

<b>Report to:</b>	QSMTM Q4 2021-22
<b>Report by:</b>	Helen Gardner-Swift, Head of Corporate Services (HOCS)
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	25 May 2022
<b>Subject/ Title:</b> (and VC no)	<b>Quality Assurance – Enquiries Service</b> VC169770
<b>Background Papers</b> (title and VC no)	CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC168485) (not attached)

## Purpose of report

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1. To provide assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries in 2021-22 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 20.

## 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. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (which continues), our priority as an organisation has been to provide key services and guidance within available resource while safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of our members of staff. We have been able to respond to enquiries sent to us by email or by post and enquiries continue to be managed, as far as possible, in line with the relevant procedures.
5. As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the office premises were temporarily closed from 23 March 2020 until 2 May 2022. An interim enquiries procedure was in place while the office premises gradually re-open which meant that we were still able to continue to consider and respond to Enquiries.
6. The office premises re-opened on 3 May 2022 and a gradual return to working in the office premises is now underway. The interim enquiries procedure has been updated and a phone message, relating to an enquiry, can be left on our general office phone number and will be picked up by the Corporate Services Team (CST). The message will then be forwarded to the relevant officer for response. As the hybrid working system develops, the HOCS and the CST will be considering how telephone enquiries can further be developed.

7. The CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC168485), considered by the SMT on 11 May 2022, set out the enquiries statistics and performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2021-22. Both KPIs were met in 2021-22.
8. 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.
9. The procedures previously 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 continuing. I was not able to complete this review in 2021-22 due to the impact of other work priorities. In addition, it would be worth waiting to see how remote working and office working moves forward this year so that account can be taken of any hybrid working arrangements that will be in place for the longer term. The review of the procedures will continue in 2022-23. In the meantime, interim procedures are in place for providing assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries (see below).

#### Interim procedures

10. The interim procedures consist of the following:
  - a condensed review of the enquiries received in 2021-22 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
11. 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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12. I have carried out a review of response to enquiries handled in 2021-22 using the interim procedures that are in place. Following this review, I am satisfied that the relevant procedures have been followed and that 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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13. 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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14. There are no privacy impact issues arising from this assurance report.

### **Equalities impact**

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15. None arising from this assurance report.

## **Resources impact**

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16. 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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17. 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 2021-22, we were still able to continue to consider and respond to Enquiries. 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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18. Enquiries are recorded and managed in line with our procedures and case management systems.

## **Consultation and Communication**

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19. QSMTM Q4 minute and publication of the CR.

## **Publication**

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