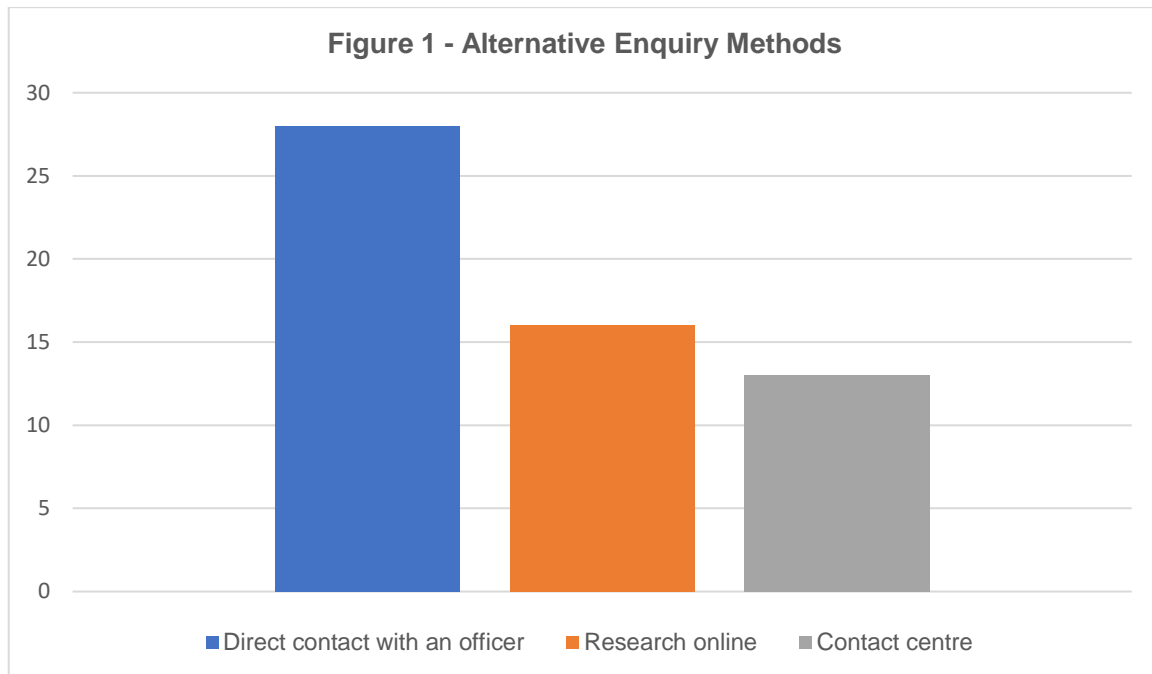


## Member Enquiries Consultation – Summary Report

41 members responded to the electronic survey disseminated via the Councillor Newsletter. All 41 indicated that they currently use the member enquiry process.

Of the 41, 34 (83%) members also indicated that they request information in other ways. A breakdown of this is provided below<sup>1</sup>;



The largest proportion indicated that make direct contact with an officer (either in person, via email or through a phone call). 16 members indicated that they research online and 13 indicated that they log enquiries directly via the contact centre.

### Quantity of Enquiries

The majority of members (19) indicated that they raise between 4 and 7 enquiries per week. At a minimum this translates to 16 per month, per member to a maximum of 28 per month, per member. On a monthly basis this totals a minimum of 304 across the 19 members to a maximum of 532 across the 19 members.

A further 6 indicate that they raise between 8 and 10 enquiries per week and an additional 4 members estimate that they raise 11 or more.

