



Glasgow City Council

Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

Item 5

16th September 2026

Report by Director of Legal and Administration and the Chief Officer, City Health and Social Care Partnership

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ICO Audit

Purpose of Report:

This report updates Committee regarding the Council's handling of subject access requests under data protection legislation following the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) audit of this and subsequent ongoing investigation.

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the background to the ICO audit taking place;
- Note the progress which has been made in addressing the backlog of subject access requests (SARs); and
- Instruct officers to bring a further update to committee in six months.

Ward No(s):

Citywide: ✓

Local member(s) advised: Yes ☐ No ☐ consulted: Yes ☐ No ☐

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On [21 May 2025](#), continued to [18 June 2025](#), Committee were advised as to the circumstances which led to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) carrying out an audit of the Council's handling of subject access requests under data protection legislation, together with a summary of the findings of the audit and the steps being taken by the Council to address these findings. A previous update on this issue was submitted to the meeting on [25 February 2026](#).
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the matters considered by this Committee on 21 May and 18 June 2025 and 25 February 2026.

2. Background

- 2.1 Committee will recall that the Council, like all organisations which process personal data, has obligations to respond to requests from individuals whose data we process, known as a "subject access requests" or SARs. Subject to certain exemptions, the Council must comply with any such request within one month of the request being validated; this period can be extended to three months for complex or voluminous requests.
- 2.2 Council and HSCP officers recognise the importance of addressing the SARs backlog as quickly as possible due to the impact delays have on those requesting information, in particular those seeking information as part of the Redress Scheme.
- 2.3 As noted previously, a number of factors have resulted in the Council having to deal with around seven times as many data SARs as we did previously – we received 377 requests in 2017, compared to 2,031 in 2025. Committee were advised in May 2025 that officers estimated that we would receive a total of 1,740 requests for the full year, and that the actual figure of 2,031 was significantly higher than this estimate and around 5½ times the 2017 level. This trend of increasing demand has continued, and in the 12 months to 31 August 2026, the Council received a total of 2,771 SARs, which is more than seven times the baseline level from 2017. The increase continues to be almost entirely in connection with requests for social work files which are dealt with by the Complaints and Freedom of Information Team (CFIT) within the HSCP. The significant backlog of cases which has built up since 2020 was standing at 527 overdue requests awaiting responses as of 6 June 2025 and 662 cases as of 18 February 2026. At time of writing (4 September 2026), the backlog stands at 607.
- 2.4 The ICO issued (and published) a formal Reprimand in relation to the Council's failure meet its statutory duties on 26 February 2025; this can be seen at <https://ico.org.uk/action-weve-taken/enforcement/glasgow-city-council/>. Publication of this was accompanied by a press release which can be seen at <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2025/02/action-taken-to-improve-access-to-personal-information-from-local-authorities-across-scotland/>. The compulsory audit which the ICO carried out in December 2024 was also published (in summary form) by the ICO on 12 March 2025 at

<https://ico.org.uk/action-weve-taken/audits-and-overview-reports/2025/03/glasgow-city-council/> .

3 ICO Audit findings

- 3.1 The full version of the ICO Audit Report was included in the papers for the meeting of this Committee on 18 June 2025 and can be seen [here](#).
- 3.2 The audit report contained eight recommendations. Seven of these are fully completed. One recommendation is still in progress. The final outstanding audit recommendation is a general catch-all which reads as follows:

“GCC have a statutory responsibility to respond to all SAR requests within one calendar month and must implement all reasonable technical and organisational measures that would ensure they can meet their obligations.”

The next section of this report sets out what steps the council is taking to address this recommendation.

4 Council action to address the backlog and next steps

- 4.1 The commitment to reduce the backlog as quickly as possible requires management to estimate the potential future numbers of SARs that may be received, the complexity of those SARs, and the resources required to process these.
- 4.2 Clearly, it is not possible to control the numbers of SARs that are received each month, but an estimate was produced in June 2025 of around 100 per month / 1200 per year to be received by the HSCP alone. As noted at paragraph 2.3 above, this equated to 1,740 requests for the full year, with the actual figure being 2,031. Modelling was then undertaken to identify the additional investment required in the size of the SARs processing team in HSCP with a view to clearing the backlog by 31 March 2027. Thereafter, the intention was that the HSCP would be in a position to respond to SARs within the one month statutory timescale, with only exceptional cases requiring longer but all cases resolved within the maximum three-month timescale (the legislation allows controllers such as the Council to extend the compliance period to three months for complex requests).
- 4.3 The HSCP has expanded the team responsible for processing SARs significantly with a view to meet the significant increase in demand. Four additional staff were appointed in 2023. A further ten staff were recruited between August and February 2026 on 18-month contracts, another post vacated in December 2025 was backfilled in April 2026, and two further staff members joined the team in August 2026. Prior to 2023, the team consisted of 8 FTE and now consists of 24 FTE, with all new posts involved in either processing, or supporting the processing of, Subject Access Requests.

