

Scottish Information Commissioner

Monitoring Model Publication Schemes 2017/18

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background	1
	Approach and sampling	1
2	THE PUBLICATION SCHEME AND GUIDE TO INFORMATION.....	3
	Availability online.....	3
	Accessing the Guide.....	4
	Timeliness, formats and enquiries	7
	Charging	9
3	CLASSES OF INFORMATION: PROCUREMENT	10
	Availability online.....	10
	Accessing procurement information	11
	Timeliness, alternative formats.....	13
4	CLASSES OF INFORMATION: DECISION MAKING	15
	Availability online.....	15
	Accessing information on decision making	17
	Timeliness, alternative formats.....	19
5	ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE.....	21
	Response to email queries	21
	Response to telephone enquiries.....	22

KEY FINDINGS

The Guide to Information



77% easy to access the Guide to Information

94% provide the Guide online – most within 3 clicks from their homepage

93% offer information via the Guide in alternative formats

Classes of Information: Procurement



82% provide some procurement information

62% provide both types of procurement information accessed

51% easy to access procurement information

39% easy to access tendered contracts

Classes of Information: Decisions



90% provide some decision-making information

79% provide all three types of decision information assessed

75% easy to access decision information

83% provide information for the most recent year

Advice and Assistance



18 of 20 email enquiries received a response

16 responses fully resolved the enquiry



13 of 14 telephone calls answered

11 of 13 answered calls resolved the enquiry

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This report sets out key findings from the third audit exercise commissioned by the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) to monitor Scottish public authorities' implementation of the model publication scheme.
- 1.2 SIC is a public official responsible for enforcing and promoting Scotland's freedom of information (FOI) laws. This includes promotion of FOI laws to the public and other users, and supporting best practice amongst Scottish public authorities. A key aspect of SIC's work with public authorities has been the production of a model publication scheme to support authorities in meeting their statutory obligations under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA). The 'publication scheme' duty in FOISA requires Scottish public authorities to publish information proactively. Correct application of the SIC's Model Publication Scheme by an authority ensures that these statutory obligations are met.
- 1.3 The study assessed how well whether authorities are meeting their statutory publication duties by examining whether and what they are publishing through their Guide to Information, a central element of the model publication scheme. The audit built on similar exercises undertaken in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Approach and sampling

- 1.4 The core elements of the study were conducted during March and April 2018 and comprised:
 - i. A web-based audit of publication scheme compliance by 71 public authorities. This exercise assessed the accessibility of each authority's Guide to Information, the timeliness of data provided through the Guide, information on any charges for information, and publication of two classes of information (procurement and decision making); and
 - ii. Follow-up telephone or email contact with 34 of these 71 authorities. This exercise assessed authorities' provision of advice or assistance to members of the public seeking information made available through the publication scheme.
- 1.5 Together, these two strands of the study sought to provide a rounded picture of public authorities' implementation of the model publication scheme.

- 1.6 The selection of public authorities for inclusion in the study was a key element in ensuring this rounded picture. A total of 71 authorities were selected from the c300 public authorities and publicly-owned companies which contribute data to the SIC's statistics portal. The sample selection sought to include a mix of authorities in terms of sectors and level of FOISA activity - selection of authorities was random within these strata, consistent with the approach to previous audits. This meant that all authorities within each sector had an equal chance of inclusion, irrespective of whether the authority was included in the previous audit.
- 1.7 Figure 1 below provides an overview of the authorities included in the study.

Figure 1: Profile of authorities included in the audit

Sector	Main web audit	Additional email & telephone contact
ALL AUTHORITIES	71	34
Central Government	4	1
Educational Institutions	10	5
Local Government	18	8
National Health Service	11	6
NDPBs	13	7
Other	13	6
Police Service of Scotland	1	1
Scottish Parliament	1	

2 THE PUBLICATION SCHEME AND GUIDE TO INFORMATION

- 2.1 The first section of the audit considered access to authorities' Guide to Information. This included an assessment of the availability of the Guide to Information, ease of access, timeliness of the Guide, offer of information in alternative formats, and provision of contact details to handle queries regarding the Guide to Information.

