

**FOIA 2000 and local government in 2008:
*The experience of local authorities in England***

December 2009

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to everyone who responded to the invitation to participate in this study. We received valuable material from 110 of the 388 local authorities in England that we invited to participate. Their contributions reflect a spectrum of local authorities' views and experiences with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI Act) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

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Executive Summary

This is the report of a study of English local authorities' experiences complying with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) from January to December 2008. (We will refer to both types of requests as FOI requests throughout this report for the sake of brevity.) In order to understand how the authorities coped with FOI compliance, we conducted a web-based survey of the authorities' FOI practitioners. The questions in the survey focused on the numbers and types of requests they received, the problems they encountered with compliance and their thoughts about different aspects of FOI. We succeeded in reaching FOI officers at most of the 388 local authorities in England with an invitation to fill out the survey. Of those we reached, 110 practitioners, or 28 per cent of the total population, gave a substantive response. The Constitution Unit is also currently undertaking a wider project on Freedom of Information and Local Government, which this survey and our previous surveys will help inform.

Key findings

Volumes of requests: We estimate that between January and December 2008 the 388 local authorities in England received 118,569 requests for information under the FOI Act or the EIRs. County councils and London boroughs received on average the largest number of requests each and district councils the fewest.

Table 1 – Estimated number of requests, refusals and internal reviews 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2008

	Number of Requests Received	Number of requests resulting in full release	Number of requests resulting in no release	Number of internal reviews
England				
London boroughs and county, metropolitan and unitary councils (150)	72,918	60,494	6,112	1,237
Average/council	494	411	43	8
District councils (238)	45,651	39,131	2,146	395
Average/council	192	164	9	2
Total England: all councils	118,569	99,625	8,259	1,632

Note: To arrive at the estimates found in Table 1, we added up the numbers reported by those who provided this information in the survey, calculated the average number per council that responded and multiplied that average by the total number of councils in each category. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number. For a more detailed explanation see Appendix D.

Who is making the requests and what are they asking for? We asked practitioners to identify the types of FOI requester that made the largest number of requests, as well as which groups' requests were the most time-consuming to process. Unlike previous years, we did not give them set categories from which to choose from but presented them with an open question. We then arranged their answers under categories broadly similar to previous years. Members of the public, businesses, and journalists were the top three for both questions. Here are the top three types of respondents by volume and then time intensiveness, with the percentage of respondents who put them in first, second or third place.

Table 2 - Requester types by volume of requests

Requesters	Largest volume	Second-largest volume	Third-largest volume
Public	61%	14%	13%
Business	13%	36%	34%
Journalist	25%	46%	33%

Table 3 - Requester types by time spent on their requests

Type	Most time-intensive	Second most time-intensive	Third most time-intensive
Public	32%	19%	26%
Business	23%	23%	34%
Journalist	32%	49%	15%

We also asked practitioners to select the three types of information that garnered the largest volumes of requests, as well as those that were the most time-consuming to answer. FOI officers reported financial information (including costs and expenses) as the most requested type of information, followed by delivery of public services, and environment third. Here are the issues and the percentage of respondents mentioning them:

Table 4 - Types of information requested by volume

Request Topic	Largest volume	Second-largest volume	Third-largest volume
Finance	30%	25%	22%
Delivery of Public Services	25%	27%	24%
Environment	12%	4%	11%
Planning	10%	11%	14%

Similarly, requests concerning finance were considered the most time-intensive, followed by delivery of public services then jointly planning and contracts.

Table 5 - Types of information requested by time-intensiveness

Request Topic	Most time-intensive	Second most time-intensive	Third most time Intensive
Finance	33%	33%	21%
Delivery of Public Services	20%	13%	18%
Planning	13%	16%	18%
Contracts/business	13%	22%	18%

How much does FOI compliance cost? We asked practitioners how many full-time equivalent staff (FTE) were employed by their respective authority on FOI and EIR compliance activities in the central FOI team and in the service departments. We then calculated the average number of hours spent on each request and multiplied this by our estimate for the total number of requests and calculated the total hours spent on FOI and EIR. Multiplying this number by an hourly rate of £25, we found the annual cost of FOI to local authorities to be approximately £34 million.

Table 6 – Figures used to calculate compliance cost

	Total number of requests	Average hours per request
England – overall total	118,569	11.6

Note: The compliance costs relate to the twelve month period from January to December 2008.

We asked about the percentage of cases in which the authority had charged a fee for an FOI request. 72 per cent of authorities reported that they did not charge at all, and the remainder of officials said they charged fees for 5 per cent of cases or less.

What problems do practitioners have with FOI compliance? Respondents were asked to list the top three problems they experienced with compliance in 2008. They identified

- difficult requests and requestors
- insufficient resources
- meeting the timescale

What positive aspects of FOI do practitioners identify? When asked to name the top three ways in which they thought that FOI had positively affected their organisation, they listed

- general improvements within the organisation (better communication, identifying weakness)
- greater openness / transparency and accountability
- improved records management practices

Overall/additional comments: At the end of the survey we asked practitioners for any additional comments about their experiences with FOI compliance. 51 provided responses, which we grouped under broad headings. The majority generally echoed or emphasised the responses to the questions above, and are similar to the comments made by officials in the 2007 survey.

1) Problems with requests and requestors: This category included 29 mentions, which can be grouped into themes:

- Journalists: a number of respondents complained about journalists requesting large volumes of information or using FOI to 'dig' for story material.
- Business: Some respondents were particularly unhappy about companies using the Act to tout for business, or using public servants as their commercial researchers at taxpayers' expense.
- Use of FOI to pursue grievances: practitioners seem to be unhappy about requesters who tried to use FOI as a route to pursue unresolved grievances with the council.

2) Internal issues including management, staff, training, systems and resources: This category included 17 mentions. The comments focused upon:

- The lack of resources for FOI compliance, both in terms of staff and finance, which has not kept up with the large increase in the number of requests received. Some mentioned the lack of provision of dedicated FOI officers.
- Colleagues' lack of understanding of the requirements or 'spirit' of the Act and the need to comply with it.

3) Issues about the legislation and advice: There were 10 mentions in this category, many of which related to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):

- Too little guidance, advice or training provided by the ICO on various procedural aspects of the Act
- Delay in getting decisions back from the ICO
- Confusion between different legislation that overlaps

4) Positive Comments: Respondents gave a range of positive comments including:

- Improvements to the overall culture of openness and information management in their council
- Supportive training and peer support networks for FOI practitioners

Summary of conclusions

This study provides an analysis of local authorities' experiences with FOI compliance in 2008. During the year the average council received 25 FOI/EIR requests a month and refused to disclose any information in about two cases per month. The number of requests to councils rose by 38,455 (48 per

cent) from 2007, and there was a decrease in the rate of refusal from 10.3 per cent in 2007 to 7 per cent in 2008. Each request took an average of 11.6 hours, a significant reduction from last year's figure of 15.3 hours.

The main users of the Act were members of the public with 54 per cent of authorities reporting that the public made the largest volume of requests in 2007 and 60 per cent in 2008. The main differences were a significant reduction in business use (17 per cent in 2007 to 13 per cent in 2008) and a large growth in use by journalists (11 per cent in 2007 to 24 per cent in 2008). As in 2007 the type of information most often requested was financial. Information about public services was second and information about contracts and business matters was equal third with planning. A majority of authorities (72 per cent) did not charge under any circumstances, and the remainder charged in 5 per cent or fewer cases.

The main problems with compliance were difficult requests and requesters, resources and timescales. The most significant positive effects of the Act were the improvements within the organisation, the development of more open, transparent and accountable authority and improved records management.

Background

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 has been in force since 1 January 2005. Though statistical data on FOI requests to central government departments in the UK are compiled and published by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) on a quarterly basis, and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) maintain similar data about FOI requests to the police, no single organisation gathers data on FOI compliance at the local government level.¹

In 2005, the Constitution Unit was commissioned by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to carry out a study of English local authorities' experiences with FOI compliance in the six months following implementation. The report of the study was published in September of that year.² However, this was a one-off project; IDeA has since removed FOI from its list of policy priorities. As a result, Unit researchers decided to continue to collect data on FOI compliance by surveying local authorities on an annual basis but on a reduced scale due to lack of funding³. We have now carried out the following annual surveys:-

- calendar year 2005 with the results published in September 2006,
- calendar year 2006 with the results published in September 2007,
- calendar year 2007 with the results published in September 2008

This report describes the findings of our fourth annual survey, which covers January to December 2008.

In our survey covering the first six months of 2005, IDeA asked us to look only at FOI compliance by English authorities. For uniformity's sake, we did the same for the 2005 calendar year study. However, for the 2006 study we widened the scope to include authorities in Northern Ireland and Wales. However subsequently we decided to return to focus solely on English authorities due to time and resource constraints.

The main aim of this project was to identify how local authorities coped with FOI in 2008 by studying the numbers and types of requests they received, problems they encountered, costs they incurred and benefits they reaped. While the primary focus of the study was the FOI Act 2000, requests handled under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) were also included. We refer to both types of request in this study as FOI requests for the sake of brevity. Comparisons with the results of earlier years are highlighted where appropriate and explored in more depth in the conclusions.

Methodology

A web-based survey of 20 questions was designed and built using Survey Monkey, fee-based Internet survey software. In early Summer 2008, we sent an email invitation to FOI officers in England to participate in the study. We sent two reminder emails to those whom we believed had not yet responded and closed the survey in early August 2009. (The survey can be found in Appendix C.)

Response rate

Our target population was the 388 local authorities in England. We sought to obtain responses from the central FOI officer in each authority. For the sake of cost-effectiveness and efficiency we communicated with authorities only via email. We built our list of email addresses of FOI practitioners from our existing email address list and filled in the missing addresses by locating them on council web sites. Despite our best efforts, we did not reach all councils but we estimate that over 90% of councils received an email inviting them to fill in the survey. When we closed the survey in early September, FOI practitioners at 110 authorities had filled out the survey in whole or part, which gave

¹ On 8 May 2007, the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) was renamed the Ministry of Justice. All statistical reports on FOIA 2000 requests to central government in 2005 and 2006 were published by the DCA.

