

Written statement to Parliament

Freedom of information: new Commission

From: Cabinet Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office>), **Lord Bridges of Headley** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/george-bridges>) and Independent Commission on Freedom of Information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-commission-on-freedom-of-information>)

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Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office Lord Bridges laid a written statement in Parliament about the new Commission on Freedom of Information.



We are committed to being the most transparent government in the world.

To deliver that goal we are opening up government to citizens by making it easier to access information and increase the volume available, with a record 20,000 datasets now on data.gov.uk, ([http://data.gov.uk/](http://data.gov.uk)) while protecting a private space for frank advice. We are strengthening accountability and making public services work better for people. The World Wide Web Foundation's Open Data Barometer and Open Knowledge's Global Open Data Index ranked the UK as the world's leading country on open government.

We are proud of these achievements and are committed to going further. Our next Open Government National Action Plan will develop an offer on transparency that further strengthens this government's commitment to open government.

Our aim is to be as open as possible on the substance, consistent with ensuring that a private space is protected for frank advice. To that end as a government we must maintain the best environment for policy-makers to think freely and offer frank advice to decision-makers. The most effective system is when policy makers can freely give advice, whilst citizens can shine a light into government.

We fully support the Freedom of Information Act (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents>) but after more than a decade in operation it is time that the process is reviewed, to make sure it's working effectively. The government has therefore today established an independent, cross-party Commission on Freedom of Information. The Commission's terms of reference are as follows:

“ The Commission will review the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act') to consider whether there is an appropriate public interest balance between transparency, accountability and the need for sensitive information to have robust protection, and whether the operation of the Act adequately recognises the need for a 'safe space' for policy development and implementation and frank advice. The Commission may also consider the balance between the need to maintain public access to information, and the burden of the Act on public authorities,

and whether change is needed to moderate that while maintaining public access to information.”

The Commission will be chaired by Lord Burns, and will comprise the Rt Hon Jack Straw, Lord Howard of Lympne, Lord Carlile of Berriew and Dame Patricia Hodgson.

The Commission will report to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and will publish its findings by the end of November.

The Prime Minister has also confirmed that policy responsibility for Freedom of Information policy will transfer from the Ministry of Justice to the Cabinet Office. This change will be effective from 17 July 2015.

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