

**MINUTES OF THE INFORMATION RIGHTS USER GROUP, 8 FEBRUARY 2007
AT DEPARTMENT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS, SELBORNE HOUSE,
VICTORIA, LONDON SW1**

Chair: Belinda Crowe, Head of Information Rights Division, DCA

Attendees: Paul Bettison, Leader of Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Anthony Kenny, Intellect UK
Judith Cullen, Head of Environmental Information Unit, DEFRA
Maurice Frankel, Campaign for Freedom of Information
Bob Satchwell, Society of Editors
Ian Readhead, Deputy Chief Constable
Peter Bottomley MP
Professor Robert Hazell, University College London, Constitution Unit
Richard Thomas, Information Commissioner, Observer
Graham Smith, Assistant Information Commissioner, Observer

Apologies: Baroness Ashton
Steve Bailey, JISC
John Hipwood, Chairman of the Press Lobby
Austin Mitchell MP
Lord Lester of Herne Hill
Rosemary Jay, Pinsent Masons
Adrian Pollitt, Head of the Office of Strategic Health Authorities

1. Baroness Ashton was unable to attend the User Group meetings, but members elected to use the opportunity to discuss the consultation paper with officials, the following points were made:
 - 1.1 Suggestion that the underlying policy objectives of s.14 could potentially be used as a neater way of addressing the problems the proposed regulations are seeking to address.
 - 1.2 New fee regulations have the potential to create a bureaucratic approach and the need to introduce safeguards to prevent perverse effect on the application to requests.
 - 1.3 Proposed fee regulations would require new skills – full comprehensive guidance will be required to support the regulations to ensure officials will be able to apply the regulations appropriately.
 - 1.4 Clear definitions required in guidance to accompany any new regulations.
 - 1.5 Need to consider how public authorities will audit their cost estimates – the suggestion of a centrally produced pro-forma was considered to be a useful tool for officials in ensuring appropriate application of the fee regulations.
 - 1.6 Impact on the ICO in terms of volume and cost of appeals generated as a result of any new fee regulations needed to be considered.

- 1.7 Important to maintain dialogue with requestors to clarify request to help requestors determine exactly what information they want.
 - 1.8 A need to consider how regulations look at the value of the request with concern that the aggregation provision does not look at the public interest.
 - 1.9 Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the pro-active release of information.
 - 1.10 Appeal cases are a very useful process in helping authorities to look at their processes and increase learning of the Act, which then becomes embedded.
2. Belinda Crowe stated that a series of workshops were being conducted with representatives from across the public sector to support the consultation and welcomed further thoughts from members on the fee regulations.