



Freedom of Information

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Headlines:

- Government withholds documents because of risk of criticism, p.17
- Council could 'clearly improve' detail recorded, p.18
- New guidance on appeals to the First Tier Tribunal, p.19

New government, new FOI

The new coalition government has announced a raft of FOI changes to increase transparency in both central and local government bodies.

In his first podcast to the nation at the end of May, the Prime Minister outlined plans to “rip off the cloak of secrecy and extend transparency as far and wide as possible,” and announced the imminent publication of various data sets, including government spending information.

This was followed up by a letter from the Prime Minister to all government departments setting out details of the transparency

programme and deadlines for the publication of a wide range of information. (See the article on pages 3-5).

The coalition government will also introduce a Freedom Bill to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act. It is thought that the contents of the Bill will be largely based on a draft of the Bill published by the Liberal Democrat Party previously.

Jonathan Bamford, Head of Strategic Liaison at the ICO, said of the new pledges: “transparency is the cornerstone of democracy.

There should be a presumption in favour of openness — transparency should be the default position, unless restricted by other serious concerns such as national security.

“We are seeing positive statements about the value of transparency, which chimes in with what we at the ICO are concerned about.”

However, the ICO is also concerned about the government’s budget cuts. A spokesperson from the ICO told *Freedom of Information* “we feel that it is unrealistic

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Police complaints body tardy with information requests

The Independent Police Complaints Commission has been criticised by the Information Commissioner for its freedom of information request handling.

The Information Commissioner has issued an Enforcement Notice against the organisation, instructing the IPCC to get on top of requests by the end of September.

The Information Commissioner was moved to take action after receiving nine complaints about the IPCC. Then, during his investigation, the IPCC admitted it was dealing with 72 requests, 69 were out of time.

The IPCC has informed the Commissioner that September was the time by which it hopes to have everything up and running smoothly again.

It has taken on three new staff — two temps and one permanent — bringing the total in the team to four. Staff have been given a target of dealing with two FOI requests and three subject access requests every week.

The Commissioner has told the IPCC to ensure that its backlog of information requests is dealt with separately from new requests, to avoid mixing them.

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