² The Constitution Unit (2005) *Freedom of Information Act 2000: the first six months – the experience of local authorities in England*. (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/files/research/foi/publications/IDeAfinalreport.pdf>)

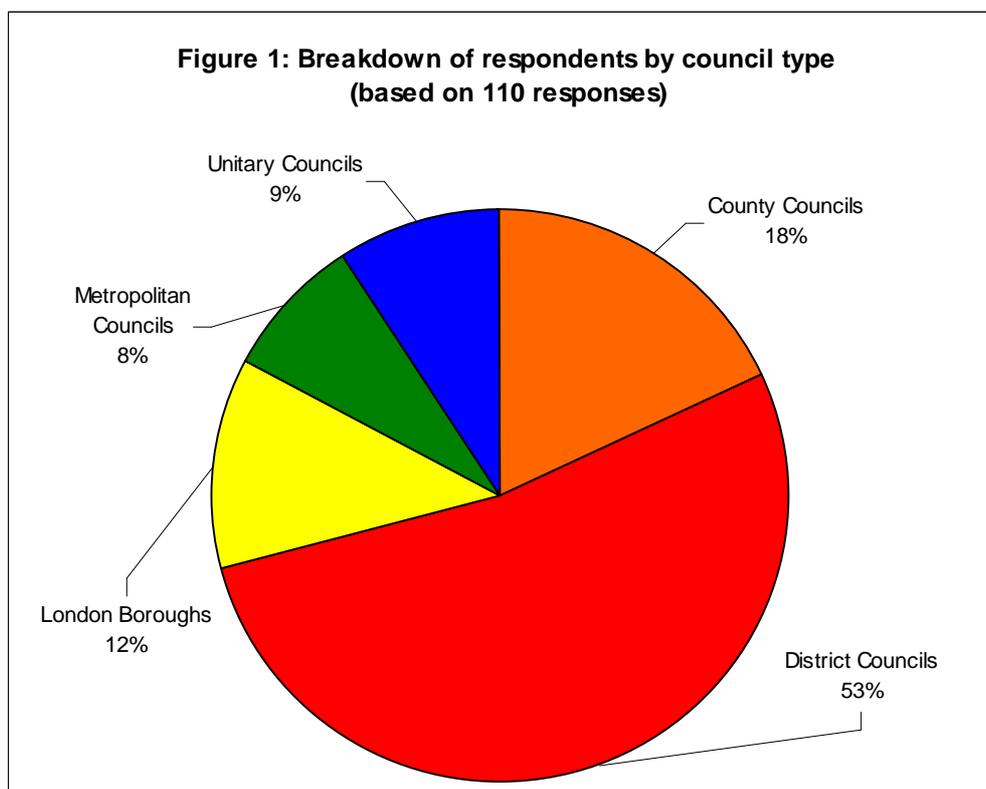
³ The study commissioned by IDeA included in-depth phone interviews with the FOI officers of several local authorities in addition to the online survey.

us a response rate of 28 per cent of the total population.⁴ Broken down by category of council, we achieved response rates in each category ranging from 22% to 57% (see Table 7). Our analysis takes into account the fact that most respondents did not answer every question. In the report we indicate the number of responses per question.

Table 7 – Survey response rate by council type

England	Total Number	Number that responded	Percentage of Total Population
County Councils	35	20	57%
District Councils	238	58	24%
London Boroughs	33	13	39%
Metropolitan Councils	36	9	25%
Unitary Councils	46	10	22%
Total		110	

Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of respondents to the survey. 53 per cent of respondents were district council FOI practitioners, 18 per cent of respondents were from county councils, 12 per cent were from London boroughs, nine per cent work for unitary authorities, and eight per cent metropolitan councils.



⁴ Not all individuals who filled out the survey answered every question. Therefore, for each question in the report we state the number of practitioners that actually supplied an answer.

Findings

Statistics relating to requests, releases, refusals, internal reviews, and meeting the 20-day deadline (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5)

Q1. How many FOI and EIR requests did your authority receive during each quarter of 2008?⁵
 (Please use information recorded in your tracking system or your best estimate when reporting the number of requests. Please note that Quarter 1 refers to January to March, Quarter 2 to April to June, Quarter 3 to July to September, and Quarter 4 to October to December.)

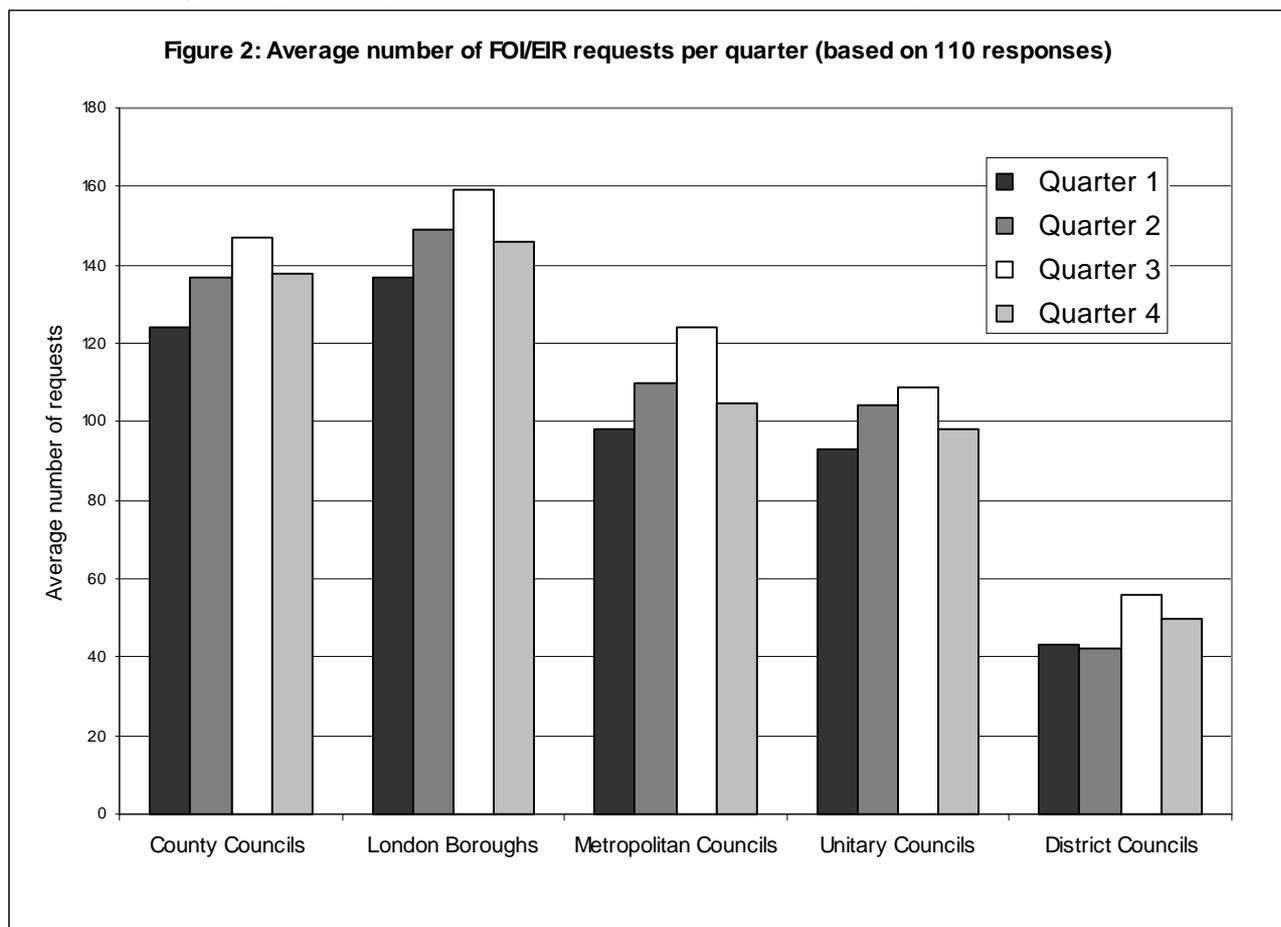


Figure 2 displays the average number of requests received by each type of council in each quarter of 2008. All council types saw an increase in the annual number of requests, from an average 207 per council in 2007 to 306 in 2008. The total number of requests received by all local authorities was approximately 38,000 higher than last year⁶.

All council types experienced the highest volume of requests in quarter three and, with the exception of Districts where the difference was very small, the lowest volume of requests in Quarter one. Overall the increase between quarter one and quarter three was about 23 per cent. However in quarter four there was a reduction of about 10% from quarter three. County and London authorities received the highest number of requests over the year, with requests per quarter per authority ranging from 124 to 159.

⁵ We provided the following definition of a request at the beginning of the survey: 'For our purposes, an 'FOI request' is a request for any information that is NOT handled as part of the organisation's 'business as usual'. For example, we expect requests for library opening times and informational leaflets to be considered 'business as usual', whereas a request for notes from the meeting that took place over the closure of the local swimming pool would be classed as an FOI request. Please include requests that fall under the Environmental Information Regulations within this definition.'

⁶ See Appendix C for the table that shows how we calculated this number of total requests.

Q2. How many FOI and EIR requests resulted in a FULL release of the information requested in 2008?

