

# Access to information

**Access to information ensures the right of citizens to understand the decisions that are taken on their behalf.**

It underlies public accountability and good governance, helping to ensure that public money is well spent and decisions are taken fairly and effectively.

We live in an age where information is generated, manipulated, transmitted and used in a range of increasingly complex, varied and speedy ways, and is society's lifeblood. By increasing information available to the public, people's understanding of decisions and ability participate meaningfully in a democratic society is enhanced.

Access to information is achieved through a combination of the proactive publication of information by public bodies and its reactive disclosure through mechanisms such as the Freedom of Information Act.

It is a wider concept than simply being able to access the information that public sector bodies hold. This itself requires public sector bodies to look at how they hold information, and to ensure it is managed effectively and to make sure they can continue to access it in the context of rapidly developing technologies. But it is also about what happens before and after people obtain information.

## The challenge

**To bring about a change in approach to how public information is shared, including a change in culture towards a more open and ongoing invitation to people to ask the government for its evidence.**

Currently there are limitations to how government proactively publishes information, and to how public bodies handle requests for it. It can be hard for citizens to scrutinise the chain of reasoning behind government decisions, because departments are inconsistent in making the evidence behind policy formulation and evaluation easily accessible. It can also be difficult to see what research government departments and arms length bodies have commissioned to inform policy, and whether that research has been published.

Government bases policy on evidence. Unless that evidence is as accessible and open to scrutiny as possible, there is a risk that the public will not be able to hold those in power to account as well as they should.

## The outcome

**By 2018 we want to have made real and substantial improvements to the public's ability to hold government to account and to understand its actions, through greater public access to significant and useful information in all parts of the UK.**