

Freedom of Information Request – Response – 27766

1. This is a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. It concerns the council's handling of requests made under that Act and under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, and the arrangements governing how such requests are processed. Where any element falls to be considered under the Regulations, please treat it as made under them to that extent.

2. Unless a different period is specified, the request relates to the period from 1 February 2026 to the date of this request. Requests for policies, procedures and guidance extend to any document in force or applicable at any time during that period, whenever made or issued.

3. I am conscious that the information rights function is itself the subject of this request. Nothing in it is directed at the conduct of any individual officer, and I do not seek the name of any member of staff.

PART ONE: POLICY AND SERVICE STANDARDS

4. Please provide the council's policy or procedure governing the handling of requests under the Act and the Regulations, together with any internal guidance, process map, staff handbook entry or desk instruction issued to those who process or contribute to responses.

Please see the attached documents.

5. Please state whether the council operates any internal service standard, target or key performance indicator for the time taken to respond to requests, and if so provide it. Please state in particular whether any standard shorter than the statutory maximum of twenty working days applies, and how performance against it is monitored and reported. Suffolk County Council (SCC) does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request relating to any separate internal service standard, target or KPI for responding to Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests that is shorter than the statutory timeframe.

SCC handles requests in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), associated Information Commissioners Office (ICO) guidance, and SCC's Freedom of Information Policy.

Requests are responded to promptly and within the statutory deadline of 20 working days where applicable.

PART TWO: TURNAROUND

6. For each calendar month from February 2026 to the most recent complete month, please state: (i) the number of requests received; (ii) the number responded to

substantively; (iii) the number responded to within twenty working days; (iv) the mean number of working days taken to respond; and (v) the median number of working days taken to respond.

	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26	May-26	Jun-26	Jul-26
i)	145	131	133	135	158	167
ii)	107*	*125	64*	96*	154*	133*
iii)	107	121	64	96	153	130
iv)	11.4	11.8	6.9	10.3	11.3	11.3
v)	12	12	7	10	14	12

* Excludes redirects and withdrawn requests

7. For the same monthly periods, please state the number of requests responded to within (i) fifteen working days or fewer, and (ii) ten working days or fewer.

	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26	May-26	Jun-26	Jul-26
i)	78	93	56	89	114	121
ii)	42	46	36	64	65	70

Figures relate to all responses, not just substantive

8. Please state the number of requests during the period in which the council relied upon regulation 7 of the Regulations, or upon section 10(3) of the Act, to extend the period for response, and the number in which a response was issued outside the statutory period.

1 extension applied under regulation 7 of the EIR.

0 issued outside of the statutory period.

PART THREE: INTERNAL HANDLING AND REFERRAL

9. Please state whether the council operates any process by which a request, or a proposed response to a request, is notified to, reviewed by, or cleared with any person other than the information rights team before it is issued. If such a process exists, please provide any policy, guidance, instruction or correspondence establishing it, and state: (i) which roles or teams are involved; (ii) the criteria by which a request is selected for such notification or clearance; and (iii) when the process was introduced.

SCC does not hold recorded information describing a formal process under which FOI/EIR requests, or proposed responses, are routinely notified to, reviewed by, or cleared with other parties before a response is issued.

Where necessary to identify, locate or verify information falling within the scope of a request, the Information Governance team engage with relevant services, officers or subject matter experts. This forms part of SCC's process for establishing what recorded information is held and ensuring responses are accurate.

In accordance with FOIA, EIR and ICO guidance, requests are handled applicant-blind and motive-blind. The identity of the requester and the reasons for making the request are not relevant to the consideration of whether information should be disclosed.

The Council does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request setting out:

- (i) specific roles or teams involved in any formal notification or clearance process;

- (ii) criteria for selecting requests for notification or clearance; or
- (iii) when such a process was introduced.

Any engagement with services is determined on a case-by-case basis according to the nature of the information requested.

