

The Campaign for Freedom of Information



1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Introduction

This publication summarises more than a thousand press stories published in 2006 and 2007 as a result of disclosures under the UK and Scottish freedom of information laws.

The stories demonstrate the enormous range of information being released under FOI. They include significant disclosures about the Iraq conflict, the possible cause of gulf war syndrome, assaults on public service staff, the state of civil service morale, compensation paid to victims of medical accidents, schools' efforts to inflate their exam results, hospital techniques for deflating waiting lists, the universities teetering on the edge of financial collapse, police officers with criminal records, government efforts to encourage gambling, lobbying by multinational oil, pharmaceutical and food companies, nuclear safety and other hazards, crimes committed by offenders on parole, unpublicised prison escapes, the expansion of the national DNA database and innumerable reports about high expenses claims and dubious public spending.

These disclosures throw new light on the government's approach to many issues, identify shortcomings in public service delivery, highlight other problems which have not been addressed and show where policies have succeeded. They reveal the substantial contribution to accountability made by the FOI Act.

The stories are taken from those published in national and regional papers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland during 2006 and 2007. The report follows the Campaign's earlier report summarising 500 FOI stories published in 2005, the legislation's first year (available from www.cfoi.org.uk/pdf/FOIStories2005.pdf).

Most of these stories are based on FOI requests made by journalists, though some may be reporting on FOI requests made by other requesters. The summaries reflect the language and perspective of the original articles, not the Campaign's views.

The research for this report was carried out by Jim Matthew and Robin Robison.

Subject index

Armed Forces	Families	Legal Costs	Psychic Powers
Arms Trade	Farming	Libraries	Regeneration
Arts	Firearms	Lobbying	Religion
Assaults	Flooding	Medicines	Restructuring
Benefits	Food Safety	Memoirs	Rights of Entry
Broadcasting	Fox Hunting	Northern Ireland	Royal Family
Charities	Freedom of Information	Nuclear	Salaries
Civil service	Funerals	Nuclear Power	Scottish Parliament
Compensation	Gambling	Nuclear Weapons	Security
Computer Systems	Ghosts	Olympics	Smoking Ban
Consultants	Gifts	Parking	Social Services
Costs	Grants	Parliament	Sport
Courts	Health	Passports and ID Cards	Standards in Public Life
Criminal Records	Health & Safety	Pensions	Taxation
Defence	Historic Buildings	Pets, Wildlife & Zoos	Terrorism
Drugs	Historical	PFI	Tourism
Economy	Honours	Phone Masts	Trading Standards
Education	Hospitality	Planning	Traffic Cameras
Emergency Planning	Housing	Policing	Transport
Employment	Immigration	Policing Costs	Travellers
Environment	Industrial Relations	Post Office	UFOs
Equality & Diversity	Inquiries	Prime Minister	Urban Myth
Expenditure	International Relations	Prisons	Waste
Expenses	Internet	Privacy	Welsh Assembly

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Story	Date	Publication	Public Authority	Subject
Massacre of the Red Caps It was the largest single loss of life under enemy fire since the Falklands war - six British soldiers murdered in a tumbledown police station in southern Iraq. Information released under the FOI Act reveals for the first time serious allegations that are at odds with official accounts of the episode. They shine fresh light on an incident that still casts a pall over Britain's involvement in Iraq more than 30 months on. Documents suggest that the army, told the Red Caps were trapped, did not order a rescue mission and that the men may still have been alive when an officer from one of the UK's elite fighting units, who was nearby, was told they were cornered, but chose not to offer assistance because it was too dangerous.	08.01.06	The Observer	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Fewer paras earn their wings The number of paratroopers qualified to parachute has fallen dramatically since the invasion of Iraq because the air transport arm of the RAF has been unable to provide enough aircraft. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that the number to have successfully completed the parachute course at Brize Norton has fallen from 92% in 2003 to just under 25% last year. Hundreds of soldiers, who have to complete the arduous P Company selection before going to parachute school, have returned to their units without their coveted wings. The figures are even worse for Territorial Army paratroopers with only one person - a medical student who reported sick and was granted extra time off - getting through last year. In 2003, 93% of TA paratroopers passed. The RAF has been blamed for lacking flexibility in providing aircraft, but Air Force chiefs say their fleet of 50 C130 Hercules has a priority to deliver supplies to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.	13.03.06	The Daily Telegraph	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Iraq invasion is blamed as thousands resign from TA The Territorial Army has suffered a drastic loss of experienced personnel with almost 16,000 troops quitting since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, information released under the FOI Act has revealed. The reserve army, which has been widely used to support under-manned regular units in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan, is now 7,000 below full strength. In the past year the TA lost 5,000 personnel, leaving 32,000 members. In 1985 it had a strength of 81,000. The Army has come to rely heavily on the TA. More than 13,000 reservists have served in the Middle East and many have resigned on completing six-month operational tours. The figures obtained by the Scottish National Party show that between October 2003 and October 2005 the TA lost 15,670 soldiers who have been replaced by 13,570 new recruits - a shortfall of 2,100.	15.06.06	The Daily Telegraph	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Private security costs £150m</p> <p>Britain has paid out more than £150m on security guards and training for local police to protect diplomats in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 400 guards were hired from four specialists security firms: Control Risks Group, ArmorGroup, Kroll Security Group and Edinburgh Risk Security Management. Between May 2003 and August 2006, the Government agreed contracts totalling £152m. The details of the contracts were revealed to Channel 4 News Online, under the FOI Act. The biggest single bill was £47.8m for contracts in Iraq for 2005-06.</p>	23.09.06	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>Gulf soldiers 'fell ill before leaving UK'</p> <p>The MoD received claims from Second Gulf War veterans who became ill immediately after immunisations and did not make it out of Britain according to a memo released under the FOI Act.</p> <p>The document adds weight to claims that 'Gulf War syndrome' was caused by the cocktail of injections given before both the Gulf conflicts. Thousands of veterans are claiming compensation for Gulf War syndrome, which the MoD has always denied existed.</p>	15.10.06	The Sunday Express	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>Iraqis get £1.2m in payouts from MoD</p> <p>More than £1.2m has been paid out to Iraqis by the MoD in compensation for the actions of British forces since the conflict began in May 2003. Claims for compensation arising from deaths and serious injuries are determined in the UK. Other payments are based on advice from a local judge in the southern city of Basra and reflect the loss sustained by the claimants. The judge's advice is considered by an area claims officer based at Basra airport. Despite the sensitivity surrounding operations in Iraq and interaction with the local population, the MoD has not changed its policy in relation to payouts to civilians affected by the actions of British troops. "Compensation claims for Iraqi citizens are handled in the same way as in previous theatres of operations," the MoD said. A total of £261,476 has been paid to Iraqis in compensation for those who had been killed or injured while £962,765 has been paid for damage to property.</p>	25.10.06	The Daily Telegraph	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>11,000 soldiers have gone AWOL since the Iraq campaign started</p> <p>The scale of soldiers' disillusionment with the Iraq war is revealed as figures show that 11,000 troops have gone on the run since the start of the campaign. Of the total, 960 are still absent without leave the equivalent of around one and a half infantry battalions. The Ministry of Defence was forced to reveal the latest figures for AWOL soldiers following a request under the FOI Act.</p>	26.03.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Ministers ignored briefing to criticise report on Iraqi civilian casualties</p> <p>The government's own scientists advised ministers that the Johns Hopkins study on Iraq civilian mortality was accurate and reliable according to information released under the FOI Act. This paper was published in the Lancet in October 2006. It estimated that 650,000 Iraqi civilians had died since the American and British led invasion in March 2003. Immediately after publication, the prime minister's official spokesman said that the Lancet's study "was not one we believe to be anywhere near accurate". The foreign secretary, Margaret Beckett, said that the Lancet figures were "extrapolated" and a "leap". President Bush said: "I don't consider it a credible report". Scientists at the UK's Department for International Development thought differently. They concluded that the study's methods were "tried and tested". Indeed, the Johns Hopkins approach would likely lead to an "underestimation of mortality". The Ministry of Defence's chief scientific adviser said the research was "robust", close to "best practice", and "balanced". He recommended "caution in publicly criticising the study".</p>	28.03.07	The Guardian	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>British Iraq pull-out plan</p> <p>British commanders in Iraq have drawn up plans to allow almost all UK troops to be withdrawn by the end of 2007. The British commander in southern Iraq, Major-General Jonathan Shaw, produced a "commander's tactical advice" in May 2007. The advice was written for Lieutenant-General Nick Houghton, the chief of joint operations, in London after the Ministry of Defence asked for options that could be presented to Brown when he takes over as prime minister. Brown is due to fly to Iraq to be briefed by Shaw and other commanders on when Britain's 5,500 troops should be pulled out of Iraq. Sources close to Des Browne, the defence secretary, insisted that while options had been passed to Houghton, there was no change to British policy in Iraq. This describes withdrawal as being "conditions based" and dependent on Iraqi troops being able to take control. Ministers have consistently refused to give any timetables for withdrawal. But in an FOI Act request released 10 days ago, the MoD said the Iraqi 10th Division, which is taking over from British troops in four provinces, has five brigades. Three of those brigades have already taken over in Dhi Qar, Maysan and Muthanna provinces. The remaining two are responsible for Basra and should have it under their control by the end of the year.</p>	03.06.07	The Sunday Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>11,000 troops go AWOL since Iraq war</p> <p>More than 11,000 soldiers have gone absent without leave since the start of the Iraq war, according to figures released by the Ministry of Defence under the FOI act. But although most of the missing have been caught or have returned of their own free will, nearly currently 1,000 remain on the run. At a time when British's armed forces are being stretched to the limit by two escalating conflicts, the Army is now carrying out a study to identify the reasons why troops are going AWOL.</p>	11.06.07	The Daily Telegraph	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£2.2bn Army boot sale funds Iraq and Afghanistan wars The Ministry of Defence has sold off historic barracks and land worth more than £2.2 billion to fund the spiralling cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Figures show ministers have met about half the cost of the conflicts by selling armed forces assets, including accommodation, airstrips, sports fields, military hospitals and firing ranges. The true cost of the invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein and driving the Taliban out of Afghanistan has never officially been released, but the respected Iraq Analysis Group has estimated that the MoD has spent in the region of £5 billion to fund the wars. Figures released under the FOI Act show that since 1998, Defence Estates - the MoD organisation responsible for managing land and buildings - sold assets totalling £2.2billion, including 12,446 hectares of land for housing and business developments.	07.07.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
We face a generation of conflict says Army chief Britain must be ready to commit troops to a 'generation of conflict' to defeat Muslim extremism, the Army's top soldier said last night. General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, spoke of 'significant achievement in Afghanistan' as a short-term objective and said it was vital for global security to have a measure of success in Iraq. He added: 'If we fail in either campaign, then I submit that, in the face of that strident Islamist shadow, tomorrow will be a very uncertain place.' Sir Richard said the public had not yet grasped that the Armed Forces were engaged 'in a wider conflict that may last for a generation'. He compared the situation indirectly to the Second World War, saying the challenge was 'as great as any that have gone before us in the last century'. His remarks came in a speech to senior military figures at the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall in June, but have only just been revealed under the FOI Act.	28.08.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Army recruiters target inner city schools The schools mostly frequently visited by army recruiting parties, all of which had received five or more visits in the previous 12 months, were in Glasgow, prompting concerns that the army was targeting school children in the poorest areas. The figures were obtained by MSP Christine Grahame under the FOI Act.	18.05.06	Glasgow Herald	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Storm as Army tries to poach hospitals staff Army recruitment teams have visited Glasgow's Royal Infirmary, Western Infirmary, Gartnavel General Hospital, Perth Royal Infirmary, the Victoria Hospital, in Kirkcaldy, and Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline, since last year according to figures released under the FOI Act. The move comes as senior officers struggle with a staffing shortfall across the TA with more than 16,000 leaving since the Iraq war.	02.07.06	The Sunday Express	Scottish NHS boards	Armed Forces
Local army recruitment unaffected by war Figures released under the FOI Act, show that just as many local army recruits enlisted in 2004/05 as before the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts began. In 2003/2004, 101 people enlisted in the borough, 88 of which were men and 13 were women. In that year most people who enlisted were aged 17.	08.08.06	Warrington Guardian	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

How the Army Recruits Plaid Cymru has accused the armed services of targeting schools in poorer areas in the wake of the war in Iraq. The party claimed that figures obtained under the FOI Act showed that most deprived schools were visited about 50% more often than the less deprived.	10.12.06	The Independent on Sunday	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Shock toll of Woodbury rash There have been more than 700 outbreaks of skin infection reported by Royal Marines who train at Woodbury common during 2005 according to information released under the FOI Act. Three people, including a Royal marine, scratched by gorse on Woodbury common have subsequently died from Panton Valentine Leukocidin (PVL), a "super-bug" which has been linked to MRSA. The information also showed that 23 marines with cases of infection were referred to hospital in 2005.	10.07.06	Western Morning News	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Earplugs to shield the troops from weapons of musical destruction Army bagpipers will be forced to wear earplugs and restrict practice indoors to 15 minutes a day because health and safety officers fear the instrument could damage their hearing. The guidelines follow a study by the Army Medical Directorate Environmental Health Team in which tests were carried out to establish whether pipers were putting their hearing at risk, which could lead to compensation claims. The pipes were tested outside and in rooms of various sizes, including a toilet with tiled walls. The study concluded that pipers should always wear ear protectors and restrict their playing to 24 minutes outside, 15 minutes when indoors, and, for those banished to a toilet, just 6 minutes. The noise from the pipes, the study found, can be louder than a pneumatic drill when played outside or a chainsaw indoors. The report, released under the FOI Act, also investigated the effect of bugles and drums on hearing, with players of these instruments advised to restrict their practice time.	24.07.06	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Parents in Forces may lose school fees perk A review of the Armed Forces' biggest perk, the boarding school allowance, has been started by the Ministry of Defence, because the cost has risen to more than £100m a year. The benefit, which helps members of the Forces, mainly officers, to pay school fees for their children while they are sent with their spouses from one overseas posting to another, may be under threat because of the rising costs. According to figures released under the FOI Act, the cost of the allowance has risen from £67.5m in 2000-01 to an estimated £100.2m for the current financial year, reflecting the increase in fees charged by boarding schools. This year 5,436 service personnel are claiming the allowance for 7,705 children.	30.08.06	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
Commandoes bullied There have been three complaints about bullying at the the Lymptone commando training base near Exmouth so far in 2006. A further six were made in 2005. But there were none in the previous year. Since 2000, there have been 17 allegations made about bullying at the base, figures released by the Ministry of Defence under the FOI Act show.	31.08.06	Exeter Express and Echo	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>1,000 servicemen sent to Priory clinics for mental health problems</p> <p>More than 1,000 servicemen have been sent to the Priory's clinics to receive treatment for mental health problems over the past three-and-a-half years at the cost of around £12.5m, it has emerged. A total of 1,035 servicemen and women have been treated by the group since it became the Ministry of Defence's main provider of mental health services in December 2003, according to official figures released in response to an FOI Act request from Channel 4 News.</p>	12.06.07	The Daily Telegraph	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>MoD forced to reveal toll of brain-damaged troops</p> <p>339 troops have suffered brain damage in the past four years, the Ministry of Defence has admitted.</p> <p>Information released under the FOI Act has revealed for the first time the full extent of treatment for neurological injuries. Although there is no official breakdown, the vast majority of referrals to the neurological rehabilitation unit at Headley Court, Surrey, have been caused by battlefield incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sixty soldiers were referred for treatment in 2003. In 2004 this figure rose to 74. Eighty-two soldiers were treated in 2005 and 72 in 2006. The figure for 2007 is on course to exceed the previous totals. By the middle of this month, 51 soldiers had already been sent to the facility. Those referred have been treated for conditions ranging from concussion to permanent mental disability.</p>	29.07.07	The Mail on Sunday	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>800 soldiers test positive for drugs</p> <p>Almost 800 British soldiers failed drug tests in 2006-07 but one in five were allowed to remain in the Army. Heroin, cocaine, Ecstasy and amphetamines were among the illegal substances taken by Army personnel, according to figures obtained under the FOI Act. The statistics show that 769 soldiers failed compulsory drug tests in 2006, including 81 from regiments in Yorkshire. Although the MoD insisted that drug-taking was "totally incompatible with service in the armed forces", only 608 Army personnel were discharged after testing positive last year.</p>	03.08.07	Yorkshire Post	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>Piano victims of RAF friendly-fire</p> <p>Spotted on the MoD's FOI disclosure log in response to a query. "You asked how many pianos have been destroyed by fire or so called 'high spirits' at each RAF station since January 2000 . . . I can confirm that we do not hold any information that indicates that pianos have been destroyed by fire or so called 'high spirits' . . . That said, I am aware from anecdotal evidence that this activity does occur on occasion. However, I can reassure you that any pianos which may have been destroyed in this manner would have been paid for privately."</p>	10.08.07	The Guardian	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Officers quit Navy after Forces lifted the ban on gays, secret paper reveals</p> <p>The Royal Navy suffered a spate of protest resignations by lower-ranking officers after the ban on gays in the military was lifted, a restricted document shows. Soldiers were so reluctant to undress or be exposed in front of homosexual comrades that they suggested the provision of homosexual-only showers and lavatories, and RAF couples expressed worries that same-sex partners would be allowed to move into family quarters and influence their children. The level of rank-and-file resistance to the scrapping of the ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces is disclosed for the first time in a 2002 paper released under the FOI Act. However, reported cases of bullying or harassment involving homosexuals in the services were described as very rare. And there had been only one complaint of an unwanted homosexual approach, in the RAF. Overall, the Ministry of Defence concluded, the change has had no tangible impact on operational effectiveness, team cohesion or Service life.</p>	15.10.07	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>Falklands ship flaws</p> <p>Sunk Falklands warship HMS Sheffield was found to have poor gear and an inexperienced crew. Twenty died and 24 were hurt when an Argentinean missile caused a huge blaze on board in May 1982. Some details of a probe into the disaster have now been released under the FOI Act. The inquiry blamed "shortcomings" for not foiling the attack. And it blasted "critical deficiencies in fire fighting equipment" and an "unfortunate lack of experience" in staff. But it said many crewmen had been brave and ruled out disciplinary steps.</p>	03.11.06	The Daily Mirror	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>How fears of trench foot led Falklands leaders to take risks</p> <p>The fear of British soldiers rapidly falling victim to trench foot and hypothermia during the Falklands conflict led politicians and commanders to take risks to bring the war to a close, according to a report published under the FOI Act. The prospect of rising casualties from exposure was one of the reasons given for the decision to send the Welsh Guards and other troops on board two Royal Fleet Auxiliary landing ships, Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad, to Fitzroy on June 8, 1982, in preparation for the final assault on Port Stanley, the capital. The ships arrived without air defence cover and, when the weather suddenly cleared, the Argentine military launched an airstrike that killed 49 servicemen. The report, published by the Ministry of Defence for the first time, outlines the findings of an official board of inquiry into the incident. One of the driving forces behind the decision to send the Welsh Guards without adequate air cover was "the need to complete land operations as soon as possible".</p>	27.08.07	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Legal fears left Atlantic Conveyor defenceless</p> <p>A helicopter-carrying merchant ship that sank with the loss of 12 men after being hit by two Exocet missiles in the 1982 Falklands conflict was unarmed and unprotected because Ministry of Defence lawyers feared that it was illegal to fit a commercial vessel with weapon systems, according to newly released classified documents. The container ship Atlantic Conveyor, which had sailed to the South Atlantic just six days after being requisitioned by the MoD, was struck on May 25, causing devastating fires and explosions on board. It was one of the biggest-impact attacks by Argentine Exocet-armed Super Etendard bombers because the Atlantic Conveyor was carrying four Chinook and seven Wessex helicopters, all of which would have played a crucial role in ferrying British troops across the Falklands as part of the campaign to liberate the islands. The Argentineans were hoping to target one of the two Royal Navy aircraft carriers but the missiles homed in on the 14,950-tonne merchant ship. Now MoD documents released under the FOI Act have revealed that the Atlantic Conveyor was not protected by her own defensive systems. Nor did she have a dedicated frigate escort equipped with an anti-missile system because there were not enough warships available to guard the vessel.</p>	11.12.07	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Armed Forces
<p>Accounting for Al Yamamah</p> <p>In the early 1990s the Ministry of Defence made sure that the Al Yamamah (massive UK-Saudi defence and infrastructure deal that has been on-going since 1985) deal was constructed in such a way as to ensure that the details were not in the public eye according to information released under the FOI Act. One Whitehall memorandum, prepared in July and August 1992 by MoD officials, said: "In particular, MoD has introduced special accounting arrangements for Al-Yamamah ... to ensure that Saudi confidentiality is preserved. If the normal rules had been followed, Saudi transactions would appear each year in the department's published appropriation accounts, laid before Parliament; and we need to avoid this." The memo also reveals that the Government subtly altered its position on whether the NAO report found that no commissions were paid. A briefing note prepared for the then-prime minister John Major for Prime Minister's Question Time on March 12, 1992 stated that the NAO report "found no evidence of improper payments". However the MoD's July/August memo narrows this exoneration to the activities of the MoD, stressing that the NAO "found no evidence of the department making improper payments".</p>	21.06.06	The Daily Telegraph	MOD	Arms Trade
<p>Al-Yamamah investigations</p> <p>A list drawn up by the NAO and released under the FOI Act shows that the NAO carried out another investigation into the Al-Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia, and that this report has been kept secret, along with other papers on the same arms deal from the late 1980s. An initial NAO report in 1992 was suppressed by the Public Accounts Committee, however there is no record that the committee ever got to see the second report mentioned in these documents.</p>	07.07.06	The Daily Telegraph	National Audit Office	Arms Trade

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

BAE confirms 'support services' deals Payments were made to senior Saudi Arabian officials as a part of the Al Yamahah arms deal according to information released under the FOI Act. BAE lawyers revealed that payments had been made for the provision of support services for Saudi Arabia, although what these support services constituted is not made clear.	05.04.07	The Financial Times	Serious Fraud Office	Arms Trade
Inquiry into secret guns-for-Iraq deal A British deal to equip the Iraqi Security Forces and army with Italian-made pistols without telling coalition partners in Rome is being investigated by prosecutors in Italy. More than 20,000 Beretta-made weapons were transported from Italy to Britain, and then sent on to Baghdad and Basra for distribution to Iraqis. Information released under the FOI Act reveals that thousands of the Berettas were ordered and paid for by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Italian prosecutors have confirmed that they are investigating two shipments of Berettas delivered from Italy to Britain, then sent to Iraq. The British Government has admitted to Parliament that it did not tell the Italians, who were part of the coalition, about the re-exportation. Newspaper reports suggest that Beretta-type pistols have become available on Iraq's black market, with some found in insurgents' hands, a claim denied by the MoD.	01.04.06	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Arms Trade
Britain targets Iraq for weapons sales Countries with poor human rights records and those on the front line in the war on terror (including Iraq) have been targeted by the Ministry of Defence as the most lucrative places for British arms companies to sell weapons. A confidential report obtained under the FOI Act reveals for the first time that Iraq and Libya are 'priority markets'. Also new on the list are Colombia and Kazakhstan, both criticised for human rights violations. The document has been prepared by the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), the agency that promotes the export of military equipment. It was sent to arms contractors last year detailing the countries that the government believes offer the best opportunities.	24.09.06	The Observer	Ministry of Defence	Arms Trade
Airline faces charges over weapons flights An airline hired by the US Government to fly bombs to Israel is facing criminal charges for landing in Scotland without declaring the deadly cargo. The case, which would be hugely embarrassing to the US and British governments, follows the outcry over the use of Prestwick Airport as a refuelling stop for jets hired by the US military to fly bunker-busting bombs to Israel. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has ruled the flights into Prestwick breached international laws because the aircraft operator, Kalitta Air, did not hold the safety licences. The CAA says lives at the airport were potentially put at risk because Kalitta and the US authorities failed to tell the British they were flying bombs in an out of Prestwick. Moving the weapons through Britain without Government permission was a blatant breach of international aviation laws. Now documents released under the FOI Act show the investigation by the CAA has revealed that the aircraft missions broke international law.	08.10.06	The Mail on Sunday	Department for Transport	Arms Trade

