

<b>Report to:</b>	QSMTM Q4
<b>Report by:</b>	Helen Gardner-Swift, Head of Corporate Services (HOCS)
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	12 May 2021
<b>Subject/ Title:</b> (and VC no)	<b>Quality Assurance – Enquiries Service</b> VC149959
<b>Background Papers</b> (title and VC no)	CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC149234) (not attached)

## Purpose of report

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1. To provide assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries in 2020-21 as required by the key document C1 Governance Reporting Arrangements (GRA).

## Recommendation and actions

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2. I recommend
  - (i) the Senior Management Team (SMT) notes the Committee Report (CR) and the assurance provided
  - (ii) this CR is published as set out in paragraph 18

## Executive summary

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3. The Commissioner has a duty to promote good practice and a power to give advice on the operation of FOI. We use this power to provide an enquiries service to the public and public authorities. Anyone with a question about FOI or our regulatory role can contact us for advice and most of our enquiries are from the public. This service is also one of the main points of contact with us and we have answered more than 25,500 enquiries since FOI was introduced in 2005. The Commissioner recognises the importance of good performance and quality in the delivery of this service.
4. As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the office premises have been temporarily closed from 23 March 2020 and an interim enquiries procedure is in place. This means that we are still able to continue to consider and respond to Enquiries.
5. The CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC149234), considered by the SMT on 29 April 2021, set outs the enquiries statistics and performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2020-21. Both KPIs were met in 2020-21.
6. The purpose of this CR is to provide assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries as required by the key document C1 Governance Reporting Arrangements.
7. The previous procedures used to assess quality in the delivery of this service are resource intensive (particularly as regards records management) and time consuming and a review of these procedures is underway. This was started in 2019-20 but I was not able to complete this review in 2020-21 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work priorities. In addition, it would be worth waiting to see how remote working and office working move forward this year so that account can be taken of any hybrid working arrangements that will

be put in place for the longer term. The review will continue in 2021-22. In the meantime, interim procedures are in place for providing assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries (see below).

#### Interim procedures

8. The interim procedures consist of the following:
  - a condensed review of the enquiries received in 2020-21 and the responses provided
  - the random selection of fifty enquiries by the HOCS who then considers the following:
    - whether the enquiries procedures have been followed
    - whether responses to enquires were accurate
9. As a shorter form of review is carried out, the following does not take place:
  - good practice is not identified
  - line managers are not informed about any individual performance and if there are any individual learning or development needs

### **Assurance**

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10. I have carried out a review of response to enquiries handled in 2020-21 using the interim procedures that are in place. Following this review, I am satisfied that the relevant procedures have been followed and that, generally, responses to the enquiries were accurate. Therefore, I am able to provide assurance that the enquiries service meets an acceptable quality standard.

### **Risk impact**

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11. This assurance report contributes to the control measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of failing to engage appropriately with our stakeholders and the public and mitigates this risk.

### **Privacy impact**

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12. There are no privacy impact issues arising from this assurance report.

### **Equalities impact**

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13. None arising from this assurance report.

### **Resources impact**

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14. As we work through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Enquiries procedures will be kept under review and the impact on resources will be monitored.

### **Operational/ strategic plan impact**

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15. As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the office premises have been temporarily closed since 23 March 2020 and interim Enquiries procedures is in place. This means that, during 2020-21, we were still able to continue to consider and respond to

Enquiries during. The procedures will continue to be reviewed and monitored as we work through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current situation.

### **Records management impact (including any key documents actions)**

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16. Enquiries are recorded and managed in line with our procedures and office systems. The Enquiries that were responded to whilst we did not have remote access to our office systems have been entered into the case management system.

### **Consultation and Communication**

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17. QSMTM minute and publication of the CR.

### **Publication**

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18. I recommend that this CR is published in full.