



*Office of the Auditor General / Bureau du vérificateur général*

**AUDIT OF THE COUNCIL REQUEST TRACKING PROCESSES  
2007**

**Chapter 12**

**VÉRIFICATION DU PROCESSUS DE SUIVI  
DES DEMANDES DU CONSEIL MUNICIPAL**

**2007**

**Chapitre 12**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ***Introduction***

The Audit of the Council Request Tracking Process was added to the 2007 Audit Plan as a result of the yearly risk assessment.

In recent consultations, Council members expressed concern that the inquiries and requests for information from Council are at times overlooked, and they lack confidence that a reliable process is in place to ensure that all of these inquiries are acted upon.

### ***Audit Objectives and Scope***

The purpose of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of the current processes and to identify any changes that should be made to ensure that all requests are appropriately followed through and responded to. The main focus was inquiries and requests from Council Members that arise through the formal meeting process of Council and its Committees. However, research involved developing an understanding of informal requests, as well as the workload associated with them in order to fully assess the inquiries process.

The scope of the audit did not include motions approved at a Committee or Council meeting.

### ***Background***

Section 31 of the City's Procedure By-law states that inquiries at meetings of Council and its Committees are to be submitted and responded to in writing. Inquiries are to be referred to the City Manager or appropriate Deputy City Manager, and responses are to be distributed to all members of the originating Committee or at Council. The status of outstanding inquiries is to be communicated on a quarterly basis by the City Clerk.

While the procedures in the By-law are being followed, there is room for some confusion and interpretation. Corporate direction is provided by the City Clerk's staff with regard to formal inquiries. The City Clerk's office defines formal inquiries as those which are:

- Pursuant to Section 31 of the Procedure By-law;
- Submitted in writing at a meeting of Committee/Council; and,
- Dealt with under "Inquiries" at the end of a meeting agenda.

In order to appreciate the full extent of the inquiries dealt with by City staff, departmental staff from the operating departments, Business Transformation Services (BTS) and Financial Services were asked to conduct a survey. Table 1 below provides

an overview of survey results with respect to inquiries from Council Members (i.e., Councillors and the Mayor).

**Table 1: Inquiries from Council Members**

TYPES OF INQUIRIES/REQUESTS	APPROXIMATE NUMBERS					
	PWS	PTE	CPS	BTS	FS	TOTAL
FORMAL	33	24	18	28	212	315
INFORMAL	2,700	7,346	1,885	481	1,932	14,344

While over 300 formal inquiries (i.e., written inquiries at meetings) were logged by City Clerk's staff in 2007, staff estimate handling over 14,000 informal requests from Council Members in 2007. This is a rough estimation of the volume of these requests and is thought to be quite conservative. Departments indicated they could not capture all requests that occur via telephone calls or informal discussions (e.g., hallway chats), the majority of which are not documented in any way, nor are those questions that are deemed to be very quick and simple to respond to tracked in any way. Refer to the table in Appendix A of the full report for detailed survey results.

As part of this audit, telephone interviews were conducted with other City Clerks to obtain their insights on common practices and challenges with respect to the handling of inquiries. It appears most municipal governments are faced with a similar situation and there is not a set of "best practices" that Ottawa could emulate. Key success factors were cited as timely responses; setting service levels; consistent practices across the organization; clearly capturing the intent of each inquiry; and capturing as much as possible in the official records. It was acknowledged that informal inquiries present a special challenge in gauging workload and determining staffing needs to respond to them.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Councillors are not satisfied with the existing process for handling inquiries. They indicate that they find the inquiries process does not seem reliable, lacks consistency in that the process changes depending on the department and specific staff involved, and that they must often follow up on items, particularly informal requests, to obtain a response. Some have also raised concern that the process should be somewhat more restrictive to prevent more complex, time-consuming inquiries and requests coming

from a single Councillor. The Councillors consulted feel that the associated time and cost implications are not being considered and should be.

Concerns identified by the audit team which relate specifically to the formal meeting process include:

- Timeframes for responding to inquiries should be set and monitored on a consistent basis;
- An interim reply step is needed to confirm timeframes once staff has had an opportunity to consider what will be involved in responding;
- Written inquiries are sometimes submitted after some Councillors and staff have left the meeting and at times are not read into the minutes;
- Verbal direction is given in the course of discussion on items, some of which may involve the tabling of a motion and as such the City Clerk's Branch could provide a more complete service by ensuring that directions are captured in the records/minutes and confirming follow-up action via email after the meeting (i.e., as is done for inquiries); and,
- The process currently does not facilitate the consideration of the time and cost implications of inquiries; more complex inquiries involving significant staff time should be reconsidered by the relevant Committee and Council as a whole before proceeding.

The formal process for inquiries is one option for Councillors and this is where the City Clerk's staff plays a role. As indicated above, the vast majority of requests from Councillors are informal and are routed directly to staff within departments. Some are communicated by email, memo or letter, and others via telephone calls or in-person conversations. Staff point out that the advantage of an informal request is less process. Responses can be emailed directly to the requester as opposed to formal inquiries which normally require the preparation of a full report which must be routed through the formal meeting process. The difficulty arises with the volume of requests and the associated workload involved in tracking, researching and responding to them.

In reviewing samples of formal and informal requests as part of this audit, it became apparent that many requests routed through the informal process should actually be dealt with as formal inquiries. For example, matters that pertain to the interpretation, changing or creation of policies, and issues that require internal consultation or a multi-departmental response are more complex and take more time than should be the case for an informal request. Given the nature of some inquiries and the associated time and cost implications, some inquiries and requests from individual Council Members should involve tabling a motion to obtain direction from the Committee or Council. For example, cases that involve changing or creating policy that will affect the public; the creation of a framework or vision for a possible program or service or significant

procedural change; and matters that require public consultation or the completion of extensive research.

The process, as it stands, works as well as it does due to the high level of staff commitment at all levels across the Corporation. In order to handle the current volume of inquiries from a broader, integrated and more informed perspective, there is a need for some level of formality and structure. For example, there is a need to define “formal” versus “informal” inquiries to clarify when each is appropriate. In addition, corporate protocols regarding where inquiries should be directed, target response dates and an interim reply mechanism are needed. There is also a need to ensure that departmental tracking systems capture the appropriate data in order to enable monitoring and reporting on service levels as well as opportunities to streamline the work involved in responding to requests.

An agreed upon corporate set of standards for inquiry services would provide clarity, direction and benchmarking capability. A corporate body charged with oversight responsibilities for inquiry and request processes could provide the leadership and support that is currently lacking. Without the introduction of corporate leadership, tools and resources to improve the management of inquiries, problems that surface will continue to be addressed sporadically by staff, to the extent possible, on a case by case basis.

Given the nature of the work to be done and the respective mandates, experience and skills of the City Clerk’s Branch and other corporate service groups, it is felt that the BTS Department would be in an ideal position to provide the required leadership. This will involve working in close consultation with the City Clerk’s Branch on aspects pertaining to the formal inquiry process.

## ***Recommendations and Management Responses***

### **Recommendation 1**

**That management define “formal” and “informal” inquiries and requests to clarify what each of these avenues are intended to be used for (i.e., see Appendix B of the full audit report for a sample outline).**

#### **Management Response**

Management disagrees with this recommendation.

Management believes the definition of a “formal” inquiry is already defined and refers to an enquiry, which is filed in writing at a Committee or Council meeting (See Section 31 of the Council & Committee Procedure By-law).

In management’s opinion, any other inquiry would be regarded as “informal”. If Council wishes to further define categories and approaches to informal inquiries



(e.g., casework, policy, etc.) and investigate establishing response standards around informal inquiries, management recommends that the Member Services Committee be asked to undertake this work.

### **Recommendation 2**

**That management identify the types of inquiries that must be tabled as a motion at Committee or Council.**

#### **Management Response**

Management disagrees with this recommendation.

It is a Councillor's right to raise any matter to a Committee or Council that they wish to raise.

On February 8, 2008, the Long-Range Financial Plan Sub-Committee (LRFP) tasked the City Manager, the City Solicitor and the City Clerk to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That management establish corporate protocols, target response dates and an interim reply step in order to tighten the management of inquiries as per recommendations related to "Effectiveness" (Recommendations 5-7).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that the protocols regarding formal inquiries should be improved. As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

Management believes that, given the wide variety of informal inquiries, it would be ineffective to develop protocols without having a thorough understanding of what Councillors want and need in each given area. Management believes that, should Council wish to further define categories and approaches to informal inquiries (e.g., casework, policy, etc.) and investigate establishing response standards around informal inquiries that the Members Services Committee be asked to undertake this work with staff.

### **Recommendation 4**

**That management revise the Procedure By-law to incorporate the changes outlined in the recommendations above.**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

The Procedure By-law is regularly updated to reflect changes.

### **Recommendation 5**

**That management establish corporate protocols for direct staff responses, including:**

- **First point of entry in departments, i.e., Deputy City Manager (DCM) or Strategic Initiatives and Business Planning (SIBP) office of department;**
- **Directing inquiries from the Mayor's and City Manager's offices for appropriate transfer to departments;**
- **Under which circumstances staff should refer requests to a higher level;**
- **What sorts of department-specific policies and guidelines may be necessary;**
- **The kinds of requests that are to be documented and tracked (i.e., all informal requests unless they can be immediately responded to and involve a specified number of minutes or less of staff time); and**
- **In documenting requests, the data that is to be captured (i.e., include corporate standards for analysis of trends and annual reporting purposes).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that if Council wishes to establish service standards and reporting for processing informal inquiries, corporate protocols will be established. Management is recommending that Member Services Committee be tasked with reviewing this report and providing its recommendations for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries.

### **Recommendation 6**

**That management develop a practice of default deadlines for all inquiries (refer to Appendix B of the full audit report for a possible framework), including:**

- **Setting different response times for various categories of requests;**
- **Providing a quick response option for formal inquiries that do not require a report to Committee/Council; and**
- **Providing an interim reply step (i.e., to re-set timelines, discuss workload implications and/or staff request for motion to proceed).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

Management agrees that, if Council wishes to establish service standards and reporting for processing informal inquiries, corporate protocols will be established. Management is recommending that Member Services Committee be tasked with reviewing this report and providing its recommendations for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That management consider ways to enhance the process for interim reporting of the status of formal inquiries including:**

- **Emailing bi-weekly or monthly updates on outstanding items and ETA dates; and,**
- **How quarterly outstanding inquiries reports are provided to Council (i.e., an agenda item or just distributed).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

### **Recommendation 8**

**That management identify corporate standards for the key information that should be captured by departmental systems to enable analyzing trends (i.e., volumes, sources, types of requests, complexity, staff time involved, response rates), identifying opportunities for efficiency gains, reducing the volume of requests, and reporting on the inquiry process from a corporate performance perspective.**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

A formal process already exists for casework inquiries through 3-1-1. With respect to informal inquiries that relate to the legislative function of a Councillor, management believes that establishing standards is best handled in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

If Council directs, management is recommending that these recommendations be tabled before the Member Services Committee for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries, where desired.