Key Findings: Guide to Information

The Guide to Information for a large majority of authorities (55 of 71) is easy to access, similar to previous audit results. The small number of authorities where the Guide is difficult to access includes two local government authorities and an NDPB.

The great majority of the authorities make their Guide to Information available online (67 of 71), and most can be accessed without using the search function. The Guide can be accessed within 3 clicks for the majority of authorities (52 of 71), similar to previous audit findings.

Nearly all authorities providing the Guide to Information online offer information in alternative formats (66 of 67).

Availability online

- 2.2 The great majority of the authorities included in the audit make their Guide to Information available online; 67 of 71 authorities did this (94%), identical to findings from the 2016/17 and 2015/16 audits. As shown at Figure 2 over the page, four 'other' authorities did not make their Guide to Information available online at the time of the audit.
- 2.3 The majority of Guides to Information are made available as downloadable documents (49 authorities provide their Guide in this way), with the remainder presented as a webpage or webpages to browse (18 authorities). As noted later in relation to specific classes of information, most Guides include direct links to available information; 57 authorities include links to at least some classes of information. This includes those presented as a document or a webpage.

Figure 2: Guide to Information available online?

Sector	Yes	No	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	67	4	71
	94%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	94%	6%	
2015/16 benchmark	94%	6%	
Central Government	4		4
Educational Institutions	10		10
Local Government	18		18
National Health Service	11		11
NDPBs	13		13
Other	9	4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1		1
Scottish Parliament	1		1

Accessing the Guide

- 2.4 The audit sought to gauge the experience that members of the public are likely to have in accessing the Guide to Information for each authority. This included identifying potential barriers to access, such as whether there is a clear link to the Publication Scheme from the authority's homepage and the number of clicks required to get to the Guide.
- 2.5 The Publication Scheme and/or Guide to Information can be navigated from the homepage for most authorities (61 of 71, 86%). The remaining 10 authorities includes 4 who do not provide a copy of the Guide to Information online, and 6 for whom the website's search function is required to access the Guide. This is a slightly more positive finding than the 2016/17 audit, and represents a 12 percentage point increase from 2015/16 which found that 74% of authorities provided a link from their homepage.
- 2.6 The audit found some variation across sectors. In particular, users are most likely to be required to use search to access the Guide to Information for central government, educational, and National Health Service authorities. However, it is notable that across all sectors, the majority of authorities included a link to their Guide to Information.

Figure 3: Guide to Information linked from homepage?

Sector	Linked	Search required	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	61	6	4	71
	86%	8%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	80%	14%	6%	
2015/16 benchmark	74%	20%	6%	
Central Government	3	1		4
Educational Institutions	8	2		10
Local Government	17	1		18
National Health Service	9	2		11
NDPBs	13			13
Other	9		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

- 2.7 These findings suggest that members of the public are likely to be able to access the Guide to Information with relative ease for the majority of authorities. However, as was found in previous audits, variations in terminology and website structure still have the potential to create barriers for those navigating websites. Around half of authorities providing a link from their homepage use terminology which is likely to be associated with the Guide - such as 'Freedom of Information' or 'Access to Information'. However, others require users to click through links which are less obviously linked to access to information such as 'about us', 'corporate', 'resources' and 'A-Z services'. There is also variation in placement of these links, including some within a drop-down menu which is not apparent until the user hovers over the relevant subheading.
- 2.8 Audit findings are broadly positive on the effort required by members of the public to access the Guide to Information.
- 2.9 The Guide can be accessed within 3 clicks for the majority of all authorities (52 of 71, 73%), and for half of authorities it can be accessed with 1 or 2 clicks. This is similar to previous audit findings, which showed that the Guide could be accessed within 3 clicks for 47-56 authorities. There remain 19 of the 71 authorities where more significant effort is required (4 clicks or more), or where the Guide is not provided online. This includes four local government, four NDPBs, three NHS authorities, and six 'other' authorities.