10. Please state whether any category of request is flagged, marked or otherwise identified as sensitive, high profile, contentious or similar, and if so provide the criteria applied and any list of subjects, individuals or topics to which such a marking is applied. SCC does not hold recorded information describing a formal category, designation or marking applied to requests as "sensitive", "high profile", "contentious" or similar, nor does it hold a list of subjects, individuals or topics to which such a marking applies.

On a case-by-case basis, the Information Governance team may bring individual requests to the attention of relevant services or senior officers where this is considered necessary.

However, SCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request setting out formal criteria for selecting requests in this way, nor any list of topics, subjects or individuals to which such consideration applies. Requests are assessed according to their individual circumstances and the information sought. Additionally, in accordance with the FOIA and EIR, requests are handled without regard to the identity of the requester or the motive for making the request.

11. Please provide any request, instruction, protocol, arrangement or correspondence concerning advance notification of requests, prior sight of draft responses, or the handling of requests on particular subjects, received by or agreed with the information rights team since 7 May 2026, and in particular any originating from the communications service, the office of the Leader of the Council, or the office of either Joint Chief Executive. Please state separately whether any such protocol, arrangement or practice has been introduced, varied or discontinued since 7 May 2026; if so, when, at whose instigation, and whether it is recorded in writing; and please provide any record of it, including any note, minute, email, calendar entry, team briefing or amendment to a process document or workflow. SCC has interpreted this question as seeking recorded information relating to any formal or informal arrangements for advance notification of FOI/EIR requests, prior sight of draft responses, or the handling of requests on particular subjects.

SCC does not hold recorded information describing any formal protocol, arrangement, instruction or practice of this nature that has been introduced, varied or discontinued since 7 May 2026.

As part of the normal process for responding to requests, the Information Governance team may engage with relevant officers and services to identify, locate, retrieve or verify information held. Where appropriate, individuals, service managers, senior managers, Communications colleagues, and senior officers, including the Joint Chief Executives, may be made aware of a request and/or provided with sight of a draft response before it is issued. This is undertaken on a case-by-case basis to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of information that is due to be disclosed into the public domain.

These requests are not selected on the basis of the identity of the requester or their motive. Nor are requests shared for the purpose of enabling records to be altered, deleted or otherwise disposed of. Once a request has been received, relevant information must be

preserved and considered in accordance with FOIA, EIR and SCC's information governance obligations. SCC's Freedom of Information Policy confirms its commitment to handling requests in accordance with FOIA/EIR and relevant guidance.

Beyond the routine case-by-case engagement described above, SCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request relating to any formal protocol, arrangement, instruction, correspondence or practice concerning advance notification, prior sight of draft responses, or special handling arrangements for particular subjects. Nor does it hold recorded information showing that any such protocol, arrangement or practice has been introduced, amended or discontinued since 7 May 2026.

PART FOUR: SAFEGUARDS AND ASSURANCE

12. Please provide any policy, procedure or guidance concerning the preservation of information once a request has been received, including any instruction that information falling within the scope of a request must not be deleted, amended or destroyed pending response; and please state how, and at what point, that instruction is communicated to those whose records are to be searched.

SCC's Freedom of Information Policy sets out SCC's commitment to handling requests in accordance with FOIA and EIR.

SCC does not hold a specific policy, procedure or guidance document solely concerning the preservation of information following receipt of an FOI/EIR request.

However, where the Information Governance team engages relevant services or officers to identify, locate and retrieve information within the scope of a request, they are expected to preserve any potentially relevant information and not delete, amend or destroy records that may fall within scope of the request while it is being considered and responded to.

This expectation is communicated as part of SCC's case-by-case handling of requests when relevant services and officers are contacted to undertake searches for information. SCC's records management and information governance obligations continue to apply following receipt of a request, and information falling within scope must be retained and considered in accordance with FOIA and EIR

Other than the general arrangements described above, SCC does not hold recorded information setting out a separate preservation instruction, including details of when and how such an instruction must be communicated.

