

<b>Report to:</b>	QSMTM Q4 2022-23
<b>Report by:</b>	Helen Gardner-Swift, Head of Corporate Services (HOCS)
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	26 May 2023
<b>Subject/ Title:</b> (and VC no)	Quality Assurance – Enquiries Service – 2022-23 VC187248
<b>Background Papers</b> (title and VC no)	CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC184938) (not attached)

## Purpose of report

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1. To provide assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries in 2022-23 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 26,000 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, our priority as an organisation has been to provide services and guidance 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 and re-opened on 3 May 2022 and hybrid working is now in place. The interim enquiries procedure was updated in 2022-23 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 the telephone enquiry procedure can further be developed.

6. The CR Enquiries Service Statistics Report (VC184938), considered by the SMT on 27 April 2023, set out the enquiries statistics and performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2022-23. Both KPIs were met in 2021-22.
7. 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.
8. 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 2022-23 due to the impact of other work priorities. In addition, it would be worth waiting to see how remote working, office working and hybrid working moves forward this year so that account can be taken of any revised working arrangements that will be in place for the longer term. The review of the procedures will continue in 2023-24. In the meantime, an interim procedure is in place for providing assurance on the quality of responses to enquiries (see below).

#### Interim procedure

9. The interim procedure consists of the following:
  - a condensed review of the enquiries received in 2022-23 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
10. 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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11. I have carried out a review of the responses to enquiries in 2022-23 using the interim procedures set out above.
12. In three cases I noted that not all relevant documentation had been correctly filed in the related Workpro case. However, generally, I am satisfied that the enquiries procedures have been followed and that responses to the enquiries reviewed 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. 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. No significant impact identified, however, the Enquiries procedures will be kept under review and the impact on both plans will be monitored.

## **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.