

Audit and Governance Committee

10 April 2024



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 three 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. RBC cases from 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23 there were 12 cases outstanding, 12 of these have been completed since the last report in January 24, leaving zero cases outstanding. For 23/24, 77 cases have been received so far, and is around 40% more than the previous year. We have seen a rise in requests for Housing, Council Tax and HR related data. Of the 77 cases, 52 have been completed and 21 remain outstanding as 4 cases were closed as an Invalid Request.
- 3.2. BFfC cases, in 22/23 a total of 59 cases were received, 52 cases have now been completed, 3 cases were closed as an Invalid Request, leaving 4 outstanding. In Q1 of 23/24 a total of 20 cases were received. In Q2, a further 12 new cases were received. In Q3, a further 10 cases were received, a further 34 cases have been received in Q4 making a total of 76 cases for the year so far. This is around 22% more than the previous year. The service has completed 48 of these cases, 3 cases were closed as an Invalid Request and 25 cases remain outstanding.
- 3.3. The implementation of the redaction software is progressing, the Supplier has provided information to the Council's IT service, and we are in the process of providing technical input. We have provided further feedback on our processes and will soon be in a position to finalise the first draft of the process blueprints. The Information Rights Services Manager is specifying a workflow to track, monitor and report on the progress of work in the new system.

SAR Backlog Data as at 22 March 2024

	20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	RBC	BfC	RBC	BfC	RBC	BfC	RBC	BfC
No Received	35	64	44	38	46	59	77	76
No Completed	32	61	37	38	45	52	52	48
No Outstanding	0	0	0	0	0	4	21	25
No Closed (Invalid requests*)	0	3	1	0	1	3	4	3

**Invalid Request – Requests that have been submitted without ID or Proof of Address, no response to requests to provide, 6 week time limit passed. ICO Guidelines.*

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.
- 3.6. Following the update provided at the January 2024 meeting for quarter 2 of financial year, 2023/24 the data for quarter 3 is below.

Total number received in Q3 allocated to Directorates and FOI Team

Directorate	Total No. Received	%	Q2	Q1
BfC	33	11.2	54	45
DACHS	45	15.3	24	12
DEGNS	113	38.4	145	160
DoR	60	20.4	75	92
FOI Team	43	14.6	47	39
Total	294	100	345	348

- 3.7. There has been a reduction by 51 cases of the number of FOI's received during the quarter 3 compared to quarter 2, we have not seen any clear themes around the subject matter of the request received in this quarter.

4. FOI's Responded to in Timescale by Directorate and FOI Team in Q3

Directorate	Total No. sent out in Timescale	%
BFfC	14	42.4
DACHS	30	66.6
DEGNS	85	75.2
DoR	40	66.6
FOI Team	43	100
Total	212	72

4.1. Breakdown by month for Q3

Directorate	FOI's received in October	% sent out in time in October	FOI's received in November	% sent out in time in November	FOI's received in December	% sent out in time in December
BFfC	11	63.6	15	66.6	7	42.9
DACHS	11	72.7	16	50	18	77.8
DEGNS	50	70	43	81.4	20	75
DoR	24	70.8	18	55.5	18	72.2
FOI Team	18	100	16	100	9	100
Overall	114	75.9	108	70.9	72	77.1

- 4.2. In Q3 the Council and BFfC responded to 72% of FOI's in timescale, this is slightly down from the 75.6% responded to in time in the previous quarter, despite the lower number received. The data is on the above tables, 212 (72%) of the 294 requests received were sent out in timescales. The response rates are shared with the Corporate Management Team monthly and overdue cases are highlighted weekly. Further communications and guidance to FOI responders have been sent out in the RBC weekly newsletter, reminding them of the importance of responding on time.
- 4.3. Of the 212 FOI's responded to, 8 came back to the Information Governance Team for Internal Reviews (IR). Of these, 3 were responded to with additional information and 5 were issued upholding the original decision on what information could be provided.
- 4.4. The Information Rights Services Manager and the Customer Relations Team Manager have been working with the RBC Project Team and the supplier in the implementation of the Council's new CRM system. Their focus is the FOI workflow along with four other common corporate governance processes. The Customer Relations Team tested the system forms and provided feedback to the Project Team, further testing of the system with amendments incorporated is scheduled for later in April. We will explore how the new system can assist us to improve our process, simplify the FOI management workflow and reporting capability.
- 4.5. 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. On a weekly basis the team share new and overdue cases with senior managers who assist with reminding staff to respond within timescales.

