

June 2009

Protocol for dealing with enquiries from MPs and Councillors

1. INTRODUCTION

This protocol sets out a process for dealing with enquiries from local politicians about health services in Lewisham. It aims to ensure that all enquiries are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner and that opportunities to involve MPs and councillors in positively promoting local NHS services are maximised.

It must be noted that letters sent from MPs or others making a complaint on behalf of an individual constituent must be dealt with separately through the formal complaints procedure.

2. POLITICAL CONTACT

MPs and councillors make contact with NHS Lewisham for a variety of reasons including asking questions on behalf of constituents, requesting information, arranging visits etc. Members of the senior team also meet with local MPs on a regular basis to brief them on current issues and answer any questions.

It is important that the Engagement Directorate is kept informed of all political contact for the following reasons:

1. To gather intelligence and information NHS services in Lewisham.
2. To explore whether there are opportunities for local politicians to take a proactive role in promoting the PCT.
3. To manage any potential media activity.
4. To manage any potential visits.

3. POLITICANS

3.1 MPs

Lewisham has three constituencies – Lewisham Deptford, Lewisham East and Lewisham West.

Lewisham Deptford - Joan Ruddock
Lewisham East - Bridget Prentice
Lewisham West - Jim Dowd

3.2 Overview and Scrutiny

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is made up of locally elected councillors. It scrutinises how we operate our services and any consultations on service changes and improvements. It is chaired by Cllr Sylvia Scott.

3.3 London Assembly

The purpose of the London Mayor and Assembly is to promote economic and social development and improve the environment in Greater London.

Len Duvall (Labour) is the LA member for Greenwich and Lewisham.

3.4 Lewisham Mayor and Cabinet

Lewisham has an Elected Mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, who leads the community, speaks up for the borough and makes key decisions about local services. The Mayor chooses councillors to form his Cabinet, which helps the Mayor make key decisions. Cabinet members have responsibility for specific issues.

- Cllr Heidi Alexander, has responsibility for Regeneration, which includes economic development, planning and transport, as Deputy Mayor.
- Cllr Helen Klier, has responsibility for the Resources portfolio, which includes overseeing Council finances, IT and staffing.
- Cllr Chris Best, has responsibility for Community Services. This includes adult social care, libraries, arts and leisure services.
- Cllr Robert Massey, has responsibility for Children and Young People. This covers schools, the youth service and care services for children.
- Cllr Peggy Fitzsimmons, is the Champion for Older People.
- Cllr Crada Onuegbu, is the Champion for Community Safety.

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- Cllr Susan Wise, has responsibility for Customer Services, which includes the environment, waste management and housing.

Lewisham also has a young Mayor called Miguel Gutierrez Astudillo. The young Mayor is in office for one year and has a budget of £25,000 to spend on things to make life better for young people in Lewisham.

3.5 Lewisham Councillors

Local councillors are elected every four years. As community leaders they represent the interests of people who live in their wards. Lewisham has 54 councillors from five different political parties. The PCT must ensure it is even handed in dealing with the different political parties.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTING LOCAL NHS SERVICES

In written responses to MPs and other political contacts, opportunities should always be explored for them to learn more about local services, and where appropriate become ambassadors in order to promote the good work that is taking place in the borough. Where appropriate, the following information should be included in response letters from the CEO. This will need to be modified accordingly.

Following your interest in <name of organisation/building/site/service>, we would be delighted if you would like to visit and meet some of the staff providing <name of service>. During your visit, <name and job title of service manager> will be able to provide you with more information about the service provided and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to take up this opportunity, please could you contact my office so that we can make the necessary arrangements? If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at any time <or insert Director of Engagement details as appropriate> on <insert phone number> as I would prefer to resolve any problems you have directly.