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>MoD targets arms deals with Libya</p> <p>Ministry of Defence staff have met officials from Libya regularly, in what appears to be preparation for major British arms sales to the authoritarian regime.</p> <p>According to figures from the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), a branch of the MoD, there have been 20 meetings between military equipment officials of the UK and Libya since 2004. DESO also opened a full-time office in the Libyan capital Tripoli last year to further promote British arms sales. Until recently, Libya was regarded by the West as one of the most dangerous regimes on earth. An arms embargo was lifted in 2004 after Libya's renunciation of weapons of mass destruction.</p> <p>Since then, DESO staff have been energetic in meeting the Libyans. Data obtained under the FOI Act by the pressure group Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), shows that, in 2004, there was one such meeting in the UK and two in Libya. In 2005, there were three meetings in the UK and five in Libya. In 2006, there were four meetings in the UK and five in Libya.</p>	09.03.07	The Independent	Ministry of Defence	Arms Trade
<p>Defence firms face bribery probe by pension funds</p> <p>Local authority pension funds are to tackle arms companies about their activities, including allegations of bribery levelled at the UK's biggest defence contractor BAE Systems. The Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF), which represents 40 funds with invested assets totalling £70bn, is drawing up a series of questions to put to defence companies as it seeks to encourage responsible investment by pension funds. Among the areas to be probed will be the conduct of companies in winning contracts, including the use of bribery. Both BAE and the government are at the centre of a political storm over the issue, following the abandonment of an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into bribery connected to the £40bn al-Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia in the Eighties and Nineties. The news comes as the pressure group Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) publishes figures showing that 75 local authority funds have a total of £311m invested in BAE. CAAT made requests under the FOI Act for details of investments in BAE at the end of December 2006 from all of the UK's local authority pension funds. The results show holdings ranging from £27.9m by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund to an investment of £128,437 from the Powys fund.</p>	08.07.07	The Observer	Local authorities	Arms Trade
<p>Fireworks didn't work</p> <p>To mark the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, York City Council staged a big party in honour of Guy Fawkes, one of the most infamous sons of York. In the event, the night was a disappointment to many people who ended up missing the colourful pyrotechnics. The fireworks were let off from a secret location - so secret that thousands of people failed to see a thing. Documents obtained under the FOI Act reveal a high-level shambles, with City of York Council seemingly ignoring advice from the police. Even one of it's own chiefs raised concerns about the safety implications of frustrated spectators moving en masse to seek out a better view.</p>	04.01.06	York Evening Press	York City Council	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Rhodri's U-turns over the Arts Council Welsh Assembly Government documents released under the FOI Act show how the First Minister initially wanted to abolish the Arts Council of Wales, then said he favoured keeping the 'arm's length' principle of funding arts organisations, before deciding that six of the biggest arts organisations in Wales should be funded directly by the Assembly Government.	12.01.06	Western Mail	National Assembly for Wales	Arts
Movie flops you paid for without buying a ticket It has backed Oscar winners, box-office hits - including Gosford Park, Bend It Like Beckham and Valiant - and has been the toast of the Cannes film festival. But not everything the UK Film Council touches turns to gold. The council, which was set up five years ago to revitalise British cinema, has invested millions of pounds of taxpayers' money and lottery grants in a series of box-office flops. The biggest duds include the 2003 romantic comedy The Republic of Love, which swallowed up £1,022,222 of lottery funding but failed to secure a release in Britain. Ape, an animated film that received £178,000 from the council and Tomorrow La Scala, which received £205,000, both failed to secure a cinematic release. Even when films make it onto the screen their returns can be very low. The French language film The Intended, which received £1,150,000 of British public funding, has made just £4,528 since its release last year. The Wooden Camera, which received £205,000, has earned a paltry £6,792. The poor box-office returns are in stark contrast to the revenues generated by the council's most successful investments. Gosford Park, the Oscar-winning murder mystery, has generated £72m in box-office receipts, television rights and DVD sales. The council invested £2m. Bend It Like Beckham made £65m after an initial investment by the council of £1,450,000. The box-office figures, released under the FOI Act, show that some of the council's smallest investments have been among its biggest hits.	05.02.06	The Sunday Telegraph	UK Film Council	Arts
Future of 7:84 company in doubt over cuts in arts funding The Glasgow-based theatre company 7:84 could be forced to leave the political and theatrical stage as it faces the end of its public funding from the Scottish Arts Council. The SAC, which funds the company with an annual grant of £232,574, is to reconsider its support at a meeting on February 28. Formed by the late John McGrath in 1973, 7:84 helped foster the dramatic careers of actors such as David Hayman, Bill Paterson, Alex Norton, Gerard Kelly, Andy Gray, Elaine C Smith and John Hannah, as well as cementing its position as the leading politically charged theatre group in Scotland. A series of internal reports, uncovered by the company using the FOI Scotland Act, shows that although the SAC praises its outreach work, its general view of the company is a dim one. One report, for 2004/5, concludes, "strongly do not recommend funding" and refers to the "poor quality" of its output. (Note: SAC funding was subsequently cancelled in 2006 but was once more secured in April 2007.)	17.02.06	Glasgow Herald	Scottish Arts Council	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>ENO staff's anger over top appointments revealed</p> <p>The fury of the 458 staff of English National Opera over the appointment of bosses without interview or due process has been revealed. A letter to Arts Council England (ACE) calls the appointments "very short-sighted" and "not what is required to move the company forward". The letter, obtained under the FOI Act, is dated December 7, a week after Loretta Tomasi became chief executive of ENO and John Berry was made its artistic director. The internal appointments flew in the face of guidelines for publicly funded organisations. The move was justified by the ENO board as necessary to avoid "uncertainty and speculation". The staff rejected this. "In our view, an internationally renowned artistic director/chief executive with visionary leadership is needed," wrote representatives of Equity, the Musicians' Union, and BECTU, the unions for the chorus, orchestra and technical staff.</p>	10.03.06	The Guardian	Arts Council England	Arts
<p>We didn't insure £100,000 vases, admits museum</p> <p>Bad enough when a loose shoelace sent Nick Flynn tumbling down a staircase at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. The ensuing crash-landing smashed three 300-year-old Qing Dynasty Chinese vases, (estimated value, when not in smithereens, £100,000.) Now documents released under the FOI Act reveal that the museum will receive nothing in compensation for the smashed vases because it failed to get them insured. And the same papers reveal that the debacle was not the only expensive accident at the museum. In 1999 an Egyptian sarcophagus lid, which had survived more than two millennia, met its match in the form of a French teenager on a school exchange trip. Attendants caught the 15-year-old trying to hide the three fragments detached by his attempt to lift it. The limestone lid, also uninsured and estimated to be worth tens of thousands of pounds, needed extensive repair and was removed from the premises for three years.</p>	12.03.06	The Sunday Telegraph	The Fitzwilliam Museum	Arts
<p>£4m price tag of BBC art collection</p> <p>A tower of light spirals 3,000ft into the London night sky through an inverted steel and glass cone. Thin rectangular blocks protrude from a bright multi-coloured mural behind an office reception, and in the shadow of the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool a model of a tiny bird sits atop a 13ft bronze perch. These are just three examples of more than 40 pieces of public art recently commissioned by the BBC that will cost more than £4m according to figures released under the FOI Act. Three years ago, the BBC, led by its creative director, Alan Yentob, launched a programme of purchasing public art linked to the redevelopment of the corporation's operations at Broadcasting House and White City in London.</p>	26.03.06	The Observer	BBC	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Canalettos may be saved for the nation</p> <p>Two celebrated paintings by Italian master Canaletto, which are in danger of being sold and shipped abroad, may yet be saved for the British public by an unknown foreign art collector. The landscapes, which show two of London's 18th-century pleasure grounds, were recently placed under an export ban by the Government amid concerns that they were to be sold abroad. Valued by three independent experts at between £6.45m and £7m, the pair of paintings - View of the Grand Walk, Vauxhall Gardens and The Interior of the Rotunda, Ranelagh - form a vital part of Britain's artistic heritage. The current anonymous owner of the two paintings had an application for an export licence rejected by the Culture minister, David Lammy, in December last year to allow time for a British buyer to be found. Now correspondence released under the FOI Act has revealed that in February, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced an offer to buy the paintings had been made, and extended the deferral period until 20 June. The Department refused to reveal details of the potential buyer.</p>	02.05.06	The Independent	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Arts
<p>Theatres set to follow the National's seven-day week</p> <p>Many of Britain's theatres could open seven days a week as a result of plans by the National Theatre to stage performances on Sundays. According to confidential documents released under the FOI Act, Nicholas Hytner, the National's artistic director, is close to securing a deal that will turn the South Bank complex into a seven-day-a-week operation. Equity, the actors' union, and the Musicians' Union are poised to embrace the idea, subject to conditions. The only stumbling block is BECTU, the technicians' union, which wants members to work on Sundays only on a "voluntary basis". If the National's plan succeeds, there is likely to be a rush of theatres in the West End and across the country opening all week. Although Mr Hytner has previously spoken out in favour of seven-day opening, the papers show the extent of the progress that is being made. The minutes of a meeting between the Arts Council and the National Theatre in October 2005 reveal that the National has agreed to spearhead the initiative on behalf of regional theatres.</p>	04.06.06	The Sunday Telegraph	The Arts Council	Arts
<p>Reasons the North East lost capital culture to Liverpool</p> <p>The European City of Culture judging panel were concerned that Newcastle/ Gateshead's bid for the 2008 title was too focused on the Quayside, would struggle for funding and were unsure it was fully supported by the public according to information released under the FOI Act.</p>	11.09.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>David Beckham tried to control the National Portrait Gallery's use of his picture David Beckham was not keen to let a national art gallery use his ubiquitous image, according to documents obtained under the FOI Act. Officials at the National Portrait Gallery, who commissioned a portrait of the former England football captain in the form of a film of him sleeping, had to go to extraordinary lengths to placate him and his representatives, who insisted on unprecedented control over the image. The documents reveal that Beckham blocked the sale of postcards in the shop, wanted to limit the artist's use of the finished work and even decided which images should appear in literature accompanying the exhibition. The papers also reveal that the player declined to take part in an ITV South Bank Show special about the commission by artist Sam Taylor-Wood because he apparently "wasn't at all keen on the exposure". Individuals, who agree to sit for the gallery, including the members of the Royal family, normally assign copyright to the gallery and the artist. Beckham's portrait was unveiled in April 2004. The files reveal that he fought to secure copyright of the image and required the gallery and artist to sign contracts with him and his company, Footwork.</p>	24.09.06	The Sunday Telegraph	The National Portrait Gallery	Arts
<p>Robbie gigs made just £185,000 for council Robbie Williams' two super-gigs netted Leeds City Council less than £200,000, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. That amounts to just over £1 a head for each of the 180,000 concert-goers - despite massive disruption caused to the city, with 11 school closures, parking restrictions and traffic problems. It is understood promoter SJM Concerts made millions from the shows at Roundhay Park, broadcast to 26 countries around the globe.</p>	04.11.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Leeds Council	Arts
<p>Questions raised over Turner judge's links to artists A Turner Prize judge has shortlisted work by artists whose creations he had previously purchased. Andrew Renton bought works by Mark Titchner, Rebecca Warren and Phil Collins in his capacity as the curator of London's Cranford Collection of modern art. He owns a number of other works by Collins in his personal collection. Mr Renton's choices are revealed in documents released under the FFOI Act. The other artist in the shortlist was Tomma Abts, the eventual winner.</p>	18.02.07	The Sunday Telegraph	The Tate Gallery	Arts
<p>Museum sitting on a £6m treasure trove The total value of the town's enormous art and historical portfolio, held by Warrington Museum, is £6.3m according to documents released under the FOI Act.</p>	01.05.07	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Museum	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Studios decision could be investigated The decision to run Elstree Film Studios in-house by Hertsmere Borough Council means external investigators could be called in to see if taxpayers' interests are being protected. Documents released under the FOI Act show that in May 2006, the council's external auditors warned the best option would be to sell the Shenley Road site on the open market if another bidding process failed to find a suitable company. A second bidding process failed in July this year, but the council decided, against this advice, to take the running of the studios in-house for up to three years.	13.09.07	Borehamwood Times	Hertsmere Borough Council	Arts
Lack of Playhouse bids revealed Kino Holdings was the only company that entered the race to permanently run the Sevenoaks Playhouse according to information released under the FOI Act. Potential bidders may have been put off because of the "daunting prospect" of turning the arts venue into a success, according to senior district councillor Felicity Broomby and Kino's director Paul Corcoran. Although there were four bidders in 2006 to reopen the Playhouse and take on the interim running of the venue, the information showed that there were no rival bidders competing with Kino for the long-term contract.	05.10.07	Sevenoaks Chronicle	Sevenoaks District Council	Arts
Art worth thousands lost by the Government Paintings, drawings and sculptures worth tens of thousands of pounds have vanished from Government buildings. Many have been stolen, while some including an 8ft square sculpture appear to have been lost. Others have been damaged beyond repair. None was insured. All are part of the Government Art Collection, used to decorate Whitehall departments, courts and embassies paid for by taxpayers. Officials have admitted that in the past ten years 80 pieces have vanished, among them 19 paintings, including a Gainsborough print, from the Royal Courts of Justice and a print of Regent Street in London by Thomas Shotter Boys which mysteriously vanished from Snaresbrook Crown Court in 2004. The disclosures, made under the FOI Act, show that 1,565 works of art almost 10% of the collection have not been on display anywhere for the past five years. Every year the GAC, which aims to 'promote British art, culture and history', gets a Government grant and spends about £250,000 of it acquiring new works.	12.03.06	The Mail on Sunday	Government Art Collection	Arts
Executive spent £60,000 on original artworks Nearly £60,000 has been spent by the Scottish Executive on original works of art to decorate its premises. More than 40 works were acquired in 2002 as part of the refurbishment of the executive's St Andrew's House headquarters in Edinburgh, at a total cost of £58,375. They range from a set of 10 etchings entitled the History of Plants to eight prints of interiors in, and views from, St Andrew's House and a screen-print entitled Thin Red Pipe Smoker. The most expensive single work formed part of a series entitled Imagination of Matter. Described as an installation with perspex and spotlights, it was bought for £15,000. The collection was the only purchase of original artworks made by the executive in the past five years. Details of it have been issued under the FOI Scotland Act.	01.04.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Embassies 'lose' dozens of artworks Dozens of artworks worth tens of thousands of pounds have vanished from British embassies or residences around the world over the past decade. At least 42 paintings, prints and sculptures from the Government Art Collection have been stolen, lost or destroyed, according to information gained through the FOI Act. None of the works were insured and apart from objects that were known to have been stolen, more than half the total simply disappeared for no known reason.</p>	17.04.06	The Independent	Government Art Collection	Arts
<p>Home Office wastes thousands on art that was too heavy for purpose The Home Office faces fresh embarrassment after the collapse of a £125,000 deal to buy a six-storey high abstract artwork for its headquarters. Officials pulled out of the project after a series of technical difficulties, which will leave the taxpayer with a bill running to tens of thousands of pounds. The sculpture, Hi-Cloud, by Eva Rothschild, was selected in 2004 following a competition run by the Government Art Collection (GAC). It was intended to dominate the interior of the new Home Office headquarters in Westminster, built in 2005 at a cost of £311m. Consisting of seven interlocking triangles in colours of the rainbow, the structure would have been attached to the atrium's supporting pillars by bronze hands cast in "meditation poses". In January this year, a committee headed by Sir David Normington, the permanent secretary, pulled the plug on the project. Documents released under the FOI Act reveal that £16,000 had already been paid to the 35-year-old artist and to engineering and construction firms for feasibility studies and preparatory work. Cancellation fees are expected to bump up the bill. Emails reveal fears that the three-ton structure would be too heavy. In November 2004, Rothschild told Adrian George, the curator of collections projects at the GAC: "I don't know anything about engineering, cleaning cradles, gantries, etc, I just know what I want my work to look like."</p>	01.04.07	The Sunday Telegraph	The Home Office	Arts
<p>Art works set to return home The National Galleries of Scotland say they are to begin a comprehensive review of more than 500 works of art, worth many millions of pounds, held in government offices, stately homes, and other galleries and museums. In particular, the galleries will re-examine the future of the 150 works of art held in offices used by the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Office, or the Lord Chancellor, at Westminster. The galleries have released details of locations of the works of art for the first time after an inquiry under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	06.02.06	Glasgow Herald	National Galleries of Scotland	Arts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£5m of new artworks left to gather dust</p> <p>The National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) is spending millions of pounds to acquire works of art that are left to gather dust in storerooms. Items worth £5m, one third of everything bought over the past five years, are in storage. They include a giant egg slicer by Mona Hatoum, the Anglo-Palestinian sculptor, bought at a cost of £63,000, which was on display for a few weeks at the end of last year before being mothballed. Shortly before, the NGS paid £120,000 for Family Series and Family Suite, two prints by Tracey Emin, the conceptual artist. These have never been shown. More than 1,000 works of art are contained in a 218 page dossier, obtained under the FOI Scotland Act, which reveals the NGS's commissioning and purchasing policy.</p>	26.02.06	The Sunday Times	National Galleries of Scotland	Arts
<p>Armed assaults on police officers</p> <p>Information released under the FOI Act has revealed how many officers in Nottinghamshire are injured by armed offenders every year. The figures show a 300% rise in armed assaults on Notts officers between 2001 and 2005. A total of 26 police officers were the victim of an armed assault in 2005 - compared to just six in 2001. Of the armed assaults in 2005, six were with a knife, four with a firearm and 16 with another kind of weapon such as a bottle or plank of wood.</p>	05.04.06	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire police	Assaults
<p>Bobbies on the beating</p> <p>In 2005/06, more than 2,325 Scottish police officers needed medical treatment after attacks – 15% of the country's force, including desk-bound officers. Information released under the FOI Scotland Act has revealed number of casualties from Scotland's eight forces. Strathclyde, the country's largest, topped the list with 1,902 serious assaults out of 7,700 officers. Bosses were unable to give exact details of the injuries or how long cops were out of action as a result. Tayside was second highest with 243 needing medical attention, of which ten were off for over a week and two were grounded for more than a month. At the other end of the scale, just 25 serious injuries were reported in Fife. Only Grampian refused to respond to the FOI Scotland Act request, claiming there was no central record of casualties.</p>	06.12.06	The Sun	All 8 Scottish Forces	Assaults

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>The battered blue line</p> <p>A Police officer is attacked every 20 minutes in Britain. At the country's biggest force, assaults have more than doubled in the past five years - and officers in some areas can be set upon at least three times a year. The equivalent of five in every six officers have been assaulted in the line of duty since 2002. Tory MP Grant Shapps, who got the figure using the FOI Act, said: "The number of attacks on our police officers in the last five years reveals the hidden yet perilous reality of life on the front line.</p> <p>Figures from 50 of the 51 forces in England, Scotland and Wales revealed 25,368 assaults on officers, last year alone. That was equal to more than 70 every day - or one every 20 minutes. Overall, there have been 126,860 attacks since 2002, equivalent to five in every six of the 151,208 people who guard our communities. In the Metropolitan Police, the problem has more than doubled in that time. There were 1,465 assaults in 2002, but that soared to 3,339 last year.</p>	26.04.07	The Daily Express	Police forces	Assaults
<p>477 attacks on medics</p> <p>Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show that in the past five years there have been no fewer than 477 incidents which saw staff so violently attacked that they needed to go to A and E units, be treated by a resident doctor or needed an X-ray examination.</p>	01.01.06	Scotland on Sunday	Scottish Health Boards	Assaults
<p>Reported assaults on north-east hospital staff double in five years</p> <p>Assaults on hospital staff in the northeast have more than doubled in the last five years, according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. In 2000 there were 237 recorded incidents in NHS Grampian hospitals compared with 574 in 2005. The figures, which were released through the FOI Scotland Act, show 1,626 attacks at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary in the last five years. Attacks at Woodend Hospital rose from eight in 2000 to 154 in 2005. There were even two assaults on staff at Aberdeen Maternity Hospital during 2005. Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin has seen a decrease from a high of 41 in 2001 to 16 in 2005.</p>	13.01.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	NHS Grampian	Assaults
<p>School staff assault fear</p> <p>Nearly 100 staff were abused or attacked in Plymouth schools during 2005. An FOI Act request to the city council revealed that 93 teachers, teaching assistants and others reported that they were insulted or assaulted by pupils, parents or other members of the public in the academic year from 2004 to 2005.</p>	31.01.06	Plymouth Evening Herald	Plymouth City Council	Assaults
<p>Assaults on Saughton's officers go up by a third</p> <p>The number of assaults on prison staff by inmates inside Saughton jail has gone up by a third in the past three years. Eleven staff were assaulted in the prison during 2005 - two more than in 2004 and four more reported assaults than in 2003. The figures, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show that just eight out of the 27 assaults resulted in police charges. The Scottish Prison Service defined two of the assaults as "serious".</p>	14.02.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Scottish Prison Service	Assaults

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

North-east teachers facing four attacks daily Teachers and staff at Aberdeenshire's primary and secondary schools are subjected to an average of almost four attacks a day. The figures, obtained under the FOI Scotland Act, showed that between October 24 2005 and January 27 2006, 217 incidents were reported to the council following the launch of a new hotline. This compares to the 153 reported incidents during the same period in 2004/05. 88 of these attacks involved some form of physical violence and non-teaching staff reported about half.	01.03.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Aberdeenshire Council	Assaults
Attacks on ambulance staff The number of attacks on ambulance staff rose from 97 in 2004 to 258 in 2005 according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. Some of the increase has been attributed to how attacks are recorded but ambulance workers confirm there has been a substantial increase in violence.	19.04.06	The Scotsman	Scottish Ambulance Service	Assaults
Attacks on council staff Aberdeenshire council staff were subjected to 764 verbal and physical assaults during 2005, more than anywhere else in the north and northeast of Scotland according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. This compared to 467 in Perth and Kinross, which had the second highest number reported, 346 in Aberdeen City and 263 in Highland. Most incidents occurred in schools and care homes, but there were also attacks on toilet attendants, housing officers, animal health and welfare inspectors and planning officers.	10.05.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Aberdeenshire Council	Assaults
Hospital assaults Assaults at Sunderland Royal Hospital have almost tripled during the past three years as staff are slapped and kicked while on duty according to figures released under the FOI Act. Doctors have been injured, porters punched and nurses attacked by aggressive patients.	07.08.06	Sunderland Echo	Sunderland Royal Hospital	Assaults
Primary pupil excluded for attacking teacher Children as young as five have been excluded from lessons after assaulting their teachers. Education bosses have even had to take action over attacks on nursery staff, figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act reveal It is understood a five-year-old who carried out an assault has been excluded from classes, although he has not formally expelled from his school. Statistics from Dundee City Council show that in 2002/03 there were 249 reported attacks on teachers - rising to 370 in the following school year. Alarming, assaults on staff in primary schools more than doubled in the same period, from 60 to 142.	19.10.06	The Mirror (Scotland)	Scottish City Councils (various)	Assaults
Assaults on staff More than 27 attacks on staff were recorded every week at England's three high-security special hospitals, new figures show. Statistics reveal that in three years, 4,248 assaults took place at Broadmoor, Berks, Ashworth, Merseyside, and Rampton, Notts, between 2004 and 2006. At Broadmoor, seven per cent of cases had to be treated in A&E, according to the statistics released under the FOI Act.	13.02.07	The Daily Mirror	NHS	Assaults

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Class war 3,194 Scots teachers have been attacked by pupils in the past year. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that Aberdeenshire tops Scotland's league of shame - with 437 recorded assaults in the region's 178 schools. Fife was the second worst area, with 239 cases. Dundee had 358 incidents, including both physical and verbal assaults.	26.03.07	The Sun	Scottish local authorities	Assaults
Ten teachers beaten a day Ten teachers are attacked by pupils every day in one of Britain's worst areas, new figures reveal. There were nearly 2,000 assaults on masters and mistresses in just one year in the East Midlands, statistics released under the FOI Act show. One male teacher suffered a serious eye injury when a chair was thrown at him, and in a separate incident a mistress was stabbed in the hand.	27.05.07	The People	Local authorities	Assaults
Only 1 in 1,000 attacks on NHS staff leads to a prosecution Only one in 1,000 assaults on nurses and other NHS staff results in a prosecution. Offences range from physical violence and sexual assault to verbal and racial abuse and attacks by dogs on health visitors or midwives in a patient's home. The shocking statistics show the failure of the Government's pledge eight years ago of 'zero tolerance' of such attacks. The figures were obtained under the FOI Act by Tory MP Mike Penning, a member of the Health Select Committee, who plans to compile a detailed report on the massive failure. Hospitals and primary care trusts which have responded to Mr Penning so far reported 5,762 assaults since 2002 - with only five prosecutions brought. Either the offences are not passed to police for investigation or a case cannot be brought because of lack of evidence or witnesses. NHS officials also claimed last night that high numbers of assaults involved those who were mentally ill - making it more difficult to bring charges. The reports came from only 11 trusts, so the real total across the NHS's 100-plus trusts will be far higher.	22.06.07	The Daily Mail	NHS trusts	Assaults

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Assaults on collectors soar in backlash over fortnightly calls</p> <p>Refuse collectors are facing a violent new phenomenon in the wake of fortnightly collections - bin rage. Attacks on binmen have doubled since 2006, with many of the crimes committed by householders frustrated about uncollected rubbish. In one incident, a collector was rammed by a car. Another was shot with a ball-bearing gun. In Norfolk, a binman was dragged from his lorry and repeatedly punched, while in Hertfordshire a driver quit his job after an attack left him traumatised. Union leaders say the trend is directly linked to the imposition of alternate weekly collections. In the last few years, 140 councils have adopted such schemes, with ordinary waste taken away one week, and re-cycled waste the next. Figures obtained under the FOI Act clearly suggest the changes have made the lives of Britain's 40,000 binmen more dangerous. A survey of more than 200 local authorities found that there were 189 physical and verbal attacks last year - one every two days - compared with 102 in the 2005/06 financial year. The highest number of assaults was in Northampton - 21, up from seven the year before. Peterborough came second with 13, ahead of Coventry, Dacorum, in Hertfordshire, and Nottingham which each reported eight attacks.</p>	21.07.07	The Daily Mail	Local authorities	Assaults
<p>Only two in 1,000 attacks on NHS staff go to court</p> <p>Fewer than two in every 1,000 assaults on nurses and doctors in London result in a prosecution. Figures released to a Conservative MP under the FOI Act reveal the Government's zero tolerance pledge on violence against NHS staff is failing. Based on the records of 35 hospitals and primary care trusts, they show there have been more than 20,000 attacks on staff in the capital over the past seven years. The assaults ranged from threats to kill and sexual assault to spitting, punching and kicking by patients and relatives. But hospital managers only passed on details of the attacks to police in 48 cases and only 38 victims saw the culprits charged or brought before the courts.</p>	08.11.07	The Evening Standard	NHS Trusts	Assaults
<p>CSA problems</p> <p>The Child Support Agency has paid out more than £10.4m in compensation between 2001 and 2005, more than a third of maintenance payments went unpaid, the level of unpaid maintenance stood at £17billion and the CSA was spending £30m paying for private debt collectors to pursue non-payers. The figures were obtained by the SNP using the FOI Act.</p>	27.04.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Child Support Agency	Benefits
<p>Child Support Agency figures questioned</p> <p>It is still predominantly men who leave the family home according to figures released under the FOI Act. But they show that previous figures from the Government claiming 70% of men refuse to pay anything are the reverse of the situation – 70% of all absent parents are paying some maintenance. The figures also show that in the three months to the end of 2005 some 30% of non-resident parents failed to pay. Of women, 31% were nonpayers, while 30% of men did not pay.</p>	27.04.06	Western Daily Press	Child Support Agency	Benefits