Figure 4: Number of clicks from homepage to access Guide to Information

Sector	1/2 clicks	3 clicks	4+ clicks	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	35	17	15	4	71
	49%	24%	21%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	46%	21%	27%	6%	
2015/16 benchmark	56%	24%	14%	6%	
Central Government	1	2	1		4
Educational Institutions	8	1	1		10
Local Government	9	5	4		18
National Health Service	5	3	3		11
NDPBs	8	1	4		13
Other	4	3	2	4	13
Police Service of Scotland		1			1
Scottish Parliament		1			1

- 2.10 The audit also sought to provide an overall measure of how easy members of the public are likely to find it to access the Guide to Information for each authority. While this necessarily involves a qualitative judgement, the ratings summarised at Figure 5 below also take account of factors such as whether the Guide is linked from the homepage, the clarity of terminology used, and the number of clicks required to access the Guide.
- 2.11 Overall, the Guide to Information is rated as easy to access for a large majority of authorities (55 of 71, 77%) - broadly similar to previous audit results. The small number of authorities where the Guide to Information is rated as difficult to access include two local government authorities and an NDPB.

Figure 5: Ease of accessing Guide to Information

Sector	Easy	Neither	Difficult	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	55	9	3	4	71
	77%	13%	4%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	83%	3%	9%	6%	
2015/16 benchmark	80%	4%	10%	6%	
Central Government	3	1			4
Educational Institutions	7	3			10
Local Government	15	1	2		18
National Health Service	9	2			11
NDPBs	11	1	1		13
Other	8	1		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Scottish Parliament	1				1

Timeliness, formats and enquiries

- 2.12 In addition to ease of access, the audit also sought to assess the timeliness of the Guide to Information, and the likely experience of members of the public seeking to access information in alternative formats or raising other enquiries regarding the Guide.
- 2.13 Most authorities do not provide information on when their Guide to Information was last updated; only 25 of 71 authorities do so (35%), although this represents an improvement on the 2016/17 audit (16% provided this information). These authorities are evenly divided between those where the Guide has been updated since the last revision to the Model Publication Scheme in June 2017 (13 authorities) and those last updated prior to June 2017 (12 authorities).

Figure 6: When was Guide to Information last reviewed?

Sector	June 2017 or later	Prior to June 2017	Unknown	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	13	12	42	4	71
	18%	17%	59%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	16%		78%	6%	
Central Government		3	1		4
Educational Institutions		2	8		10
Local Government	6	2	10		18
National Health Service	2	3	6		11
NDPBs	2	1	10		13
Other	2	1	6	4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Scottish Parliament			1		1

- 2.14 Nearly all authorities whose Guide to Information is available online include an offer of information in alternative formats (66 of 67). This is very similar to previous audit findings. The Guide published by one educational institution did not specifically include an offer of information in alternative formats.
- 2.15 The majority of Guides include a general statement adapted from the Model Publication Scheme, offering information via multiple routes. As a minimum these typically offer information online, in person or by post – although nearly half also offer other options such as email, telephone and other physical media such as CD-ROM or memory stick.

Figure 7: Guide to information offers alternative formats?

Sector	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	66	1	4	71
	93%	1%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	91%	3%	6%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	93%	1%	6%	100%
Central Government	4			4
Educational Institutions	9	1		10
Local Government	18			18
National Health Service	11			11
NDPBs	13			13
Other	9		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

- 2.16 All authorities providing their Guide to Information online include contact details for enquiries – very similar to previous audits which found that only 1 or 2 authorities did not provide contact information.
- 2.17 A large majority of those providing contact details (60 of 67) include all three of the contact options listed in the Model Publication Scheme (postal address, telephone number and email). This includes 18 authorities whose Guide also includes a named contact for enquiries.

Figure 8: Contact details provided for queries?