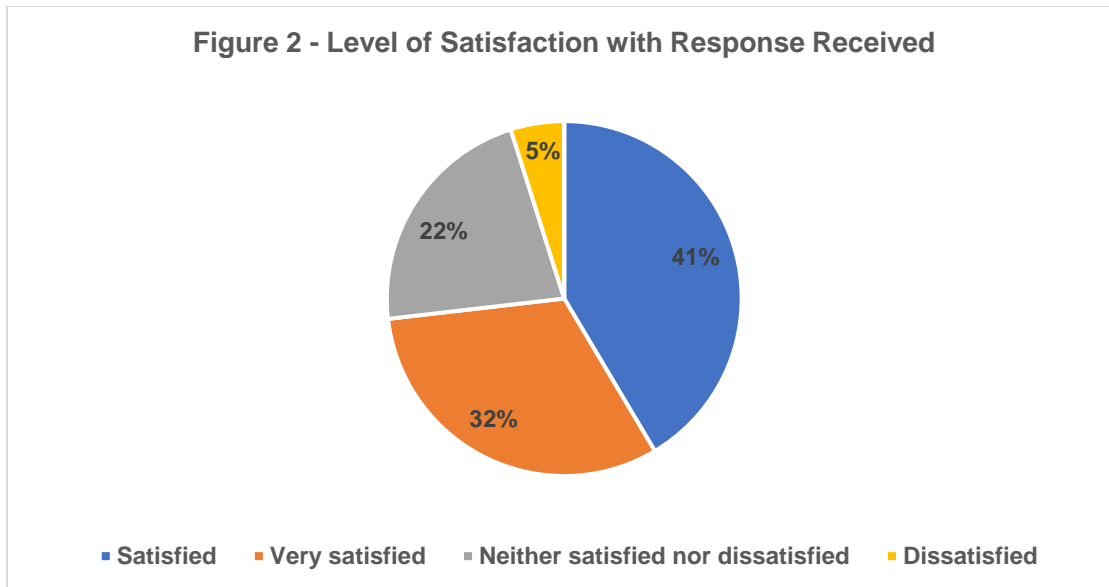
13 members indicated that they raise between 1 and 3 enquiries on a weekly basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Members were able to select multiple answers for this question

### Satisfaction with Response Received

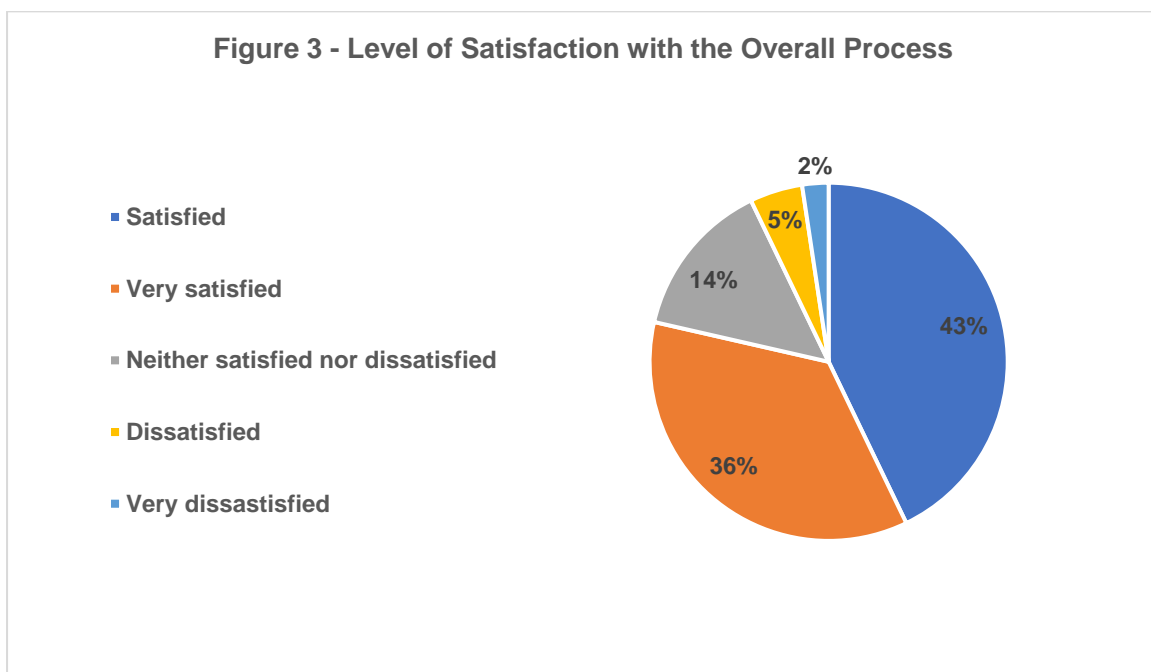
In the main members are satisfied with the responses received to enquiries raised. A breakdown of this is provided below;



