Data Access Request Backlog

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Background

In March 2014, the HSCIC undertook a review of Data Releases made by its predecessor organisation, the NHS Information Centre. The findings of this review were published on June 17th.

In response to the review, and specifically to recommendations made by Sir Nick Partridge, the HSCIC Board introduced a series of steps to guarantee greater openness and reassurance to the public, stricter controls over data use and better clarity for data users. During the time that this review was being undertaken and whilst new processes were being designed, a backlog of data requests built up. Work to clear the backlog has been ongoing with steady progress being made in line with the forecast up until the end of August. At this time however, the rate of progress slowed significantly for a number of reasons, including:

- A higher than expected number of new applications being received.

- The degree of difficulty of cases remaining in the backlog (the most complex cases remained).

- The requirement for all applications for identifiable data to be reviewed by the Data Access Advisory Group (DAAG).

- The time taken by organisations to absorb and respond to the additional information required to meet the new evidential standards.

As a result of this, the HSCIC will not be able to achieve the original target to clear the backlog of data requests by the end of November.

The purpose of this paper is to inform the Board of action taken in response to the slowing rate at which requests for data were being cleared and provide an update on current progress and the re-forecast delivery date for clearing the backlog.

Response to 'slow down' in Delivery

Stricter governance controls, more stringent quality checks and issues in the end to end process for the management of requests for data resulted in a plateauing rate at which requests were being cleared from the backlog. In recognition of this, a programme head was brought in and immediate changes were implemented. These included:

- Prioritising resources to ensure availability of senior staff to manage difficult cases and high profile relationships.
- Prioritising applications, focusing on:
    - the most complex applications
    - the oldest applications
    - those that were 'paused' for internal review within the HSCIC.

- Reviewing the end to end process, identifying and resolving bottlenecks and setting up process workshops to ensure full buy in from process owners.
- Engaging with customers to provide direct, specialist assistance with their applications and build relationships.

Progress

Since implementing the changes, the following progress has been achieved:

- Data Sharing Contracts have been issued to all existing customers (491) with a request that they return the contract by 19th December.

- The processes for managing the contracts within CRM have been established with training provided to the appropriate staff.

- The new Data Sharing Agreement has been finalised for roll out upon receipt of a signed Data Sharing Contract.

- A project board has been established to provide management oversight of the issues and progress.

- Dedicated senior resource has been tasked with undertaking a complete review of the end to end process of application, approval and release. This work has identified several bottlenecks which are being resolved by working closely with all teams involved and ensuring ownership of specific parts of the process.

- Key stakeholders have been engaged by senior staff to build relationships, understand issues and support them through the application process.

- A new application form has been developed which aligns with the new Data Sharing Agreements and better supports the Data Access Advisory Group (DAAG) process. Additional guidance on completing the application form has been provided on the Data Access Request Service website along with an exemplar application to demonstrate the level of detail required to secure a recommendation for approval.

- Two specialist Information Security resources have been retained to review the security elements of the applications. This has significantly improved the rate at which applications are being processed internally.

Progress on Data Request Numbers

The impact of the above changes is demonstrated through the reduction in the backlog (see dashboard in appendix A). In the four weeks that the revised approach has been operational, the total number of outstanding data requests has reduced from 501 to 355, with the actual backlog (requests received prior to Aug 1st 2014) reducing from 320 to 181.

The below table provides a breakdown of the number of data requests as of 7th November:

Backlog	**181**
(Number with customer)	(50)
MRIS (medical research)	**28**
BAU (post Aug 1st 2014)	**146**
Total	**355**

Re-projected Completion Date

In line with the current rate of clearance and accounting for the complexity of a number of outstanding data requests, the re-forecast rate for the clearance of the backlog of requests (those received prior to Aug 1st 2014) is the end of January 2015.

Service Level Agreements

The HSCIC made a public commitment to implement Service Level Agreements for the processing of applications and release of data. These agreements range from 14 days for simple applications (extensions) to 60 days for complex applications.

These SLAs will be measured as elapsed time with the HSCIC only, and exclude the time during which responses are being awaited from customers as the HSCIC has no control over this period. Where responses are not forthcoming the HSCIC team are actively chasing customers and have an ongoing approach to build relationships with customers, however in many cases, there remain significant delays in getting a response.

The 14 day SLA for simple applications will apply to requests for extensions to Data Sharing Agreements. These are not required to go through DAAG where they do not contain sensitive data therefore can be progressed more rapidly. An extension Board will be set up to progress these in the most efficient manner. Reporting on this SLA will commence for all new requests being put forward for extension as of 17th November.

