Planned FOIA extension a ‘blunderbuss’ says charity chief

The Chief Executive of charity leaders’ network Acevo, Sir Stephen Bubb, has described the government’s planned FOIA extension to the charity sector as “a blunderbuss that would do nothing for transparency but ultimately harm good causes.”

The comments come after Liberal Democrat MP Tom Brake launched a bill under the 10 minute rule in Parliament calling on charities, private companies and the royal household to be fully covered by the Act.

Charities are currently exempt from FOIA despite receiving tens of millions of pounds in grants from the government. This has resulted in controversy, for example last year when Kids Company, a high profile charity run by Camila Batmanghelidjh, collapsed despite being handed tens of millions of pounds grants over the past decade.

Matthew Hancock, the Cabinet Office minister who is leading the FOIA review, is in favour of the changes. He said: “I have campaigned for transparency in many different ways and driven the open data agenda, because transparency brings accountability and improves value for money, so we should look at ways that FOI should be extended.”

The new powers would be bought in via a FOIA amendment and could be in place as early as 2017.

Although lambasted by Bubb, the plans were welcomed by campaigners for greater transparency in the charity sector.

Gina Miller, founder of the True and Fair Foundation said: “There is no denying that the charity sector plays a pivotal role in ensuring a true and fair society.

(Continued on page 17)