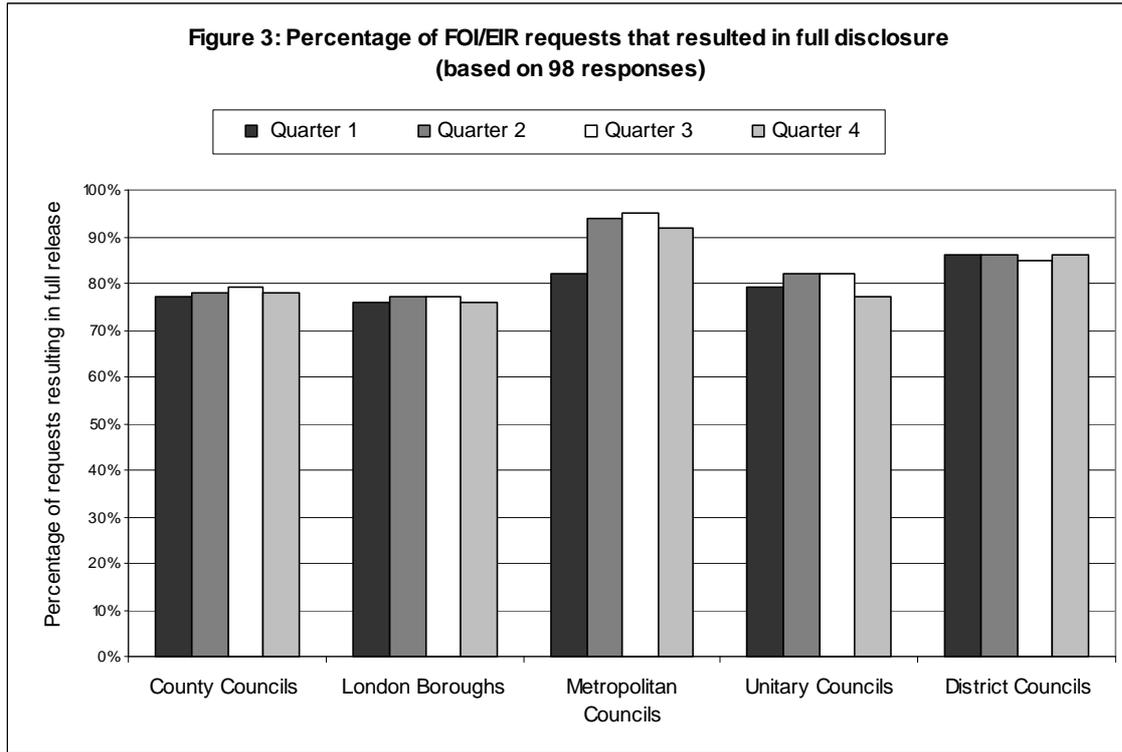


Figure 3 shows the percentage of requests resulting in full disclosure. All types of authority showed a significantly higher percentage rate of full disclosure than last year, with County Councils rising from 62 to 78 per cent and London Boroughs from 67 to 77 per cent. District Councils continued to report the highest percentage of disclosures, rising from 81 per cent last year to 86 per cent in 2008.

Q3. How many FOI and EIR requests resulted in a release of NONE of the information requested in 2008?

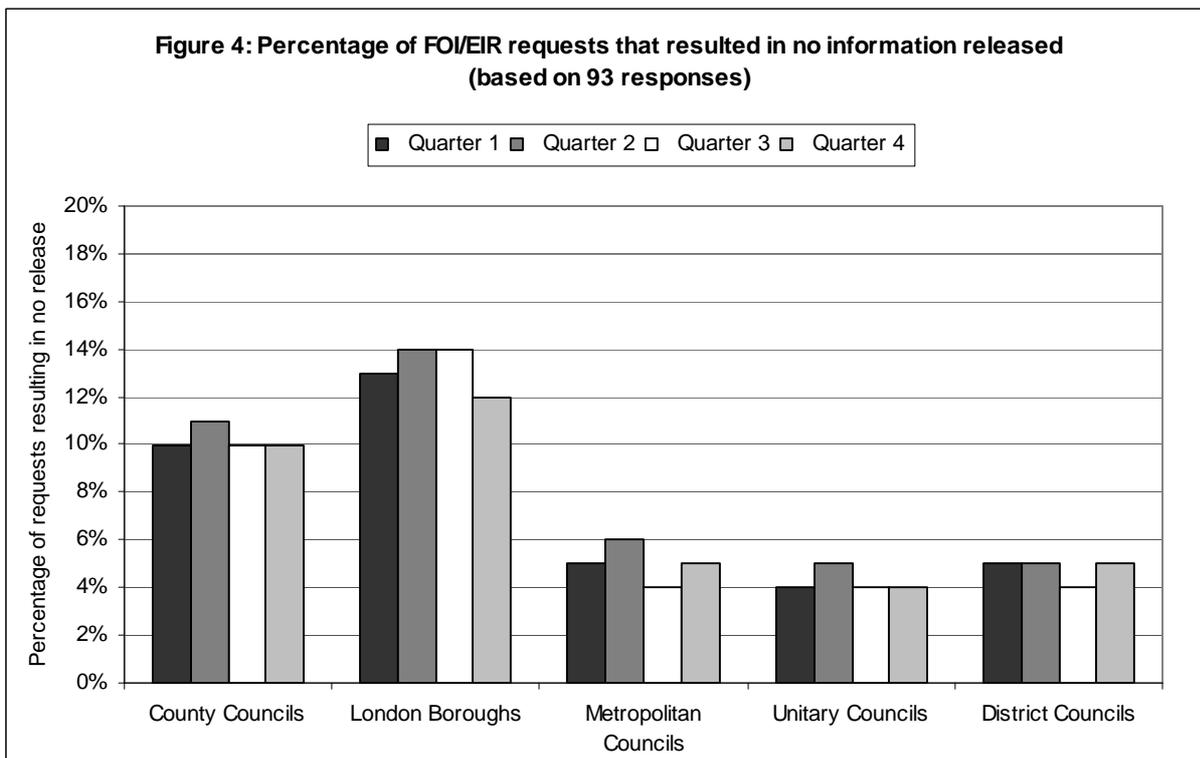


Figure 4 shows the percentage of requests refused. The average refusal rate across councils in 2008 was 7 per cent, which was significantly lower than the rate of 10.3 per cent in 2007. At 10 per cent, county councils have reduced their refusal rate substantially from 22 per cent in 2007. Percentage refusals by London boroughs has changed significantly from year to year. They had the highest average refusal rate at 17 per cent in 2006, saw a decrease to 8 per cent in 2007 and in 2008 this increased to 13 per cent. Unitary councils again had the lowest average refusal rate over all four quarters at 4 per cent, down from 5.5 in 2007. District councils' refusal rates rose from 8.1 per cent in 2006 to 8.3 in 2007, but have come down to 5 per cent in 2008.

Q4. How many FOI and EIR requests were settled within the statutory 20-day time limit in 2008?

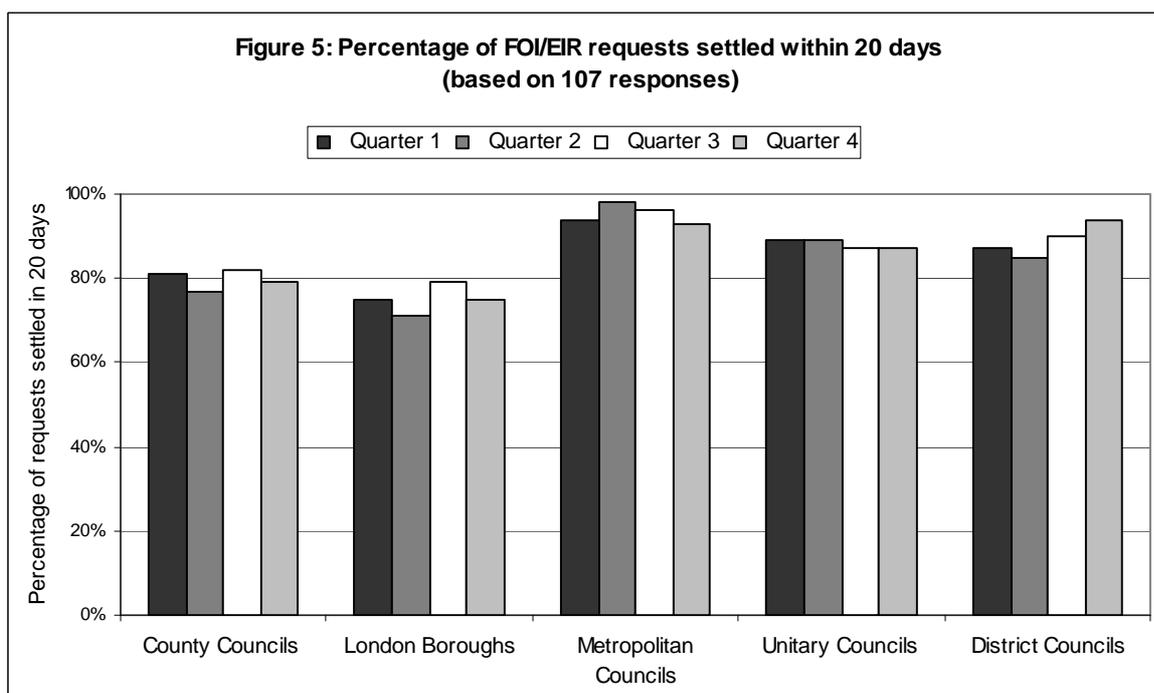


Figure 5 shows the percentage of requests settled within 20 days. Eighty-six per cent of all information requests made in 2008 were answered within the 20 day time limit. Over the first four years of FOI the 20 day time limit has been met by local authorities fairly consistently in the mid 80 percentages (2005 – 85%, 2006 – 86%, 2007 – 83). London councils made a significant improvement from 2006 to 2007 from 78 to 89 per cent. However in 2008 this was reversed – down to 75 per cent. County council's rate fell from 87 per cent in 2006 to 80 in 2007 and has remained at this level in 2008.

Unitary authorities were at 86 per cent in 2006 and 85 in 2007 and have remained broadly at a similar level in 2008 (88 per cent). District councils' rate increased from 91 to 94 per cent between 2006 and 2007 and in 2008 fell back slightly to 89 per cent. Metropolitan councils experienced the biggest drop in on-time responses, from 92 per cent in 2006 to 66 in 2007, but in 2008 have increased their timeliness back to 95 per cent.

Q5. How many requests were subject to an internal review within your authority in 2008?

