

# Sandwell Audit Themed Review – Freedom of Information

Audit and Risk Committee



# Timeline

Audit Start  
Date

- 4th July 2022

Audit End  
Date

- 12th October  
2022

Query  
Resolution

- 21st November  
2022

# Evidence Base

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Sample of  
Freedom of  
Information  
Requests

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View of dashboard  
for Strategic  
Enabling Team

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Data and  
Governance  
database



# Executive Summary

## Scope and objectives of audit work

Our audit considered the objectives and the potential risk to the achievement of those objectives.

Objectives Reviewed	Potential Risks
Ensure that adequate controls are in place for the dealing and responding to Freedom of Information request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key data is not being published within required timescales.</li> <li>• Staff are not aware of the guidance that is available, and this therefore has not been referred to and applied when producing and publishing data.</li> <li>• Exemptions to data have not been correctly applied, leading to data to being published which should not be.</li> </ul>
Limitations to scope of audit	Freedom of Information requests for 2022/23.

## Overall conclusion

Our audit provides **substantial assurance** over the adequacy of the controls reviewed as part of the process to mitigate risks to an acceptable level.

No Assurance	Limited	Reasonable	Substantial
Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.



# Issues Arising - Significant

## 2 Findings and Recommendations

Action is required to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving objectives <b>Significant</b>		
No	Findings	Recommendations, agreed actions, responsibility and target date
2.1	<p>Examined Freedom of information requests (Fol), received and responded to as at September 2022. A total of forty-two requests were responded to. However out of those, twelve responses were not completed within the prescribed timeframe of 20 days.</p> <p><b>Implication:</b> Non-adherence to regulatory timeframe.</p>	<p>The Authority should ensure that Fol requests are responded to within the required timeframe. If the request is considered to be complex, then an extension should be sought to enable the request to be completed within the required time frame.</p>

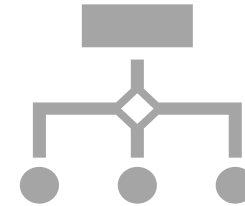
# Issues Arising – Merits Attention

Action is advised to enhance risk control or operational efficiency <b>Merits Attention</b>		
No	Finding	Suggested action/s including responsibility and target date
2.2	<p>The flow chart demonstrating how FoI requests are processed by the Authority incorrectly illustrates that approval is given by management retrospectively. The flow chart does not reflect the actual process whereby approval is received from the relevant SET Members prior to the release of the information to the requester.</p> <p><b>Implication:</b></p> <p>The flow chart not reflecting the actual process could result in information being released without having received prior approval.</p>	<p>The flow chart should be amended to reflect the actual process of approval being obtained from the relevant SET Member in advance of the information being released.</p>

# Outcomes and Assessment



## Opinion of Substantial Assurance



## 2 Issues Identified

### 1 - Significant

- Automated approvals process - Complete
- **More** resource in the area

### 1 - Merits Attention

- Flowchart amended - Complete

# Remediation of Audit Outcomes

- 'Significant'

*Response times outside the statutory 20 working days*

- Cause - Responses awaiting approval missed in inboxes
- Solution – Implement MS O365 Approvals Process
  - Approvals in one place
  - Standardised Format
  - Repeatable process
- Status Complete

- 'Merits Attention'
- Process Flowchart shows retrospective approval of requests by Strategic Enabling Team (SET)
- Cause - Incorrect process chart
- Solution – Chart Amended to reflect correct process
- Status Complete