

Public Sector News

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The importance of access to information which could be (broadly) described as 'official' has hit the headlines recently with the press coverage given to MPs' expenses. The Freedom of Information Act and the access it gives to information held by public-sector bodies has gone from being a dry bit of legislation to being seen as an effective tool to scrutinize the work of the government.

The knock-on effect must be even greater pressure on all public-sector bodies to be more transparent and therefore to make more of the information they hold widely available. This will comprise information covered by the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs).

Local authorities have, for instance, been approached by companies that undertake searches for people buying property, and asked to make available free of charge under the EIRs information for which currently they charge. Providing this information free on the Web would represent a substantial loss of income at an already difficult time, which could in turn result in cuts in services. However, the pressure to make information available can only get greater, and local authorities will have to consider how they respond to this pressure.

Highways information

An excellent new portal has been launched for anyone managing standards and information for highway construction and maintenance. You can find it at www.tap.iht.org; access is free.

It is a joint venture from the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT), and brings together in one place electronic versions of standard tools such as the Traffic Signs Manual, and Local Transport Notes.

The information is split into topics, which are the Environment, Highways, Public Transport, Safety, Traffic Management, Intelligent Transport Systems and Vulnerable Road Users. Under each topic you can narrow down the documents to find what you need. A very useful tool.

Still on the topic of highways information, but from a different angle, the Highways Agency has been putting out press releases about the staggering amount of information they collect and manage to keep us all on the move as we travel the country. This includes a network of detector loops which measure traffic flow; you can view this data on their website.

www.highways.gov.uk

YouTube

For the first time a House of Lords Select Committee is accepting evidence using YouTube instead of insisting on it being in print format. The committee is looking at 'People and Parliament', and seeks to find ways of engaging the public with what goes on in the House of Lords and Parliament more generally.

Cabinet Papers

The National Archives, working with JISC digitization programme, has made available to view or download over half a million pages of Cabinet papers from 1915 to 1978. You can access this resource at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers.

Public Sector News is supplied by ALGIS in LARIA (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists in Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. Jane Inman is currently Chair of ALGIS. ALGIS welcomes anyone with an interest in public sector information who feels they would benefit from being part of a community working in the same area. For more information go to www.algis.org.uk

Editor's note: Jane Inman and Howard Picton are authors of *Finding British Official Information. Official publishing in the digital age* to be published by Chandos later this year.