

Audit and Governance Committee

27 July 2023



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Information Governance Quarterly Update
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Michael Graham, Asst. Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Lead councillor	Cllr Liz Terry, Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	The Committee is asked to: 1. To note the progress to date and future actions outlined in this report 2. To identify matters of interest for future reports

1. 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. Policy context

- 2.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
 - Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 2.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
 - People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others
- 2.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate

Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

2.4. 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.

2.5. 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

2.6. 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.

3. Update

Subject Access Requests

3.1. Of the 18 backlog cases from 20/21 & 21/22 financial years that were outstanding the Service has completed a further two cases since the last report in July 2023, leaving 16 cases outstanding.

3.2. In 22/23 a total of 59 cases were received for BFfC, 43 cases have now been completed with 16 outstanding. In Q1 of 23/24 a total of 33 cases were received and 15 cases were completed with 18 cases outstanding at the end of quarter 1. In Quarter 2 so far, a further 20 new cases have been received making a total of 53 cases for the year so far. The service has completed 26 of these cases and 27 cases remain outstanding.

3.3. The contract for the redaction software has been completed. The kick-off meeting with the supplier to discuss implementation took place on 14 September to agree next steps. We are now waiting on the project plan for implementation, staff training and testing from the supplier's Project Manager.

SAR Backlog Data as at 15 September 2023

	20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC	RBC	BFfC
No Received	35	64	44	38	46	59	24	29
No Completed	28	64	35	38	46	43	12	14
No Outstanding	7	0	9	0	0	16	12	15

FOI cases

- 3.4. 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
- 3.5. Notwithstanding these measures, performance across the Council remained 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.
- 3.6. Following the update provided at the July 2023 meeting for Quarter 4 of financial year, 2022/23 the data for Quarter 1 of year 23/24 is below.

Total number received in Q1 allocated to Directorates and FOI Team

Directorate	Total No. Received Q1 23/24	%	Q4 22/23	Q3 22/23	Q2 22/23	Q1 22/23
BfC	45	12.9	36	38	51	41
DACHS	12	3.4	26	18	14	23
DEGNS	160	46.1	131	77	131	107
DoR	92	26.4	100	76	95	118
FOI Team	39	11.2	41	28	7	N/A
Total	348	100	334	237	298	289

FOI's Responded to in Timescale by Directorate and FOI Team in Q1 23/24

Directorate	Total No. sent out in Timescale	%
BfC	30	66.6
DACHS	7	58.3
DEGNS	120	75
DoR	60	76
FOI Team	39	100
Total	256	73.6

- 3.7. There has been a further increase of 4.2% in the number of FOI's received during the Quarter 1, the reasons for this are not known and we have not seen any clear themes around the subject matter of the request received in this quarter.

3.8. Breakdown by month for Q1 23/24

Directorate	FOI's received in April	% sent out in time in April	FOI's received in May	% sent out in time in May	FOI's received in June	% sent out in time in June
BFfC	15	73.7	14	93.3	16	56.2
DACHS	1	100	4	50.0	7	80
DEGNS	42	81.4	55	76.4	63	76.7
DoR	32	77.3	31	84.1	29	68.6
FOI Team	13	100	14	100	12	100
Overall	103	76.6	118	80.5	127	69.8

- 3.9. In Q1 the Council and BFfC responded to 348 FOI's and 256 (73.6%) of these were responded to within timescale. Unfortunately, the response rates have declined in this quarter, and this is primarily due to some system issues that came about as a result of a software update from the supplier. This caused a number of requests to disappear from the system. The service is working with the system owner and Supplier to find a solution as this has also started to impact the response figures in this current quarter (Quarter 2).
- 3.10. Of the 256 FOI's responded to, two came back to the Information Governance Team for Internal Reviews (IR). Of these, one was issued with a revised response and one was issued with the original information.
- 3.11. We continue to raise awareness of the importance of responding to FOI's on time, offer one to one advice to responders, and continue to send reminders to responders, this is done by email outside of the FOI system. We have also updated the presentation we give at the new starters Corporate Induction to include more information about how we can assist responders.
- 3.12. Assistant Director of Legal Services and the Information Rights Services Manager met to discuss the next steps and a follow up action plan to keep monitoring the progress of response rates.

Data Transparency

- 3.13. The Data Transparency pages were reviewed on 01 September 2023 and the Contract and Procurement data remain out of date. This has been highlighted to the Assistant Director Procurement and Contracts who is taking steps to update the data.

Information Governance Board

- 3.14. 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.
- 3.15. There have been no further cyber incidents since the last report to this committee. The cyber incident reported in April 2023 to this committee was required no further action from the Council.
- 3.16. As the most common themes across both organisations continue to relate to mis-addressed emails and postal addresses being wrongly input work is being carried out by the Digital, Technology & Change team through a Business Analyst to analyse these incidents with a view to finding the root causes and possible solutions to minimise these incidents and this may be through the MS Office product which has a security measure. Digital, Technology & Change team will advise the IG Board once the analysis work is complete. These incidents and the main themes are reported to IG Board monthly. The

IG Team review each incident and identify learning for the staff/services involved to ensure repeat incidents do not reoccur.

- 3.17. In the last report to this committee, we brought to your attention the Joint Legal Team (JLT) action plan, work is progressing from this, the IG Board has asked for a progress update at the October meeting.

Information Management Strategy

- 3.18. 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.
- 3.19. We are working with the Data Stewards in BFfC and DACHS on the Action Plan work. We also have representation at the meetings from Records Management Unit and Digital, Technology & Change theme. The monthly meetings are going well, with good attendance and engagement. The Data Stewards are working on updating the Information Asset Register (IAR) and Record of Processing Activities (ROPA). We are also working on a new template for Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA), a process of signing these off at the IG Board and keeping a central record.

Training

- 3.20. The Board continues to monitor the Cyber Security and Information Governance training which is currently rolled out for all staff and members through Learning Pool, the Council's e-learning package. The uptake of the new Cyber Security training for 2023 show that 64% of RBC staff and 60% of BFfC staff have completed the new 2023 Cyber Security module. With regards to the Information Governance training the uptake for 2023 show that 60.6% of RBC staff and 40% of BFfC staff have completed the training. We remain disappointed by these figures. The Senior Leadership teams within the Council and BFfC will be asked to monitor their own areas for compliance through the Power Bi reporting tool. The expectation is that SLG will be able to monitor their own staff and where there is non-compliance they can take appropriate action to encourage their staff to complete the training.
- 3.21. Managers who have staff that are non-IT users, have been asked to contact the IG Team to arrange bespoke face to face training.

Next Steps

- 3.22. The focus is on continuing the work with the Data Stewards, the action plan work from the Breach Management process review, work with the Business Analyst on next steps from their findings on the breach analysis work and the project plan for the redaction software.

4. Contribution to strategic aims

- 4.1. 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".

5. Environmental and climate implications

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

6. Community engagement

- 6.1. 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.

7. Equality impact assessment

- 7.1. 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.

8. Other relevant considerations

- 8.1. Nothing relevant.

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. Timetable for implementation

- 11.1. Not applicable.

12. Background papers

- 12.1. There are none.