13. Please state what steps the council takes to satisfy itself that a search undertaken in response to a request is complete, including whether any confirmation or certification is required from those who conduct searches, and whether any check, sampling exercise or audit of search completeness is carried out.

SCC does not hold recorded information describing a formal process, checklist, certification requirement, sampling exercise or audit regime for verifying that searches undertaken in response to FOI/EIR requests are complete.

SCC's approach is to work with the relevant service area(s) that are responsible for the information requested. Staff are expected to identify and provide all recorded information held by SCC that falls within the scope of the request, in accordance with the requirements of FOIA, EIR and SCC's Freedom of Information Policy.

Where a service area advises that no information is held, or where the adequacy of searches is subsequently challenged, for example during an internal review, the Information Governance team may request further details of the searches undertaken, including the locations searched and the search terms used.

Search completeness is therefore considered on a case-by-case basis through engagement between the Information Governance team and the relevant service area. However, SCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request setting out a formal requirement for staff to certify searches, nor does it hold recorded information relating to routine checks, sampling exercises or audits specifically for the purpose of assessing the completeness of searches undertaken in response to FOI and EIR requests.

14. Please state whether any technical measure, such as the suspension of automatic deletion or the application of a hold to relevant accounts or systems, is applied upon receipt of a request, and if so describe it.

SCC does not hold recorded information describing a formal technical process whereby automatic deletion is suspended or a hold is automatically applied to accounts, mailboxes or systems upon receipt of an FOI or EIR request.

However, when engaging with services and officers to identify information falling within the scope of a request, the Information Governance team advises that relevant information must not be deleted, amended or destroyed while the request is being processed. In addition, services are advised to retain relevant information for a period of 41 working days following the issue of the response to allow for the statutory period during which an applicant may request an internal review.

This process is communicated on a case-by-case basis as part of the handling of individual requests. SCC's Freedom of Information Policy confirms the Council's commitment to handling requests in accordance with FOIA, EIR and associated obligations.

Other than the arrangements described above, SCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request regarding any technical preservation measures that are routinely applied upon receipt of an FOI or EIR request.

15. Please provide any guidance or training material issued to officers or councillors concerning section 77 of the Act, which makes it an offence to alter, deface, block, erase, destroy or conceal information with the intention of preventing disclosure.

SCC does not hold recorded information in the form of specific guidance or training materials issued to officers or councillors concerning section 77 of FOIA

However, as part of SCC's handling of FOI and EIR requests, officers are made aware of their obligation to preserve information that falls within the scope of a request and that records must not be altered, deleted, concealed or otherwise disposed of in a manner that could affect SCC's ability to comply with its obligations under FOIA and the EIR. This is particularly reinforced where a service advises that no relevant information is held, to ensure that appropriate searches have been undertaken and that relevant records have been retained.

SCC's Freedom of Information Policy confirms its commitment to handling requests in accordance with FOIA, EIR and associated requirements.

Beyond the case-by-case advice provided by the Information Governance team, SCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request comprising specific guidance or training materials relating to section 77 of the Act.

16. Please state, in numerical form only and without identifying any individual or case, how many occasions in the last five years the council has received an allegation, or conducted an investigation, concerning the deletion, withholding or concealment of information after a request had been received, and the outcome in each case.

SCC does not hold this information in a format that would enable the requested figures to be readily extracted.

SCC currently retains FOI & EIR request data for the current financial year and the previous three full financial years. For ICO complaints, SCC retains data for the current financial year and the previous two full financial years.

During these periods, the Council has handled:

- 5,081 FOI/EIR requests;
- 179 Internal Reviews; and
- 9 ICO complaints.

To determine how many occasions involved an allegation or investigation concerning the deletion, withholding or concealment of information following receipt of a request, SCC would be required to manually review each relevant case record to identify whether it contained information falling within the scope of your request.