Sector	3+ options	1 or 2 options	No contact details	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	60	7	0	4	71
	85%	10%	0%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	86%	7%	1%	6%	
2015/16 benchmark	77%	16%	3%	4%	
Central Government	3	1			4
Educational Institutions	9	1			10
Local Government	17	1			18
National Health Service	11				11
NDPBs	11	2			13
Other	7	2		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Scottish Parliament	1				1

Charging

- 2.18 Finally, the audit assessed the extent to which authorities include details of any charges for providing information through the Publication Scheme. The SIC's guide to the Model Publication Scheme sets out what authorities can and cannot charge for in relation to supply of information through the Publication Scheme, and requires that the Guide to Information includes a charging schedule if the authority intends to charge.
- 2.19 Nearly all of those providing their Guide to Information online include some form of charging schedule (66 of 67 authorities), and most of these (60 authorities) include detail on how charges are calculated.
- 2.20 Most of these authorities provide a short statement on charging that is adapted from the Model Publication Scheme. These typically refer to charges for producing printed copies of information and postage of materials to members of the public, although most also refer to other costs such as provision of information via CD-ROM or memory stick. A small number include fixed charges for specific products offered by the authority, such as valuation rolls or register of electors for assessors.

Figure 9: Does Guide to Information provide charging information?

Charging schedule included?	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	66	1	4	71
	93%	1%	6%	100%
Central Government	4			4
Educational Institutions	9	1		10
Local Government	18			18
National Health Service	11			11
NDPBs	13			13
Other	9		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1
Explains how charges calculated?	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	60	7	4	71
	85%	10%	6%	100%
Central Government	4			4
Educational Institutions	9	1		10
Local Government	17	1		18
National Health Service	10	1		11
NDPBs	10	3		13
Other	9		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament		1		1

3 CLASSES OF INFORMATION: PROCUREMENT

- 3.1 This section presents findings in relation to the first of two specific aspects of the Publication Scheme included in the audit: procurement information. This included an assessment of the availability of procurement information, ease of access, the timeliness of information provided, and the availability of information in alternative formats.
- 3.2 The SIC's Guide to the MPS sets out minimum requirements for the information that authorities are expected to publish under this class of information. This includes procurement policies and procedures, and a register of contracts awarded through formal tendering.

Key Findings: Procurement

Most authorities provide procurement policies and/or details of tendered contracts online, and more than half provide both - an improvement from the 2015/16 audit.

Procurement information is linked from the Guide to Information for more than half of authorities – also an improvement from 2015/16.

Procurement information is easy to access for around half of authorities, similar to 2015/16. Access is easiest for educational institutions and NDPBs.

Availability online

- 3.3 Most authorities provide their procurement policies and/or register of tendered contracts online; 58 of 71 authorities do so (82%), and more than half provide both (44 of 71, 62%). This represents an improvement since procurement information was last assessed by the 2015/16 audit; this found that 43% of authorities provided both forms of information. The 13 authorities who provide neither procurement policies nor a register of tendered contracts include three local government authorities, two NHS authorities, two NDPBs, and six 'other' authorities.
- 3.4 The audit also assessed how authorities provide information on tendered contracts. Most of the 49 authorities providing this information do so via a link to the Public Contracts Scotland or other tendering website. Thirty authorities use this approach, and 19 provide a register of contracts via their own website. All of those providing details of tendered contracts include the key information required under the MPS; the name of the supplier, period of contract, and contract value.

Figure 10: Procurement information available online?

Procurement policy etc	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	53	18	0	71
	75%	25%	0%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	64%	36%	-	
Central Government	3	1		4
Educational Institutions	10			10
Local Government	15	3		18
National Health Service	7	4		11
NDPBs	11	2		13
Other	5	8		13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1
Register of tendered contracts	Via own website	Via 3rd party website	No	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	19	30	22	71
	27%	42%	31%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	39%	13%	49%	
Central Government	2	1	1	4
Educational Institutions		10		10
Local Government	7	4	7	18
National Health Service	1	7	3	11
NDPBs	6	3	4	13
Other	2	4	7	13
Police Service of Scotland		1		1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

Accessing procurement information

- 3.5 As was the case in relation to the Guide to Information itself, the audit assessed a number of potential barriers to members of the public accessing procurement information.
- 3.6 A majority of all authorities include a link to procurement information from their Guide to Information (43 of 71, 61%), an improvement from the 2015/16 audit (50% provided a direct link). A number of these authorities manage this via a link to a third party website – for example, most of those providing details of tendered contracts online do so via a third party website. This is most commonly the Public Contracts Scotland (PCS) website, including some authorities who link directly to their PCS profile with details of tendered contracts, thus minimising the input required from members of the public.
- 3.7 There was some variation across sectors in these findings, with local government, NDPB and ‘other’ authorities less likely to provide a link to procurement information.

