

Freedom of Information (follow-up)
City of York Council
Internal Audit Memo

Service Area: Customer and Business Support Services
Responsible Officer: Assistant Director, Governance and ICT
Status: Final
Date Issued: 12th March 2015

1.0 Introduction and scope

- 1.1 Veritau issued an internal audit report on Freedom of Information on 16th October 2013. The overall opinion was limited assurance and seven findings were raised including a priority one finding.
- 1.2 The priority one finding related to the council not meeting the 20-day target in which to respond to FoI requests. The audit found that in the sample period, 70.6% of requests were responded to within the sample period. The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) suggests that action could be taken if this rate falls below 85%.
- 1.3 As per Veritau's follow-up procedure, re-testing should be carried out where an audit opinion is limited assurance or lower.
- 1.4 A piece of work was therefore carried out in order to address the two main findings from the 2013-14 audit – the council is not achieving the target (finding 1.1) and requests were not being allocated to a Head of Service (finding 2.1).

2.0 Findings

Finding 1.1

- 2.1 The work was started in March 2014 and reviewed the last quarter of data available, October-December 2013. The data supplied by the Customer Feedback Team (CFT) showed that 96% of the requests received in this time; however our analysis calculated the figure as 86%. There was a significant difference in the number of requests that were classified as 'out of time'
- 2.2 Discussions with the CFT enabled us to identify that they were not including requests classified as 'no response sent' which is where the council have failed to provide any response and should therefore be included within the 'out of time' figures as it will naturally not have been responded to within 20 days.
- 2.3 In addition, there were a small number of multi-directorate requests that had not been included along with one schools request that should have been included in ACE (now CSES).
- 2.4 CFT agreed to include these in the next set of data and we agreed to review this. In July 2014 we reviewed two months of data, March and April 2014.
- 2.5 For March 2014, the CFT data showed 90% of requests were completed in time, whilst our analysis showed 89% of requests were completed in time.
- 2.6 For April 2014, the CFT data showed 92% of requests were completed in time, whilst our analysis showed 91.5% of requests were completed in time.
- 2.7 There remained some discrepancies on how responses were included in the statistics; however it is clear from the differences that this had been reduced considerably.
- 2.8 It should also be noted that there remains a significant element of manual intervention in order to produce the monthly reports from the data downloaded from Respond, the system that holds data for the CFT.
- 2.9 CFT has been approved funding to receive training from Respond's software provider during 2015 and it is hoped that this will enable them to produce more effective and less labour-intensive performance information.

Finding 2.1

- 2.10 A sample of requests were taken at random from the October-December 2013 data; our testing showed these were consistently allocated to a Head of Service; therefore we are satisfied that this finding has been successfully followed-up.

Other findings

- 2.11 Performance information is now being produced as per finding 3.1. This is reported on a monthly basis as examined at 2.4.
- 2.12 CFT has delivered training to relevant staff as per finding 4.1. Roles and responsibilities are currently being agreed as part of an internal restructure and this is expected to be completed in May 2015. Relevant policy and procedural documents will be produced at that time.
- 2.13 The publication scheme has been updated as per finding 5.1. Information is currently not searchable, however it is hoped this may be possible, along with a link to the Freedom of Information section on the front page when the new website is rolled-out. This is expected to be completed in May 2015. It is accepted however, that this is out of the control of the Fol team.
- 2.14 Responsibility for updating the website forms part of the discussions about internal roles and responsibilities (see 2.12) and is therefore also subject to a revised date of May 2015.
- 2.15 Progress has been made towards producing a checklist for Heads of Service to capture the information required by transparency best practice. This has not yet been completed however, and a revised date has also been agreed of May 2015.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 Good progress has been made in relation to the key findings of the audit, to the extent that response rates have been increased. This has certainly been helped by requests now being allocated consistently to a Head of Service.
- 3.2 Performance information is now reported on a monthly basis, and whilst we identified some minor discrepancies, the fact that significant manual intervention is required means this is likely. This should be improved if increased reporting capability from Respond can be identified.
- 3.3 The other findings are at various stages of completion. Where the timescales have changed, revised dates have been agreed and these will be followed-up when they become due.
- 3.4 A full systems audit of this area should be carried out during 2015-16.