



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Examples of best practice in the UK

Access to environmental information

# Transparency in action

- Journalists, activists, campaigners, researchers and ordinary individuals are frequent users of both the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- We publish performance statistics and “league tables” for government bodies
- The Information Commissioner publishes decision notices on the results of investigations
- Appeals to the tribunals and courts are heard in public, except for brief discussions of sensitive information
- The government has two website for proactive disclosure of policy material - <https://gov.uk/> - and data – <https://data.gov.uk/> and other sites for specialist information

# Alignment with the FOI Act where practical

## The benefits

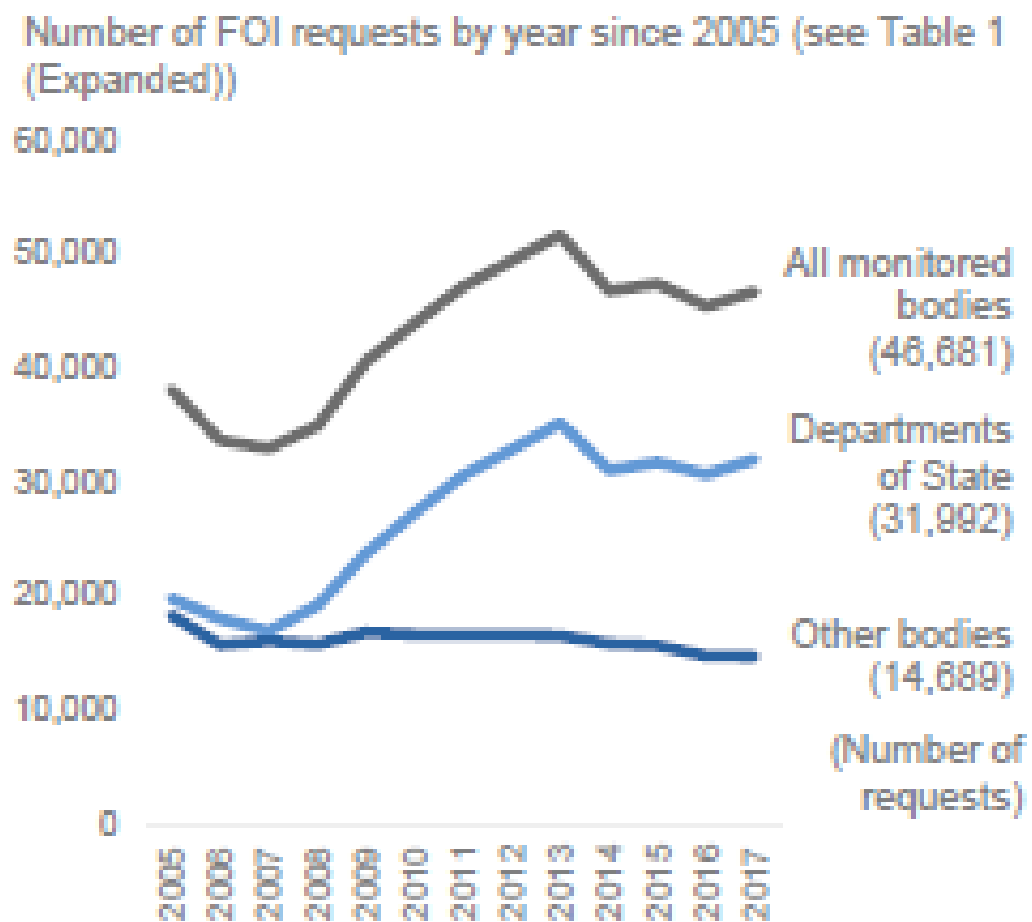
- One model for the practical side of access to information
  - Easier for users and public authorities to understand
  - Similar but not identical access rights
  - Similar procedure for internal administrative reviews, ICO, tribunal appeals etc.
  - Both have a code of practice setting out standards to meet
- The role of the Information Commissioner
  - Independent regulator for both the EIRs and the FOIA – issues decision notices
  - Guidance on both regimes
  - Practical advice for public and public authorities, database of decisions
  - Promotes “publication schemes” to standardise the information disclosed proactively by public authorities
- BUT
  - Differences in the details of exceptions and exemptions

# Publication of performance statistics

## Transparency in action

- Cabinet Office analyses and publishes the performance of 40 central government departments and other bodies which have significant policy-making, regulatory or information-handling functions
- Published quarterly and annually as national statistics
- Limited to requests for information, not proactive disclosure
- Easy-to-use “league tables”
- 46,681 FOI requests were received across all these bodies in 2017 – a 3% increase on 2016
- Fewer than 1500 requests were for environmental information in 2017
- Used by the ICO for monitoring performance
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/704094/foi-statistics-annual-2017-bulletin\\_1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/704094/foi-statistics-annual-2017-bulletin_1.pdf)

# Example of a graph from Cabinet Office



# Figures from What Do They Know

- 514,849 requests submitted since the site began
  - not all are true requests for recorded information
  - some are clearly not asking for recorded information
- 23,651 public authorities on the list
  - not all valid – WDKT’s wish-list of publicly-funded bodies, also some now defunct
- Range from huge city councils to government departments (ministries) to public museums and dentists
- Can see how many requests each public authority has received – local authorities get the most
- Huge divergence in number of requests received by government departments - depends on the level of interest in their policies
- WDTK is a mySociety project run by a charity, run by volunteers

# Proactive publication of data

- Air quality data from over 1500 monitoring sites - <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/data/> - data and simple statistics
- Data.gov.uk - data published by central government, local authorities and public bodies to help users build products and services
- Special section on the environment – example:

## **Meteorological data collected at Thetford (2006-2014)**

**Published by:** Forestry Commission

**Last updated:** 21 March 2016

In response to widespread concern that air pollution could affect forest condition, the International Co-operative Programme on the Assessment and Monitoring of Air Pollution Effects on Forests...

# Example – accessing environmental data

- Access and rights of way
- Land management
- Landscape
- Parks, trails and nature reserves
- Protected sites and species
- Recreation
- Wildlife and habitat conservation
- Publications, maps and data
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