Figure 11: Procurement information – web link from Guide to Information?

Sector	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	43	24	4	71
	61%	34%	6%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	50%	44%	6%	
Central Government	2	2		4
Educational Institutions	7	3		10
Local Government	10	8		18
National Health Service	8	3		11
NDPBs	9	4		13
Other	5	4	4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

- 3.8 Variation in whether, and how, authorities link to procurement information from their Guide to Information is reflected in the effort required by members of the public to access procurement information.
- 3.9 Procurement information can be reached within 3 clicks for only around a third of all authorities (24 of 71, 34%), and for around half of authorities this requires more time and effort (34 of 71 require 4+ clicks, 48%). This includes some where links included in the Guide to Information were broken, and fairly significant time was required to access procurement information via the authorities' website. Information on tendered contracts typically requires more time and effort to access than procurement policies and procedures.

Figure 12: Procurement information – number of clicks from homepage

Sector	1/2 clicks	3 clicks	4+ clicks	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	2	22	34	13	71
	3%	31%	48%	18%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	6%	27%	30%	37%	
Central Government	1		3		4
Educational Institutions		7	3		10
Local Government		8	7	3	18
National Health Service		1	8	2	11
NDPBs	1	3	7	2	13
Other		3	4	6	13
Police Service of Scotland			1		1
Scottish Parliament			1		1

- 3.10 Overall, procurement information is rated as easy to access for around half of all authorities (36 of 71, 51%), very similar to findings of the 2015/16 audit. In terms of specific types of procurement information, there is no notable difference in ease of access – the smaller number of authorities for whom it is easy to access information on tendered contracts is primarily due to fewer authorities making this information available at all.
- 3.11 Ratings are most positive for educational institutions (most of whom link direct to their APUC profile for procurement information) and NDPBs, and less positive for NHS, local government and ‘other’ authorities. However, it should be noted that only 7 authorities are rated as making it difficult for members of the public to access procurement information.

Figure 13: Ease of accessing procurement information

Overall	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	36	15	7	13	71
	51%	21%	10%	18%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	49%	11%	7%	33%	
Central Government	2	0	2	0	4
Educational Institutions	7	2	1	0	10
Local Government	9	3	3	3	18
National Health Service	2	7	0	2	11
NDPBs	10	1	0	2	13
Other	4	2	1	6	13
Police Service of Scotland	1	0	0	0	1
Scottish Parliament	1	0	0	0	1
Procurement policy etc	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	34	13	6	18	71
	48%	18%	8%	25%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	51%	6%	7%	36%	
Register of tendered contracts	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	28	18	3	22	71
	39%	25%	4%	31%	100%
2015/16 benchmark	30%	10%	7%	53%	

Timeliness, alternative formats

- 3.12 Finally in relation to procurement information, the audit assessed the timeliness of the information available and the extent to which information is offered in alternative formats. The timeliness of procurement information relates primarily to information on tendered contracts; indeed, relatively few authorities include clear information on the most recent date of revision for procurement policies or procedures.

- 3.13 Audit findings are very positive on timeliness of information on tendered contracts. The great majority of authorities providing this information include information for the most recent 2017/18 financial year (44 of 48 authorities). The four authorities for whom information is not available for the most recent financial year include two NHS, a central government and an NDPB authority.

Figure 14: Timeliness of information on tendered contracts

Sector	2017/18	2016/17	Prior to 2016/17	N/A, Unknown	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	44	2	2	23	71
	62%	3%	3%	32%	100%
Central Government	2		1	1	4
Culture and Leisure Trusts	10				10
Educational Institutions	11			7	18
Local Government	8			3	11
National Health Service	6	2		5	13
NDPBs	5		1	7	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Publicly owned companies	1				1

- 3.14 Few authorities include specific reference to procurement information being available in other formats. However, nearly all (57 of the 58 authorities providing procurement information) include statements within their Guide on access to information in alternative formats.

