

Background

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), further the aim of greater openness in the public sector, enabling members of the public to better understand the decisions of public authorities, and ensuring that services provided by the public sector are seen to be efficiently and properly delivered.

By conforming to the FOIA Section 45 Code of Practice the Executive Office is able to discharge its functions under Part 1 of the FOIA through:

- facilitating the disclosure of information under the FOIA by setting out good administrative practice for handling requests for information;
- protecting the access to information interests of applicants by providing advice and assistance; and having effective means of complaining about decisions taken under the FOIA;
- facilitating consideration of the interests of third parties, who may be affected by any decision to disclose information, by setting standards for consultation; and
- promoting consideration of the implications for Freedom of Information before agreeing to confidentiality provisions in contracts and accepting information in confidence from a third party more generally.

The Information Commissioner has a duty under section 47 of FOIA to promote the following of good practice by public authorities and, in particular, to promote observance of the requirements of FOIA and of the provisions of the Code of Practice. The FOIA confers a number of powers to enable the Information Commissioner to carry out that duty specifically in relation to the Code such as practice recommendations (Section 48), decision notices (Section 50), and enforcement notices (Section 52).

This annual report presents a summary of FOIA statistics for the Executive Office on the following matters:

- Requests for information received
- Request handling - Timeliness of responses
- Requests for Internal reviews received
- Internal reviews handling - Timeliness of responses

For further information regarding the legislation please see the links below:

- Full text of the FOI Act:
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents
- Full text of the EIR regulations:
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3391/made

Contacts

The Access to Information Team within the Information Management and Central Advisory Branch in TEO can be contacted:

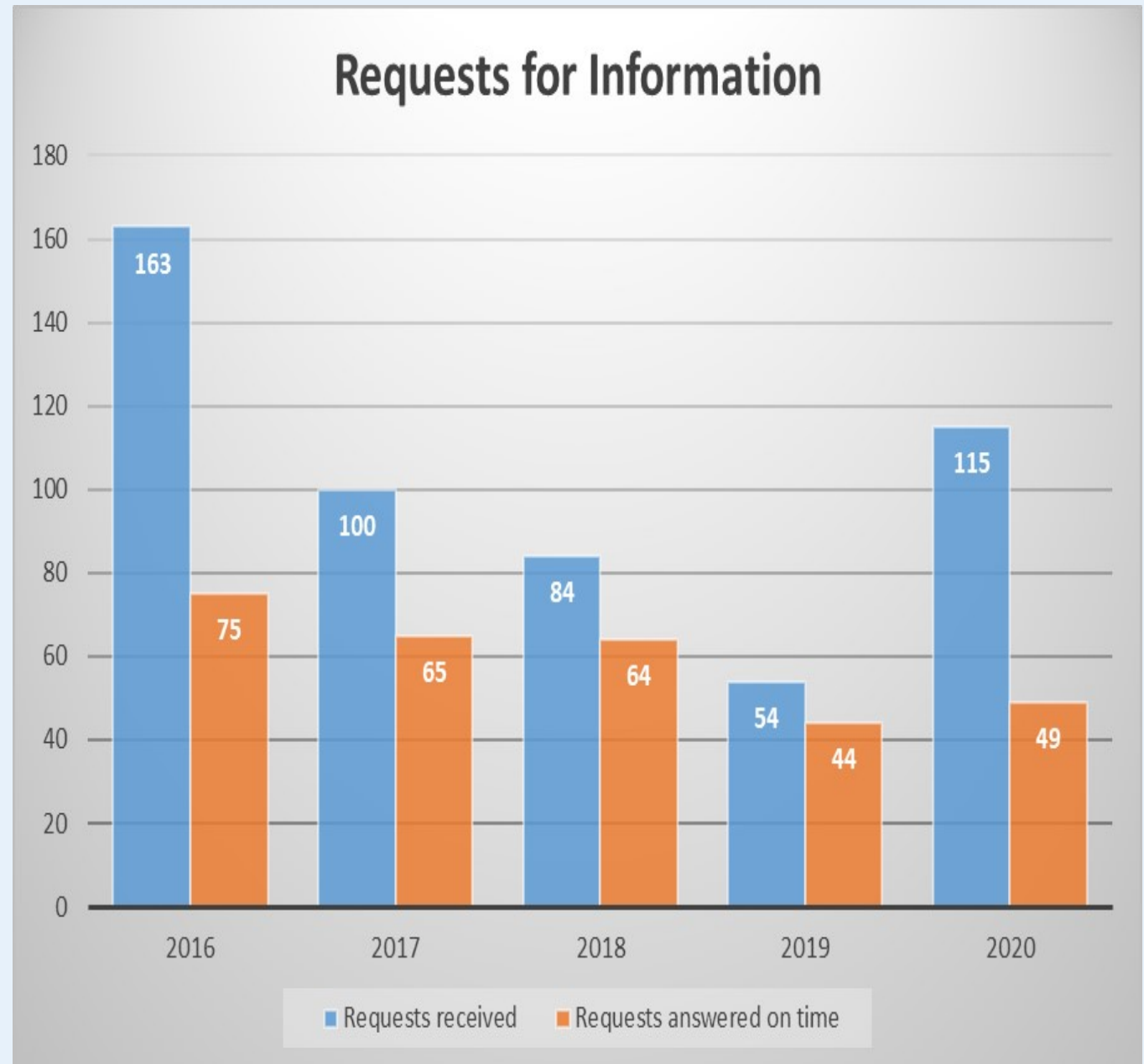
- ⇒ by email to: foi@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk
- ⇒ in writing to: Information Management and Central Advisory Branch
Room A5.18, Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast, BT4 3SR
- ⇒ by telephone to: 028 9052 2046

Key Statistics

- There were 115 requests for information received in 2020; this is an increase of 61 (113 percentage points) on 2019.
- A total of 49 requests (43 percentage points) were processed on time.