- 4.4 Funding was not provided for these additional posts, therefore the HSCP has had to fund these temporarily in a challenging broader financial climate – the IJB is reporting a £2.1m overspend position up to the end of July 2026, and the IJB Medium Term Financial outlook is projecting a £40m budget gap in 2027/28. The 2026/27 budget included savings of £33m, which are being progressed.
- 4.5 The HSCP also funded a new software solution providing AI-supported redaction capability with the intention of increasing the efficiency of SAR processing. Unfortunately, the test of change failed to demonstrate the efficiency savings we were hoping for in this area, and the test will not be extended. The modelling undertaken in June 2025 incorporated projected efficiencies from this software, and the lack of actual efficiency savings has contributed in part to the slower than anticipated reduction in the backlog. Work is however continuing (including engaging with Microsoft and Microsoft delivery partners) around maximising use of Copilot (Microsoft's AI tool) to ascertain whether efficiency savings can be generated through use of this tool.
- 4.6 As reported previously, targets were set to clear sixty cases more each month than were received based on an expectation at that time that around 100 cases would be received each month. Demand continued to rise and in February the revised target was to clear 72 cases more than received each month, assuming 150 new cases each month. The current pattern is that over the past twelve months, we have received an average of 231 new SARs each month.
- 4.7 One factor in this increase in new SARs, also reported to Committee in February, is a notable spike in requests from a number of law firms from England. We have engaged with these firms in an effort to reduce unnecessary SARs being submitted, e.g. where their client has no connection with Glasgow and we do not hold any information – but we still need to undertake extensive searches to conclude that we do not hold anything – or where their client is seeking a payment from the Scottish Government Redress Scheme. Redress Scheme applications can now proceed without the requirement for a SAR. We have been in touch with Redress Scotland regarding this, and we understand that Redress Scotland have also engaged with these firms, but to date this has not resulted in any marked decrease in the number of new requests being submitted.
- 4.8 The impact of the new staffing resources described in paragraph 4.3 above is evidenced by a significant upturn in the amount of information being processed and cleared, as per data provided in Appendix 1. However, this increased activity has been almost entirely offset by the continuing increase in levels of new requests, with the net result that the backlog is broadly the same as it was when last reported in February.
- 4.9 The table below shows the increase in activity, and also the increase in new SARs for the Council as a whole. This shows that despite a significant increase in the numbers of cases closed, the corresponding increase in SARs received has prevented HSCP reducing the backlog until recently, but that the current backlog is now reducing. Members should note that the “current backlog” refers to cases which have gone beyond their statutory timescale (which is generally

three months for requests for social work files, one month for most other requests); there is therefore no direct correlation between SARs received in a given month, cases closed, and the movement in the backlog.

Month	New SARs received	Total cases closed	Current backlog
Feb-25	140	103	480
Mar-25	133	125	465
Apr-25	142	161	505
May-25	150	126	525
Jun-25	143	122	546
Jul-25	210	144	567
Aug-25	144	100	599
Sep-25	171	146	637
Oct-25	163	320	663
Nov-25	218	198	685
Dec-25	257	192	715
Jan-26	212	276	701
Feb-26	184	273	649
Mar-26	260	263	631
Apr-26	266	249	624
May-26	224	218	598
Jun-26	332	266	587
Jul-26	240	291	599
Aug-26	244	212	607

- 4.10 The average number of pages processed by the CFIT team in the HSCP prior to August 2025 was 23,111, however from September 2025 to January 2026 that increased to 36,748 (59% increase); the average number of pages processed by the team has significantly surpassed this in the period February 2026 to August 2026, and the team now process on average 63,147 pages per month (a further 72% increase). The average number of cases cleared per month was 60 prior to August 2025, however from September 2025 to January 2026 that increased to 165 (175% increase) and from February 2026 to August 2026 increased again to 188 (14% increase).
- 4.11 For the most recent completed month, the team cleared 148 cases, with the total number of pages processed being 43,753, however this is a drop from the two previous months where the team cleared over 80,000 pages in both June and July, two consecutive months where the team recorded their most productive month since recording in this way began.
- 4.12 CFIT staff undertake regular process review activity to identify and implement efficiencies, in order to maximise the productivity of the team. The team also

undertake regular calibration sessions to ensure consistency of approach across the group.