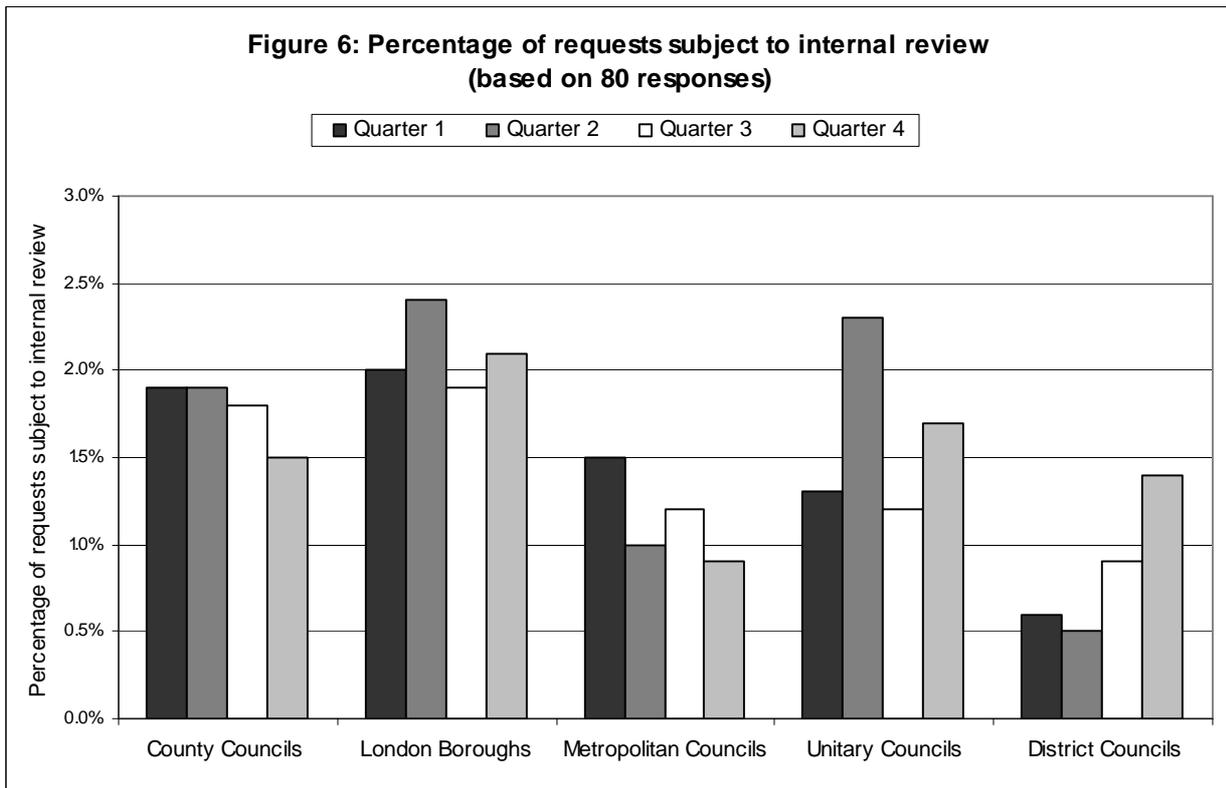


Figure 6 deals with internal reviews. In 2008 1.4 per cent of all requests to local authorities were subject to internal review. This compares to 1.3 in 2007, 2.4 in 2006 and 2.2 in 2005.

The highest rate of internal reviews was carried out by London Boroughs, up from 1.5 per cent in 2007 to 2.1 per cent in 2008. County Councils were up from 1.6 per cent in 2007 to 1.8 per cent in 2008. Unitary Councils remained at the same level as in 2007 at 1.6 per cent. Metropolitan Councils' rate reduced from 1.4 per cent in 2007 to 1.2 per cent, and District Councils reduced significantly from 1.4 in 2007 to 0.9 per cent in 2008.

Staff assigned to FOI and EIR compliance tasks (Q6)

Q6. On average, how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were assigned to FOI and EIR compliance tasks in the following areas of your organisation – central information team and all other departments – in 2008? (Please count staff in terms of full-time equivalents. For example, one full-time person and four people at 25% time each equals two FTEs.)

This is a difficult question for FOI officers to answer for two main reasons: a) in many authorities FOI compliance is only one of a number of staff responsibilities; b) in few authorities are the hours spent on FOI compliance recorded. Nevertheless we believe that the great majority of authorities that replied were able to produce fair estimates.

Some respondents gave us the total number of staff who had been trained to deal with FOI requests, rather than the number that represented total FTE staff time spent on FOI. We were able to speak to a number of these FOI officers and seek their help in estimating the latter. Calculating FTE time on FOI compliance is becoming increasingly difficult as FOI becomes more embedded in the normal activities of authorities. As one stated last year, “We do not record time taken to deal with requests as we accept it as part of everyday life as a public authority.”

We received 98 responses to the question excluding those that we believe resulted from a misunderstanding of the question, being clearly unfeasible numbers, and about which we were unable to phone the respondent to clarify. Thus, Table 8 below shows our analysis, based upon these 98 responses.

Table 8 – FTEs assigned to FOI compliance tasks and average hours spent per request

Authorities (98 responses)	Total FTEs	Total FTE hrs/month	Total requests (12 months)	Average requests/mont h	Average hours/requests
	248.6	34803	35183	2932	11.6
<i>Only councils that provided both total requests and FTE numbers are included in this table</i>					

In 2008 we have seen some significant differences between the different types of council. In particular District Councils spent an average of 8.6 hours handling a request. This is a considerable reduction from the 14.8 hours in 2006 and around 15 hours in 2007. However, given the comparatively small samples and the difficulties about estimating described above we are cautious about drawing any firm conclusions from these differences.

As in our report of 2007 we would like to highlight the wide spread around the overall average of 11.6 hours. Thirty-seven councils – including twenty district councils - reported spending between an average of one to seven and a half hours handling a request. Seventeen councils reported spending fifteen hours or more on average handling a request. Both groups included all five types of council.

Sources of requests (Q7, Q8)

As we did in 2007, we asked respondents to list the top three types of requesters and suggested categories that were not prescriptive. We then coded the responses under broad headings.

Q7. To the best of your knowledge, which were the top three categories of FOI requesters to your organisation in 2008 IN TERMS OF NUMBER OF REQUESTS? (e.g. public, media, business, campaign groups, etc)

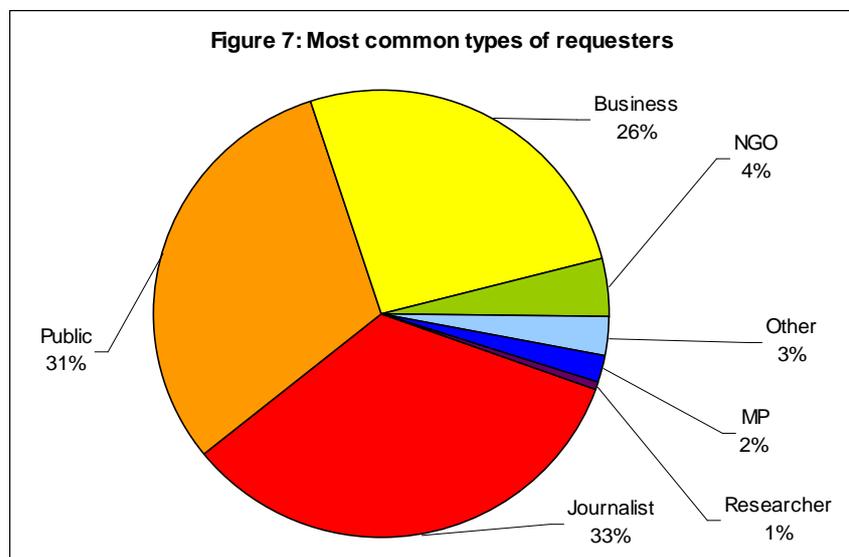
Table 9 – Types of requesters by volume of requests

Requesters	Largest volume	Second-largest volume	Third-largest volume
Public	61	14	13
Business	13	36	34
Journalist	25	46	33
Researcher	0	0	2
MP	1	2	3
NGO	1	3	11
Other	2	1	6
Total responses	103	102	102

Table 9 shows the types of requesters by volume. 61 of the 103 officials who answered this question said the largest group of requesters in 2008 was the public, followed by journalists and then business. The public similarly were the largest by volume in 2007, though the second largest groups were business and the third journalists. Second choices for the highest number of requests put journalists on 46 followed by business on 36 and the public on fourteen.

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

- | | |
|---------------|-----|
| 1. Journalist | 33% |
| 2. Public | 31% |
| 3. Business | 26% |
| 4. NGO | 4% |
| 5. Other | 3% |
| 6. MP | 2% |
| 7. Researcher | 1% |



Q8. Using the same list of requester categories, please select the top three category of FOI requesters IN TERMS OF AMOUNT OF TIME spent on the respective group's requests. (Most time-intensive, second most time-intensive and third most time-intensive requests)

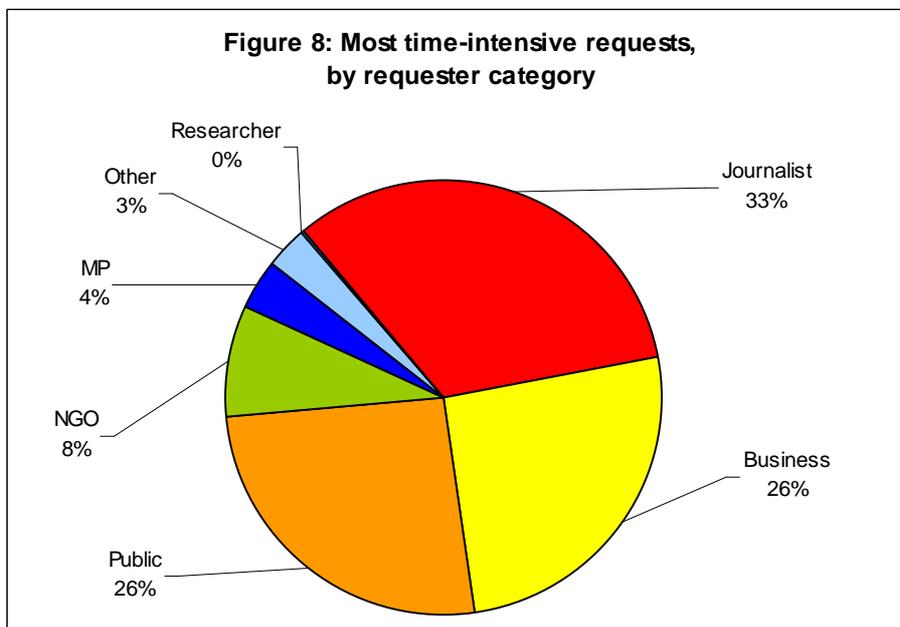
Table 10 – Types of requesters by time intensiveness

Type	Most time-intensive	Second most time-intensive	Third most time intensive
Public	25	15	19
Journalist	25	39	11
Business	18	18	25
NGO	7	4	9
MP	2	2	5
Researcher	0	0	1
Other	2	1	4
Total responses	79	79	74

Table 10 show requester types by time intensiveness. Members of the public and journalists were jointly considered the most time intensive groups on 25 responses each, followed by business on eighteen and then NGOs on seven. Journalists were a clear second in 2007 and thus the time-intensiveness of their requests has risen considerably. In terms of second most time-intensive, journalists were selected by 39 respondents, business eighteen and public fifteen, the same ranking as 2007. The third most time intensive were business, followed by journalists and then the public. The other notable change is the rise in NGOs as a factor across all categories.

