

<p style="text-align: center;">THH Board of Directors</p> <p style="text-align: center;">18th December 2017</p>	
<p>Report authorised by: Paul Davey, Director of Business Transformation</p> <p>Report Author: Debbie Palmer, Complaint and Members Enquiries Manager</p>	<p>Report type: For information and decision</p>
<p>Title: Preparation for the 2018 Mayoral Elections</p>	

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide the THH Board with revised projections for the volume of Members Enquiries expected during the election period.
- Provide the THH Board with an overview of the steps identified and taken to date to support our readiness for the Mayoral and Local elections 2018.
- Recommend the adoption of the revised LBTH Member/Officer Relations protocol.

Recommendations

- THH Board to note the revised projections for the volume of Members Enquiries expected during the Mayoral and Local election 2018.
- THH Board to note the steps that have been taken and are being considered by service areas to manage the anticipated increase in Members Enquiries.
- THH Board to adopt the revised LBTH Member/Officer Relations protocol.

2 Background

2.1 As in most local authorities there are competing demands between the needs of Members in their constituency work and the politically neutral position demanded of officers. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Secretary of State issued a Constitution Direction in December 2000 requiring all local authorities to have in place a protocol for managing the relationship between Members and officers.

- 2.2 The Nolan Committee on Standards of Conduct in Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales has expressed the view that the following principles should be observed;
- Advice to political groups must be given in such a way as to avoid compromising an officer's political neutrality.
 - Advice must be confined to Council business.
 - Relationships with a particular party group should not be such as to create public suspicion that an officer favours that group above others.
 - Information communicated to an officer by a party group in confidence, should not be communicated to other party groups.
- 2.3 As an ALMO owned and operated on behalf of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the largest social landlord in the borough, Tower Hamlets Homes is exposed to higher levels of interactions with Members through their association with the governance functions of the organisation and their casework activity.
- 2.4 In the period leading up to the 2014 Mayoral and Local elections, THH experienced a significant increase (71% compared to previous year) in the number of Members Enquiries that were received. Although the volumes of enquiries subsided following the elections and did not reach a similar level during the 2015 Mayoral elections, they remain higher than the pre-2014 election period.

Number of Member Enquiries received annually

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 To date	2017-18 Projected
976	3,342	2,049	1,613	1,218	786	2,500 (revised from 3,450)

- 2.5 During the course of the 2015 Mayoral elections, THH was associated with a number of incidents which generated public concern over the neutrality of the organisation and its staff.
- 2.6 In May 2015, a post on the Love Wapping website raised concerns over the inclusion of election materials alongside the Open Door publication whilst being distributed to residents. No members of staff were found to have been involved with this incident. A subsequent post in August 2015 highlighted that data used to support the Decent Homes programme had been used during the 2014 and 2015 Mayoral elections for campaigning purposes. The investigation into this security breach revealed that the information had been legitimately shared with the office of the former Executive Mayor in 2013.

- 2.7 This report sets out the measures already identified to support THH effectively managing the anticipated increase in Members Enquiries and recommends that the Board adopt the revised LBTH Member/Officer Relations protocol to provide a framework for the relations between Members and officers.

