



Constitution and General Purposes Committee

9 April 2019

Title	Campaign for Freedom of Information - Report on FOI good practice in London Boroughs
Report of	Clair Green – Director of Assurance
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	Appendix A – Campaign for Freedom of Information report FOI Good Practice: A survey of London local authorities
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Summary

This report presents a summary of the findings of the recent Campaign for Freedom of Information report on Freedom of Information (FOI) performance and good practice in London Boroughs. Elements of the report refer to best practice examples with Barnet Council. The report also include update on Barnet's FOI performance in 2018/19.

Officers Recommendations

1. That Committee note the report, and the recognition from CFOI of the positive and effective approach Barnet has taken in order to be an exemplar of FOI good practice.
2. That Committee note the council's commitment to maintaining continuous improvement in this regard, as evidenced by current high levels of performance.

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 In a report published on 6 March, the Campaign for Freedom of Information (CFOI) revealed performance and procedure gaps across the majority of London boroughs (see Appendix A).
- 1.2 Despite the negative findings with regard to most boroughs, Barnet is repeatedly held up in the report as an exemplar of good practice and excellent levels of performance.
- 1.3 The CFOI is the primary advocacy group that promotes and defends freedom of information in the UK. Its central aims are to strengthen the public's rights under the Freedom of Information Act and related laws and oppose attempts to weaken them.
- 1.4 Barnet's response to the Freedom of Information Act is led centrally by the Information Management Team in Assurance, with assistance from Link Officers throughout the council and partner organisations.
- 1.5 The CFOI has been aware of Barnet as a centre of excellence for Freedom of Information for some time, and the organisation has asked the Transparency and Open Data Manager to present at events promoting performance improvement and good practice for both a delegation of the Tunisian government and, most recently, at a seminar for all London boroughs.
- 1.6 The recent report cites Barnet as one of only 9 boroughs that meet the Information Commissioner's requirement that 90% of FOI requests are answered within statutory deadlines, and one of only 3 boroughs that achieve over a 95% response rate.
- 1.7 The council is also praised for its openness and transparency, not just in terms of publishing a disclosure log and FOI performance data, but also in reducing of the Act by publishing frequently requested data and information on the Open Barnet portal. The report notes a third of all requests were answered with published data and information.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To ensure that members are aware of the council's achievements with regard to FOI performance (see Appendix A) and the high standards it continues to set.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 There are no alternative options as this report is for committee to note.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 There are no post decision implementation relevant to this report

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan - Barnet 2024 has three outcomes for the borough focus on place, people and communities:

- a pleasant, well maintained borough that we protect and invest in
- our residents live happy, healthy, independent lives with the most vulnerable protected
- safe and strong communities where people get along well.

5.1.2 As outlined in the council's approach to this vision, providing access to transparent and Open Data ensure we deliver a 'efficient and effective council'.

5.2 **Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.2.1 No resource implications

5.3 **Social Value**

5.3.1 Not applicable

5.4 **Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000

5.5 **Risk Management**

5.5.1 There are no risks

5.6 **Equalities and Diversity**

5.6.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the Public-Sector Equality Duty which requires a public authority (or those exercising public functions) to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.

5.6.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day to day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and Civil Partnership

5.6.3 Changes to policies and services are analysed in order to assess the potential equalities impacts and risks and identify any mitigating action possible, through an equalities impact assessment, before final decisions are made. Consideration will also be made to the equalities and data cohesion summary.

5.7 **Corporate Parenting**

5.7.1 N/A

5.8 **Consultation and Engagement**

5.8.1 N/A

5.8 **Insight**

5.8.1 N/A

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1 Campaign of Freedom of Information - www.cfoi.org.uk