Positively, no members reported that they are 'very dissatisfied' with the response received to enquiries raised. Only two members reported dissatisfaction which translates to 5% of the 41 responses received. The largest proportion indicated either 'satisfied' (41%) or very satisfied (32%). A further 9 members (22%) indicated that they are 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.

### Satisfaction with the Overall Process

Overall, the members which responded are satisfied with how the current democratic member enquiry process works. A breakdown is provided below;



18 (43%) members indicated that they are satisfied with how the current process works. This is followed by a further 15 (36%) members who state that they are 'very satisfied' with the process. 6 members are 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. Furthermore, 2 members (5%) are dissatisfied, and one member is 'very dissatisfied'.

### **Additional Comments**

Members were asked if they would like to make any additional comments about the member enquiry process, to which 34 responded. The main themes are explored below;

#### **Democratic Services Unit (DSU) Staff**

Several members made positive comments regarding the support received from staff within the Democratic Services Unit. The service they provide is noted as being of a high quality. This is consistent with feedback received from members during the Member Enquiries Workshop sessions.

*"I cannot give DSU enough praise for the work they do and their politeness and efficiency."*

*"I have no complaints, always courteous, even when I make mistakes."*

One member suggested that an explanatory message to indicate when the Democratic Services Unit are unable to answer the phone would be helpful.

#### **Turnaround Time**

In some instances, members feel that the mandatory 7-day window in which to respond to enquiries is too long. This is noted as being particularly frustrating if the enquiry is deemed by the members as requiring an immediate response.

In this regard the DSU was praised once again for their role in chasing up updates.

*"Sometimes important queries need immediate answers and not 7 days."*

*"Sometimes departments don't get back or wait until the last day to respond. In time sensitive cases this can be very frustrating."*

*"Most of the time the requests are dealt with in a timely manner, but DSU staff do, 15% of the time have to chase up requests which should be unnecessary."*

One member referred to having not received any response to some of their enquiries. Reference is made to whether this is then escalated.

*"When you don't get a response within the timeframe is it followed up by the CE as some of my queries are awaiting a response for months. Some are responded to in part but then nothing is heard even though the DSU keep asking. I think the DSU are fantastic, it is not their fault some do not respond."*

#### **Closing the Loop**

Several members made comments relating to the process and its efficiency in terms of 'closing the loop'. A source of frustration is the difficulty in following up or clarifying something in an original enquiry. Whilst the 7-day window applies to the initial enquiry it would appear that this doesn't necessarily apply to follow-ups. In this regard, members suggested that officers could be more proactive in following up with updates.

*“The current process works well for the first enquiry for officers to reply as DSU send out reminders. However, once the first reply has been received by Councillors, officers do not follow up with updates.”*

*“The only real problem I have with the existing system is that you sometimes have to go so far as to raise a new enquiry to follow up on the response you receive from officers regarding the original query. Queries have to be answered within 7 working days but if I want to then clarify something in the response or ask a follow up question, it doesn't seem that a response within 7 working days is mandatory for that follow up. I've actually got an existing query chase up that I've asked DSU about and it's been nearly 3 weeks since I first asked for an update, and I had to send another email this week to ask again for an update.”*

*“No follow up when enquiries go adrift after initial response. Should be logged until member is satisfied that all reasonable steps have been undertaken or reasons for inaction e.g. due to funding constraints.”*

Members indicated issues with the fact that they are unable to keep a log of the enquiries that they have raised and which of those have been actioned or closed. In some instances, 'actioned' could suggest that a 'holding email' has been sent by an officer within the 7-day window which would translate in the system as a 'closed' enquiry. This creates issues for members but also for DSU, as it results in increased 'chasing' and frustration.

