



Aneurin Bevan University Health Board reaches near-perfect compliance in FOI and SAR responses with Civica

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board covers the areas of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and South Powys and a population of around **600,000**. With an annual budget of **£1.7bn**, it relies on a staff of 16,000 to serve the health needs of citizens across southern Wales.

An essential part of this responsibility is to be responsive and compliant in managing incoming requests for information. These can arrive via a subject access request (SAR), in which patients or third parties ask for patient records and documentation. Enquiries also come via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, which will be made by anyone, including members of the public, staff, the press or members of parliament. The Information Commissioner's Office recommends that FOIs are responded to within 20 working days and SARs typically should have a response within one month.

Challenges with compliance

The SAR team at the Health Board handles around 500 SARs per month from patients, solicitors and the police and had been receiving requests over email, phone or a form shared on an MS Word document. Eight members of staff were tasked with processing these requests, pulling information from disparate systems and getting the information back to the requester within their compliance target of one calendar month. Responses were then being returned over email or with CDs or papers in the post.

Despite the heavy administrative burden, the team were just about able to maintain good compliance, but when two full time members of staff left the team and another went on maternity leave, compliance quickly dropped to as low as 26%. This struggle continued for around 18 months. The team had been stretched even before it reduced in size, but it was legacy software that compounded the problem. It was difficult to use, limited in its application and was approaching its end of life.

Key outcomes



>98%
compliance



90% faster on every
request that comes in



Best practice SAR and
FOI case management



The FOI team were facing similar challenges. Whilst the number of FOI requests represent a smaller proportion of incoming enquiries, the compliance targets are more rigidly set by the ICO and requests themselves are evolving to become more complex. The team was using spreadsheets and written logs to keep track of requests. Responses could take weeks to complete, and compliance rates were typically between 30-40%.

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We were very aware that our existing processes simply weren't conducive to efficiency”, said Dan Davies, Chief Business Officer at the Health Board. “More time was being spent on keeping up with the administration than it was on producing responses. We were not only limiting our ability to efficiently respond to requests, the manual processes meant that we were also unable to effectively report on how we were doing. If I was to ask somebody a simple question like ‘how many requests have we had this month’, it could take up to a day to establish a definitive answer.”

Automating processes with Civica

Recommendations for **Civica Case Management** came from other nearby Health Boards and NHS Trusts. The implementation was seamless, moving from procurement to implementation in just ten business weeks.

The new system allows the team to manage all information requests in one place with a single sign-in and provides end-to-end workflows to almost eradicate the administrative burden. This allows the team more time to communicate, interpret, draft and make sure that responses are as effective as possible.

Dynamic templates provide case handlers with tools for immediate responses and timely follow-ups to contacts. This ensures a responsive service and gives the requesters peace of mind that their case is being attended. There are also templates that can be used in reaching out to different areas of the Health Board when seeking information required to answer enquiries. This whole process is accompanied by automated notifications that help to keep requests on track.

“The dashboards are my new best friend, as I get visual prompts to show me exactly what is outstanding and who it's with”, said a member of the SAR team. “It's made things easier and saved a lot of hours.” In fact, they estimate that the team can now be **90% quicker in processing every single request that comes in.**

Through Civica, incoming requests can be themed so that similar requests follow a similar path through the organisation. Previously, a request might be passed around the organisation and never quite reach the correct person. Now, the system learns and remembers, picking up cases that fall within the same theme so they can be shared promptly with the correct person. This builds new efficiencies and means that the team doesn't need to rely on the knowledge

or network of any one person. An inbuilt disclosure log means redacted responses are automatically uploaded to the Health Board website, ready to signpost a requester who may need similar information, negating the need for a new request.

Releasing time and relieving stress

Staff have felt the immediate benefits of digitising their systems and introducing more automation. “A year ago, we needed people to work overtime and weekends to keep up with the demand. Now we have room to breathe again”, said the representative from the SAR team.

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We can work effectively with Civica to stay well ahead of our compliance targets. If we were to have a blip in resourcing if there were several staff absences at once, for example, it would no longer be a worry. We can even afford to help other departments out when they are struggling because we have full visibility of what's in front of us. It's dramatically changed our working style, removing a lot of stress points and making us more effective in delivering results.”

From a department low of just 26% compliance, the SAR team is now regularly hitting **compliance of 100%**. Similarly, for the FOI team compliance is rarely below 94% and often as high as 100%.

Value-add reporting

The ability to report has also been transformed at the Health Board. Dan Davies continued: “With Civica, I don't only have visibility of all requests, I also know how many times we applied an exemption, what our compliance was, which themes keep coming in compared to last month, have we got an issue with one department facing more requests than others? Maybe it's an issue, or maybe it's something we are doing really well. All of this information is invaluable and now informs our business so that we better understand the landscape and can continue to improve our abilities to provide the best possible service to citizens and stakeholders.”

Find out more about how Civica's solutions could support your organisation:

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