Governance:	Enquiries, including those raised by councillors, are a way of the Council being held to account by the public and their elected representatives.
Risk:	There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.
Equality:	There are no direct equality implications arising from this report. Members of the public can raise enquiries in a range of methods to best suit their needs.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct implications for health and wellbeing from this report.
Social Value	This report contains no social value implications.

7. Appendices

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board – Terms of Reference – Appendix 1

8. Background Papers

None