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>DWP phone charges</p> <p>The government department supposed to tackle poverty has made more than £250,000 out of the jobless and pensioners. DWP profited to the tune of £268,874 during 2005-06 from processing claims and issuing tips on how to get benefits and advice. DWP split the profits from charging upwards of 3.5p per minute on a "local" 0845 number with a phone operator. The DWP runs 1,947 of these 0845 lines. Colin Hampton, co-ordinator of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Association used the FOI Act to obtain the figures.</p>	26.09.06	The Times	Department for Work and Pensions.	Benefits
<p>On the sick? Live it up on Costa Del Skive</p> <p>More than 12,000 claimants bank £46m a year in sickness benefits while living in holiday hotspots like Spain, Jamaica and Cyprus. One in four of those claiming incapacity benefit abroad, bankrolled by the British taxpayer, is living in Spain. France is home to 1,600 more sunshine claimants, while thousands live in other countries across the globe - from Australia to Barbados, Cyprus and Jamaica. The Department for Work and Pensions has received incapacity benefit claims from more than 20 countries. Some 3,140 claimants live in Spain, 2,570 are in Ireland, 1,000 in Germany, 180 in the United States and 390 in Cyprus. And one in four of the 2,000 appeals lodged on overseas claims subsequently has been approved. A breakdown of the claimants' health complaints, obtained under FOI Act, lists a catalogue of problems including infectious and parasitic ailments, diseases of the blood, circulatory system, respiratory system and digestive system and also injury and poisoning.</p>	15.04.07	The Sunday Express	Department of Work & Pensions	Benefits
<p>Staggering!</p> <p>Alcoholism can now be given as a reason for claiming incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and other payments, like housing support and child related benefits. It can all total up to £20,000 a year - and at the last count there were 49,720 claimants, at a cost of £1 billion. Capital of the UK's drunk jobless problem is Inverclyde, where one in every 150 people in the local authority area claim benefits due to booze problems. Glasgow runs a close second, with 2,240 claimants. The top ten also includes Dundee, Aberdeen, West Dunbartonshire and Edinburgh.</p> <p>England's biggest cities are also plagued by alcohol addiction. In Manchester one in 200 workers draws benefits because of booze. In Newcastle it's one in 346, while Lambeth is London's worst area with one in 344. The figures have been released under the FOI and FOI Scotland Acts.</p>	13.05.07	The News of the World	Department of Work & Pensions	Benefits
<p>Fraud probe team 'costs more than it recovers'</p> <p>Sandwell's benefits investigation team has cost more to run than it has recovered in fraudulent overpayments. A campaign group say that details they obtained under the FOI Act show that the team had cost taxpayers over £517,000 in 2006-7, but had only identified £265,000 in overpayments. The figures also revealed that the team undertook only 80 prosecutions last year, at a cost of £6,500 each, and 15 staff alone cost over £440,000, an average of £29,000 each per year.</p>	09.11.07	Birmingham Evening Mail	Sandwell Council	Benefits

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Coffee sours BBC's relationship with architect Papers released by the BBC under the FOI Act show that architect Richard MacCormac accused the BBC of "dismantling" one of the "fundamental ideas" of his design for the upgrading of Broadcasting House. The omission of tea and coffee-making facilities from the thoroughfares worried him, as it meant the circulation spaces would not be "places of social and intellectual exchange". Though peace prevailed on the issue, letters obtained by Building Design magazine show it was a clash that soured the relationship.	12.01.06	The Guardian	BBC	Broadcasting
BBC blows £36m on jets and hotels BBC staff are spending almost £36m a year jetting around the world and checking into luxury hotels with licence payers picking up the tab. Figures released under the FOI Act show that staff spent £19.5m on airfares in the 12 months to December 1, 2005. Another £16m was spent on hotels, which works out at £43,835 for every night of the year. The biggest spenders are the news and sports departments whose bills average almost £1m a month while the flight and hotel expenses bill just for Mr Thompson, his deputy Mark Byford and their special projects teams was £127,000 last year. Chairman Michael Grade, his fellow 10 governors and their 34 support staff spent £95,000 on accommodation and flights.	22.01.06	The Sunday Express	BBC	Broadcasting
BBC advisers hitch ride on gravy train The BBC is in the grip of a multi-million pound consultancy culture with costs spiralling, new figures reveal. Documents released under the FOI Act show the organisation is a lucrative gravy train for consultants, often on £3,000 a day. In the 12 months to November 2005, the BBC doubled its use of management consultants, spending £5m at the rate of almost £100,000 a week. The £5m is the equivalent of some 42,000 TV licences. There are so many "strategy" reviews taking place governors felt forced to spend £1m on advisors to review the reviews.	19.02.06	The Sunday Express	BBC	Broadcasting
BBC Scotland bosses' expenses hit £190,000 BBC Scotland's senior managers claimed £190,000 in expenses in 2005, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. 23 senior executives, heads of department and other top staff ran up the bill in the year ending March 2005. Most of that figure - £133,659 - was spent on travel, including flights, taxis, mileage and out-of-pocket expenses. Managers spent a further £34,910 on other costs, including hotels, expenses at conferences and other out-of-pocket items. The remainder, £22,231, was spent on hospitality.	28.02.06	The Scotsman	The BBC	Broadcasting

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Revealed: the BBC shows we really like</p> <p>Classical music concerts and nature documentaries are the most popular with audiences according to information released under the FOI Act. News, current affairs, comedy and classic drama, all regularly cited by the BBC to justify its licence fee, failed to figure in the Appreciation Index (AI) top 10. The AI figures show on a scale of 0 to 100 how much audiences enjoy the programme they watch, regardless of the ratings figures. They are based on weekly diaries kept by thousands of viewers. A separate list of the lowest AIs for 2004 was dominated by the National Lottery midweek draw, then hosted by Eamonn Holmes. It occupied six of the 10 slots, ranging from 53 to a rock bottom 49. Also in the bottom 10 was I Am Not An Animal, Steve Coogan's poorly received animated series about talking animals.</p>	30.04.06	The Sunday Times	BBC	Broadcasting
<p>BBC premises used for private meetings</p> <p>Michael Grade used the corporation's premises for private meetings relating to his involvement in a TV production company and the BBC knew nothing about these meetings according to information released under the FOI Act.</p>	11.06.06	The Sunday Telegraph	BBC	Broadcasting
<p>BBC used MI5 to vet thousands of staff</p> <p>Confidential papers, obtained under the FOI act, have revealed that the BBC allowed MI5 to investigate the backgrounds and political affiliations of thousands of its employees, including newsreaders, reporters and continuity announcers. The files, which shed light on the BBC's hitherto secret links with the Security Service, show that at one stage it was responsible for vetting 6,300 different BBC posts - almost a third of the total workforce. They also confirm that the corporation held a list of "subversive organisations" and that evidence of certain kinds of political activity could be a bar to appointment or promotion. The BBC's reliance on MI5 reached a peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s at exactly the same time as millions of viewers were tuning into the fictional adventures of George Smiley in Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy and Smiley's People.</p>	02.07.06	The Daily Telegraph	BBC	Broadcasting
<p>£1.1m bill for BBC's Vision of the future</p> <p>The BBC spent £1.1m on a consultation exercise which led to the TV division being renamed BBC Vision and radio re-branded Audio and Music. The huge cost of the restructuring (the third in ten years) included £76,000 spent on consultants, £17,000 on stationery and £140,000 on hotels, hospitality and travel. In addition, £530,000 was spent on 'audience research' and £125,000 on 'staff costs' while the 'project leaders' racked up another £11,000 in expenses. It is essentially an internal reorganisation that will have little direct impact on programmes. The results included reorganising BBC departments and renaming them. The figures, released under the FOI Act, reveal that six consultants were hired for the project including former BBC controller of strategy and marketing Susan Denham, who was paid £26,000.</p>	27.07.06	The Daily Mail	BBC	Broadcasting

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

BBC ditches plans to downgrade the regions The BBC's director of governance Nicholas Kroll drew back from implementing controversial proposals that would have downgraded the BBC National Secretaries in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland according to information released under the FOI Act.	01.12.06	Western Mail	BBC	Broadcasting
BBC's female reporters are paid £6,500 less than men Female correspondents working on the BBC's flagship television news bulletins earn £6,500 less than their male counterparts on average, according to figures released under the FOI Act. The average female news correspondent working for the One, Six and Ten o'clock news broadcasts is paid £59,050 - compared to £65,625 for a male correspondent. A second document released reveals that while 107 BBC staff were paid more than £100,000 in 2001, that number had risen to 322 by September 2006. Yet, in the same period, the number of staff had fallen to 21,538, from 21,683.	08.12.06	The Independent	BBC	Broadcasting
Dyke was sacked without governors' vote Greg Dyke was dismissed as the BBC's Director-General without the BBC governors taking a formal vote, board minutes have revealed. The documents, which the BBC had attempted to withhold were released after the Information Tribunal ordered them to be disclosed under the FOI Act. In a dramatic account of a critical meeting, Mr Dyke's fate was sealed after Richard Ryder (the acting Chairman) concluded the discussion by saying that he judged the overall view of the board was that Greg's offer of resignation should be accepted. The key part of the secret meeting, on January 28, 2004, lasted less than an hour. Arguments advanced for getting rid of Mr Dyke included one that his relationship with Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary, was "very poor" and that by accepting his resignation it would make renewing an extension to the BBC's Royal Charter much easier.	12.01.07	The Times	BBC	Broadcasting
Eric and Ernie's defection The defection of Morecambe and Wise to ITV in 1978 was such a devastating blow to the BBC that its governors planned to lobby the government, secret papers have revealed. They wanted to try to rein in the massive spending power of the independent television companies. But in the short term, the corporation decided the best strategy for countering the "damaging loss" of Eric and Ernie to the opposition was to repeat their phenomenally successful Christmas show of 1977 on Christmas Eve the next year. It was at a sombre meeting on 30 January 1978 that the BBC board was first told how the corporation's offer to keep Morecambe and Wise had been finally rejected by Britain's most famous comedy double act. A note of the minutes of the meeting released under the FOI Act reveals that Thames Television had agreed to pay the duo "very large sums" for just two shows a year.	20.01.07	The Independent	BBC	Broadcasting

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

BBC hit by £1m bill for stolen goods More than £1m of BBC property has been stolen in the past two years. Cameras, props and vehicles disappear with alarming regularity, landing the corporation with an average daily bill of nearly £1,500. A total of 591 thefts were reported to the BBC's Investigations Unit in 2005 while the figure dropped slightly to 452 last year. The losses are revealed in the BBC's crime log, which was released under the FOI Act. The missing items range from portable air-conditioning units used in outside broadcast operations to food and drink from the canteen. The report reveals that several years passed before anyone realised that drawings and paintings worth £12,500 had been removed from the walls of BBC offices. Missing vehicles include three hire cars, worth £31,000 in total, stolen from BBC car parks.	25.02.07	The Mail on Sunday	BBC	Broadcasting
Terry Wogan is the only celebrity paid for BBC's Children In Need The total cost of the TV, radio and online shows, including studios, outside broadcast facilities, staff and production for 2005's Children in need appeal, was £1.2m. It raised £17.2m. Sir Terry Wogan was the only celebrity to be paid for the work associated with children in need, receiving £9,065 for a seven-hour role as the main presenter according to information released under the FOI act.	04.03.07	The Mail on Sunday	BBC	Broadcasting
Beeb's fare saving The BBC has saved nearly £5,000 a day by cutting back on taxi perks for daytime newsreaders, figures released under the FOI Act show. Presenters including Natasha Kaplinsky and Sophie Raworth, who are said to earn more than £200,000 a year, must now pay for their own transport to and from work. In the 2006/07 financial year, the Beeb spent £17.7m on taxis and private hire cars, compared with £19.8m the previous year.	11.05.07	The Daily Star	BBC	Broadcasting
£180,000 cost for abortive BBC HQ plans The BBC spent more than £180,000 of licence fee-payers' money on an abandoned project to find a new regional headquarters in Milton Keynes. The corporation had worked on the plan to set up the new base in central Milton Keynes for about five years until it was aborted in May 2007 because there was not enough cash available.	12.06.07	Milton Keynes Citizen	BBC	Broadcasting
The Diana interview that changed BBC reporting The BBC's relationship with the monarchy was never more strained than during its coverage of the troubled marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales. The Princess's frank interview with Martin Bashir in November 1995, when she spoke about a relationship involving three people, was regarded as a declaration of war by the Palace. But senior executives in the BBC saw it rather differently. Memos and letters released under the FOI Act reveal how cock-a-hoop the BBC was with its scoop. A memo written by the then Managing Director of News, Tony Hall, praises Martin Bashir for his "interview of a decade - if not of our generation".	22.06.07	The Independent	BBC	Broadcasting

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>The £70,000 Glastonbury junket</p> <p>Five MPs were given ten Glastonbury premium tickets worth £255 each (£100 more than the standard price) by the BBC. They were also invited to lavish receptions on Friday and Saturday night at the Somerset festival in June 2007. Labour MP Sion Simon was given three complimentary tickets, LibDem Jenny Willott and Tories Nick Herbert and Damian Green were each given two tickets and Conservative Theresa Villiers took one. The BBC has also admitted that several staff were dispatched to entertain the MPs and other guests, adding to the bill. In response to an FOI Act request, John Dickie, head of BBC corporate affairs, wrote: 'Five MPs were guests of the BBC. The net cost to the BBC for tickets, running the marquee and hospitality over three days was approximately £68,000. 'Some staff were asked to entertain guests but no one was present solely to entertain MPs.'</p>	14.07.07	The Daily Mail	BBC	Broadcasting
<p>Tickets for gigs and even nest cameras - the BBC's £100k prize giveaway</p> <p>BBC Wales has given away more than £100,000 worth of prizes and cash to viewers and listeners over the past three years. Cash payouts have totalled £27,974 while prizes have included concert tickets and accommodation linked to shows, DVDs, CDs and even "nest cams" (miniature cameras to watch birds). Viewers have also been given BBC-branded merchandise such as umbrellas, clothing, moneyboxes, mugs and badges. The BBC finally released details of the handouts after they fought for almost two years to prevent the information being released under the FOI Act.</p>	06.11.07	South Wales Echo	BBC	Broadcasting
<p>How too many adverts are interrupting your viewing</p> <p>Big Brother, Lost and other Channel 4 shows have fallen foul of rules limiting the amount of advertising that can be shown. In the case of Big Brother, television executives attempted to justify the breach by arguing that the reality show should be treated more like a sporting fixture. The documents obtained under the FOI Act include correspondence between Channel 4 and Ofcom, the television regulator, show that several other shows on the channel have breached the same rules and that Ofcom failed to discipline the channel for any of the infringements listed.</p>	19.03.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Channel 4	Broadcasting
<p>Charities lose as £2bn fund is left untouched</p> <p>A fund worth almost £2 billion has been left untouched despite ministers promising two years ago that it would be used for good causes. Chancellor Gordon Brown ruled out using the cash for workers stripped of their pensions, claiming at the time that the money was needed for hard-pressed charities. But information released under the FOI Act reveals that two years after commandeering the pot not a single penny has been spent. The money is cash abandoned by savers in hundreds of orphan bank accounts. In his 2004 Budget, the Chancellor said: "Where assets and owners cannot be reunited, it is also right that the assets be reinvested in society."</p>	05.11.06	The Sunday Express	HM Treasury	Charities

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Charity investigated The Smith institute is being investigated by the Charity Commission for the second time in five years for its links to the Labour Party. Documents obtained under the FOI Act show that the Commission was concerned about regular meetings at 11 Downing Street as early as 2001.	31.01.07	Daily Telegraph	HM Treasury	Charities
Begging boxes collect just £350 Begging boxes aimed at helping the homeless in Aberdeen have raised less than £350 in the first three months of their operation. Figures obtained using the FOI Scotland Act found that the five boxes dotted across the city centre brought in £348 between May and August. Last night, one local homeless charity, Aberdeen Cyrenians, called the boxes a gimmick. The charity's director of business development Sue Irving said: "Anybody who wants to help homeless people should be welcomed but the sums of money we're talking about are never going to make a real difference. These are not going to change people's lives."	23.08.07	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Aberdeen City Council	Charities
It could bees you Lotto chiefs have paid out £10,000 in charity cash - to boost beekeeping in Africa. The money will be used to help farmers in war-torn Sudan make money by selling honey to lucrative overseas markets. It is one of dozens of grants being given by the Big Lottery Fund to British-based charities who help overseas projects. By 2009 more than £72m will have been handed over. Details of the awards were released by Culture Secretary James Purnell under the FOI Act.	23.12.07	The Sunday Mirror	Department for Culture, Media & Sport	Charities
Whitehall body needs more staff - to cut jobs The government department that is meant to slim down the Civil Service has ballooned in size because of its dependence on external consultants, according to information, released under the FOI Act. The figures show that Office of Government Commerce's total spending on "external consultancy services" jumped from £5.8m to £9.2m between 2003-04 and 2004-05. This represents nearly a quarter of the department's £43m budget. The OGC's role is to work with other government departments to help them to meet their efficiency targets, amounting to £21.5 billion a year by 2007-08. It is also expected to find a further £3 billion savings in government procurement. Between 2003-04 and 2004-05, it's spending on management consultants rose from £4.2m to £5.7m, a 35% increase. In addition expenditure on highly paid "interim" managers for specific projects rose by 139% from £1.2m to £2.9m during the same period.	02.01.06	The Times	Office of Government Commerce	Civil Service

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Executive under fire over school fees perk Since 1999, the Scottish executive has been offering help with private schooling costs to officials who agree to move to other parts of the country according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. The perk is available to civil servants despite Labour being implacably opposed to private education. The party scrapped the assisted places scheme, which helped less well off families to send their children to independent schools. It has also threatened to scrap tax breaks on donations to such establishments. The executive is offering to pay up to £11,000 per child to subsidise private day school and boarding costs as an inducement for officials to take part in its controversial jobs relocation strategy. Relocated civil servants are also being offered nearly £3,000 to spend on their new homes. In addition, officials can qualify for £710 a month to rent a home in the area where they work and £ 25a month for gardening fees for second homes.	12.02.06	The Sunday Times	Scottish Executive	Civil Service
Whitehall surveys reveal low morale and little faith in bosses Only one in 10 civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions have confidence in their senior managers, according to one of several staff satisfaction surveys published yesterday which reveal low morale and high levels of bullying across government departments. In the Home Office and the education, environment and transport departments more than one in eight officials report bullying or harassment. Staff-surveys produced by most Whitehall departments were released by the Cabinet Office under the FOI Act.	05.04.06	The Guardian	The Cabinet Office	Civil Service
Scottish Executive staff survey results The results of a confidential employee survey, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show that: * only 27% of civil servants feel the Scottish Executive makes good use of money; * only 52% of civil servants in Scotland believe that any checks are made before money is spent; * only 28% feel there is a culture of sound financial management. The survey reveals for the first time what the 7,000 staff who work for the Executive and its agencies in Scotland actually feel about the way the government is run.	26.05.06	The Scotsman	Scottish Executive	Civil Service
Pay of top Ulster civil servants The most senior officials in Northern Ireland's Government departments have been receiving performance bonuses of up to £11,000 a year - bringing some annual pay packages to the £130,000 mark. The details, released under the FOI Act, relate to the period 2002-2005 when rank and file civil servants were involved in lengthy industrial action over their wages.	16.06.06	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Government Departments	Civil Service

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Agency move west 'will cost jobs, waste £7m, cause chaos'</p> <p>The Scottish Executive agency at the centre of plans to move civil service jobs out of Edinburgh has warned ministers that even partial relocation would create massive disruption, cost millions and cause staff to quit according to correspondence released under the FOI Scotland Act. In official advice to ministers, bosses at Registers of Scotland said it would cost £7m to move even 186 of its 1,000 Edinburgh-based posts to Glasgow. They said being forced to move would make the agency less efficient and force it to increase charges to its clients, which include the public, solicitors and businesses. They also said a staff survey had found only eight per cent were willing to move house or commute to the west. And they warned it would take up to ten years to train senior registration personnel to replace any who quit.</p>	31.07.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Registers of Scotland	Civil Service
<p>Whitehall fails to name one post switched to Merseyside</p> <p>The Lyons review in 2003 recommended that government departments move 20,000 staff out of London and identified Liverpool and Wirral among the top places for departments to consider. It was hoped that around 2,000 of those jobs would come to Merseyside. However, figures released under the FOI Act reveal that in the following three years, not a single job could be confirmed as having moved to Merseyside by any government department.</p>	08.08.06	Liverpool Daily Post	Central government departments	Civil Service
<p>DPPs staff so stressed they need a psychologist</p> <p>Stressed staff at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions have been provided with a consultant psychologist. An internal report into the running of the office, released under the FOI Act concluded that management was less than effective due to a relentless stream of case files caused by understaffing forcing James Hamilton, the current DPP, to hire a consultant psychologist to deal with stressed employees struggling to cope with apparent traumatic case files.</p>	19.11.07	The Daily Mail	Crown prosecution Service	Civil Service
<p>Foreign Office to move to Milton Keynes</p> <p>A new outpost has been added to the list of charismatic and dangerous postings for British diplomats: Milton Keynes. The move to the sprawling new town 50 miles up the M1 from Whitehall is part of a secret Foreign Office money-saving plan to move mandarins out of London. With the Foreign & Commonwealth Office needing to save hundreds of millions of pounds to fund its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the roles of its 1,000-plus staff in the historic Old Admiralty Building are being re-examined. A copy of the minutes of the Foreign Office management board, obtained under the FOI Act, reveals details of the plan. The Old Admiralty Building is the second largest Foreign Office building in Whitehall and costs about £1.5m a year to heat, light and maintain. It is home to some of the FCO's less glamorous functionaries, including the treaty section, which advises on international agreements, the language training department, the protocol directorate and the travel advice unit, which warns of international hotspots. First to move will be the legalisation department, which provides confirmation that a signature, seal or stamp on any international contract or other paperwork is genuine.</p>	30.12.07	The Mail on Sunday	Foreign & Commonwealth Office	Civil Service

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Compensation for miscarriages of justice There have been 24 rough justice compensation claims in Scotland since 1999 according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. Seven have been decided. Six were successful and one was thrown out. Two successful claimants have been paid in full. A further three have received interim payments while their final compensation levels are being assessed.	10.07.06	The Daily Record	Scottish Executive	Compensation
Compensation for wrongful arrest Police forces paid £2.3m compensation for wrongful arrests in 2005. London's Metropolitan force paid out £1,734,730 to 118 people who unjustly found themselves on the wrong side of the law. Most of the compensation payments were made in out-of-court settlements and came from information gathered from 37 forces in England. Just two - Cumbria and north Yorkshire - did not have to pay anything out.	19.07.06	The Express	Police forces	Compensation
Police pay £1.2m in crash claims in six-year period Police have paid out more than £1.2m in claims and compensation for injuries and damage caused by Devon and Cornwall force accidents in the last six years. Police cars have been involved in over 2,000 accidents in the two counties in that period. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that 2,108 accidents involving police cars have occurred between April 2002 and March 2007. Since April 2001, £405,304 has been paid out as a result of 100 personal injury claims caused by accidents involving police cars. In the same period, £810,330 has been paid out in 723 compensation claims for damage to property caused by accidents involving police cars.	28.09.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon and Cornwall Police	Compensation
Police accidents Analysis using statistics disclosed under the FOI Act shows that the amount of compensation paid by police forces after crashes involving their vehicles reached an estimated £10m in 2006/07. The sum was extrapolated from the responses of the 25 police authorities that held compensation records. The findings also show that last year there were 15,000 accidents involving police vehicles. The average number of crashes per force has risen 14% since 2000, though the figure has fallen after a peak of 452 per force in 2004.	13.10.07	The Times	Police forces	Compensation
Police misconduct costs forces £44m Police forces have paid out more than £44 million in compensation and damages in the past five years, mostly to victims of alleged police misconduct. The bulk was paid out for wrongful arrests, assaults, malicious prosecutions and abuses of human rights, according to data obtained under the FOI Act. The figures show that between 2002 and 2007 the 55 police forces received more than 31,000 claims.	03.12.07	The Times	Police forces	Compensation
Compensation for bullying There has been a big rise in the number of claims by children for compensation for bullying at school according to figures released under the FOI Act. Payouts over the past 2 years have reached £1.5m with a further £4.5m in legal costs. They show that compensation varied widely across the country with payments ranging from a few hundred pounds to £20,000.	30.05.06	The Daily Express	Local authorities	Compensation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

School compensation payments Suffolk schools have paid out £646,000 in personal injury claims over the past five years, figures released under the FOI Act show. The largest damages payments were given to a teacher, who was awarded nearly £200,000 after being attacked. The damages were part of liability payouts totalling nearly £666,000 to staff, parents and pupils following incidents at schools. The largest amount paid to a student for a personal injury at school was £38,322.37, with another getting £11,683 as a result of an accident.	11.04.07	The Evening Star	Suffolk County Council	Compensation
Lad hurt in school break-in wins £6k A boy who broke into a school was handed £5,700 compensation when he hurt himself swinging on a gate. The claim was part of an estimated £2m paid out to kids who were injured on school property last year. The findings were revealed by an FOI Act survey of 97 Local Education Authorities. More than two successful claims are lodged every day against councils for accidents on school premises. The largest pay-out was £21,500 for a pupil in Derbyshire who suffered a back strain in a drama class after "not receiving adequate instruction". And in Sandwell, West Midlands, a pupil fell while trying to retrieve his school bag from on top of a pile of chairs - and got £11,334. In Knowsley Merseyside, a child who cartwheeled off a playground boulder and injured an arm received £9,000. In Lincolnshire, a student got £3,000 for back injuries sustained carrying a saxophone. The authority which paid out the most to pupils last year was Rotherham - which settled 16 claims at a cost of £121,927.	16.07.07	The Sun	Local education authorities	Compensation
Families of CJD victims attack Reid's payout jibe John Reid, the defence secretary, has been accused of "gross insensitivity" by the families of CJD victims after suggesting they were making too many compensation claims. Documents released under the FOI Act show that Reid, then health secretary, told Sir Robert Owen, chairman of the trust administering CJD - "mad cow disease" - payouts, that making awards on a discretionary basis was "encouraging an endless number of victims". The transcript of the meeting in October 2004 shows that he then went on to compare CJD victims with soldiers who claimed that they had Gulf war syndrome, which he said "did not exist".	12.02.06	The Sunday Times	Department for Health	Compensation
£5m pavement falls payout Almost £5m has been paid to people who have tripped up on Sussex pavements in the past five years. In total 1,556 people have demanded cash for bumps, bruises and broken limbs between 2000 and 2004, figures obtained under the FOI Act show.	07.03.06	Brighton and Hove Argus	Sussex Councils	Compensation
Highways compensation claims Roads-related compensation claims received by North Lincolnshire Council have increased by more than 40% according to information released under the FOI Act. Statistics show 89 claims were made to the authority's highways department during the 2005/06 financial year. This is a 43.5% increase on the 62 claims made during 2004/5. Only six of the claims last year were successful, with 20 failing, and £8,495 had been paid out in compensation.	26.05.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North Lincolnshire Council	Compensation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Compensation for 7/7 victims The victims of the July 7th 2005 bombings will get an average of £4,300 each according to information released under the FOI Act. The lowest figure was £750 and the highest was £118,000	30.06.06	The Star	Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	Compensation
Pothole misery Figures released by Coventry City Council under the FOI Act reveal that they had 1,299 complaints about potholes between May 2005 and May 2006. And the city council has paid out nearly £6,000 in compensation for damaged cars.	20.07.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Coventry City Council	Compensation
MoD compensation payments The Ministry of Defence has paid out record compensation for disruption caused by low-flying military aircraft, including payouts to a beehive owner in the Balkans and a farmer who lost pedigree cattle when Chinook helicopters were sent in to demolish hilltop sites in Northern Ireland. The bill for claims arising from low-flying aircraft increased in 2006/07 to £4.1 million, against £759,000 the previous year. Many of the claims are for relatively small amounts but the MoD said that the issue was an emotive one in parts of the country. The total MoD bill for compensation payments and legal fees in 2005-06 was £78 million. Most of the payments, revealed in a report issued under the FOI Act, were to service personnel and civilian staff who sued after injuries while on duty.	10.04.07	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Compensation
Computer costs exceed benefits Ministers approved the huge NHS computer system in spite of reports showing that its costs exceeded its likely benefits. They now concede that the planned £6.3 billion scheme will cost £12.4 billion by the time it is fully implemented. At least one software supplier, iSoft, has run into financial trouble trying to meet the specification and is facing investigation by the Financial Services Authority. Now documents released under the FOI Act suggest that costs outweighed benefits in eight out of ten components of the scheme, called Connecting for Health. The project is divided into five regional "hubs", and the data released shows that for four of them, including London, the benefits of the scheme were calculated at £438m, against costs of £604m.	25.08.06	The Evening Standard	Department for Health	Computer Systems
National Audit Office report changed. Three draft National Audit Office reports on the NHS's £12.4bn National Programme for IT (NPfIT) released under the FOI Act show that many of the most serious criticisms of the NPfIT were omitted from the final publication. Between the drafts there had been a "clearance" process with health officials in Whitehall. Wording was changed in such a way as to give a more favourable impression of the programme, and removing entire passages of criticisms that had sound, quoted sources.	29.08.06	Computer Weekly	The National Audit Office	Computer Systems

