

CAMDEN COUNCIL FOI BAU PROCESS

Introduction

Recently, the ICO used our 'Business as Usual' (BAU) model as a case study on their website [here](#). We thought it might be helpful to put together a fact sheet to share our ideas and practices and to help answer any frequently asked questions.

Here at Camden, we have a culture of dealing with Freedom of Information requests as service priorities. This has grown over time and has helped us to gain a performance figure of 99.6% for the financial year 2021/22, which is something that we're extremely proud of.

What is a BAU?

What constitutes a BAU? A BAU can be a request for which there may be an easy answer – or that can at least be answered more quickly and easier than a Freedom of Information request - and therefore might not require being put through the FOI process. These queries should be much quicker to process than a FOI request, giving a faster response for the customer. We may have the information at hand online or one of our services may have the answer, so a quick email internally or perhaps an even quicker phone call may resolve a query. We aim to process BAUs within three working days.

As these requests are potentially being dealt with outside of FOI it's important to keep in mind whether any FOI or EIR exemptions may apply to the information being asked for and if so, how would this affect the response. Also, any personal data is subject to GDPR.

FOI or BAU?

Early on in our Freedom of Information logging process it became clear to us that not every request needed to be logged as a Freedom of Information request. We publish all of our [Freedom of Information responses](#) regularly online on our [Open Data Portal](#), so the majority of repeat and similar requests can be pointed towards these, referencing any other response that may be relevant to the request.

We also have a great deal of information covering a wide range of subjects publicly accessible online, for example, at our Open Data Portal and on our [Camden website](#), so many requests can be answered using these resources, hopefully satisfying the requester.

Within our BAU reply, we state that if the requester is unhappy with the BAU response, then under their rights of the Freedom of Information Act, they can let us know and we will look at their request again formally under the act and we will send them a reply within 20 working days.

Proactive publishing and datasets

Being able to deal with FOI requests less formally as BAU can be dependent on how much information is published and available to the public, so proactive publishing of your organisation's data is key. The more data that is out there, the more easily we can signpost requesters to it. It's not very time efficient for FOI officers to be processing requests as FOI when the data is already easily accessible.

An enormous amount of time and effort can be saved for services by creating and uploading information regularly to datasets. Once regular requests for the same information are being received it's worth considering whether this information needs to be published to avoid duplicating work across teams. It also allows the public to find the information easily. The datasets should be updated regularly by the relevant team or at a frequency as suggested by the [Local Government Transparency Code](#).

Triage

We triage BAUs that come to us, separating them out from other correspondence and definite FOIs that need to be logged. These BAUs are then researched to see what information can be given from our online resources, or maybe a colleague in the relevant service area can provide an answer which we can then relay back to the requester. In this case it's important to create a calendar reminder to chase the colleague to ensure that the query isn't forgotten about. It may be more convenient for the service area to respond directly to the requester, in which case we can then let the requester know that an officer from the relevant team will be in touch, again asking that our colleague copies the FOI team into their reply. It's crucial to keep the requester in the loop so that they can feel reassured that they will receive a response more quickly than they would as a formal FOI. Also, if the FOI team are copied into the final response, we know that the query has been dealt with.

Part BAU / Part FOI

There are instances where some information in a request is easy to deal with so we can offer the readily available data to the requester in our reply, letting them know that the remainder of the request has been logged as FOI. There is an example towards the end of this document.

Repeat requests

We frequently receive repeat requests for data such as business rates and Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) data for parking. These requests are easy to divert to our already [published datasets](#) on our Open Data Portal. Here the public has instant access to all the information they need and can filter and download the data to an Excel spreadsheet if they so wish. We also treat food hygiene reports as BAU, redacting where necessary.

FOIs from other councils

There is an understanding between local authority chief executives not to send FOIs to other councils. This is due to the red tape that dealing with such requests causes and that they were designed for the public to access information, rather than for councils to obtain information from fellow councils. Therefore, these requests are not logged but are sent internally to the relevant service asking that they reply directly to the requester.

FOI FAQs

When frequent requests for the same subjects come in, for example, something that may be topical, then we will proactively publish a **FOI FAQ** sheet that is specific to that subject in the hope of quelling further requests. We publish these [FOI FAQs](#) together in one place on our open Data Portal. By gaining information from the service area and collating it into a presentable and readable format this greatly helps to stem the tide of requests we might receive on the subject. A good example of this is the FAQ on Cecil Rhodes House at the above link.

Another good reason to produce a FAQ document is when we have received so many FOI requests about the same subject that it becomes pertinent to collate the responses so far onto one document. Please see the FAQ document for Boris Nemtsov as a good example, again at the link.

