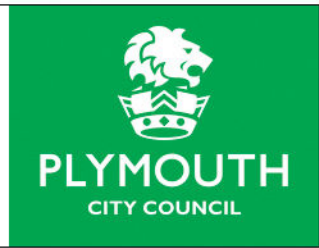


SUPPORT SERVICES OSP

Information Management



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION RESPONSE STATISTICS

Introduction:

The Freedom of Information Act (Fol) became operational from 2005 and provides the right to request data or information held by the Council and for the applicant to be told whether the information is held and to receive a copy of the data or information (not documents) unless an exemption to release applies.

Other legislation also allows information to be requested i.e. the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and the small numbers of environmental requests under the EIR are included in the Fol figures.

However the EIR also allows 'property search' requests to be made to the Council which are dealt with separately by the Land Charges team, but all of these are completed within the statutory 20 working day timescale.

Information requests are varied and where they can be answered quickly with readily available data or information, or the applicant pointed towards an information source, such as a web page, then a particular request is not formerly recorded.

When the application is more detailed, difficult to answer, or is requesting sensitive information, then the request is formerly recorded in the 'Flare' system and it is from these more difficult requests that the statistics are provided. Each Directorate has staff that oversee the application process and log the outcome.

The number of formal requests dealt with by the Council has increased each year and is currently more than twice the number received in 2005. The annual numbers of requests that went through the formal process has been shown on the Council's web site since July 2012 and will be updated at the end of this year.

Please see the web page:

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/councilanddemocracy/information/inforequestsandanswers.htm>

Issues in respect of information requests:

1. The regulator – the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) expects that 85% of applications should be answered within the statutory 20 working day response time. The ICO has served statutory undertakings on low performing public authorities which bind them to ensuring that applicants are dealt with according to their rights.

However the calculation of the response time for the Council is not accurate, as not all applications for information are currently logged, or included in the published response time.

- a. The recording system is being upgraded to 'Dynamics' and this should allow more comprehensive logging and calculation of response rates.
2. Under the 'transparency agenda' more data and information is being published by the Council on our web pages and through reports to Committee e.g. we publish expenditure of over £500 spend each month. This has led to more detailed enquires as businesses seek to identify what services they could supply and as other requestors try to find out the 'facts behind the published information'.
 - a. The ongoing project to improve the Council's web site should lead to more publishing of data and cross referencing of published information, so that requestors will be able to 'self-serve' and not need to make a formal application for information.
3. Applications can be unrelated to current activities being undertaken by the Council and thus the information is not readily available and needs to be retrieved from storage, which takes significant staff time.
 - a. There is currently a rationalisation of physical storage space which includes a review of whether hard copy documents need to be held and is having the effect of making more documents 'findable'. There is also a plan to introduce electronic document and records management (eDRMS) across the Council, which when funded will enable much more efficient and effective obtaining of the data and information that is held.
4. Where requests are about current issues, the applicant is often seeking information that is contentious or very detailed; so the response requires careful consideration.
 - a. The introduction of eDRMS will allow different files held by different business teams to be accessed very easily and make information concerning a particular subject easily available for both staff and enquirers.

Performance rate for Fol

The following table shows the response rate by each Directorate to the formal applications for information that they have dealt with during the current financial year.

2012 / 2013 Financial Year cumulative figures	Fol Total that should be completed for OCT report	Fol Number over limit or not completed	Fol over limit %	Fol statutory achievement %
Executive Unit	1	0	0	100
People	149	51	34	66
Place	132	25	19	81
Corporate Services	149	29	19	81
All Directorates	431	105	24	76

Indication of applicants for information during the current financial year:

Councillor or MP	3%
Media	14%
Business/Corporate	27%
Individuals	52%
Other	4%

In order to improve the current achievement rate, all Assistant Directors have been asked to improve the flow of information within their Directorate and to ensure that applications for information are progressed in a timely manner. In particular the People Directorate have recently recruited to assist with responding to requests for information. As the initiatives described above are implemented, then the visibility and availability of information and our response rate will also be improved.

Richard Woodfield
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Customer Services