

MINUTES OF THE INFORMATION RIGHTS USER GROUP, TUESDAY 24 JULY 2007 AT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, CLIVE HOUSE, VICTORIA, SW1

Chair: Michael Wills MP, Minister with responsibility for Information Rights

Attendees: Maurice Frankel (Campaign for Freedom of Information)
Bob Satchwell (Society of Editors)
Lord Lester of Herne Hill
Peter Bottomley MP
Rosemary Jay (Pinsent Masons)
Paul Bettison (Leader of Bracknell Forest Borough Council)

Observers: Richard Thomas (Information Commissioner)
Graham Smith (Deputy Information Commissioner)

Apologies: Austin Mitchell MP
Steve Bailey, JISC
Ian Readhead, Deputy Chief Constable
Professor Robert Hazel, University College London, Constitution Unit
Anthony Kenny, Intellect UK
John Hipwood, Chair of Press Lobby
Judith Cullen, Head of Environmental Information Unit, DEFRA

1. Freedom of Information (FOI) fees regulations

1.1 The consultation on the fees regulations has closed. The responses are being analysed and Ministers will decide next steps in due course.

1.2 The responses to the consultation will be published, and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) will consider early publication of the responses.

2. FOI guidance

2.1 The MoJ is reviewing the guidance on its website and undertaking a project to update it to include references to relevant decisions of the Information Commission and Information Tribunal.

3. Making FOI work better

3.1 The Information Commissioner's Office are producing:

- Guidance on MPs correspondence
- Further guidance on section 14 of the FOI Act (vexatious requests), to be released this week
- A charter for responsible use of the FOI Act, to be released next week

3.2 The MoJ is:

- encouraging government departments to release information proactively
- working with The National Archives to review the records management code of practice under s46 of the Act

4. Role of the Information Rights User Group

4.1 The role of the User Group should be focussed on strategic discussions about how to build on the success of freedom of information. Specifically:

- the FOI Act is already having the impact of improving government
- the challenge is how to balance the benefits of FOI without diverting resources
- the role of IR user group should be as a sustained, regular dialogue with feedback of perceptions of FOI and ways to address challenges

- the group needs to work collaboratively to identify and address issues in FOI at an early stage

5. Next steps

5.1 MoJ to write to Group members with a list of its activities to make FOI work better.

5.2 The next meeting is to be held in September.