

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- GDPR ‘raises uncertainties for FOI archives’, p.17
- SIC vacates Office, her replacement yet to be announced, p.18
- Police Federation of England and Wales now receiving FOI requests, p.20

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Denham — ‘it’s the message, not the media, that counts’

The Information Commissioner has discussed the critical roles that archives and information management play in government accountability, saying she is “committed to doing everything I can to improve the state of information management in the UK.”

Giving a recent speech at Northumbria University, the Commissioner reflected on her experience from her former positions as a professional archivist and regulator of access and privacy rights in Canada, before setting out her

views on the importance of archives and records to the future of British democracy.

“What a pivotal time it is for us”, the Commissioner said. “In an age where fake news threatens to erode democracy, the reliability of professional record-keepers can counter the expanding glut of misinformation, sensationalism and false fears.

“We need archivists and information managers to advocate and promote the importance of good, accurate, accessible information management sys-

tems. And yet, most people remain flummoxed as to what exactly constitutes information management, records systems, or data protection and information law.”

The Commissioner recalled how her passionate belief in the necessity for proper information management was present even before she entered academic study. Ever since, she has become “a firm believer” that public officials, both elected and appointed, must be held to account through

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New FOI Code of Practice to be published in early 2017

The Cabinet Office has confirmed that it will review the Section 45 Code of Practice in the early part of this year. The Code has not been updated since FOIA’s introduction in 2005.

The current Code lays out what FOI Officers should do to help provide requesters with advice and assistance under Section 16 FOIA. It also covers how authorities should transfer requests

when they have not been sent to the correct place, confidentiality discussions, third parties and responses, and complaints procedures for FOI requests.

Journalist and author Matt Burgess commented: “A well-revised, requester focused Code of Practice could include timelines for public authorities to handle internal reviews, clarification on the time needed to

process public interest test considerations and more.”

The government has said that the revised Code will also clarify how private contractors getting public money are to interact with FOI. Also, a review previously concluded that the Code of Practice should describe how authorities should use the vexatious (Section 14) provision within the FOI Act.