

ANUUAL FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REPORT 2022

Executive Summary

Following the implementation of the Freedom of Information (FOI) system in October 2018, an update was provided at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2021. It was agreed at the meeting to receive an annual update report on all FOIs received.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Joanne McIntosh, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Email: Joanne.McIntosh@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3038

Contact Person: Natalie Khan, Democratic Services Officer
Email: Natalie.khan@woking.gov.uk , Extn: 3083

Date Published: 11 February 2022

1.0 Yearly Report

- 1.1 The total FOIs received from January – December 2021 and 2020 for comparison, are reported as follows:

Reporting From	Total Received	Total Breached	Total Refused
Jan – Dec 2020	690	76	15
Jan – Dec 2021	632	23	12

- 1.2 The total includes figures for FOI referrals, which are requests received intended for other services, including those for Surrey County Council. These requests were mostly for Children Services and Surrey County Highways respective departments.
- 1.3 Although the number of FOIs which exceeded the statutory timescale ('breached') is considered high, it is significantly lower than the previous year's total. The Council strives to complete all FOIs within the statutory timescale of twenty working days. However, over the past two years, responses had been delayed in some cases as Officers were re-deployed to assist other service areas during the covid pandemic.
- 1.4 During the height of the Pandemic, the acknowledgements sent out in response to the receipt of an FOI request included an explanation that, in these exceptional times, responses to requests would be delayed as Officers were re-deployed to services supporting the Council's response to Covid-19.
- 1.5 It should be stressed that all FOI requests are fulfilled.
- 1.6 The progress of individual FOI requests is monitored and the Responsible Officers will be contacted by the Democratic Services Team in the event that the request is not completed within 15 working days. Furthermore, the system will send automatic reminders to the Responsible Officers. In addition, a weekly email is sent to the members of the Corporate Leadership Team setting out details of the FOI requests which have not yet been completed, enabling them to speak to the responsible Officers within their service areas.

2.0 Monthly Breakdown

- 2.1 Please note that the figures for the breached/refused FOIs are reported in the month they breach/are refused rather than the month they are submitted in.
- 2.2 An FOI request can be refused on the basis of exemptions applied, for example a Section 40(1) "Any information to which a request for information relates is exempt information if it constitutes personal data of which the applicant is the data subject".

Month	Total received	Completed	Refused	Breached
2021				
January	57	55	0	1
February	67	66	1	1
March	55	55	0	0

April	43	41	1	0
May	51	50	2	2
June	51	51	2	1
July	44	42	0	1
August	68	62	0	6
September	50	47	1	3
October	56	55	2	2
November	59	58	2	6
December	31	15	1	0
Total	632	597	12	23

3.0 Breakdown by Department

3.1 Please see the table below that details the FOIs received, broken down by department.

Department	Total FOIs Received
Housing	97
Benefits, Revenue and Customer Services	82
Democratic Services*	79
Environmental Health	56
HR	38
Finance	36
Neighbourhood Services	34
IT	34
Green Infrastructure	30
Planning	22
Building Services	21
Asset Management	18
Legal	16
Parking	16
Planning Policy	12
Licencing	9
Health & Wellbeing	6
Sports and Leisure	5
Family Support	5
Community Safety	4
Engineering Team	4
Business Liaison	2
Corporate Support	2
Flooding	2
Elections	1
Marketing	1

*The high figure for Democratic Services reflects the fact that the Team oversees the system and, where able to, will respond direct to a request regardless of the topic.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The Council received slightly fewer FOI requests during 2021 compared to the previous year 2020 (632 against 690). FOI requests can have a significant impact on an individual's workload, particularly for those Officers in Housing and Revenue and Benefits. However, the majority of the requests are completed promptly by providing the information requested in a timely manner.

REPORT ENDS