

**TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE
COMMITTEE - 14 APRIL 2014**

35 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SCRUTINY REVIEW

Councillor Sykes introduced a report on the findings and recommendations of the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review which had been undertaken by three members of the Committee, Councillors Christina Muspratt, Adam Sykes and Stuart Whittingham.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provided public access to information held by public authorities. Public authorities were obliged to publish certain information about their activities and members of the public were entitled to request information from them.

In January 2013, Wirral Council was subject to a three month period of monitoring action by the Information Commissioner's Office due to the timeliness of responding to Freedom of Information (Fol) requests. On 14 November 2013, the Information Commissioner's Office notified the Council that it was satisfied performance had improved, resulting in no further monitoring action being taken. The Review Panel acknowledged and commended the Council in ensuring that response times for Fol requests were now over the 85% threshold required by the Information Commissioner.

The Review Panel's report provided a number of recommendations which they believed should assist the Council in managing its requirements to meet the Freedom of Information Act and also to become a more open and transparent Council.

The report contained 8 recommendations which the Committee were requested to consider.

Councillor Sykes thanked the officers involved in producing the report, Jane Corrin, Surjit Tour and Mike Lester.

The Chair echoed the thanks to officers and also thanked the other two Members involved in the Scrutiny Review.

A Member queried what could be done with the search facility on the internet which could help to reduce the number of Fol requests if information was more easily accessed on the internet.

The Strategic Director responded that anything to improve the 'search' facility across the internet would be looked at and the Council was shortly to embark on changes to internet accessibility. This could be picked up by the Committee in the new municipal year.

He also welcomed the positive approach taken by the scrutiny review. It was important to note the number of requests received was around the average for comparable local authorities and that response times had improved significantly. The

aim would be to provide consistency in terms of response times. The more information that the Council could provide upfront then the hope would be to reduce the number of FoI requests. He welcomed the report and was happy to accept all the recommendations.

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and the eight recommendations contained therein, be endorsed.**
- (2) That the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review be referred to Cabinet.**