



Freedom of Information

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Headlines:

- The future of FOI, p.14
- Request for dead body image, p.15
- Openness creates pension problems for Chancellor, p.15

Inside this issue:

Editorial	2
FOI and confidentiality—when will information be protected?	3
Spotlight of FOI moves closer to the heart of government	6
Recent decisions	11
FOI News	14

Delay to fees changes may see plans scrapped

Following plans to water down FOI by making information less freely available, the UK government now seems to be making a U-turn.

The government had proposed to allow public authorities to add more activities (such as reading documents and consulting with other staff) to the list of items that are counted in the reckoning for charging—anything over £600 for central government and £450 for local authorities will not be disclosed.

But there is now to be

a further opportunity to comment on the proposals.

According to the official statement, the government is issuing a supplementary paper to consult on the principle of amending the 2004 Freedom of Information Fees Regulations, specifically on whether they should be amended to deal with requests that impose a disproportionate burden on public authority resources.

The supplementary paper is aimed at members of the public, public

authorities, the media and campaign groups with an interest in the proposed changes.

Information Rights Minister Baroness Ashton said, “The Freedom of Information Act has benefited the public enormously. We must continue to build on its success.

“It is entirely right a reasonable amount of money and time is spent dealing with requests for information. But public money is limited and it is the Government’s

(Continued on page 14)

FOI—according to the ICO

The Information Commissioner’s Office has issued a press release stating that 4 out of 5 public authorities have a positive attitude towards the Freedom of Information Act two years after its introduction.

83% of public authorities surveyed by the Commissioner apparently believe the Act has helped create a culture of greater openness in the public sector, and 59% of respondents agreed that freedom of information had reduced unnecessary secrecy.

Over half of public authorities questioned said that since the Act was introduced they now publish more information as a matter of course. However, a third of respondents felt their organisation would release less information under the Act if permitted to charge for consideration time.

Three quarters of respondents said they had received requests for information under the Act. Information regarding decisions made by

public authorities and statistics about organisations were the most requested pieces of information.

According to the research, requests for personal information about staff was the most common reason for refusing disclosure under the Act. One-third of public authorities turned down requests for commercially sensitive information.

The survey was carried *(Continued on page 14)*