

WHAT MAKES A GOOD RESPONSE?



Anyone has a right to request information from a public authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. As a result, Sheffield City Council get a *lot* of requests. Follow these tips to ensure compliance with the law and that we get the right response first time around!

Get it right first time = less work for everyone!

1.



Does the request make sense?

Under FOI, we have a duty to advise and assist the applicant.

While the Information Management (IM) team try to field requests before allocating to the service, it may need a service with more technical knowledge of their data to go back for clarification. This gives the applicant an opportunity to either narrow down their request or specify exactly what they are looking for.

2.



Do we hold the information?

Under FOI, we have a duty to tell the applicant whether we hold any information falling within the scope of their request.

Even if we are refusing the information, we need to confirm if this information is held. If it is not held by your service, please tell the IM team as soon as possible. It may be held with another service.

3.



Does the response answer the request?

On face value, you may think the information you have provided answers the question.

Carefully review the wording and each point the requester has raised. Does the information really cover what they are asking for? Or does the information you hold only cover some elements? You may need to ask other individuals in your service or elsewhere in the Council for further information. This should be done as soon as possible so they can gather the relevant data too!

4.



Have I correctly applied any exemptions?

As a Council, we strive towards transparency and all responses must be approached in favour of disclosing.

However, not everything can be disclosed. It may be the data contains personal information, it is available elsewhere (e.g. online) or it would exceed the costs set out by the Act (18 hours of work). If you're not sure, please ask the IM team for advice as soon as possible. Exemptions take time to consider and apply and we need to demonstrate clearly why we are applying the exemption.

5.



What should I avoid?

Avoid saying that information is "not held in a reportable format".

Remember, our duty under FOI is to confirm whether we hold the information we've been asked for; saying that it is "not held in a reportable format" doesn't provide a clear answer.

It is much more helpful to a) confirm that we hold the information, but b) state that to search for the information would exceed the time/cost limit. You get bonus points if you explain why!

Not sure? Ask the IM team!

Sometimes an FOI request can stump the best of us. If you aren't sure how to approach a response, please get in touch with the Information Management team right away. We're here to advise and want to make it straight forward for everyone.