



Freedom of Information

Volume 7, Issue 5

May / June 2011

Headlines:

- Scottish FOI guidance launched, p.17
- Cabinet Office delays over dossier, p.18
- Notice on Tribunal website dictates change, p.20

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Government departments not meeting FOI time limits

After monitoring the performance of 33 public authorities, the UK Information Commissioner's Office has found that several organisations, including the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence and Birmingham City Council have failed to reduce the time taken to respond to Freedom of Information requests.

The authorities were monitored over a period of three months from 1st October to 31st December 2010 and the ICO is now in discussions with some of the organisations about the improvements they

should put in place, as well as the appropriate regulatory action.

In addition, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the London Borough of Islington, Wolverhampton City Council and Westminster City Council have been asked to sign undertakings to improve their performance in this area.

Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, said: "I am delighted that over two thirds of the authorities whose performance we have been

monitoring have managed to overcome their problems. However, the remaining authorities have not done enough to convince us that they have a clear and credible plan for getting back on track.

"Over the next four weeks, we shall be discussing appropriate next steps with them."

No action is being taken against the remaining 26 authorities because they have maintained or improved their response times sufficiently.

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PM calls for review of Whitehall FOI management

Following the discovery that sensitive information released in relation to Freedom of Information requests was not sufficiently redacted, David Cameron has ordered a review of Whitehall information management.

One example is the admission by the Ministry of Defence that secrets about Britain's nuclear submarines were obtainable from a government report online.

Due to a technical error, although the document had been redacted, those parts that has been blacked-out could be read by simply 'copy and pasting' the contents into another document. It has now been replaced with a secure version of the document.

Since this incident, further discoveries of insufficient redaction have been found in documents from other Whitehall departments, such as the Department

of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Some officials use a software programme such as Photoshop to paste a black area over text that needs to be redacted, which obscures it but does not remove it.

By editing documents in this way, normal home or office software can disclose the obscured text.

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