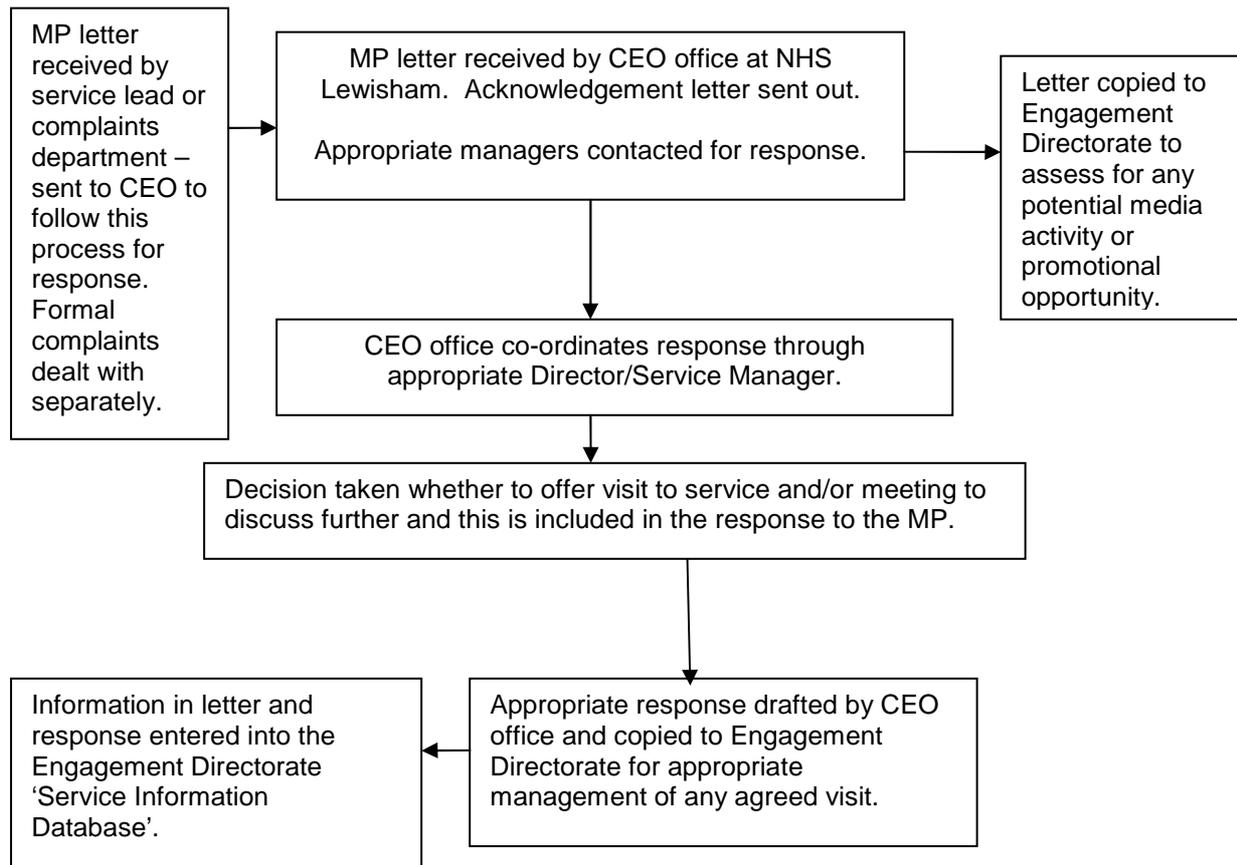
5. PROCESS

The following process needs to be followed to effectively manage any enquiries from these groups.

- Step 1 All political enquiries and letters need to go to the CEO's Office for response and co-ordination. The CEO office will formally acknowledge receipt of all letters and ensure that all enquiries should be responded to within four weeks. It must be noted that any formal complaints must be dealt with through the formal complaints procedure.
- Step 2 Engagement Directorate to be copied into any correspondence with relevant information recorded on the Service Information Database.
- Step 3 In developing an appropriate response, the CEO office to liaise with Engagement Directorate to explore any opportunities for MP to take a proactive role in promoting PCT. This may include offering a meeting or visit to relevant service.
- Step 4 Response sent and Engagement Directorate informed of any further response/acceptance from MP so that any visit can be appropriately managed.

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Diagram 1 – Response flow chart



6. PURDHA

Purdha is the period of time from when a local or national election is called until the election day itself. The period exists to ensure that there is no risk of public funds being used, or seen to be used to support one particular political party or another.

In practice this means that most communication activity has to cease as it can be difficult to predict what may become a political issue during an election campaign. However, if the PCT agrees to host a visit from a politician of one party, it should offer the same access and facilities to the other parties campaigning locally. Our priorities are to ensure that services to patients continue and are not disrupted by any visits and that the organisation is seen to be impartial and even-handed.

7. MONITORING

The Engagement Directorate will monitor the service information database on a regular basis. It is anticipated this will be done at Directorate meetings on a bi-monthly basis, increasing frequency during the approach to a General Election.

This protocol will be updated on an annual basis and any further enquiries should be directed to the Engagement Directorate.

Engagement Directorate

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