

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	28 September 2022		
TITLE:	INFORMATION GOVERNANCE QUARTERLY UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Terry	PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services and Resources
SERVICE:		WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	Michael Graham	TEL:	
JOB TITLE:	Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services	E-MAIL:	michael.graham@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the actions in progress to improve the Council's policies, systems and processes around Information Governance.
- 1.2 In the last two years, the Committee has received a number of limited assurance reports in relation to information governance and work is ongoing to address the underlying issues in the following areas:
- Freedom of Information
 - Data Transparency
 - Records Management

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

Audit and Governance Committee is asked:

- 2.1 To note the progress to date and future actions outlined in this report.
- 2.2 To identify matters of interest for future reports.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's new Corporate Plan outlines its vision and priorities for Reading for the next three years (2022/25). The Council's vision is to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success. To make this vision happen, the work of the Council is focused around three Corporate Plan themes:
- Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 3.2 These themes are underpinned by the TEAM Reading principles which explain the way we work at the Council:
- Team

- Efficiency
- Ambitious
- Making a difference

3.3 Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website [Corporate Plan-2022-25](#).

3.4 Data is playing an increasing role in designing, delivering and transforming public services to improve outcomes for customers and drive efficiencies within current financial constraints.

3.5 The Local Government Association describe the value of data to public services as facilitating:

- The design of services around user needs
- The engagement and empowerment of citizens to build their communities
- Efficiencies and public service transformation
- Economic and social growth
- Greater transparency and accountability

3.6 Effective information governance is a key requirement for the Council which has duties to be both open and transparent whilst at the same time protecting the confidential information it holds about people and businesses. How it collects, uses, stores, shares and destroys personal data is governed by the Data Protection Act. The Council also has to comply with the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Access to Information Act in relation to its records. Compliance is monitored by the Information Commissioner who has wide ranging powers including the ability to impose considerable financial penalties for breaches of the Data Protection Act.

4. UPDATE

Subject Access Requests

4.1 There remains a backlog of subject access requests. We have brought in additional temporary members of staff to deal with the backlog, and we are working on a business case to procure a longer-term technology based solution to reduce the time needed to deal with these requests, as they are extremely time-consuming.

SAR Backlog Data as at 16 September 2022

	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23	
	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC
No Received	52	83	35	64	45	38	21	32
No Completed	52	80	27	47	34	29	13	15
No Outstanding	0	3	8	17	11	9	8	17

4.2 The Information Governance Officer has been recruited and is due to start in the post during the first week of October. In the interim the team's apprentice and Interim Information Governance Officer, are continuing with supporting the Team Leader. Two agency staff are in post until the end of December to continue to assist with the backlog.

4.3 We will report further progress to the Committee.

FOI cases

- 4.4 As previously reported, a number of measures have been taken with the aim of increasing FOI performance:
- Centralisation of the function in the Customer Relations Team
 - Implementation of a new case management system
 - Review of the procedures
 - Training has been provided to officers
 - Continual monitoring weekly by CMT
- 4.5 Notwithstanding these measures, performance across the Council remains disappointingly low, despite some pockets of improved performance which have been reported to previous Committees. The Council aspires to meet the 90% response rate expected by the Information Commissioner and this has been included as a Corporate Plan KPI.
- 4.6 Following the update provided at the July 2022 meeting for quarter 4 of 21/22 financial year, the table below shows the quarter 1 data for 2022/23.

Freedom of Information Requests

Total number received in Q1

Directorate	Total No. Received	%	Q4 Total
BFfC	41	14.2%	35
DACHS	23	8.0%	15
DEGNS	107	37.0%	125
DoR	118	40.8%	100
Total	289	100%	275

- 4.7 There has been a further increase in the number of FOI's received during the quarter, we cannot establish a pattern as to why this is on the upward trend.
- 4.8 FOI's Responded to in Timescale by Directorate in Q1

FOI's Responded to in Timescale by Directorate

Directorate	No. Sent Out in Timescale	%
BFfC	21	51.2%
DACHS	11	47.8%
DEGNS	73	68.2%
DoR	77	65.3%
Mixture	0	0
Total	182	58.1%

4.9 Breakdown by month

Breakdown by month for Q1

Directorate	FOI's received in April	% Sent Out in Timescale in April	FOI's received in May	% Sent Out in Timescale in May	FOI's received in June	% Sent out in Timescale in June
BFfC	10	70%	16	43.8%	15	46.7%
DACHS	8	37.5%	11	45.5%	4	75%
DEGNS	39	66.7%	31	61.3%	37	75.7%
DoR	27	66.7%	47	70.2%	44	59.1%
Overall	84	60.2%	105	55.2%	100	64.1%

In Q1 the Council and BFfC responded to 289 FOI's and 182 (58.1%) of these were within timescale, again disappointingly low.

