



Centre for **Freedom of Information**

FOI Practitioners' Conference 2021
Resilience: FOI & EIR During and After the Pandemic
24-25 August 2021 – online

PROGRAMME

Day 1 – 24 August 2021

- 09:30** **Day 1 open**
- 09:45 – 10:30** **Looking Back and Looking Forward**
Daren Fitzhenry, Scottish Information Commissioner
- Managing FOI During the Pandemic**
Gerry Hendricks, Head of FOI Unit, Scottish Government
- Questions**
- 10:30-10:45** **Break**
- 10:45-11:30** **Workshops A**
- Option 1: Impact of Covid on FOI – Commissioner's activity and learning points
Margaret Keyse, Head of Enforcement, Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC)
Paul Mutch, Policy and Information Team, SIC
- Option 2: Public authority pandemic case studies 1
Rachel Mitchell, Care Inspectorate
Tara Palmer, NHS Ayrshire and Arran
Rhoda Davidson and Sharon Phipps, NatureScot
- Option 3: Discussion: Sharing experiences of FOI during the pandemic
Joe Chapman and Lynsey McKenna, Policy and Information Team, SIC
- 11:30-11:45** **Break**
- 11:45-12:30** **Workshops B**

- Option 1: Impact of Covid on FOI – Commissioner’s activity and learning points
Margaret Keyse, Head of Enforcement, SIC
Paul Mutch, Policy and Information Team, SIC
- Option 2: Public authority pandemic case studies 2
Craig Geddes, East Renfrewshire Council
Alan Bell, NHS Grampian
Sheena Brennan, Police Scotland
- Option 3: Discussion: Sharing experiences of FOI during the pandemic
Joe Chapman and Lynsey McKenna, Policy and Information Team, SIC

12:30 **Day 1 close**

Day 2 – 25 August 2021

09:30 **Day 2 open**

09:45 – 10:30 **EIRs Research – Key Outcomes for Authorities**
Professor Colin Reid, University of Dundee

A Recipe for Success in FOI

*Lynn Wyeth, Head of Information Governance & Risk at
Leicester City Council and doctoral researcher at De Montfort
University, Leicester*

Questions

10:30-10:45 **Break**

10:45-11:30 **Workshops C**

Option 1: Future of publication – learning from good practice, informing change
Erin Gray, Head of Policy and Information, SIC
Joe Chapman, Policy and Information Team, SIC

Option 2: Public authority improvement case studies 1
Miles Watters and Angela Morrison, Highland Council
Lindsay Turpie, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Option 3: Discussion: Support for FOI staff – what do you need, how can we help
Paul Mutch and Lynsey McKenna, Policy and Information Team, SIC

11:30-11:45 **Break**

11:45-12:30 **Workshops D**

Option 1: Future of publication – learning from good practice, informing change
Erin Gray, Head of Policy and Information, SIC
Joe Chapman, Policy and Information Team, SIC

Option 2: Public authority improvement case studies 2
Jackie McKelvie, Scottish Police Authority
Margaret Guthrie, NHS Fife

Option 3: Discussion: Support for FOI staff – what do you need, how can we help
Paul Mutch and Lynsey McKenna, Policy and Information Team, SIC

12:30 **Day 2 close**

WORKSHOPS

Day 1

Impact of Covid on FOI – the Commissioner’s activity and summary of learning points

Members of the Scottish Information Commissioner’s team will give an overview of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on FOI in Scotland during 2020-21, explaining the findings of the research that featured in the Commissioner’s Special Report, and sharing some of the key learning points that have emerged from investigations during that time. The session will focus on the effect of the temporarily extended timescales and the use of the provision for considering the effect of the pandemic on timeliness, as well as the potential pitfalls arising from remote working, including in relation to searching devices and systems.

Public authority pandemic case studies

FOI Officers will present their story of working in FOI during the Covid-19 pandemic, including how they and their organisation adapted to new ways of working, the resulting challenges they faced in continuing to respond to requests, what changes were made, and the lessons that they and other FOI practitioners can learn from the experience. The two pandemic case study sessions will feature different speakers, covering a variety of public authorities – large and small, and across different sectors – with differing stories to tell.

Sharing experiences of FOI during the pandemic

In this facilitated discussion, delegates will have a unique opportunity to talk openly and informally with fellow FOI practitioners from across Scotland about their experience of working during the pandemic. 2020 was a time of significant change and upheaval, bringing about personal and professional challenges for FOI staff – including a reduced ability to communicate with others, both within and across organisations. This session is a chance to fill that gap and allow like-minded people to reconnect; sharing hints, tips, guidance and good practice – as well as pitfalls to avoid!

Day 2

Future approaches to publication – learning from good practice and informing change

Among the aspects addressed by the Post-legislative Scrutiny of FOISA – the recommendations of which were released in May 2020 – was how to ensure proactive publication of information keeps pace with public expectations and adapts to new technologies and behaviours. In this session, members of the Commissioner's team will discuss the research they have carried out into current practice, identify examples of good practice for FOI officers to learn from, and explain the proposed replacement of publication schemes with a statutory publication duty and code of practice, seeking the views of practitioners to help inform this approach.

Public authority improvement case studies

Across Scotland, many FOI teams have managed to overcome ongoing and pandemic-related challenges to make real improvements to their handling of requests and publication of information. The first improvement case study session will look at the wide-ranging changes and ongoing monitoring being implemented by Highland Council, and then hear from Dumfries and Galloway Council about their analysis and monitoring of data regarding requests during the pandemic. The second session will feature recent successful FOI improvement projects undertaken by the Scottish Police Authority and NHS Fife.

Support for FOI staff – how can the Commissioner help, what do you need

“Help us to help you!” This discussion offers an ideal opportunity for FOI practitioners to advise the Commissioner's staff on how to develop and improve the resources available for authorities. The Commissioner's website provides a huge range of information and guidance, from self-assessment toolkits to exemption briefings as well as the decisions database and support for new authorities; a new email newsletter with FOI news and learning points was also recently launched. How effective are these resources and how could they be enhanced?