

Organisational Excellence Committee

17 September 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [5]

Department: Corporate Services

Title | Taitara: Information Request Update

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview on key activities of the information request function of the Democracy Services Team over the Financial Year 2025-2026.

Executive Summary | Whakarāpopototaka Matua

The information request function coordinates responses to requests for information under Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA) and under Privacy Act 2020. This includes providing advice on the application of any potential withholding or refusal grounds and managing Ombudsman complaints relating to information requests.

This report provides the Organisational Excellence Committee with an overview of demand, performance, complaints, and continuous improvement activities relating to Council's Information Request function during 2025-2026.

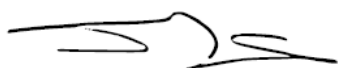
Key highlights include a significant increase in request volumes, continued high compliance with statutory response timeframes, positive Ombudsman outcomes, and ongoing implementation of recommendations from the Ombudsman's 2025 review of Queenstown Lakes District's (QLDC) LGOIMA practice.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtōhuka

That the Organisational Excellence Committee:

1. **Note** the contents of this report.

Prepared by:



Name: Jon Winterbottom
Title: Democracy Services
Manager
7 September 2026

Reviewed and Endorsed by:



Name: Rebecca Pitts
Title: Director Democracy
Services
7 September 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Meaghan Miller
Title: General Manager
Corporate Services
9 September 2026

Context | Horopaki

1. Following a Democracy Services update presented at the 7 July 2026 Organisational Excellence Committee (the Committee) meeting, the Committee requested a more detailed overview of the recent performance and activities of the information request function of the Democracy Services Team (the Team).
2. This report responds to that request by outlining key statistics for the 2025-2026 financial year, complaint outcomes, and continuous improvement activities.
3. Attachment A provides a summary of Ombudsman complaint outcomes for the 2025 calendar year.

Responses to Information Requests in 2025-2026

4. Council received 389 requests for official information in 2025-2026, including withdrawals and transfers i.e. cases where requests have been officially transferred to other agencies. This is an increase from 285 in 2024-2025 and 194 in 2023-2024.
5. LGOIMA requires that decisions be communicated to the requestor within 20 business days of receiving the request. As per the [Ombudsman's guidance](#), a decision requires an agency to decide whether the request will be granted and, if so in what manner; and for what charge (if any). Where the decision is to release information - either in part or in full - that information is released at the same time the decision is shared or, in uncommon instances where that is not possible, as soon as is practically possible thereafter.
6. In 98.7% of responses to requests received in 2025-2026, decisions were communicated consistent with the required timeframe. The average time for completion over this period was 13 days.
7. Based on current records, information relating to 111 requests was released in full and 189 requests involved a partial release of information. In cases that involved a partial release, some requested information was either withheld and/or refused under LGOIMA. Information relating to 71 requests was withheld and/or refused in full, while 18 requests were cancelled/withdrawn.

Withholding and Refusal Grounds

8. LGOIMA recognises that there are circumstances where information requested may be withheld or refused. Sections 6 and 7 set out the withholding grounds available to local authorities, while Section 17 sets out refusal grounds. In many cases, these provisions apply only to part of a request, meaning the remaining information can be released where appropriate.
9. Where information is withheld under Section 7, Council must consider whether there is a greater public interest in releasing the information.

10. In 2025-2026 the five most commonly utilised withholding grounds were:

Ground	Times used	Typical reason
Section 7(2)(a) Withholding in order to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.	64	Protecting personal information such as private contact details, personal financial information, information about an individual's circumstances etc. Example: proactively released response sent on 16 January 2026 .
Section 7(2)(f)(ii) Withholding in order to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the protection of such members, officers, employees, and persons from improper pressure or harassment	52	Protecting staff, elected members or others named in information from being unfairly targeted because of their role. Example: proactively released response sent on 1 April 2026 .
Section 7(2)(f)(i) Withholding in order to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to members or officers or employees of any local authority in the course of their duty	27	Protecting the ability to have internal, preliminary discussions to test ideas, challenge proposals, or give candid advice. Example: proactively released response sent on 28 January 2026 .
Section 7(2)(b)(ii) Withholding in order to protect information where the making available of the information would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information.	25	Protecting the commercial position of QLDC's commercial partners so as not to disadvantage them in future negotiations or tendering processes. Example: proactively released response sent on 4 May 2026 .
Section 7(2)(g) Withholding in order to maintain legal professional privilege	24	Protecting privileged and confidential legal advice provided to Council. Example: proactively released response sent on 12 March 2026 .

