

Freedom of Information – Response – 26555

Please provide under the Freedom of Information Act:

- 1. Any documents presentations or slide sets held by the communications department for the purposes of training councillors or staff in dealing with the media or press*
- 2. Any records held by the communications department on the performance of individual councillors or staff in training sessions or media or press interviews and any associated actions to improve that performance*
- 3. Any briefing notes or framework argument documents provided for use in preparation for or during media interviews during this calendar year to a) the executive director for children and young people b) the cabinet member for children and young people and c) the cabinet member for education and send*

After careful consideration, Suffolk County Council (SCC) is refusing your request under Section 14 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Section 14 provides that a public authority is not obliged to comply with a request for information if that request is vexatious.

This decision has been made based upon the volume, nature and disproportionate burden that the multiple requests submitted in close proximity would place on SCC's resources.

Since 27 October 2025, SCC has received seven FOIA requests and two internal reviews from you, summarised below:

FOI Reference	Date received	Summary of request
26491	27/10/2025	Export of WhatsApp chats between senior officers and Councillors.
26554	08/11/2025	Complaints against Councillors and internal communications.
26555	08/11/2025	Media training material, performance records and briefing notes.
26556	08/11/2025	Timeline and awareness of FOI 26491.
26557	08/11/2025	Grant funded short breaks.
26558	08/11/2025	Disciplinary action against senior staff.
26585	14/11/2025	Copies of emails regarding FOI 26491.
Internal Review of 26491	13/11/2025	Challenging our application of s.12.
Internal Review of 26556	14/11/2025	Challenging our response and requesting additional information which was logged as a new request under 26585.

The requests collectively require extensive searches across multiple departments and systems, including:

- WhatsApp messages between senior officers and cabinet members, deletion settings, and governance policies (26491)
- Internal communications and complaint records involving councillors (26554)
- Communications and meeting records relating to a previous FOI request (26556)
- Training materials and performance assessments for media handling (26555)
- Grant-funded short breaks under the Activities Unlimited service (26557)
- HR records of warnings and performance plans for senior staff (26558)

While each request may appear reasonable in isolation, the cumulative impact of processing them together is excessive and would involve significant time and effort, diverting staff from core duties. Additionally, the requests show a pattern of persistent scrutiny of internal operations and individuals, which may be disproportionate to any public interest served.

In assessing whether the application of s.14 is proportionate and appropriate SCC has considered the following factors in light of the internal reviews and further correspondence received:

1. Volume and Burden

Since 27 October 2025, you have submitted multiple requests covering broad topics, alongside follow-up requests and internal reviews containing extensive allegations and demands for interviews with senior officers. The combined scope of the requests and demands from the internal reviews would require substantial manual effort across multiple teams in order to provide a response.

2. Overlap and Repetition

Several requests revisit the same subject matter, particularly WhatsApp communications and handling of FOI 26491. For example:

- 26491: Requested exports of WhatsApp chats. SCC applied s.12 and provided advice on narrowing the scope.
- 26556: Asked when officials were made aware of FOI 26491. SCC provided all recorded information; further details would require creating new information, which is outside FOIA scope.
- 26585: Requested copies of emails relating to FOI 26491.
- Internal reviews demanded interviews with senior officials and alleged misconduct.

This pattern demonstrates a lack of reasonable narrowing despite advice under s.16 FOIA. The volume and tone of the requests and responses to the requests we have supplied suggest an ongoing pattern of disproportionate engagement.

3. Escalation Beyond FOIA Process

Following responses to FOI 26491 and 26556, you contacted Councillors directly, asking them to confirm awareness of your FOI request and supply WhatsApp exports. This bypasses the formal FOIA process and places inappropriate pressure on elected members.

4. Tone and Nature of Correspondence

Your subsequent correspondences with the Council purport, or intimate, that SCC is:

- Seeking to undermine the FOI legislation – *“I am deeply suspicious of attempts to undermine the FOIA that occurred at your council between 27 October to your reply of yesterday”*
- Potentially colluding to delete WhatsApp messages – *“Possible collusion to delete WhatsApp messages: There is a risk that the Chief Executive, Leader, Deputy Leader, and Head of Communications may have colluded to delete relevant messages after becoming aware of my request but before the FOI team formally requested preservation or disclosure of the chats.”*
- Attempting to frustrate disclosure – *“Improper briefing of involved parties: Individuals named in the request may have been briefed, officially or unofficially, on its content in a manner intended to frustrate disclosure.”*

You also stated our handling *“does not smell right”* and demanded interviews with numerous senior figures. These demands and allegations go beyond FOIA’s scope and do not represent a genuine attempt to obtain information for public interest purposes.

For these reasons, and in line with ICO guidance, SCC is refusing this request under Section 14 FOIA.