Quality Assurance Procedures: Enquiries

Scottish Information Commissioner

Contents

Glossary and abbreviations

Term used	Explanation
The Commissioner	The Scottish Information Commissioner
FOI	Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004
FTE	Full time equivalent
HOE	Head of Enforcement
HOBS	Head of Business Support
HOPI	Head of Policy and Information
Officer	All employees of the Scottish Information Commissioner who respond to enquiries
QA	Quality Assurance

Introduction

1. The Scottish Information Commissioner (the Commissioner) has a duty to promote good practice and a power to give advice on the operation of FOI. One of the ways the Commissioner does this is by providing an enquiries service to the public and to public authorities. The Commissioner recognises the importance of good performance and quality in the delivery of this service. The service delivered must be to a defined standard which meets the needs of and, where practicable, the expectations of those who use our enquiries service.

2. The Commissioner carries out quality assurance in relation to the enquiries service. The purpose of the quality assurance is to:

    *   help us achieve greater consistency across the office

    *   ensure that the Enquiries Procedures are being followed and that responses to enquires are accurate

    *   identify and evidence good practice that we can share and learn from (including new material for the website and for publication through our Guide to Information) and

    *   inform line managers about individual performance and, if there are learning or development needs, to help us better support officers

Quality Criteria

3. Responses to enquiries are assessed against a number of set criteria, as set out in the Appendix. Each criterion refers to a particular aspect of the Enquiries Procedures which gives additional background about what is expected when responding to an enquiry.

How are assessments carried out?[1]

4. As part of regular performance and development meetings, line managers must assess a random selection of enquiry responses handled by their respective teams. The enquiries, as far as possible, are selected at random, with the following provisos:

    *   any enquiry which took over two weeks to respond should be assessed

    *   the proportion of enquiries assessed per FTE officer are roughly the same throughout the year

    *   the number of enquiries assessed for each officer are, as far as possible, spread evenly throughout the year.

5. The assessor may use the template in the Appendix of this procedure to guide their assessments of enquiries.

6. It is very important that assessments are carried out carefully and objectively. Line managers should highlight areas of good practice, so that we can all learn from them, not just practices which do not comply with the Enquiries Procedures. Where a line manager is of

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[1] Interim procedure in place pending full review of these procedures

the view that a particular criterion has not been met, they will, wherever possible, suggest ways in which the work could have been improved as part of normal line management duties.

7. Line managers will be asked to provide assurance to the HOBS on an annual basis that appropriate assessments of enquiry responses have taken place, measures were taken to address any poor practice identified and provide HOBS or HOPI, at the relevant time, any identified improvements that could be made.

Monitoring

8. It is the responsibility of the HOBS to ensure that assessments are being carried out.

9. The HOBS reports every annually to the Quarterly Senior Management Team on the outcomes of the assessments carried out. The report is anonymous, but highlights particular areas of good practice or of concern.

10. The HOBS's report is also shared with all of the officers who respond to enquiries.

11. Line managers and officers will take account of the assessments as part of the Performance and Development Framework.

Review

12. These procedures will be reviewed in line with the Key Documents Register.

Appendix - QA Enquiries

WorkPro reference:		Assessor:	
Enquirer:		Officer:	

Aims and principles		Met? Yes/no/not applicable	Comments	Enquiries Procedures: paragraph
1	Was the response helpful and proportionate and was it correct?			5
2	Was the response made in good time?			6
3	Was the response expressed in language appropriate to the enquirer?			7
4	Did the response only deal with matters within the Commissioner's remit?			8
5	In responding, was the officer mindful of avoiding prejudice to future investigations?			9
6	If existing sources of information are available (e.g. YRTK, website), did the response refer the enquirer to those?			10
7	Did the officer signpost the enquirer to other organisations or suggest further research they could undertake for themselves?			11
Case management		**Met? Yes/no/not applicable**	**Comments**	**Enquiries Procedures: paragraph**
8	Was the WorkPro record created within two days (or by the end of the month, whichever is sooner)?			87
9	Was the correct Enquiries Type used?			95
10	Was the synopsis field completed appropriately?			97, 99
11	Where appropriate, was the Issues/Non-compliance tab completed properly?			104
13	Was the case closure process in line with the procedures (i.e. Outcome Code and date populated) and completed promptly			108 -112

Other comments from assessor (if any)
Comments from officer or line manager (if any)

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