### **Recommendation 9**

**That management develop plans for the implementation of the necessary information systems and tools, working in collaboration with ITS and operating and administrative staff including:**

- **Implementing MAP systems at the branch level within departments; and,**
- **Reviewing existing and required tools within the Mayor's and City Manager's offices.**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that technology could assist in the tracking process of formal inquiries. The City Clerk is investigating an electronic process in collaboration with the IT Services Branch.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 10**

**That management clarify which inquiries and requests are to be logged (i.e., all requests for which a written record or paper trail exists via email, memo, letter or inquiry form).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management confirms that all formal inquiries are logged.

With regard to informal inquiries, if Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 11**

**That management research the feasibility of and options available for developing a Corporation-wide knowledge database that:**

- **Allows staff across departments to log new inquiries and requests;**
- **Provides appropriate access privileges to facilitate the identification of previous like inquiries and requests; and the sharing of potentially relevant existing information, reports and contacts between groups;**
- **Facilitates searching for previous requests and responses within a department and ideally across departments; and,**
- **Incorporates built-in quality control mechanisms regarding the reliability of information (i.e., levels of sign-off on reports, memos, etc.).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 12**

**That management consider a phased approach, giving priority to:**

- **All inquiries and requests from Council Members as a first step; and,**
- **The needs of departments with interrelated responsibilities (e.g., Public Works and Services, and Planning, Transit and the Environment with respect to environmental issues).**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation 13**

**That management identify required fields and information to be logged into systems to consider the effects on staff workload and avoid excessive data collection.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation 14**

**That management assign corporate oversight responsibility for the management of inquiry and request processes to the BTS Department.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management confirms that the City Clerk will continue to have oversight responsibility for formal inquiries raised through the legislative process.

If Council directs, management will review the recommendations regarding informal inquiries in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation 15**

**That management establish a mandate to provide leadership and support to the Corporation as outlined by the recommendations contained in this report.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation 16**

**That management work in close collaboration with the City Clerk's Branch in developing protocols and tools with respect to inquiries that are routed through the formal meeting process.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

**Recommendation 17**

**That management determine resource requirements for the assumption of these responsibilities and explore options for proceeding within existing resources including:**

- **Reviewing existing resources within BTS and the City Clerk's Branch;**
- **Exploring the possible secondment of a resource from within the City Clerk's Branch to work under BTS leadership for a fixed term to lend expertise and to facilitate changes with respect to the formal inquiries process;**
- **Exploring the possible transfer or secondment of a resource from among the SIBP groups in the operating departments of the City; and,**
- **Consideration of staff and contract resource possibilities.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

***Conclusion***

The City Clerk's Branch currently supports the formal inquiries process in terms of written inquiries that occur at meetings of Council and its Committees. This represents a small portion of the total number of inquiries and requests for information handled by City staff. A significant amount of staff time is involved in responding to informal requests for information from individual Council Members, most of which are directed to staff within departments across the Corporation.

Council Members have expressed dissatisfaction with the reliability and response rates of the existing approach to managing inquiries. While inquiries have been generally recognized as a significant staff responsibility, the extent to which this activity occupies staff time was not clear prior to this audit.

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Over the years, management across the Corporation has developed independent departmental protocols, practices and tracking systems to manage inquiries. At this point, there is a need for leadership at a corporate level in order to make improvements to the management of both formal and informal inquiries. Recommendations are aimed at improving the reliability and response rates of the related services provided to Council Members and streamlining and reducing the work involved for staff in responding.

### ***Acknowledgement***

We wish to express our appreciation for the cooperation and assistance afforded the audit team by management and staff.

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## RÉSUMÉ

### ***Introduction***

La vérification du processus de suivi des demandes du Conseil municipal a été ajoutée au Plan de vérification de 2007 à l'issue de l'évaluation annuelle des risques.

À l'occasion de consultations récentes, les membres du Conseil municipal ont dit s'inquiéter du fait que leurs demandes de renseignements et requêtes sont parfois négligées et douter qu'un processus fiable soit en place pour en assurer le suivi.

### ***Objectifs et portée de la vérification***

La présente vérification avait pour objectif d'évaluer l'efficacité des processus actuels et de cerner tout point à améliorer pour assurer le traitement adéquat et complet des demandes. Elle portait principalement sur les demandes de renseignements et les requêtes des membres du Conseil présentées au moyen du processus officiel aux réunions du Conseil et de ses comités. Toutefois, la recherche effectuée englobait aussi les demandes non officielles et la charge de travail qu'elles représentent, de sorte que nous puissions dresser le tableau complet du processus de traitement des demandes.

La vérification n'a pas porté sur les motions approuvées lors d'une réunion d'un comité permanent ou d'une réunion du Conseil.

### ***Contexte***

L'article 31 du Règlement de procédure de la Ville stipule que les demandes de renseignements formulées aux réunions du Conseil et des comités municipaux doivent être soumises par écrit et faire l'objet d'une réponse écrite. Elles doivent être acheminées au directeur municipal ou au directeur municipal adjoint approprié, et la réponse doit être distribuée à tous les membres du comité ayant formulé la demande ou à la réunion du Conseil. Le greffier de la Ville est tenu de produire un rapport trimestriel sur le statut des demandes en instance.

Bien que les procédures prévues par le Règlement soient respectées, certains éléments peuvent porter à confusion ou se prêter à une interprétation. Le Bureau du greffier municipal émet des directives générales relatives aux demandes officielles, qu'il définit d'après les critères suivants :

- demande formulée en vertu de l'article 31 du Règlement de procédure;
- demande présentée par écrit au cours d'une réunion d'un comité ou du Conseil;
- demande inscrite au point « demandes de renseignements » à la fin de l'ordre du jour.



Pour nous donner une idée du volume de demandes traitées par le personnel de la Ville, nous avons demandé au personnel des services opérationnels, de Services de transformation des activités (STA) et de Services financiers d'effectuer un sondage. Le tableau 1 résume les résultats dudit sondage en ce qui a trait au nombre de demandes de renseignements présentées par les membres du Conseil (les conseillers et le maire).

**Tableau 1 : Demandes de renseignements des membres du Conseil**

TYPE DE DEMANDES	APPROXIMATIONS					
	STP	UTCE	SCP	STA	SF	TOTAL
OFFICIELLES	33	24	18	28	212	315
NON OFFICIELLES	2 700	7 346	1 885	481	1 932	14 344

Alors que le registre du Bureau du greffier municipal répertorie plus de 300 demandes officielles (c'est-à-dire formulées par écrit au cours de réunions) en 2007, le personnel estime avoir traité au-delà de 14 000 demandes non officielles de membres du Conseil au cours de la même année. Il s'agit là d'une estimation très approximative du volume de ces demandes, jugée fort prudente. Les services ont précisé ne pas être en mesure de recenser toutes les demandes formulées et réglées par téléphone ou au cours de conversations informelles (p. ex., lors d'un échange dans le couloir), d'une part parce que la majorité ne sont rapportées d'aucune manière que ce soit, d'autre part parce que les questions simples auxquelles il est jugé possible de répondre rapidement ne font l'objet d'aucun suivi. Veuillez vous reporter au tableau de l'annexe A du rapport intégral pour les résultats détaillés du sondage.

Dans le cadre de la vérification, des entretiens téléphoniques ont été tenus avec des greffiers d'autres municipalités pour connaître leur point de vue sur les pratiques courantes et les difficultés liées au traitement des demandes de renseignements. Il semble que la plupart des administrations municipales vivent une situation semblable et qu'il n'existe aucun ensemble de « pratiques exemplaires » qu'Ottawa pourrait adopter. Parmi les principaux facteurs de réussite mentionnés, citons : répondre rapidement aux demandes, établir des normes de niveau de service, uniformiser les pratiques au sein de l'administration, saisir clairement la demande, et consigner le plus de renseignements possible dans les dossiers officiels. En général, tous les greffiers reconnaissent que les demandes non officielles posent un problème particulier lorsque

vient le temps d'évaluer la charge de travail et les besoins en personnel qui y sont associés.

### ***Sommaire des principales constatations***

Les conseillers sont insatisfaits du processus actuel de traitement des demandes de renseignements et des requêtes qui, à leurs yeux, semble peu fiable et pas toujours uniforme (c'est-à-dire qu'il change selon le service et le personnel en cause), alléguant qu'il leur faut souvent faire un suivi avec le personnel pour obtenir une réponse, en particulier dans le cas des demandes non officielles. Certains croient que le processus devrait être resserré quelque peu pour éviter qu'un même conseiller adresse de nombreuses demandes complexes dont la réponse nécessite beaucoup de travail et de temps. Les conseillers consultés estiment que le temps et les coûts associés aux demandes ne sont pas pris en considération, mais qu'ils devraient l'être.

Les préoccupations relevées par l'équipe de vérification relativement au processus de traitement des demandes officielles formulées au cours des réunions portaient entre autres sur les points suivants :

- Les délais de réponse aux demandes de renseignements devraient être préétablis et constamment surveillés.
- Il faut prévoir une étape où le personnel, après avoir évalué l'ampleur de la tâche, indiquera combien de temps il faudra pour répondre à la demande.
- Les demandes écrites sont parfois soumises après que certains conseillers et membres du personnel ont quitté la réunion et ne sont pas toujours consignées au procès-verbal.
- Comme certaines directives verbales données au cours des délibérations relatives aux points à l'ordre du jour peuvent comprendre le dépôt d'une motion, la Direction du greffe pourrait offrir un service plus complet en s'assurant que ces directives sont notées dans les dossiers ou le procès-verbal et en confirmant par courriel après la réunion (comme c'est le cas pour les demandes de renseignements) les mesures de suivi qui seront prises.
- Le processus actuel ne permet de tenir compte ni du temps ni des coûts associés aux demandes de renseignements; les demandes plus complexes auxquelles le personnel doit consacrer beaucoup de temps devraient être examinées à nouveau par le comité en cause et le Conseil dans son ensemble avant d'être traitées.

Le processus de demandes officielles est une des options qui s'offrent aux conseillers et celle qui fait intervenir le Bureau du greffier municipal. Comme nous l'avons mentionné précédemment, la majorité des demandes des conseillers sont formulées de façon non officielle et acheminées directement au personnel des services concernés, au moyen d'un courriel, d'une note de service ou d'une lettre ou encore par téléphone ou

en personne. Le personnel fait observer que les demandes non officielles présentent l'avantage de ne pas être assujetties à des formalités administratives, les réponses pouvant être communiquées directement à l'intéressé par courriel tandis que les demandes officielles nécessitent habituellement la rédaction d'un rapport complet qui doit être déposé officiellement au cours d'une réunion. Le problème tient au nombre de demandes et à la charge de travail associée à chacune d'elles pour assurer le suivi, faire la recherche nécessaire et rédiger la réponse.

