

# E learning on Freedom of Information

## Background

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005 the new Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation comes into force, which will affect all officers and councillors who deal with the public. To demonstrate compliance with the Act, a comprehensive programme of training and communication needs to take place within each authority, in preparation for the 2005 deadline.

There are several organisations, including the Local Government Association and the Information Commissioner's Office, providing guidance and advice to local authorities. The IDeA is working with these organisations to produce the content for an e-learning module on Freedom of Information.

An e-learning solution will enable local authorities to put large numbers of staff through the same training, in a shorter period of time, than more traditional training methods can. It also means that the training can be used for new staff and as refresher or just-in-time training.

## Aims

The aim of this e-learning module is to enable local authorities to comply with the FOI Act. To fulfil this, the training will:

- Introduce the FOI Act and the benefits of implementing it
- Outline the role and responsibilities of officers and councillors under the FOI Act
- Enable councils to prepare for implementation of the FOI Act
- Demonstrate how to manage information and handle requests for information
- Convey the customer perspective and expectations of FOI

## Audience

The target audience has been identified as four key groups:

1. Officers who need to be aware of the Act and its implications, but do not have direct responsibilities under it, i.e. they manage information but will not need to handle requests for information
2. Officers who have direct responsibilities under the Act, i.e. they may have to handle requests for information
3. Officers responsible for preparing the council for implementing the Act
4. Councillors

Each group has slightly different requirements from this training, but there are some areas that are relevant to all. The e-learning takes this into account. For example, a checklist for a councillor will be different from a checklist for an officer responsible for implementing FOI in their council.

## Content

The module is broken down into three sections. The first section was released in September 2004. Sections two and three will be released in December 2004.

### ***1. Introduction to the Freedom of Information Act***

- What Freedom of Information is and the drivers for implementing it
- The impact of Freedom of Information on councils
- The relationship of Freedom of Information to related legislation (Data Protection, Environmental Information Regulations, accounts and audit legislation, local government legislation)

- Roles and responsibilities within a council regarding Freedom of Information
- How to prepare for implementation, including checklists and an implementation plan

### ***2. Records Management***

- How to record information and why
- Complying with the Records Management Code
- Benefits of effective records management

### ***3. Handling Information Requests Under FOI***

- The process for handling requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act
- The process for handling requests under related legislation
- When exemptions apply and how to respond
- How to handle complaints

## **Treatment**

### ***Scenarios and examples***

Realistic scenarios and examples are used to provide context and credibility for the learning. If you have any situations you think should be included please contact [Emma Goss](#) on 020 7296 6507.

### ***Characters***

There are two groups of characters used in the scenarios and examples throughout the learning. These include:

Council characters:	councillor, senior manager, officer responsible for implementing FOI, officers responsible for handling information
Members of the public:	journalist, student, parent, retired person, known local business, unknown local business, someone known only by their email address

### ***Checklists***

The module prompts the learner to put into practice what they learn by providing them with checklists to complete. In this way the module pushes learners towards the actual activities they need to undertake to be compliant with the Act.

## **Other IDeA Resources on FOI**

The e-learning module links to a resource on [IDeA Knowledge](#). This provides case studies and examples from the experiences of councils currently preparing for Freedom of Information, as well as a discussion forum to share questions and ideas. There is also a topic briefing paper and a resource list on FOI.

If you would like to contribute any of your experiences for this resource, or would like more information, please contact [Tracy Bortier](#) on 020 7296 6888.

In addition the e-Government Strategic Support Unit is a free resource for all local authorities. The Strategic Advisor with responsibility for FOI is Lydia Pollard: email [lydia.pollard@idea.gov.uk](mailto:lydia.pollard@idea.gov.uk), telephone 020 7296 6189.