FREEDOM OF INFORMATION: THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE’S VIEW

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What I will cover

• FOI and records management
• What local authorities need to do
• What PRO is doing to help
Why FOI needs good RM

Can you answer these questions with ‘yes’?

• Does your organisation know what information it holds and where it is?
• If information has been destroyed, can you show when and why?
• Are you keeping the records you need for current and future information and accountability purposes?
‘Your right to know’

‘Statutory rights of access are of little use if reliable records are not created in the first place, if they cannot be found when needed, or if the arrangement for their eventual archiving or destruction are inadequate’

(White Paper para 6.12)
Section 46 code, Part I

- RM as specific corporate function with lead responsibility at senior level
- Policy statement on RM
- Adequate resourcing for RM
- Recordkeeping arrangements - create, keep and maintain records of business activities
- Disposal arrangements
- Electronic records
• Move records management from the basement to the Board Room
• Treat records as an asset for which someone senior must be accountable
• Have a corporate approach to records management – policy & standards
• Ensure everyone keeps a reliable record of actions taken & decisions made
• Manage, monitor and audit
Does non-compliance matter?

• Information Commissioner has limited enforcement powers
• But that is not the point:
  - Reality is that business interest lies in being able to locate and retrieve information speedily and economically in response to requests
  - Reality is that authorities are required by FOIA keep promises in publications schemes and to do so requires good records management
Model Action Plans

- Advisory Group on Openness in the Public Sector (December 1999)
- Model action plan for developing records management compliant with the Code of Practice
  - Central Government
  - Local Government
  - FE and HE
  - Police
  - NHS, Schools……
Model action plans: nine Steps to compliance

1. The RM Function
2. Roles and responsibilities
3. Policy statement
4. Training and awareness
5. Record creation and record keeping
6. Record maintenance
7. Record disposal
8. Access
9. Performance measurement
Other support by PRO

• Functional requirements for electronic records management systems
• Testing of software against these requirements
• Electronic records management toolkits
• Standards and good practice guidance
• Disposal Schedules

www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement
ISO 15489

- Records Legislation
- Freedom of Information Legislation

- Code of Practice

General guidance

- Records Management Standards
Good luck – but it will take more than luck to fit your records management for FOI!