L'examen d'un échantillon de demandes officielles et non officielles réalisé dans le cadre de la présente vérification a révélé que de nombreuses demandes formulées officieusement devraient en fait être traitées comme des demandes officielles. Par exemple, les questions relatives à l'interprétation, à la modification ou à la création de politiques et les demandes qui nécessitent une consultation à l'interne ou la participation de plus d'un service sont plus complexes et leur traitement prend plus de temps qu'il n'en faut normalement pour répondre à une demande non officielle. Vu leur nature de même que le temps et les coûts qui s'y rattachent, certaines demandes de renseignements et requêtes formulées individuellement par des membres du Conseil devraient faire l'objet d'une motion afin que le comité concerné ou le Conseil puisse donner des directives quant au suivi à assurer. C'est le cas, par exemple, des demandes visant la modification ou l'élaboration d'une politique qui touchera le public, la création d'un cadre ou d'une vision pour un programme ou un service envisagé ou une modification importante des procédures, et des questions nécessitant une consultation du public ou de vastes travaux de recherche.

Si le processus actuel fonctionne, c'est grâce au dévouement du personnel à tous les paliers de l'administration. Pour qu'un tel volume de demandes de renseignements puisse être traité dans une perspective élargie, coordonnée et éclairée, un certain degré de formalité et de structuration s'impose. Par exemple, il faut définir ce qui distingue une demande « officielle » d'une demande « non officielle » afin de clarifier dans quelles circonstances chacune est de mise. De même des protocoles généraux doivent être établis pour régir l'acheminement des demandes et arrêter des délais de réponse cibles ainsi qu'un mécanisme de réponse provisoire. Il faut également s'assurer que les systèmes de suivi mis en place par les services cernent les données appropriées afin que l'on puisse surveiller les niveaux de service et faire rapport à ce sujet, ainsi que les possibilités de simplifier le travail nécessaire pour répondre aux demandes.

L'adoption d'un ensemble de normes municipales pour le traitement des demandes de renseignements procurerait clarté, orientation et points de référence. Une entité municipale chargée de superviser les responsabilités associées aux processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements et des requêtes pourrait fournir l'encadrement et le soutien qui font actuellement défaut. Sans l'introduction d'un encadrement à l'échelle municipale, d'outils ou de ressources visant à améliorer la

gestion des demandes, les problèmes qui se présentent continueront d'être réglés sporadiquement par le personnel, cas par cas, dans la mesure de ses capacités.

Vu la nature du travail à accomplir ainsi que, l'expérience, les compétences et le mandat respectifs de la Direction du greffe et des autres services municipaux, Services de transformation des activités semble l'entité la mieux placée pour assurer l'encadrement général voulu. Il lui faudra à cette fin travailler en étroite collaboration avec la Direction du greffe pour tout ce qui touche le processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements officielles.

## ***Recommandations et réponses de la direction***

### **Recommandation 1**

**Que la direction établisse la distinction entre une demande de renseignements et requête « officielle » et une demande de renseignements et requête « non officielle » pour préciser à quelles fins chacune doit être utilisée (voir à l'annexe B du rapport de vérification intégral pour un aperçu de l'échantillon).**

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction n'est pas d'accord avec cette recommandation.

La direction juge qu'il existe déjà une définition de « demande de renseignements officielle » et que cette expression désigne toute demande de renseignements présentée par écrit au cours d'une réunion de comité ou du Conseil municipal (voir l'article 31 du Règlement de procédure pour le Conseil et les comités municipaux).

La direction estime que toute autre demande de renseignements devrait être considérée comme étant « non officielle ». Si le Conseil souhaite définir différentes catégories et méthodes de traitement des demandes non officielles (examen des dossiers, politique, etc.) et examiner l'opportunité d'établir des normes de réponse pour les demandes non officielles, la direction recommande de confier cette tâche au Comité des services aux membres.

### **Recommandation 2**

**Que la direction définisse les types de demandes devant être présentées sous forme de motion au comité ou au Conseil.**

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction n'est pas d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Un conseiller a le droit de soulever toute question de son choix auprès d'un comité ou du Conseil municipal.

Le 8 février 2008, le Sous-comité du Plan financier à long terme (SCPFLT) a chargé le directeur municipal, le chef du contentieux et le greffier de la Ville d'élaborer et de recommander des façons d'améliorer la gestion, par le personnel, des demandes de

renseignements et des motions. Lorsque le présent rapport sera publié, le Comité des services organisationnels et du développement économique et le Conseil municipal se seront déjà penchés sur ces recommandations.

### **Recommandation 3**

**Que la direction établisse des protocoles généraux, des délais de réponses cibles et une étape de réponse provisoire pour favoriser une gestion plus rigoureuse des demandes de renseignements, conformément aux recommandations en matière d'efficacité (recommandations 5 à 7).**

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction approuve cette recommandation.

La direction admet qu'il faut améliorer les protocoles entourant les demandes de renseignements officielles. Comme il a été mentionné précédemment, le directeur municipal, le chef du contentieux et le greffier de la Ville ont été chargés, à la réunion du SCPFLT du 8 février 2008, d'élaborer et de recommander des façons d'améliorer la gestion, par le personnel, des demandes de renseignements et des motions. Lorsque le présent rapport sera publié, le Comité des services organisationnels et du développement économique et le Conseil municipal se seront déjà penchés sur ces recommandations.

La direction estime que, compte tenu de la grande variété des demandes non officielles, il serait inefficace d'établir des protocoles sans connaître avec précision les désirs et les besoins des conseillers dans chaque secteur donné. En outre, elle croit que si le Conseil souhaite définir différentes catégories et méthodes de traitement (examen des dossiers, politique, etc.) et examiner l'opportunité d'établir des normes de réponse pour les demandes non officielles, il devrait en confier la tâche au Comité des services aux membres pour qu'il s'en acquitte en collaboration avec le personnel.

### **Recommandation 4**

**Que la direction révise le Règlement de procédure pour y intégrer les modifications énoncées dans les recommandations précédentes.**

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Le Règlement de procédure est mis à jour régulièrement pour tenir compte des modifications.

### **Recommandation 5**

**Que la direction établisse des protocoles généraux pour les réponses données directement par le personnel, notamment pour établir :**

- un point d'accueil des demandes dans chaque service (c'est-à-dire le Bureau du directeur municipal adjoint ou le Bureau des initiatives stratégiques et de la planification opérationnelle des services, par exemple);

- l'acheminement des demandes de renseignements depuis les bureaux du maire et du directeur municipal jusqu'aux services appropriés;
- les circonstances dans lesquelles le personnel doit confier une demande à un palier supérieur;
- le type de politiques et de lignes directrices qui sont adaptées à chacun des services et qui pourraient s'avérer nécessaires;
- le genre de demandes devant être consignées et faire l'objet d'un suivi (p. ex., toutes les demandes non officielles à l'exception de celles auxquelles le personnel est en mesure de répondre sur-le-champ en y consacrant un nombre de minutes n'excédant pas une limite établie);
- les données devant être consignées dans les dossiers des demandes (p. ex., préciser des normes municipales aux fins de l'analyse de tendances et de la rédaction de rapports annuels).

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

La direction convient que si le Conseil souhaite établir des normes de service et exiger des rapports sur le traitement des demandes de renseignements non officielles, des protocoles généraux seront établis. Elle recommande que le Comité des services aux membres soit chargé d'examiner le présent rapport et de soumettre des recommandations en vue d'un examen et de l'élaboration d'un processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements non officielles.

### **Recommandation 6**

**Que la direction instaure des délais de réponse par défaut pour toutes les demandes de renseignements (voir l'exemple proposé à l'annexe B du rapport de vérification intégral), en prévoyant notamment :**

- des délais différents selon la catégorie de demande;
- des délais rapprochés pour les demandes non officielles ne nécessitant pas la rédaction d'un rapport au comité ou au Conseil;
- une étape de réponse provisoire (c'est-à-dire pour redéfinir le délai de réponse prévu ou discuter de la charge de travail que représente la demande ou de la nécessité de présenter une motion autorisant le personnel à entamer le travail).

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Comme il a été mentionné précédemment, le directeur municipal, le chef du contentieux et le greffier de la Ville ont été chargés, à la réunion du SCPFLT du 8 février 2008, d'élaborer et de recommander des façons d'améliorer la gestion, par le personnel, des demandes de renseignements et des motions. Lorsque le présent rapport sera publié, le Comité des services organisationnels et du développement économique et le Conseil municipal se seront déjà penchés sur ces recommandations.

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### **Recommandation 7**

**Que la direction envisage des façons d'améliorer le processus de production de rapports provisoires sur l'état d'avancement des demandes de renseignements officielles en cours, notamment :**

- par l'envoi de courriels toutes les deux semaines ou tous les mois pour informer de l'état d'avancement des demandes en cours et des dates d'achèvement prévues;
- en revoyant le mode de transmission au Conseil municipal des rapports trimestriels sur les demandes de renseignements en cours (p. ex., point à l'ordre du jour ou simple distribution).

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Comme il a été mentionné précédemment, le directeur municipal, le chef du contentieux et le greffier de la Ville ont été chargés, à la réunion du SCPFLT du 8 février 2008, d'élaborer et de recommander des façons d'améliorer la gestion, par le personnel, des demandes de renseignements et des motions. Lorsque le présent rapport sera publié, le Comité des services organisationnels et du développement économique et le Conseil municipal se seront déjà penchés sur ces recommandations.

### **Recommandation 8**

**Que la direction adopte des normes municipales afin de recenser les renseignements clés devant être consignés par les systèmes des divers services pour permettre l'analyse des tendances (volumes, sources, types de demandes, complexité, temps consacré par le personnel, taux de réponse), le repérage d'économies potentielles, la réduction du nombre de demandes et la production de rapports sur le processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements dans le contexte du rendement municipal.**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Un processus officiel existe déjà pour les demandes individuelles présentées par l'entremise du service 3-1-1. Pour ce qui est des demandes non officielles relatives aux tâches qui incombent aux conseillers, la direction croit qu'il vaudrait mieux traiter de l'établissement de normes en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction recommande que ces recommandations soient soumises à l'examen du Comité des services aux membres aux fins d'examen et d'élaboration, au besoin, d'un processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements non officielles.