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>NHS supercomputer is a £20bn letdown as data is scaled back</p> <p>Controversial plans for a Health Service computer program have been heavily scaled back because of technical failures, according to a paper submitted to the board of Britain's largest NHS trust, Leeds Teaching Hospitals, by its director and deputy director of informatics. It was obtained under the FOI Act. The documents, drawn up by senior health officials, contain damning criticism of the IT upgrade, which is already billions of pounds over budget and three years behind schedule. The key aim of the Government's National Programme for IT was to establish a central database of 50 million patients' medical records. But difficulties with the software mean the electronic records will now contain only a fraction of the information Ministers originally intended. Despite this, the overall cost of the troubled scheme is expected to remain the same at £20 billion.</p>	05.12.06	The Daily Mail	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	Computer Systems
<p>Criminal record system upgrade bogged down</p> <p>The new Criminal History System, ordered in 1998, was due to come into operation in March 2004. Its estimated cost was £1.5m. However, information released under the FOI Scotland Act, has revealed that the system is now unlikely to be up and running before the end of 2006 and the total cost has increased to more than £10m, seven times the original price tag. A report by outside consultants found failures at every level: there was no clear understanding of what the new system was meant to do, hence constant changes in the specifications; nobody had overall control and key players bickered; staff were overoptimistic about targets and complacent about slippage.</p>	03.01.06	Glasgow Herald	The Scottish Assembly	Computer Systems
<p>Council justifies the purchase of its new laptop computers</p> <p>Mendip councillors have justified the £100,000 of taxpayers' money paid out for new laptops. The district council has spent £2,000 each on 47 computers that it says is a priority to bring up-to-date email and internet access to the fingertips of councillors. But under the FOI Act, it was revealed that ten out of the 46 Mendip councillors were refused a laptop.</p>	19.01.06	Bath Chronicle	Mendip Council	Computer Systems
<p>Doncaster Council blackberries</p> <p>Doncaster Council is spending more than a quarter of a million pounds on line rental for blackberries. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that the council currently has 761 of the devices in use, which cost £113,389 to buy and a further £255,696 per year in line rental - £28 per unit per month. The council did not disclose how much more is spent on calls, messages and emails.</p>	26.01.06	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster City Council	Computer Systems

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Computer increases waiting list times In December 2005, just 12 people were waiting more than six months for an operation in England. But in the same month the Connecting for Health computer systems were launched on a trial basis at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital Trust in Oxford the number of people waiting longer than six months started to rise. Within a few weeks more than 100 people in England were waiting longer than six months, most of them at the Nuffield, which insists that the problem is now resolved. Staff who were instructed to sort out the problem could not even establish from the malfunctioning computers which patients had been waiting the longest and the numbers kept climbing. Details of the waiting list problems at the Nuffield were released under the FOI Act.	04.06.06	The Sunday Times	Health Trusts	Computer Systems
Local authority consultancy costs Lancashire County Council spent more than £4m of taxpayers' money on employing external consultants in just 12 months according to information released under the FOI Act. The figure was nearly double the amount spent in 2005. The authority paid more than 80 different firms to seek specialist information. In total, £4.057m was spent in 2004/5; almost double the £2.068m spent the previous 12 months.	18.01.06	Lancashire Evening Post	Lancashire County Council	Consultants
Consultancy payments by NHS 24 The Scottish health helpline NHS 24 spent £17.5m on private management consultants, the vast majority of which (£14.2m) went to CapGemini according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. The investigation has also established that a senior NHS 24 employee failed to register personal interests in CapGemini. Figures from the English health helpline, NHS Direct, show it spent just £760,800 on consultancies.	07.05.06	Scotland on Sunday	NHS 24	Consultants
Tories spend £350k on cash-saving tips A Tory-run council paid consultants £350,000 - to tell it how to save money. Officials from Dorset County Council asked financial experts Deloitte how they could get around a £20m shortfall. After four months work, at £3,211 a day, they were given "blindingly obvious" tips such as cutting red tape and making better use of taxes. Other advice was to "empower" staff and sell unused council buildings. The cost only emerged after an FOI act request.	16.08.07	The Daily Mirror	Dorset County Council	Consultants
Council cab bill jumps by 50% The cost of taxi trips claimed by Edinburgh city councillors has increased by more than 50% in five years according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. The total cost to the public purse of taxi trips claimed by city councillors has risen on average by around ten per cent a year over the past five years - far faster than the rise in taxi fares in the city over the same period. Councillors ran up fares of nearly £14,000 in 2005 - compared to less than £9,000 at the turn of the decade - despite official rules discouraging their use.	10.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>High court cases</p> <p>Of cases referred to the High Court by the Attorney General seeking an increase in the sentence, there were 23 violent cases, 19 sexual offences, 18 robbery and 17 for drugs according to figures released under the FOI Act. The original sentence was found to be "unduly lenient" in 75% of the cases referred. The Attorney General is pushing for higher sentences for all these categories of crime.</p>	16.05.06	The Times	The Home Office	Courts
<p>Child abusers 'should be jailed for longer'</p> <p>The Attorney General has called for tougher jail terms for paedophiles after figures showed that more than 200 judges had handed out sentences that were too lenient. Lord Goldsmith, QC, the Government's senior law officer, has asked the Sentencing Guidelines Council to consider current levels of sentencing in child abuse cases because of concern that penalties are too low. He has listed details of 339 cases in the past three years in which he has brought challenges over "unduly lenient" sentences. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show that three quarters were agreed by the Court of Appeal to be too lenient. Among the list of more than 200 judges, about one in ten of the senior judiciary, is Stuart Fish, who retired last year. Ten of his judgments were found to be unduly lenient by the Court of Appeal. One of the biggest sentence increases involved Judge Robert Winstanley, who sentenced Luan Plakici, 26, an Albanian, to ten years for smuggling kidnapped women into Britain and forcing them to become sex slaves. The sentence was more than doubled to 23 years by the Court of Appeal.</p>	12.06.06	The Times	Ministry of Justice	Courts
<p>Lodgings for m'lud cost more than £5m a year</p> <p>More than £5m of taxpayers' money is being spent on lavish overnight lodgings for High Court judges each year. It can cost as much as £2,300 to accommodate one member of the judiciary for a single night, far outstrip-ping the cost of a five-star hotel. The figures released under the FOI Act brought calls from MPs for a review of the way the mainly London-based judges who are paid £162,000 a year are accommodated when out of the capital 'on circuit'. The 32 houses used include historic manors staffed with butlers and cooks, and costs have risen by more than £136,000 over the past two years, despite previous spending reviews. In 11 cases, the lodgings cost the taxpayer more than £1,000 for every night a judge used them, including a £1,605a-night bill for one in St Albans, just a 20-minute train journey from Central London.</p>	27.02.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Justice	Courts
<p>Sentences for rapists are getting softer</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act show that in recent years the sentences for rape have been getting shorter. In Scotland the average sentence fell to around 6 years, whereas in England and Wales the average sentence for the offence is 7 years.</p>	11.03.07	The Sunday Times	Ministry of Justice	Courts

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£111m owed in fines Convicted criminals owe more than £111m in fines and other court payments in London alone. According to figures that were released under the FOI Act, a further £4m was owed to Watford and Dorking courts. The total sum for England and Wales may be as much as £1 billion.	09.04.07	The Times	The Courts Service	Courts
Sex probe on judges Court bosses have probed 1,434 complaints against law chiefs over computer use. A secret list was drawn up by the Lord Chancellor's office, which claimed details were "exempt" from the FOI Act. But Information Commissioner Richard Thomas has forced the court regulators to admit it exists.	17.05.07	The Times	Ministry of Justice	Courts
Judges get to keep robes Circuit judges have won the battle to keep their wigs and gowns. The Lord Chief Justice is expected to announce that the circuit bench will undergo minimal change to their costume. But senior judges handling civil, commercial and family cases are still likely to be rid of their wigs and move to a simple gown. Findings of a public consultation (just released under the FOI Act) show widespread opposition to change in court dress.	12.06.07	The Times	Ministry of Justice	Courts
Police in the dock Almost 30 serving PSNI officers have been accused of criminal offences since the beginning of 2004, including attempted murder, sexual assaults, and drink driving. In two years, wages totalling almost £500,000 have been paid to 28 suspended police officers that have been charged or summonsed for a criminal offence. Material released under the FOI Act shows that another 28 officers are, or have been, accused of serious offences. These include violent crimes such as attempted murder, aggravated assault, grievous bodily harm and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. Sex offences alleged to have been committed include gross indecency, indecent assault and indecent behaviour. There have also been a number of alleged car crimes that include dangerous driving, driving while unfit through drink or drugs, careless driving, no insurance, no driving licence, failing to stop after a damage only accident, failing to remain at the scene and failing to report. Some of the 28 suspended officers face allegations of misconduct in public office, forgery, breach of the Data Protection Act, possessing a firearm with intent, deception, perverting the course of justice and disorderly behaviour.	23.02.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Criminal Records
Metropolitan police officers with criminal records Figures released under the FOI act reveal that at least 74 Met officers have kept their jobs despite being convicted of crimes. Of these, 61 were found guilty of drink-driving while other offences included assault and criminal damage. Twelve officers were allowed to stay in their posts despite being recommended for the sack by disciplinary panels. The Met said the figure concerned court cases between 2000 and 2005 - which means the true total could be even higher. A total of 33 civilian staff were convicted of crimes without losing their jobs.	10.04.06	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Criminal Records

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>166 officers have criminal records.</p> <p>Figures released by the Police Service of Northern Ireland under the FOI Act show that a total of 166 officers have been convicted of criminal offences since the force was established in November 2001 not including anyone who may have carried a criminal record over from the RUC. In the past five years officers supposed to be enforcing law and order have been convicted of a catalogue of serious crimes including assault, theft, indecent behaviour and being drunk in charge of a firearm. 29 officers have been convicted of different offences - but only 25 have been sacked or forced to resign as a result of their crimes.</p>	26.12.06	The Daily Mirror	PSNI	Criminal Records
<p>Violence, drugs and sex offences among past records of 200 taxi drivers</p> <p>More than 200 licensed taxi drivers in Aberdeenshire have criminal records, with convictions including violent and sexual crimes, theft, fraud and housebreaking. The figures, obtained using the FOI Scotland Act, show that in Aberdeenshire about one in seven taxi drivers have a criminal record, with 207 out of 1,435 drivers having convictions.</p>	14.02.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Aberdeenshire Council	Criminal Records
<p>Chinook engine faults</p> <p>New evidence has emerged that suggests the RAF Chinook that crashed in the Mull of Kintyre in 1994 should not have flown. Documents, obtained under the FOI act and posted on the Professional Pilots Rumour Network website, show concerns shortly before the tragedy. Writing after the crash, the Director of Test and Evaluation said the Chinook fleet had suffered four in-service incidents, including the engine temperature rising to 950C two weeks before the accident. The problem caused damage to the engine, but, strangely, ground tests later showed no fault found. There were so many real and false warnings pilots were issued with guidance about possible faults and told "if engine operation is normal, aircrew should expect the 'Eng Fail' light to extinguish after a 12 second lapse of time". The Chinook was flying from RAF Aldergrove, in Ulster, to a security conference on June 2, 1994, and passengers included a senior MI5 officer and Special Branch officers. An RAF Board of Inquiry blamed the pilots and ruled the helicopter was flying too fast when the pilots tried to take emergency action to avoid a steep hillside.</p>	19.02.06	The Sunday Express	Ministry of Defence	Defence
<p>Navy ship security is sunk by poacher</p> <p>A thief stole a top secret device which allows pilots to see in the dark from HMS Illustrious. Details of the theft in Rosyth, Fife, in December 2002 have been revealed under the FOI Act. And the Ministry of Defence admitted another 262 raids on its properties in the last four years. In another massive security breach, a gang made off with diving suits, knives and other underwater kit worth £18,000 from Faslane naval base near Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire. Inquiries into the raid between January and September 2004 drew a blank. Just one third of MoD thefts are detected.</p>	23.04.06	The News of the World	Ministry of Defence	Defence

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Swan Hunter Tyneside yard never in the running to build aircraft carriers</p> <p>Letters released under the FOI Act reveal Swan Hunter's Tyneside yard was not considered suitable to be a frontline contractor in the project to construct the Royal navy's new aircraft carriers. Despite a number of Ministry of Defence assurances that the Wallsend yard would be a major contractor to build the 65,000-tonne aircraft carriers, a letter from the aircraft carrier alliance project team leader to the chief of defence procurement stated: "The alliance assessment considered the capability, capacity and resources of all the UK shipbuilding industry, including Swan Hunter, who were not considered to have the intrinsic design capability required for the blocks and/or suitable facilities."</p>	13.06.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Ministry of Defence	Defence
<p>Chemical alert at defence site</p> <p>A chemical weapons scare was sparked at a former nerve agent factory when a digger driver accidentally unearthed equipment used to produce mustard gas according to information released under the FOI Act. The discovery at the former Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke, near Redruth in Cornwall happened in 2006 as contractors investigated a shaft thought to lead to one of five known dump sites. Tons of equipment and plant from the factory, which manufactured 20 tons of the deadly nerve agent sarin between 1954 and 1956, was buried after the facility was closed in 1977. Its chemical weapons were either treated and disposed of on site or transported to Porton Down in Wiltshire. But the material unearthed by accident (thought to be reaction vessels used in the production of chemical weapon agents) had not been mapped, so nobody was aware of its exact whereabouts.</p>	29.05.07	Western Morning News	Ministry of Defence	Defence
<p>Drug users dumping 500m dirty needles every day in Lothian</p> <p>Drug users are dumping up to 500 used needles in Edinburgh and the Lothians every day. Figures from NHS Lothian reveal that, on average, 819 needles are handed out every day but only 356 are returned safely. The statistics, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show that just over five million needles were dished out between January and October 2005. Health bosses admit that 99% of them are for drug users but say a lot of used needles are put in special safety bins, where they are not counted by health officials.</p>	02.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	NHS Lothian	Drugs
<p>Addicts referred to Weston-super-Mare</p> <p>Information requested under the FOI Act by Weston-super-Mare MP John Penrose has shown that at least 850 drug addicts were referred to the town (by local authorities around the UK), which has a population of 75,000, in the past 30 months, though the real figure is thought to be at least 1,000. Many of the town's old guesthouses and big mansions have become drug treatment centres over the years as their owners looked for new sources of income after the local tourism industry declined, leading to a flood of drug addicts sent from across the UK, often with minimum supervision, to drying-out centres in Weston-super-Mare.</p>	11.01.06	Western Daily Press	Local authorities	Drugs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Airports on alert to halt drugs imports Drugs with a street value of more than £660,000 are seized at Sussex airports every week. Cocaine made up the biggest haul, but millions of pounds worth of softer drugs, such as cannabis, were also recovered at Gatwick and Shoreham airports. Figures released under the FOI Act show customs officers made 381 drugs seizures, weighing 2,428kg, at Gatwick and Shoreham airports in the 12 months to April 2005.	03.03.06	Brighton and Hove Argus	HM Revenue and Customs	Drugs
Councils fail to track drug addict parents The majority of Scotland's councils have no record of how many children are born to parents who are drug addicts and sex offenders. Only five out of 32 local authorities compile data on babies of drug addicts and fewer than half hold information on the children of sex offenders. Data obtained under the FOI Scotland Act has revealed that councils have no uniform system of identifying children born to drug addicts and sex offenders.	12.03.06	The Sunday Times	Scottish local authorities	Drugs
Clearing the streets of drugs Sunderland police seized drugs worth more than £1.2m in 2005. Figures released under the FOI Act show that cocaine with a street value of more than £1m was seized, making it by far the most netted illegal substance. More than £90,000 of cannabis was found along with almost £13,000 of Ecstasy tablets. However, despite local fears that the drug was flooding the city, the figures reveal just £27 worth of crack cocaine (weighing 0.27g) was found.	14.03.06	Sunderland Echo	Sunderland Police	Drugs
Substance abuse in schools Five primary school children were expelled in Birmingham during 2005 after being caught with drugs according to information released under the FOI Act. The figures also showed that 60 Birmingham secondary school pupils were excluded for drugs possession in the last 12 month.	09.04.06	The Sunday Mercury	Birmingham City Council	Drugs
Drug taking in schools During 2005, there were 250 recorded cases of drug taking by school pupils, nearly four times the problem with alcohol, according to figures released under the FOI Act.	01.05.06	The Express	Department of Health	Drugs
Addicts taking methadone unsupervised 723 Edinburgh methadone users prescribed the drug between April and September 2005 were only required to take it in the presence of a medical professional for two weeks, and administered the doses themselves the rest of the time according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act.	02.06.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Drugs
Drug addicts, young and old Over the past 2 years more than a quarter of a million pounds has been spent on drug substitutes for addicts in Coventry according to information released under the FOI Act. The information also showed that the oldest known heroin addict in Coventry is 72 years old and the youngest being treated for problems with cocaine, ecstasy and alcohol is aged just 15.	07.08.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Coventry City Council	Drugs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Child drug dealers Figures released by Sussex Police under the FOI Act show under-17s have been responsible for more than 89 drug offences in Brighton and Hove in the past three years. They include 13-year-olds dealing heroin and crack, a 16-year-old crack dealer and a 15 year-old peddling ecstasy. Figures given for 2003 to 2006 show 24 of the offences involved children aged just 14.	09.08.06	Brighton and Hove Argus	Sussex police	Drugs
Children as young as 12 'on heroin' Children as young as 12 are being admitted to hospital after taking heroin and Ecstasy. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show children across the country are being treated for ingesting potentially fatal Class A drugs. Worst affected is the Greater Glasgow area, where 144 children under 16 have been hospitalised after taking Class A drugs in the past five years. NHS Lothian also confirmed cases of children aged 12-16 being admitted to hospital after ingesting heroin and other opiates in 2005-06. NHS Grampian has had two cases of children one aged 12 taking Ecstasy in the past five years.	11.02.07	The Mail on Sunday	NHS	Drugs
Move to legalise poppy crops The 2007 Afghanistan opium harvest will almost certainly be the largest ever. In the five years since the overthrow of the Taliban regime, land under cultivation for poppy has grown from 8,000 to 165,000 hectares. The US wants to step up eradication programmes, crop-spraying from the air. But, desperate to win "hearts and minds" in Afghanistan and protect British troops, Tony Blair is on the brink of a U-turn that will set him on a collision course with President George Bush. The Prime Minister has ordered a review of his counter-narcotics strategy - including the possibility of legalising some poppy production. Much of the legally produced drug could be used to alleviate a shortage of opiates for medicinal use in Britain and beyond. An FOI request has revealed that the Government looked carefully at proposals to buy up Afghanistan's poppy crop as early as 2000, under the Taliban. The removal of that regime - justified to both US and British voters partly in terms of a victory in the "war on drugs" - has made it politically difficult to financially reward poppy farmers.	01.04.07	The Independent on Sunday	The Foreign Office	Drugs
Animal tests of illicit drugs 'cruel' British universities have spent £10m in a decade on animal experiments into the effects of illegal drugs, according to activists who say it is cruel because such drugs are "luxury" items people use by choice. The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection has produced a report which includes data released under the FOI Act and says Cambridge University has received £1.6m over the last decade for such tests from the Medical Research Council. It has extrapolated this figure to come up with £10m nationally. The report says one study looked at how chemicals in cannabis caused rats to get the "munchies" like human cannabis smokers; another involved playing the Prodigy and Bach to rats high on methamphetamine - leading to a reprimand from the Home Office for going beyond the original research licence.	12.04.07	The Guardian	Cambridge University	Drugs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Assembly's poverty policy has 'no significant impact' External assessors of the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship anti-poverty initiative, Communities First, concluded that it had no significant impact in its first three years. A report written by Cambridge Policy Consultants last June said, 'It has become clear to us (and to the Welsh Assembly Government) that, apart from a few partnerships, there will be no substantial regeneration outcomes from the first three years of the programme operation.' An extract of the report is among material released following a request under the FOI Act.	11.03.06	Western Mail	Welsh Assembly	Economy
Minister ignored critical business report Nicol Stephen, the deputy first minister, gave the go-ahead for a controversial £12m-a-year Scottish Enterprise business start-up scheme to continue without reading a damning report showing that half its ventures failed within three years. Stephen ordered that the Business Gateway scheme, which provides advice for start-up companies, be saved despite a £30m overspend. However, documents obtained under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that the decision was taken without the minister having read a critical report by consultants. Scottish Enterprise (SE) had hoped to use the millions it saved by reforming the scheme to help dig itself out of its financial black hole. Now it will have to find the money elsewhere. It is expected that 100-130 jobs will be lost. The 155-page study, commissioned by the Scottish Executive and carried out by GEN Consulting, was passed to the enterprise agency six months ago. It reveals that just 55% of businesses helped by the scheme survive longer than three years. In some areas the survival rate is 36%. The report also shows that each job created by the scheme costs the agency £5,400.	09.04.06	The Sunday Times	Scottish Enterprise	Economy
Council business boost to economy The majority of successful tenderers chosen by North Lincolnshire Council last year were local area firms. Figures released under the FOI Act show that during 2005/06 the council awarded contracts worth about £100m and almost 75% were awarded to North Lincolnshire firms. About 90% of the winning bidders were based in Lincolnshire. The figure could be even higher if those companies from outside North Lincolnshire, which have an operations base in the region, were counted.	28.09.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North Lincolnshire Council	Economy
Closed for business More than 500 shops, offices and other businesses across York are lying empty, according to figures released under the FOI Act. The figures show the number of vacant business premises is now declining, but only after 12 months of year-on-year increase. In March 2007, the latest month for which figures are available, there were 549 unoccupied premises, including garages, shops, restaurants and offices. The figure represents a drop of 22 on February, and a marginal drop of three on March 2006. But the previous 12 months, from March 2006 to February 2007, all showed a year-on-year increase in the number of empty business properties.	16.05.07	York Press	York Council	Economy

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Schools shun 'tough' subjects to climb tables Thousands of teenagers are being steered away from GCSEs in academic subjects so schools can boost their standing, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. Schools are opting for vocational qualifications instead of the traditional 'tough' subjects such as science and history. Pupils who gain the intermediate GNVQs pick up the equivalent of four GCSEs at grade C or better helping schools to climb official league tables. This is because schools are ranked according to the number of pupils passing five GCSEs at grades A* to C.	13.01.06	The Times Educational Supplement	Department for Education and Skills	Education
Schools in £120m debt crisis A list of debt-burdened schools, released under the FOI Act, reveals how primaries and secondaries across England are now struggling with total debts of more than £120m. More than 1,800 schools are in the red - including 27 in Bolton, the constituency represented by Education Secretary Ruth Kelly. Four schools owe more than £1m each and one is almost £2m in the red.	29.01.06	The Sunday Express	Department for Education and Skills	Education
Fight to save school sports fields Kensington and Chelsea council wants to rebuild Holland Park School (dubbed the Eton of comprehensives) using the proceeds of the sale of its sports pitches, which would be replaced by flats. Figures released under the FOI Act show ministers have continued to approve the sale of school playing fields, despite assurances that this will only happen as a last resort.	01.02.06	The Evening Standard	Department for Education and Skills	Education
Academies 'select by the back door' City academies were yesterday accused of using 'banding' tests to introduce selection by the back door. Funding agreements between the Government and the first 27 academies show that one in three is using tests to ensure they get children from a range of abilities. Banding usually requires pupils to sit a test, normally a written exam. Applicants are then placed into four or five ability groups. An equal number is then chosen from each set, ensuring that up to a quarter are highfliers. Academy chiefs argue that the system allows them to take a spread from all ability ranges, but critics claim that the system is 'open to manipulation' and schools can also use relatively broad 'bands', taking pupils from the very top of each. The funding agreements, released under the FOI Act, also show that almost half are selecting pupils by 'aptitude' in areas such as sport, ICT and music. Specialist schools may also select up to ten per cent of pupils by 'aptitude' but currently only around 6% use these powers.	11.02.06	The Daily Mail	Department for Education and Skills	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