Templates

Email templates can help to quickly deal with common requests, for example, our standard BAU response which can be found at the bottom of this document. This way we can be assured of consistency in our replies and include any relevant links. As mentioned earlier, this template also includes the option for logging as FOI if the requester is unhappy with the BAU option.

In terms of helpful tools, we have developed a [Camden FOI Response Search](#) tool. This enables searches to be carried out within our previous responses using key words and reference numbers. We include a link to this tool in our FOI page on our website, and this is also included in our BAU response email template.

Summary

It's important to try and get the BAU response right first time to so that the requester can be assured that we have answered as well as is possible, avoiding any possible cause for complaint. There have been occasions when a requester has insisted that their request be treated formally as FOI, but this doesn't happen very often and is, after all, why we include the option in our emailed response. We often receive

grateful emails from requesters thanking us for dealing with their requests so efficiently.

Template example

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response.

There is/are several responses regarding your request already published on our Open Data Portal - Open Data Camden <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/browse>

Please click on the following link and enter ' _____ ' in the **'find in this dataset'** search field to view it/them, particularly _____.

<https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/Your-Council/Camden-Freedom-Of-Information-Responses/7mk-4ya8/data>

Additionally, we have a new FOI response search tool which allows for more flexible searches. Please follow the link - [Camden Freedom Of Information Response Search](#)

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden Council.

Further examples

Here are some examples of BAU requests and responses.

Part BAU / Part FOI example

1a) Please can you tell me the number of incidents of **RESTRAINT** that have been used on pupils within special schools in your local authority over the last 5 academic years (2017/2018, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 (so far). Can I have the data as an annual breakdown.

FYI - By Special schools I mean: Schools which provide tailored provision for pupils with special educational needs.

b) How many of these resulted in a physical injury to a child or young person?

2a) Please provide me with the total number of incidents of **SECLUSION** that took place in special schools in the local authority, over the last 5 academic years (2017/2018, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 (so far). Can I have this as an annual breakdown.

b) How many of these resulted in an injury?

3a) Do staff at special schools in the local authority receive regular training in the use of restraint?

b) If the above answer is yes, which type of training or provider is used, and how regularly (for instance, is it annual, biannual, or upon starting a staff role)? Please could I receive the information by email, if you need to clarify any part of this request, please feel free to contact me on XXXXXX.

Response

Thank you for your request. So you can have some of the information you requested more quickly – some of the information you requested is already published on our Open Data Portal - Open Data Camden <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/browse>

Information regarding your request up to and including 2020/21 is already published on our Open Data Portal, Open Data Camden <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/browse> in previous responses.

Please click on the following link and enter '**CAM3247**' and '**CAM3346**' in the '**find in this dataset**' search field to view them.

<https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/Your-Council/Camden-Freedom-Of-Information-Responses/j7mk-4ya8/data>

I have logged your request for the remaining **time period 2021/22** as FOI. Your FOI reference is **CAM3542**. Please quote this on any enquiries relevant to this request.

Please also ensure that you have added no-reply@camden.gov.uk to your safe senders list to avoid any response going into your spam folder.

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Kind regards,

Example 1

Request received 16/12/22

You publish your FOI figures for financial year. But can I have the number of FOIs you've had this calendar year; how many were late and what your performance is so far. As of today, how many open cases have you got and how many are due before end of year? How many will be late?

Response – sent 16/12/22

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response.

Please find the answers to your queries as follows. Please note these figures are as at 14/12/22.

1. Can I have the number of FOIs you've had this calendar year,
1204 received so far
2. How many were late and what your performance is so far.
We had 5 that were overdue earlier in the year but currently none are overdue. Our performance is 99.6% of cases responded to on time.
3. As of today, how many open cases have you got
We have 82 open cases
4. How many are due before end of year? How many will be late?
31 cases are due before the end of the year. None are overdue and we do not expect any to go overdue.

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden Council.

Example 2

Request received 05/12/22

1. Data for every location of residential and non-residential parking in Camden. And availability and restriction time.
2. location of red route parking bays in Camden.

3. location of controlled parking zone in Camden.
4. Location of electric vehicle charging points in Camden.
5. Data regarding parking fine appeals have been accepted and rejected in the year 2020, 2021, and 2022.

I need an update as soon as possible.

Response - sent 06/12/22

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response. The answers to your questions are as follows –

1. Data for every location of residential and non-residential parking in Camden. And availability and restriction time.

The information you requested is already published on our Open Data Portal, Open Data Camden <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/browse>

The link is - [Camden Parking data](#)

2. location of red route parking bays in Camden.

TfL is the traffic / highways authority for the Red Route and Camden holds no information in regards of them. To make an information request to TfL, click this link [Freedom of Information - Transport for London \(tfl.gov.uk\)](#)

3. location of controlled parking zone in Camden.

