

# Freedom of Information

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## Headlines

- Commissioner orders release of safeguarding review findings following unsuccessful application of section 35, p.17
- FOI journalist complains about biases in ICO’s listening exercise, p.19
- FOI agency understaffed and overwhelmed, p.20

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## Redacted briefing document reveals ICO’s thinking on FOI strategy

The Information Commissioner’s Office has disclosed a redacted briefing document prepared for the new Commissioner John Edwards in January 2022, on developing the ICO’s FOI strategy.

The document, authored by Warren Seddon, the ICO’s Director of FOI and Transparency, was intended to inform and support Mr Edwards as he begun a listening tour of key stakeholders (which is ongoing). It contains the ICO’s thoughts on current and future approaches to FOI.

The nine page briefing begins by restating the goals that the previous Information Commissioner committed to as part of Openness by Design, the ICO’s bespoke strategy for the ICO’s Access to Information functions, which completed this month (March 2022).

Those goals were: (1) ensuring that access to information rights are upheld in a consistent and timely manner; (2) providing excellent customer service to individuals making requests to the ICO; (3) raising awareness of access to information rights and making

it easier for the public to access their rights; (4) prompting the reform of information rights legislation so that it remains fit for purpose; and (5) further developing and sustaining new international partnerships.

“Despite a lack of additional funding for this area of work, we will be able to make a case that we have completed or made significant progress against goals 1,2,4 and 5. The combined impact of the pandemic on our service, a continual rise in casework and a

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## Minister confirms that Cabinet Office does not routinely capture data

Cabinet Office Minister Steve Barclay has written to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee confirming that the Cabinet Office does not routinely capture data on the number of FOI requests which are referred to the controversial FOI Clearing House.

Referring to a figure he previously provided for the number of cases dealt with by the Clearing House function, Mr Bar-

clay said it related to ‘round robins’, i.e. requests made to more than one department and that have repeat characteristics. In 2020, the Cabinet Office, via its Clearing House function, gave advice on 516 aggregated ‘round robins’, said Mr Barclay. This, he said, is a small proportion of over 30,000 requests received by government departments in the same time period.

The review of the Clearing House is ongoing. In January 2022, the Cabinet Office’s Permanent Secretary, Alex Chisholm, said his colleagues has yet to appoint anyone to lead the internal review that the authority plans to do.

It has emerged that the Cabinet Office has so far spent around £39,000 on legal action attempting to keep the Clearing House operations protected from disclosure.