School arsenal Children as young as seven are taking weapons into school. Statistics revealed under the FOI Act, show knives, guns and even a steel chain were among the weaponry found on youngsters in Lincolnshire county schools. The figures reveal that 34 pupils were excluded for taking weapons into school between January 2003 and February 2004, one of those an infant pupil in Year 2. There were a total of 32 separate reports of weapons in schools - 12 involving knives, 11 pellet guns, eight ball-bearing guns and one steel chain. Lincolnshire County Council has refused to reveal the names of the 18 schools where the incidents took place.	13.02.06	Lincolnshire Echo	Lincolnshire County Council	Education
More bullies are being thrown out of schools More bullies are being removed from schools as head teachers move to stamp out abuse, figures released under the FOI Act show. Children were suspended or expelled for bullying on 860 occasions in London schools during 2005, up 52% from 567 in the previous 12 months. Head teachers said the figures showed schools were taking an increasingly zero-tolerance approach to bullies.	20.02.06	The Evening Standard	London boroughs	Education
Report highlights failings in specialist status schools Most Doncaster schools with specialist status are failing to offer pupils enough courses in subjects they have declared an interest in, according to a local education authority report. A council review of education provision for youngsters aged 14 and over has highlighted weak links between school specialisms and curriculums. The report, released by Doncaster Council under the FOI Act, describes curriculums as "predictable" with "little move" into specialist courses beyond GCSE or work-related Applied GCSE. Information technology is highlighted as one particular area of concern although the report points out that five schools have started offering the Diploma in Digital Applications.	03.03.06	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Education
Schools unable to keep out intruders Dozens of Scottish schools are still open to intruders 10 years after being urged to tighten up security in the wake of the Dunblane shootings. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that more than 45 primary and secondary schools in the north and northeast are still to be fitted with secure entry systems. And of the schools that do have intercoms and other security measures, there is evidence to show they are not always used effectively. Security was especially lacking in Moray, where all its secondaries and almost half its primaries had still to be fitted with secure entry systems, and Aberdeenshire, where only two of its 17 secondary schools had security systems in place.	21.03.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Local authorities	Education
Threat of job cuts at local school Staff at Mansfield's Sherwood Hall School could lose their jobs as part of a desperate bid to reduce the school's massive debts. Education chiefs say a number of job-cuts at the cash-strapped school will happen over the coming months in the ongoing battle to transform the school's fortunes. An audit report released under the FOI Act reveals the school has debts of more than £628,000.	30.03.06	Mansfield Chad	Nottinghamshire County Council	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

The university that cut its pass mark to 21% A university let students keep studying for pharmacy degrees even though they had failed their examinations. De Montfort University (DMU) raised the results of failing students, who moved into the next year of the course without resitting the papers, despite furious protests from lecturers and external examiners. Staff argued that the original marks, showing a 50% failure rate, were fair because students were "not up to the programme" and were often too lazy to do the work required. But senior administrators at DMU's Leicester School of Pharmacy said, at an emergency meeting to review the grades, that jobs were at risk unless the failure rate was reduced. Internal documents released under the FOI Act show the extent of academic concern about the decision in summer 2004 to change results for first and second-year students. The pass mark on one module was lowered, in effect, to 26% and on another to 21% "with compensation". The documents showed that lecturers and examiners believed that many of the students had a "poor attitude to work". One member of staff complained that increases to their grades were "academically indefensible".	20.04.06	The Times	Leicester De Montfort University	Education
Academy bail-out linked to election An emergency grant to a Middlesbrough City Academy came just before the 2005 general election. The timing of the payment, revealed under the FOI Act, which may have saved the school from a highly embarrassing closure, is likely to raise concerns that it was made for political reasons with the election looming. Ministers agreed a £15m bailout for the school, identified as failing 2 months earlier, just 10 days before the election.	30.04.06	The Sunday Times	HM Treasury	Education
Cash cuts the college drop-out rate Paying some Coventry students up to £30 a week to stick it out at college has proved a success according to statistics released under the FOI Act. The dropout rates at colleges across the city have fallen since the scheme was introduced.	30.05.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Coventry City Council	Education
City academies overspend by £48m The first city academies have cost the taxpayer more than £657m in building and other start-up costs, £48.5m more than original estimates according to figures released under the FOI act.	09.06.06	The Evening Standard	Department for Education and Skills	Education
Lax hygiene at hundreds of nurseries More than 300 nurseries and child-minding facilities were told by the Care Commission to improve their cleanliness and safety during 2005 according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. One in four facilities were not telling children to wash their hands, whilst among the other problems found by inspectors were dirty toilets, staff not wearing disposable aprons when changing soiled nappies, children sharing play areas with dogs, and lunch boxes not stored in a fridge.	10.06.06	The Scotsman	The Care Commission	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Racist incidents in Bradford schools Bradford primary and secondary schools reported an average 11 racist incidents a week last term according to statistics released under the FOI Act. And education chiefs in the city yesterday revealed they took emergency action following recent anti-terror raids in the city and after the July 7 bombings of 2005 to try and prevent a backlash in schools. So far during the 2005/06 school year there have been 298 racist incidents reported and in the 2004/05 academic year there were 405.	20.06.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Bradford Council	Education
Objections to proposed maths GCSE changes Many of the most academically successful schools oppose proposed changes to the maths GCSE exam according to documents released under the FOI Act. Proposals to make maths more attractive to pupils by scrapping the three-tier GCSE paper in which some candidates are only able to score a D-grade are to be introduced by 2008. However, responses from some schools showed that they feared bright pupils would not be stretched by the new exam.	22.06.06	The Evening Standard	Department for Education and Skills	Education
Student loan debt hell A call for the student loans scheme to be scrapped was made yesterday after the discovery that hundreds of thousands of graduates are being pursued by debt collectors. Figures obtained by the Scottish National Party using the FOI Scotland Act, show that as many as 358,867 student accounts have been referred to debt collection agencies.	29.06.06	The Express	Student Loans Company	Education
Pupils found with knives in school just get caution One in seven children caught with knives in school is being let off with a warning. Overall there has been a 45% increase in the number of thugs caught with a potential deadly weapon who escape with a caution. Up to 10,000 offenders a year avoid jail. Home Office figures released under the FOI Act showed 113 people were dealt with for having a blade in school in 2004. But of those, 81 were cautioned, 20 were fined and just 12 were held in custody.	06.07.06	The Daily Express	Home Office	Education
Bullied teenagers go under knife Hundreds of teenagers in Scotland have received cosmetic surgery on the NHS to avoid being bullied at school, with most undergoing operations to have their ears pinned back. New statistics obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show that more than 40 girls aged under 18 have gone under the knife to enlarge or reduce their breast size in the past five years. Another 21 teenagers have had surgery on their noses and 520 have had prominent ears pinned back.	10.07.06	The Times	Scottish NHS trusts	Education
Sacked school staff get £2m West country schools have paid out £2m over the last five years to get rid of poorly performing teachers, information released under the FOI Act has revealed. Teachers who are failing in their job, ill, or facing disciplinary action, have been given pay-offs on condition they agree to quit their jobs. In Cornwall, schools reached so-called "compromise agreements" with 58 teachers which cost £687,597. In Devon, 71 teachers received £745,747 under similar arrangements, while in Plymouth £511,825 was paid in 62 cases.	12.07.06	Western Morning News	Local County Councils	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Music dies out as cuts start to bite Ministers were warned about the impact on poorer children of cuts in funding for schools music - but went ahead anyway. Letters released to Eleanor Burnham, North Wales Liberal Democrat AM, under the FOI Act, reveal that Welsh Arts Council chairman Geraint Talfan Davies told the Assembly government in April 2004 that the impact of reducing the budget of its music development fund (MDF) from £3.5 million to £1.9m would be "considerable". He warned that it would have the worst effect on those children whose parents could not pay for tuition, contrary to government objectives. The MDF was set up in 1999 and has provided tuition, instruments and workshops for more than 60,000 children. The funding is no longer ring-fenced and is now paid to local authorities as part of the revenue support grant. An Estyn report published earlier this year confirmed that the changes to the fund had resulted in cuts to music provision. Meanwhile, special music funding in England has increased from £60m a year to £90m guaranteed to 2008. Scotland has also approved a £17m increase over the next three years.	14/07/06	Times Educational Supplement	Welsh Assembly	Education
Boards sit on 64 vacant sites Education boards across Northern Ireland own more than 60 vacant and unused properties, some of which have been empty for 20 years, figures released under the FOI Act have shown.	21.08.06	Belfast Newsletter	Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards	Education
The school (taxi) run Glasgow City Council's spent £3,836,862 on taxis for school children in 2005/06, while Edinburgh City Council's spent £3,814,000. Aberdeen City Council spent £1,125,000, Highland Council £1,770,000, Perth and Kinross Council £1,165,000, Angus Council £678,798 and Clackmannanshire Council £333,000. The transport bill in Moray was £600,000, £3,277 in Orkney, £190,835 in Shetland and £71,827 in Argyll and Bute. Stirling Council spent £1,798,633 on school transport in total in 2005/06. The figures have been made available under the FOI Scotland Act.	19.10.06	The Sun	Scottish local authorities	Education
Academies are failing on GCSE results Half of the first wave of flagship academies are failing their pupils, according to internal reports released under the FOI Act. They show that at eight of the 14 academies, which have cost on average £25m each to build, pupils are failing to achieve the GCSE results that would be expected given their ability. The so-called "value-added" measure is seen as a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of a school than raw league table examination results. The data undermine the claims by ministers that poor results from the academies can be attributed to the deprived background of many of their pupils. "Value added" measures whether a child's GCSE results match the ability they displayed at 11. In eight of the schools, they fell back, two produced better results than expected and the other four performed as would be expected. The data have been disclosed in performance and assessment reports, known as Pandas, by the schools inspection service Ofsted. It produces a similar analysis for every school in England but it is rarely circulated to parents or the public.	22.10.06	The Sunday Times	OFSTED	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

A third of city primary pupils fail to reach writing standard A third of Edinburgh children are starting high school without the level of writing skills laid down by the Scottish Executive according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. Hundreds of youngsters are also leaving city primaries without reaching the "benchmark" levels for reading and maths. A total of 1337 children aged 11 and 12 left primary school in Edinburgh this summer without reaching the level D standard that the Executive expects "most" children to have achieved.	31.10.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Scottish Executive	Education
160 staff are suspended as dangerous to children 160 teachers and other school staff were suspended in 2005-06 over fears that they posed a danger to children according to information released under the FOI Act. 100 staff in secondary schools and 66 in primaries were suspended following claims of physical and sexual abuse and other concerns. Allegations included inappropriate relationships with children, sharing porn with pupils and sending explicit text messages. Nearly half of all suspensions are still continuing. At least 25 resulted in dismissal and six in resignation.	03.11.06	The Daily Mirror	Local education authorities	Education
3,000 pupils miss school for cheap holidays Up to one in three secondary school pupils in Cardiff are taken on holiday during term time because parents cannot afford to pay summer holiday prices according to information released under the FOI Act. More than 3,000 pupils missed school days during the 2004/05 academic year to go on holiday with their families.	13.11.06	South Wales Echo	Welsh Assembly	Education
Pupils' dinner costs less than a tin of dog food Kids are being fed school lunches that cost just 32p - less than the price of a can of dog food. Almost half of Scotland's 32 education authorities spend less than £1 on secondary school lunches according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. Glasgow - which tops the list of Scotland's most unhealthy cities - spends the least on lunches, at 32p. Yet in areas like Dundee, pupils are eating lunches which cost £1.98 - six times the amount spent by Glasgow.	01.12.06	The Sun	Scottish Local Authorities	Education
FOI produces schools stats the executive didn't want you to see Details on the quality of Scots schools were released yesterday. The Executive stopped publishing league tables three years ago, claiming they were misleading. But now they have been forced to reveal figures under the FOI Scotland Act. The figures show that 34% of children across Scotland gained five Standard Grades at credit level.	15.12.06	The Sun	Scottish Executive	Education
Comprehensives still fail to make Oxbridge grade A league table of the state schools most successful at getting pupils into Oxford and Cambridge universities has been revealed this year for the first time under the FOI Act. The figures show that less than 20% of secondaries provide all the entrants from the state sector, with most of the successful applicants coming from grammar schools or sixth-form colleges.	17.12.06	The Sunday Times	Oxford and Cambridge Universities	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Grammar schools face axe A pressure group campaigning to stop the merger of two Grammar schools in Lincolnshire, says it's used the FOI Act to establish the move is being driven by the local education authority and not the schools as has been claimed. Nick Seaton, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, says "We obtained documentation under the FOI Act showing that local councillors were talking about this merger back in May, yet they claim that the whole idea has been driven by the schools, which is untrue." Last year Tony Blair pledged that not one of the 164 grammar schools still in existence would be closed unless parents wanted a different kind of school.	31.12.06	The Sunday Express	Unclear - maybe LEA	Education
Schools reject trust status Comprehensive schools in London have rebuffed Tony Blair's flagship plan for trust schools. The Prime Minister wants schools to opt out of local authority control and be taken over by charitable "trusts" set up by businesses, churches, campaign groups and parent organisations. But information released under the FOI Act, shows that of 28 representative schools across London, only 2 had discussed becoming trust schools.	04.01.07	The Evening Standard	London Schools	Education
Ambulance crews' 500 school visits Ambulances were called to schools in Coventry and Warwickshire nearly 500 times between September 2005 and August 2006. The call-outs included assaults, suicide bids, carbon monoxide poisoning, and falls in the playground. The figures released under the FOI Act show that 489 emergency calls were made to the West Midlands Ambulance Service from schools. Accidental injuries accounted for 243 of the calls, including knocks and bumps. Staff at secondary schools called ambulances 16 times to deal with drug overdoses and another three times to deal with psychiatric emergencies, including suicide attempts. There were also 14 assaults, one of them in a primary school, which prompted a 999 call.	04.01.07	Coventry Evening Telegraph	West Midlands Ambulance Service	Education
Sex allegations against teachers Education chiefs have suspended seven teachers and dismissed another following complaints of physical and sexual misconduct against teachers and teaching staff since September 2003. Figures released under the FOI Act, show allegations were made against 39 members of teaching staff in north Lincolnshire schools. Between September 2005 and August 2006, 11 incidents were reported, 13 between September 2004 and August 2005 and 15 between September 2003 and August 2004.	13.01.07	Scunthorpe Evening News	North Lincolnshire Council	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>On-the-spot truancy fines soar 60%</p> <p>The number of on-the-spot fines for truancy has jumped 59% as London boroughs crack down on the problem. Information released under the FOI Act reveals that about 50,000 children play truant every day across the country. Truancy rates rose last year despite expenditure of around £900m on the flagship "behaviour and attendance" strategy in recent years. The DfES figures for London showed that 14 boroughs failed to issue any fines between January and September 2006. Among the other 18 London authorities, the number issued rose 59% from 237 in the first four months of 2006 to 377 between April and September. The number of parents facing "fast-track" prosecution, which can see them in court three months after being warned, also went up 59% from 2,174 to 3,467. Only a minority of these cases actually came to court but, again, the trend was upwards. There were 302 prosecutions from April to September 2006, up 38% from 218 between January and April.</p>	19.01.07	The Evening Standard	Department for Education and Skills	Education
<p>Imbalance of demand and supply in schools</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act have highlighted an acute imbalance within Exeter's recently reorganised primary and secondary school system. While there are hundreds of spare places at some city schools, others are so oversubscribed that they are being forced to turn away dozens of disappointed families. The information also shows that dozens of parents have launched appeals after their children failed to get into popular schools.</p>	29.01.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Exeter Council	Education
<p>Elite public schools tighten grip on Oxford</p> <p>Oxford's attempts to rid itself of its reputation for giving preference to the "old school tie" have been dented by new figures showing it admitted almost twice as many Old Etonians last year as in 2001.</p> <p>The number of pupils from Eton and other leading independent schools such as Westminster, St Paul's and Winchester have surged despite efforts by the university to boost its state-school intake. While the overall proportion of state-school pupils has edged up slightly at Oxbridge, elite private institutions have notched up the greatest gains. The main losers have been less prestigious independent schools. The new data, released under the FOI Act, give a snapshot comparison between 2001 and 2006. Both universities reduced their independent sector intake by only 177 in that period.</p>	04.03.07	The Sunday Times	Oxford and Cambridge Universities	Education
<p>Multiversity sunk by secret cut-backs</p> <p>Doncaster City Council stopped the proposed development of 5 community campuses in 2004, but never made the information public until forced to release details under the FOI Act. The cancellation of these projects left the flagship central college in financial crisis and ended plans for the country's first "multiversity" - a mix of vocational and academic courses for students from the age of 14 through to degree-level study.</p>	08.03.07	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster City Council	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Breakfast in school is off the menu for most kids</p> <p>Labour's free breakfast scheme for primary school children has a take-up of less than 6% across Wales. At the 2003 National Assembly election, a key Labour pledge was to provide a free breakfast for 'all primary school kids'. However, information released under the FOI Act reveals that less than 6% of children were getting the meal in November 2006.</p>	08.03.07	Western Mail	Welsh Assembly	Education
<p>School standards fall in half of Scotland</p> <p>Tens of thousands of children are failing to master the basics in literacy and numeracy by the age of 14.</p> <p>Data obtained under the FOI Scotland Act shows that standards among pupils about to embark on Standard grade courses fell in more than half of local authorities last year. Glasgow, Midlothian, East Ayrshire and Clackmannanshire are among the worst-performing areas. In two thirds of schools in all four authorities, more than 50% of S2 pupils failed to reach basic standards in writing. More than 50% of pupils failed to reach the minimum grades in maths in half of schools in Dundee and it was the same in reading in a quarter of schools in Aberdeen.</p> <p>The figures, which chart the results of S2 tests in Scotland's secondaries, were released under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	11.03.07	The Sunday Times	Local councils	Education
<p>Classroom chaos at the Causeway</p> <p>When the Causeway School was opened in 2002, it was hailed as the solution to dealing with some of Peterborough's most troubled youngsters. But the state-of-the-art school in Park Lane, Eastfield, was unexpectedly closed in June 2006. Documents released under the FOI Act show the full extent of the problems at the school. In comments to governors, the headteacher reported "students are currently being contained, but little teaching was taking place" and, "the school is currently an angry and aggressive place". Other problems included repeated racial abuse to two members of staff and a hardcore group of defiant pupils who refused to accept teachers' authority, resulting in a staff absence rate of 40% during one term. Other figures show how the number of temporary exclusions at the school had soared before the school's closure, despite having just 30 children on the roll in its last year, there were 86 exclusions in the final 12 months at the school, compared to just 20 in its first academic year. Attendance was also poor, with as few as 10 pupils turning up for class, while one 13-year-old pupil failed to show up at all for two consecutive terms.</p>	12.03.07	Peterborough Evening Telegraph	Peterborough Council	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Smaller is not always better</p> <p>Education Minister Jane Davidson scrapped a promise to reduce the size of primary school classes because she wasn't convinced that pupils would benefit. A partnership agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats that ran from 2000 to 2003 carried a commitment to have maximum class sizes of 25. Now a letter sent by Ms Davidson to First Minister Rhodri Morgan on the subject has been disclosed under the FOI Act. And in the letter, dated December 5, 2005, Ms Davidson referred to research that had been published on the issue and stated; 'Not all the studies reviewed identify gains from smaller classes and some dismiss any significant connection, emphasising instead that teaching methods and effective class organisation have a greater effect on outcomes.'</p>	12.03.07	Western Mail	The Welsh Assembly	Education
<p>Schools are forced to expel 230 pupils a day</p> <p>More than 200 primary school pupils were expelled every day in 2006 because of offences involving alcohol, drugs and sex. Some 43,720 children aged 11 or under were sent home as a result of illegal, violent or offensive behaviour during school hours, official figures show. It means 230 pupils were excluded on average each day. The figures, released under the FOI Act, suggest the number of young children caught with drugs and alcohol or involved in sexual misconduct has shot up by 2,420, or 6%, in just one year.</p>	13.03.07	The Daily Mail	Schools	Education
<p>Universities 'filter out' the middle class</p> <p>Some of Britain's leading universities are secretly operating selection schemes that can discriminate against applicants from good state or independent schools. Internal documents show that six of the 20 elite Russell Group universities are identifying applicants from schools with poor exam results or from deprived areas based on their postcode. Admissions tutors are then advised to favour them over equally well-qualified candidates from better schools or backgrounds. The schemes, revealed under the FOI Act, will fuel criticism that universities are attempting to socially engineer their intakes. It follows government pressure to increase the number of students from poorer back-grounds.</p>	01.04.07	The Sunday Times	Universities	Education
<p>Councils failing to meet targets on PE</p> <p>Only one of Scotland's councils is giving schoolchildren enough physical education, according to figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act. East Renfrewshire Council was the only one of 23 local authorities who responded to a request for information on primary and secondary schools that was meeting the Executive's target of offering all pupils at least two hours a week of PE.</p>	10.04.07	The Times	Scottish Local Councils	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Playgrounds + accidents = £135,000</p> <p>Thousands of pounds have been paid out for playground accidents on Wearside, despite a schools' compensation culture crackdown. In four years, council bosses have paid out more than £135,000 for pupils' slips and falls, figures obtained under the FOI Act have revealed. But just one in four cases led to actual payouts. Sunderland Council has been forced to settle claims made by parents ranging from football and netball injuries to fingers being jammed and falls from walls and staircases. Last year, there were 10 complaints, with compensation handed out in just one incident, a school visitor tripping over a pipe. Since 2001, the biggest payout of 21 settlements cost taxpayers £16,071, while the smallest was £310.50.</p>	27.04.07	Sunderland Echo	Sunderland City Council	Education
<p>Sick classrooms</p> <p>High levels of carbon dioxide at the city's newly built schools could be affecting the performance of thousands of pupils a report shows. The independent report, commissioned by the county council and released under the FOI Act, also predicts that temperatures in classrooms could soar to 46C or even higher on sunny days. It has led the council to withhold hundreds of thousands of pounds in payments to the company running the schools until it sorts out the problems. It follows an increase in the number of pupils and teachers off sick.</p>	14.05.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Exeter Council	Education
<p>Nine school places are lost after parents lied</p> <p>At least nine school places have been withdrawn from Westcountry children over the past five years, after their parents lied to get them a place. Information released under the FOI Act revealed the figures across 4 Local Education Authorities in the Devon and Cornwall. The news comes as Devon County Council has announced that it is reviewing its admissions process, after four of the seven places were withdrawn at primary schools this year. Two children lost places in the reception classes of both Shaldon Primary, near Teignmouth, and the Grove Primary in Totnes, after the authority investigated complaints that parents had given false addresses.</p>	28.05.07	Western Morning News	Local Education Authorities	Education
<p>Almost 50 universities 'at risk of financial collapse'</p> <p>A swath of universities were in financial crisis even after the introduction of tuition fees, according to a secret government list. More than 40 institutions feature on the list, which classifies them as at risk of financial failure after 1998, when means-tested tuition fees were introduced. Those on the list include South Bank University in London, Liverpool John Moores University and Queen Mary, University of London. Another three institutions were deemed to be so at risk that their names were kept off the list, which was revealed after an FOI request by The Guardian newspaper. The Higher Education Funding Council for England published the list only after pressure from the Information Commissioner, who ruled that students applying to certain institutions had a right to know their financial buoyancy.</p>	07.07.07	The Times	Higher Education Funding Council for England	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Top schools given Oxbridge boost</p> <p>An elite group of independent schools is tightening its grip on leading universities as an unintended consequence of government pressure to raise the numbers of undergraduates from state schools.</p> <p>New figures show that the most successful schools are sending more pupils to a narrowing range of "ivy league" universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol. But because universities are cutting their overall proportion of independent school students, middle-tier independent schools are being squeezed. The figures, released by universities under the FOI Act, specify the numbers of pupils from each independent school gaining places at universities in the Russell Group of 20 leading institutions.</p>	15.07.07	The Sunday Times	Universities	Education
<p>Headmaster used pupils to work for his company</p> <p>He lied, wasted precious college resources and even ordered staff and pupils to carry out work for companies he was linked to while running up more than £300,000 worth of debt. These are the damning criticisms of former Applemore College principal Frank Callaghan levelled at him in a confidential audit report that has been released under the FOI Act. Although the report fails to show conclusively that Mr Callaghan made significant personal gains from his actions, it did find that he spent money with two companies he had close ties to without the college getting much in return. He had also failed to properly disclose his links with the two firms, Digital Media Interactive Ltd of which he was a director and shareholder, and Solent Educational Ltd whose bosses he had formerly been in business with, despite spending tens of thousands of pounds a year on their services.</p>	20.07.07	Southern Daily Echo	Hampshire County Council	Education
<p>Academy exclusion 'is selection by back door'</p> <p>City academies have an exclusion rate nearly three times higher than that of neighbouring schools. Statistics released under the FOI Act show that 8.7 pupils per thousand were excluded from a sample of 14 academies during the past school year. By comparison, 3.2 pupils per thousand were excluded from secondary schools in neighbouring areas, according to an analysis published in Regeneration and Renewal magazine.</p>	12.08.07	The Observer	Education authorities	Education
<p>TV guru Beckles was asked to set up academy</p> <p>Education guru Yolande Beckles, who received thousands of pounds from deprived children for a Caribbean trip that never happened, was courted by the Government to sponsor a city academy. Miss Beckles rose to fame in a BBC2 TV series. Families have not yet been refunded the £1,000 paid for each child to take an educational holiday to Trinidad and Tobago. Her company, Global Graduates, spent months negotiating with the then Department for Education and Skills to run a "talent spotting" academy. Emails obtained under the FOI Act show that Miss Beckles met Lord Adonis, the minister responsible for academies, before the 2005 general election. None of the emails, however, indicate that background checks were made on her, despite county court judgments against her and a previous dismissal from an educational charity after financial irregularities.</p>	22.08.07	The Evening Standard	Department for Education and Skills	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Student hell raisin' is fruitful</p> <p>The University of St Andrews' reputation as a paradise for party animals has been dented by the revelation that students have been fined for such grave offences as having overnight guests in their rooms, lighting candles and making "inappropriate use of foodstuffs". Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show that 77 students have been hauled before university chiefs and found guilty of inappropriate behaviour in the past year. The renowned Fife institution collected more than £2,000 in fines from rowdy scholars. They include two students penalised for that most student-like of practices of having "unauthorised" guests in their room (£40). The list of recorded disciplinary incidents for the 2006-2007 term reveals that students were penalised for a wide range of incidents from the serious - creating public disturbances and setting off fire alarms - to the bizarre and petty - failing to supply a photograph when issued with a key, for which six students were fined £10. The most common infraction was for breaking the smoking ban, with 16 students being fined £50 for lighting up. One repeat offender was fined a further £75. Eight students found with lit candles in their rooms were fined £325 in total, while 10 were fined £10 each for their "refusal to conform to fire alarm regulations".</p>	30.09.07	Scotland on Sunday	St Andrews University	Education
<p>Home-education numbers soaring</p> <p>The number of parents withdrawing their children from school to educate them at home has gone up five-fold in the city and county over the past five years. Figures obtained under the FOI Act reveal how rising numbers of parents are becoming disillusioned with traditional schooling. Parents say the number of tests children have to take at school and bullying levels are leading them to take the decision to teach children themselves. Leicestershire has seen one of the biggest leaps in the UK in the number of children being withdrawn from their schools to be educated at home, from 51 in 2002 to 265 in 2006. In the city, in that space of time, the number had gone from four to 40.</p>	01.10.07	Leicester Mercury	Leicestershire and Leicester City Councils	Education
<p>Just 11% of parents win school entry appeals</p> <p>Families fighting for places in popular London secondary schools have less than a one in eight chance of success at appeal. Just 11% of appeals for better schools succeeded this autumn, according to data obtained under the FOI Act.</p>	08.11.07	The Evening Standard	London Borough Councils	Education
<p>Private schools booming despite Labour's billions</p> <p>Parents are turning their backs on state schools despite billions of pounds of extra spending on education, the Government admitted yesterday.</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act show a larger share of parents are paying to send their children to private schools. More than 430,000 children aged five to 15 attend independent prep or senior schools.</p>	10.11.07	The Daily Mail	Department for Education	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Baby boomer retirement crisis A third of the county's head teachers will be eligible for retirement within the next five years, prompting fears for the leadership of our schools. Figures, released under the FOI Act, show more than a quarter of Norfolk's teachers are also over the age of 50, raising concerns it will become increasingly difficult to recruit good leaders. The impending crisis, caused by the retirement of the so-called 'baby boomers' born after the Second World War, is expected to hit the entire country.	27.11.07	Norwich Evening News	Norfolk County Council	Education
Anonymous donor causes alarm Mystery surrounds an anonymous donation made to fund a new north London academy. City University will use the reported £1million as its contribution to an academy on the site of Islington Green School, which it is co-sponsoring with the City of London Corporation. Critics have expressed fears that anonymous donors contributing large amounts to Government projects may be able to buy influence. The funding agreement for the new City of London Academy Islington in north London is expected to be signed soon by Jim Knight, the schools minister. Details of the donor's request to remain anonymous only emerged because of a FOI Act enquiry by Ken Muller, a local teacher.	07.12.07	Times Educational Supplement	City of London Academy	Education
Great grammar U-turn Figures show that the number of pupils attending grammar schools has increased by more than a fifth under Labour. Children are far more likely to be educated at grammar school under Gordon Brown than they were under the Tory governments of John Major or Margaret Thatcher. This is because grammars have expanded their places to meet soaring parental demand in the face of the Government's legal ban on opening selective schools. Statistics obtained under the FOI Act reveal that this year 156,800 pupils were registered as attending grammar schools - up 22% from 1997. Grammar pupils now make up 4.8% of the school population - up from 4.2% a decade ago. Previous figures released by the Government showed that 111,848 or 3.8% attended grammar schools in 1993 - under John Major's Government - and 117,147 or 3.1% in 1983 when Margaret Thatcher was leader.	08.12.07	The Daily Mail	Department for Education	Education
A year of shame for students Shocking student behaviour is rife throughout the UK's universities. Hundreds of undergraduates have been hauled before dons for shameful incidents including sexual assault, outraging public decency, attacking staff, fighting, drug abuse, drink-driving, harassment and selling alcohol to kids. Figures released under the FOI Act show 1,836 students on 70 campuses got formal warnings in 2006/2007.	29.12.07	The Daily Telegraph	Universities	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Hundreds of university student cheats exposed</p> <p>131 students at Warwick University and 331 students at Coventry University were caught cheating in their coursework by passing off other people's work as their own in essays and other assignments. In some minor cases students had made a reference to an academic book or paper and forgotten to put a footnote saying so. But in more serious cases they had copied from other students - or cut and pasted entire chunks of text from internet sites. Having their marks for the whole module reduced to zero punished most of the students caught cheating. Some also had a written warning. In the most serious cases, revealed in information released under the FOI Act, students were thrown out of the university.</p>	14.03.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Warwick and Coventry Universities	Education
<p>Exposed, the school cheats as young as seven</p> <p>Almost 200 children, some as young as seven, have been caught cheating in their exams. They have had their national curriculum test results either annulled or changed by exam watchdogs. And 248 teachers have been investigated by the National Assessment Agency for artificially boosting youngsters' performance in the papers sat by seven, 11 and 14-year-olds. The figures show a fourfold increase in allegations of cheating reported to the agency, which is responsible for national curriculum tests, between 2000 and 2005. The findings come in an internal NAA report on test 'maladministration', which was passed to Ministers in March, and released under the FOI Act. The agency said it had investigated 248 teachers for 'over-aiding/coaching' pupils in the Key Stage One, Two and Three tests since 2002, along with at least 251 pupils for alleged cheating. As a result, 170 pupils had had their individual results annulled or amended. More than 50 schools were investigated for having an 'overactive' helper a person who assists a child to read or write the paper. Fifty-eight were investigated after two sets of handwriting were detected on pupils' papers fuelling fears that teachers had written the answers themselves and then told students to write over them.</p>	02.09.06	The Daily Mail	Department for Education and Skills	Education
<p>107 students caught out as exam cheats</p> <p>Sheffield University caught 66 students trying to cheat in exams during the last three years - with offenders smuggling in mobile phones, course notes and even textbooks. At Sheffield Hallam 51 undergraduates were caught out during the same period, with 27 identified during 2005-6 alone. The most common form of cheating was bringing banned notes into exams - with 39 cases recorded at Sheffield and 24 at Hallam. Students were caught bringing everything from scraps of paper, notes hidden in dictionaries, past exam papers and even an entire folder of notes into exams. Using mobile phones to obtain outside help was also popular with 11 smuggled in since 2003, followed closely by banned dictionaries with six brought into exams. Other items favoured by cheats include electronic translators and dictionaries, banned calculators and course books. At Hallam six candidates managed to access computer-based information, while there was one case of a student copying answers from another undergraduate. The University of Sheffield results, obtained through the FOI Act, cover the past three academic years. They also show one of the worst offending university faculties is engineering, with 22 of the 66 cases of cheating recorded there.</p>	09.05.07	Sheffield Star	University of Sheffield	Education

