

SNP admits FoI performance 'isn't good enough'

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21 Jun 2017



Scottish Government ministers have admitted their performance on complying with Freedom of Information laws "isn't good enough".

In a Holyrood debate sparked by the Scottish Conservatives today, the SNP's record on replying to FoI requests was heavily criticised by opposition parties.

It follows an open letter from journalists complaining about transparency sent earlier this month, as well as statistics showing the Scottish Government is worse than other public sector bodies at responding in full and on time.

And today, the Scottish Government's business manager Joe Fitzpatrick told MSPs that "recent performance has not been good enough" and those submitting FoI requests "have had reasons to be unhappy".

However, he also hinted that – 12 years on from FoI laws being passed – people were more familiar with the legislation, and therefore more likely to submit detailed requests which, he said, now take an average of seven hours to resolve.

The Scottish Government also accepted the debate motion, which "condemns" the SNP's performance and calls for an independent inquiry into the issue.

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives revealed that barely a third of FoIs to the Scottish Government result in a "full disclosure", compared to 57 per cent across other public bodies.

Scottish Conservative MSP Edward Mountain said:

"There are serious concerns about the way in which the Scottish Government is interpreting and implementing FoI legislation.

"There have been widespread complaints about delays beyond the 20 working-day deadline, emails requesting updates being routinely ignored and ministers taking control of requests without the consent of the applicant.

"Delays and withholding information are not acceptable.

“But it’s not just Freedom of Information – there are also examples of Scottish Government meetings held with no agendas or minutes, or ministers hiding behind a thin veil of commercial confidentiality.

“It all points to an SNP code of secrecy.

“Thankfully, by its own admission, the SNP agrees we need an independent inquiry into this.

“That proves the Scottish Government has been disingenuous in dealing with FoIs, it knows it has and it can’t hide it, and that ministers must be more honest, transparent and accountable in future.”

The text of today’s Scottish Conservative motion, which the SNP added to but did not amend, reads: *“That parliament condemns the Scottish Government’s poor performance in responding to Freedom of Information requests and calls for an independent inquiry into the way the Scottish Government deals with them. Furthermore, parliament agrees to undertake post-legislative scrutiny of the Act.”*

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives revealed SNP failures on FoI:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/06/scottish-governments-foi-failure-exposed/>