The UK Government’s recent proposal to restructure FOI fees will no longer go ahead. Currently, FOI requests are mostly free; those that are charged for may be refused if the request will cost more than the £450/£600 ceiling cost, which is in place to prevent FOI bills soaring. The Government planned to change this structure and introduce a system where requests are charged on a billed-for basis. Such changes would have allowed authorities to refuse more FOI requests, as more requests would reach the ceiling and thus become refusible.

More controversially, the proposal suggested that multiple requests from one organisation would be measured under a single ceiling, giving large media organisations a severe disadvantage over other requestors. The changes were opposed strongly by campaigners, and Ministry of Justice statistics reveal that of the 324 individuals/organisations who responded to the Government’s consultation, 73% objected to it. Respondents feared that the change to fees would restrict transparency in decision-making by public authorities and would reduce the democratic effects that the Act has created since it came into force.

The Ministry of Justice said that it would not proceed with the proposed changes. “Taking account of the range of responses received, the Government has decided to make no changes to the existing fees regulations,” a spokesman said.

The spokesman added that the Ministry of Justice intends “to deliver a (Continued on page 14)