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Huge rise in cheating students <p>Hundreds of students have been caught cheating at university. The University of Ulster, the largest in Ireland, has seen a 900% rise in plagiarism since 2001. And investigators at Queen's University, Belfast, caught nearly 100 students trying to trick their tutors in just one year. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, come just weeks after internet giant Google said it would ban firms selling essays online.</p>	21.06.07	The Daily Mirror	Northern Irish Universities	Education
How Scotland will cope with bird flu deaths <p>Scottish police forces are preparing to buy hundreds of inflatable body storage tents in preparation for mass deaths in a bird flu epidemic. Health experts say a global pandemic of a deadly new strain of bird flu in humans is bound to strike at some point in the future. Officials say Scotland's crematoria could not cope with the demand of disposing of thousands of extra bodies and the authorities are anxious to avoid burial in mass graves because of the "severe distress" it would cause. Documents obtained under the FOI Scotland Act reveal funeral services would have to be cut short because of sheer demand. A survey of mortuaries across the country has revealed a shortage of body storage space if a pandemic should occur, with a present maximum of 2,513 spaces. Scottish Government officials met representatives from a firm that manufactures inflatable tents for body storage in June 2007. E-mail exchanges and letters reveal officials and police are impressed with a mobile "body storage system" made by Airegroup, for use in disasters. It has been used by the US military and has a generator to keep bodies at low temperature.</p>	08.10.07	The Daily Express	Scottish Executive	Emergency Planning
Just one in six workers at a big Norfolk hospital has had a flu jab <p>Just one in six workers at a big Norfolk hospital has had a flu jab this winter. Figures show that 500 staff at the James Paget Hospital, Gorleston, have had the inoculation, out of a total workforce of 3,000. The figures, released under the FOI Act, could not be broken down into medical staff and support staff. A free flu jab was on offer to all hospital workers in 2005, as fears grew that a flu pandemic could sweep Britain. The Government recommended that all key workers (including hospital staff) have the inoculation to give hospitals the strongest chance of staying fully operational should a flu pandemic hit.</p>	30.01.06	Eastern Daily Press	Health Trust	Emergency Planning
Bird flu pandemic power crisis fears <p>An Ulster paper, entitled 'Planning for the Consequences of an Influenza Pandemic' has been released under the FOI Act. It outlines the preparedness of Northern Ireland government departments in the face of a flu pandemic but does not focus on frontline health service plans. It states that the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Industry "can not guarantee effective business continuity planning for pandemic influenza across its key services." Essential services that DETI is responsible for co-ordinating include food supply, oil, coal and gas supplies, and telecommunications. The reason cited is the "likely random spread of influenza infection" hitting specialist workers who cannot be replaced through wider redeployment within the department or the Northern Ireland Civil Service.</p>	30.03.06	Belfast Telegraph	Department of Health (Northern Ireland)	Emergency Planning

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Bird-flu emergency plans Scotland's plans for dealing with an avian-flu pandemic have been revealed in papers released under the FOI Scotland Act. The papers also reveal that 2 emergency planning exercises had been conducted, one just days after the body of an H5N1 infected swan was discovered in Fife.	04.05.06	The Daily Record	Scottish Executive	Emergency Planning
Bullying and harassment at Newcastle City Council Newcastle Council has released information under the FOI Act showing that of seven complaints of bullying and harassment made by members of staff in 2005, only one resulted in disciplinary action.	05.01.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Newcastle City Council	Employment
Councillors want us to pay for leaving parties Long serving public representatives were being invited to retire in May 2007 with 'golden goodbye' payments of up to £20,000 each. Highland Council alone has been swamped by redundancy requests from half its 80 councillors, costing £685,000 of public money. But as well as receiving handsome severance payments, councillors can now expect an invitation to so-called 'vaedictory banquets' being arranged up and down the country. Some local authorities are even planning to hand over gifts, including medals, engraved salvers and framed photographs, to those leaving. Emails released under the FOI Scotland Act demonstrate how keen one member was to celebrate. When asked which of three dates would suit him best, Conservative Tony Ffinch replied: 'The 16th is fine with me (or how about all three dates?)' Financial prudence, however, is evident at Perth and Kinross and Aberdeenshire councils. While they may be planning civic events, they are asking their councillors to pay for the tickets themselves.	04.03.07	The Mail on Sunday	Scottish councils	Employment
Councils pay £2m race bill Racial discrimination claims by staff cost councils £2m in 2006/07. A total of 213 compensation claims - almost one every working day - were lodged. The figures, revealed in an FOI Act survey, show £1m was paid out. Legal fees would push the overall bill to about £2m.	10.04.07	The Sun	Local authorities	Employment

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Minister for limousines Transport Minister Tavish Scott recently launched a £1m taxpayer-funded campaign to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport. He launched the initiative claiming that 'many Scots drive to work without being aware of the alternatives'. Ironically, only hours before his announcement, Mr Scott made the four-mile journey to the parliament in a chauffeur-driven car even dropping his girlfriend off on the way. The LibDem minister regularly gets government cars to make 250-mile-plus round trips to allow him to catch a flight to his Shetland home for the weekend. He has also been driven by chauffeur from the Scottish Executive's St Andrews House base to the parliament rather than walk the 800 yards, despite official guidelines which call on ministers to 'use public transport and walk to engagements whenever possible'. The revelations last night sparked accusations that Mr Scott, who along with his ministerial colleagues last year ran up a limousine bill of almost £800,000, was not practising what he preached. The figures were released under the FOI Scotland Act.	03.02.06	The Daily Mail	The Scottish Executive	Environment
Water company pays for bottled water Scottish Water has spent £250,000 on bottled water that it says is for customers who are suffering lack of water because of leaks or other problems according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act.	27.04.06	The Daily Mirror	Scottish Water	Environment
NHS carbon trading sees millions go up in smoke Hospitals have lost nearly £6m since a controversial Government scheme to cut carbon emissions was introduced. The chaos caused to essential public services by Labour's participation in the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme is revealed in a series of emails and documents released under the FOI Act. They show that hospitals have suffered a net loss of £5.8m since the beginning of 2005. Campaigners say that this is the equivalent of employing 309 nurses. The documents also show that the Department of Health has attempted to cover up the cost of the scheme under which public services and companies buy carbon credits to offset their emissions.	05.11.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Department of Health	Environment
Noise complaints Doncaster council handled 1,984 noise complaints during 2006, 1,947 in 2005 and 1,639 in 2004. In 2006, 707 people rang council staff with a gripe about music, 394 complained about noisy animals and 321 reported that neighbours were disturbing them according to statistics released under the FOI Act.	09.02.07	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Environment

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Air charge collects £21,000 since take-off</p> <p>A Charge for air travel made by Scottish Executive ministers and staff collected nearly £21,000 in its first seven months. The executive collects £5 for each internal flight, single or return, £6 for European travel and £15 for air journeys outside Europe. The charges are made under the Carbon Emissions Levy, introduced in June 2006. Up to the end of 2006, the carbon-offsetting scheme collected £20,970. The executive is holding the money and is considering ways to apply it to achieve the offsetting objective. The figure was disclosed under the FOI Scotland Act. Another disclosure under the legislation revealed that ministers and civil servants ran up an air bill of £1.25m from nearly 3,000 flights from October 2005 to September 2006.</p>	21.03.07	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Environment
<p>MSC Napoli's toxic cargo</p> <p>When it was beached off Branscombe in January 2007, the MSC Napoli was carrying more than 1,500 tonnes of toxic chemicals including battery acid, a banned pest killer and a substance, which can affect human hormones. The owners of the Napoli have refused to publish full details of what she was carrying when the 62,000-tonne vessel was deliberately run aground. In the wake of the accident officials only confirmed 1,552 tonnes of chemicals were being transported but would not give details of what they were. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the full inventory of the chemicals. The list includes 81.5 tonnes of battery acid, 60 tonnes of hazardous phosphorous, 36 tonnes of fluorocarbons (a chemical found inside fridges) and 42 tonnes of methyl bromide (a pest killer banned in most countries).</p>	23.03.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Environment
<p>Carbon offsetting under investigation</p> <p>Firms that promise to help environmentally conscious consumers to "offset" their carbon emissions are under official investigation after allegations that they have overcharged customers and made misleading claims. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has begun a "scoping study" to identify possible areas for full investigation, according to minutes of the OFT's April board meeting, obtained under the FOI Act.</p>	20.05.07	The Sunday Times	Office of Fair Trading	Environment

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Wildlife group sues government agency over Sakhalin-2</p> <p>A government agency is to be taken to court by wildlife campaigners who argue that the Export Credit Guarantee Department is undermining Britain's ethical foreign policy by giving financial support to a Russian gas project that will increase global warming and threatens an endangered species of whale. WWF, in partnership with the environmental and social justice organisation, the Corner House, has filed the case against the department arguing that it committed itself to underwriting \$1bn worth of contracts for Shell's Sakhalin-2 scheme three years ago despite ministers insisting no decision had yet been taken. The wildlife group yesterday issued a letter dated March 4 2004 from the ECGD to the Shell consortium, Sakhalin Energy Investment Company, obtained under the FOI Act which says: "We are pleased to confirm . . . that ECGD is able to support the contracts detailed in the schedules of this letter." But the note from the government department also points out that the support is conditional on the agency being reassured on various potential "environmental and social impacts arising from the project". Days later in the House of Commons, the then trade minister, Mike O'Brien, insisted that "in October 2002 we received an application for cover for the Sakhalin-2 project. No decision on ECGD cover has yet been taken."</p>	16.08.07	The Guardian	Export Credit Guarantee Department	Environment
<p>Green tax 'all stick and little carrot'</p> <p>Green taxes reap the Government more than 50 times the sum it hands back in tax breaks for environmental initiatives, new research reveals.</p> <p>A damning report on the Government's green credentials says the Treasury distributed just £549m in "green tax breaks" last financial year - 1.8% of the amount it amassed in environmental taxes. Treasury coffers overflowed by £29.3bn in green taxes, including £25.1bn in fuel duties and £2.1bn of air passenger duty, the report says. The Government defended its record, saying some of its environmental investment programmes and tax concessions were ignored in the research. The report was compiled by accountancy group UHY Hacker Young. Partner Roy Maugham said the analysis, from figures provided under the FOI Act, highlighted how much further the Treasury could go if it was serious about stimulating environmental investment.</p>	03.09.07	The Daily Telegraph	HM Treasury	Environment

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Heritage concern as MPs look at scheme to cut their carbon footprint</p> <p>A plan to slash the carbon footprint of the houses of parliament by almost a third using wind turbines, tidal power and underground boreholes is being considered by Palace of Westminster officials. A detailed study into the greening of the parliamentary estate, commissioned by MPs and peers shows how parliament could be partly powered by a 35m high wind turbine on the neighbouring Victoria Gardens and a field of tidal power turbines in the Thames next to the members' terraces. A borehole, dug 120m into London's chalk aquifer, is planned to provide pure drinking water and another, drilled into Black Rod's garden, would cool the air in the debating chambers instead of electricity hungry air-conditioning units. There are also plans to spend millions fitting double glazing to draughty windows and installing miniature power stations in the cellars which will take the palace partly "off-grid". According to the plans, obtained under the FOI Act, the project will cost at least £20m. The designs have been drawn up on the orders of the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod by BDP Sustainability, a firm of engineers and architects who have advised Tesco on improving the sustainability of its stores. The House of Commons administration committee is scheduled to consider the plans formally early next year.</p>	12.11.07	The Guardian	House of Commons	Environment
<p>Local authorities ignoring duties to promote equality, says report</p> <p>Legal requirements to eliminate discrimination and promote equality are being ignored by nine out of 10 local authorities, according to a report published this week. Information obtained under the FOI Act by the think-tank Committed2Equality, reveals that 88% of local authorities are unaware that most of their suppliers do not have equality practices in place. Of the 300,000 organisations that supply local authorities, 92% have no equality practices. Local authorities spend £40bn with these organisations each year and would be in a strong position to see that the practices are enforced. The survey suggests that most councils do not bother to do so.</p>	26.06.06	The Guardian	Local Authorities	Equality and Diversity
<p>Ministers spend £12,000 on TVs for their offices</p> <p>The best place to watch the 2006 World Cup may be the offices of the Scottish Executive, which have recently been fitted out with some of the slickest new widescreen TVs. During 2005, the Executive spent more than £12,000 on new widescreen sets for its buildings in Edinburgh, including a 50-inch plasma screen for its biggest office at Victoria Quay in Leith. Information released under the FOI Scotland Act, revealed that civil servants bought the sets after not spending anything on new TVs in either 2003 or 2004. The most expensive of the new sets was the 50-inch NEC plasma TV, costing £4,130, including installation. The Executive has also bought two 42-inch plasma screen NEC TVs at £1,595 each.</p>	22.01.06	Scotland on Sunday	The Scottish Executive	Expenditure
<p>'Madness' of council interview costs</p> <p>Torbay Council's recent recruitment process for a customer services director took place at the Grand Hotel in Torquay and cost £1,500, it has been revealed. And interviews for a chief executive in 2005 were held at the five-star Imperial Hotel and cost £3,000. Torquay businessman David Scott using the FOI Act obtained the information.</p>	14.03.06	Torquay Herald Express	Torbay Council	Expenditure

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cost of council "away days" The cost of two "away days" to discuss a district council's budget cost taxpayers almost £850, figures released under the FOI Act show. The day-long sessions were held at the Beechwood Hotel in North Walsham as Cabinet members and senior officers thrashed out North Norfolk District Council's spending plans for 2006/07.	22.03.06	Eastern Daily Press	North Norfolk District Council	Expenditure
£250,000 to drive ministers around The Welsh assembly government has released full details of the costs of running its official cars for First Minister Rhodri Morgan and his team of ministers under the FOI Act. The 2005 bill stood at £234,921, with the largest chunk of £158,938 paid in salaries to the five official drivers, which includes overtime and driver management. A bill of £23,695 was paid for hiring ministerial cars when assembly cars were not available or for travel in north Wales, London and occasionally Scotland. The assembly government has also released the weekly log sheets of the First Minister's journeys in his official car, a Volvo S80.	27.03.06	South Wales Echo	Welsh Assembly	Expenditure
Cost of team building The full cost of the dozens of "team-building exercises" has been revealed in documents released under FOI Scotland Act. They show Fife Council spent £79,911 in the last two years, including £30,000 by the education department on 48 events.	28.04.06	The Daily Record	Fife Council	Expenditure
Sharp rise in council postage spending Spending on postage by North East Lincolnshire Council increased from £494,315.01 in 2004/05 to £614,884 during the 2005/6 financial year according to information released under the FOI Act.	03.05.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North East Lincolnshire Council	Expenditure
Counting the cost of the town hall The upkeep of Horncastle Town Hall has cost taxpayers almost a quarter of a million pounds since 1974 according to figures released under the FOI Act.	09.05.06	Horncastle News	East Lindsey District Council	Expenditure
Spending taxpayers' cash like water Councils spent £122,000 of taxpayers' cash on bottled and filtered water last year. Lincolnshire County Council is the biggest spender - with a £53,770 bill for bottled mineral water and £45,711 for water coolers and dispensers in 2005-06. The £99,481 total equates to the salaries of four newly qualified teachers or trainee firefighters. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, show that the seven district councils in Lincolnshire spent just over £23,000. Of this, £777 was spent on bottled water and the rest went on water for coolers or dispensers.	15.02.07	Lincolnshire Echo	Lincolnshire Councils	Expenditure
Overseas visits Malaysia, Quebec City and Latvia were among the destinations visited by members of the National Assembly. Around £30,000 of public money was spent on 23 separate overseas trips in 2004-05 by AMs outside of First Minister Rhodri Morgan's cabinet. Another £5,000 went on the cost of sending officials with some Assembly Members, according to figures released under the FOI Act.	03.01.06	South Wales Echo	National Assembly for Wales	Expenses

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£750,000 council phone bills Birmingham City Council is spending almost £750,000 a year on mobile phone bills for staff and councillors. The authority has issued 5,300 phones to staff and council members under a deal with Vodafone. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that between November 2004 and October 2005, the council paid £474,000 in mobile call charges and £230,000 in line rentals.	02.02.06	Birmingham Evening Mail	Birmingham City Council	Expenses
Consultants' £50,000 bill for council Private consultants brought in to run courses for Cardiff councillors and senior executives ran up a bill of £50,390. Sessions were run at City Hall and County Hall over a two-month period from November 2004 to January 2005, according to details released under the FOI Act. Cardiff council said the final cost to taxpayers included travel and accommodation bills of £2,399.50 claimed by the three experts brought in to run the courses, which included a foundation conference.	09.02.06	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Expenses
Councillor claimed £2,000 Expense data released under the FOI Act shows Derby councillor Sara Bolton claimed more than £2,000 in travel expenses during 2005. Ms Bolton was the highest claimant of the city's 51 councillors during the year, with about a quarter of all travel claims coming from her.	14.02.06	Derby Evening Telegraph	Derby City Council	Expenses
Executive spends £1.3m on 4 contracts for PR Four public relations companies have shared more than £1.3m in Scottish government contracts in the past 18 months figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show. The firms were employed to organise public information campaigns.	16.02.06	The Scotsman	Scottish Executive	Expenses
How every MSP is allowed a taxi to Holyrood Documents released by the Scottish parliament under the FOI Scotland Act show that SNP leader Alex Salmond claimed more than £8,500 to commute by mini-cab from his home in Linlithgow to the Scottish Parliament in the two years he was an MSP.	17.02.06	The Scotsman	The Scottish Executive	Expenses
North Eastern travel expenses Taxpayers forked out more than £250,000 on first-class train travel and taxis for councillors and officials from some of the North East's biggest town halls in 2005. In total, £176,000 was spent on first-class rail and at least £100,000 on taxis. Council leaders say travelling first class on business can make sense as people are able to work on the train and they can take advantage of cut-price ticket deals. Among the biggest spenders in the North East was Gateshead Council, which spent £84,655 on first-class rail travel. Newcastle City Council spent £40,490 and Northumberland County Council £31,131. North Tyneside and Durham County Councils have now stopped first-class travel, while others claim to be clamping down on costs.	04.03.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Various local authorities	Expenses

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cost of mobile phone calls Top Birmingham Labour politician Sir Albert Bore ran-up a £1,450 bill on his city council mobile phone in just six months. The cost of Sir Albert's calls, from May to October, were ten times greater than Conservative council leader Mike Whitby, whose bill was £144. The figures were provided under the FOI Act.	29.03.06	Birmingham Post	Birmingham City Council	Expenses
MPs get cash perk for home extensions A new perk is to be given to MPs that will let them use taxpayers' money to help to fund extensions on their second homes worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. The new rules, due to be announced in July, will enable MPs to remortgage their second homes and claim back interest payments. The loans can then be used to fund improvements on their houses. The Commons Green Book rules allow MPs to claim for decoration and "necessary" repairs to make good wear and tear. Until now they could not claim for improvements that increase the value of a property. The changes to the rule book, revealed Under the FOI Act, were agreed in February by the members estimate committee. The House of Commons finance and administration department said in a statement: "A decision has been taken in principle by the members estimate committee to allow remortgaging in certain circumstances."	21.05.06	The Sunday Times	The House of Commons	Expenses
Flying in American to set UK rates is costing taxpayer £80,000 Having a US academic on Bank of England monetary committee is costing the taxpayer £80,000 a year in travel and accommodation, on top of his annual salary of almost £90,000 according to figures released under the FOI Act. Professor Blanchflower struck a deal with Gordon Brown to work three days a week as an external member of the monetary policy committee, concentraed into a 12-day monthly shift. The Treasury agreed that his costs would be met by the Bank of England.	28.06.06	The Independent	HM Treasury	Expenses
Welsh Assembly members travel less Figures for the 10 months to October 2006 show that overseas visits by Welsh Assembly ministers are well down on the previous two years. Figures released under the FOI Act revealed that during that segment of 2006 for which data was available, 13 ministerial trips were made overseas at a total cost of £32,213, compared with 24 in 2005, at a cost of £98,676. It is argued that the reduction is due to members of the minority government having to be present in the assembly for votes.	04.01.07	Western Mail	Welsh Assembly	Expenses
Health chiefs rack up £8.6m taxi bill AN £8.6m bill has been run up by just three of the country's 14 health boards and support body NHS National Services Scotland (NHS NSS) according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. The worst offender is NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which spends an average of £2,700 per day on taxis, despite plans to slash the number of its accident and emergency departments by 60%. Since 2001, Scotland's largest health board has paid out £5m. NHS chiefs denied the money was spent ferrying bosses around, claiming taxis were needed to transport patients, records and test results.	12.01.07	Daily Mail	Scottish Executive	Expenses

