

# Freedom of Information

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## Headlines

- ICO adds to guidance on information held for EIRs purposes, p.18
- ICO publishes new analysis of publication schemes, p.19
- Analysis of meetings between ministers and lobbyists, p.20

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## Internal consultations on FOI requests — new guidance

The Information Commissioner’s Office has published a short guide for public authorities to support them in keeping internal consultations on FOI requests timely and transparent.

The guide contains key steps and actions that authorities can take to help to minimise any sign-off delays. It is also designed to support authorities in being easily able to explain to the ICO what measures they have taken to comply with their statutory duties.

Public authorities frequently need to consult internally on how to handle requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The complexity of requests or the sensitivity of information being requested often requires higher level of sign-off.

The ICO says that “seeking multiple layers of sign-off is not a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with the statutory timescales. Therefore, you should put measures in place to ensure that you manage any of these

processes within the statutory timeframe.”

The guide identifies minimum questions to consider for anyone involved in the process of administering and taking decisions on FOI requests as part of the internal consultation process.

The first question is whether the FOI response needs to be cleared with individuals or teams outside the usual case processes. These might include senior staff or officials, Ministers, councillors with relevant respon-

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## ICO releases suite of FOI resources

The Information Commissioner’s Office has developed a suite of products to help public bodies improve their compliance with freedom of information law and respond to information requests without delay.

In addition to the guide on consulting internally on freedom of information requests (see above), the suite includes a FOI self-assessment toolkit; key questions on timeliness and a responses rate calculator; a template action

plan; training videos; and the ICO’s publication schemes report (see the news item on page 19).

The FOI toolkit is designed to help public authorities assess their current FOI performance and provide indicators of where efforts should be focused in order to improve. It also provides templates for taking improvement actions.

The toolkit currently has two topics: timeliness and the costs limit exemption.

The ICO will continue to add topics to the toolkit.

First, authorities need to decide which topic they want to assess their performance against. Once they have decided, they can then work through each of the modules in the topic.

“It is important to complete all topics to give you a full understanding of where all opportunities for improvement lie,”

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