This is sure to create a 'bottle-neck' effect whereby in some instances new enquiries are logged by members which relate to previous enquiries. Whilst this creates additional pressure for DSU, the officers dealing with the enquiry and the members themselves it is also important to note that this will have an effect from a data capturing perspective.

Members indicate that this is also hampered by the different/ lack of reference numbers allocated to enquiries which then makes it difficult to monitor which have been addressed and which are still open.

In addition, specific reference was made to the frustration around not knowing if an enquiry directed to the contact centre has been actioned or not.

This is consistent with feedback received via the Member Enquiries Workshop Sessions.

*“The DSU staff are an asset to the county, and I've always found them to be very helpful, going out of their way to try to resolve any issues. The issue for me is when an enquiry goes to the Contact Centre. The response is "you raised a report of an obstruction in a road". There is no reference to which one I have reported (I might have sent 5 that week). I can't marry it up with my enquiry. I also don't receive a response that it has been done when we used to in the past. This causes more work for officers as I and no doubt others are asking for updates.”*

*“Depending on the nature of the complaint I receive I very often report directly via the website direct online facility. Whilst the complaint is always acknowledged most complaints referred to services this way do not result in any update or confirmation that the issue has been addressed.”*

## Contact Centre Calls

Two members referred to the long wait times they and their constituents face when contacting the Council via the contact centre.

*“If I want to contact X, I phone reception, 20 mins later the call is answered. I ask to be put through to X, they do but X does not answer the phone, I put the phone down, and try phoning reception again, 20 mins later it is answered, etc. A totally unacceptable level of service, the same service members of the public think is also unacceptable. As for the DSU, they have helped me so often, diolch byth.”*

*“Y gwyn barhaol rwyn dderbyn wrth aelodau'r cyhoedd yw ei methiant i gael ateb ar y ffon pan yn treial cyslltu a'r Cyngor Sir./ The constant complaint I receive from the public is that they are unable to get an answer when they contact the Council on the phone.”*

## Quality of Responses

Reference was made to the varying degree of quality with regards to responses received. However, there is some recognition that officers are under pressure and may not always be able to respond to enquiries as comprehensively as required in the time frame. It was also noted by one member that the seriousness with which the member enquiry function is regarded varies between officers.

*“The quality of some officers’ responses is awful whilst others have obviously put in a lot of effort into their response. I usually highlight these to the Head of Service as a way of thanking those officers for the help they've given me.”*

*“Some Officers seem to take the Enquiry System more seriously than others while DSU staff and Cabinet Members are more supportive.”*

## Direct Contact with Officers

One member expressed frustration with regards to planning committee members not being able to contact officers directly to discuss planning applications.

## Changes to Current Process

Although one member noted that they find the process easy and simple to use, and another six utilised the comment box to thank staff for their service, others made suggestions with regards to changes that could be made, these include;

- Strengthening the relationship between what comes in/or is logged via the contact centre with the member enquiry process.
- Sharing with members the nature of the calls coming in from residents via the contact centre.
- The development of a system which allows members to keep track of the enquiries that they have logged and the resulting action.
- The development of a system which would allow members to ‘flag’ or escalate/prioritise enquiries. This extends to categorising enquiries.
- The development of a cloud-based system rather than an email system.
- Removal of the requirement for some enquiries to be logged via the contact centre in favour of enquiries being directly sent to the relevant officer.
- Removal of the need for DSU to be copied into responses which would limit the number of emails members receive in relation to an enquiry.

- Ensuring that officers aren't deciding what enquiry is a 'priority'. There is a fear that this could lead to an accusation that some members are being favoured over others. They expand to say that the current process is fair.

#### Other Points of Note

One member indicated that training on the Geodiscover system would be beneficial.