

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- FOI responsibility now with Cabinet Office, p.17
- Details of 3 year old tender capable of protection, p.18
- European Commission accused of FOI cover up, p.19

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Government's FOI review to take evidence at the end of September

The government's controversial review of the Freedom of Information Act will begin taking evidence from the public in September.

The body responsible for the review, the Independent Commission on Freedom of Information, made the announcement saying that information about the form of responses would be up on its website soon.

The Commission, which has been met with widespread suspicion and concern since its inception in July 2015, has remained quiet about its activities so far.

FOI requests to the Cabinet Office (which is sponsoring the review) seeking further information about the review's scope and Commission members have been fruitless.

The Commission's terms of reference are to 'consider whether there is an appropriate public interest balance between transparency, accountability and the need for sensitive information to have robust protection'.

It will also look at whether the operation of the Act adequately recognises the need for a 'safe space' for policy development and implementation and frank

advice. The Commission, whose members include former Home Secretary and FOI dissident Jack Straw, may also consider the compliance burden of FOIA on public authorities and whether any changes are needed.

Labour MP Tom Watson said: 'It is quite clear this isn't a review, it's a process to roll back the Freedom of Information Act.' Watson's colleagues in the Labour Party have turned on former Home Secretary Jack Straw, accusing him of conniving with the Conservative Party to disman-

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Ministry of Justice monitored over unacceptable delays

The Information Commissioner's Office is monitoring the Ministry of Justice following concerns over the timeliness of its responses to Freedom of Information requests.

The ICO will review the performance of the Ministry of Justice in relation to FOI requests received between 1st September 2015 and 30th November 2015.

The review is happening because of delays being identified in a significant number of cases, where the statutory time limit of 20 working days was exceeded. The latest MOJ quarterly FOI statistics indicate that the response rate was well below 85%, which is one of the triggers for formal monitoring to be considered.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich Council, which was the subject of an ex-

tended period of monitoring, has now been taken off formal monitoring following sustained improvements in performance.

The ICO has also announced that Cumbria County Council, Nottingham City Council and Salford City Council are no longer being monitored after improvements in their performance

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