

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- Local Government Transparency Regulations now in force, p.17
- SIC's Annual Report reveals 14% rise in requests, p.18
- New version of Open Government Licence launched, p.20

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Private Members' Bills foretell new transparency obligations

A new private Member's Bill published on 28th October seeks to amend the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to apply its provisions to private healthcare companies and other bodies seeking health service contracts.

The Bill, if enacted, would apply to information relating to contracts or bids submitted to an NHS body, matters affecting its ability to provide services in accordance with that contract and its performance of that contract.

The sponsor of the Bill, which is expected to have its House of Commons second reading debate

on 5th December 2014, is Labour MP, Grahame Morris. If enacted, it will enter into force on 1st September 2015 in England and Wales.

On 17th October, the MPs debated another private Member's Bill that would ensure that all information held by a contractor about a public service contract is subject to FOIA, regardless of what the contract itself says.

The Transparency and Accountability Bill which is sponsored by Liberal Democrat MP, John Hemming, aims (among other things)

to increase government accountability relating to child care proceedings. Commenting on the Bill, Mr Hemming said:

"Simon Hughes (State Minister responsible for FOI) has agreed to further meetings. Specifically on the issue of FOI, the government is proposing to change the code of conduct for contractors. I personally believe that statute will be necessary, but this is a good first step".

Mr Hemming added that it was 'clear that the UK public systems are very

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Committee criticises arm's-length government as opaque 'Matrix'

The Public Administration Select Committee has said that the system of arms-length government (quangos and agencies) is still 'confused and opaque' and lacks accountability, despite the government's reforms.

The Committee, which was tasked with reporting on who is accountable in relationships between the government and arm's-length bodies in the wake of controversy around the

government's handling of flooding last Winter, released its first report on 4th November.

The report cites organisational forms and names as 'inconsistent', saying that 'most public bodies answer to Ministers but some are directly accountable to Parliament'.

The report states: 'There is no agreement on how many types of body exist. There are overlaps and

blurring between categories. Accountability arrangements and reforms so far have been ad hoc.'

The report notes that the government has reviewed non-departmental public bodies, but recommends that it should review all forms of arm's-length government, including executive agencies and non-ministerial departments.

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