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Executive's £1.3m bill for air travel</p> <p>The Scottish Executive notched up a £1.3m bill flying across Britain. Despite promises to become greener ministers and civil servants took to the skies on board more than 5,000 domestic flights last year with the taxpayer footing the bill. Ministers want to cut the amount of harmful gases pumped into the atmosphere as a result of car, taxi, rail and plane journeys. The new figures, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show Mr McConnell's cabinet spent more than £19,000 on domestic flights while their officials ran up a £1.2m. The Crown Office also spent £60,170. Finance Minister Tom McCabe took the highest number of domestic flights, flying on 16 occasions, totalling more than £3,000 including a £355 ticket for Glasgow to London.</p>	22.01.07	Daily Mail	Scottish Executive	Expenses
<p>MSPs in a 'mix up' over failed expenses</p> <p>The cost of hiring a cement-mixer was among dozens of expenses claims made by members of the Scottish parliament last year that were rejected as excessive, inappropriate or simply bizarre. Details of rejected claims were released under the FOI Scotland Act. Other claims included a toothbrush, a pair of spectacles, an umbrella, a bottle of whisky and membership of a think tank. Andy Kerr, the health minister, raised eyebrows when he claimed £315 for repair work on the garden wall of his Edinburgh home. Kerr filed an expenses claim under the Scottish parliament's allowances scheme. The Labour MSP for East Kilbride, who is one of Jack McConnell's closest colleagues and earns £89,564, had the request turned down by officials, who told him they did not pay for members' home maintenance. Officials also failed to see why Gordon Jackson, the Labour MSP and QC, should be reimbursed £36 for dinner at Edinburgh's Harvey Nichols brasserie. David McLetchie, the former Tory leader, had a £5 taxi claim rejected when he was in the middle of the taxi fare scandal that wrecked his career. The total amount of rejected expenses came to £4,500.</p>	11.02.07	The Sunday Times	Scottish Parliament	Expenses
<p>MPs expenses</p> <p>FOI Act requests have revealed many details of MPs expenses including: £16,600 for Janet Anderson MP for car use, and Taxis for Richard Bacon MP at £5685 and Stephen Dorrel MP at £4993.</p>	14.02.07	The Times	House of Commons	Expenses
<p>£336,000 worth of globetrotting expenses by civil servant paid to advise us how to save money</p> <p>The man who ensures public money is spent properly was facing uncomfortable questions after it emerged he had racked up a £336,000 expenses bill for a string of trips around the world. Sir John Bourn, head of the National Audit Office, has made at least 43 journeys abroad in the past three years at the taxpayers' expense. His wife, Lady Bourn, has accompanied him on 22 of the stays at a cost to the public purse of £76,000. The Comptroller and Auditor General was forced to reveal details of his globetrotting to private Eye magazine under the FOI Act. Documents reveal that Sir John and wife Ardita have enjoyed numerous stays in five-star hotels around the world. The jetsetting couple travel first-class on all long-haul flights and business class on shorter visits.</p>	12.05.07	The Daily Mail	The National Audit Office	Expenses

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Inquiries continue into council claims Two Stoke-on-Trent city councillors have paid back travel expenses following an internal inquiry. The investigation was launched after a dossier claiming to lift the lid on a scam involving at least 12 current and former local politicians was handed to the police. Some councillors are alleged to have submitted vastly inflated mileage figures to boost their travel expenses. The authority is carrying out its own inquiry, and the findings are being shared with fraud squad detectives. Now, information released under the FOI Act, shows two councillors have paid back or agreed to pay back a total of £167.29 since the start of the internal investigation in September. One of the unnamed politicians over-claimed travel expenses by £130.40 between April 2005 and March 2007 (the period covered by the inquiry). The other councillor has paid back £36.89.	29.06.07	Stoke Sentinel	Stoke City Council	Expenses
The MSPs who took on loans ... and wanted us to pay them back Two MSPs were caught trying to claim thousands of pounds in expenses after taking out extra home loans and charging the taxpayer. Labour's Alasdair Morrison and Tory David Mundell each received thousands of pounds a year from Holyrood's accommodation allowance, which lets MSPs buy second homes in Edinburgh. But documents published under the FOI Scotland Act show they remortgage the properties then applied for more taxpayers' money.	16.09.07	The Mail on Sunday	Scottish Executive	Expenses
Gay adoption soars by 50% One in 20 children adopted from care goes to live with a gay couple, figures show. In some areas, as many as one in five youngsters in care are adopted by same-sex partners. And the number of adoptions by gays and lesbians is rising by more than 50% a year in many parts of the country. The figures obtained under the FOI Act show gay adoption has become commonplace in the four years since Labour reforms made it possible for homosexual couples to adopt. But the Government has still missed its target of an overall 50% increase in adoptions for the 60,000 children stuck in the care system. Numbers of adoptions of children in care rose to 3,700 last year, up 35% from 2000.	20.01.07	The Daily Mail	Department for Children, Schools & Families	Families
1,000 men living legally with multiple wives Polygamous marriage is flourishing as the Government admits for the first time that nearly a thousand men are living legally with multiple wives in Britain. Although the families are entitled to claim social security for each wife, no one has counted how many of them are on benefits. Ministers appear to be ignoring the separate practice of unauthorised polygamy, which is said to have become commonplace in some Muslim communities. The Ministry of Justice admits that it has no estimates of numbers for these unions, which are often presided over by an Islamic cleric. The first official estimate was made in response to an FOI Act request asking for statistics on benefits that are paid to wives who share a husband.	28.05.07	The Times	Department for Work & Pensions	Families

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Overseas 'Scottish' farmers cash in The Scottish Executive have been paying the new single farm payment subsidy to companies based as far away as Australia and Canada according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. <i>Following a further release under the FOI Scotland Act individual farmers receiving subsidies were identified in March 2006.</i>	07.02.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Farming
Islanders net £1m from scheme A Scheme to rid scrapie from Shetland's sheep flock has seen more than £1.165m shared between 18 crofters and farmers, and given one of them almost £300,000. Lambs were paid at £50 each, while the Government paid £90 for every ewe. Information released under the FOI Scotland Act reveals the scale of the payments to each of the individuals who sent lambs and ewes into the scheme, which is part of the national scrapie plan to eradicate the brain-wasting disease from British sheep.	11.02.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	The Scottish Executive	Farming
Farms in health risk A major investigation into the enforcement of farm animal health, welfare and transport regulations has revealed more than 65,000 breaches over 21 months, animal welfare campaigners said today. The research by the Badger Trust also shows huge disparities in enforcement across counties in England and Wales. The Trust used the FOI Act to assess how consistently farm animal health, welfare and transport rules are being enforced in English and Welsh counties where there is a persistent problem with bovine tuberculosis. It reveals that the health and welfare of farm animals is a "county lottery", with livestock in some counties potentially receiving far less protection from the law than others.	27.02.06	Western Daily Press	English County Councils	Farming
Subsidies paid to quangos 3 Scottish quangos (Scottish Water, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Crofters Commission) shared £933,078 in agricultural subsidy payments between 1997 and 2005 according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act.	29.04.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Farming
Farm export subsidies British-based exporters, including Nestle and Dairy Crest, have claimed £126m of taxpayers' money over the past two years for sending surplus butter and milk powder to poor countries such as Nigeria and Bangladesh, according information released under the FOI Act. The data, obtained by Jack Thurston of campaign group farmsubsidy.org, shows that most of the recipients of the cash are large agribusinesses. The biggest winner, Fayrefield Foods, was able to bank more than £22m over two years, 2004 to 2005. Philpot Dairy Products, the export arm of Dairy Crest, which owns well-known brands such as Country Life and Clover, also claimed a total of almost £22m. These levels of subsidy are enormous relative to the size of the companies: the £10m claimed by Fayrefield Foods in 2004 was worth almost 10% of its turnover, for example, and dwarfed its profits, which were less than £1m. Nestle, whose export of skimmed-milk powder to developing countries has long been controversial, received more than £7m.	21.05.06	The Observer	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Farming

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Agency axes jobs The Rural Payments Agency had reduced staff levels by 400 and faced escalating costs for computer systems during the period when it was under fire for problems in making payments to farmers according to information released under the FOI Act.	17.06.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Rural Payments Agency	Farming
Wild salmon at risk as a million farm fish escape More than a million farmed salmon have escaped into the wild in the past three years in accidents which scientists fear may be driving the wild salmon population towards extinction. The figures, released by the Scottish Executive under the FOI Scotland Act, show that a total of 1.6m salmon have escaped from fish farms in more than 50 separate accidents since 2000, with 821,512 escaping last year alone. So far this year, official figures show 105,987 of the fish have escaped from salmon farms. Recent scientific evidence shows that the accidental escape of farmed salmon from pens each year can lead to catastrophically reduced survival of the progeny of wild salmon which breed with the domesticated fish.	29.08.06	The Daily Telegraph	The Scottish Executive	Farming
£6m yearly bill for lost eartags Between January 1, 2001, and October 24 2006, farmers had to replace 4,548,082 primary tags and 1,256,915 secondary tags on their cattle according to statistics released under the FOI Act. The cost of replacing these 5,804,997 tags was £29.02m, almost £6m annually over the five-year period. The tags are compulsory, and manufacturers claim a 99% retention rate once attached to an animal.	04.11.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs	Farming
Fish farms that produce nothing More than half the fish farms in Scotland are producing nothing, according to figures released to a Highlands and Islands MSP under the FOI Act. Of 252 licensed sites, 140 are producing nothing, according to the figures, compared with 126 in 2005 and 121 in 2004.	09.11.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Crown Estates Commissioners	Farming
Taxpayers milked for £1m by a dairy farm A Scottish dairy farmer has exploited a loophole in European law to annually earn the right to claim more than £1m in subsidies. Information released under the FOI Scotland Act shows that William Hamilton and Sons, of Meldrum Farm, Blairdrummond, Stirling, has taken advantage of a flaw that allows it to get handouts on almost nine times the amount of milk it produces. Under EU law, the business will continue to qualify for the lottery-size payment annually until 2012 - even if it stops producing milk.	03.03.07	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Farming

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Government stands accused of concealing controversial support for biotech research Ministers are secretly easing the way for GM crops in Britain, while professing to be impartial on the technology, internal documents reveal. The documents, obtained through the FOI Act, show that the Government colluded with a biotech company in setting conditions for testing GM potatoes, and gives tens of millions of pounds a year to boost research into modified crops and foods. The information on funding proved extraordinarily difficult to get, requiring three months of investigation by an environmental pressure group, a series of parliamentary questions, and three applications for the information. Friends of the Earth finally obtained still partial information last week which shows that the Government provides at least £50m a year for research into agricultural biotechnology, largely GM crops and food. This generosity contrasts with the £1.6m given last year for research into organic agriculture, in spite of repeated promises to promote environmentally friendly, "sustainable" farming.	28.10.07	The Independent on Sunday	Department of Food & Rural Affairs	Farming
Ulster gets more than 2,000 new guns every year Legal gun ownership in Northern Ireland is increasing with almost 2,000 new firearms being registered every year. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that police have authorised 7,174 new guns over the last four years recorded. There are presently more than 144,500 legally held guns in Northern Ireland - which amounts to more than one licensed gun for every 12 people. That is almost three times the number of legally held guns in England and Wales per head of population, and more than twice the equivalent figure for Scotland. The actual total is even more stark when security force personal protection weapons and illegal guns are taken into account.	10.02.06	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Police Service	Firearms
Soldiers accused of gun-running Nine British soldiers are facing a court martial for allegedly smuggling guns out of Iraq to sell for drugs and cash. At the same time, documents obtained under the FOI Act and information from Revenue and Customs showed that 19 seizures of weapons and ammunition have been made in Britain since 2000.	13.10.06	The Times	HM Revenue and Customs	Firearms
Britain's violent inner cities are living in the shadow of the gun, survey shows Birmingham city centre is the country's "gun capital", according to the findings of a comprehensive survey of firearms. The next highest concentration of gun crimes is found in Manchester city centre, with areas of Cleveland and south London also appearing in the top 10. The area with the lowest level of shootings and firearms incidents in England and Wales is west Norfolk, followed by two areas of Northamptonshire. The firearms league table of the 43 police forces in England and Wales is the most detailed examination yet of regional gun trends. Using information released under the FOI Act, firearms figures in the year up to April 2005 were obtained for about 230 police command units from all forces in England and Wales.	27.10.06	The Independent	Police forces	Firearms

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Shotgun licences for 27 under-16s More than two dozen children under the age of 16 have been issued with shotgun certificates by Humberside Police. Figures, released under the FOI Act, show that as of the end of September 2006 27 shotgun certificate holders in the Humberside Police force area were aged 16 or under.	04.01.07	Scunthorpe Evening News	Humberside police	Firearms
Shotgun licence to child of ten Children, one as young as ten, have been given shotgun licences in Nottinghamshire, information released under the FOI Act reveals. Some 42 youngsters aged under 16 have been given the shotgun certificates in the past four years.	14.04.07	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottingham Police	Firearms
Council costs of local flooding Milton Street, Swanscombe, is on a flood plain and the drains cannot cope following heavy rainfall. Kent County Council, which is responsible for the drains, confirmed the street is in a high-risk flood area and says it hopes to update the area's drainage system during 2006. The work will cost in the region of £48,000 and involve installing soakaways underground pits, which absorb overflow from rainwater pipes or land drains. The pits, which require a licence from the Environment Agency to install, would take excess water therefore stopping it flooding the street. Under the FOI Act, KCC released information showing it has paid out £15,286 in flood-related property and vehicle compensation claims in the Swanscombe area over the past decade.	21.01.06	News Shopper	Kent County Council	Flooding
More homes face flooding risk as budget is slashed by £24m The Government has slashed the budget for protecting five million people and property worth £200 billion in Britain from the growing risk of flooding caused by climate change. Information obtained by the Conservatives under the FOI Act undermines the Government's commitment to the environment despite pledges from Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to set an example to the rest of the world. The Environment Agency has warned ministers that the £23.7m reduction in its budget for England this year will increase the risk of flooding, lead to more bathing and river water quality failures and reduce action to combat the illegal disposal of waste, including "big, bad nasty" fly-tipping incidents.	01.11.06	The Daily Telegraph	The Environment Agency	Flooding
Food premises have been given a clean bill of health. An FOI Act request showed that East Riding Council has made no prosecutions against food premises for breaches of health and safety in the past 12 months. The council's food safety team is responsible for a range of services, including enforcing standards of food hygiene and safety in food premises.	09.01.06	Hull Daily Mail	East Riding Council	Food Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Two in three top hotels fail hygiene test</p> <p>More than two thirds of Edinburgh's top hotels have failed to meet basic food safety and hygiene standards. A total of 21 out of the city's 30 four and five-star hotels were not up to scratch during council inspections carried out over the last 18 months. Contraventions spotted by food safety inspectors ranged from problems with mice and flies to inadequate training for kitchen staff. And six out of eight of the city's five-star hotels, including the Scotsman and Balmoral, were among those highlighted by inspectors for breaking food safety and hygiene legislation. All of the hotels with contraventions from the last 18 months said they have subsequently carried out of the council's recommendations. The inspection reports, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show the Balmoral on Princes Street had the highest number of visits from inspectors since July 2004. In September 2004, inspectors found evidence of mice in the hotel's Number One Bar and returned to the hotel five times over the next month to check up on the problem.</p>	16.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Food Safety
<p>Burger bars grilled on hygiene lapses</p> <p>Fast food restaurants throughout Swansea have been told to put right a string of environmental health problems over the past two years. Official inspections by officers from Swansea Council's Environment Department show that many of the city's fast food joints have been pulled up for poor basic food hygiene. The documents were released under the FOI Act and show that the big fast food chains are not immune to sloppy practices.</p>	30.01.06	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea City Council	Food Safety
<p>Ramsey's kitchen nightmares</p> <p>Council health inspectors found a number of problems at Gordon Ramsay's restaurants. An inspector who visited Ramsay's three-star Michelin restaurant in Chelsea last March found several problems that fell foul of the 1990 Food Safety Act. The inspector demanded that the chef fix broken tiles - where scraps can accumulate - and split door seals and stop storing cleaning materials next to food. Most embarrassingly for a chef with a spotless approach, Ramsay was ordered to "thoroughly clean" the freezer. The restaurant, called Gordon Ramsay, was breaking rules on electrical safety and did not have an accident book, Kensington and Chelsea council found. Worse was to come during an inspection by Westminster council of Gordon Ramsay at Claridge's hotel in September 2005. Although standards were generally high, the inspector found a washing-up sink so close to food preparation there was a risk of "contamination". The chefs were seen to be wiping their hands on "dirty cloths". The inspector jotted down: "More frequent hand-washing required." Other problems included the storage of butane gas next to food and stowing of wine in an electrical cupboard - the bottles were quickly removed. Soap was missing from the ladies' staff lavatory.</p>	31.01.06	The Independent	London borough councils	Food Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Chinatown restaurants in hygiene hall of shame Chinese restaurants featured heavily in a list of 12 named as amongst the least hygienic in central London, where even basic rules of hygiene were flouted when inspectors called during 2005. City of Westminster food safety officers rated all in the highest priority bracket. Their inspection reports, obtained under the FOI Act, reveal an extraordinary catalogue of rule breaches. Six of the restaurants are in Chinatown, two in Queensway and the others are scattered around Westminster.	01.02.06	The Evening Standard	Westminster City Council	Food Safety
Hygiene on the menu People in Utttoxeter are among the first in the country to be able to check food hygiene inspection results for outlets in their area. East Staffordshire Borough Council has made available on its website about 100 reports from inspections carried out since January. Reports contain details of hygiene advice given by inspectors from the council's food team, and identify any areas of food law that need to be addressed. Business owners can respond to points raised in their report, allowing them to inform customers when they have addressed the issues raised. The initiative began because several requests were made by residents to see reports under the FOI Act.	11.03.06	Stoke Sentinel	East Staffordshire Borough Council	Food Safety
Restaurants in Capital are failing on hygiene Council reports, released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that a quarter of Edinburgh's top restaurants have failed to meet basic food safety and hygiene standards during inspections in 2005. A total of 12 out of 46 of the city's top eating places assessed by food safety inspectors over 12 months have fallen foul of environmental laws. Mice infestations, out-of-date food and failures to store both raw and cooked food properly were among the contraventions. Even the restaurant where the council's food safety inspectors traditionally have their Christmas lunch, Room in the West End, came in for criticism.	14.03.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Food Safety
Delia scores own goal with health inspectors Environmental health officers found a series of problems in Delia Smith's kitchens at Norwich City football club according to information obtained under the FOI Act. The food company, Delia's Canary Catering, was ordered to tackle health and safety "as a matter of urgency" after the team found a lack of training in the kitchens. The Carrow Road club, where the celebrated chef is joint majority shareholder with husband Michael Wynn Jones, was also pulled up over dirty handwash basins, ice machines and ice cream scoops. Her company was also told to remove a pinboard to prevent drawing pins falling into fans' food.	15.03.06	The Daily Express	Norwich Council	Food Safety
Sniffing out smuggled meats More than 77 tonnes of illegal meat imports were seized by British customs officers at ports and airports during 2005. Figures released under the FOI Act show officers had greater success in stopping illegal meat and meat products in the year to April 2005. The statistics show there were 10,716 seizures totalling 77.009 tonnes, against 6,389 and 69.695 tonnes in 2004.	08.04.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	HM Revenue and Customs	Food Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Reports show poor hygiene in school kitchens Reports released under the FOI Act show that kitchens in just two Swansea schools, two Carmarthenshire schools and four of Neath Port Talbot's senior schools were given a clean bill of health. The majority were handed a list of Improvements by health inspectors that they were legally required to carry out. These ranged from faulty fridges and flaking paint to food being kept on the floor. At Gowerton Comprehensive a squirrel broke into a food store during a holiday break, opened packets of dry food and made off with enough food to see it through winter.	26.08.06	South Wales Evening Post	South Wales councils	Food Safety
Watchdog's damning verdict on Cadbury's over salmonella scare Staff at the Government's food watchdog were annoyed by Cadbury's behaviour during the salmonella outbreak in the summer of 2006 that left dozens of people with serious poisoning, according to documents obtained under the FOI Act. Minutes of internal meetings at the height of the outbreak show officials at the Food Standards Agency (FSA) suspected the company's products had caused the illness despite Cadbury's claims that its chocolate was "perfectly safe". The documents show that Cadbury could have been more helpful in supplying information about the contamination, which coincided with a sharp rise in cases of a rare strain of salmonella. Despite being careful to avoid a public attack on Cadbury, the FSA privately considered that Cadbury had posed an "unacceptable" risk to the public.	23.09.06	The Independent	Financial Services Authority	Food Safety
'Appalling' food hygiene at the Commons is revealed Ministers, MPs and thousands of visitors to the House of Commons were exposed to a high risk of food poisoning because of the poor state of Parliament's kitchens. An official inspection of the food preparation areas, released under the FOI Act, uncovered a series of failings, ranging from mouse infestations to filthy door handles in staff lavatories. A Westminster council inspector spent three days examining all 13 restaurants at the Commons in daily use by MPs, ministers, researchers, journalists and secretaries.	05.03.07	The Evening Standard	Westminster Council	Food Safety
Council takes action over stores' displays of beef Environmental health officials in Aberdeen have become the first in Scotland to take action against supermarket chains over their fresh beef displays according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. Aberdeen City Council staff visited Tesco and Makro on January 26 2007 and February 23 2007 respectively after receiving complaints over the co-mingling of beef from different nations.	31.03.07	Aberdeen press and Journal	Scottish Local Authorities	Food Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Scandal of filthy hospital kitchens Official inspection reports reveal that breaches of food hygiene laws include infestations of mice and cockroaches, kitchen staff not washing their hands, food being kept at the wrong temperature and remnants of meals becoming stuck in equipment have been found in many hospitals. Other hazardous incidents included ice cream and prawns being stored together in fridges and freezers, orange juice kept next to chemicals and patients' meal trays being used to transport contaminated material from the wards. The Liberal Democrats' shadow health secretary, Norman Lamb used the FOI Act to obtain the most recent food hygiene inspection reports for hospitals they monitor from 145 local authorities.	12.08.07	The Observer	Local authorities	Food Safety
Supermarkets fail on hygiene Almost half of the Capital's biggest supermarkets have failed to meet basic food safety and hygiene standards during inspections in the last year. Nine of the 22 stores assessed by the city council's food safety inspectors over 12 months have fallen foul of environmental laws. Samples of food taken from branches of Scotmid, Sainsbury's and Morrisons were found to have excessive bacteria during council tests. Other contraventions highlighted included raw and cooked foods being stored together, dirty floors and worn-out chopping boards. The council reports, released under the FOI Scotland Act, reveal that one of the city's biggest supermarkets, Asda at The Jewel, had 25 failings when inspectors visited in March.	02.10.07	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Food Safety
3,000 police hours on hunt ban Three thousand hours have been spent policing the foxhunting ban - but not one prosecution has been made. The equivalent of 375 days policing has been given over to dealing with the ban, according to a survey of 12 English police forces covering rural areas. The figures prove hunts are acting within the law despite it being "inconsistent and badly drafted", said a Countryside Alliance spokeswoman. But last week the League Against Cruel Sports sent Chief Constables details of 33 hunts it claims are repeatedly breaching the Hunting Act which came into force in 2005. Although a total of 126 calls were made by members of the public or huntsmen, there were no prosecutions. Suffolk notched up the most police hours dedicated to dealing with the fox-hunting ban - 1,500 hours. But Derbyshire was not far behind, spending 508 hours working on the ban. The 12 force areas were questioned under the FOI Act.	27.02.06	The Daily Express	Police Forces	Fox Hunting
Now FOI will come at a price from university Information released under the FOI Act show that the University of Ulster is planning to introduce fees for releasing information under the FOI Act. The university is among the first public organisations to draw up plans to charge for information which has remained free since the Act came into force last January.	13.06.06	Belfast Telegraph	University of Ulster	Freedom of Information

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Why Government changed its mind about restricting Freedom of Information requests At the start of 2007, Government appeared determined to press ahead with new rules that would stop the media and campaign groups from making costly and embarrassing requests for information. By mid-spring there was strong cross-party opposition to the plans but Falconer and his ministerial colleagues showed no appetite for compromise. But then Jack Straw, the new Justice Secretary, seemed to lose his will for the fight. By October the whole debate had been turned on its head, with Gordon Brown suggesting that FOI laws could be extended to cover some private firms. New documents released under the FOI Act now provide a clearer understanding of why the Government got cold feet. Responses to its own consultation paper published last year include submissions from FOI officers who show themselves to be less than enthusiastic about the idea of "blanket aggregation", whereby a financial cap would be put on the amount of money that could be spent on complying with FOI requests made by individuals from within the same organisation.	14.12.07	The Independent	Ministry of Justice	Freedom of Information
Council pays for burials of lonely In The past nine years, 32 people have died in North Lincolnshire without anyone to arrange or pay for their funeral. All of them were found to be living alone, without family or friends and under the 1984 Public Health Act, the local authority were obliged to carry out the funerals as revealed by information released under the FOI Act.	29.05.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North East Lincolnshire County Council	Funerals
Jackpot of freebies for gambling watchdog Gambling watchdog Peter Dean faces questions over his relationship with the gaming industry after he was found to have accepted a wide range of gifts and hospitality from gambling organisations. The gifts received by Mr Dean, chairman of the Gambling Commission, include a watch, bottles of champagne, a painting, two statuettes and a set of glass goblets. Documents obtained under the FOI Act show he has also accepted meals or accommodation more than 40 times from companies which stand to benefit from the relaxing of the gambling laws. Mr Dean, 66, who is in sole charge of ensuring that gambling does not spiral out of control, has already dismayed opponents of gambling with his 'laissez-faire' approach to regulation. He said this month that proposed super-casinos with million-pound jackpots were 'not such a very big deal' and admitted he had lobbied the Government on behalf of the gaming industry to keep tax low for Internet casinos.	28.01.06	The Daily Mail	The Gambling Commission	Gambling
Prescott's casino junket Documents released under the FOI Act show that John Prescott (then Deputy Prime Minister and with responsibility for local government) was involved in casino policy. The documents show that Prescott visited a casino in Sydney in Australia in 2004 and that the department described this as a regeneration site visit.	05.07.06	The Mirror	Department of Culture	Gambling

