



Executive Advisory Body

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 20 August 2019
Subject	Freedom of Information Improvement Plan
Agenda No.	7
Paper No.	8.3
Prepared By	[Redacted - s.38(1)(b) Personal Information]
Purpose	Discuss

1. Background

- 1.1. Freedom of Information legislation covers three duties on organisations that fall within scope:
 - Duty to respond to requests
 - Duty to publish information
 - Duty to advise and assist
- 1.2. As a result of two high profile interventions by the Information Commissioner, which highlighted significant variations in performance across Scottish Government, the Scottish Government is currently rolling out a Freedom of Information Improvement Plan which is being managed by the central Scottish Government Freedom of Information Unit. Implementation will be managed in five work streams: compliance; case handling; training; case file records management and monitoring; and communications and behaviour change.
- 1.3. Executive Agencies and Directorates are required to create and implement a complementary local improvement plan.
- 1.4. Social Security Scotland's overall performance dipped in May 2019. A number of immediate remedial actions were identified and implemented to address these issues. Performance in June and July has improved.
- 1.5. The Senior Leadership Team discussed a number of more formal improvement options in June 2019. An overall approach has been agreed and a detailed Improvement Plan created. The Plan has been approved by Scottish Government's Freedom of Information Unit.

2. Key points

- 2.1. Freedom of Information performance across Scottish Government has been a concern for some time.
- 2.2. Social Security Scotland has seen a significant increase in the number and complexity of requests since January 2019.
- 2.3. Performance in May 2019 dipped. Immediate action was taken to address this including:



20 August (19-20) FOI Improvement Plan

- Requiring confirmation within 24 hours of allocation that the proposed Case-Handler has accepted the case.
 - Regular, frequent calls to all active Case-Handlers to check progress and offer support.
 - Revisions to Case Tracker Report to better capture blockers to progress.
- 2.4. Further changes are being implemented as part of formal Improvement Plan agreed with the Scottish Government Freedom of Information Unit.
- 2.5. This Plan aligns Social Security Scotland’s approach to the overall Scottish Government requirements and meets our duties under Freedom of Information legislation.
- 2.6. The formal Improvement Plan covers the following aspects:
- Resourcing
 - Allocation of requests
 - Process and reporting
 - Training and support
 - Communication
- 2.7. Specific actions include:
- Creating a Freedom of Information team within Social Security Scotland. This team will lead on implementation of the Improvement Plan and creating the necessary consistency in responding and reporting on all Freedom of Information matters.
 - Delivery of a Core Skills for Case-Handlers Workshop for designated Case-Handlers, a second workshop is planned for later in August.
- 2.8. We continue to work closely with Scottish Government’s Freedom of Information Unit and have accepted a recent offer to pilot their planned Triage process. This new process will ensure all requests are valid, identify any particular sensitivities and monitor progress of response to ensure it meets targets.
- 2.9. Initial progress on implementation of the plan and our additional actions have already resulted in improvements to performance. As a result, performance in June and July improved. See below table:

Month FOIs were Due	May	June	July
% of Responses within Deadline	0%	73%	100%



3. Conclusions

- 3.1. The Executive Advisory Body are asked to note the steps which are being taken to improve Social Security Scotland's performance in the handling of Freedom of Information requests and the progress which has already been made.



4. GOVERNANCE CHECKLIST

Strategic Objective	Contribution
<p>Dignity, fairness and respect</p> <p>Delivering a service with dignity, fairness and respect at its core.</p>	<p>Providing information in an accessible, useful manner is key to building trust and demonstrating commitment to our stated values.</p>
<p>Equality and tackling poverty</p> <p>Promoting equality and tackling poverty.</p>	
<p>Efficiency and alignment</p> <p>Ensuring efficiency and aligning our activities with wider public sector for the benefit of the people we serve.</p>	<p>Implementing the FOI Improvement Plan will provide a more effective and efficient service in fulfilling our obligations under the legislation.</p>
<p>Economy, society and environment</p> <p>Contributing to our economy, society and protection of our environment.</p>	

Strategic consideration	Impact
Environment	
Governance	<p>Any options will have an impact on governance issues and the Governance and Strategy Unit within Social Security Scotland.</p> <p>A more consistent approach to handling FOI's and a better understanding of the process will contribute to improvements in performance.</p>
Data	
Finance	Approval required for cost of new positions.
Staff	Better initial and on-going training and support for Case Handlers will improve confidence and effectiveness of responses and contribute to overall performance.
Equalities	A more consistent, centralised approach will better comply with Equalities legislation and good practice.
Estates	



Strategic consideration	Impact
Communications and Presentation	Impact on the new website, design, content and upkeep. Additional internal communication of Branding Guidelines