11. In 2025-2026 the three most commonly utilised refusal grounds were as follows:

Ground	Times used	Interpretation / example
Section 17(e) Refusal on the basis that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it	116	Requests often seek information that QLDC does not hold and for that reason cannot provide. Searches for information are thorough to ensure that this ground is appropriate applied. Typically, this ground applies only to part (not all) of the requested information. Example: proactively released response sent on 11 February 2026 .
Section 17(f) Refusal on the basis that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research	36	Some requests seek a significant volume of information, the search for and collection of which would put a significant strain on ongoing operations. In such cases, the requestor is either offered an opportunity to refine the scope of their request, and/or QLDC may offer to process the request for a charge. If appropriate refinements are not proposed or the offer to process for a charge is not accepted, then this refusal ground may be applied., Example: proactively released response sent on 21 January 2026 .
Section 17(d) Refusal on the basis that the information that the information requested is or will soon be publicly available	24	Where requested information is already publicly available, responses direct the requestor to where the information can be found while also citing this ground. This ground also applies for information to be publicly released in the near future; in such cases, responses clarify when and in what forum that information will become publicly available. Example: proactively released response sent on 9 February 2026 .

12. More information on all withholding grounds and refusal grounds is included in Ombudsman's guides, which can be found on the [Ombudsman's website](#). These guides - as well as Ombudsman

opinions, case notes and reports - are important resources for the information request function of the Democracy Services Team, which regularly refers to these resources both to assist in the development of an approach on specific requests as well as for training purposes.

Primary Themes of Responses

13. Council does not currently categorise responses according to the type of information request or of how many are made by particular requestors. However, officers have manually reviewed the responses from 2025-2026 to provide this level of detail.
14. Requests were categorised by their primary theme i.e. the theme that characterised the majority of a particular request. Many requests sought information related to multiple themes, and it was not always clear which should be considered as the primary topic. To reflect the subjective element in assigning a primary theme in such cases, only approximate percentages are provided in this report.
15. The ten most common primary themes identified for requests received in 2025-2026 were as follows:
 - Resource Consent/Resource Management (RM): ~ 18% of requests
 - Correspondence requests: ~13% of requests
 - Contract/procurement: ~8% of requests
 - Wastewater/Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP): ~7% of requests
 - Roading: ~5% of requests
 - Freedom camping: ~5% of requests
 - Building consents: ~5% of requests
 - Rates: ~4% of requests
 - FTE/Staffing: ~3% of requests
 - Infringement: ~3% of requests
16. Focusing on the top five categories identified above, the highest-volume themes among 2025-2026 requests were as follows:
 - **RM/Resource Consent**
 - Consent files
 - RM-specific correspondence
 - Planning decisions
 - Affected-party assessments
 - Consent monitoring

- **Correspondence**
 - Requests for emails
 - Internal communications
 - Meeting notes
 - Councillor/staff communications
- **Contract/Procurement**
 - Cougar
 - Veolia
 - Recruiters
 - Airport management
 - Procurement plans and tenders
- **Wastewater/WWTP**
 - Shotover WWTP
 - Disposal field
 - Long-term discharge solution
 - Hāwea wastewater
 - Project Pure
- **Roading**
 - Macetown Road
 - Chard Road
 - Lower Shotover Road
 - Speed management
 - Traffic counts
 - Road maintenance

17. Request topics broadly reflected major public issues during the year, including wastewater management, resource consenting, procurement activity and key infrastructure projects. This indicates a strong public interest in major growth and infrastructure issues facing the district.

Multiple Requestors

18. The top ten requestors in the 2025-2026 period accounted for around 100 requests, or just over 25% of all requests received over the course of the year.

19. The greatest number of requests made by one source was 15. Two sources each made 15 requests: one source was a media outlet, while the other was a company, association, incorporated society or collective¹.
20. Among the top ten requestors, two were media outlets (one of which made 15 requests, and another 8 requests), three were individuals, and five were companies, associations, incorporated societies or collectives.

