

WIRRAL COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

26 JANUARY 2011

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) REQUESTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Following the report presented to this Committee on 29 September 2010, it was agreed that a further report should be produced with a breakdown of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that were received in 2009 and 2010.
- 1.2 It was also agreed that figures from neighbouring Local Authorities should be sought and produced within a new report.
- 1.2 This report analyses the FOI requests which are recorded on a central register and held in calendar year format.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Since the introduction in 2005 of the public right of access to information held by public bodies, Wirral Council continues to receive a higher than average number of FOI requests. Requests come from the local community and also worldwide. Types of requests reflect both local topical issues and also national media stories.
- 2.2. Requests must be received in writing, which includes email, and 95% of requests are by email. There is a Service Request button on the web site which is used to generate an FOI request from the public. The Information Manager receives the requests and liaises with the most appropriate officers in the various Departments of the Council to obtain the information to facilitate the request.
- 2.3 Research shows that the number of requests for local government continues to rise over the years whilst central government figures remain constant.
- 2.4. Because FOI requests are generally anonymous in nature, and because of the use of an email address; it is difficult to demographically categorise requestors. For requests where the identity of the enquirer is clear, it has been noted that there are a higher percentage of men, rather than women who make requests using the legislation.
- 2.5. There are 20 working days in which the Council must provide the information requested or refuse the request and send a response to the enquirer explaining the refusal to supply the information.

2.6. There is a right to an internal review if the requestor is dissatisfied with the response from the Council. In 2009 there were 11 requests for an internal review and in 2010 there were 25 requests for an internal review, 11 of which were from a requestor who had been deemed as vexatious. Internal reviews are facilitated by the Monitoring Officer.

2.7 A comparison is shown below for FOI requests received in 2009 and up to September 2010 with neighbouring Authorities.

WIRRAL		LIVERPOOL		KNOWSLEY		ST HELENS	
MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER	MONTH	NUMBER
Jan-09	150	Jan-09	88	Jan-09	45	Jan-09	25
Feb-09	65	Feb-09	99	Feb-09	47	Feb-09	32
Mar-09	84	Mar-09	109	Mar-09	44	Mar-09	25
Apr-09	69	Apr-09	108	Apr-09	50	Apr-09	32
May-09	56	May-09	111	May-09	78	May-09	29
Jun-09	62	Jun-09	109	Jun-09	38	Jun-09	34
Jul-09	64	Jul-09	123	Jul-09	57	Jul-09	37
Aug-09	55	Aug-09	103	Aug-09	44	Aug-09	38
Sep-09	62	Sep-09	108	Sep-09	48	Sep-09	45
Oct-09	100	Oct-09	128	Oct-09	64	Oct-09	53
Nov-09	77	Nov-09	112	Nov-09	54	Nov-09	46
Dec-09	59	Dec-09	91	Dec-09	52	Dec-09	35
	903	Total	1289		621		431
Jan-10	67	Jan-10	84	Jan-10	43	Jan-10	31
Feb-10	55	Feb-10	102	Feb-10	48	Feb-10	35
Mar-10	80	Mar-10	142	Mar-10	72	Mar-10	51
Apr-10	80	Apr-10	97	Apr-10	41	Apr-10	36
May-10	59	May-10	104	May-10	43	May-10	44
Jun-10	80	Jun-10	109	Jun-10	54	Jun-10	50
Jul-10	79	Jul-10	116	Jul-10	50	Jul-10	44
Aug-10	52	Aug-10	106	Aug-10	49	Aug-10	45
Sep-10	65	Sep-10	127	Sep-10	62	Sep-10	54
	617	Total	987		462		390

2.8 The volume of requests for 2009 at Wirral Council was 903 and the volume of requests up to the end of October 2010 has risen to 717. The table below shows the requests broken down by Department. The Finance Department figure includes requests facilitated by the Information Manager, which include non Finance related requests.

Department	Number of Requests in 2009	Number of Requests in 2010 to Oct
Finance	365	248
Technical Services	127	133
Law/HR/Asset Management	102	115
Regeneration	77	
CYPD Education	70	69
CYPD Social Care	46	38
Adult Social Services	50	44
Corporate Services	45	47
Request across more than one Directorate	21	23

- 2.9 A percentage of requests are miscellaneous in their subject matter and difficult to categorise, but a more detailed breakdown of the requests received in 2009 and 2010 are given below.

	No of Requests in 2009	No of Requests in 2010
Requests made by Media	106	100
Whatdotheyknow Website	180	165
Repeated Vexatious	104	2
Education Related	70	69
Financial Enquiries	58	54
Adult Social Care	50	36
Child Social Care	46	30
Parliamentary Researchers	36	7
Highways and Traffic	28	32
Strategic Asset Review	25	3
Waste and Recycling	22	21
Leisure	16	10
Parking	16	14
Expenses and Away Days	15	12
Pensions	15	8
ICT	15	18
Salaries	14	15
Council Tax	14	10
Planning	11	15
Business Rates	11	13
Tranmere Rovers	10	5
Housing Benefit	10	4

(NB: Any categories with less than 10 requests have been omitted from 2009. For comparison against 2009 however, low category numbers for 2010 that appear on the table above have been completed.)

- 2.10 There has been a noted increase in 2010 of requests that relate to the environment such as carbon emissions, phone masts, wind turbines, solar panels, sustainable and locally sourced procurement.
- 2.11 For requests received in 2009 and 2010-up to October where the Council was unable to supply information for various reasons, requestors were still contacted and the reasons their request was refused was explained to them.

	2009	2010
Requests that did not come under the definition of an FOI request	3	3
Requests that would take over the 18.5 person hours limit to fulfil	22	25
Requests that were part of a repeated and vexatious notice	53	2
Requests where the Council did not hold the information in question	55	52
Section 40 Exemption, contains Personal Data	5	4
Section 21 Exemption, information accessible via an alternative means	6	8
Section 22 Exemption, information to be published at a later date	11	3
Section 43 Exemption, information with Commercial interests	13	4
TOTAL	168	101

3. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

3.1. There are none arising from this report.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

5. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are no planning implications in this report.

6. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are no community safety implications in this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

8. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are none arising directly out of this report.

9. MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are no particular implications for any Member or ward.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1. Freedom of Information requests.

11. RECOMMENDATION

11.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE