

West Yorkshire Police

Freedom of Information audit report

March 2024

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 West Yorkshire Police (WYP) with an independent assurance of the extent to which the information handling practices of WYP, within the scope of this agreed audit, conform with the codes of practice under sections 45 and 46 of the FOIA. WYP agreed to a consensual audit by the ICO of its compliance with the FOIA.

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

Scope area	Description
Freedom of Information (FOI)	The extent to which FOI/EIR accountability, policies and procedures, performance measurement controls, and reporting mechanisms to monitor compliance are in place and in operation throughout the organisation.

Audits are conducted following the Information Commissioner’s data protection audit methodology. The key elements of this are a desk-based review of selected policies and procedures, remote interviews with selected staff, and a virtual review of evidential documentation.

Where weaknesses were identified recommendations have been made, primarily around enhancing existing processes to facilitate compliance with data protection legislation. In order to assist WYP 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. WYP’s priorities and risk appetite may vary and, therefore, they should undertake their own assessments of the risks identified.

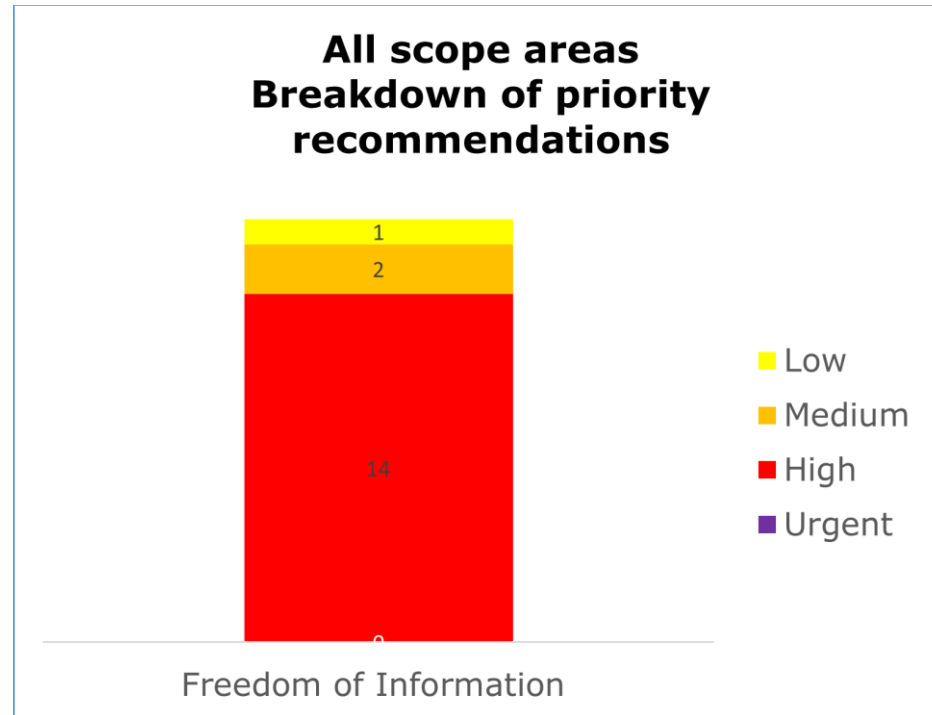
Audit Summary

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

The assurance ratings above are reflective of the remote audit methodology deployed and the rating may not necessarily represent a comprehensive assessment of compliance.

Priority Recommendations

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

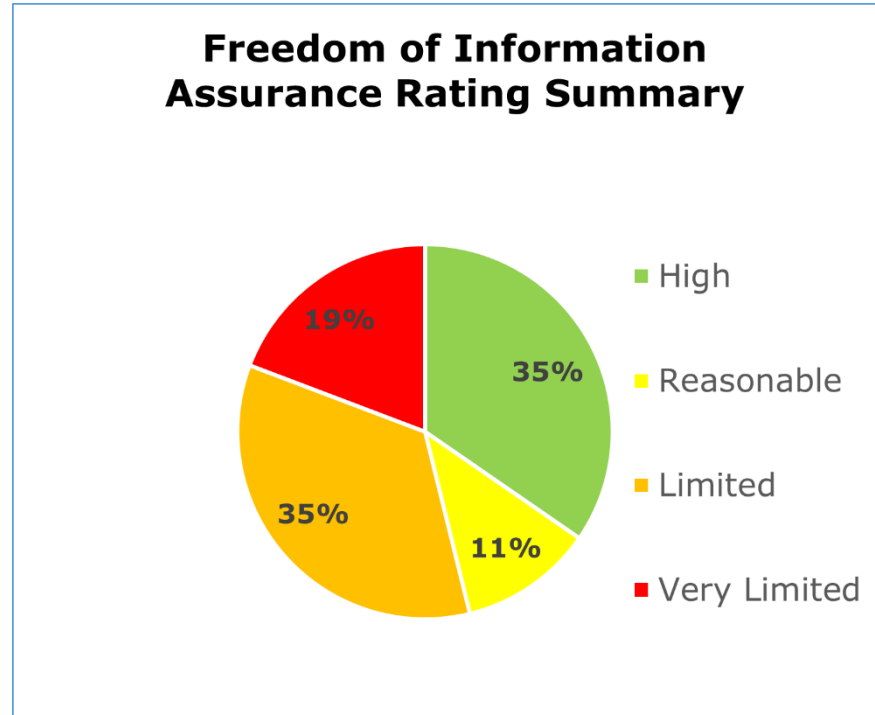


The bar chart above shows a breakdown by scope area of the priorities assigned to our recommendations made:

- Freedom of Information has 14 high, 2 medium and 1 low priority recommendations.

Graphs and Charts

A pie chart showing the percentage breakdown of the assurance ratings given for the Freedom of Information scope.



The pie chart above shows a summary of the assurance ratings awarded in the Freedom of Information scope. 35% high assurance, 11% reasonable assurance and 35% limited assurance and 19% very limited assurance.

Areas for Improvement

- Begin to complete quality checks on completed requests prior to their release when personal data is redacted. Ensure the internal process for redacting personal data, including the defined method of redaction, is documented within the FOI standard operating procedure (SOP).
- Carry out dip sampling on completed requests to ensure the correct process for handling requests is being followed. Dip sampling should assess whether exemptions have been correctly applied, redactions are applied on a case-by-case basis and the internal process for handling requests is being correctly followed.
- Update the all staff induction and refresher training to ensure information pertaining to FOI is more forward facing. Ensure staff with responsibilities for handling FOI requests undergo periodic refresher training.
- Begin to send out regular reminders to staff on how to recognise FOI requests. Reminders should include the correct process on handling requests.

Best Practice

- WYP hold a weekly risk assessment (RAM) meeting whereby all FOI requests are reviewed. The ICO considers this proactive cross organisation assessment of FOI requests to be best practice and encourages its continuation.

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 West 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 West Yorkshire Police. The scope areas and controls covered by the audit have been tailored to West Yorkshire Police and, as a result, the audit report is not intended to be used in comparison with other ICO audit reports.