



Scarborough Borough Council

# **Guidelines for Elected Members Contacting Officers**

**DOCUMENT CONTROL**

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## **GUIDELINES FOR ELECTED MEMBERS CONTACTING OFFICERS**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Council recognise the important role that Elected Members have in representing the interests of their constituents, especially where they are experiencing difficulties with the Services that the Council provides. The provision of prompt responses from officers to enquiries from Elected Members is therefore essential. However it is also recognised that expectations around response times need to take into account the duty of care that the Council has to employees in relation to them having a reasonable work/life balance.
- 1.2 The following guidelines have been prepared to clarify the Council's arrangements with respect to how officers are expected to deal with enquires from Elected Members and aims to ensure that they are dealt with in a timely manner. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations as set out in the Council's Constitution.

### **2.0 WHO DO THE GUIDELINES APPLY TO?**

- 2.1 The guidelines apply to all Elected Members.

### **3.0 KEY PRINCIPLES**

- 3.1 Where an enquiry is received from an Elected Member, officers will aim to respond promptly and openly.
- 3.2 Officers should ensure that they enable voice mail facilities during working hours both for their desk and mobile telephones so that messages can be left when they are unavailable.
- 3.3 Officers are not obliged to deal with non-emergency enquires from Elected Members outside of normal working hours.
- 3.4 Where an officer is on leave they are not obliged to deal with enquires from Elected Members however they must ensure that Elected Members are made aware that they are not available and who should be contacted in their absence.
- 3.5 The Council can only lawfully provide support services to assist Elected Members in discharging their role with the Council. Officer support is therefore only to be used for Council business and not in connection with party political/campaigning activity or for private purposes. Where it is felt that an enquiry from an Elected Member imposes a disproportionate burden on an officer's work/is considered to be of a political/private nature, this should be explained and discussed with the Elected Member concerned by the relevant Service Unit Manager/Director.



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### **4.0 RESPONSE TIMES**

- 4.1 Elected Members' enquiries generally fall into specific categories and these guidelines set out the different methods of engagement and the protocols in relation to each of these.

#### **Meetings**

- 4.2 Elected Members are asked where possible to make appointments to meet with officers if this is the preferred method of communication.

#### **Letters/E Mails/Telephone Enquiries**

- 4.3 Officers will make every effort to provide a substantive response to an enquiry from an Elected Member as soon as possible but:-

- **Letters** - Within no more than 10 working days.
- **E Mails** - Within no more than 3 working days.
- **Telephone** - Within no more than 2 working days.

- 4.4 In the event that a substantive response cannot be provided within these timescales, officers will be expected to acknowledge receipt of the enquiry and provide a revised timescale in which a substantive response will be provided (ideally be no longer than 15 working days).

- 4.5 In the event that an officer is on leave then they will be expected to respond to the Elected Member in accordance with the timescales set out above once they return to work unless the query has been directed to and is being/has been dealt with by a colleague in their absence. In such circumstances officers are required to make Elected Members aware of that they are not available and provide an alternative contact to assist in their absence.

#### **Enquires Received Outside of Working Hours**

- 4.6 Where an Elected Member contacts an officer outside of working hours there is no requirement for them to deal with non-emergency enquires. In such circumstances the Elected Member should leave a voicemail or send an E Mail to the officer. Where such a voicemail/E Mail is left then the officer will respond within the timescales set out in paragraph 4.3. In the event that an officer is on leave then they will be expected to respond to the Elected Member in accordance with the timescales set out above once they return to work unless the query has been directed to and is being/has been dealt with by a colleague in their absence.



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### **Emergency Situations**

- 4.7 Should an Elected Member become aware of an emergency situation where it is considered that an immediate response from the Council is required (as opposed to the emergency services), they should contact the Council's Control Centre emergency number 01723 351558. The Control Centre Operative will then refer the issue immediately to an appropriate officer who will take appropriate action. This facility is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year but must only be used in emergency situations.

### **5.0 RAISING CONCERNS**

- 5.1 In the event that an Elected Member is unhappy with the timescales in which an officer has responded to an enquiry then they should raise this with the relevant Service Unit Manager/Director.
- 5.2 Where an employee feels that they have been asked to provide a response within an unreasonable timescale that is not in accordance with these guidelines then they should raise this with the relevant Service Unit Manager/Director.