**Information Governance Service**

**FOI casework lessons learned :**

**July to September 2023**

## Introduction

* 1. In response to the ICO Practice Recommendation for LBTH dated 10 July 2023, this document has been formulated by the IG Service to document some of the lessons learned in the LA’s response to meet the PR recommendation.
  2. The intent of the lessons learned is to document some of the root causes of delays from allocation to clearance at different stages with mitigations for any recurring problems identified specifically

## Allocation Delays

* 1. It was found in some cases that were delayed that the FOI had been allocated and confirmation that the correct responsible party who potentially held the information had not been obtained in a timely manner. This led to cases having to be re-allocated in some cases with only a few working days remaining before the deadline preventing a timely response.

Action:

The mitigation recommended to IG officers that confirmation is received at time of allocation or soon thereafter where doubt of correct ownership and if not received, treat the case as one that is urgent regardless of the time remaining.

* 1. The correct number of services/officers were always allocated to and then tracked. For example, if a FOI concerned multiple services (e.g. housing and IT), at times the system reflected core responsibility on a single service which meant multiple information returns could be difficult to track.

Action:

The mitigation was to create a robust and regular tracking system for every service (updated and sent weekly) with responsibility for FOI’s external of the casework system to create another point of reference and accountability.

* 1. Some officers fedback to the IG service that allocated and tracking emails from our casework system (icasework) appeared too generic and difficult to track the information.

Action:

The mitigation was the additional tracking system sent via email (referred to above) to every single officer who has cases allocated in their name with clear information such as reference numbers/name of the request/service area/due date

## Response Stage Delays

* 1. The most common reason for response stage delays was insufficient chasing in the “middle stage” of casework. Essentially the time between initial allocation and approaching the last 5-10 working days.

Action:

The mitigation was to create a robust and regular tracking system for every service (updated and sent weekly) with responsibility for FOI’s external of the casework system to create another point of reference and accountability. This meant every single FOI case within the LA was chased on a minimum basis of 1 week whereas before some cases may not be touched for 20+ days.

* 1. Another issue (particularly in significantly high pressure areas of the council such as Housing) is losing sight of the high priority statutory responsibility for services to response to FOI casework in a timely manner leading to chasing required from the IG service.

Action:

The ICO PR for LBTH was seen as a significant opportunity to remind staff at all levels of the responsibility of the council as a public and accountable authority. The ICO PR was presented to staff at all levels including the Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership. Successful messaging had been passed through all levels of officers which lead to more reactive response work from officers. This messaging will remain sustained due to regular FOI performance reports and accountability as a standing item on the councils Strategic Information Governance Board (quarterly).

* 1. With complex casework, officers were at times felt hesitant on how to understand these requests and how to respond.

Action:

A campaign of FOI casework awareness was carried out by the IG service through July – September 23 at meetings across different council services to hear these concerns and provide additional teamwork and communication links between the IG service and these services.

## Case Completion Delays

* 1. On some rare occasions, a case response was completed but had not been correctly sent back to the IG service leading to a delay on a case that had been completed but not dispatched.

Action:

The mitigation was a direction was placed on all open casework permanently on the screen which clearly directs officers on how to complete cases and also how to escalate cases approaching their deadline.

