

Public Access Agency Reference Group Meeting

Date: 18 April 2018, 1pm

Location: Room 27.20, Level 27, 121 Exhibition Street, Melbourne

Participants

Sven Bluemmel, Information Commissioner, OVIC
(Chair)

Sally Winton, Public Access Deputy
Commissioner, OVIC

Cameron Montgomery, City of Ballarat

Chelvi Arunagiri, City of Melbourne

Chris O'Donnell, VicRoads

Lisa Scholes, Department of Health and Human
Services

Monica Barnes, Country Fire Authority

Nicolas Thomas, Melbourne Health

Rhiannon Bourke, Victorian WorkCover Authority

Robin Davey, Victoria Police

Tony Calder, Monash University

Sarah Crossman, Secretariat, OVIC

Ianina Belski, OVIC (observer)

Shantelle Ryan, OVIC (observer)

Agenda Items

1. Welcome/Apologies

- The Information Commissioner welcomed the members of the reference group and thanked them for their time and willingness to make a contribution.
- The Information Commissioner outlined OVIC's vision for the group.
- The Public Access Deputy Commissioner noted OVIC's intention that the group represent a broad cross-section of views on and experience with the FOI Act.
- Members were encouraged to share information received at meetings, and meeting outcomes, with their colleagues.

2. The Reference Group in practice

- The group discussed:
 - the value of robust discussions on matters falling within the terms of reference;
 - the opportunity for members to learn from other agencies' challenges and experiences and to share useful information and resources;
 - the opportunity for OVIC to obtain feedback and input from agencies on its proposed education, training and awareness-raising initiatives, and how else it could assist agencies in administering the FOI Act;
 - the utility in sharing information amongst the group about issues such as how agencies facilitate access to information outside of the FOI Act.

3. Draft Terms of Reference

- The group reviewed and resolved to adopt the draft Terms of Reference, subject to the following amendments:
 - amend the third paragraph on page 1 to: "More generally, OVIC's role is also to support a positive culture of information management and access across government".
 - amend the first dot point on page 2 to: "raise the profile and support the role of FOI practitioners".

- The group agreed to circulate their contact details to facilitate information sharing arrangements.

Actions:

OVIC to circulate the amended Terms of Reference to all members.

OVIC to compile a list of all members' email addresses and telephone numbers, to circulate to all members.

4. FOI in Victoria

- Group members discussed the key challenges their agencies face in administering the FOI Act:
 - Resourcing constraints
 - Operationalising new third party consultation requirements
 - Reduced time frame in which to process access requests
 - Record/document management
 - Requests for access to documents for use in legal proceedings (or pre-discovery)
- The group also discussed initiatives that OVIC could undertake to assist agencies in administering the FOI Act, including:
 - publishing more extensive and targeted guidance and tools on the FOI process for applicants and agencies, the application of exemptions to particular classes of documents or types of requests, third party consultation and privacy issues, and OVIC's complaint and review processes;
 - providing advice on addressing the issue of high-volume repeat requests from the same applicant;
 - reviewing aspects of its complaint and review processes (e.g. making inquiries and seeking submissions, strategies for informal resolution).

Actions:

Information Commissioner to raise the matters discussed with relevant OVIC business units. These matters are also expected to form the basis of further discussions at subsequent reference group meetings.

5. Other Business

- The Public Access Deputy Commissioner spoke to two papers, which were circulated at the meeting. The first relates to OVIC's current training and education initiatives. The second relates to emerging FOI trends in Victoria. The intention is that the papers will inform discussions at subsequent meetings about emerging issues facing the FOI system in Victoria, and OVIC's training and education program.

6. Close

- The Information Commissioner noted that discussion on Agenda items 5a and 5c and the two meeting papers will be carried forward to the next meeting.
- OVIC will notify members of the details for the next meeting. At that time, OVIC will invite agencies to provide proposed items for discussion.
- Meeting closed 3pm.