Data Transparency

- 4.6. The Data Transparency pages were reviewed in March 2024 and the Contract and Procurement data remain out of date. However the Assistant Director Procurement and Contracts has confirmed they have planned for this work to gather the information will begin in April 2024. Other data requires updating and the Assistant Directors responsible for this data have been advised to update the data by the end of April 2024. These are the expenditure over £500 for December 2023 to date, grant payments to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, parking data and local authority land data.

Information Governance Board

- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. There have been no cyber incidents since the last report to this committee. However, on 22nd and 23rd February 2024 IG Team were alerted by a number of staff that they had received an email from "Yammer" (now Viva Engage) containing personal information that had no relation to their role and therefore were not entitled to receive. IG Team notified ICT who were able to remove the personal details immediately. The information remained within the corporate network and an all-staff bulletin was issued on 29th February 2024.
- 4.9. The current theme around data breaches is still around mis-addressed emails either through the mistyping of email addresses, email addresses being auto-populated and not checked before sending or inappropriate use of the cc. function which displays personal emails to all recipients on the email. Following a breach that was reported to the ICO (whose decision was that no further action was necessary), IG Team carried out a bespoke awareness session around secure use of email with the team responsible for the breach, within a week of the breach.

Information Management Strategy

- 4.10. 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.
- 4.11. We are working with the Data Stewards in BFfC and DACHS on the Action Plan work. We have raised awareness of the of Data Protection Act and empowered Data Stewards and staff to be confident about the lawful basis for sharing information across the organisation and with relevant partner agencies. Next month (April) we will be starting to work on updating the retention schedules used by BFfC and DACHS staff. We have changed the schedule of meetings to give Data Stewards enough time to work through tasks, we are mindful they are operational staff with other responsibilities across the organisation. The meetings will be held every other month from April 2024. We are now replicating this work with the Data Stewards from DoR and DEGNS. The first meeting is scheduled for the end of March followed by a meeting in May 2024 and so on.
- 4.12. The IG Team have created an Information Governance area on the RBC & BFfC Intranet for staff to access information governance related matters such the breach management process, Subject Access Request process, FOI process and training links, useful templates etc. The format and content have been agreed with the Data Stewards.

Training

- 4.13. Cyber Security and Information Governance training is a mandatory requirement for RBC and BFfC staff. This is available to all staff and members through Learning Pool, the Council's e-learning package. The Senior Leadership teams within the Council and BFfC have been 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.

- 4.14. A new training suite of Cyber Security and Information Governance training is now available to all staff via the Learning Pool. Communications and access to the training has been provided since mid-March. All staff have been instructed to complete the full training or refresher training (where appropriate) by the end June 2024. Data on the uptake of the training will be reported to this Committee in July 2024.
- 4.15. Managers who have staff that are non-IT users, have been asked to contact the IG Team to arrange bespoke face to face training.
- 4.16. A Mandatory Training Task & Finish Group has been set up with representatives from multiple departments to ensure the mandatory training requirements agreed by CMT are properly communicated, that there is appropriate monitoring and follow up to ensure that training is delivered as envisaged by CMT. Systems will also be reviewed for staff who do not have access to IT but use a phone for their work and still handle personal data.

Next Steps

- 4.17. The focus is on continuing the work with all of Data Stewards. The action plan work from the Breach Management process review, implementation of the redaction software, further testing of the governance forms on the new CRM system and design, testing and working with the Mandatory Training Task & Finish Group.

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

- 7.1. 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.

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. Other relevant considerations

- 9.1. Nothing relevant.

10. Legal implications

10.1. 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.

11. Financial implications

11.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12. Timetable for implementation

12.1. Not applicable.

13. Background papers

13.1. There are none.