Please follow this link - <https://www.camden.gov.uk/controlled-parking-zones>

4. Location of electric vehicle charging points in Camden.

Please follow the link to Zap Map –

[Map of electric charging points for electric cars UK: Zap-Map](#)

Please follow this link for more information on Camden's Electric Vehicle infrastructure -

[Electric vehicles - Camden Council](#)

5. Data regarding parking fine appeals have been accepted and rejected in the year 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Please follow the link - [Annual reports and appeal statistics | London Tribunals](#)

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden Council.

Example 3

Request received 28/11/22

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000/ Freedom of Information Act (Scotland) 2002.

Please provide the following:

(i) A list of companies in which the fund directly holds shares, and the market value of each holding.

(ii) A list of the various funds, trackers, pools and CIVs in which the pension fund invests - both the name of each fund, and the manager who deals with it on the funds' behalf?

(iii) A list of companies invested in by the funds, trackers, pools and CIVs you hold funds in, providing the market value of each underlying investment. Understanding that shares held indirectly fluctuate frequently, simply the latest information you already have on this will be fine.

(iv) total value of the fund's investment portfolio.

I trust that the full implications of the Freedom of Information Act will be considered in assessing this request. Many thanks for your time.

Response – sent 28/11/22

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response.

The information you have requested is already published on our Open Data Portal, Open Data Camden <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/browse>

All the information is filterable and downloadable using the on-screen tools.

The link to the exact data set is as follows -

<https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/Your-Council/London-Borough-of-Camden-Pension-Fund-Alternative-/ukra-5u2p/data>

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden council.

Example 4

Request received 23/11/22

I would like to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

1. (a) How many residential properties does the council currently own?

(b) What is the total value (or estimated value) of these properties?

2. (a) How many residential properties does the council own which are currently vacant/ empty?

(b) What is the total value (or estimated value) of these properties?

3. (a) How many residential properties does the council own which have been vacant/ empty for more than six months?

(b) What is the total value (or estimated value) of these properties?

4. Please provide a list of all residential properties that the council currently owns which have been vacant/ empty for more than six months. For each property, please state: (i) the full address; (ii) the number of bedrooms; (iii) the amount paid for the property at time of purchase; (iv) the current estimated value, if known.

NB: if it is not possible to provide all of the information requested, please provide as much of it as possible.

Response - sent 24/11/22

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response.

Regarding question 1, you can find this information on our Open Data Portal at [Housing Stock datasets](#)

All the information is filterable and downloadable using the on-screen tools.

Regarding empty residential properties these are not published as per our [FOI FAQs](#)

Please follow the link for contact details for the [Empty Homes Team](#)

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden Council.

Example 5

Request received 18/11/22

I am writing on Friday 18 November to make an open request for information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. In order to assist you with this request, I am outlining my query as specifically as possible. If you feel this request is too wide or unclear, I would be grateful if you could contact me, as I understand that under the Act you are required to advise and assist requesters.

If any of the information is already in the public domain, please can you direct me to it, with page references and URLs if necessary.

My questions are as follows:

1. Please inform me how many fixed speed cameras your authority is responsible for. If possible, please break this down by device type (EG Gatso, Truvelo, HADECS).
2. Please inform me how many average speed cameras your authority is responsible for. If possible, please break this down by device type (EG SPECS, VECTOR, Siemens).
3. Please inform me of the total financial cost to your authority of maintaining and calibrating the fixed speed cameras your authority is responsible for from 2018 to present. Please break this down by calendar or financial year. If possible, please also break this down by device type.
4. Please inform me of the total financial cost to your authority of maintaining and calibrating the average speed cameras your authority is responsible for from 2018 to present. Please break this down by calendar or financial year. If possible, please also break this down by device type.
5. If possible, please inform me how many speeding tickets were issued by the fixed cameras your authority is responsible for from 2018 to present. Please break this down by calendar or financial year, and by device type if possible.
6. If possible, please inform me how many speeding tickets were issued by average cameras your authority is responsible for from 2018 to present.

Please break this down by calendar or financial year, and by device type if possible.

If it is not possible to obtain the level of granularity outlined above, please simply tell me a) how many speed cameras your authority is responsible for in total, and b) how much financial cost these cameras incurred for maintenance and calibration from 2018-present, broken down by year.

Response – sent 18/11/22

Thank you for your request. We are dealing with this as a routine request rather than formally as a Freedom of Information Act request so we can provide you with a faster and less formal response.

Speed cameras are operated by TfL (Transport for London). The Council is not responsible for them and doesn't hold any information on them.

<https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/transparency/freedom-of-information>

This doesn't remove or affect your rights under the Freedom of Information Act. So, if you're unhappy with this reply for any reason please let us know at foi@camden.gov.uk. We will then have a look formally under the Act and send you a formal reply within 20 working days of your original email

Thank you for your interest in Camden council.