Cheltenham Borough Council

Audit, Compliance & Governance Committee

09 July 2025

Information Requests Annual Report 2024-25

Accountable member:

Councillor Rowena Hay, Leader of the Council

Accountable officer:

Victoria Bishop - Governance, risk and assurance manager

Ward(s) affected:

N/A

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

Cheltenham Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that it meets its legal requirements under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and the Environmental Information Regulations (2004).

This report details the Councils handling of information requests made during 2024-25. The number of information requests received reduced since the previous year, but an upwards trend from 2020 still remains. The council has responded to 87.8% of requests within the statutory 20 working day deadline.

Recommendation: That Audit, Compliance and Governance

- **considers the progress report and makes comment on its content as necessary.**

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

None

1.2 Legal implications

The legal implication of not dealing with requests within the legal timescale or not applying the exemptions in accordance with the relevant legislation is that the ICO can take action against the council and the results of that action are published.

Signed off by: Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities claire.hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

None

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

None

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

None

2. Performance management – monitoring and review

2.1 Information requests are monitored via the annual report to the Audit, Compliance & Governance Committee and two Key Performance Indicators (KPI) targets: % change in FOI requests received when compared with the previous year % - FOI requests responded to within timescale

3. Background

3.1. The Council is committed to Freedom of Information as an essential part of the openness and transparency of local government.

3.2. The Council proactively makes available as much information as possible on its website and follows the ICOs model publication scheme. Where themes of information requests are identified, information is published on the council's website to reduce further potential requests for information. The Council publishes all information released in response to Freedom of Information requests in its disclosure log.

3.3. Requests are answered by the business area responsible for the subject matter of the request, the information is then quality checked by the information officer before being returned to the requestor. Response times are monitored and managed by the information officer. Reminders are sent out before the deadline and any overdue responses are repeatedly followed up.

3.4. The responsibility for providing the information lies with the Service Manager. The information officer is available to guide and support Service Areas when responding to requests, particularly in the application of exemptions. Either the Service Area or Information Officer can request additional support from One Legal.

3.5. The council has seen a decrease in the number of information requests it receives. Namely the number of EIR requests. Last year we amended our process to reduce the number of EIR requests, this has had a positive impact.

3.6. The council has now migrated to a new online platform for managing FOI's. Overall, the transition has been successful, any issues are being escalated to the Governance Risk and Assurance manager who is discusses solutions with the IT applications analyst and the commercial and business development manager.

3.7. This years report includes data mostly from the previous process, with only 20 cases logged on new online platform in that financial year. However next year's report (25-26) will pull data from purely the online platform, and all the disclosure logs will be automatically produced.

3.8. EIR's, SAR's and Internal reviews are still dealt with outside of the online platform and are managed on a spreadsheet.

4. Statistical detail of request handling 2024-25

4.1 The types of information that are formally treated as Freedom of Information (FOI) or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests and that are reflected in the following statistics are: those submitted directly or passed to the Council's Information Officer; and requests for information that do not reflect day-to-day business because they are usually quite voluminous or involve the collation of information from many Council services; and/or the requester has asked that their request be dealt with under the FOI Act or the EIRs.

5. Number of requests received

5.1 4.847 requests for information were received in the year 2024-25. This is a reduction from the previous year however still shows an overall upward trend since 2020-21. Of the requests received, 669 were under the FOI act, and 178 were handled under the EIR's.