The 30 day SLA will apply to new, low to medium complexity applications and amendments and the 60 day SLA will apply to complex applications (where the legal basis is not clear, where complex slices of data across multiple data sets are required etc.). Measurement of these will not commence until the backlog is cleared.
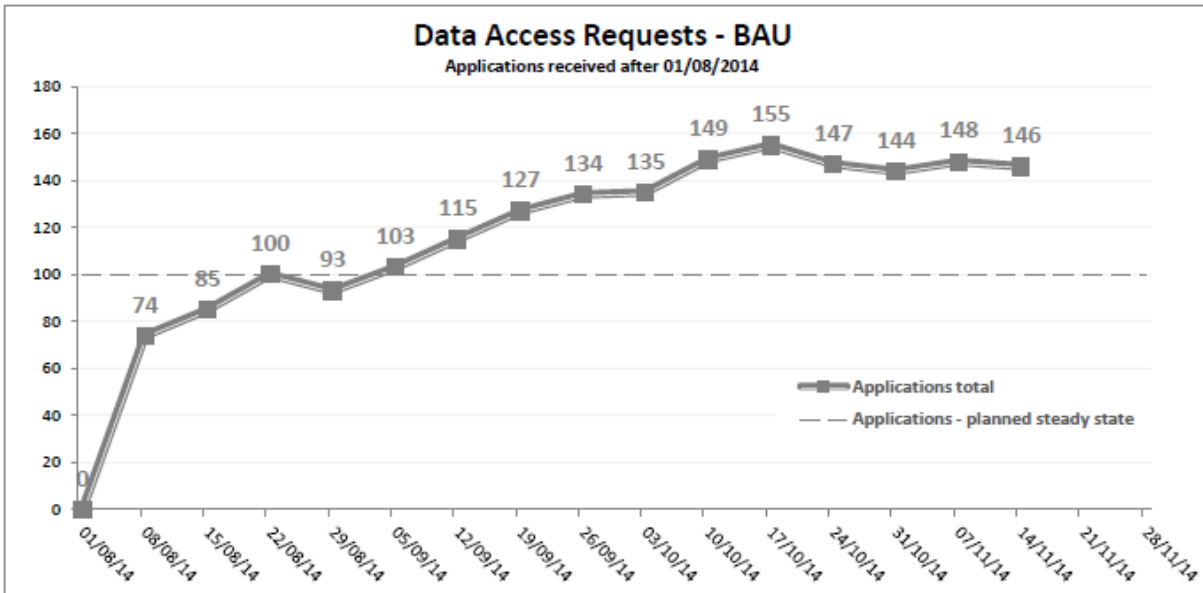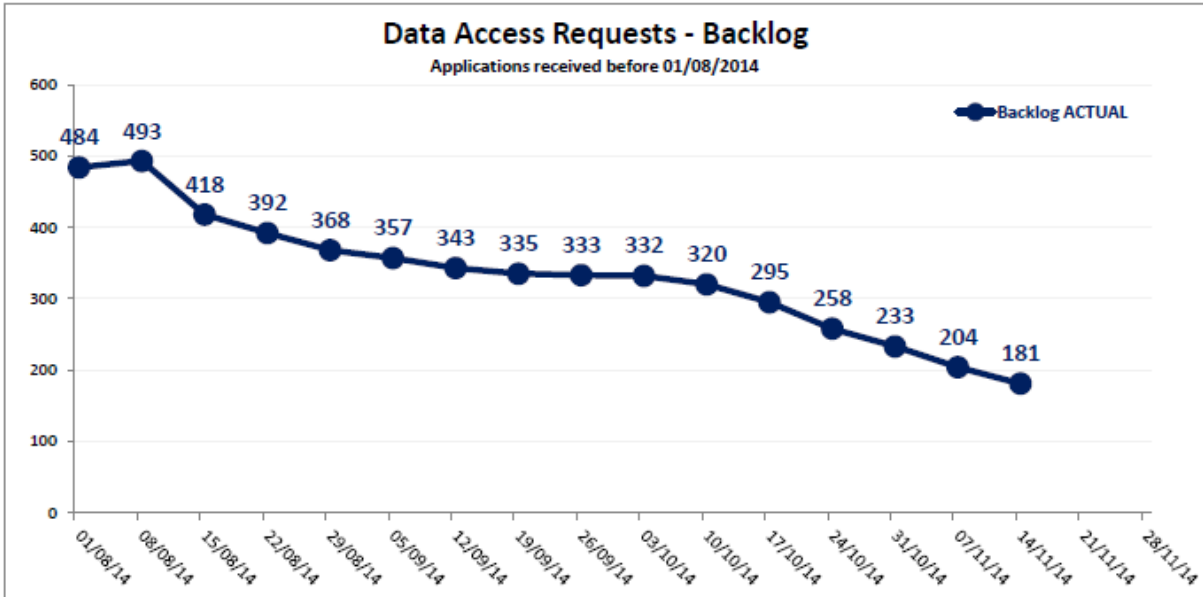
Actions Required of the Board

For information only.

Appendix A – Progress Dashboard

Data Access Requests Service - Progress Dashboard

Reporting Period: 08/11/14 - 14/11/14

Forecast backlog total: 63
Actual backlog total: 181 ↓23

Data Access Requests - Backlog
Applications received before 01/08/2014

Data Access Requests - BAU
Applications received after 01/08/2014

Backlog	181
BAU	146
MRIS	*28*
Pipeline Total	355