



Cabinet Office

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Mr Tim Hughes
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30 September 2015

Dear Mr Hughes,

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

Thank you for your letter of 13 August about the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Like you, the Government regards the FOIA as a fundamental pillar of the UK's approach to open government. We are fully committed to transparency and I support the important contribution that the FOIA has made to increasing accountability across the public sector. Now the FOI Act has been in force for more than ten years we want to make sure it is working effectively. We therefore have appointed an independent Commission to consider its operation.

The terms of reference for the Commission refer specifically to the protection the FOIA provides for sensitive information and the costs it imposes. The issues the Commission has been asked to consider are key to ensuring effective government. It is essential that public authorities have confidence in the ability of the FOIA to protect sensitive information and that its costs are proportionate to the benefits it brings. The Commission will consider its programme of work independently of the Government and will reach its own conclusions.

On the 15 September the Commission announced that it will issue a public call for evidence to inform its thinking. As a result it will be open for all those interested in this subject to contribute their views to the Commission. I would very much like you to feed into this process.

The Ministry of Justice proposal to introduce further fee charging to increase fee income for courts and tribunals is intended to ensure that the justice system as a whole is adequately funded, whilst at the same time reducing the cost of the service to the taxpayer and maintaining access to justice. The Government has recently conducted a public consultation on these proposals, which closed on 15 September, to which I hope you will have also contributed. The outcome will be announced in due course.

I hope that this letter provides some reassurance. I am looking forward to meeting with you and other members of the Open Government Network shortly to continue our ongoing conversation on open government. I understand that the Open Government Project is progressing well and I look forward to seeing the Network's ideas on how we develop an offer on transparency which strengthens this government's commitment to open government overall.

Yours

Matthew

THE RT HON MATTHEW HANCOCK MP