- 4.13 Following discussions with the ICO team, a decision was taken in October 2025 to focus the majority of the additional resource on clearing the oldest cases in the backlog, with some additional resource deployed on addressing incoming current cases that could be quickly resolved to prevent the backlog growing excessively. This has been largely effective with those dating more than 24 months reducing from 28 in August 2025 to zero cases in January 2026, and with only 4 cases older than 18 months outstanding in February. There has been further success in this regard, and there are now no cases at more than 15 months, and only 10 at more than 12 months. It should be noted that many of the older cases are due to the need to correspond with the requestor to clarify additional details as our investigators uncover more information (e.g. details of siblings who may have pertinent information in their files on the data subject). The statistics quoted are based on a start date from when the very first correspondence request was received.
- 4.14 In addition to understanding the impact of the position on service users, it is also important to recognise the physical and emotional impact of the ongoing commitment to clearing the backlog of SAR cases. Training was arranged with the Scottish Association for Mental Health to ensure staff are equipped to protect their mental health while processing large volumes of what is often distressing material and absence rates in the team remain low.
- 4.15 Subject Access Officers are being tasked with clearing the longest-standing SARs as a priority, however additional work is also being undertaken to address urgent requests and to identify and clear minor requests at the earliest possible opportunity to avoid new requests adding to the backlog where these can be resolved quickly.
- 4.16 A commitment was made that the backlog could be reduced to zero by March 2027. This commitment was made based on projections in relation to the number of cases expected, investment in and successful recruitment of staff and expected efficiencies from the AI redaction software. Whilst the recruitment has been successful, demand has surpassed expectations and the software has not reached the level of efficiencies envisaged. It therefore needs to be recognised that there remains a significant risk around achieving the 31 March 2027 target date. Management will continue to monitor progress closely in relation to targets to identify if this position changes.
- 4.17 As previously advised, ICO staff indicated that monitoring of the Council's compliance with statutory timescales, and the extent of the SAR backlog, would continue to be monitored. It was also made clear that if there is not a significant improvement, then further regulatory action would be taken.
- 4.18 Following submission of our last quarterly monitoring report to the ICO (covering performance to the end of June 2026), the ICO clarified that in addition to assessing the size of the backlog, any decisions on future regulatory action would take into account the Council's compliance with the ICO's "[Better](#)

[Records Together](#)” initiative, a campaign calling for improvement in how records are handled, with new resources including the ICO’s Better Records Together standards, based on research with people with experience in care and the organisations who handle care records.

- 4.19 The ICO’s Care Records Standards (part of Better Records Together) contains 60 different standards which organisations creating and managing records relating to people in care should (or must) comply with. These standards cover aspects such as providing age-appropriate information explaining data use, rights and how to exercise rights, training frontline staff on data protection rights and access rights, and providing information in a range of accessible formats, as well as more basic records keeping requirements such as storing records securely, protecting them from damage and keeping information accurate and up-to-date. Standards are split into “must” (i.e. this is a legal obligation), “should” (i.e. doing this is good practice) and “could” (i.e. this is an optional are for consideration).
- 4.20 HSCP staff have been compiling a matrix demonstrating which of these standards we are complying with, and how well. The summary table for this is set out below:

ICO Care Records Standards: RAG Summary					
Standard Level	Total	Green	Amber	Red	Completion %
Must	17	16	0	1	94.1%
Should	19	14	4	0	73.7%
Could	24	11	9	2	45.8%

RAG definitions	
Green	Requirement fully implemented and evidenced
Amber	Partially implemented, inconsistent, or evidence incomplete
Red	Not implemented or significant gaps identified
N/A	Not applicable; record the rationale in comments

- 4.21 Officers will bring a further update report on progress with dealing with this issue in six months’ time.

5. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial:

There are no direct financial implications from this report for the Council. However if the ICO remain dissatisfied with the Council’s progress in reducing the backlogs of SARs, they may issue a financial penalty notice under section 155 of the Data Protection Act 2018. The costs

of the steps already taken described above came from the HSCP budget and were previously reported to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee of the IJB.

Legal: The Next Steps section above sets out the ways in which the Council is seeking to better comply with its obligations under the UK GDPR

Personnel: None directly arising from this report; as noted above, the Health and Social Care Partnership have recruited additional temporary staff to assist in tackling the backlog.

Procurement: There are no direct procurement issues arising from this report.

Council Strategic Plan: This work directly supports Grand Challenge 4 of the Strategic Plan, to enable staff to deliver essential services sustainably, innovatively, and efficiently.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25 n/a.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report? None.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage. Reducing the time it takes to process SARs will assist claimants for the Scottish Government Redress Scheme in being able to make and validate their claims sooner.

Climate impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify: n/a

What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal? n/a.

Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target? No.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts: The steps described in the report will allow the Council to better give effect to individuals' rights under data protection legislation.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Committee is asked to:

- Note the background to the ICO audit taking place;
- Note the progress which has been made in addressing the backlog of subject access requests (SARs); and
- Instruct officers to bring a further update to committee in six months.