4 CLASSES OF INFORMATION: DECISION MAKING

- 4.1 This section presents findings in relation to the second class of information considered by the audit: information on decision making. This included an assessment of the availability of information on decisions, the ease of accessing this information, and the timeliness of available information.
- 4.2 The SIC's Guide to the Model Publication Scheme lists decisions as a class of information authorities are expected to publish, and specifies the range of information expected as a minimum.

Key Findings: Decision Making

The great majority of authorities include reference to information on decision making in their Guide to Information (64 of 71).

More than 90% of authorities provide meeting minutes, agendas and/or strategies/plans online - more than three quarters provide all three.

Information on decision making is easy to access for most authorities (53 of 71). This includes all NHS authorities, Police Service and Scottish Parliament, and a large majority of NDPBs and educational authorities.

Availability online

- 4.3 The great majority of authorities include reference to information on decisions in their Guide to Information (64 of 71, 90% - identical to findings of the 2016/17 audit). Of the remaining seven authorities, four do not provide the Guide to Information online and three do so but do not include specific reference to information on decisions. These authorities include two local government and one central government authority.

Figure 15: Guide to information includes Class 3: Decisions?

Sector	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	64	3	4	71
	90%	4%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	90%	4%	6%	
Central Government	3	1		4
Educational Institutions	10			10
Local Government	16	2		18
National Health Service	11			11
NDPBs	13			13
Other	9		4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

- 4.4 In terms of specific types of information on decisions, the audit focused on (i) minutes of meetings, (ii) meeting agendas and associated reports, and (iii) strategies, plans and other documents that set out how the authority will operate.
- 4.5 The great majority of authorities provide at least one of these forms of information; 65 of 71 authorities (92%) provide one or more online, and more than three quarters provide all three (56 of 71, 79%). This represents an improvement since the 2016/17 audit, which found that a little more than half (54%) of authorities provide all three types of decision making information.
- 4.6 Authorities providing all three forms of information on decision making include all NHS authorities, Police Service and Scottish Parliament, and a large majority of local government and educational authorities. The six authorities for whom this information is not available online include five 'other' authorities and one local government authority.
- 4.7 In terms of specific types of information on decisions, the main points of note are:
- The great majority of authorities provide minutes of meetings online; 61 of 71 (86%), similar to the 2016/17 audit. However, 14% do not provide this information online.
 - More than three quarters provide access to meeting agendas and associated documents online; 56 of 71 (79%), an improvement on the 2016/17 audit (60%) although there remains 21% of authorities who do not provide this information online.
 - The great majority of authorities provide strategies, plans and other documents associated with how the authority operates; 65 of 71 (92%), an improvement on the 2016/17 audit (84%) although 8% of authorities do not provide this information online.

Figure 16: Information on decision making online?

Sector	All 3 types	1-2 types	Not provided	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	56	9	6	71
	79%	13%	8%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	54%	37%	9%	
Central Government	2	2		4
Educational Institutions	8	2		10
Local Government	17		1	18
National Health Service	11			11
NDPBs	10	3		13
Other	6	2	5	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

Minutes of meetings	Yes	No	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	61	10	71
	86%	14%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	84%	16%	
Agendas and/or associated documents	Yes	No	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	56	15	71
	79%	21%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	60%	40%	
Strategies and plans	Yes	No	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	65	6	71
	92%	8%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	84%	16%	

Accessing information on decision making

- 4.8 As was the case in relation to the Guide to Information and procurement information, the audit sought to identify potential barriers to members of the public accessing information on authorities' decision making.
- 4.9 The majority of all authorities include a link to information on decision making from their Guide to Information (48 of 71, 68%). This is broadly similar to findings of the 2016/17 audit, although the proportion of authorities including a link to decision information is somewhat smaller (74% in 2016/17).
- 4.10 This is a positive indicator of the ease with which members of the public are likely to be able to access information on authorities' decision making. However, as was found in relation to procurement information, how this information is linked to can have an impact on users' experience. For example, a number of authorities provide a link to their homepage or pages on how they make decisions, where additional navigation is required to access the specific type(s) of decision making information.
- 4.11 There was some variation across sectors in the extent to which authorities provide direct links to this information. The majority of NHS authorities, Police Service and Scottish Parliament do so. Educational institutions and 'other' authorities are less likely to include a link to decision information.