### **Recommandation 9**

**Que la direction élabore, en collaboration avec le personnel de Services de technologies de l'information, le personnel opérationnel et le personnel administratif, des plans pour la mise en œuvre des systèmes et des outils informatiques nécessaires en envisageant notamment :**

- l'instauration de systèmes MAPau niveau de la direction de chaque service;
- l'examen des outils existants et des besoins à ce chapitre au sein des bureaux du maire et du directeur municipal.

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

La direction convient que la technologie pourrait faciliter le processus de suivi des demandes de renseignements officielles. Le greffier de la Ville étudie actuellement un procédé électronique en collaboration avec la Direction des services de technologie de l'information.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

### **Recommandation 10**

**Que la direction précise quelles demandes de renseignements et quelles requêtes doivent être consignées dans les dossiers (p. ex., toutes les demandes pour lesquelles il existe un document ou une trace écrite tels qu'un courriel, une note de service, une lettre ou un formulaire de demande de renseignements).**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

La direction confirme que toutes les demandes de renseignements officielles sont inscrites dans un registre.

Pour ce qui est des demandes non officielles, si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

### **Recommandation 11**

**Que la direction étudie les options qui pourraient mener à la création d'une base de connaissances municipale et qu'elle en détermine la faisabilité, l'outil devant :**

- permettre au personnel des divers services de consigner toute nouvelle demande de renseignements et requête;



- offrir des privilèges d'accès appropriés pour faciliter le repérage de demandes de renseignements et requêtes antérieures analogues et l'échange, entre divers groupes, de renseignements, de rapports et de coordonnées de personnes-ressources qui pourraient être pertinents;
- faciliter la recherche de demandes et de réponses antérieures visant un même service et, idéalement, tous les services;
- comprendre des mécanismes intégrés de contrôle de la fiabilité de l'information (p. ex., personnes autorisées à signer les rapports, notes de service, etc.).

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

#### **Recommandation 12**

**Que la direction envisage une méthode progressive, la priorité étant accordée :**

- à toutes les demandes de renseignements et requêtes des membres du Conseil municipal dans un premier temps;
- aux besoins des services ayant des responsabilités interreliées (p. ex., Services et Travaux publics et Urbanisme, Transport en commun et Environnement pour les questions d'environnement).

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

#### **Recommandation 13**

**Que la direction détermine les champs et les renseignements obligatoires dans les systèmes de consignation des demandes pour évaluer l'effet de chaque demande sur la charge de travail du personnel et éviter la collecte de données superflues.**

#### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

#### **Recommandation 14**

**Que la direction assigne à Services de transformation des activités la responsabilité de superviser la gestion des demandes de renseignements et requêtes ainsi que de leur traitement à l'échelle municipale.**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

La direction confirme que le greffier de la Ville conservera la responsabilité de superviser les demandes de renseignements officielles présentées selon le processus réglementaire.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera les recommandations concernant les demandes de renseignements non officielles en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

### **Recommandation 15**

**Que la direction crée un mandat pour encadrer et soutenir le traitement des demandes de renseignements à l'échelle municipale, tel qu'il est énoncé dans les recommandations du présent rapport.**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

### **Recommandation 16**

**Que la direction collabore étroitement avec la Direction du greffe afin de définir des protocoles et des outils pour le traitement des demandes de renseignements officielles présentées au cours des réunions.**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d'accord avec cette recommandation.

Comme il a été mentionné précédemment, le directeur municipal, le chef du contentieux et le greffier de la Ville ont été chargés, à la réunion du SCPFLT du 8 février 2008, d'élaborer et de recommander des façons d'améliorer la gestion, par le personnel, des demandes de renseignements et des motions. Lorsque le présent rapport sera publié, le Comité des services organisationnels et du développement économique et le Conseil municipal se seront déjà penchés sur ces recommandations.

### **Recommandation 17**

**Que la direction détermine les besoins en ressources associés aux responsabilités et étudie les façons de faire en sorte que celles-ci soient assumées à partir des ressources existantes, notamment par les moyens suivants :**

- examiner les ressources existantes au sein de Services de transformation des activités et de la Direction du greffe;
- envisager la possibilité de détacher un membre du personnel de la Direction du greffe, pour une période déterminée, auprès de Services de transformation des

- activités afin d’y mettre à profit son expertise et de faciliter la transition vers le processus modifié de traitement des demandes de renseignements officielles;**
- **étudier la possibilité de muter ou de détacher aux services opérationnels de la Ville un membre du personnel des groupes d’Initiatives stratégiques et Planification opérationnelle;**
  - **examiner les possibilités en matière de personnel et de ressources contractuelles.**

### **Réponse de la direction**

La direction est d’accord avec cette recommandation.

Si le Conseil le demande, la direction étudiera ces recommandations en consultation avec le Comité des services aux membres.

### ***Conclusion***

La Direction du greffe s’occupe actuellement du processus de traitement des demandes de renseignements officielles, c’est-à-dire des demandes écrites présentées au cours d’une réunion du Conseil municipal ou de ses comités. Or, ces demandes ne représentent qu’une infime portion du nombre total de demandes de renseignements et requêtes traitées par le personnel de la Ville. Celui-ci consacre beaucoup de temps à répondre aux demandes de renseignements non officielles formulées individuellement par les membres du Conseil, qui sont pour la plupart acheminées aux personnels des divers services municipale.

Les membres du Conseil se sont dits insatisfaits de la fiabilité et du taux de réponse associés à la méthode de gestion actuelle des demandes de renseignements. Bien que le traitement de ces demandes soit généralement réputé de représenter une partie importante des responsabilités qui incombent au personnel, l’ampleur du temps que celui-ci consacre à cette activité n’était pas connue avant qu’ait été effectuée la présente vérification.

Au fil des ans, les équipes de gestion des services municipaux ont adopté leurs propres protocoles, pratiques et systèmes de suivi pour gérer les demandes de renseignements. À l’heure actuelle, il faut une supervision à l’échelle municipale pour améliorer la gestion de ces demandes, officielles et non officielles. Les recommandations du présent rapport visent à augmenter la fiabilité et le taux de réponse des services de renseignement fournis aux membres du Conseil de même qu’à simplifier et à réduire le travail que doit effectuer le personnel pour répondre aux demandes.

### ***Remerciements***

Nous tenons à remercier la direction et le personnel de leur collaboration bienveillante et de l’aide qu’ils ont apportée à l’équipe de vérification.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Audit of the Council Request Tracking Process was added to the 2007 Audit Plan as a result of the yearly risk assessment.

In recent consultations, Council members expressed concern that the inquiries and requests for information from Council are at times overlooked, and they lack confidence that a reliable process is in place to ensure that all of these inquiries are acted upon.

The purpose of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of the current processes and to identify any changes that should be made to ensure that all requests are appropriately followed through and responded to. The main focus was inquiries and requests from Council Members that arise through the formal meeting process of Council and its Committees. However, research involved developing an understanding of informal requests as well as the workload associated with them in order to fully assess the inquiries process.

## **2 SCOPE**

The subject of this audit was inquiries and requests, made formally to staff, at a Committee or Council meeting for information or preparation of a report to clarify issues, etc. Such requests could cover any number of issues and require specific action from staff to follow-up. The focus of this audit was the identification of any gaps in the process of tracking these sorts of requests and recommending improvements that would ensure that requests are not overlooked.

The scope of the audit did not include motions approved at a Committee or Council meeting.

## **3 OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH**

Four audit objectives and a detailed set of criteria guided the completion of work and are included in this report under the “Observations and Recommendations” section. The audit objectives and criteria can be summarized as follows:

1. Is the process for handling inquiries at City Council and committee meetings clear and adhered to?
2. Is the existing process effective in responding to inquiries?
3. Is the City’s current approach efficient?
4. How is the present system for handling inquiries monitored or overseen to ensure it is meeting the needs of the organization?

A review of the existing approach to following up on Committee and Council requests involved tracking 22 cases through the process. This included samples from each of the four departments of the City and Financial Services as follows:

1. Planning, Transit and the Environment Department (PTE):
  - Two requests from Planning & Environment Committee
  - Two requests from Transit Committee
  - Two requests from Council
2. Community & Protective Services Department (CPS):
  - One request from Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee
  - Three requests from Community & Protective Services Committee
3. Public Works and Services Department (PWS):
  - Two requests from Transportation Committee
  - Two requests from Planning & Environment Committee
  - One request from Council
4. Business Transformation Services Department (BTS):
  - Two requests from Corporate Services & Economic Development Committee
  - One request from Council
  - One request from Planning & Environment Committee
5. Financial Services (FS):
  - Three requests from Corporate Services & Economic Development Committee

Key steps in the review included:

- Consultation with the Council and Committee Services Division of the City Clerk's Branch;
- The designation of a key contact person within each department to consult with the operations within their own departments and to act as the primary departmental contacts providing information and input to the Consultant for the duration of the project;
- Meetings and follow-up key contacts within departments regarding the completion of:
  - a tracking sample of a cross-section of inquiries and requests from 2007 as described above;
  - a survey of informal inquiries and requests for 2007; and,

- clarifying related departmental policies and practices;
- Consideration of input from Councillors;
- Industry research involving telephone interviews with five other cities to obtain insights regarding standard practices and common challenges and solutions;
- Consultation with Information Technology Services staff regarding existing tracking systems across the City and possibilities with regard to cross-departmental sharing of information and corporate analysis and reporting;
- Obtaining feedback from departments on draft observations and recommendations; and,
- Provision of a report with recommendations for improvement.

## **4 CONSULTATION WITH COUNCIL MEMBERS**

The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) invited Council Members to provide their comments at the outset of this audit. Five Councillors responded and the input they provided during individual interviews is summarized below.

### **4.1 Structure**

It is felt that there is a lack of structure regarding how requests are handled. The process varies by department and who is involved. Some feel that the process for formal inquiries is managed more tightly than the process for informal requests. Councillors commented that the inquiries process is, at times, used inappropriately and that staff time is being spent on requests that may not be worth the workload involved. Inquiries are at times not always read into the minutes and may be submitted after Council and staff members have started to leave. There is a general concern about time and cost implications not being considered.

Generally, the sense was that the rules needed to be clearer and more restrictive in several areas. Currently, any Councillor can ask for a study and it is felt that such requests should come from the whole Committee or Council, as is the case with the requests to the Auditor General or from the Police Services Board. The suggestion was made that staff should come back with implications, timelines or refuse requests that are unreasonable.

### **4.2 Timeframes**

It is also felt that timeliness for responses should be a greater focus for both formal and informal requests. Councillors commented that they must often chase after informal requests and are frustrated by a lack of set turnaround times for all inquiries. They would like to see timeframes set and monitored to ensure timely answers are received. It was suggested that perhaps different response times should be set for various categories of requests, with interim reporting of status.