SCC estimates that the time required to locate, retrieve and extract this information would exceed the appropriate limit prescribed by section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is 18 hours for local authorities.

In accordance with its duty to provide advice and assistance under section 16 of FOIA SCC can advise that, if you were willing to refine your request to allegations or investigations arising from Internal Review requests received during either the current financial year or the previous full financial year, the Council may be able to provide some information within the cost limit.

PART FIVE: OUTCOMES

17. For the period specified at paragraph 2, please state the number of internal reviews requested, the number completed, and the outcomes by category, that is the number in which the original response was upheld, partly overturned, or overturned.

39 Internal Reviews requests.

27 Internal Reviews completed.

19 Upheld

8 Partially Upheld

18. Please state the number of complaints made to the Information Commissioner concerning the council during the period, and the number of decision notices issued, together with the outcome of each.

2, both resolved informally with no decision notices issued.

Chasing a Response

1. Check responses that should be back from directorate in 3 days' time
2. Check the ref no isn't purple as that means there is a response in the inbox.
3. Double check the 'Progress Report' section to see what has already been done/agreed.

Chasing the Requests

1. Open the new info request email from the file folder and forward to directorates who haven't yet responded.
2. Insert the chaser email template and fill in blanks
3. Copy date from tracker that you expect a response by.
4. Update the tracking sheet: Chased xx/xx

****If the directorate comes back saying that they may not be able to get the response to you by the date given go back to them and ask when we can expect to receive the response by****

Clarification Requests

1. Email received from directorate requesting clarification.
2. Check that the information requested has not already been provided in the original request
3. Update the tracking sheet to show the status column as 'on hold' and then in the progress report state that the request is on hold and when it is on hold until (this will be 20 working days from the date clarification was requested).
4. Open the file folder, then the Acknowledgement email and hit 'Reply All'
5. Insert and complete the 'clarification request' email template and send to the requester.
6. Save the clarification email in the file folder as; 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Request for Clarification.
7. Reply to the directorate confirming the request is on hold pending clarification and when to then save the sent email in the file folder as; 20XX-XX-XX – XXXX – (directorate) Require Clarification
8. Delete the email from the directorate from the inbox.

Receiving Clarification

If no clarification is received

1. Move the file folder into completed
2. Close the request in the tracking sheet; mark the status column as 'withdrawn', mark 'working days to complete' as N/A, input the 'date released' as today's date and then fill out the 'progress report' column to say request withdrawn as no clarification received.
3. Email the directorate(s) to let them know that the request has been withdrawn due to no clarification being received and then save the email in the file folder as: 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Request Withdrawn

