

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- ICO completes its overhaul of publication scheme documentation, p.18
- Health bodies must pro-actively disclose details of meetings with pharmaceutical companies, p.19
- FOI law passed in Paraguay, p.20

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Minister reveals three-pronged plan for future of FOIA

Justice Minister Simon Hughes has revealed his pre-election FOI plans, which include an updated FOIA Code of Practice, increased transparency for outsourcing contracts and a consultation on expanding the Act's scope.

Mr Hughes said that he intends to take three steps before the May 2015 general election.

Firstly, he wants to press ahead with plans to extend FOI to cover the Housing Ombudsman, the Advertising Standards Authority, the Panel on Takeover and Mergers, and the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

The Minister said he hopes that the move will not be controversial, as the list of bodies is a limited group compared with the much longer list of bodies the government previously indicated in 2011 as under consideration for FOI coverage.

The second proposed step is updating the Section 45 Code of Practice which gives guidance on how public authorities should implement FOI. The updated Code would contain stricter guidelines on the amount of time taken for assessing if releasing information is in the public interest and also for reviews of

FOI decisions.

It is understood that the Code would include new provisions giving greater transparency for outsourcing contracts (for the ICO's view on this, see the news item on page 18).

The third proposed step is a far-reaching consultation exercise, to cover both wider principles of potential FOI coverage and administrative processes for its current operation.

Mr Hughes would like to increase the scrutiny of

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ICO announces latest monitoring, and praises others for raising standards

The ICO has announced the latest four bodies to be monitored over timeliness in responding to requests, and has given feedback of the results of its previous monitoring.

London Borough of Lambeth, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Warwick District Council and Wigan Council are being monitored after each council was the subject of a significant number of FOI complaints

to the ICO over delays in their response times.

The ICO will be examining the timeliness of all four councils' responses to FOI requests received between 1st September and 30th November 2014.

ICO Deputy Commissioner, Graham Smith, commented: "The four councils we have named today should see their inclusion on the latest monitoring list as a clear signal that

they need to improve their practices."

Meanwhile, the BBC and Essex Police, subjects of the ICO's previous monitoring exercise, have been praised for raising their standards for timeliness of their responses to FOI requests.

The two organisations were monitored between 1st May and 31st July

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