### **4.3 Departmental Policy/Protocol**

Councillors felt that it is not sufficiently clear who to go to in departments with requests and that each department should have a protocol to clarify who to contact.

### **4.4 Documentation**

Some commented that official records and minutes could be more complete in capturing inquiries raised at meetings and identifying the requester and responder of record. Some commented that directions to staff should be more clearly captured to ensure they are not forgotten. It was felt that responses should be more formalized.

### **4.5 Resources**

Concern was raised about the number of requests and the impact on departments' workloads. The need to identify inappropriate requests in terms of time and costs involved was also raised. It was mentioned that perhaps a research function for Councillors would make sense rather than tying up departments directly.

### **4.6 Analysis**

Council Members noted that there are, at times, inconsistencies in responses. It was suggested that there is a need to analyze requests to identify the same or similar requests. It was also mentioned that the former City of Ottawa had one single tracking system used by all which facilitated this sort of tracking and analysis at a corporate level. It is felt that the City Manager should be aware of all requests and yet, currently does not have the ability to do this.

## **5 INDUSTRY RESEARCH**

The City Clerks of five cities agreed to participate in telephone interviews to share information about their inquiries processes and to discuss common challenges and possible solutions. The five cities included Edmonton, Windsor, Region of Peel, Region of Niagara and Region of Durham. Comments provided are summarized below under the main themes that emerged.

### **5.1 Resources**

As is the case at the City of Ottawa, Clerks' departments of the other cities contacted, oversee and support the formal inquiry process that involves meetings of Council or its Committees. Operating departments deal independently with informal inquiries. It is typical that far more informal requests are received than formal inquiries, and informal inquiries and statistics are not tracked corporately. Windsor is just starting to collect corporate data through a newly established Councillor Secretariat<sup>1</sup> within the City Clerk's Branch. This two-person function is dedicated to providing support to

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<sup>1</sup> Windsor's Councillor Secretariat is the sole provider of administrative support to an 11-person Council.

Councillors including handling all Council Member inquiries and research related to constituent-specific concerns. They steer Councillors to the Secretariat and away from directly contacting departments. In most other cities, informal inquiries are directed through department heads.

## **5.2 Procedure By-law and Rules for Inquiries**

In many cities, target timeframes are built into the By-law. In most cases, Councillors can object to a request and ask staff to explain the associated workload; however, this rarely happens. In some cases, inquiries are formally adopted at meetings through passing a motion on the whole list of questions or they are read into the minutes.

## **5.3 Formal Inquiries Process**

Holding a question period at the end of Council/Committee meetings is typical; however Edmonton has its inquiries process at the beginning of meetings. Written inquiries are most common and some cities require that Councillors read the inquiry out loud at the meeting. Clerks' staff follows up on each inquiry after meetings, capturing for the record the original requester, the verbatim request, and the department and person that the item has been referred to. In some cases, the Clerk's official record (i.e., a form, chart with details of the inquiry) goes into the formal minutes as well.

Staff can answer inquiries verbally at the meeting and a report or other form of written response usually follows at a future meeting, available to everyone. If a request is deemed onerous by staff, some make a practice of taking it back to committee for a decision on whether it is worth proceeding.

## **5.4 Deadlines**

The City of Ottawa has established a three-month timeframe to respond to inquiries. The City of Windsor's administration must strive to respond to Councillor inquiries in 30 days. Edmonton's rule is an eight week timeframe for all inquiries including "administration"/formal inquiries and requests for a report as well as motions for information. If the response cannot be done by then, staff must provide status on the report with adjusted timeframes. The administration is consulted on the spot in meetings and adjustments are made to the due date according to the work involved. Peel has no targets or standards and timeframes depend on the item and nature of request but it is estimated that probably 50% of formal inquiries are responded to with a report by the next meeting.

## **5.5 Informal Inquiries Process**

It is common to have a huge volume of inquiries from individual Councillors which is typically thought to be around twice the level of formal inquiries. Most often, each department has their own system to track informal inquiries and each system is



different, depending on needs and history. Windsor is now able to track them all and keep statistics through its central Councillor Secretariat function. Edmonton Councillors are encouraged to start at the top and not contact staff at lower levels which helps to ensure consistent responses.

### **5.6 Formal versus Informal Inquiries**

Many draw a distinction between any requests that are raised at Committee/Council meetings versus those that arise outside of that process. The cities contacted do not formally distinguish between when the formal or informal inquiry process should be used. There is some feeling that requests for research should be raised formally as a motion or directive. It is felt that informal requests should deal with questions of established policy, previous Council decisions, procedural questions, basic information on straightforward issues, constituent concerns, information that is at hand, to help Councillors draft a motion or inquiry, or requests for the education of the Council Member. It was noted that often Councillors will come up with an informal inquiry as the first step before proceeding with a formal inquiry. Edmonton generally promotes the use of the formal process and the use of motions for significant papers or research that would take longer than eight weeks to resolve. Informal requests are seen as a concern in that once outside the formal domain, it is difficult to know what is being done and the staff workload involved.

### **5.7 Directions**

The Clerks' staff often provides follow-up memos on directions to ensure these are not forgotten. They are emailed to department heads via their Administrative Assistants.

### **5.8 Outstanding Inquiries**

Outstanding items tend to be tracked in a similar way to Ottawa with follow up calls to departments and regular reports to Council. Edmonton's City Manager follows up on any outstanding items (as part of an agenda review process every two weeks), triggered by the City Clerk's due-date reports (which are always electronically accessible to all). Peel CAO and Commissioners do monthly follow up with interim responses to the CAO but not to Councillors, unless requested.

### **5.9 Inquiry Tracking and Knowledge Systems**

Formal inquiries are tracked through the City Clerks' departments. Edmonton's City Clerk's Department uses the POSSE job management system which creates a job for every inquiry and everyone can look at and know the status. Others would see the benefits to one central tracking system, if linked between departments. People feel a key benefit would be the ability to assess if there is duplication of requests and different opinions being offered from different areas. It is felt that the organization would have a better idea of the inquiries being raised. The POSSE system could apparently do this. It was developed in-house and was sold to a private sector firm to market. It is used in

Calgary and other places and was started in the Planning Department to process applications for plan approvals. Share Point is a new office product that could apparently also be used for tracking; everyone can access to see but not edit.

Most saw benefits to having a searchable knowledge database. Typically, a combination of small databases and manual files (of hot issues likely to come up again) is kept by City Clerks' staff. Windsor has "The Live Link" program database which provides access to all formal requests through meetings of Council, all reports and questions and responses since 1999, entered at the response stage before the report goes out. The system captures what, when, where referred to, who asked, name of the actual report and where to find it. A Live Link reference number on all reports indicates they have been entered into the official record. The system generates reports on outstanding items. Official inquiry records and outstanding lists are also accessible on the City's intranet. Niagara is looking at creating a report database that will be corporately managed and a pilot for laptops for Councillors. The IT group is working with City Clerk's records staff on this.

### **5.10 Inquiries versus 3-1-1**

Inquiries are seen as more related to policy issues and may involve interpretation or changing a policy. 3-1-1 service calls are more about adhering to policies, bylaw enforcement and complaints.

### **5.11 The Most Important Factors**

Timely responses are seen as key, as is keeping Council in the loop on what is done and outstanding. Service levels should be set for both formal and informal inquiries. Consistency in documentation, managing items and responding was stressed.

It is felt that the initial capturing of what the Council Member is looking for is a critical first step, along with clarifying the actual intent. This can involve making time to work back and forth with the Councillor and the department to frame the inquiry in a way that is productive. Then it is crucial to make sure that the information requested goes back to the Councillor.

People advised that capturing as much in the official records as possible is the best approach, ideally by motion. However, they also emphasized having an open mind and allowing Councillors to go to staff but via senior levels with mechanisms in place to enable management to monitor the activity and responses.

It was felt that there would be benefits to cross-corporate tracking to increase efficiency and save money. Because the volume and nature of informal requests are largely unknown, this creates a special challenge in gauging workload and determining staffing needs to respond to them.

Based on the industry research and the review of current City practices, a suggested framework was developed with possible definitions and characteristics for formal and informal inquiries. Please refer to Appendix B for full details.

## **6 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Clarity of Inquiries Process**

#### **6.1.1 Audit Objective**

**Is the process for handling inquiries at City Council and Committee meetings clear and adhered to?**

#### **6.1.2 Audit Criteria**

- Does the City By-law clearly state what is required in terms of the submission and response to inquiries at meetings of City Council and its Committees?
- Are inquiries being handled in accordance with the By-law? If not, what sorts of variances exist and why is this?
- Are Councillors generally aware of the procedures?
- Are procedures appropriately implemented by staff?
- Should any changes to the By-law be considered?

#### **6.1.3 Observation/Issue**

While the stipulated procedures in the By-law are being followed, there is room for some confusion and interpretation.

Section 31 of the City's Procedure By-law states that inquiries at meetings of Council and its Committees are to be submitted and responded to in writing. Inquiries are to be referred to the City Manager or appropriate Deputy City Manager and responses are to be distributed to all members of the originating Council/Committee. The status of outstanding inquiries is to be communicated on a quarterly basis by the City Clerk.

Corporate direction is provided by the City Clerk's staff with regard to formal inquiries. The City Clerk's office defines formal inquiries as those which are:

- Pursuant to Section 31 of the Procedure By-law;
- Submitted in writing at a meeting of Committee/Council
- Tabled during the course of a meeting of Committee or Council; and,
- Dealt with under "Inquiries" at the end of a meeting agenda.

In the case of formal inquiries:

- Items are recorded in the Minutes of Committee/Council meetings under “Inquiries”;
- The Committee Coordinator follows up after the meeting to refer items for action;
- The Committee Coordinator brings forward outstanding items each quarter; and,
- The City Clerk provides Council with a quarterly report/list of outstanding items.

The City Clerk’s staff indicates that formal inquiries are submitted in writing; however they acknowledge that written inquiries are sometimes submitted after some Councillors and staff have left and, although subsequently reflected in the minutes, are often not read into the minutes when presented. In many other cities, inquiries must be read out at the meeting. At the City of Edmonton, the inquiries section of the agenda occurs at the beginning of meetings with the intent to give Councillors the opportunity to raise inquiries in public.

#### **6.1.4 Cause**

Departmental staff responds to a variety of requests at meetings. In addition to formal written inquiries, verbal direction is given during the course of discussion on items, some of which may involve the tabling of motions. Councillors have suggested that records/minutes could be more complete in this regard. In many other cities, the City Clerks’ staff records and follows up on directions as well to ensure these are not forgotten.

Outside of the meeting process, many informal requests go directly to staff at all levels throughout the City. Staff point out that the advantage here is less process. Responses can be emailed directly to the requester as opposed to formal inquiries which may require the preparation of a full report which must be routed through the formal meeting process. The difficulty arises with the volume of requests and the associated workload involved in tracking, researching and responding to them.