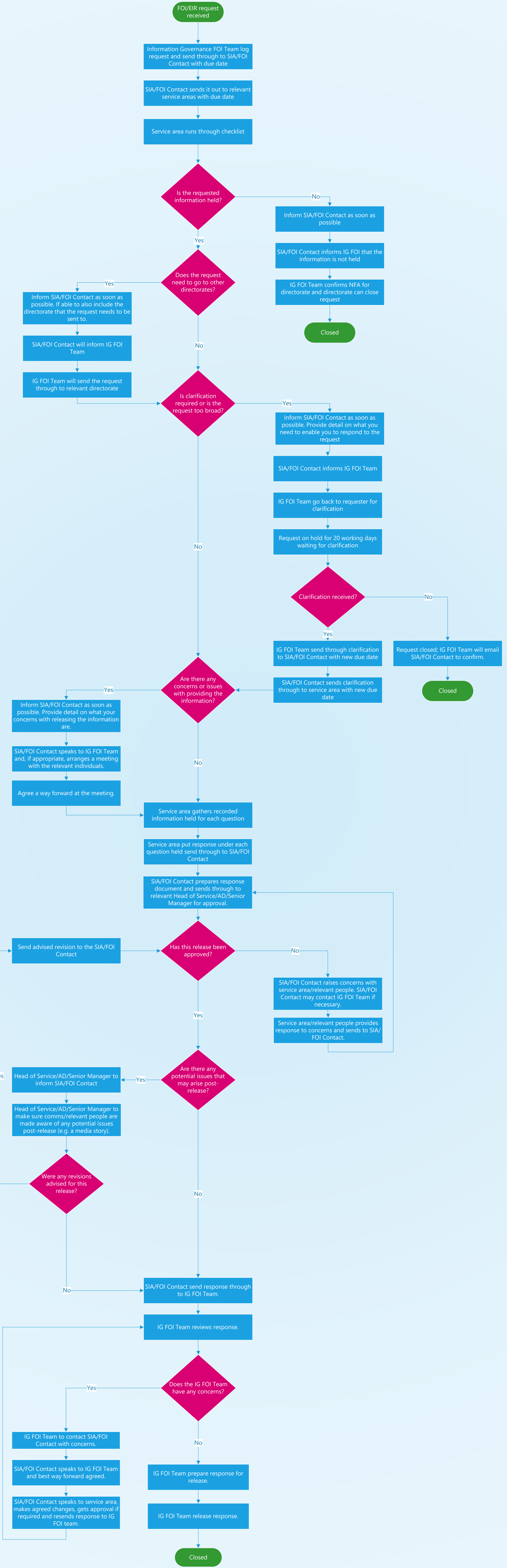
Clarification Received

1. Update the tracking sheet, change the 'status' column to open, change the 'date rec'd' to the date the clarification was received (ensure this is a working day, same as if logging a new request) and update the 'progress report' column to say that clarification has been received and sent to the directorate along with a new due date to IG.
2. Save the clarification email from the requester in the file folder as: 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Clarification Rec'd

3. Open the file folder and then the email sent to the directorate(s) confirming the request is on hold pending clarification, press 'Reply All' insert the 'Clarification Received' template and complete.
4. Send the email to the directorate(s) and then save in the file folder as: 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX- Clarification Sent to (directorate(s)).
5. Delete the emails from the inbox.

Clarification Received after the Deadline

1. Log as a new request but under IG notes let the directorate(s) know that it links to a request that was withdrawn due to no clarification being rec'd and what the previous reference number was.



Follow on Query

1. Identify whether the email is asking for new information or clarifying an answer we have given or complaining they are unhappy with the response
 - If asking for a new or additional information, then it's a follow-on request.
 - If they are unhappy with the response, then it is an internal review
 - If they are asking for clarity on information, we have provided in response to their request then it's a follow on query.
2. Save the email in the file folder with the name; 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Follow on Query
3. Open up the directorates reply to the request and hit 'forward'
4. Use the 'Follow on Query Received' template and fill out. Give the directorate a week to respond to the query and make a note in your outlook calendar of when it's due back.
5. Save the email sent to the directorate in the file folder with the name; 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Follow on query sent to XXX
6. When the response is received from the directorate save it in the file folder with the name; 20XX – XX – XX – XXXXX – XXX Follow on Reply
7. Open the requesters follow on query email, hit reply and insert the 'follow on query' response template.
8. Fill out the template, next to 1) put the request the requester submitted next to it and the directorates response next to Q1. (delete 2) and Q2). And send.
9. Save the email in the file folder under the name: 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Follow on Response

Internal Review

1. Ensure it is an internal review. Internal reviews are any expression of dissatisfaction by the requester at the response of their request. Check the date when the original response was sent.

If the expression of dissatisfaction by the requester is received within 40 working days, then an IR can be logged. If, however, it comes after 40 working days, it cannot be logged as an IR and the requester must be notified. Suggest that we can deal with the query as a new request for information.

