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Daren Fitzhenry
Scottish Information Commissioner
By email: dfitzhenry@itspublicknowledge.info

17 May 2022

Dear Daren

Thank you for sharing with me your progress report.

The Scottish Government is committed to openness and transparency and recognises that scrutiny is the bedrock that underlies effective governance. Freedom of Information (FOI) handling plays a critical role in that.

As your report recognises, the Covid pandemic had had a significant impact on our FOI handling. Prior to the pandemic the Scottish Government was meeting its target to respond to 95% of requests on time in 7 of the 8 months to March 2020. Responding to the pandemic necessitated an immediate redeployment of staff at an unprecedented scale within the Scottish Government. The scale of the shift necessarily affected our case-handling directly with large numbers of established trained case handlers and FOI advisers redeployed. We are working hard to restore levels of performance. Over the past two years the response rate for requests issued within 20 working days has improved to around the average for Scotland, 86%. We have, at the same time, responded to a 25% increase in requests in 2021 over the previous year, answering a record 4,200 requests last year.

Nevertheless we remain committed to further improvement, including achieving the target of answering 95% of requests on time.

I welcome the recognition in your report that there is an increased understanding across the organisation of FOI processes and procedures and that good practice is evident, and that you are satisfied by progress in several key areas of the action plan we agreed with you in 2018. The evidence of the increasing profile of the FOI Unit's role and recognition of the expertise it provides is also welcome.

I welcome your recommendations and will work with my officials to develop the next phase of our improvement plan to address the areas that you have identified that require further work, and to assure myself that practice has improved and is consistent across the organisation. I note your plans for the next assessment in 2023, and we will continue to update you on a

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regular basis on the development and delivery of the improvement plan. In the meantime, I appreciate the ongoing advice and support from you and your team.

Yours sincerely

GEORGE ADAM

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