

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTES OF AN INFORMAL MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – MEMBER ENQUIRIES

Date: Monday, 01 December 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Stephen Booth, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Kamal Choudhury and Akin Elekolusi.

Officers: Assistant Director Business Change and Digital; Nadia Capuano, Head of Customer and Digital Services; Greg Arends, Democratic Services Officer; Lee Waller and Scrutiny Officer; Stephen Weaver

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.45pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lynda Guy, Sandra Barr, and Ceara Roopchand.

2 **MEMBER ENQUIRIES**

Members were asked to share their experiences of the member enquiries system as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

Members were sent the below questions to answer in advance of the meeting, answers were collated and given to officers to prepare the presentation based on this feedback:

- How long did you have to wait for a basic reply acknowledging the issue is logged?
- How long did you wait for a substantial reply?
- How long for an outcome (job done or conclusion it could not be resolved)?
- How long did you have to chase the issue?
- Where you told which SBC team was dealing with it (or, if appropriate, another external agency was responsible)?
- Were you effectively signposted or your message proactively forwarded to the best people?
- If there is one thing you'd like to prioritise for improvement, what would it be?

Summary of presentation

- Types of Member Enquiries
 - Complaints
 - Service requests
 - Enquiries
- Yoursay Member contacts Quarter 1-2 2025/26
 - Member contact peaked in April, this was likely due to canvassing and dropped off in May due to the elections taking place
 - The figures then remained steady month on month to the end of Quarter 2
- Examples of member enquiries
 - Matters of public interest like a planning permission
 - Asking about a constituents housing application
 - Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) cases or Tree works
 - Requesting a service like street cleaning, environmental nuisance or a repair
- Routes taken for member enquiries
 - Email to Yoursay
 - Email to senior officers (Assistant Directors, Leadership Team)
 - Direct to officers
 - Generic team contacts
 - Face to face discussions / service meetings
- Feedback from members – strengths
 - Prompt acknowledgements
 - Quick turnaround on simple cases
 - Using Yoursay email is easier than logging online
- Feedback from members – weaknesses
 - Some complex cases don't get responses until they are chased by members and some parts of a case may be resolved and action ceases before other components are sorted
 - Certain departments are less responsive
 - Officer absence can affect response times
 - Automated responses can mislead and lack full context
 - No-reply email addresses are unhelpful
 - "Nothing to do with SBC" don't always contain signposting
 - Information on which back-office team is handling the enquiry is not always clear
 - Jargon and acronyms can be confusing for members and residents
 - Access to information (e.g. tree ownership) is sometimes lacking
 - Multiple enquiries can be lost if the first issue is resolved
- Considerations that may need to be factored into any recommendations
 - Monitoring and Performance
 - Data Protection
 - Coordination between members, MP, officers, and residents

Discussions during the presentation included:

- Third party responsibilities
- Consent to discuss (GDPR)
- Guidelines for officer response times / standards
- Alternative approaches to the current communication methods (De-centralised / Centralised / Fully integrated system / Informal mixed approach – Some members expressed a preference for a centralised system
- Key person dependencies / reliance on email
- A central triage for all member enquiries
- Information pages for members
- Provision of a free text area
- Providing a trackable ticketing number for all cases to make the system auditable – even if a replacement solution is proposed for a deregulated model

The Head of Customer and Digital Services agreed to take away the issues and recommendations members raised and come back in the next quarter with some draft options on improvements/replacement of the current YourSay system.

Informal Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following possible recommendations were suggested:

- There should be regular updates from officers to members until a case is resolved and it should be made clear to members when a case has been resolved
- There should be a discussion with the Strategic Leadership Team regarding Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each department regarding timescales for responses to members and to residents on an issue
- Improvements to automated case closures (E.g. street cleansing, hedge cutting) providing a narrative and detail of when the routine works will be carried out, not just a bland reference like “when the area is next cleaned on a routine visit, etc.”
- Fuller responses provided alongside automated ones when needed (E.g. signposting to the relevant other authority or company rather than “it’s not us” responses)
- An Information page for members to include:
 - Third party contact information for key services like HCC, UK Power Network, Water company.
 - Tree / street light ownership information
 - Frequently Asked Questions
 - Changes to processes / systems (E.g. housing allocation policy / Street cleansing schedule.