In order to appreciate the full extent of the inquiries dealt with by City staff, departmental staff from the operating departments, BTS and Financial Services was asked to conduct a survey of informal requests. Table 1 below provides an overview of survey results with respect to inquiries from Council Members (i.e., Councillors and the Mayor).

**Table 1: Inquiries from Council Members**

TYPES OF INQUIRIES/REQUESTS	APPROXIMATE NUMBERS					
	PWS	PTE	CPS	BTS	FS	TOTALS
FORMAL	33	24	18	28	212	315
INFORMAL	2,700	7,346	1,885	481	1,932	14,344

While over 300 formal inquiries (i.e., written inquiries at meetings) were logged by City Clerks' staff in 2007, staff estimate handling over 14,000 informal requests from Council Members this year. This is a rough estimation of the volume of these requests and is thought to be quite conservative. Departments indicated they could not capture all requests that occur via telephone calls or hallway chats, the majority of which are not documented in any way, nor are those questions that are deemed to be very quick and simple to respond to tracked in any way. Refer to the table in Appendix A for detailed survey results.

Although the Procedure By-law relates only to the operation of Council and its Committees and not to administrative tasks, there is a need for the City to define "formal" versus "informal" inquiries to clarify when each is appropriate. In addition, corporate protocols regarding where inquiries should be directed, target response dates and an interim reply mechanism are needed. A more comprehensive set of guidelines that addresses these issues could be incorporated within the Procedure By-law.

### **6.1.5 Impact/Risk**

City Councillors have expressed concern that the inquiries process may not be reliable, lacks consistency and that they must often follow up on items, particularly informal requests, to obtain a response. Some have also raised concern that the process should be somewhat more restrictive to prevent more complex, time-consuming inquiries and requests coming from a single Councillor. They feel that the associated time and cost implications are not being considered and should be.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**That management define "formal" and "informal" inquiries and requests to clarify what each of these avenues are intended to be used for (i.e., see Appendix B for a sample outline).**

#### **Management Response**

Management disagrees with this recommendation.

Management believes the definition of a “formal” inquiry is already defined and refers to an enquiry, which is filed in writing at a Committee or Council meeting (See Section 31 of the Council & Committee Procedure By-law).

In management’s opinion, any other inquiry would be regarded as “informal”. If Council wishes to further define categories and approaches to informal inquiries (e.g., casework, policy, etc.) and investigate establishing response standards around informal inquiries, management recommends that the Member Services Committee be asked to undertake this work.

### **Recommendation 2**

**That management identify the types of inquiries that must be tabled as a motion at Committee or Council.**

#### **Management Response**

Management disagrees with this recommendation.

It is a Councillor’s right to raise any matter to a Committee or Council that they wish to raise.

On February 8, 2008, the Long-Range Financial Plan Sub-Committee (LRFP) tasked the City Manager, the City Solicitor and the City Clerk to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion ‘management’ by staff. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That management establish corporate protocols, target response dates and an interim reply step in order to tighten the management of inquiries as per recommendations related to “Effectiveness” (Recommendations 5-7).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that the protocols regarding formal inquiries should be improved. As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion ‘management’ by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

Management believes that, given the wide variety of informal inquiries, it would be ineffective to develop protocols without having a thorough understanding of what Councillors want and need in each given area. Management believes that, should Council wish to further define categories and approaches to informal inquiries (e.g., casework, policy, etc.) and investigate establishing response standards around

informal inquiries that the Members Services Committee be asked to undertake this work with staff.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That management revise the Procedure By-law to incorporate the changes outlined in the recommendations above.**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

The Procedure By-law is regularly updated to reflect changes.

## **6.2 Effectiveness**

### **6.2.1 Audit Objective**

**Is the existing process effective in responding to inquiries?**

### **6.2.2 Audit Criteria**

- Are inquiries from Council and its Committees being addressed?
- What is the satisfaction level of Council Members with the current approach to responding to inquiries?
- Are the appropriate controls in place to ensure follow-through on all inquiries?
- Is the process sufficiently consistent across departments to facilitate the tracking and coordination of individual requests?
- Do the City Clerk and Committee Coordinators play an appropriate role in ensuring an effective and timely response to inquiries?
- Is the current approach to capturing/recording inquiries at meetings of Council/Committees and the responses to them adequate?
- Are responses/answers to inquiries effectively communicated?

### **6.2.3 Observation/Issue**

Councillors are not satisfied with the existing process for handling inquiries. They indicate that they must often follow up with staff to determine the status of their outstanding inquiries and find the process lacks consistency and standard protocols and that the process changes depending on the department and the specific staff involved.

The formal process for inquiries is one option for Councillors and this is where the City Clerk's staff plays a role. Formal inquiries are raised as the last item on meeting agendas and are submitted in writing, for the most part using either the motion pads available at meetings or a "Council Request/Motion" form which is e-mailed in advance of meetings. These inquiries are officially recorded and tracked by the

Committee Coordinators. After meetings, a memo and the completed inquiry form are forwarded to the designated departmental staff person handling the inquiry, and staff progress is followed up quarterly with reports of outstanding items to Council at the end of each quarter. Responses to formal inquiries are normally provided in writing, either to the original requester or to all members of the Committee or Council, depending on the circumstances. This may take the form of the completed Council Member Inquiry/Motion Form, a report, memo or e-mail response.

The City Clerk's staff is not expected to play a role in informal inquiries that occur during or outside of the meeting process. Departments are responsible for noting and following up informal/verbal inquiries (i.e., directions to staff) that occur during meetings. Any support provided by the City Clerk's staff on these items, for example, what is captured in the Minutes or any follow-up after the meeting, is at the discretion of the individual Committee Coordinator.

With respect to timeframes, target dates for responding to inquiries are often not set at meetings. While some departments make a point of following up with the requester to indicate how long a reply will take, this is not a consistent practice. Consequently, expectations are often not clear and Councillors may be uncertain as to whether an item has been overlooked or forgotten. Staff, on the other hand, typically finds that it is only once research on an item has begun that the level of work involved becomes clearer. Particularly in cases involving more complex analysis, policy work or where multiple departments must be consulted, the response often takes longer than anticipated. Responding to what may initially appear to be a simple question can, at times, involve significant staff time and months of elapsed time. Without some sort of interim response or status report, Councillors may not be aware of the progress being made or the workload involved.

All departments treat requests from Council Members (including the Mayor) as a priority. While some departments treat formal inquiries as the first priority, others do not distinguish between formal and informal requests, preferring to respond as quickly as possible to simpler, less complex questions.

Departmental staff across the Corporation handles informal requests/inquiries from individual Council Members in accordance with departmental standards/practices and direction from their own management. Some departments have, or are, taking steps to formalize various aspects of the informal inquiries process (e.g., a departmental protocol for staff responses; response times, interim replies).

Inquiry tracking systems are at various stages of development or enhancement; ITS has worked with many parts of the Corporation in the development of MAP-based tracking systems. A project has recently been completed in CPS and ITS is now working with



PTE while PWS is completing staff training for their new tracking system implemented earlier in 2007.

#### **6.2.4 Cause**

Responsibility for inquiry processes and tools is currently spread across departments of the City and there is a need for corporate direction, standards and consistency.

#### **6.2.5 Impact/Risk**

Council Members need access to both formal and informal avenues to obtain the information they require to conduct business. Unreliable or ineffective inquiry processes may ultimately impact on Council decision-making and direction-setting.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That management establish corporate protocols for direct staff responses, including:**

- **First point of entry in departments, i.e., Deputy City Manager (DCM) or Strategic Initiatives and Business Planning (SIBP) office of department;**
- **Directing inquiries from the Mayor's and City Manager's offices for appropriate transfer to departments;**
- **Under which circumstances staff should refer requests to a higher level;**
- **What sorts of department-specific policies and guidelines may be necessary;**
- **The kinds of requests that are to be documented and tracked (i.e., all informal requests unless they can be immediately responded to and involve a specified number of minutes or less of staff time); and**
- **In documenting requests, the data that is to be captured (i.e., include corporate standards for analysis of trends and annual reporting purposes).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that if Council wishes to establish service standards and reporting for processing informal inquiries, corporate protocols will be established. Management is recommending that Member Services Committee be tasked with reviewing this report and providing its recommendations for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That management develop a practice of default deadlines for all inquiries (refer to Appendix B for a possible framework), including:**

- **Setting different response times for various categories of requests;**
- **Providing a quick response option for formal inquiries that do not require a report to Committee/Council; and**
- **Providing an interim reply step (i.e., to re-set timelines, discuss workload implications and/or staff request for motion to proceed).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

Management agrees that, if Council wishes to establish service standards and reporting for processing informal inquiries, corporate protocols will be established. Management is recommending that Member Services Committee be tasked with reviewing this report and providing its recommendations for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That management consider ways to enhance the process for interim reporting of the status of formal inquiries including:**

- **Emailing bi-weekly or monthly updates on outstanding items and ETA dates; and,**
- **How quarterly outstanding inquiries reports are provided to Council (i.e., an agenda item or just distributed).**

### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

## **6.3 Efficiency**

### **6.3.1 Audit Objective**

**Is the City's current approach efficient?**

### **6.3.2 Audit Criteria**

- Is the elapsed time involved in responding to inquiries reasonable?
- What sorts of flags in the process prevent delays or gaps in responding?
- How much time is involved for staff in responding to inquiries from Council and Committees?
- Is the appropriate staff involved (i.e., knowledge, qualifications, levels)?

- Are the current/planned tracking systems and/or other tools adequate?
- Should one City-wide tracking system be considered?
- What data and capabilities should be built into the tracking system(s)?
- How could the process of responding to inquiries be improved to gain efficiencies?

### 6.3.3 Observation/Issue

There are inefficiencies in the City's current approach to handling inquiries which imply that opportunities exist for improvement. Considering the volume of inquiries and the total level of effort being expended across the Corporation, inquiries represent a significant workload issue that is worthy of attention. The collection of key information/trends (i.e., inquiry volumes, sources, nature and complexity) across City groups would allow for the identification of specific changes that would lead to efficiency gains.

All groups consulted have commented that while, for the most part, staff aims to respond to Councillor requests on a priority basis, these tasks are in addition to their regular operational or administrative responsibilities. Staff estimates that the typical request can take, on average, anywhere between 1 and 15 staff hours to resolve. More complex requests can easily involve hundreds of staff hours to prepare a response. The potential to improve response times will depend on the extent to which processes can be streamlined, the associated workload diminished and the volume of inquiries and requests reduced.

