

Annex A

Quality Assurance Procedures

All business areas within the Scottish Government adhere to the procedures as set out on our SharePoint site. Some areas have put in place additional steps which are set out below. You will wish to note that not all business areas use all of these additional steps.

- FOI cases are monitored at Directorate level by the Directorate Business Management Team (DBMT). We run a bespoke weekly report identifying all cases and reviews in the Tracker, and we share this information with the Deputy Directors (DD), Unit Heads and Divisional FOI Champions.
- FOI Champions (named colleagues in the division who have considerable experience in answering cases) are asked to make contact with the case handlers. They offer guidance, where required, and brief the case handlers on the importance of the timetable and the steps that need to be considered to make sure the case is answered on time. The FOI Champions are asked to keep the DBMT and their DDs/Unit Heads updated on progress and to flag any risk of a case not being answered on time.
- The Directorate Business Manager briefs the Director and DDs on the FOI position at the Weekly Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting.
- FOI is a standing item at our monthly SMT corporate performance meetings and the individual operational Mid-year reviews with DDs/Unit Heads.
- Colleagues in other Directorates are consulted as appropriate to ensure our replies are accurate.
- Individual FOI replies are cleared by team leaders or at DD/Unit Head level for their respective Divisions.
- When an FOI arrives it is triaged by a senior person to check that it is within scope and whether further information is required from the requester.

- The team meet monthly to review performance, revise handling procedures and discuss any issues that have occurred concerning the FOI process over the last month. There are process notes available and each team member is encouraged to complete FOI training.
- In addition to the Scottish Government Freedom of Information Tracker on Saltire, we use a specific Due Date Tracker to maintain focus on individual requests.
- We maintain a separate database of all previous related FOI requests in the event that these are required to be accessed for reference.
- There is a dedicated team who actively monitor the FOI/EIRs and are available for any additional support or advice caseworkers require.
- We monitor FOI requests when they come in, and where the request is not straightforward, one of my Deputy Directors have a discussion with the member of staff who is taking responsibility for the request about the way that it should be approached. One of us would generally keep in touch with a member of staff handling the request if they have questions and would then clear the draft response before it is either sent on to Special Advisers and Ministers or directly issued. If comments come back from SpAds or Ministers, we would see an amended version before it is issued.
- FOIs are a standard item on the Monday Senior Leadership Team (SLT) Agenda where the Business Manager will raise awareness of any deadlines due in the next two weeks.
- The Head of Policy, acts as a single point of contact for all requests (there is access to his inbox and check for requests in his absence). He carries out an initial assessment of the case, e.g. to determine whether it is likely to breach the cost limit then assigns to a member of the case-handling team.
- Cases are allocated based on who has capacity and allocation is rotated to ensure that all members are regularly handling cases, to maintain their experience and knowledge.
- All team members are included in the process so all are aware of the cases that are being received in the team and can respond if a case-handler is absent.
- The team also has a monthly meeting to discuss any issues, share knowledge and learning opportunities that are arising with cases and to keep each other aware of what stages individual cases have reached.

- Weekly case tracking reports are produced so the Director and her Management Team can keep up to date on their performance.
- We circulate a list of active and recently publish FOIs to divisional business management teams each week. The updated list is shared each Monday for discussion at the Directorate Management Team on Tuesdays.
- Clearance is provided at a senior level, which is normally Divisional Head or Deputy Director. The aim is to have the response with senior management by day 10 to build in time to ensure a high quality response has been drafted.
- A directorate FOI Champion and a business manager are responsible for monitoring FOIs and ensuring timely responses.
- Within the Directorate's Business Management Unit (BMU) is the FOI Champion and the BMU ensures support for staff is provided and training arranged as required.
- Divisional performance against SG FOI standards and targets are a standing item for discussion at senior management meetings.
- We have a system in place whereby we use a weekly update to issue a reminder to our staff on the latest information on all outstanding FOIs.
- Ensure all training and e-learning is up to date.
- When FOIs arrive they are flagged to senior management in the division to assess their complexity/sensitivity.
- In drafting FOI responses officials can draw on advice from FOI Champions, and named colleagues in the division who have considerable experience in answering cases.
- Our BMU tracks the FOIs on a weekly basis and provides a report to SMT including details of where the FOI is in terms of the clearance process (line manager, DD, Director then SpAds/Ministers). This will also flag any potential issues with an FOI and they can be handled and dealt with as quickly as possible.

QA process after release

- We conduct a brief lessons learned exercise for any requests that are not issued within the required timescales, by gathering information from owners about the reasons for the late issue, any actions that could have prevented it and what approach will be taken in future to prevent the same issue arising. We also closely scrutinise the decisions for any requests that are escalated to an OSIC appeal and disseminate the findings and learning points through our staff notice and Director meetings.
- On the release of any information, steps are taken to ensure that this is placed in the public domain via the Scottish Government website.