

Freedom of Information

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Constitutional Affairs Committee critiques FOI

Headlines:

- OPSI and National Archives merger, p.14
- Brown forced to disclose pensions information, p.15
- Commissioner to get 'tough', p.15

The Constitutional Affairs Committee has published a report into the progress of the Freedom of Information Act saying that the legislation is proving 'useful' and 'effective' and is leading to the release of significant and valuable information.

However, the Committee regards excessive delays on access to information as contrary to the spirit of the Act and welcomes a commitment from the Information Commissioner to adopt a firmer approach to enforcement, putting "pressure on public authorities" to deal with requests more quickly.

According to the Commit-

tee, "the DCA must work with the Information Commissioner to raise standards so that authorities consistently provide a more timely response to requesters."

The Committee has also demanded that the ICO speed up its complaints resolution process—which it regarded as unsatisfactory, "with many requesters and public authorities having to wait months for the Commissioner to begin investigating their complaints." The quality of some investigations was "inadequate."

The Commissioner is expected to publish a progress report in September,

which the Committee will use to assess the success of the ICO's recovery action plan.

The Committee is not convinced the relationship between DCA and the ICO is working effectively. It recommends that the Government consider making the Information Commissioner directly accountable to, and funded by, Parliament.

The Committee also expresses concern that there is apparent complacency in Government about preserving digital records, indicating a "lack of leadership" in improving records management in pub-

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Publication schemes — ICO publishes new 'policy'

A review of FOI publication schemes has found a low level of awareness of publication schemes and a need for clearer guidance on their content and practical operation.

The review, carried out by the Information Commissioner's Office, found that public authorities want clear guidance from the Commissioner as to what should be in their publication schemes. This has led

to the publication of a new policy aimed at helping public authorities to develop more effective schemes.

Assistant Commissioner, Ged Tracey, said, "The review indicated that public authorities wanted the ICO to help them to develop and clarify existing schemes. We intend to do this through a combination of support and the production of good practice

guidelines leading to the delivery of Sector Publication Scheme Packs."

Public authorities will now be required to submit their schemes for re-approval between 1st June and 31st December 2008. However, they will still be required to meet their continuing legal duties in relation to existing schemes.

During the interim period
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