

South Yorkshire Police

Freedom of information audit report

August 2023

Executive summary



Audit Methodology

The Information Commissioner is responsible for enforcing and promoting compliance with data protection legislation, as well as the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). Section 47 of the FOIA provides provision for the Commissioner to assess whether a public authority is following good practice, including compliance with the requirements of this Act and the provisions of the codes of practice under sections 45 and 46. The ICO sees auditing as a constructive process with real benefits for controllers and so aims to establish a participative approach.

The purpose of the audit is to provide the Information Commissioner and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) with an independent assurance of the extent to which the information handling practices of SYP, within the scope of this agreed audit, conform with the codes of practice under sections 45 and 46 of the FOIA.

SYP agreed to a consensual audit by the ICO of its compliance with the FOIA. An introductory telephone meeting was held on 6 June 2023 with representatives of SYP to discuss the scope of the audit.

It was agreed that the audit would focus on the following area:

Scope Area	Description
Freedom of Information (FOI)	The extent to which the information handling practices of SYP, within the scope of this agreed audit, conform with the codes of practice under sections 45 and 46 of the FOIA.

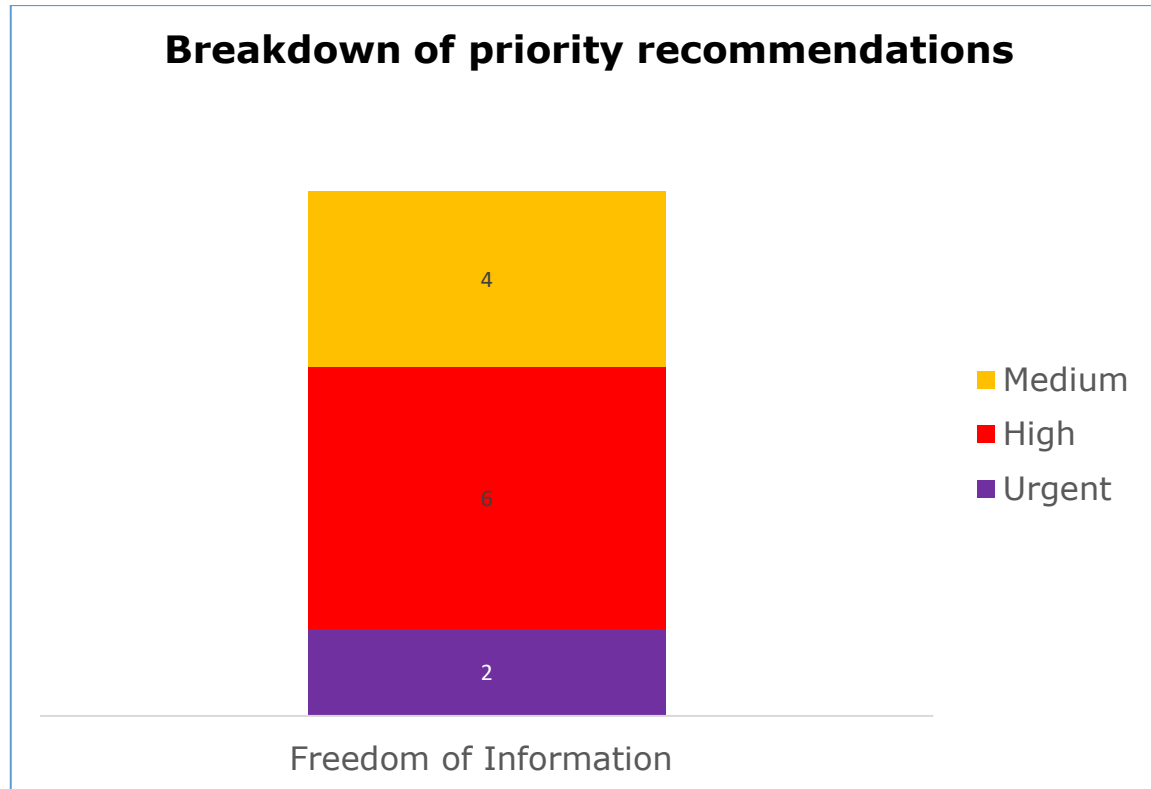
Audits are conducted following the Information Commissioner’s audit methodology. The key elements of this are a desk-based review of selected policies and procedures, on-site visits including interviews with selected staff, and an inspection of selected records.

Where weaknesses were identified recommendations have been made, primarily around enhancing existing processes to facilitate compliance with freedom of information legislation. In order to assist SYP in implementing the recommendations each has been assigned a priority rating based upon the risks that they are intended to address. The ratings are assigned based upon the ICO’s assessment of the risks involved. SYP’s priorities and risk appetite may vary and, therefore, they should undertake their own assessments of the risks identified.

Audit Summary

Audit Scope area	Assurance Rating	Overall Opinion
Freedom of Information	LIMITED	There is a limited level of assurance that processes and procedures are delivering freedom of information compliance. The audit has identified considerable scope for improvement in existing arrangements to reduce the risk of non-compliance with freedom of information legislation.

Priority Recommendations



A bar chart showing a breakdown of the priorities assigned to the recommendations made.

Areas for Improvement

- Compliance with responding to FOI requests within the statutory timeline was low at the time of the audit and local reports do not potentially show complete compliance details. An exacerbating factor to low compliance is that staffing levels are not currently appropriate to the volume of requests received.
- Information Asset Owners (IAOs) are tasked with adopting a strategic role for data governance across their respective department. Their ongoing reporting to SYP's most senior data board, chaired by the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO), was not however demonstrated to be fully embedded. This risks both the SIRO not receiving complete information about data governance and FOI compliance across SYP, and IAOs not being held to account for data and FOI compliance in their respective departments.
- FOI awareness is not included in all staff training.
- Whilst it was demonstrated that staff apply diligence and seek guidance appropriately when handling requests, there was not a high level of awareness of the formalised national and local FOI written policies and instructions nor of the relevant Codes of Practice.
- SYP's publication scheme does not include all the information recommended by ICO guidance.

Disclaimer

The matters arising in this report are only those that came to our attention during the course of the audit and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the areas requiring improvement.

The responsibility for ensuring that there are adequate risk management, governance and internal control arrangements in place rest with the management of South Yorkshire Police.

We take all reasonable care to ensure that our audit report is fair and accurate but cannot accept any liability to any person or organisation, including any third party, for any loss or damage suffered or costs incurred by it arising out of, or in connection with, the use of this report, however such loss or damage is caused. We cannot accept liability for loss occasioned to any person or organisation, including any third party, acting or refraining from acting as a result of any information contained in this report.

This report is an exception report and is solely for the use of South Yorkshire Police. The scope areas and controls covered by the audit have been tailored to South Yorkshire Police and, as a result, the audit report is not intended to be used in comparison with other ICO audit reports.