

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

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- Campaign group gets support for FOI Bill, p.18
- Daren Fitzhenry appointed as new SIC, p.19

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FOI experts discuss failures at heart of government

FOI Specialist Martin Rosenbaum has analysed ICO decision notices from the previous two years and discovered a litany of complaints and criticism directed against bodies at the heart of the government. Mr Rosenbaum concluded his research by speculating whether Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham is being tough enough in her approach to enforcing the law.

‘Poor’, ‘disappointing’ and ‘unacceptable’ were just some of the descriptions of the treatment of FOI applications by the

Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Cabinet Office.

The Cabinet Office and the Home Office were identified as having the worst record of failure on timely cooperation in the country. The two departments accounted for more than half of the number of Information Notices (Commissioner’s enforcement tool, reserved for particularly uncooperative bodies) issued by the ICO in the period. Since May 2015, the regulator has issued 50 such notices, with 15 going against the Cabinet

Office and 11 against the Home Office. Mr Rosenbaum said: “As the department responsible both for FOI policy and for civil service efficiency, the Cabinet Office should surely be setting a good example to the rest of Whitehall.”

In dozens of instances, the Commissioner condemned the Cabinet Office’s slow responses.

In one case involving files on the UK’s historical relations with India, the ICO’s decision accused

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Elizabeth Denham publishes first Annual Report

The Information Commissioner’s Office has released its latest Annual Report, showing numbers of FOI complaints and most complained about sectors being similar to the previous year.

The ICO handled nearly 5,500 complaints this year, an increase of almost 5% on 2015/16.

Of these, the ICO took action in 27% of all cases, while a further 25% were

‘informally resolved’, with the majority of the remainder of complaints either ineligible or made too early.

The report names local government as the sector which generated the highest percentage of complaints, with 39% of all complaints sent to the ICO referring to councils across the country.

Central government is the sector with the second-

highest number of complaints at 17%, followed by the police and criminal justice sector at 14%.

All three sectors were in the top three regarding FOI complaints the previous year, the report shows, with councils generating 40% of all complaints, central government on 17% and police and criminal justice on 16%.

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