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... (Continued on page 17)