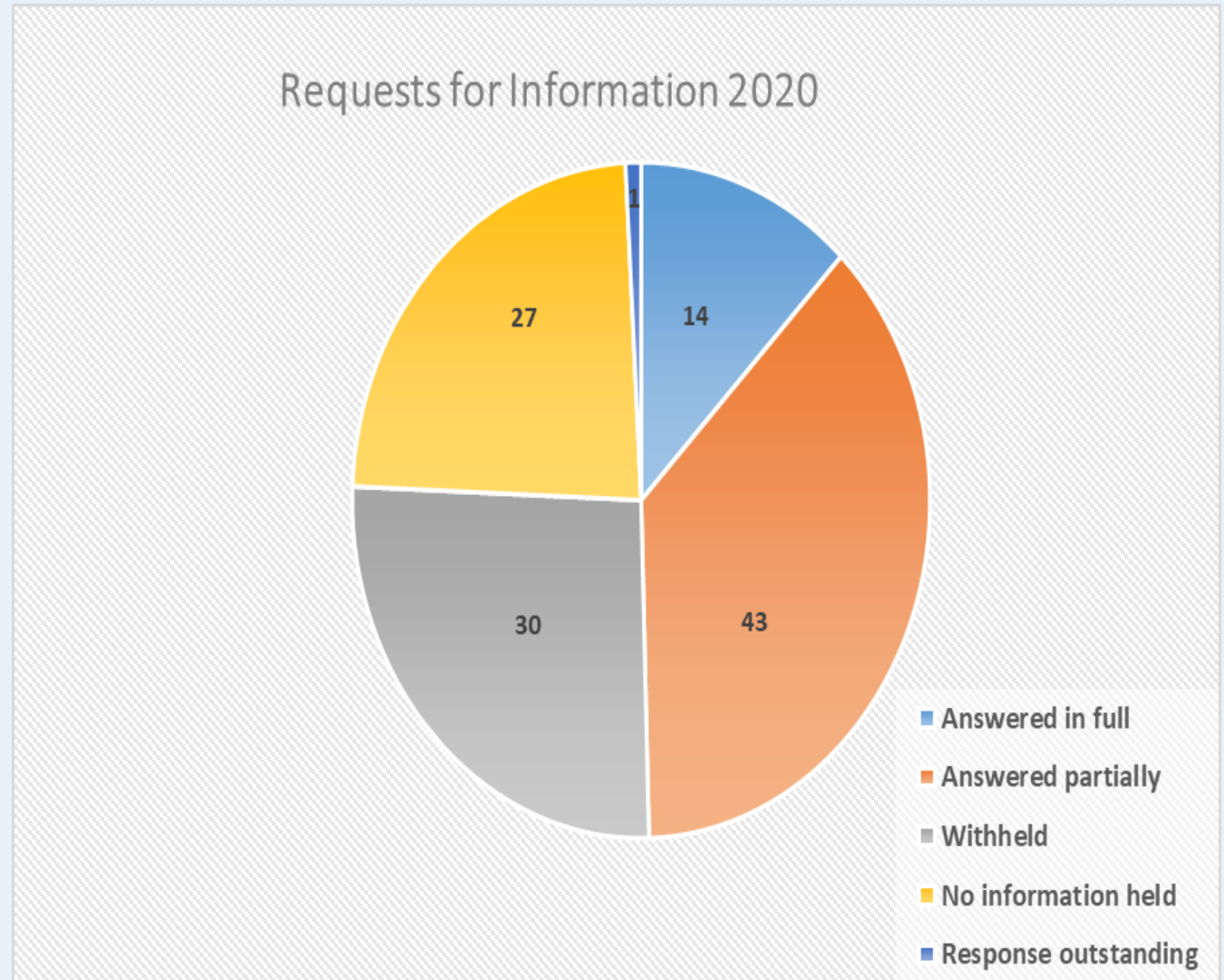
An additional 62 requests for information were responded to under normal course of business as provided for under paragraph 14 of the ICO Section 45 Code of Practice; paragraph 8 of the ICO FOIA Section 8 guidance; and the ICO Guide to Freedom of Information. This is an increase of 25 (68 percentage points) on 2019.

Furthermore, in support of the principles of freedom of information, during 2020 the Executive Office released 53 historical files with terminal dates of 1997 to the public through the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.



Key Statistics

- ⇒ 57 (50 percentage points) of the requests for information received were answered either in full or partially during 2020.
- ⇒ 30 (26 percentage points) of the requests for information received were refused on the grounds that the information sought was exempt under Part 2 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and the public interest favoured non-disclosure.
- ⇒ The Department did not hold any information in regard to 27 (23 percentage points) of the requests for information.



In the event that a requestor is dissatisfied with the department's response to a request for information, they can request the department to carry out an internal review.

The internal review involves a fresh and thorough examination of the initial decision, where possible by a person other than the original decision maker; and a response should issue within the 20 working days stipulated by the Information Commissioner.

Key Statistics

- There were 11 requests for an internal review received in 2020; an increase of three from the previous year.

