

Freedom of Information (Fol) - Part 2 - Costs exaggerated?

Written by WRT

Thursday, 17 November 2011 13:31 - Last Updated Friday, 02 December 2011 12:22



The Chief Minister stated *"...such a piece of legislation (FOI) might come at a high cost"* in his Keys answer (01.11.11).

Later he went on to say *"we are basing that at the moment on the experience in Jersey, where the cost ran into many millions to actually get it established and I think there is an annual running cost of somewhere in the region of £1 million a year."*

In a subsequent interview for Manx Radio he again referred to Jersey *"...but we must understand the fact that in jersey for example it cost them over £4 million pounds to bring in the original structure and I think the annual running cost is over a £1 million...."*

Mr Bell you are not right.

The States of Jersey, only in May, adopted a new Freedom of Information (Jersey) Law 201-. It has yet to be implemented, a process which could take about 4 years.

In the months prior, Jersey's Council of Minsters was making the same pronouncements as Mr Bell is now making here.

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They claimed a £5.6 million was needed to implement FOI with £1.3 million a year running costs and that cuts would have to be made in the business and strategic plans.

In April the final version of a specially commissioned independent consultants Report "States of Jersey Freedom of Information Implementation Plan" was published.

Within it costs are given, and these in no way correspond to the inflated figures being bandied about by Mr Bell.

The costings are specific to the circumstances and particular requirements of Jersey. They are not all 'up front' costs, but occur incrementally over the 4 year implementation period.

And remember the figures are estimated not actual.

PAG decided to uncover firm evidence of the cost of FOI.

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We found out that an investigation by BBC Radio Cornwall had calculated that each FOI request cost the Unitary Authority £150 to process. Incidentally, over a 2 year period less than 10% of the 2264 requests were from the Media.

Based on Cornwall's figures we extrapolate, here in IOM, the annual running cost would be £26250 to process 175 requests (This is based on requests per head of population).

Another calculation we did, based on UK published figures for the first quarter of 2011, gives a much lower number of FOI requests here at 68.

Are there any indicative figures nearer to home?

Yes, in a written answer to July Tynwald it was estimated that a total of 697 questions had been asked by politicians in Keys, LegCo and Tynwald (October 2010 to July 2011) at a calculated cost of £89.30 per question. Total £62242.10

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So there's our calculation of running costs for FOI Chief Minister. - now let's have yours.

We also challenge you to publish the paper you and your Ministers considered at your meeting on November 2nd. After all this legislation is about openness and transparency.