5.2 Upon review of the 2024-25 data, we can see that it is number of EIR requests that have reduced significantly as opposed to FOI requests. FOI requests have more steadily increased over the years and have only had a slight drop this year, whereas the EIR requests dropped from 367 to 178 in 2024-25. Last year we amended our process to reduce the number of EIR requests, this has had a positive impact.
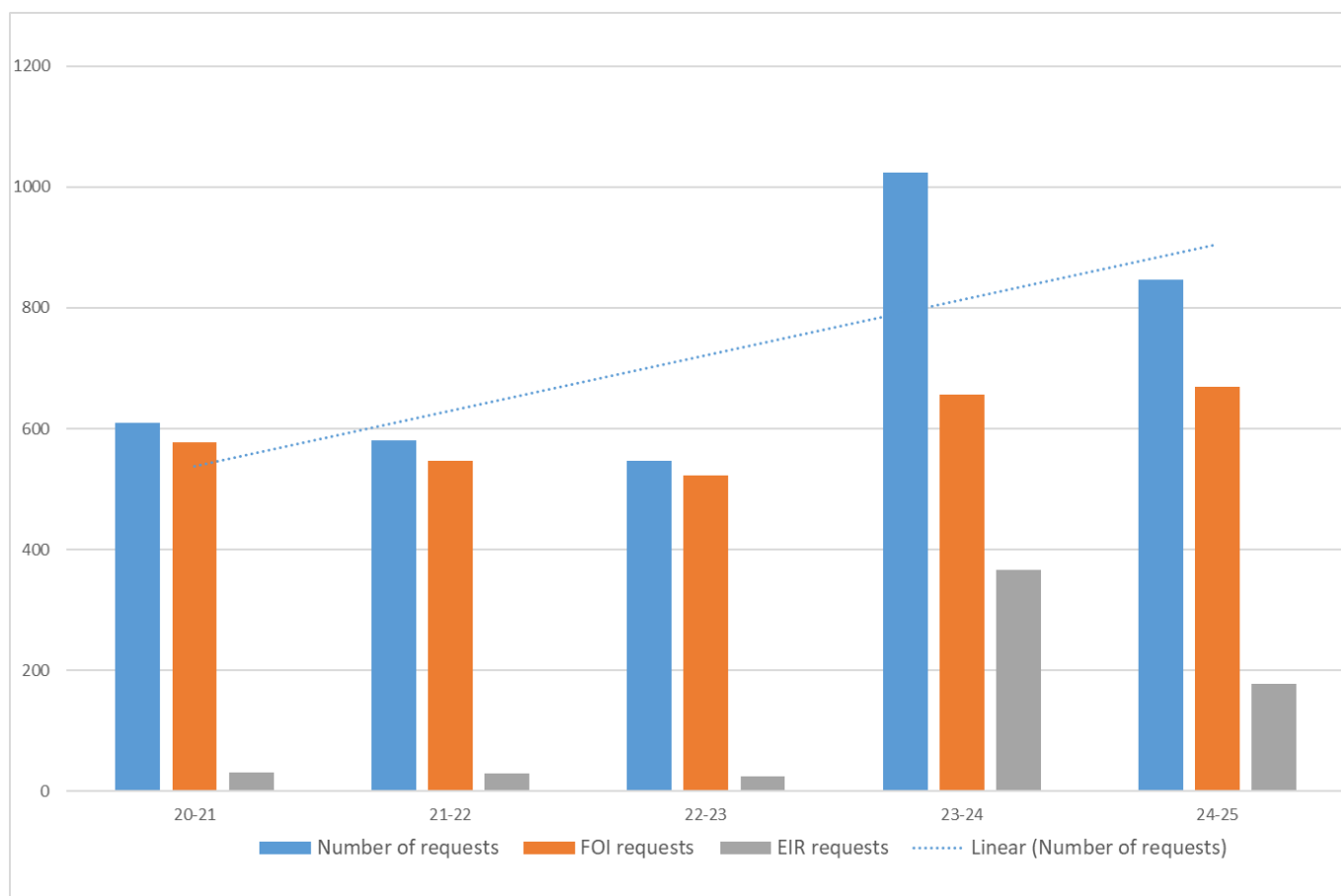
5.3 2024-25 Information requests by Service Area

Service area (From spreadsheets)	Number of Requests
Multiple Service Areas	175
Planning	95
Housing Services (formally CBH)	75
Finance	55
Revs & Bens	54
HR	43
Environmental Health	43
Property and Assets	39
ICT (Publica)	39
Licensing	35
Clean Green	27
Communities & Wellbeing	27

Cemeteries and Crematoriums	19
Housing Strategy	17
Neighbourhood Team	10
Parking (Revs & Bens)	8
Customer Services and Business Support	7
Democratic Services	6
Procurement	6
Public Protection	6
Parks and Public Realm Manager	6
Elections	5
Private Sector Housing	5
Climate Change Team	5
Corporate Projects	4
Marketing Cheltenham	3
One Legal	3
Building Control	2
Commercial & Income Generation	1
Counter Fraud	1
Solace	1
Ubico	1
Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer	1
Golden Valley	1
Grand Total	**825**

5.4 *2 Service areas were blank as they were not for CBC

Service area (from online platform)	Number of Requests
Safeguarding and Equality Diversity and Inclusion	3
Environmental Health - Environmental Protection, Food Safety, Regulatory Health and Safety, Animal Licensing	3
Planning	2
Public Realm, Parks & Gardens/Green Space Development	2
Environmental Services	2
Housing Options	2
Public realm CCTV, animal control, emergency planning, anti-social behaviour (Solace)	1
Business Rates	1
Finance & Assets	1
Communications and Marketing	1
Parking Services	1
Property - Works & Maintenance Team	1
Total	**20**

6. Response Timeframe by Service Area

Service Area (From spreadsheets)	Number of Requests	Number responded to in 20 days	% on time	Max Response time
Clean Green	27	12	44.44%	114
Building Control	2	1	50.00%	41
Planning	95	81	85.26%	36
Multiple Service Areas	175	155	88.57%	34
Neighbourhood Team	10	7	70.00%	33
Communities & Wellbeing	27	23	85.19%	31
Housing Services (formally CBH)	75	53	70.67%	31
Finance	55	45	81.82%	28
Revs & Bens	54	49	90.74%	28
Private Sector Housing	5	4	80.00%	28
Licensing	35	32	91.43%	26
ICT (Publica)	39	38	97.44%	26
HR	43	40	93.02%	25
Environmental Health	43	37	86.05%	25
Housing Strategy	17	12	70.59%	25
Democratic Services	6	5	83.33%	25
Elections	5	4	80.00%	24
Procurement	6	5	83.33%	23
Property and Assets	39	30	76.92%	22
Customer Services and Business Support	7	7	100.00%	17
One Legal	3	3	100.00%	17
Cemeteries and Crematoriums	19	19	100.00%	16
Public Protection	6	6	100.00%	16
Golden Valley	1	1	100.00%	16
Climate Change Team	5	5	100.00%	15
Parks and Public Realm Manager	6	6	100.00%	14
Solace	1	1	100.00%	14
Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer	1	1	100.00%	14
Marketing Cheltenham	3	3	100.00%	12
Parking (Revs & Bens)	8	8	100.00%	9
Corporate Projects	4	4	100.00%	6
Counter Fraud	1	1	100.00%	3
Commercial & Income Generation	1	1	100.00%	2
Ubico	1	1	100.00%	1

