

## The FOI Requests

One person's vexatious complainer is another's concerned resident. You can decide for yourself what I am. Like most people I would read about what my local council was up to from time to time in the local papers but I seldom got a straight answer about what was going on if I contacted them. That all changed with the Freedom of Information legislation. It can take some time, but as often as not, I can now extricate nuggets of vital information to throw light on the situation and confirm my suspicions that my local council is worse than useless.

The most important document saved on my laptop is a standard letter which just cries out for the insert of a paragraph with my most recent query.

"Dear Sir,

I am writing to make an open government request for all the information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act.

(Insert request here)

I understand that under the act, I should be entitled to a response within 20 working days.

Yours etc"

"Bins to be privatised" was the headline that caught my eye in the local paper. On closer reading when I got home it seemed that the Council was planning to make budget savings by outsourcing the Council's Waste, Recharge levied of £20 and then back after emptying. There were to be no concessions, but the Council planned to introduce a scheme of grant support to elderly and disabled residents who can persuade a neighbour to take their bins for collection. This would enable them to make a token payment to their neighbour. The scheme would be called 'The Nurturing Neighbourliness Fund'. The Council hopes the revised service will attract some very low tenders. At first I assumed it was one of those options that councils put forward only to be ruled out as a step too far, but imagine my horror as I read that it was to be voted on at a special Council Meeting and that the SNP minority administration had secured the support of the three Tories and independent councillor Joe Malone, giving them a 16-14 majority.

I was first to take my seat on the public benches at the Council Meeting and by the time the Provost made his entry, chain dangling, there wasn't a seat to be had. The Chief Executive waffled on about how 'any adverse equality impact would be mitigated by the financial support to incentivise good neighbourliness. Social solidarity would be promoted and health benefits flow from having to push your own bins out every week'. Labour highlighted a long list of dire consequences - hundreds of missing wheelie bins; dogs rummaging through rubbish; antisocial behaviour of tenants who failed to put their bins out for weeks on end. When it came to the vote 15 hands went up for the motion.