Departments indicate that staff members coordinate inquiries to involve the appropriate knowledge, expertise and authority levels. For example, items will be raised to a higher level if the nature of the inquiry is broader or has policy implications. Some requests do not have a natural 'home' and many others are referred to the wrong group creating jurisdictional and workload issues. To avoid 'bouncing' the requester from group to group, misdirected requests are not normally re-routed. Inquiries of a general nature are often referred to PTE and BTS and this has occurred at Committee/Council meetings not attended by these groups. In one case, it took a year before staff was informed.

Based on the statistics provided, many interdepartmental requests are directed to the Strategic Initiatives and Business Planning (SIBP) Division within BTS, although other departments also coordinate responses on occasion. These requests tend to be of a more complex and time-consuming nature. For example, the issue of banning of plastic water bottles at City buildings was raised at a Committee meeting in May 2007 and BTS was ultimately requested to coordinate the gathering of information. Given the environmental focus of this request, it may have been more practical for either PWS or

PTE to take the lead. The response involved consultation with virtually every area of the City including all three operating departments and eight different branches. It took an estimated 200 hours of staff time (from the various groups) over a five-month period, resulting in a report back to Committee for information.

In 2006, the Real Estate Services Division in RPAM dealt with a high volume of requests received via the Contact Centre which were routed in error; improvements initiated by management are underway to address this situation. A separate audit of the 3-1-1 Contact Centre was also conducted in 2007.

Departments have indicated that written requests are easier to manage and track given that an automatic record exists via the original request. Verbal requests in the hallway or through a phone call may not be captured anywhere and can become lost if the person becomes distracted by other intervening events or responsibilities. Departments have developed their own tracking systems for following up on inquiries and requests based on their needs and what was possible over time. In most cases, one system is used in the Deputy City Manager (DCM) and Director offices and requests directed to this senior level are tracked departmentally. Various other databases, spreadsheets or Word documents are used to track inquiries at a branch level. Budget-related inquiries are the exception in that Financial Services (FS) acts as the central receiver of all questions that span across City operations and FS distributes these inquiries to the appropriate departments for response. This is monitored constantly with one staff member handling all inquiries from Council Members while another deals with public inquiries.

What has been missing are comprehensive statistics or trends on the volume, types of requests, complexity, etc. Without this level of information, opportunities for efficiency gains are difficult to identify, both in terms of process improvements and the reduction of requests for information that could be addressed another way. Also, a composite knowledge database of previous inquiries and responses does not exist at a departmental or corporate level to facilitate the identification of previous related inquiries and requests and responses or relevant information that already exists and could be useful in avoiding duplication of effort or redundant research.

Since amalgamation, ITS has worked with various groups across the City to implement a MAP-based tracking system for inquiries. The City's MAP system is an enterprise system developed by the City for various applications. The original application was as a Request for Service (RFS) tracking system for the 3-1-1 call line. It does not involve reliance upon third parties or license renewal fees. Expanding its application is free in this sense but involves extensive staff involvement in the review of related business processes and in system design and implementation. It has generally taken 8-12 months in elapsed time for each implementation project, depending on whether a departmental

lead was assigned. At this point, MAP inquiry tracking systems have been implemented across the City as follows:

- Business Transformation Services;
- Real Property Asset Management;
- Financial Services;
- DCM and Director offices of Public Works and Services;
- DCM and Director offices of Community and Protective Services;
- The Parks and Recreation Branch; and,
- Planning, Transit and the Environment Department is ready to begin as soon as a resource to lead the project is available.

Statistical reports can be provided by ITS for the groups listed above based on the data collected by the various departmental applications. So far, as outlined above, MAP has been implemented at the executive level which means that inquiries that are routed through the DCM or Directors' offices are captured on the MAP system. The flow of requests going directly to the branches of each department is not captured by this system and would require implementation at that level to do so. PWS is in the process of implementing the MAP tracking system within the branches of the department. At present, branch-level staff across the Corporation uses a variety of tracking systems/tools (i.e., Excel spreadsheets, etc.). Using the MAP inquiry tracking system offers a number of advantages including protection of data, back-ups, support, and reporting services via ITS.

ITS advises that sharing information across working groups of the City is a more complicated matter. Departmental MAP systems have been designed as a tracking tool and searches on a given topic or key words would likely involve filtering through a long list of requests in the system to identify any truly similar or related requests. While responses to requests are not shown in MAP, there may be a link to documents and/or a contact person who developed the response.

There is a need to look at data being captured by various departmental applications and define categories of data that should be captured by everyone. There may be other applications that can provide further options with respect to reporting and/or sharing of information.

#### **6.3.4 Cause**

Corporate resources or tools are currently not in place to facilitate overseeing inquiries as a whole across the City.

### **6.3.5 Impact/Risk**

Beyond formal written inquiries, processes and tools for the management of inquiries and requests have developed on a department-by-department basis without coordinated corporate direction. Without corporate direction and analysis, no meaningful change is possible in terms of level of service to Council Members, response rates or the staff time involved.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That management identify corporate standards for the key information that should be captured by departmental systems to enable analyzing trends (i.e., volumes, sources, types of requests, complexity, staff time involved, response rates), identifying opportunities for efficiency gains, reducing the volume of requests, and reporting on the inquiry process from a corporate performance perspective.**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

A formal process already exists for casework inquiries through 3-1-1. With respect to informal inquiries that relate to the legislative function of a Councillor, management believes that establishing standards is best handled in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

If Council directs, management is recommending that these recommendations be tabled before the Member Services Committee for review and input into the development of a process for informal inquiries, where desired.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That management develop plans for the implementation of the necessary information systems and tools, working in collaboration with ITS and operating and administrative staff including:**

- **Implementing MAP systems at the branch level within departments; and,**
- **Reviewing existing and required tools within the Mayor's and City Manager's offices.**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management agrees that technology could assist in the tracking process of formal inquiries. The City Clerk is investigating an electronic process in collaboration with the IT Services Branch.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

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### **Recommendation 10**

**That management clarify which inquiries and requests are to be logged (i.e., all requests for which a written record or paper trail exists via email, memo, letter or inquiry form).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management confirms that all formal inquiries are logged.

With regard to informal inquiries, if Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 11**

**That management research the feasibility of and options available for developing a Corporation-wide knowledge database that:**

- **Allows staff across departments to log new inquiries and requests;**
- **Provides appropriate access privileges to facilitate the identification of previous like inquiries and requests; and the sharing of potentially relevant existing information, reports and contacts between groups;**
- **Facilitates searching for previous requests and responses within a department and ideally across departments; and,**
- **Incorporates built-in quality control mechanisms regarding the reliability of information (i.e., levels of sign-off on reports, memos, etc.).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 12**

**That management consider a phased approach, giving priority to:**

- **All inquiries and requests from Council Members as a first step; and,**
- **The needs of departments with interrelated responsibilities (e.g., Public Works and Services, and Planning, Transit and the Environment with respect to environmental issues).**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation. If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

### **Recommendation 13**

**That management identify required fields and information to be logged into systems to consider the effects on staff workload and avoid excessive data collection.**

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### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

## **6.4 Oversight**

### **6.4.1 Audit Objective**

**How is the present system for handling inquiries monitored or overseen to ensure it is meeting the needs of the organization?**

### **6.4.2 Audit Criteria**

- Who has responsibility for oversight of the City's handling of inquiries?
- What sorts of standards/targets/criteria guide performance in this area?
- How do problems within the system/process become known?
- If the inquiries process is not being adequately monitored, how might this be accomplished?
- Should other performance criteria be considered?

### **6.4.3 Observation/Issue**

This is the first time that the City's inquiry process has been reviewed. Oversight for the City's handling of the full range of inquiries is spread across virtually all departments. Corporate guidelines do not exist and departments have developed their own standards, tools and practices.

The City Clerk's staff provides support with respect to written inquiries raised through the formal meeting process. While departments employ their own tracking systems to follow up on assigned inquiries, the City Clerk's Branch provides a backup for this portion of the inquiries dealt with by staff. Any of these inquiries that remain outstanding are monitored and brought forward on a quarterly basis with reports to Council.

As discussed, the majority of inquiries are considered informal and are tracked by departments on an independent basis. Internal protocols within departments for following up on these inquiries vary depending on the department. It appears that SIBP staff across the City has started to play a quasi-leadership and coordination role with respect to developing protocols and tools to facilitate the process within their own departments. The SIBP group within BTS has repeatedly been relied upon to manage the response to more complex, multi-departmental inquiry projects.



#### 6.4.4 Cause

The process, as it stands, works as well as it does due to the high level of staff commitment at all levels across the Corporation. In order to handle the current volume of inquiries from a broader, integrated and more informed perspective, there is a need for some level of formality and structure. An agreed upon corporate set of standards for inquiry services would provide clarity, direction and benchmarking capability. A corporate body charged with oversight responsibilities for inquiry and request processes could provide the leadership and support that is currently lacking.

Two options were considered in identifying the appropriate location for corporate leadership of the inquiry and requests process – the City Clerk’s Branch and the Business Transformation Department. Their respective mandates are discussed below<sup>2</sup>.

The City Clerk’s Branch is responsible for ensuring that all statutory obligations are administered to meet full compliance with Provincial legislation and that it delivers programs and services as a Centre of Expertise.

Key services include:

- Officiate at City Council meetings;
- Provide Council and Committee Services;
- Provide support to the Mayor’s Office and City’s Elected Officials;
- Facilitate delivery of French Language Services;
- Administer municipal elections, access to information and protection of privacy;
- Provide a point of contact on all matters of protocol through its Office of Protocol;
- Run POA & Courthouse Services;
- Provide staff resources to the Police Services Board;
- Provide printing and mail services;
- Manager statutory notification;
- Maintain all statutory obligations related to vital statistics in accordance with provincial legislation; and,
- Coordinate Volunteer Services.

The Business Transformation Services Department is responsible for:

- The provision of services that support the work of management and staff across the City departments as well as the public;

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpts regarding mandate, objectives and services were taken from the City’s 2008 Budget.

- Providing centralized expertise, standards and support to City departments to facilitate delivery of their services and programs to residents; and,
- Facilitating effective transformation through strategy, technology solutions and performance management.

The focus of services is to:

- Improve customer and client services;
- Empower and develop employees;
- Realize operational efficiency and effectiveness;
- Measure performance;
- Ensure accountability and transparency to our taxpayers; and,
- Promote excellence at the frontline.

The Executive Director's Office provides strategic leadership and centralized expertise, standards and support as follows:

- Provides strategic and performance management support to the Centres of Expertise;
- Manages the audit process including the Fraud and Waste Hotline, providing support to the Council Audit Working Group, and status tracking of all audit recommendations;
- Manages the City's intranet;
- Manages and supports the Management Advisory Committee;
- Serves as a liaison between the community, standing committees of Council, Council and City departments;
- Provides effective program governance by providing a corporate administrative policy framework, tools and leadership;
- Delivers the departmental contributions to legislative agenda, corporate and departmental planning processes and corporate projects; and,
- Ensures development, reporting and feedback on departmental strategic and operational plans and manages corporate strategic issues and legislative governance matters.

