

# Westminster Legal Policy Forum Keynote Seminar: Freedom of Information - future challenges

Date: Morning, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Venue: Congress Hall, Congress Centre, 28 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS

Draft agenda subject to change

- 8.45 - 9.00 Registration
- 9.00 - 9.05 **Chairman's opening remarks**  
Lord Redesdale
- 9.05 - 9.15 **The impact of the Freedom of Information Act**  
*Themes: Why was the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) introduced, and how well has it responded to the initial objectives set? Who uses the FOIA, and what do they want to know? How can the impact of the FOIA be measured?*  
Dr Benjamin Worthy, Research Associate, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Unit, the Constitution Unit, School of Public Policy, University College London
- 9.15 - 10.05 **'You only need to ask' - Freedom of Information requests in practice**  
*Themes: What are the advantages and disadvantages of an increasing emphasis on a 'culture of transparency'? How well are public authorities complying with the FOIA? How efficient are responses to information requests and what are the consequences of delays in the FOI system? Are there disparities between public authorities in how they handle and respond to information requests? Is there a clear understanding across public authorities of when exemptions to the Act can appropriately be invoked? How can the recording and storage of information by public authorities be improved? How significant is increased access to numerical information under the FOIA and are there resulting concerns over the nature of information presented in a statistical format?*  
Dr Mirza Ahmad, President, Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors and Corporate Director of Governance, Birmingham City Council  
Patricia Barratt, Senior Associate, Public Policy Group, Clifford Chance  
Paul Jackson, Legal Services, Office for National Statistics  
Matthew Stephenson, Head of Information Governance, University of Salford and Chairman, Records Management Society  
Questions and comments from the floor with Dr Benjamin Worthy, Research Associate, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Unit, the Constitution Unit, School of Public Policy, University College London
- 10.05 - 10.35 **The view from the Information Commissioner's Office**  
Graham Smith, Deputy Commissioner and Director, Freedom of Information, Information Commissioner's Office  
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.35 - 10.40 **Chairman's closing remarks**  
Lord Redesdale
- 10.40 - 11.00 Coffee
- 11.00 - 11.05 **Chairman's opening remarks**  
Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC
- 11.05 - 11.35 **Freedom of Information in a cold climate**  
*Themes: How significant will the budgetary and staffing cuts be in the coming year? How can departments 'do more with less'? Is there a valid concern that response times to FOI requests will increase? How can complaints about delays best be handled? Could FOI request fees be increased to control demand?*  
Professor Robert Hazell, Director, the Constitution Unit, School of Public Policy, University College London  
Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.35 - 12.25 **A culture of transparency - beyond the FOIA**  
*Themes: To what extent is proactive disclosure a common feature of public authority practice, and what is the potential to build upon this? How do the FOIA, Environmental Information Regulations and the Data Protection Act interact, and what more can be done to ensure public authorities are able to recognise the distinction between information requests? How successful is the current appeals process and could more be done to ensure consistency and efficiency in the system? What are the likely implications of the reduction in the 30-year rule?*  
Jenny Carpenter, Senior Policy Advisor, Environmental Information Unit, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Hazel Grant, Partner, Bristows  
Maurice Frankel, Director, Campaign for Freedom of Information  
Robin Callender Smith, Judge, First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)  
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.25 - 12.55 **Freedom of Information - future policy developments**  
Jane Sigley, Head of Freedom of Information Policy and Strategy, Ministry of Justice  
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.55 - 13.00 **Chairman's and Westminster Legal Policy Forum thanks and closing remarks**  
Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC  
Sean Cudmore, Senior Producer, Westminster Legal Policy Forum