Figure 17: Information on decisions – web link from Guide to Information?

Sector	Yes	No	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	48	19	4	71
	68%	27%	6%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	74%	16%	10%	
Central Government	3	1		4
Educational Institutions	5	5		10
Local Government	13	5		18
National Health Service	10	1		11
NDPBs	10	3		13
Other	5	4	4	13
Police Service of Scotland	1			1
Scottish Parliament	1			1

- 4.12 Experience in relation to the time and effort required to access information on decision making was somewhat mixed. This information can be reached within 3 clicks for less than a third of all authorities (20 of 71, 28%), and for nearly two thirds this requires 4 clicks or more (45 of 71, 63%). This includes some where relatively time-consuming browsing of webpages is required.

Figure 18: Information on decisions – number of clicks from homepage

Sector	1/2	3	4+	N/A	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	3	17	45	6	71
	4%	24%	63%	8%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	19%	31%	39%	11%	
Central Government	1	1	2		4
Educational Institutions		4	6		10
Local Government		7	10	1	18
National Health Service	1	1	9		11
NDPBs	1	4	8		13
Other			8	5	13
Police Service of Scotland			1		1
Scottish Parliament			1		1

- 4.13 Overall, information on decision making is easy to access for three quarters of all authorities (53 of 71, 75%), very similar to the 2016/17 audit. However, as noted earlier (see paragraph 4.7) there remains a proportion of authorities who do not make one or more types of decision information available online. This profile of experience is broadly similar across specific types of information on decision making.

- 4.14 Decision making information is easy to access for all NHS authorities, Police Service and Scottish Parliament, and a large majority of NDPBs. Ratings are less positive for 'other' and local government authorities.

Figure 19: Ease of accessing information on decision making

Overall	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	53	11	1	6	71
	75%	15%	1%	8%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	76%	9%	10%	6%	
Central Government	3	1			4
Educational Institutions	9		1		10
Local Government	12	5		1	18
National Health Service	11				11
NDPBs	11	2			13
Other	5	3		5	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Scottish Parliament	1				1
Minutes of committee, board etc meetings	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	52	9	0	10	71
	73%	13%	0%	14%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	73%	1%	10%	16%	
Agendas and/or associated documents	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	47	9	0	15	71
	66%	13%	0%	21%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	49%	1%	10%	40%	
Strategies and plans	Very/Fairly easy	Neither/ Nor	Very/Fairly difficult	N/A	TOTAL
ALL AUTHORITIES	57	8	0	6	71
	80%	11%	0%	8%	100%
2016/17 benchmark	74%	0%	10%	16%	

Timeliness, alternative formats

- 4.15 Finally in relation to information on decision making, the audit assessed the timeliness of the information available and the extent to which information is offered in alternative formats.
- 4.16 Audit findings are very positive on timeliness of decision making information. For example, the great majority of authorities providing meeting minutes and/or agendas online include information for the most recent 2017/18 financial year (59 of 61). This is similar to, indeed is slightly more positive than, findings of the 2016/17 audit.

Figure 20: Timeliness of information on decision making

Meeting minutes: most recent data	2017/18	2016/17	Prior to 2016/17	Not provided	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	59	1	1	10	71
	83%	1%	1%	14%	100%
Central Government	3			1	4
Educational Institutions	9			1	10
Local Government	17			1	18
National Health Service	10		1		11
NDPBs	12	1			13
Other	6			7	13
Police Service of Scotland	1				1
Scottish Parliament	1				1
Agendas/documents: most recent data	2017/18	2016/17	Prior to 2016/17	N/A, Unknown	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	54	1	1	15	71
	76%	1%	1%	21%	100%
Central Government					
Educational Institutions	2			2	4
Local Government	8			2	10
National Health Service	17			1	18
NDPBs	10		1		11
Other	9	1		3	13
Police Service of Scotland	6			7	13
Scottish Parliament	1				1
Strategies/plans: most recent data	2017/18	2016/17	Prior to 2016/17	N/A, Unknown	ALL
ALL AUTHORITIES	57	7	1	6	71
	80%	10%	1%	8%	100%
Central Government					
Educational Institutions					
Local Government	3		1		4
National Health Service	8	2			10
NDPBs	17			1	18
Other	10	1			11
Police Service of Scotland	11	2			13
Scottish Parliament	6	2		5	13

4.17 Few authorities include specific reference to decision-making information being available in other formats. However, nearly all (63 of the 65 authorities providing decision information) include statements within their Guide to Information on access to information in alternative formats.