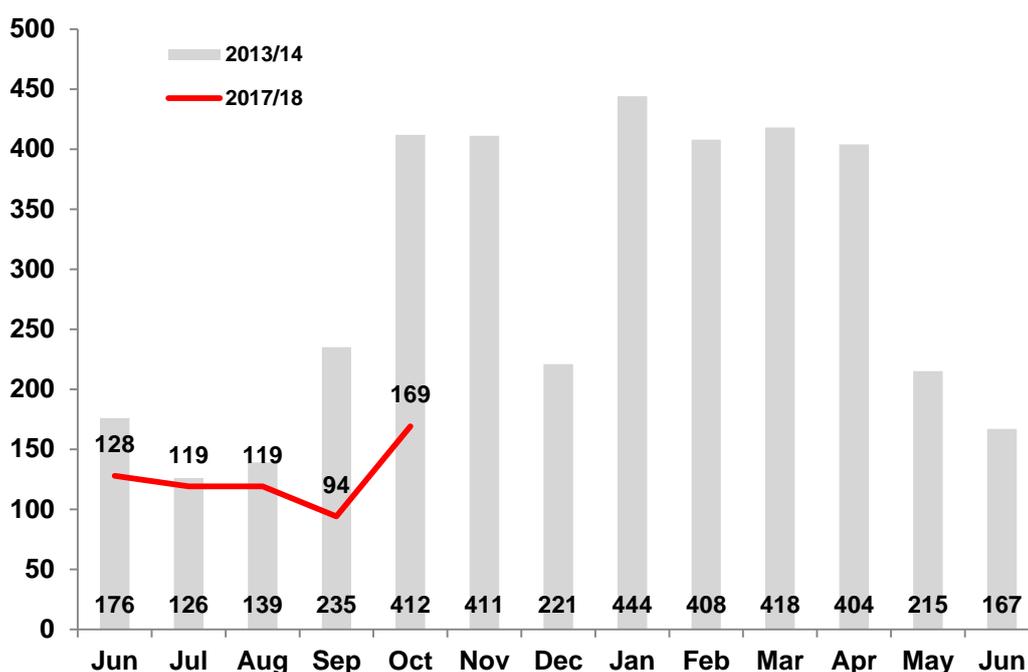
3 Managing Member/Officer Relations

- 3.1 In May 2017, the THH Board formally adopted the LBTH Member/Officer Relations protocol which sets out the roles and standards of conduct expected of Members and officers.
- 3.2 As part of the Best Value Improvement programme required of LBTH by the Secretary of State, the Council has reviewed and redrafted the Member/Officer Relations protocol. This new version of the protocol removes sections related to the General Principles of Conduct, the Statutory Framework; Gifts and Hospitality; and Members and Officers and the Media as these are deemed to be appropriately covered elsewhere.
- 3.3 The revised Member/Officer Relations protocol has been endorsed by the Council's General Purposes Committee and its Standards Committee in October 2017 and approved for adoption at the Council meeting on 22nd November 2017. In light of this, the Board is recommended to adopt the revised protocol which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.4 To further reinforce the role and responsibility of Members ahead of the election period, the Corporate Director for Governance at LBTH has written to all Members directing them to the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission for candidates and agents. This is attached as Appendix 2. This message will be reinforced by letters issued by THH to all Members which will also address issues related to the use of social media. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix 3.

4 Member Enquiry Projections for Mayoral and Local elections 2018

- 4.1 In April 2017, EMT considered a report which estimated that we would receive a total of 3450 Members Enquiries during 2017/18. This projection was calculated on the basis of the number of enquiries in 2016/17 and applying a similar percentage increase as seen during the 2014 Mayoral and Local elections.

Number of Member Enquiries received by month 13/14 and 17/18



- 4.2 Based on figures from September and October 2017 which show lower levels of Members Enquiries than previously anticipated, it is now assumed that we will receive 2,500 enquiries during the election period. This approximately represents 250 – 300 enquiries per month from November 2017 to April 2018. Projections for individual service areas are provided in the table below.
- 4.3 It is possible that the past trend may not be an accurate indicator of the timing and number of enquiries that will be submitted to THH this time round. Close monitoring will continue throughout the period and swift action initiated should the rate of increase be in excess of that assumed.

Projections by service area 2017/18

Service Area	2017/18 Original Estimates	Actuals April – Sept 2017	2017/18 Revised Estimates
Repairs General Build	800	158	670
Capital Investment/ Decent Homes	600	59	200
ASB	500	89	400
Leasehold Services	440	86	400
Repairs Mechanical & Electrical	220	19	100
NHO (North)	210	43	150
NHO (South)	210	67	150
HSC	200	49	200

Environmental Services	140	37	130
New Build	40	3	20
THH other	60	26	50
Chief Executive office	20	1	
Rents		10	40
Strategic Engagement	10	1	5
ESTIMATED TOTAL	3,450	648	2505

5 Preparing for the Mayoral and Local elections

- 5.1 To support the readiness of the organisation for the Mayoral and Local elections, resourcing has been discussed at DMT meetings and services have identified a range of steps that will be taken to help manage the increased volume of enquiries. The table below captures the steps being considered or currently pursued by the service areas which have historically generated the highest volumes of Members Enquiries.