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

- 1. Journalist 33%
- 2. Public 26%
- 3. Business 26%
- 4. NGO 8%
- 5. MP 4%
- 6. Other 3%
- 7. Researcher 0%



Information requested and fees (Q9, Q10, Q11)

Q9. To the best of your knowledge, which were the most requested categories of information to your organisation in 2007 IN TERMS OF NUMBER OF REQUESTS? (largest, second largest, and third largest)

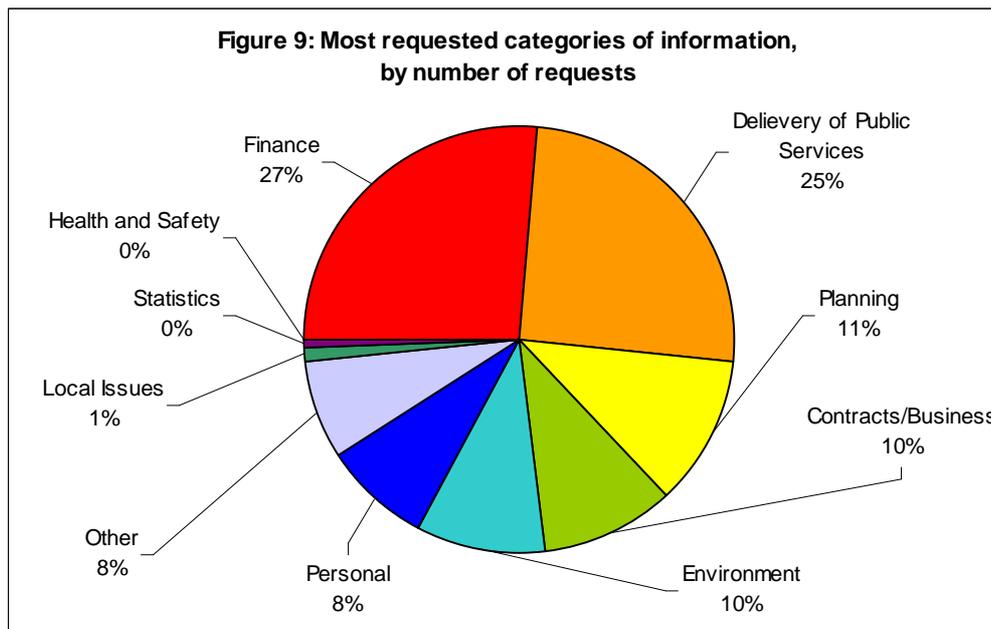
Table 11 - Types of information requested, by volume of requests

Request Topic	Largest volume	Second-largest volume	Third-largest volume
Finance	28	18	19
Delivery of Public Services	23	19	21
Environment	11	3	10
Planning	9	8	12
Contracts/business	9	9	7
Personal	7	6	7
Other	3	7	10
Local issues	1	1	1
Statistics	1	0	0
Health and Safety	0	0	0
Total responses	92	71	87

In a change from 2007, the most requested type of information was financial, with 28 respondents saying this is the most-requested type of information. Delivery of public services was considered by 23 respondents to be the most common topic, Environment was chosen by eleven people, and Planning and Contracts were joint third, chosen by nine respondents each. The second largest in volume was delivery of public services, followed by finance and then contracts. The third largest in volume was delivery of public services followed by finance and then planning. In 2007, the most requested were planning followed by financial and then personal data.

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

1. Finance	27%
2. Delivery of Public Services	25%
3. Planning	11%
4. Contracts, business	10%
5. Environment	10%
6. Personal	8%
7. Other	8%
8. Local Issues	1%
9. Statistics	0%
10. Health and Safety	0%



Q10. Using the same list of information categories, please select the top three categories of information **IN TERMS OF AMOUNT OF TIME** spent on that type of information request. (most time-intensive, second most time-intensive and third most time-intensive requests)

Table 12 - Most time-intensive requests by information topics

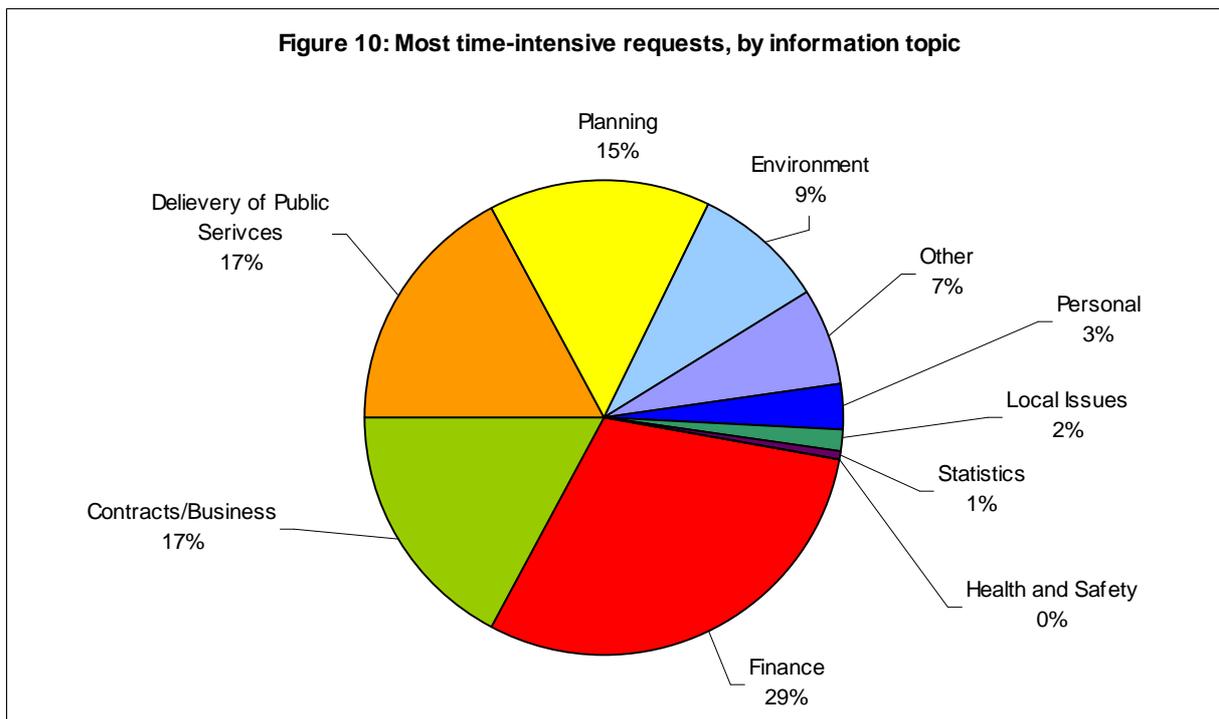
Request Topic	Most time-intensive	Second most time-intensive	Third most time Intensive
Finance	23	21	13
Delivery of Public Services	14	8	11
Planning	9	10	11
Contracts/business	9	14	11
Environment	6	6	5
Other	4	3	6
Personal	3	0	3
Local issues	1	1	1
Stats	0	1	0
Health and Safety	0	0	0
Total responses	69	64	61

In 2007, the most time intensive requests were planning, followed by financial and then personal information. In 2008, one-third of officials saw finance as most time-intensive topic, followed by delivery of public services then jointly planning and contracts. In terms of second most time intensive, this was finance, contracts then planning. In the third most time-intensive category, finance was again first, with contracts, delivery of public services and planning all joint second.

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

1. Finance 32%
2. Contracts, business 18%
3. Delivery of Public Services 18%
4. Planning 16%
5. Environment 11%
6. Other 9%
7. Personal 3%
8. Local Issues 2%

- 9. Statistics 1%
- 10. Health and Safety 0%



Q11. In approximately WHAT PERCENTAGE of cases did your organisation charge a fee for an FOI request in 2008 for any reason?

We received 108 responses to this question. Few authorities charged for any type of request in 2008, whether for disbursement or charging for excessive cost. 72 per cent of authorities did not charge in any circumstances, and 28 per cent in 5 per cent of cases or less.

Problems with compliance (Q12)

Q12. Please describe the top three problems you experienced with FOI/EIR compliance in 2008.

In order to understand the difficulties that local government FOI practitioners face in their job, we asked respondents to fill in the top three problems they encountered with compliance in 2008. We grouped these responses into categories and counted the number within each category. Most practitioners gave us three responses, while twenty of them just listed one or two.

Table 13 – Top three problems with compliance

Problems	number of responses as first choice	number of responses as second choice	number of responses as third choice
Cooperation	7	14	15
Requests and requesters	23	34	28
training, processes	7	8	14
records management	6	7	5
timescales	25	5	5
resources	30	16	13
business	3	6	1
other	1	7	1
Total responses	102	97	82

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

1. Problems with requesters and requests	30%
2. Resources	22%
3. Timescales	13%
4. Cooperation and support from service departments and management	12%
5. Lack of training, processes, systems and advice	10%
6. Records management	6%
7. Business use	4%
8. Other	3%