5 ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

- 5.1 This final section presents findings in relation to authorities' response to requests for assistance in relation to information made available under their Publication Scheme.
- 5.2 As is set out in section 1, the study incorporated an additional 'mystery shopper' element to gauge the quality of assistance provided by authorities. This involved email and telephone requests for information being issued to a total of 34 authorities, a subset of the 71 included in the main audit work. The selection of authorities was informed by audit findings in relation to the Guide to Information and availability of specific classes of information – this included a mix of authorities where issues were identified, and others which met required standards. The selection of authorities also sought to ensure a cross section of authority types.
- 5.3 Email and telephone requests were split between 17 requests for procurement information, and 17 requests for information on decision making. Our assessment of authorities' response to these enquiries is provided over the following pages.

Key Findings: Advice and Assistance

Email and telephone requests for information were issued to 34 of the 71 authorities included in the audit.

A response was received to 18 of the 20 email enquiries, all but one within the 4 week time period. 16 of the 18 email responses answered the enquiry fully – one response directed us back to the Guide to Information and one advised that the authority could not provide the requested information.

Of the 14 telephone queries made, 13 were answered and the enquiry answered in 11 of these 13 calls. Of the three unresolved enquiries, one was unanswered and two advised that no-one was available to provide assistance.

Response to email queries

- 5.4 A total of 20 email enquiries were made to authorities, including a mix of requests for procurement and decision-making information.
- 5.5 A response was received in relation to 18 of the 20 email enquiries. The two emails where no response was received were both enquiries related to procurement information issued to 'other' authorities.
- 5.6 In terms of the timeliness and quality of email responses, audit findings were positive:
- 13 of the 18 responses were received within a week of the initial email enquiry, and all but one were received within 4 weeks of the initial enquiry.
 - 16 of the 18 responses answered the enquiry fully – and all of these provided a copy of and/or a link to the information.

- Of the two responses that did not fully answer the enquiry, one response re-directed the enquiry back to the authority's Guide to Information, and one advised that the requested information (procurement) could not be provided by the authority.
- In terms of the quality of response, 16 of the 18 were rated as very or fairly good. One response was rated as neither good nor poor, and one as poor.

Response to telephone enquiries

5.7 A total of 14 telephone enquiries were made to authorities. This included a range of authority types and a mix of requests for information on procurement and decision-making information. In terms of authorities' handling of telephone enquiries, the key findings were:

- Of the 14 telephone queries made, 13 were answered. The one call which was not answered was to an NHS authority which went to voicemail.
- Of the 13 answered calls, the member of staff answering was able to provide a response to the query in three cases. In the remaining 10 cases the experience was somewhat mixed:
 - four were passed to a member of staff who was able to provide a response;
 - in three cases we were provided with alternative contact details - including one where significant time was required to find a staff member with knowledge of the correct contact;
 - two took a message; and
 - in one case we were advised that requests had to be made by email.
- In terms of the quality of response, the enquiry was answered in 11 of the 14 calls (equivalent to around three quarters). Of the remaining three calls, one was unanswered, and in two cases we were advised that the relevant contact was on leave and no-one was available to provide assistance.
- In all 11 of the calls where the enquiry was resolved our mystery shopper was advised of where to find the required information. In addition, one authority provided a copy of the requested information.
- Across most answered calls, staff manner was rated positively. However, the exercise did identify some variation in the quality and depth of information provided. This included two calls where no staff member was available to provide assistance, and one call where the staff member answering the call initially indicated that the requested information was not available to the public. While this variety of experience reflects the diversity of authorities in terms of size and experience dealing with information requests, it also illustrates the time and effort that may be required of members of the public in resolving these queries.