

Press Release

Date: 28 September 2010

Freedom of Information Act shines a torch on public services, says Information Commissioner

“Freedom of Information has a key role to play in helping to deliver greater transparency and accountability. These are key priorities in public policy”, says Information Commissioner Christopher Graham in a message to mark International Right to Know Day.

International Right to Know Day is designed to raise awareness of individuals’ rights to access information held by public authorities and gain better understanding of how public money is spent.

Christopher Graham says: “Freedom of Information shines a torch into the dark corners of public service, identifying wasted money and duplication of effort. Freedom of Information must have paid for itself many times over in the beneficial impact it has had on reducing unnecessary spending – and that contribution can only increase in the years ahead.

“Organisations, whether public or private, need to invest in information rights - whether it’s Freedom of Information, good records management, or data protection. Where organisations fall down on their information rights obligations they do so at the cost of destroying citizen and consumer trust.”

Under the Freedom of Information Act, public authorities are required to operate a Publication Scheme. Under this scheme authorities must produce a guide to the information they hold and are encouraged to publish as much information as possible as a matter of routine.

Christopher Graham continues: "In the current circumstances of reduced budgets and increased concern for transparency and accountability, information rights are a front line service, not a mere back office function. We all have to do more for less, but much is expected of all of us working in the information rights field."

Over the past 12 months, Decision Notices by the ICO have ordered the disclosure of the Youth Justice Board Physical Control in Care Prison Service manual, details of bonuses received by the City of London Police Force and information relating to the amount the BBC spends on taxi booking services.

"These headline successes by the ICO are only part of the story," says Mr Graham. "More and more, public authorities are volunteering to publish information without being ordered to do so by the Information Commissioner. That means less money is being wasted on long drawn out investigations and appeals."

ENDS

If you need more information, please contact the ICO press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. Links to Decision Notices noted:

- Youth Justice Board

http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/decisionnotices/2009/fs_50173181.pdf

- City of London Police – Police bonuses

http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/decisionnotices/2010/fs_50262907.pdf

- BBC's taxi spend

http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/decisionnotices/2010/fs_50259955.pdf

2. The Information Commissioner's Office upholds information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.

3. The ICO has specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.

4. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can find us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ICOnews

5. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides individuals or organisations with the right to request official information held by a public authority. The Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) provide access to environmental information. The ICO's policy on enforcing public access to official information and the powers at its disposal are set out [here](#).