2. Open the internal review tab on the tracking sheet and complete the following fields;

- Ref No – this is the original request reference number.
- Request type – either FOI or EIR
- Requester – the person's name who made the request
- Internal review – copy and paste from the email as you would a new request.
- Status – leave blank
- Date internal review received – the working day the request was received (same as logging a new request)
- Directorate – the directorate(s) you send the internal review to (this will be the same as who the original request went to)

3. Once the tracking sheet is complete go to the complaints folder, then the appropriate year. Right click in the folder go down to 'new' and select 'folder'. Name the folder; (ref number) – Due Out (date internal review is due out).

4. Go into the folder just created and create a shortcut to the original file folder and then one from the original file folder to the internal review file folder. Keep the shortcut names to the default ones that come up.

5. Send Acknowledgement of Internal Review to requester using the 'Internal Review Acknowledgement' and then save it in the internal review folder.

6. Save the internal review request email in the internal review file folder and name as; 20XX-XX-XX – XXXXX – Internal Review Request.

7. Move the internal review email into the FOI Manager's area in the inbox.

Logging a Request

****Make sure you move the email to the correct category in the inbox before you do anything with it****

1. Copy important information from the email request and paste into the tracking sheet in the 'request' column (make sure you save the tracking sheet before trying to update it to ensure everything is up to date). Tidy up the request, remove spaces, ensure bullet points are changed to numbers where suitable etc...
2. Input the request type (FOI or EIR)
3. Input the requester name, requester type, in the progress notes put: 20XX-XX-XX – Sent to (directorate(s))
4. Double check the date that the email was sent (received) and put this in the date rec'd column (if the request was received at the weekend put Friday's date)
5. Input the date the acknowledgement was sent (this should be today's date)
6. Input the status (this should be open, please check the tracking sheet for options)
7. Input the directorate
8. Input the directorate area
9. Save the spreadsheet
10. Go to processes and templates and open up the [FOI](#) or [EIR](#) response template.
11. Click file - save as – browse - ACCS drive – Information Management – Access to Information – Information Requests FOI & EIR – Monitoring Requests – 20XX – click 'new folder' – name new folder as request reference - open the folder – save template as: [ref number] – Response.
12. Copy and paste the request from the tracking sheet into italics in the response template. Tab down under each question and put A – so the directorates can see where to put their response and press save.
13. Click new email and change the 'from' email address to 'FOI@suffolk.gov.uk'
14. Click on the body of the email and select the template '[New Info Request](#)'

15. Fill out the template, attach the response document and send it to all the relevant directorates.
16. Save the sent email in the file folder. Make sure to change the mail format from Unicode to Outlook mail message and save as: yyyy-mm-dd – ref number – (keep the same)
17. Delete the message from the sent folder
18. Go to the request email and click reply
19. Delete the subject line and ensure you are sending the email from the FOI@suffolk.gov.uk email address
20. Click the body of the email and use the 'Acknowledgement' template
21. Fill out the template and change the subject line by dragging the top line of the template (highlighted yellow) into the subject bar, ensure you have used your external signature at the bottom of the email
22. Send the email
23. Save the sent message in the file ref folder: yyyy-mm-dd – (ref number) – [Acknowledgement](#)
24. Delete the email from the sent folder
25. Save the original request email in the file folder: yyyy-mm-dd – (ref number) – Original Request

Paper FOI Requests

1. Save the tracking sheet and find the next available reference number, input all the information as you would electronically (following steps 2-9 above) but when it comes to the request you must write it out manually
2. Once you have completed the tracking sheet and filled out the request manually save it and then scan the letter into the system and then move it to the FOI mailbox, then save the PDF from the email into the file folder (you may need to create one) as: yyyy-mm-dd – Ref Number – Original Request
3. Follow steps 11-17 above

4. If the requester has provided an email address on their request you will need to open a blank email, type in the email address it is going to and then follow the instructions from step 20 above
5. If there is no email address on the request, you will need to use the letter templates saved in: ACCS – Information Management – Access to Information – Information Requests FOI & EIR – Process and Templates – Letter Templates – (FOI-EIR) Acknowledgement
6. Once you have filled out the letter template you will need to save it in the file folder under: yyyy-mm-dd – Ref Number – Acknowledgement and print it out
7. Fold the letter carefully and place it into an envelope and put it in the post.