Complaints to the Ombudsman

21. The Ombudsman publishes six-monthly reports on complaints relating to local authorities handling of official information requests. As the most recent published data on the [Ombudsman's website](#) is from the 2025 calendar year, that data has been used in this report. A verbal update will be provided to the Committee if the 1 January - 30 June 2026 report is released prior to the Committee's meeting on 17 September 2026.
22. Upon receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman will first decide whether it can be investigated. Even where an investigation is deemed appropriate, many complaints are resolved through communication with the complainant and the council either prior to or during an investigation.
23. If an investigation is completed the Ombudsman can form an opinion on whether the council acted unreasonably or unfairly. Where the Ombudsman thinks a council has acted unreasonably and/or unfairly, they can recommend a remedy. More information on the Ombudsman complaint process can be found on the [Ombudsman's website](#).
24. Where an investigation is finalised, the report indicates whether the Ombudsman has identified an administrative deficiency or not. Where an administrative deficiency is identified, the Ombudsman specifies what type of deficiency was identified as well as remedy.
25. Based on reports from the Ombudsman, 12 complaints against QLDC were completed during the 2025 calendar year. Of these 12 complaints, three were from media outlets, eight were made by individuals, and one was from a company, association, incorporated society or collective.
26. Of these 12 complaints, four were resolved without investigation, and five were resolved during an investigation. In three cases, the Ombudsman investigation was finalised and a final opinion formed. In the three cases where an opinion was formed, no administrative deficiency was identified.
27. In the nine cases resolved during or prior to investigation, the outcome of eight was categorised as *remedial action to benefit the complainant*, while one outcome was classified as *provision of advice / explanation by agency or Ombudsman which satisfies complainant*. For these nine cases

¹ Following the practice of the Ombudsman in its six-monthly reports on complaints data, the source of requests has been categorised into one of three categories: a) media, b) individual, or c) company, association, incorporated society or collective.

(resolved during or without investigation), the remedies involved reasons/explanations given (three cases), decision changed (five cases) and an apology (one case).

Continuous Improvement

28. As part of its commitment to continuous improvement, the information request function regularly reviews Ombudsman decisions, complaint outcomes and sector guidance to identify opportunities to strengthen processes and service delivery. For example, the following are lessons learned based on recent Ombudsman cases:

- **Reinforcing process for responding to requests:** Direct responses from internal teams can result in information being provided without the request having been assessed against the requirements of LGOIMA, and may lead to incomplete or incorrect responses. LGOIMA is an organisation-wide responsibility, and it is important to ensure that internal teams understand their role in supporting the formal LGOIMA process.
- **Confirming what information is held:** Before making a LGOIMA decision, it is essential to ensure that all reasonable steps have been taken to determine whether requested information is held by Council. This is particularly important for complex or historic requests, where information may sit across different systems, teams or records.
- **Reviewing historic requests appropriately:** Previous responses should not be assumed to be complete or correct simply because they have already been issued. Historic or complex matters may warrant a fresh and thorough review.

29. In addition to actions identified above, work is planned to further enhance the digital reporting system used to record and monitor information requests.

Actions Points from the Ombudsman's June 2025 Report

30. In 2024 the Ombudsman announced that it would conduct in-depth examinations of practices associated with LGOIMA in five agencies in New Zealand, one of which one was QLDC. The Final Opinion of the Chief Ombudsman on *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act compliance and practice in Queenstown Lakes District Council* was published in June 2025 and can be found on the [Ombudsman's website](#) (hereafter this is referred to as the June 2025 Report).

31. The June 2025 Report included 26 suggested actions that the Ombudsman considered could improve QLDC's practice. QLDC developed a plan to implement the actions and provided status updates to the Office of the Ombudsman.

32. Progress against the 26 actions is tracked in Attachment B. As of September 2026, eight of the 26 actions have been completed, six of the actions are ongoing (i.e. there is no specified date for completion), eight of these actions are in progress, while four of these actions have not been started.

33. In March 2026 the Ombudsman acknowledged the significant progress made and advised that no further follow-up reporting was required (the acknowledgment email from the Ombudsman is included as Attachment C).

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

34. This report is for noting only and so no options are presented.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi i kā Whakaaro Hiraka

35. This matter is of low significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because this report is for noting purposes only, although it is acknowledged there may be some public interest in the subject matter due to its relationship to Council decision making and public participation.

36. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are elected members, Council officers, and residents/ratepayers of the Queenstown Lakes District community.

37. The Council is not required to consult on this matter.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

38. The Council is not required to consult iwi Māori on this matter.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

39. This matter relates to the Regulatory/Legal/Compliance risk category. It is associated with RISK10035 Ineffective business processes within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a moderate residual risk rating.

40. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to retain the risk at its current level. This will be achieved both by the Committee's awareness and oversight of the relevant business processes as well as ongoing process improvements highlighted in this report.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

41. There are no financial implications related to this report.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

42. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- Decision Making for Official Information Requests;

- Official Information Proactive Release Policy; and
- Privacy Policy.

43. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies.

44. This report is for noting only and is not included in the Long Term/Annual Plan.

Legal Considerations and Statutory Responsibilities | Ka Ture Whaiwhakaaro me kā Takohaka Waeture

45. In all matters related to Information Requests, due consideration is given to the following key items of legislation:

- Local Government Act 2002;
- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987; and
- Privacy Act 2020.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

46. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

47. The recommended option:

- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not significantly alter the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	Ombudsman Complaints Data for 2025
B	Action Tracker of Recommendations for June 2025 Ombudsman's Report
C	Acknowledgment Email from Ombudsman on Action Points

Attachment A: Ombudsman Complaints Data from 2025

Case ID	Nature of Complaint Made	Complaint From	Outcome	Reason for Outcome	Combined Deficiency	Combined Remedy
CASE-015448	Refusal in part	Individual	Resolved during investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Decision changed
CASE-020108	Refusal in full	Individual	Resolved without investigation	Provision of advice / explanation by agency or Ombudsman which satisfies complainant		Reasons/explanation given
CASE-020476	Incomplete or inadequate response	Individual	Resolved without investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Reasons/explanation given
CASE-025908	Refusal in part	Media	Investigation finalised (final opinion formed)	No administrative deficiency identified	-	-
CASE-025908	Extension	Media	Investigation finalised (final opinion formed)	No administrative deficiency identified	-	-
CASE-011655	Delay in making decision	Individual	Resolved without investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Apology
CASE-025908	Refusal in part	Media	Resolved during investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Decision changed
CASE-025908	Incomplete or inadequate response	Individual	Resolved without investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Reasons/explanation given
CASE-025982	Refusal in full	Individual	Investigation finalised (final opinion formed)	No administrative deficiency identified	-	-
CASE-027634	Refusal in full	Company, association, incorporated society or collective	Resolved during investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Decision changed
CASE-030446	Refusal in full	Individual	Resolved during investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Decision changed
CASE-030668	Refusal in part	Individual	Resolved during investigation	Remedial action to benefit complainant		Decision changed

Note: This table is based on data published in Ombudsman reports on completed LGOIMA complaints from [1 January – 30 June 2025](#) and [1 July – 31 December 2025](#), which can be found via the links provided.

Queenstown Lakes District Council progress report as at 7 September 2026

Progress

- Not started – work on the recommendation or action is yet to start
- In progress/ongoing – work on the recommendation or action is underway
- Completed/fully implemented – work on the recommendation or action is complete

Progress as at 7 September 2026

Action point	Progress	Estimated date of completion
	(see above for criteria)	(where possible, and unless completed)
The Chief Executive and senior leaders should build on the overall positive view of the Council and ensure there are clear, visible, regular statements to staff about the importance of the LGOIMA and the Council’s commitment to openness and transparency.	Ongoing	
Consider adding to the section of the Council’s website dedicated to LGOIMA requests, an overarching statement of commitment to the LGOIMA principles and purposes.	Complete	17 July 2025
Consider building a more explicit statement about transparency and access to information into the Council’s strategic framework which clearly links the commitment to releasing information to the public’s ability to engage meaningfully in Council decision making.	Not started	LTP development will be November 2025 – June 2027
Review and update LGOIMA training for staff, incorporating our suggestions.	In progress	31 October 2026
Ensure all staff receive LGOIMA training appropriate to their role.	In progress	TBC

