

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Annual report on HDC compliance with the Freedom of Information (FOIA) & Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) Acts

Meeting/Date: 20th July 2016

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Strategic Partnerships and Shared Services

Report by: Information Governance Manager (3C ICT)

Ward(s) affected: All Ward(s)

Executive Summary:

This is an annual report on the Council's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The numbers of requests received by the Council in 2015 showed a decline (-11%) from the previous year, following a long period of growth, with 2016 numbers similar to 2015 so far. Customer Services process more than a third of all requests.

Nearly all (94%) of requests are completed without withholding information, but only 1% can be resolved by reference to proactively published information. This presents an opportunity to reduce the burden, particularly within Customer Services.

Further measures are being taken, with a new, shared request management system due to be launched before the end of 2016, and from March this year access to greater support and expertise via 3C ICT.

Recommendation(s):

Corporate Governance Panel is asked to note the content of this report.

1 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Report on the requests for information received by the Council under FOIA & EIR.
- Highlight any issues encountered and actions to be taken to improve performance.

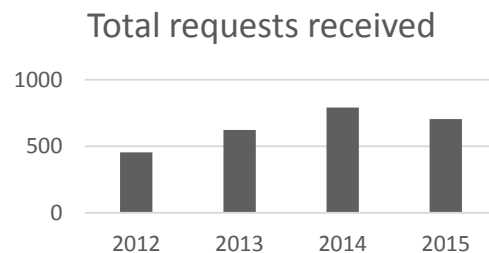
2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The public has had the right to access information held by the Council under the Freedom of Information Act. The Freedom of Information Act (FOI) works alongside the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) which came into force in 2004. Service areas are responsible for responding to requests, and 3C ICT manage the process, provide support and ensure compliance.

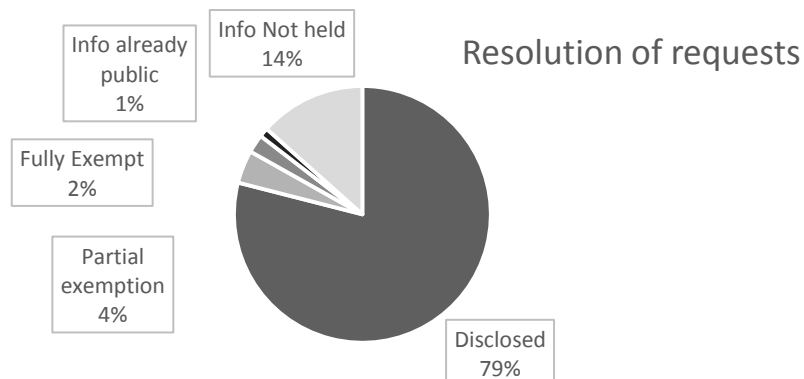
2.2 The Council receives many requests for information in all service areas. Most are dealt with as part of the day-to-day business, but where a request is out of the ordinary, specifically invokes the legislation, or is likely to engage an exemption, it is formally logged and processed. This report relates to those formally processed requests.

3. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

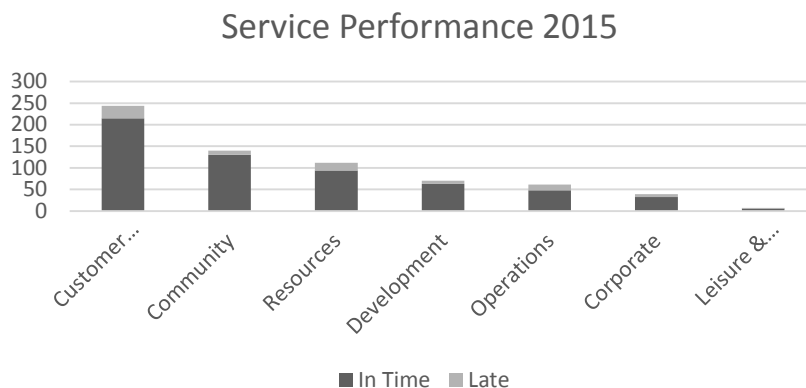
3.1 Total requests received in 2015 were 704. This compares to 791 for 2014, a reduction of 11%. Request volumes received to date in 2016 are similar to those for 2015.



3.2 Most requests are dealt with quickly and effectively, and most disclose all information requested. 6% of requests have at least some information withheld. Only 1% of information requested was already available to the requestor.



- 3.3 Completion of requests within the statutory time-frame has risen from 70% in 2014 to 87% in 2015. The target is currently 90%.
- 3.4 Customer Services receives significantly greater volumes of requests (244) than the next busiest service, Community (140). The most frequent requests continue to be for business rates information, comprising more than 10% of all requests.



- 3.5 The source of requests is becoming more difficult to assess, since many are sent from anonymous webmail addresses.
- 3.6 Requestors have the right to an 'internal review' of their case if they are not satisfied with the outcome, before taking further action to the Information Commissioner's Office. In 2015 6 internal reviews were undertaken, and in 2016 (to May) there have been 3.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 None – paper is intended for Corporate Governance Panel.

5. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS

- 5.1 The key impact of non-compliance with FOIA/EIR is scrutiny from the regulator, and reputational damage due to poor service or inadequate information management.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

- 6.1 The strategy under 3C ICT for the next 12 months will focus on the ownership of information, open data, and improving support from the Information Governance team.
- 6.2 A new system for managing requests will be implemented by the end of 2016. This is a joint system with South Cambridgeshire DC and Cambridge City. The new system will provide automated workflows, a disclosure log, and reporting to service managers in real time.
- 6.3 Further work will be undertaken to identify owners of information and to support them to achieve good record keeping, management and security of their information.
- 6.4 Under 3C ICT, information owners will have access to a much greater source of expertise in this area, which will be on site and more accessible.

6.5 Commonly requested data sets will be proactively published, and together with a disclosure log of previous requests, it is expected that 10-15% more requests can be completed by reference to existing information.

7. LINK TO THE LEADERSHIP DIRECTION

7.1 This supports the aim of 'Ensuring we are a customer focused and service led council'.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 None

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 HDC must comply with the law concerning FOIA/EIR.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

12.1 This paper updates Members on how requests under FOIA/EIR has been dealt with by HDC. Performance in this area is improving, and with the further measures being taken this improvement is expected to continue.

12.2 Members of the Corporate Governance Panel are asked to note the contents of this report.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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