Election planning by key service areas

Service	Steps	When
Neighbourhoods Directorate including ASB, Housing Service Centre, Environmental Services, Neighbourhood and Leasehold Services	Options to recruit a temporary shared NHD resource to assist with drafting of and sending out responses to residents being explored.	February to end of May
Repairs including North and South General Build and Repairs Electrical and Mechanical	With the reduction of complaints from previous years it is felt that these service areas would be able to cope with the additional Member's Enquiries within existing resources.	Ongoing
Property Services including Capital Delivery, Investment Planning and New Build	Property Services have held 1 of 2 planned workshops on dealing with ME's and complaints. Additionally weekly monitoring sessions have also been arranged to support with any possible increases in volume. No additional resources are currently deemed necessary.	Ongoing

- 5.2 Throughout the election period, the Complaints Team will continue to monitor the volumes of Member's Enquiries received. In the event that the volumes of enquiries cannot be appropriately managed using the processes and resourcing set out above, additional capacity will be provided by reassigning the current pool of four graduate trainees. Where this is still considered to be insufficient, additional staff will be sourced on a temporary basis.
- 5.3 To support staff prepare and build their confidence ahead of the anticipated increase of Members Enquiries, the Centre for Public Scrutiny has been engaged to provide training sessions for key members of staff with responsibility for overseeing and managing Members Enquiries. These sessions have been held in October and November 2017. Individuals who have attended training sessions will also be responsible for cascading information across their service areas. This is expected to help prepare and build confidence amongst staff ahead of the anticipated increase during the election period.
- 5.4 The Centre for Public Scrutiny is also in the process of finalising a guide which aims to:
- Support understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors
 - Provide brief information on how the council works
 - Enable understanding of the principles behind effective member/officer relations and the importance of this for THH when dealing with members' enquiries.

The draft guide is attached as an Appendix 4 to this report.

- 5.5 In June 2017 the role of assessing and assigning of Member Enquiries was transferred to LBTH from the Complaints Team. This change, since the last election, will help limit the impact on THH. Additionally, from September 2017, individual service areas have sent responses to residents on behalf of the Member. These changes have streamlined the process and have contributed to an improvement to response times (YTD 81% compared to 67% at the end of March 2017).
- 5.6 In January 2017, EMT agreed that a standard suite of templates would be adopted to streamline the response process for Members Enquiries where it related to standard service requests or issues already raised as a complaint. Although this initiative was not implemented, these templates will now be rolled out across the organisation to enable routine enquiries to be responded to quickly during the election period.
- 5.7 With the peak of the campaigning period expected to coincide with the end of the financial year, there is likely to be an increase in requests for annual leave and a higher than average number of staff absent through leave booked in advance. To ensure this does not detrimentally affect the capacity of services to manage their caseloads, all Heads of Services have been requested to have in place appropriate plans for managing leave and requests for leave during this period. To help reinforce this message, the Complaints team will periodically send reminders to all Heads of Services and Directors.

6 Finance

There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any additional resource that may be required to manage the impact of increased numbers of Members Enquiries will be covered from within existing budgets.

7 Legal Implications

Clause 33.3 of the Management Agreement requires THH to deal with Members Enquiries in accordance with the protocol adopted by LBTH.

8 Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 The measures set out in this report aim to support THH improve efficiency, transparency and accountability in the way it handles Member's Enquiries and Member/Officer relations. The overall aim is therefore to reduce risk to the organisation and its reputation.
- 8.2 Not approving the recommendations made in this report may affect the capacity of the organisation to act with impartiality and expose it to reputational harm.