The provision of corporate leadership with respect to the inquiries and requests process will involve:

- Dealing with both formal inquiries and informal requests for information;

- Establishing corporate standards for services to Council Members and data capture and reporting by departments;
- Pursuing identified process improvement opportunities within the control of the City Clerk's Branch as well as those within the domain of departments across the Corporation;
- Close consultation with all operating departments;
- Consultation with ITS to explore technology issues and options;
- Monitoring and reporting on statistical trends and service levels; and,
- Identifying and implementing further service enhancements and efficiency improvements based on information that becomes available through consistent data capture and reporting across departments.

Given the nature of the work to be done and the respective mandates of these two groups, it is felt that the BTS Department would be in an ideal position to provide the required leadership.

#### **6.4.5 Impact/Risk**

Without the introduction of corporate leadership, tools and resources to improve the management of inquiries, problems that surface will continue to be addressed sporadically by staff, to the extent possible, on a case by case basis.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**That management assign corporate oversight responsibility for the management of inquiry and request processes to the BTS Department.**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

Management confirms that the City Clerk will continue to have oversight responsibility for formal inquiries raised through the legislative process.

If Council directs, management will review the recommendations regarding informal inquiries in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**That management establish a mandate to provide leadership and support to the Corporation as outlined by the recommendations contained in this report.**

#### **Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation 16**

**That management work in close collaboration with the City Clerk's Branch in developing protocols and tools with respect to inquiries that are routed through the formal meeting process.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

As indicated above, the City Manager, City Solicitor and the City Clerk were tasked to develop and recommend improvements to inquiry and motion 'management' by staff at the February 8, 2008 LRFP meeting. By the time this report is published, the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee and City Council will have addressed those recommendations.

**Recommendation 17**

**That management determine resource requirements for the assumption of these responsibilities and explore options for proceeding within existing resources including:**

- **Reviewing existing resources within BTS and the City Clerk's Branch;**
- **Exploring the possible secondment of a resource from within the City Clerk's Branch to work under BTS leadership for a fixed term to lend expertise and to facilitate changes with respect to the formal inquiries process;**
- **Exploring the possible transfer or secondment of a resource from among the SIBP groups in the operating departments of the City; and,**
- **Consideration of staff and contract resource possibilities.**

**Management Response**

Management agrees with this recommendation.

If Council directs, management will review these recommendations in consultation with the Member Services Committee.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The City Clerk's Branch currently supports the formal inquiries process in terms of written inquiries that occur at meetings of Council and its Committees. This represents a small portion of the total number of inquiries and requests for information handled by City staff. A significant amount of staff time is involved in responding to informal requests for information from individual Council Members, most of which are directed to staff within departments across the Corporation.

Council Members have expressed dissatisfaction with the reliability and response rates of the existing approach to managing inquiries. While inquiries have been generally recognized as a significant staff responsibility, the extent to which this activity occupies staff time was not clear prior to this audit.

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Over the years, management across the Corporation has developed independent departmental protocols, practices and tracking systems to manage inquiries. At this point, there is a need for leadership at a corporate level in order to make improvements to the management of both formal and informal inquiries. Recommendations are aimed at improving the reliability and response rates of the related services provided to Council Members and streamlining and reducing the work involved for staff in responding.

## **8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We wish to express our appreciation for the cooperation and assistance afforded the audit team by management and staff.

## APPENDIX A - TABLE OF INFORMAL REQUESTS SURVEY RESULTS

OVERVIEW INFORMATION		APPROXIMATE NUMBERS/ PERCENTAGES					
		PWS	PTE	CPS	BTS	FS	TOTALS
VOLUME	TOTAL FORMAL REQUESTS	33	24	18	28	212	315
	TOTAL INFORMAL REQUESTS	3,300	502,821	8,709	1,045	2118	517,993
	• FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS (incl. mayor)	2,700	7,346	1,885	481	1,932	14,344
	• FROM CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE	100	354	81	92	62	689
	• FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC	500 <sup>3</sup>	495,121	6,743	472	124	502,960
	OTHER - NOT INCLUDED IN TOTALS	212,492 <sup>4</sup>		121,223 <sup>5</sup>		204,220 <sup>6</sup>	537,935
NATURE OF INFORMAL REQUESTS	BUDGETARY/FINANCIAL DATA	100	2,912	608	35	316	
	POLICIES/PROCEDURES	10	20,438	551	136	236	
	OTHER STATISTICAL/FACTUAL INFORMATION	20	459,143	662	186	335	
	OPINION/ANALYSIS	200	14,671	404	160	556	
	PROGRAM-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS	2,970	5,657	6,484 <sup>7</sup>	449	675	
	PROJECT RELATED						
	OTHER				79		
HOW COMMUNICATED	CALL CENTRE REFERRALS		7,785		70	9	
	E-MAILS/FAX	2,150	30,934	3,758	760	548	
	LETTERS	100	1,985	745	17	275	
	PHONE CALLS	450	44,098	3,559	187	1,103	
	IN-PERSON INQUIRIES	600	2,788	647	11	183	

<sup>3</sup> Represents only those requests tracked by the Deputy City Manager's office.

<sup>4</sup> 212,492 requests are made re: RTS (Traffic and Parking), Utility Services (Customer Service), Call Centre Referrals (Service Requests and Information Requests/3-1-1 Public) not included in total figures or breakdown/analysis.

<sup>5</sup> 121,233 includes 58,534 service requests and 62,689 information requests administered via 3-1-1 and documented separately by Client Service Centre. Note that CPS figures for informal requests include only DCM and Director offices as breakdown of managerial to clerical not tracked.

<sup>6</sup> 204,220 informal requests via Revenue Inbound Telephone Lines (tax and water); 99.9% of these requests are from the public.

<sup>7</sup> Program-specific requests including Public Health, Public Library, Cultural Services/Community Funding, Fire Services, Housing, Parks and Recreation, Employment and Financial Assistance, Paramedic Service (presented in terms of greatest to least volumes).

OVERVIEW INFORMATION		APPROXIMATE NUMBERS/ PERCENTAGES					TOTALS
		PWS	PTE	CPS	BTS	FS	
COMPLEXITY AND WORKLOAD	TRANSIT INFO CENTRE		415,231				
	CLERICAL/STAFF-LEVEL RESPONSES	40%	83%		45%	62%	
	MANAGERIAL-LEVEL RESPONSES REQUIRED	60%	17%		55%	38%	
	THE INTAKE PERSON WAS ABLE TO DIRECTLY REFER THE MATTER ON TO THE RIGHT PERSON	95%	99%	93%		99%	
	THE RESPONDER REQUIRED CLARIFICATION FROM THE REQUESTER	20%	5%	44%		22%	
	MULTI-DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE REQUIRED	5-10%	19%	7%	19%	5%	
	AVERAGE ELAPSED TIME BETWEEN REQUESTS AND RESPONSES	15-30 days	2 days	5 days	2-5 days to 2 wks	1-2 days to 3 mos	

## APPENDIX B - POSSIBLE DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL INQUIRIES

FORM OF REQUEST	DEFINED	PROCESS	TIME-FRAME	DEPARTMENTAL EXAMPLES
Informal Request for Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ≤1 hour of work involved</li> <li>• specific to one organizational area</li> <li>• questions of established policy</li> <li>• previous Council decisions and reports</li> <li>• procedural questions</li> <li>• basic info on straightforward issues</li> <li>• constituent stuff or ward-specific info at hand</li> <li>• to help Councillors draft a motion or inquiry</li> <li>• for the education of the Councillor</li> </ul>	<p>Sent by email, faxes, letter or memo (i.e., paper trail of some kind is required) via DCM or SIBP office of department</p> <p>Or could be Verbal Direction at Council/Committee, captured in minutes + follow-up email via City Clerk's Branch</p> <p>Response emailed to requester</p>	1-2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting Policy at Lansdowne Park</li> <li>• Status of Bronson Safety Audit</li> <li>• Requests for Parking Permits for Developers/Tradesmen</li> <li>• City Policy for closing Zoning Applications</li> </ul>
Formal Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anything that could be the subject of an Informal Request but Council Member chooses to raise as a Formal Inquiry</li> <li>• info that is available but requires digging up</li> <li>• interpretation of policy</li> <li>• creation of or changes to internal staff policies that do not impact the public (i.e., HR)</li> <li>• potential internal consultation required (i.e., Legal, HR, Financial Services)</li> <li>• requires multi-departmental response</li> </ul>	<p>Written, public submission at meeting of Committee/Council.</p> <p><u>2 Possible Options</u> Response is emailed to requester, copied to all Committee/Council Members + Committee Coordinator.</p> <p>Report to Committee/Council.</p>	<p>2-4 weeks</p> <p>8-10 weeks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog-to-Work Policy (i.e., to do with staff and impact on workplace)</li> <li>• Two-Alarm Fire at Palmer Recycling (i.e., public notification of emergency-in-progress)</li> <li>• Blue Box Materials in other cities</li> <li>• Solution to Removal of Planning Application Signs</li> <li>• OC Transpo Drivers Cell Phones</li> <li>• Community Consultation Process for Official Plan Review</li> <li>• Delays re: Issuance of Birth Certificates</li> <li>• Reporting Growth as a Comprehensive Package for 2008 Budget</li> <li>• Tax Payment Arrears (i.e., research system constraints, feasibility, solution)</li> </ul>



FORM OF REQUEST	DEFINED	PROCESS	TIME-FRAME	DEPARTMENTAL EXAMPLES
Requires Motion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant papers, research</li> <li>• involves changing or creating policy that will affect the public</li> <li>• requires the creation of a framework or vision for a possible program/service or significant procedural change</li> <li>• may involve public consultation</li> <li>• requires the historical review of an issue for which records are not readily available</li> </ul>	<p>Must be put through as a motion at Committee/Council before proceeding.</p> <p>Report to Committee/Council.</p>	16-24 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminating Scents in City Hall Facilities (i.e., affects public as well as staff)</li> <li>• Health Effects/Trends in Municipal Pesticides Regulations</li> <li>• Plastic Water Bottles at City Buildings</li> <li>• RPAM inquiries on land use that are big P policy issues</li> <li>• Habitual Problem Landlords</li> <li>• Review of Cancellation of Rural Backyard Swim Program</li> </ul>
<p>Note: For Reports to Committee/Council, allow 6 extra weeks for legislative agenda process; this includes 3 weeks for departmental draft review/signoff process and 3 weeks for report to appear on Committee/Council agenda.</p>				