The State of FOI in Local Government 2021

Monday 11 October, 2021

The State of FOI in Local Government 2021

35% of Local Government FOI practitioners don't believe current FOI legislation is fit for purpose

A new comprehensive report on the 'State of FOI in Local Government', published today, by eCase, reveals that over a third of local government FOI practitioners don't believe that current FOI legislation is fit for purpose. It also reveals that only half of UK councils are answering the required 90% of FOI requests within 20 days.

This newly-released report is the outcome of an in-depth research survey of local government FOI practitioners. The report looks at how councils are performing, what factors impact performance, and current attitudes towards FOI legislation and its profile within the public sector. It concludes with what the model council looks like in terms of performing at the optimum level.

Its key findings are that:

- There were huge gulfs in performance with half of our respondents not meeting their timeliness target (less than 90% of requests answered within 20 days). Nearly a quarter of respondents had a timeliness rate of less than 79% answered on time.
- The majority of councils (76%) felt that there was good senior management support for the FOIA, but that this didn't always filter down to middle management.
- The tools used to process FOI cases and support from senior management had the biggest impact on timeliness rate. The vast majority (95%) of councils that achieved a 90%+ timeliness rate had good senior management support
- The best performing councils operate with good senior management support, a centralised model, enough resources, and the right tools in place.
- The importance of the FOI Officer's job role needs to be elevated to improve the image it has as a good career choice.
- Proactive publishing of information can help to alleviate several of the issues that Officers have with current legislation.

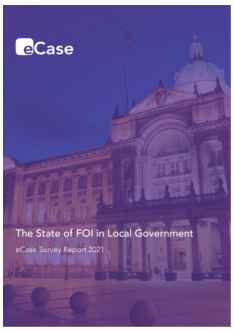
Commenting on the report, Lynn Wyeth, FOI Officer & Doctoral Researcher at De Montfort University states that, "Whilst there was a smattering of Freedom of Information research undertaken a few years after the Act was implemented, there has been very little undertaken in the United Kingdom particularly focussing on 'how' local authority officers actually 'do' FOI. Previous research looked at quantities of requests, and who made requests, but rarely looked at the procedures around processing requests. The report presents interesting statistics about performance which could generate a bigger conversation around there needing to be a more centralised repository so the public can easily see how compliant their local authority is and to compare it with others."

Speaking on behalf of eCase, Richard Clarke, Director, said, "Whilst there is a lot known about FOI at a central government level, research at a local government level has been limited. Our research surfaces some key results and sentiments that have likely been operating under the radar for some time. Whilst there are many high-performance councils, there are also many that appear to be struggling. The main aim of the research is to highlight the key factors that contribute to good performance and detail how these can be implemented. We also felt it was important for our research to highlight the obstacles faced and the sentiment surrounding the FOI Act, both from practitioners themselves and from other service areas.

"I believe that the insights and recommendations in this report will provide local government and the wider public sector, with a clear roadmap for improvement."

The State of FOI in Local Government report is available, free of charge, to the public sector and members of the press. Request your copy at ww3.ecase.co.uk/foilg

Media:





Related Sectors:

Computing & Telecoms :: Government :: Public Sector & Legal ::

Related Keywords:

Freedom Of Information Act :: FOIA :: FOI :: Local Government :: Information Rights :: Information Governance :: Local Authority :: Councils :: Govtech ::

Scan Me:

Company Contact:

eCase

T. 0203 745 5608
E. catriona.anderson@ecase.co.uk
W. https://www.ecase.co.uk/

View Online

Additional Assets:
ww3.ecase.co.uk/foilg

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.ecase.pressat.co.uk