

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- Scottish housing associations to be subject to FOIA from November, p.18
- Government failing on FOI, think tank warns, p.19
- College hiding principal's expenses may be committing criminal offence, p.20

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Commissioner urges government to extend the Act

The Information Commissioner has called for the Freedom of Information Act to be expanded to include non-public sector organisations, including charities and social care bodies, that run government services.

In a report to Parliament titled 'Outsourcing Oversight? The case for reforming access to information law, Parliament', Elizabeth Denham lays out a detailed case for extending the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 to include "organisations

providing a public function...[and] to extend the reach of the existing law to enable greater transparency and accountability in modern public services." The Commissioner said the current law is unfit for purpose. "It needs to keep pace with the changes in the modern public sector and public expectations," she said.

The report quotes a 2018 Institute for Government study which notes that the government now spends almost a third of its total expenditure on external suppliers.

In other words, the government relies on a large number of organisations other than 'traditional' public authorities to deliver and support public services. The report recognises that this reliance manifests itself in various forms, from outsourcing to joint ventures.

Both the collapse of Carillion (which held around 420 public sector contracts) and the Grenfell fire tragedy (in respect of which individuals are said to have faced difficulties obtaining documents from

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ICO consults on its proposed 3 year Freedom of Information strategy

The ICO has launched its proposed Freedom of Information strategy for the next three years, and is inviting comment on the draft document.

Introducing the strategy, Gill Bull, Director of Freedom of Information at the Information Commissioner's Office, said "every year, more and more people ask us to independently review decisions made by public authorities about their requests for information under the Freedom of

Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations. By the end of this financial year, we're expecting to have received a record 6,500 cases for consideration.

"Our vision is to increase the public's confidence in organisations that process personal data and in those responsible for making public information available.

"The transparency brought about by freedom

of information is an important part of that vision and an essential part of our democracy. Amid concerns about the impacts of fake news, being able to access accurate and timely public information assumes increasing importance."

Ms Bull referred to recent headlines regarding the numbers of young people in care being placed in poor quality accommodation; variation in access to

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