

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CABINET

Date of Meeting:	23 July 2012
Report of:	Borough Solicitor
Subject/Title:	Notice of Motion on the introduction of a Policy of Responding to Elected Member Enquiries
Portfolio Holder	Strategic Communities

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report invites the Cabinet to consider the following Motion, proposed by Councillor Boston, which has been referred by Council to the Cabinet for consideration:

“That Cheshire East Council adopt a policy of responding to elected member enquiries within 2 working days even if that response is a holding reply pending the collection of further information”

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet consider the Motion and offer its advice to Council.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To enable Council to consider the Cabinets views on the matter.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 None

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All Members are affected by this matter.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 None identified.

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Director of Finance and Business Services)

- 7.1 None identified.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 None identified.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 None identified.

10.0 Background and Options

10.1 On 19th April 2012 Council considered a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Boston on a policy of responding to elected member enquiries with two working days. The Notice of Motion is attached at Appendix1.

10.2 The Member Officer/Relations Protocol contained in the Constitution (Paragraph 4.4 refers) states that officers should respond to enquiries and complaints in accordance with the Council's standards.

10.3 The Council has published a Customer Charter which sets out the service standards that the public can expect when they contact the Council.

10.4 Amongst other things it states:-

If you telephone us:

- we will aim to answer your call within 20 seconds
- we will phone you back within one working day if you leave a message
- when the offices are closed we will inform you of our out-of-hours service, together with when the offices will next be open
- your call will be answered by a member of staff, who gives their name and who will take responsibility to ensure that your call is dealt with efficiently.

If you write or send us an email:

- we aim to respond to all letters within ten working days. If this is not possible we will tell you why and give you a response date
- we will respond to your email in full within five working days.

10.5 Within the Council there is a culture of responsiveness, and this is supported by the statistics used to monitor compliance with the Charter.

10.6 If Cabinet Members believe that there could have been unacceptable delays and that the existing requirements set out in the Member Officer/Relations Protocol Cabinet should be reviewed then Cabinet might wish to invite officers to review the approaches in other local authorities and consult further with all members of the Council on this matter before submitting a comprehensive report on the matter to Cabinet.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer. There are no specific background documents.

Name: Paul Jones
Designation: Democratic Services Team Manager
Tel No: 01270 686458
E-mail: paul.jones4@cheshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1

NOTICE OF MOTION TO COUNCIL 19 APRIL 2012

MINUTE 106

Consideration was given to the following Notices of Motion :-

5. Submitted by Councillor G Boston

Response Time for Elected Members Enquires

Elected Members as the representatives of local people often need to contact Cheshire East staff for information/explanation of particular actions, or as is more often the case inactions.

Recent experience is that officers are sometimes taking as long as three weeks to respond to enquiries made by Elected Members. Whilst that timescale is clearly unacceptable there isn't actually a protocol laid down for what is an acceptable response time to Elected Members. Following discussion with senior officers of this Authority we are told that the acceptable timescale for a response to an Elected Member is the same as the general public which is five days.

The Labour Group's view is that we are not members of the public but their elected representatives; furthermore we are almost always making an enquiry when for whatever reason the customer response protocols have broken down.

Other authorities have specific response times for elected member enquiries for example Manchester City Council has 24hrs with a clear expectation on officers that responding to elected members is a top priority.

On behalf of the Labour group I move that Cheshire East Council adopt a policy of responding to elected member enquiries within 2 working days even if that response is a holding reply pending the collection of further information.

RESOLVED

That the motion stands referred to Cabinet for consideration.