6.1 Due to the low numbers of cases that were logged in the online platform in this financial year we have not broken-down response times by area for cases in the online platform.

7. Personal data requests including Subject Access Requests (SAR)

7.1 Across the year 2024-25, 31 personal data requests were received (these numbers are not included in the total for information requests as they are recorded separately). Most cases were dealt with within the statutory calendar month requirements, excluding one case that took 117 days because the clarification was not provided by the requestor.

Service Area	Number of requests
Revs & Bens	15
Housing	6
Multiple Service Areas	4
Elections	3
Democratic Services	1
HR	1
Environmental Health	1

8. Internal reviews and Appeals to the ICO

8.1 Where an applicant is dissatisfied with the way in which the Council has handled an information request, they can request an internal review.

8.2 Of the requests received, only 11 (1.3%) resulted in an internal review being requested. This is a reduction on last year by 6 cases. 100% of requests for review received were responded to within the review timeframes. Of the one case that was not responded in the 20-day timeframe, an extension was sought and it was deal with within 40 days. If an applicant is unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, an appeal can be made to the Information Commissioner for a decision on whether we have appropriately handled the request and internal review.

9. Performance management – monitoring and review

9.1 The council has responded to 88% of requests within the statutory 20 working

day deadline. This equates to 745 requests of the 847.

9.2   In 13 cases a clarification was requested. In cases such as these the clock is stopped until we received the clarification. In 19 cases we requested an extension, therefore we would not be within the 20-working day deadline, but have communicated this with the requestor.

9.3   Unfortunately, this brings us just under the ICO target of 90%. The Governance Risk and Assurance manager will work with the information Governance officer to improve the response rate within the 20-working day deadline, however it is noted that those responded to outside of the 20 day deadline was higher in Q1 of 24/25 and has improved since then.

10.   % change in FOI requests received when compared with the previous year

10.1 The percentage change in the total number of FOI requests received compared with the total number received in the previous year – this indicator gives an indication of workload. This KPI is reported annually.

Period	KPI data
Annual 2024/25	The council received 19.2% less requests than the previous year.

11. % FOI requests responded to within timescale

11.1 The number of FOI requests responded to within the 20 day timescale set within the FOI and EIR legislation, expressed as a percentage of total FOI requests received. This KPI is reported quarterly.

Period	Target	Actual
Q1 2024/25	90%	81.9%
Q2 2024/25	90%	90.2%
Q3 2024/25	90%	88.8%
Q4 2024/25	90%	91.5%

12. ICO compliance statistics

Period	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
The number of requests received during the period	243	205	153	246
The number of the received requests that have not yet been processed	0	0	0	7
The number of the received requests that were processed in full within the statutory deadline	199	185	136	225
The number of the received requests that were processed in full where the deadline was extended (within the legislation)	4	1	9	5
The number of the received requests where the processing took longer than the statutory deadline	44	20	17	21
The number of requests where the information was granted in full	218	194	148	222
The number of requests where the information was refused in full	14	0	1	0
The number of requests where the information was granted in part and refused in part	0	0	0	1
The number of requests received that have been referred for internal review	3	1	0	7

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Appendices:

    i.   Risk Assessment

Background information:

- All disclosure logs have now been updated and can be found on the website here - [Disclosure log (FOI) | Data protection and freedom of information | Cheltenham Borough Council](). The disclosure log does not hold personal information, however it does show what kind of requests we get and what the responses were.

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
1	If the exemptions are not utilised correctly it may lead to information being inadvertently published in the public domain, which could lead to reputational damage	Victoria Bishop	3	2	5	Reduce	Information Governance officer has been on training which included information about exemptions and monitors the exempts used by officers	Victoria Bishop	
2	If there is poor request handling it may result in ICO Interventions and ICO decision notices being issued, which could lead to reputational damage	Victoria Bishop	4	2	6	Reduce	Requests are now handled in our online platform, this has presented some initial issues but long term should reduce the risk. In addition, we have clear internal review processes and escalation process for officers not responding.	Victoria Bishop	

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
3	If personal information is not correctly redacted it may lead to a data incident	Victoria Bishop	4	3	12	Reduce	This risk is currently higher as we have had some internal reviews relating to redactions, as such we are looking at what further training we are providing to officers. This risk is somewhat mitigated by the information governance officer checking redactions where possible.	Victoria Bishop	