Responses

Preparing a Response

**** Any attachments need to be saved in the file folder under 'Reply Data' unless they relate to something specific i.e. a road****

1. Move the email into the 'responses to prepare' category in the inbox and change the subject line to; Ref Number – (directorate) Reply
2. Ensure the information is in the correct format, if not either copy into a template or alter the one received
3. Make sure that the font used for the questions is Arial in black size 12 italics and the font used for the answers is **Arial in purple size 12** no italics and is directly below the relevant question. Go through the response check that all the questions have been answered appropriately and ensure that it reads well and is easy to understand (extend abbreviations, change wording from 'We' to 'Suffolk County Council' etc...)
4. Save the response in the file folder as [date] – [ref number] – [Response]. If there are other documents to be sent out along with the response document save them in the file folder and rename them – [date] – [ref number] – Reply Data [1]. Make sure you clearly state in the response which question these relate to, i.e. please see the attached document Reply Data 1.
5. Save the original reply email from the directorate in the file folder as [date] – [ref number] – (directorate) Reply
6. Find the reference number on the tracking sheet and update the progress report to say; yyyy-mm-dd (directorate) Reply Rec'd – DRAFT. If an exemption has been applied input this into the column called 'exemptions applied' and go to the tab at the bottom of the tracking sheet called 'exemptions' and put it in the appropriate box
7. Save the tracking sheet
8. If the response is ready to send out and you are not waiting for responses from other directorates move the response into the 'responses for checking' category in the inbox for the FOI Lead Officer to check. If you are waiting for answers from other directorates, you can delete the email from the inbox whilst waiting for their responses.

Sending out a Response (this will be in the 'responses ready for release' section of the inbox).

1. Find the reference number on the tracking sheet

2. Open up the file folder and find the response word document – double check it matches up with the information on the tracking sheet, close the document and then ensure the date it is saved under is the date you are sending it out
3. Open up the 'Original Request' email and hit reply – if the request was sent from another directorate or came in via post but had an email address on it use the 'Acknowledgement' email in the file folder instead
4. Ensure the email address you are sending from is: FOI@suffolk.gov.uk
5. Click on the body of the email and use the FOI or EIR '[Response](#)' template.
6. Fill out the email template and attach the requests Word response document from the file folder along with any other attachments that may need to be sent out – if the files are too large to send via email out you may need to ask for the requesters email address and put the information on an encrypted memory stick to post to them;

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs _____

We have gathered the information in response to your FOI or EIR (delete as appropriate) I request XXXXX however, the attachments that relate to your request are larger than our email server limit therefore we would like to send the information to you via memory stick which is free of charge. For Information Management to be able to do this please could you provide us with your postal address?

Kind Regards

(your name)

(external signature)

If you have to send it out via the mail or the entire request has had to be dealt with via post, you will need to use the letter templates rather than emails and save copies of the emails in the file folders.

7. Double check everything matches up and then go to the tracking sheet to update as follows:
 - Turn the row white (no fill)
 - Change the status column to what you have done with the response i.e. Closed or Redirected
 - Date released column (ensure 'working days to complete' does not say -1, -2 etc... if it does override it to say '0')
 - Update the progress report with; yyyy-mm-dd (what you put in the status column)
8. Make a note of the reference number so you can move it over to the 'Completed' folder in the file path and double check the email and attachments one last time before sending it.

9. Once sent delete the email in the 'Responses ready for release' category in the inbox and save the email you sent to the requester in the file folder: yyyy-mm-dd – Ref Number – Response and then delete from the sent box
10. Once deleted click on any email in the inbox, click file then save as, click out of the file folder, and then cancel – open up the file path and move the file folder into the completed folder then cross it off the list.