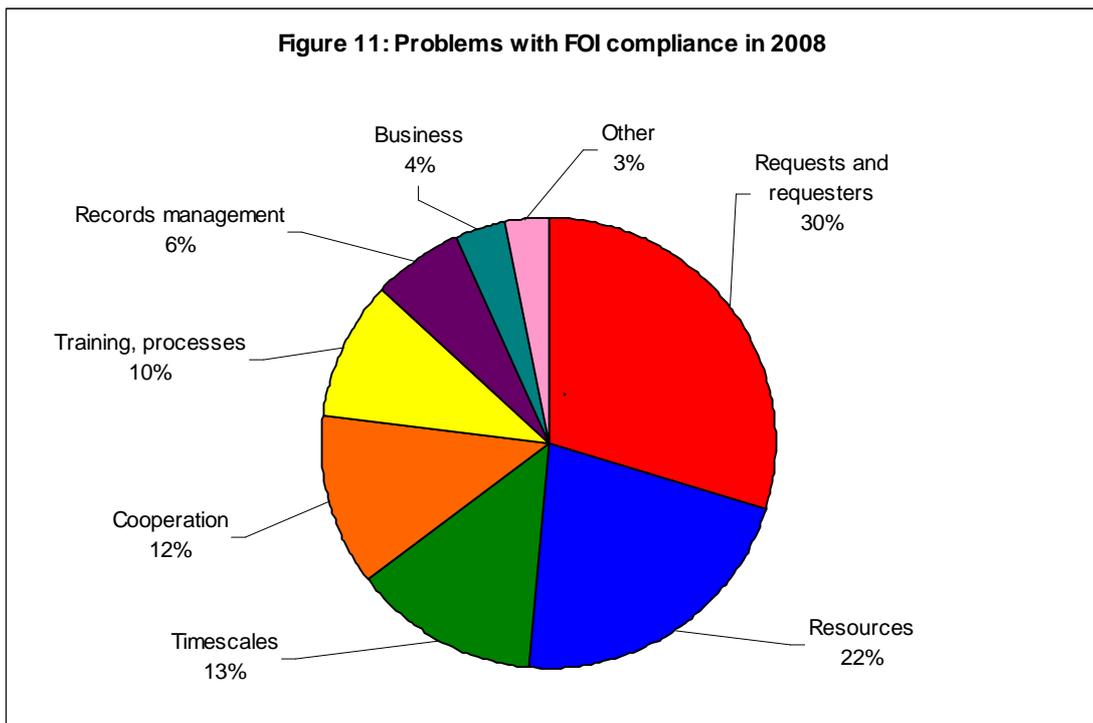
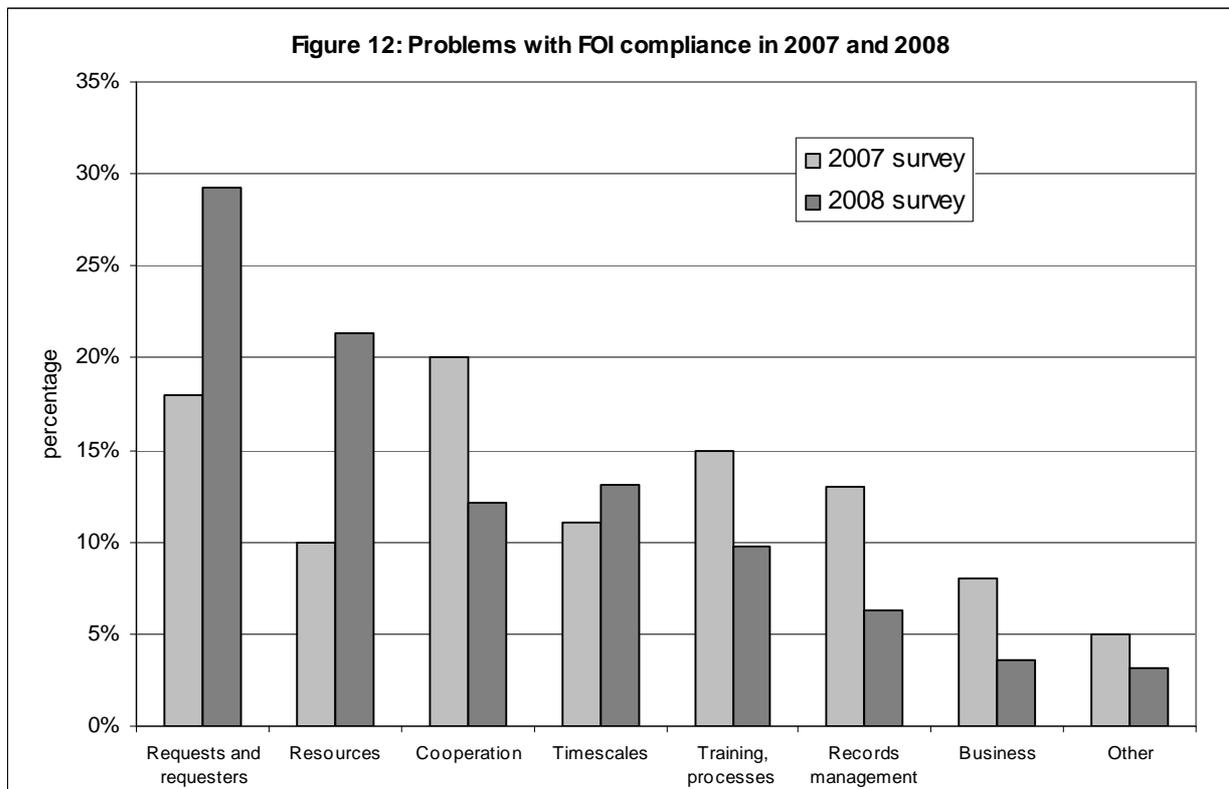


Figure 12 shows perception of problems with resourcing of FOI is the biggest change from last year's survey, from sixth place in 2007 to second in 2008. The proportion of problems with 'requesters and requests' has also changed significantly, from eighteen per cent last year, to 30 percent this year.



Problems with requesters and requests (85 mentions: first choice - 23 respondents, second choice - 34 respondents, third choice - 28 respondents)

- "Vague requests"
- "The complexity of requests (requests which involves many hours work)"

- “Overuse of the Act by some local groups and media putting undue pressure on available resources”
- “Vexatious enquiries from residents of the district whose sole purpose seems to be to waste the council's time as these individuals do not like the council”
- “Requests asking for third party personal data”

Resources (59 mentions: first choice - 30 respondents, second choice - 16 respondents, third choice - 13 respondents)

- “Economic environment resulted in cutbacks, meaning lower priority/fewer resources for FOI/EIR “
- “Staff are already busy and can't always drop everything to work on requests”
- “Staff being pulled off FOI to do other things”
- “Resources, i.e. the ICO's virtual ruling out of use of section 14 of the FOI Act”

Timescales (35 mentions: first choice - 25 respondents, second choice - 5 respondents, third choice - 5 respondents)

- “Responding within 20 days due to time constraints/volumes”
- “Ensuring time limit compliance for complex requests across services”
- “Directorates not responding on time”
- Comments were sometimes linked with resources, e.g. “resources/time”

Cooperation and support from service departments (36 mentions: first choice - 7 respondents, second choice - 14 respondents, third choice - 15 respondents)

- “Lack of understanding of FOI obligations within authority”
- “Colleagues delaying in providing information to us”
- “Cultural - some staff reluctance to contribute to FOI requests”
- “Negative attitude of Chief Executive/senior management/elected members”
- “Chief Officers/Senior managers increasing their involvement with some requests, often making it more difficult to meet the 20 working day deadline.”

Lack of training, processes, systems and advice (29 mentions: first choice - 8 respondents, second choice - 8 respondents, third choice - 13 respondents)

- “Making decision as to what to redact”
- “Understanding whether exemptions should apply”
- “Requests being recognised as FOI/EIR”
- “Lack of centralised management of requests”

Records management (18 mentions: first choice - 6 respondents, second choice - 7 respondents, third choice - 5 respondents)

- “Difficulty of locating information that is cross cutting”
- “Extracting the information requested”
- “Finding if data is held and who holds it”
- “Poor records management”

Business use (10 mentions: first choice - 3 respondents, second choice - 6 respondents, third choice - 1 respondents)

- “Companies ‘fishing’ for business by submitting spurious requests about contracts”
- “Misuse e.g. compiling trade directories, salespeople”
- “Business requests for commercial data harm the wider value of openness and transparency in FOI, as the regular flow of requests for contact and contract details undermines the goal of FOI legislation.”
- “Enquiries from companies who realise that using FOI is a good way to transfer their labour costs onto taxpayers.”

Other (9 mentions: first choice -1 respondent, second choice - 7 respondents, third choice - 1 respondent)

- “The new model Publication Scheme took quite a large amount of work to put in place and so far we have seen no benefit in terms of reducing FOI requests. People do not read the information and then not put in a request. Instead, they read the published information and then ask different questions on the same topic”
- “Local government reform caused delays in communication”
- “Ensuring we keep up to date on most recent ICO Appeals/Tribunal decisions”

Benefits of FOI (Q13)

Q13. Please fill in the top three ways in which you think FOI positively affected your organisation in 2008.

We asked respondents to give us the top three most positive effects of FOI on their authority in 2008. We then grouped the responses into several categories and counted the number within each category. We received 86 first choices, 71 second choices and 49 third choices.

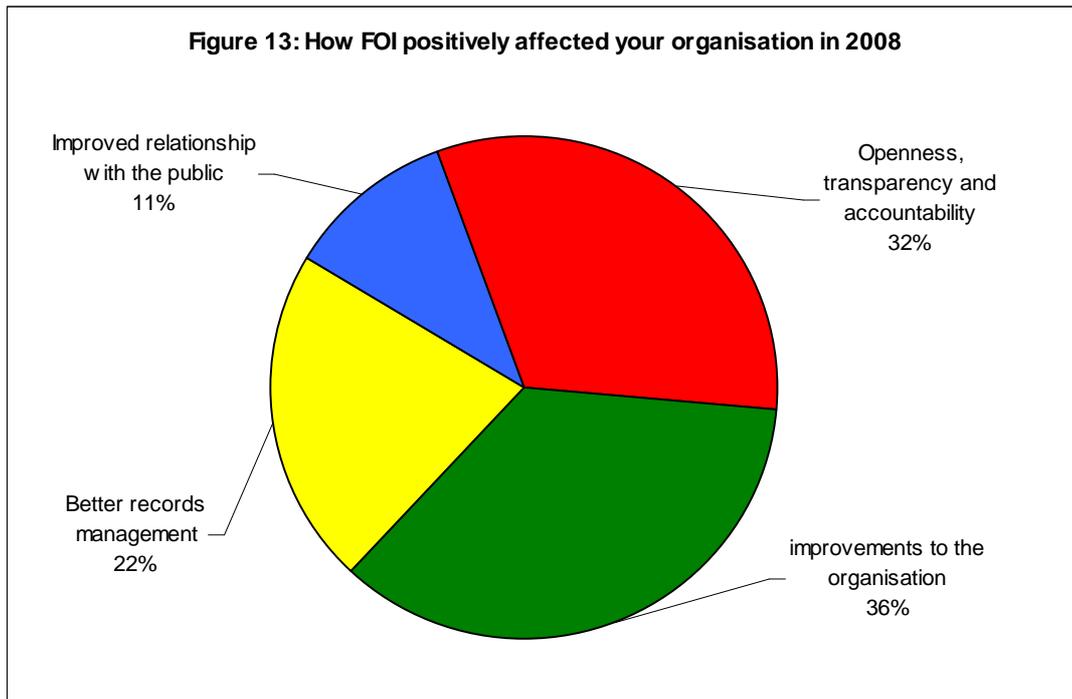
Table 14 – Top three benefits of FOI

Benefits of FOI	number of responses as first choice	number of responses as second choice	number of responses as third choice
Openness, transparency and accountability	38	18	7
Improvements to the organisation	25	33	16
Better records management	17	15	13
Improved relationship with the public	6	5	13
None/I don't know	0	0	0
Total responses	86	71	49

We then gave a weighting of 45 to first choices, 35 to second choices and 30 to third choices, then added the weighted totals in each category and adjusted the results to percentages. The results are as follows:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Improvements within the organisation (not related to records management) | 36% |
| 2. Openness, transparency and accountability | 32% |
| 3. Better records management, including information management | 22% |
| 4. Improved relationship with the public | 11% |
| 5. None/don't know | 0% |

Figure 13: How FOI positively affected your organisation in 2008



These are similar results to last year's survey, with this year's top three benefits being the same, but in a different order. The most significant change is 'improvements to the organisation', which goes from 28 per cent in 2007, to 36 per cent in 2008.

Improvements within the organisation (not related to records management) (74 mentions: first choice - 25 respondents, second choice - 33 respondents, third choice - 16 respondents)

- "Continued improvement in staff attitude to information sharing"
- "People are more careful about information created"
- "Senior officers decided to publish their expense claims"
- "Improved communication between departments"
- "Makes management more aware of the consequences of decisions"

Openness, transparency and accountability (63 mentions: first choice - 38 respondents, second choice - 18 respondents, third choice - 7 respondents)

- "Shows we provide value for money"
- "Transparency: allowed public to understand why things took place"
- "Accountable/effective decision making"
- "Good governance"
- "Greater awareness of the need not to be pointlessly secretive"
- "More open about information - active consideration of publishable information"

Better records management, including information management (45 mentions: first choice - 17 respondents, second choice - 15 respondents, third choice - 13 respondents)

- "Prompted more organisation of information"
- "Better recording of decisions"
- "More thought given to quality of record keeping by staff"
- "Changing the culture to bring about an improvement in records management"
- "We know better what we hold and what we don't"
- "Improved statistical monitoring processes"

Improved relationship with public (24 mentions: first choice - 6 respondents, second choice - 5 respondents, third choice - 13 respondents)

- "Public understanding of decision-making"

- “Insight into what concerns the public”
- “Increased transparency improves reputation”
- “Rights of the public to understand what has been agreed in their name”
- “Increases public confidence”
- A concrete example was given of the impact FOI had on policy-making: “One instance where the council changed its policy (on hosting meetings in external venues) due to FOI requests”

Objectives of FOI (Q14)

We asked respondents for some thoughts on the objectives of FOI and if they felt these were being achieved. For reasons of space and focus we have not included the data from this question in this report, but the results will be used in later articles relating to our wider local government FOI project (see Appendix A).

Additional comments (Q15)

Q15. Please provide any additional comments and any specific concerns about your experiences as an FOI practitioner.

The final survey question provided practitioners with an opportunity to provide information not covered by the previous questions or to expand on their answer to one or more of those questions. We received 51 responses, some of which contained more than one substantial comment. In total we received 63 comments. We grouped these into several categories and counted the number within each category. The breakdown is as follows:

1. Problems with applicants and requests	46%
2. Internal issues, including, management, culture, resources and systems	27%
3. Issues about legislation and the advice available	16%
4. Positive and constructive comments	10%
5. Problems completing the survey	1%

Problems with applicants and requests (29 mentions)

- “Rules need to be tightened up to ensure it is only members of the public who can do this, not councillors for political gain, not companies who sell on the information at the taxpayers expense and not the media who are looking for bad news stories about the local council”
- “There has been a tremendous increase in the numbers of businesses using the legislation to ‘tout’ for business. I do not believe that this is what it is meant to be used for”
- “I appreciate the aims of the Act but in practice, it is used as a stick by the public and media to beat LAs [local authorities] with...This does not result in a proven increase in transparency and openness”
- “Increased use of FOI by MPs, researchers and political parties to obtain information - ironic when compared with their vigorous attempts to prevent disclosure under FOI of their expenses”
- “We frequently receive vexatious enquiries from residents of the district whose sole purpose seems to be to waste the council's time as these individuals do not like the council.”
- “The law should be clarified to make it clear that where one person, or a group of people acting in common purpose, is requesting information, there should be a specific time limit placed on the amount of time the council or other body is obliged to spend answering their enquiries on any topic.”
- “The amount of time which we are obliged to spend on enquiries before we can start charging for information is way too high. Suppose each resident in our district makes one FOI request per year... we would have to spend approximately 1.8 million hours on answering FOI requests without charging...we would need to employ approximately 1000 full time staff dedicated to answering such enquiries. This is approximately double the total number of staff

currently employed by the council as a whole. This is absurd. The only way this system can survive is if the vast majority of people are not requesting information at all”

Internal issues, including, management, culture, resources and systems (17 mentions)

- “I often find myself in an difficult position and face hostility when trying to impress the need to comply with the spirit of the Act when it conflicts with senior management opinion”
- “Information often gets misreported or taken out of context. This all makes the role of the FOI Officer harder when we are trying to internally persuade the organisation to disclose information in compliance with our obligations”
- “Need more money from central government with a specific direction for it to be spent by councils on FOI/EIR/DP compliance”
- “I do not think that this council affords FOI the importance it deserves. I am often pulled away from my job to do other work and am constantly chasing departments for answers to FOI requests”
- “FOI can seem like a bit of an uphill struggle in a small authority as I am the sole person responsible for the service alongside two other job roles”
- “The number of requests is increasing dramatically , and beyond what I would have predicted two years ago. This of itself makes the process more complex and compliance within the timescales more difficult”

Issues about legislation and the advice available (10 mentions)

- “I wish there was official training somewhere! It's hard to find any really specific guidance for certain situations. The ICO don't run training but they can punish us if we don't get it right!”
- “More and more requestors are using the appeal route in 2009 and the guidance on this is vague. Officers often wish to use the exemptions to avoid revealing information which necessitates getting legal advice, which is proving costly”
- “We have concerns about the Information Commissioner's processing of complaints”
- “Legislation often appears to be conflicting with other legislation therefore making it frustrating at times”

Positive and constructive comments (6 mentions)

- “As an FOI practitioner, I feel as though our department it is very interesting, being in the heart of the local government”
- “There is a really skilled group of FOI practitioners across the public sector thanks to networks (e.g. AGMA), courses (e.g. Northumbria University), and training (e.g. Act Now) and this peer group is an invaluable source of support”
- “We continue to adapt to the rising numbers of requests by making improvements to the mediums we have available to access information, and the Act has greatly enhanced this part of our operation”

Problems completing the survey (1 mention)

- “Question 3 does not specify whether to include requests where no response was received from the applicant when we have gone back for clarification, or requests which were transferred to another authority - we have included such requests”

Conclusions

The number of FOI requests made to authorities in England rose by 38,455 from 2007 to 2008. The percentage of requests that resulted in a full release of information rose from 73 per cent in 2007 to 84 per cent in 2008, while the proportion of non-disclosure cases decreased from 10.3 per cent to 7 per cent in the same period. Local authorities processed 86 per cent of requests within the statutory deadline in 2008, up from 83 per cent in 2006. The percentage of requests subject to internal reviews fell slightly from 1.5 per cent in 2007 to 1.4 per cent of all FOI requests in 2008.

Local authorities are spending 11.6 hours per request, down from last year's average of 15.3 and the 2006 average of 13.1. Few authorities charged for requests in 2008.

We asked practitioners to fill, in free-form, the top three problems they experienced with FOI compliance in 2008. We found that 'requests and requesters' was officials' greatest challenge, followed by resources, and meeting timescales. This differs markedly from the 2007 survey, where cooperation by service departments was highlighted as the biggest challenge, and problems with requests and requesters was second, on 18 per cent. This year, that figure is almost 30 per cent. The challenge of insufficient resources, the second biggest problem this year at 22 per cent, did not figure in last year's top three. It was, however, a significant problem in 2006. Several officials noted directly in their answers to Q12 ('Problems with compliance') that resources allocated to FOI were not keeping up with the increased number of requests they were dealing with, or that staff were taken off FOI to do other things. Resourcing (or lack of) may also play into the increased weighting given to problems with requests and requesters this year. While this problem was ranked second in 2007, its prominence in this 2008 survey suggests officials' patience with difficult and time-consuming requests - in a more difficult working environment - is waning. Problems with training and processes dropped from the highest ranked problem in 2006, to the third worst in 2007, to only the fifth worst in 2008. This perhaps signifies a 'bedding in' of systems and increased institutional knowledge of FOI as time passes. This may also account for the reduction in the number of times officials cited a lack of cooperation with service departments, or records management, as a problem.

In terms of benefits, the 2008 survey shows a continuation of the trend for officials to cite three particular benefits most often: improvements to the organisation, increased openness and transparency, and better records management. These benefits have been the top three in the 2006 and 2007 surveys, with only their ranking changing over time. Improvements to the organisation (non-records management) has increased from 2007 to 2008, while officials have cited better records management less frequently. This suggests perhaps that the 'high-water mark' in interest in records management has been met. It was also cited less frequently as a problem in 2008 compared to 2007. Improvements to the relationship with the public has remained steady from 2007 to 2008, at 11 per cent.

As in previous years, the additional comment question solicited a wide range of responses. Most comments were about requesters/requests, especially regarding the use of FOI to tout for business, to pursue grievances and to 'fish' for news stories. Like last year, the second most frequently mentioned issue was internal issues, especially the massive increase in the number of requests to have to process, with insufficient resources and staff. However, amid the problems were a number of positive comments about the fact that FOI had improved the culture of the organisation.

As we were unable to carry out follow-up interviews with the people who filled out the survey, we can only speculate as to the reasons behind some of the above answers. As time passes, FOI requesters become better educated about what to ask for and their requests become more complex and/or increasingly touch upon sensitive areas. Nevertheless there has been a significant fall in the number of hours required to comply with a request possibly arising from greater experience and confidence amongst FOI staff. Overall the percentage of requests resulting in full disclosure has increased and compliance with the 20 day timescale has remained at a similar rate to previous years. Internal

reviews have remained at a similar level to that reported in 2007 (2007 1.3 per cent, 2008 1.4 per cent).

The unit has recently been awarded funding by the ESRC to undertake a 28 month study of the impact of FOI upon local government. This will involve interviewing members of fifteen case study authorities, analysis of press stories about or using FOI and an online survey of FOI requesters. If you would like to help or find out more about this study, or our other work on FOI and Whitehall or FOI and Parliament, please follow the links below in Appendix A.

