

Freedom of Information

Volume 15, Issue 5

May / June 2019

Headlines

- Northants Police draft in volunteers to tackle transparency backlog, p.18
- Ministers accused of stonewalling over migrant health reports, p.19
- Baseline assessment data kept hidden, p.20

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Reject rates get higher and higher

Government ministers have been accused of “keeping the public in the dark” as latest official figures show that the number of FOI requests rejected by Whitehall departments hit a record high.

Requests to government departments have nearly doubled since the law was enacted 14 years ago. 41% of all resolvable requests received by government departments last year were withheld in full — a 20% rise since the transparency law came into effect in 2005. Meanwhile, 42% of the

34,452 FOI requests received last year were granted in full, compared to 60% in 2005.

The Cabinet Office, the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Ministry of Justice topped the list of departments rejecting requests in full last year, turning down 58%, 54% and 53% of all resolvable queries respectively.

Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle, speaking for the Best for Britain campaign, said: “It’s no surprise that the departments most

keen to keep the public in the dark are those most heavily involved with Brexit.

“You have to ask yourself why this information is being hidden. The government is clearly desperate to avoid anyone getting hold of anything to do with its Brexit strategy, because it’s all an embarrassing mess.

“The lack of transparency over this is very worrying, but unfortunately consistent with the government’s refusal to allow

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Campaign group raises concerns about the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill

The Campaign for Freedom of Information has discussed its “serious concerns” about the prohibition on disclosure contained in Clause 28 of the draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill.

The draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill sets out how the government intends to maintain environmental standards as the UK leaves the EU.

The group says that as

things currently stand Clause 28 is likely to override the right of access that would otherwise apply under the Environmental Information Regulations. It would prevent disclosure regardless of whether it would be harmful and regardless of the public interest in the information; would introduce a greater level of secrecy than applies under existing EC arrangements; would be incompatible with both the Aarhus Convention and Article 10 of the European Convention

on Human Rights; and would be a major reversal of the progress made over more than 25 years in opening up environmental information.

Under the draft Bill, the proposed Office for Environmental Protection (‘OEP’) could investigate complaints alleging a serious failure by a public authority to comply with environmental law. It could demand information from the authority by

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