Action point	Progress	Estimated date of completion
Ensure advanced training is available for decision makers on technical aspects of the LGOIMA.	In progress	TBC
Review and update LGOIMA training for elected members, incorporating our suggestions.	Completed	15 December 2025
Consider surveying elected members on their LGOIMA training needs and deliver training as indicated.	Ongoing	15 December 2025
Assess the IM training needs of staff, which might include surveying staff on their IM and record keeping training needs, and deliver training as indicated.	In progress	30 November 2026
Review and update LGOIMA policy incorporating our suggestions, and publish LGOIMA policy once it is updated.	Complete	12 September 2025
Develop LGOIMA guidance for staff.	In progress	TBC
Review and update Elected Member handbook to reflect current workshop practice.	Complete	12 September 2025
Review and update Information Request Guidance incorporating our suggestions.	Not started	
Ensure there is guidance for elected members about council information kept on personal devices and in personal email and/or social media accounts.	Complete	12 September 2025
Review and update proactive release of information policy incorporating our suggestions, and ensuring alignment with the needs of residents. Publish this proactive release policy when finalised.	In progress	30 September 2026
Review and update resources for Meetings and workshops incorporating our suggestions.	In progress	TBC
Ensure records are kept of substantive discussions on LGOIMA requests.	Ongoing	

Action point	Progress	Estimated date of completion
Where necessary, keep a summary of the decision making process on LGOIMA requests which should include consideration of section 7(1) public interest considerations.	Ongoing	
Ensure results from reviews such as Ombudsman investigations are incorporated into LGOIMA team training and into LGOIMA guidance.	Ongoing	From 1 September 2025
Consider updating Standing Orders around public forums at extraordinary Meetings, giving consideration to the principles in section 14 of the Local Government Act.	Complete	31 July 2025
Ensure robust record keeping of closed workshops, and consider recording closed workshops where there is a likelihood the recording can be released in future.	Complete	31 July 2025
Publish the topic of workshops in advance of their occurrence.	Complete	This has been in-place practice since public workshops from 1 March 2024.
Consider collecting more comprehensive data on LGOIMA request handling so that opportunities for performance improvement and for the proactive release of information can be identified, and include this in reporting to senior leaders.	In progress	TBC
Consider adding as a reporting measure, the number and/or percentage of LGOIMA responses the Council proactively publishes.	Ongoing	To be reported from end of Q1 FY2025-2026.
Consider including LGOIMA compliance statistics for media information requests into LGOIMA performance reporting.	Not started	
Consider developing a quality assurance process for completed LGOIMA requests.	Not started	

Attachment C: Acknowledgment Email from Ombudsman on Action Points

From: [Laura McCarthy](#)
To: [Jon Winterbottom](#)
Cc: [Rebecca Pitts](#); [Naell Crosby-Roe](#)
Subject: RE: Posts-investigation follow ups
Date: Thursday, 19 March 2026 12:40:34 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)

Hi Jon

Apologies in the delay replying – thank you very much for this.

We have reviewed the action plan and can see significant progress has been made to implement the action points. This completes our follow-up, and we won't be seeking any further updates. Thank you to you and your team for your engagement throughout this process.

I note you have sought some about advice / guidance / training for advanced LGOIMA training from the Office – I'll follow-up with the team responsible, to see where the request has got to.

Please get in touch with any questions / concerns.

All the best
Laura

From: Jon Winterbottom <jon.winterbottom@qldc.govt.nz>
Sent: Wednesday, 18 March 2026 7:40 am
To: Laura McCarthy <Laura.McCarthy@ombudsman.parliament.nz>
Cc: Rebecca Pitts <Rebecca.Pitts@qldc.govt.nz>; Naell Crosby-Roe <Naell.Crosby-Roe@qldc.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: Posts-investigation follow ups

Hi Laura,

Please find attached the updated action point tracker.

Thanks
Jon

Jon Winterbottom (he/him) | Democracy Services Manager |
Kaiwhakahaere Ratoka Manapori |
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E: jon.winterbottom@qldc.govt.nz



From: Laura McCarthy <Laura.McCarthy@ombudsman.parliament.nz>
Sent: Thursday, 12 March 2026 4:23 PM
To: Jon Winterbottom <jon.winterbottom@qldc.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: Posts-investigation follow ups

Thank you for the update, Jon – no problem, next week for the updates is fine.

From: Jon Winterbottom <jon.winterbottom@qldc.govt.nz>
Sent: Thursday, 12 March 2026 4:21 pm