

FOI Commissioner takes a new approach

✘ The Scottish Information Commissioner has this month launched a consultation on proposals to revise the way that Scottish public authorities make information proactively available under Freedom of Information (FOI) law. The consultation, which will run until 29 October 2010, is seeking a range of views on the Commissioner's plans to enhance the information that authorities publish for the public.

Under FOI, every Scottish public authority is obliged to produce a 'publication scheme' – a document that sets out the types of information that they commit to routinely publish. Authorities must then make this information – which typically includes minutes of meetings, organisational policies and financial data – proactively available. The Commissioner is consulting on plans to build on best practice in Scotland by developing one model publication scheme for use by all Scottish public authorities. In doing so, he aims to encourage authorities to publish more information, while making the schemes easier for the public to use. The proposals will also mean that the Commissioner can move his own focus away from approving individual authority schemes, to actively assessing whether authorities are publishing information in accordance with the scheme.

Introducing the consultation the Scottish Information Commissioner, Kevin Dunion, said:-

"In these challenging times, as public authority resources are squeezed, my proposal for a single model publication scheme is a more efficient way of fulfilling legal obligations.

"Publishing information proactively has obvious benefits for

the public, but it's also good for authorities. If the public can access the information they want to see directly, then this should reduce the demands on authorities of responding to individual information requests. Indeed, proactive disclosure of certain types of information may also help the public to understand the tough choices that authorities have to make."

The Commissioner's consultation paper is available at www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/News/PublicationSchemeConsultation.asp, or by telephoning 01334 464610.

The consultation closes on Friday 29 October 2010.