Appendix A – Constitution Unit: FOI and local government

Following on from a two year study of the impact of FOI on Whitehall, the Constitution Unit at University College London has been funded to do a two and half year study of the impact of FOI upon local government. Local government in Britain has been a focus of more than two thirds of all FOI requests. Understanding the impact of FOI on local government is central to a wider understanding of how the Act is working.

This will be the first systematic study of the objectives, benefits and consequences of FOI and local government. The study will evaluate the impact of the legislation by speaking to selected officials who work with it across 15 different local authorities and conducting a survey of FOI officers in local authorities across England. The project will also survey requesters who use FOI and interview local journalists and analyse media articles that report FOI. All interviews will be anonymous.

We will seek to measure FOI against the objectives set for it, asking whether FOI has made local government more transparent, more accountable and improved decision-making, as well as the effect of FOI upon public understanding, participation and trust in local government.

The study will also examine how FOI has interacted with the new reformed model of local government. It will seek to measure how FOI has impacted upon local political leadership, local accountability, partnership working and local service provision.

Interviews

We will seek to interview a range of people in each case study. If interviewees wish, both the authority and individual interviewees can remain anonymous with any reference to particular local events/issues removed. Each interview will be semi-structured and last around 45 minutes to an hour. If possible, we will seek to do them over a short time period (two days). Interviews can also be conducted over the telephone.

Interviewees will include those directly affected by FOI (FOI officer) and indirectly (Press officer, policy officer(s), Chief Executive or representative).

- CE or nominee
- 2 x heads of most relevant service departments
- FOI officer and the person to whom he/she reports directly
- Press/PR officer
- Legal officer
- Lead Councillor and two portfolio holders (one whose directorate deals with FOI and one with experience of it)

Survey of requesters

We would also ask for help in contacting requesters by placing a link to an on-line survey on all local authorities' websites, or on their responses to FOI requests. The link will go through to an online survey that asks the requesters what requests they make, why they make them, and their views on the process and aims of FOI. We will be happy to supply local authorities with anonymised breakdowns/ statistics of our results.

For more details about this project and our other FOI work see our web pages <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/index.htm>

For further information contact: Ben Worthy, Research Associate, at the address below, or email b.worthy@ucl.ac.uk, or Tel: +44 (0) 20 7679 4974.

Appendix B- Survey invitation letter

EMAIL TITLE: Constitution Unit survey of FOI and local government

Dear FOI Officer,

This is a voluntary survey from UCL's Constitution Unit, the results of which will benefit your council. The survey is quick, simple and easy to do. The survey is web-based and seeks information that we hope is readily available to you. The Constitution Unit has already carried out surveys in 2005, 2006 and 2007. This is the fourth annual survey. We published [reports](#) outlining the findings for each year.

To fill out this year's survey, click on the link: <http://tinyurl.com/mde9g2>

This year your findings are even more important. Following on from our current study of the impact of FOI upon central government, in August 2009 the Unit begins an in-depth study of the impact of FOI upon local government funded by the ESRC (see http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/projects/local_government.htm for more details).

Both the survey and our research project will help to show how FOI is working at a local level, helping to ensure that local authorities' needs are properly taken into account when the operation of the Act is reviewed and policy changes are considered. We are grateful to all FOI officers who filled out those surveys.

Confidentiality

Your submission will be treated in confidence. **The report and any published material will be written so that no individuals or authorities are identified.** However, we may want to publish the full list of authorities that participate.

Thank you for your help,

Ben Worthy, Research Associate

Survey instructions

- 1) Please click the link below. This will take you directly to the survey.
 - 2) We estimate that it will take you about 20 minutes to complete.
 - 3) You may return to the survey at any point before we close it on 10 August to edit your answers. You may also return to an incomplete survey before 10 August to complete it – if so, you will be taken to the point that you left off.
 - 4) Some of your answers may be approximations or best guesses. This is OK. If you do not have information available and are not in a position to make a fair estimate please leave the question and go to the next.
 - 5) The last day you will be able to fill out the survey is 10 August 2009
 - 6) If you experience any problems with the survey or have any general questions about this study, please contact Ben Worthy at 020 7679 4974 or by email at b.worthy@ucl.ac.uk.
- Survey link: <http://tinyurl.com/mde9g2>
-

Appendix C – Survey

The FOIA 2000 in 2008: How did things go for local authorities?

The Constitution Unit is part of the School of Public Policy at University College London. We are keen to stay abreast of developments in the application of FOI at the local government level. We do this in the form of annual online surveys. This survey covers the year 2008 (January-December).

This year, it is even more important that we understand the situation. We have received ESRC funding to undertake an in-depth two year study of the impact of FOI in local government. The results from this and previous studies will be of benefit to our work, which will begin in August 2009. Some of what we are looking at is described in Question 14. Please feel free to see our website for details (www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit) and give any comments you feel may be appropriate.

Thank you in advance for participating in our survey. Your submission will be treated in confidence and the report and any published material will be written so that individuals and authorities are not identified. We may, however, want to publish the full list of authorities who participate.

Number of FOI and EIR requests

For the purposes of this survey, please use the following definition of an FOI request:

An 'FOI request' is a request for any information that is NOT handled as part of the organisation's 'business as usual'. For example, we expect requests for library opening times and informational leaflets to be considered 'business as usual', whereas a request for notes from the meeting that took place over the closure of the local swimming pool would be classed as an FOI request. Please include requests that fall under the Environmental Information Regulations within this definition

1. How many FOI and EIR requests did your authority receive during each quarter of 2008?⁷
(Please use information recorded in your tracking system or your best estimate when reporting the number of requests. Please note that Quarter 1 refers to January to March, Quarter 2 to April to June, Quarter 3 to July to September, and Quarter 4 to October to December.)

- Quarter 1
- Quarter 2
- Quarter 3
- Quarter 4

2. How many FOI and EIR requests resulted in a FULL release of the information requested in 2008?

- Quarter 1
- Quarter 2
- Quarter 3
- Quarter 4

3. How many FOI and EIR requests resulted in a release of NONE of the information requested in 2008?

- Quarter 1
- Quarter 2
- Quarter 3
- Quarter 4

4. How many FOI and EIR requests were settled within the statutory 20-day time limit in 2008?

⁷ We provided the following definition of a request at the beginning of the survey: 'For our purposes, an 'FOI request' is a request for any information that is NOT handled as part of the organisation's 'business as usual'. For example, we expect requests for library opening times and informational leaflets to be considered 'business as usual', whereas a request for notes from the meeting that took place over the closure of the local swimming pool would be classed as an FOI request. Please include requests that fall under the Environmental Information Regulations within this definition.

- Quarter 1
- Quarter 2
- Quarter 3
- Quarter 4

5. How many requests were subject to an internal review within your authority in 2008?

- Quarter 1
- Quarter 2
- Quarter 3
- Quarter 4

6. On average, how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were assigned to FOI and EIR compliance tasks in the following areas of your organisation – central information team and all other departments – in 2008? (Please count staff in terms of full-time equivalents. For example, one full-time person and four people at 25% time each equals two FTEs.)

For the following questions, please provide your best estimate or guess based on your experience of dealing with FOI requests.

7. To the best of your knowledge, which were the top three categories of FOI requesters to your organisation in 2008 IN TERMS OF NUMBER OF REQUESTS? (e.g. public, media, business, campaign groups, etc)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

8. Using the same list of requester categories, please select the top three category of FOI requesters IN TERMS OF AMOUNT OF TIME spent on the respective group's requests. (Most time-intensive, second most time-intensive and third most time-intensive requests)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

9. To the best of your knowledge, which were the most requested categories of information to your organisation in 2007 IN TERMS OF NUMBER OF REQUESTS? (largest, second largest, and third largest)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

10. Using the same list of information categories, please select the top three categories of information IN TERMS OF AMOUNT OF TIME spent on that type of information request. (most time-intensive, second most time-intensive and third most time-intensive requests)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

11. In approximately WHAT PERCENTAGE of cases did your organisation charge a fee for an FOI request in 2008 for any reason?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

12. Please describe the top three problems you experienced with FOI/EIR compliance in 2008.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

13. Please fill in the top three ways in which you think FOI positively affected your organisation in 2008.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

14. The Constitution Unit has been awarded funding to do an in-depth study of FOI and local government. As part of this, we are trying to assess to what extent FOI has achieved the six key objectives set out below. Please tick one answer for each objective and use the box below to offer any thoughts.

- Transparency
- Accountability
- The quality of decision-making
- Public understanding of decision making
- Participation
- Trust

15. Please provide any additional comments and any specific concerns about your experiences as an FOI practitioner in the box below.

16. For which type of authority do you work?

- London borough
- Unitary council
- Metropolitan council
- County council
- District council

17. Please provide us with the name of your organisation:

18. Would you be willing to participate in further research, including a telephone interview, about your experiences as an FOI practitioner?

- Yes, in principle
- No

20. Please provide us with your work email address.

21. Please let us know if you have any comments about the survey itself, including suggestions for improvements.

Appendix D – Breakdown of number of requests and appeals by council type

Estimates of requests, refusals and appeals by council type					
1st January to 31st December 2008					
	Total requests	Total full release	No info. released	20 days requt. met	Internal reviews
Category					
County Councils					
Total for 20 councils	10920	7642	935	8716	156
Average/council	546	425	55	436	10
Total for 35 councils	19110	14859	1925	15253	341
London Boroughs					
Total for 13 boroughs	7677	4976	703	5782	124
Average/borough	591	498	78	445	12
Total for 33 boroughs	19488	16421	2578	14677	409
Metropolitan					
Total for 9 councils	3934	2386	136	3332	41
Average/council	437	398	23	417	5
Total for 36 councils	15736	14316	816	14994	185
Unitary					
Total for 10 councils	4040	2591	138	3568	59
Average/council	404	324	17	357	7
Total for 46 councils	18584	14898	794	16413	302
Other Councils ave./council	494	411	43	413	8
Other Councils: total (150)	72918	60494	6112	61337	1237
District Councils					
Total for 58 councils	11125	8714	478	9573	88
Average/council	192	164	9	171	2
District Councils total (238)	45651	39131	2146	40685	395
All Local authorities					
Totals (388authorities)	118569	99625	8259	102022	1632
average/authority	306	257	21	263	4
%s of total requests		84	7	86	1

Note: Estimated totals for each council type are based upon multiplying the average per council by the total number of councils. Because the number of responding councils did not reach the level of a representative sample, this is not a scientifically reliable method of calculating the total number. However, we use it to give an idea of the numbers across local government.