The FOI Act 2000 states all responses must be sent out within 20 working days.

Customer Relations and IG Service have embarked on a plan of working with services with a view to improve response timescales across the Council and BFfC. The service has updated the FOI policy and procedure which will be published on a dedicated FOI intranet page. An action plan for working with services has been approved by CMT and Information Governance Board which is the process of being rolled out during the Autumn. This includes a communications plan for both RBC and BFfC. Feedback on progress and performance will be provided at the January 23 committee meeting.

Data Transparency

- 4.12 Members will recall that the audit in this area revealed that some of the information, which was required to be published, was not available on the Council's website. All the relevant information and sources of data have now been identified and a Transparency Code page has been added to the Council's website. A process for review and publishing the required information for the future is now in place and will be presented at the Information Governance Board on a quarterly basis.

Information Governance Board

- 4.13 The Information Governance Board meet monthly and review Cyber Security Incidents and possible breaches of the Data Protection Act which may need to be reported to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Where any subsequent actions are identified then these are monitored. There have been no recent incidents which are of a sufficiently high-risk rating to notify the ICO.
- 4.14 The most common themes across both organisations continue to relate to mis-addressed emails and postal addresses being wrongly input, either through transcription errors or in a few cases, wrong data has been held on our systems. All of the incidents and main themes are reported to IG Board on a monthly basis, and solutions are being considered to mitigate email errors and to raise awareness around accuracy in postal correspondence.
- 4.15 The Board asked the Information Governance Team and IT Security team to explore whether further measures can be put in place to increase security of outgoing emails. Since the last update, due to the continuing issue of misdirection of emails colleagues in IT Security have identified two possible products as a security measure to address this problem. The Board will review both proposals and take view on the cost benefit

analysis. There are risks of possible fines for data breaches which may exceed the cost of having a system in place to help mitigate these risks.

Information Management Strategy

- 4.16 The Information Management Strategy and Action Plan was presented and signed off by the Policy Committee in March 2022. This sets out the Council's approach to information management and governance. The IG Service is currently working with the Information Assets Owners to identify Data Stewards for the relevant systems. Planned training will take place in the Autumn for the Information Asset Owners and the Information Governance Champions Network will be launched. The IG Team will progress this work and progress will be reported to this committee in January 2023.

Training

- 4.18 The Board continues to monitor the Cyber Security training which is currently rolled out for all staff and members through Learning Pool, the Council's e-learning packages have been updated to the 2022 versions. Both the Cyber security training and the Information Governance Training modules have been updated to the 2022 versions and both modules have a re-fresher 2022 version also. The uptake of the training remains low, as at 12 September 2022 only 47% of staff had completed the 2022 module either in full or the refresher. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager has identified officers who have not completed the training and escalated this information to Assistant Directors and Executive Director with a request that this training is completed by the first week of October 2022. By the January 2023 committee meeting, we hope to report improved figures on the uptake of the training.
- 4.19 Non-IT users have also been asked to complete the paper based training by the first week of October 2022. Again, we hope to report on improved figures for the uptake of this training.

Next Steps

- 4.20 The focus is the delivery of the Information Management Strategy. In addition the Action Plan, and working with services, to improve FOI response rates across the Council and BfFC is taking priority this Autumn.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The purpose of Information Governance is cross-cutting and relevant to all Services of the Council and to all of our public facing services which collect and retain data about the public. The role of Information Governance contributes to the Corporate Priority foundation of "Getting the best value".

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2 There is nothing within this report which is of relevance for the Council's strategic priority of Climate Change.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

- 7.2 It is not anticipated that there will be public consultation on the Information Management Strategy or Action Plan. It will however be in the public domain at Policy Committee and this Committee, and I anticipate members will wish to receive regular updates at this Committee. This will ensure that progress in this field is visible to residents.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this report. All citizens have rights to information and there is no evidence that any section of the community is disadvantaged in accessing those rights under the current service provision. There is no reason to think that any section of society will be adversely affected by the roll-out of better Information Governance and an Information Management Strategy within the Council.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council is required to comply with a number of information governance regulations including the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Access to Information Act. Effective governance, policies and practices are essential to minimising the risk of data protection breaches and to help ensure the appropriate handling of information requests. Failure to do so could result in regulatory action being taken against the Council.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are none