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Bid to put UK at heart of online gambling Plans to turn Britain into a "world leader" in internet gambling have been drawn up by ministers, according to internal Whitehall documents. In stark contrast to America, where online gambling has in effect been outlawed, ministers want to attract offshore companies to Britain. New legislation will lift the current ban on online gaming businesses in Britain from next year. But documents obtained under the FOI Act reveal that a government charm offensive is well under way. They show that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has lobbied the Treasury on behalf of online betting and gaming firms to introduce a favourable tax regime. Over the past two years, ministers and officials at the department have met representatives of the internet gambling industry on 26 occasions.	08.10.06	The Sunday Times	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Gambling
Falconer Met Dome Team 13 Times One of Tony Blair's closest Cabinet allies met the team behind plans for a Millennium Dome supercasino 13 times. The details were released under the FOI Act. One of the meetings came days before the Government published a White Paper on gambling reform which gave the green light for supercasinos in this country. The Lord Chancellor flew to LA to meet Mr Anschutz shortly after his firm announced it wanted to open a casino on the Dome site. Lord Falconer held a series of talks with representatives of the billionaire Philip Anschutz. He even enjoyed VIP hospitality in Los Angeles as a personal guest of the American tycoon.	27.11.06	The Daily Mail	Department for Constitutional Affairs (now Ministry of Justice)	Gambling
New casino plans 145 casino sites in 49 towns and cities across the country have been given approval in recent years according to information released under the FOI Act.	30.01.07	The Daily Mail	Department of Culture, media & Sport	Gambling
Gambling on a super-casino Cardiff could be wasting thousands of pounds campaigning for a super-casino when the UK government has already made up its mind, it is feared. Shadow Culture Minister Owen John Thomas said that while the Government's Casino Advisory Panel had written directly to Blackpool council to gauge their interest, neither Cardiff nor Glasgow councils had received a similar letter. Mr Thomas, who received details of the letter under the FOI Act, said: 'Had this letter been sent to several local authorities, its content could be viewed as fairly innocuous. This clearly suggests that Blackpool has been singled out by the Westminster Government to become the home for the UK's first super casino. In the meantime, local authorities are spending significant sums of money for what may be a done deal.' The Welsh capital was bidding to be the home for the UK's only super casino to be built in the new Sports Village in Cardiff Bay (<i>The "super casino" was eventually awarded to Manchester</i>).	31.01.06	South Wales Echo	Department if Culture Media and Sport	Gambling

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Casino gamble cost city £40,000</p> <p>Peterborough's gamble to bag one of the Government's multi-million pound casinos cost local taxpayers more than £40,000 according to information released under the FOI Act. In April last year, the city council officially entered the race to build one of just 16 casinos across the country which will be allowed under new gambling laws and paid consultants KPMG over £40,000 to research and put together the bid. But the city council's hopes were dashed when the Government panel knocked Peterborough out of the casino race.</p>	27.03.07	Peterborough Evening Telegraph	Peterborough Council	Gambling
<p>Edinburgh Castle is not the spooky place many say it is</p> <p>Guards at one of Scotland's most haunted castles have reported not a single ghost, ghoul or supernatural bump in the night in more than 30 years. Edinburgh Castle is supposed to be haunted by the ghosts of the Headless Drummer, the Tunnel Piper, the Ghost Dog and the former inmates of the Castle's dungeons. Tales of spooky goings-on have terrified locals and visitors to the capital for generations. But soldiers posted on guard duty in recent decades have not once had cause to report supernatural activity around the castle's historic buildings and ramparts. Ministry of Defence officials have scoured 30 years' worth of guards' reports and files but have admitted their records contain no evidence of headless drummers, mysterious tunnel pipers or any such ghosts. Ghost-hunters, who made the request under the FOI Act, had hoped the papers might have revealed soldiers hearing footsteps and then finding no one around when they went to investigate, or unexplained noises or sights.</p>	30.10.06	The Express	Ministry of Defence	Ghosts
<p>Oh! They're just what I've always wanted</p> <p>Details of all civic gifts received by Lesley Hinds since she took office almost three years ago have been obtained by under the FOI Scotland Act. They reveal the weird and wonderful selection of gifts brought to Edinburgh from all corners of the globe by visiting groups, organisations and VIPs. They include a book of Polish paintings, another on the embassies of France, a birdbath from the Swiss justice department, a traditional flag from the Australian Parliament, and a silk scarf from the Dalai Lama. Other gifts include Japanese spoons, a Chinese calendar, a New Zealand beef bone pendant, an elephant-shaped key rack from Zambia and an American Christmas tree bauble.</p>	11.03.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Gifts
<p>The Muslim Council of Britain has received grants of £150,000 from the Home Office</p> <p>The Muslim Council of Britain has received grants of £150,000 from the Home Office, according to letters released under the FOI Act. Correspondence between Sir Iqbal Sacranie, former leader of the Council, and a Home Office minister revealed Sir Iqbal originally asked the Government for £500,000.</p>	17.06.06	The Times	The Home Office	Grants
<p>Swansea NHS Trust spent £1.2m on cardiac care</p> <p>An FOI Act request to Swansea NHS Trust revealed that a number of private health providers (as far away as London) were paid to provide cardiac care and help reduce waiting lists in Swansea.</p>	07.01.06	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea NHS Trust	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Hospital 'cleans up' in Act A request was made under the FOI Act in 2005 for health and safety inspection reports on Welsh hospitals. Bridgend Council refused to give details of inspections at the Princess of Wales Hospital in the town, saying it was 'not in the public interest'. The decision was appealed to the Information Commissioner, who ordered the council to hand over the documents. And, it emerged the hospital had actually been given a clean bill of health - and even given a food hygiene award. It came despite a number of flaws discovered by inspectors including eggs two days past their use-by date, food debris in cabinets and missing and damaged tiles. But the report said: 'I am pleased to inform you that at the time of the inspection there was generally a high standard of cleanliness throughout the kitchen and associated areas. Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that the central kitchen qualifies for a Bronze Food Hygiene Award.'	15.01.06	Wales on Sunday	Bridgend Council	Health
What goes on behind trust's closed doors Minutes released under the FOI Act, have revealed what was being discussed when the Swansea's NHS trust told the press and public to leave its board meetings. The trust regularly used the 1960 Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act as a tool to go into closed session. However, it has never published any agenda details or public minutes of what it discusses in private.	13.03.06	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea NHS Trust	Health
Bed-blocker spends 4 years in hospital A patient stayed in hospital for four years, - despite being well enough to be discharged. It cost the NHS £300,000 to keep the patient in a ward in the worst recorded instance of bed-blocking. The unnamed patient was considered fit for discharge after a stint in a Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust hospital in Kent. But they spent another 1,533 days there at £200 a day, according to figures released under the FOI Act. Bed-blocking can happen when hospital doctors declare a patient fit, but further care - like a nursing home - is not available or thought suitable by family. The worst ten bed-blocking patients have cost the NHS £1.4m with 6,946 needless days in hospital. The second worst example was in East Cheshire where a patient stayed an extra 970 days followed by a patient in North Glamorgan who blocked a bed for 643 days.	02.05.06	The Sun	NHS Trusts	Health
Electric shock treatment Controversial electric shock treatments treatment has been given 4,790 times by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust since 2001 according to figures released under the FOI Act.	22.06.06	Leicester Mercury	Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust	Health
NHS Grampian criticised over alcohol shares Details of shares held by The NHS Grampian endowment fund, which manages charitable donations made to NHS Grampian, have been released under the FOI Scotland Act. Among those listed is the alcohol manufacturer Diageo, a company in which NHS Grampian's fund managers have acquired more than 27,000 shares, worth almost £250,000.	13.07.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	NHS Grampian Fund	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Bedbug infestations Nearly 4,000 cases of bedbug infestation were reported in London during 2005 - an increase of 300% on 2000 according to information released under the FOI Act.	01.08.06	The Evening Standard	London councils	Health
Hospitals that received tissue in 'stolen bones' scandal are named An NHS watchdog has named 25 hospitals caught up in a scandal over allegedly stolen body parts implanted into patients. The hospitals, which include Guy's, St George's, Northwick Park, all in London, and the Royal London, as well as seven private hospitals, bought bone tissue for use in bone grafts and dental implants from a US company, Biomedical Tissue Services. The US firm is at the centre of allegations that more than 1,000 body parts were stolen by gangs in New York and sold for transplants. The body of the late BBC broadcaster Alistair Cooke who died aged 95 in 2004, is reported to have been traded in the case. The UK Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency said that 82 body parts had been imported to Britain from Biomedical Tissue Services and an unknown number had been implanted in patients. All the parts imported were bone tissue which had been "screened and processed" to remove the risk of infection, the MHRA said. The affected hospitals were informed when the scandal broke last October and all unused bone parts were recalled, but the list was not made public until being released under the FOI Act.	22.09.06	The Guardian	MHRA	Health
High-mileage ambulance The average of age of 250 accident and emergency ambulances in the Yorkshire region's fleet is four years according to information released under the FOI Act. Front-line 999 ambulances are retired with mileages of about 280,000 after five to seven years. However, amongst the higher mileage vehicles used for patient transfers and similar, non-emergency work is one 11 year-old vehicle with 360,000 miles on the clock.	14.10.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Yorkshire Ambulance Service	Health
Council staff sick leave figures Swindon Borough Council lost around 60,000 days to long-term sick leave in one year, a sixth of which was for "psychological" reasons. About 500 employees took long-term sick leave (defined as being absent for more than 20 days) between September 2005 and 2006 according to the figures released under the FOI Act.	15.11.06	Wiltshire Gazette and Herald	Swindon Council	Health
Scandal of operations not performed Thousands of operations paid for by the NHS have not been carried out at a private health centre in the Westcountry. The treatment centre, at Bodmin, North Cornwall, opened in January 2006 and is contracted to carry out 6,000 minor procedures a year. Under the terms of its £32m, five-year contract, it is paid for a set amount of procedures even they are not carried out. Figures released under the FOI Act show that from January 2006 until this month, just 3,297 procedures were completed against a target of 6,983. Performance was at rock bottom in its first three months when only 281 of 1,505 operations (18.7%) were completed. That rate improved to 45% in the next six months and now stands at 65%.	27.03.07	Western Morning News	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>'Postcode lottery' claim over disabled children</p> <p>Disabled children in the Midlands face a "postcode lottery" for funds for vital equipment, according to a report produced using information released under the FOI Act. Staffordshire-based charity BDF Newlife, which offers financial help to families with sick or disabled children, discovered primary care trust budgets for wheelchairs or monitors ranged from nil to £187,000. Wyre Forest primary care trust (PCT) was one of four English trusts that spent nothing on specialist equipment. South Western Staffordshire PCT confirmed it budgeted only £1,000 for such grants, making it the third worst behind Harlow, Essex, and Mendip, Somerset, which spent £504 and £547. But the three Sandwell PCTs - Wednesbury and West Bromwich, Rowley Regis and Tipton, and Oldbury and Smethwick - had a combined budget of £187,169. Fourteen of the region's 26 health trusts gave information. They had a total of £406,892 - £29,063 per PCT, below the national average of £45,613.</p>	27.04.07	Birmingham Post	NHS Trusts	Health
<p>Hard-up NHS trusts cut back on unproven homoeopathy treatment</p> <p>The NHS is turning its back on homoeopathy and other unproven alternative medicines in the face of a financial crisis and pressure from doctors. More than half of the primary care trusts (PCTs) in England are now refusing to pay for homoeopathy or severely restricting access. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that at least 86 of the 147 trusts have either stopped sending patients to the four homoeopathic hospitals, or are introducing strict measures to limit referrals. Another 40 trusts have yet to provide data. More than 20 have taken action since receiving a letter organised a year ago today by Professor Michael Baum, a cancer specialist at University College London, which argued that "unproven or disproved treatments" such as homoeopathy and reflexology ought not to be available free to patients.</p>	23.05.07	The Times	NHS Primary Care Trusts	Health
<p>As the smoking ban looms, far fewer are kicking the habit</p> <p>With almost half of Britons unaware that it will be illegal to smoke in public places from 1 July 2007, new figures reveal there has been a dramatic slump in the number of smokers kicking the habit. Spending on stop-smoking adverts was slashed from £22m in 2005 to only £13m in 2006, according to information released this month under the FOI Act. This was accompanied by the figures for people quitting smoking falling by 10,000 - from 76,000 during April to June 2005 to 66,000 for the same quarter in 2006.</p>	27.05.07	The independent on Sunday	Department of Health	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Labour cronies outnumber Tories 4 to 1 on NHS boards</p> <p>Four times as many Labour supporters have been appointed to run the Health Service than Tories.</p> <p>The figures, released under the FOI Act, prompted fresh concern about a culture of cronyism in public appointments. They showed that 312 applicants with declared affiliations to the Labour Party have been appointed to local health trust jobs and other NHS posts, compared with 77 Tories and 53 Liberal Democrats. In 2001, the then Health Secretary Alan Milburn handed his power to directly appoint members of NHS boards to a new commission. The Government was forced into the move after an independent assessment concluded that the boards were being packed with Labour politicians, appointed on the basis of their loyalty to the party rather than ability. But the latest figures suggest there is still a huge bias in NHS appointments.</p>	07.07.07	The Daily Mail	Department of Health	Health
<p>Thieves sink their teeth into the NHS</p> <p>Scotland's hospitals are hotbeds of petty theft, with everything from computers to false teeth disappearing from wards since 2005. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show thieves have cost the NHS £100,000 since 2005, with eight health boards reporting thefts or losses of equipment at a rate of more than two a day. Criminals have stolen cash from patients' and staff lockers, as well as taking clothes, jewellery, mobile phones and credit cards. But the thefts are not confined to small, easily concealed items. Larger pieces of equipment, such as computer monitors, laptops and gardening tools have all mysteriously disappeared from hospitals.</p>	08.07.07	The Mail on Sunday	NHS trusts	Health
<p>1,000 patients readmitted within a week</p> <p>During the first six months of 2007 a total of 1,032 patients were readmitted to Ipswich Hospital as a matter of emergency within seven days of being discharged according to statistics released under the FOI act.</p>	17.08.07	The Evening Star	Ipswich Hospital	Health
<p>NHS chiefs get £80m in pay-offs</p> <p>The NHS has paid out more than £80million in redundancy costs after closing down strategic health authorities, it has been revealed. More than 700 staff lost their jobs last year when the number of strategic health authorities was slashed from 28 to 10. These included 61 senior managers, each with average redundancy packages of £358,355, and one chief executive with a £900,000 retirement deal. Opposition parties criticised the costs which were revealed after requests under the FOI Act. Some 28 authorities were set up in 2002 to supervise health services in England to coordinate care and deliver Government policy. But in 2005, ministers announced £250million had to be cut from red tape and the number of authorities was cut to ten.</p>	24.08.07	The Daily Mail	Strategic Health Authorities	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Organs from drug addicts 'being used in transplants' Hundreds of below-standard hearts, lungs and kidneys have been taken from drug addicts and transplanted into critically ill patients. Three per cent of the organs transplanted in the past five years came from donors with a history of drug abuse - some of whom died from an overdose - figures obtained under the FOI Act have revealed. One surgeon said doctors were "desperate" for organs and used some they would otherwise have rejected.	10.12.07	The Daily Telegraph	NHS trusts	Health
Concern at under-16s abortions Girls aged under 16 are having abortions at the rate of almost one a day in Scotland. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act, showed that, according to the Information and Statistics Department for Scotland, 896 Scottish girls had abortions during a three-year period. Of those, almost a third were carried out by health authorities in the north and north-east including 101 abortions on girls under the age of consent in Scotland from 2002 to 2004 - the third highest in Scotland - by NHS Grampian.	14.03.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Information and Statistics Department for Scotland	Health
Abortion figures A total of 12,603 abortions were carried out in Scotland in 2005 according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. Of those, 9401 were first-time procedures. 131 women who had an abortion in 2005 were having the procedure for the fourth time. Another 44 were on their fifth termination or more. Most were aged between 25 and 29, followed by women aged 35 or over.	27.10.06	The Daily Record	NHS Scotland	Health
100 teenagers a month having second abortion More than 18,000 girls under 18 had abortions last year, including at least one who had at least six abortions. The figures on abortions were released by the Department of Health under the FOI Act. Some 1,316 girls under 18 had a second abortion while 90 underwent their third. Some 44 women had their eighth abortion last year, with 20 of these under 30. In the 18- to 24-year-old group, 16,474 had a second abortion while 3,060 were on their third. A study by doctors from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has shown that the number of under-18s ending unwanted pregnancies has gone up by more than seven per cent since 1999 - the year Labour launched its teenage pregnancy strategy.	22.12.06	The Daily Telegraph	Department of Health	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>The girl of 18 who has had six abortions</p> <p>As many as one in 22 teenage girls in some parts of the country had an abortion last year, according to official figures. In total, a record 18,619 under-18s had terminations. One 18-year-old had her sixth abortion in 2006. Another 135 girls under 14 terminated their pregnancies. The statistics - released by the Department of Health under the FOI act - show the number of teenage abortions has increased by more than 2,500 each year since 1997. Teenage abortion rates were highest in the London borough of Lambeth, where one in 22 girls under 18 had a termination in 2006. This was nearly five times the rate in the region with the fewest abortions, Herefordshire, where one in 100 under-18s had a termination. Nine of the top ten locations were in London, with one in 25 teenage girls in Southwark having an abortion, closely followed by Barking and Dagenham, Lewisham, Hackney and Croydon. The only area outside the capital in the top ten was Coventry, with a rate of one in 33.</p>	06.08.07	The Daily Mail	Department of Health	Health
<p>Our wasted youth</p> <p>1,466 under-age boozers have been admitted to hospital in Wales suffering from serious diseases including alcohol poisoning, mental health problems, liver disorders such as gastritis, and chronic pancreatitis since April 2002.</p>	01.01.06	Wales on Sunday	National Assembly for Wales	Health
<p>Liver disease</p> <p>In five years NHS Grampian has seen a 65% surge in patients admitted with alcohol-related liver disease according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. 565 people were admitted to hospital in Grampian during 2005 with liver disease, of these, 306 were related to alcohol.</p>	02.06.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	NHS Grampian	Health
<p>Missed appointments cost NHS £600m</p> <p>Missed hospital appointments cost the National Health Service more than £600m in 2004/05. Figures released under the FOI Act show the number of patients failing to attend an appointment has risen by nearly two million in a year. According to data from 264 NHS trusts the number of missed appointments rose from 5,050,697 in 2003/04 to 6,834,379 in 2005. The total cost to the NHS is estimated to be £614.</p>	08.05.06	The Daily Telegraph	NHS trusts	Health
<p>NHS cancels 620 ops a day</p> <p>The NHS is cancelling more than 620 operations every day because of administrative errors, it is claimed. Mistakes such as forgetting to book operating theatres and failing to inform the patient of the date led to around 162,500 cancellations in 2005. When all causes - including lack of beds - were taken into account, a total of 250,000 operations were cancelled - 962 every working day. The numbers also appear to have risen by a quarter over the past three years, according to newly-released figures. The scale of the problem emerged after Tory MP Grant Shapps used the FOI Act to request data from all NHS trusts in England and Wales. Estimates for numbers of cancellations were made on the basis of the 55 bodies that responded.</p>	16.10.06	The Daily Telegraph	Department of Health/NHS Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Hospital operation cancellations In 2006 3,447 Swansea hospital operations were cancelled at the last minute. Out of that figure a total of 1,687 patients either turned up at the hospital on the day of their planned surgery only to be told to head back home again, or were told the day before that their operation was off. But figures released under the FOI Act revealed the rest, a total of 1,760, were effectively cancelled by the patients themselves. Of those, 598 patients simply did not turn up on the day. Other problems including lack of staff or equipment have been blamed for some of the hold-ups, whilst 189 cancellations were caused because of a lack of ward beds and 114 were shelved because of an administrative error.	11.01.07	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea NHS Trusts	Health
Operations cut for lack of sterile equipment Growing numbers of operations are being cancelled because of a lack of sterile surgical instruments, newly released figures show. Some Health Service trusts have seen an eightfold increase since 2003 in the amount of patients turned away at the last minute. Nationally 41% more operations are being lost because dirty surgical instruments, or the wrong ones, are being sent to theatres. The figures were released under the FOI Act.	29.01.07	The Daily Mail	NHS trusts	Health
Girls of 13 given contraceptive implants on NHS The National Health Service has been giving girls as young as 13 contraceptive injections and implants in an attempt to cut teenage pregnancies. Figures released under the FOI Act show that in a sample of five primary care trusts, seven 13-year-old girls have received either an implant or an injection in the past year. The figures also show children as young as 12 have been given the morning-after pill. In the same five trusts, one 12- year-old girl and 40 13-year-old girls have been given the emergency contraception after unprotected sex in the past year.	08.01.06	The Sunday Times	Bolton, Bromley, Enfield, Croydon, Central Cheshire PCTs	Health
Contraceptive injections given by NHS to hundreds of 14-year-olds Almost 1,000 girls aged 14 and under were given treatment on the NHS last year to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Figures released under the FOI Act show that 150 youngsters received a contraceptive implant in England. A further 750 were given contraceptive injections. Among girls aged 15, 1,920 were given the injection and 290 received the implant. Parents would not be told if their daughter had received such treatment unless she gave consent for them to know.	26.02.06	The Mail on Sunday	Department of Health	Health
Young teens prescribed morning after pill 34 girls aged 13 or under were given the morning after contraceptive pill by the NHS in Doncaster in 2005. And 14 other girls in the same age group were put on the pill by health professionals between January and December, figures released under the FOI Act show. A total of 32 girls aged 15 or younger received either a contraceptive implant or injection that makes them infertile for up to three years.	03.03.06	Doncaster Free Press	Health Care Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Hundreds of condoms given out to teens in safe sex drive</p> <p>More than 1,000 condoms a week are being handed out free to children under 16 as part of a controversial safe sex programme in the Lothians. The confidential C:card service hands out contraception to children as young as 13 at youth clubs and other venues on condition youngsters talk to an adviser about safe sex. A total of 53,638 free condoms were issued to 13 to 15-year-olds in Edinburgh and the Lothians as part of NHS Lothian's C:card service in 2005, according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	16.01.07	Edinburgh Evening News	NHS Lothian	Health
<p>Schools prescribing pill for girls</p> <p>Five schools in Leicestershire make emergency contraception available to teenagers according to information released under the FOI Act. Lutterworth Grammar School has admitted girls had been given 345 doses over four years - thought to be the highest total in the country. 16 pills have been given to girls at King Edward VII Community College, in Coalville, since 2001 and five to pupils at Bosworth Community College, in Desford, since 2003. The contraception was made available through William Bradford Community College, in Earl Shilton, in 2002. It is not known how many pills, if any, have been handed out. Fullhurst Community College, in Braunstone, Leicester, has also made pills available on a trial basis, but so far, no girls have sought them. Pupils can be prescribed the pills - without their parents knowing - after meeting with health professionals at school who can arrange emergency contraception and also offer a wider range of health services.</p>	02.05.07	Leicester Mercury	Leicestershire County and Rutland Primary Care Trust	Health
<p>Schools give morning after pill to girls as young as 11</p> <p>Thousands of girls as young as 11 can obtain the morning after pill at school without telling their parents. Sexual health clinics are being set up in secondary schools in England as part of a Government drive to cut teenage pregnancy.</p> <p>Figures show that in some areas, up to half of schools now offer children a range of services, including free condoms, pregnancy kits and emergency contraception. One school has admitted handing out 345 morning after pills in the past four years. Britain's teenage pregnancy rate remains one of the highest in Europe, although it has fallen in the past decade. In 1998, 7,462 girls under 16 fell pregnant compared with 7,855 in 2005. In some areas, half of schools now offer some form of sexual health advice. In North Staffordshire, 18 secondary schools use mobile sexual health services. In North Tyneside, five out of 11 high schools have nurses and youth workers and in Thurrock, Essex, drop-in centres are provided at seven schools. Data obtained through the FOI Act identified 226 schools that administered the morning after pill.</p>	09.07.07	The Daily Telegraph	Local education authorities	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Morning after pill for girls aged 12 Girls as young as 12 are being given the morning-after Pill without their parents' knowledge at chemist shops. A report shows the powerful contraceptive is available to young girls at High Street pharmacies in almost every area. It reveals the growing ease with which they can get hold of a pill that has barely been tested on girls under 15 and was previously available only on prescription. Under a controversial Government scheme to cut teenage pregnancies, youngsters are asked only basic questions in a brief consultation with a pharmacist. The scheme is operated by eight out of ten local NHS trusts. The Family Education Trust, which produced the report, says the policy is having no effect on pregnancy rates and is actually increasing promiscuity, putting girls at greater risk of sexually transmitted diseases. Disclosures under the FOI Act reveal that 84% of England's 152 NHS trusts allow pharmacies like Boots to hand out the morning-after pill to girls under 16. Some set lower age limits of 12, 13, 14 or 15, but more than half do not. 59% of trusts would consider refusing to licence a new pharmacy unless it promised to provide the pill to children. Family planning clinics issue more than 20,000 morning-after prescriptions to under-16s every year.</p>	03.12.07	The Daily Mail	NHS trusts	Health
<p>Call to end NHS 'lifestyle' surgery Thousands of women are getting breast enlargements, tummy-tucks and nose jobs on the National Health Service. In the past five years almost 2,500 women had plastic surgery at NHS hospitals, at a cost of about £200m. Most have been carried out in Glasgow where, last year, £17m was spent on operations. In the past five years there have been 2,000 breast and tummy-tuck operations. The release of the figures under the FOI Scotland Act coincides with mounting calls from surgeons for a clampdown on cosmetic surgery for non-medical reasons which, they claim, is wasting scarce NHS resources.</p>	26.02.06	The Sunday Times	NHS Scottish Trusts	Health
<p>Fatbuster surgery trebles The numbers of patients having potentially dangerous stomach operations on the Health Service have more than trebled in two years, it was revealed last night. The stomach stapling and gastric banding treatments are seen by many as a quick fix for obesity. But surgeons have warned that up to 1% of such operations end in death, and say long-term healthy eating and physical activity are better solutions. Despite that, figures released under the FOI Act show that the surgery is being provided on the NHS at an unprecedented rate. The statistics, which come from a sample of 16 hospitals trusts that perform stomach surgery, show there were 63 operations in 2003, 107 in 2004 and 216 last year. The operations cost the NHS between £3,000 and £5,000 a time.</p>	08.05.06	The Daily Mail	NHS Hospital trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cosmetic surgery operations for children <p>Amongst the cosmetic surgery procedures conducted in Scotland were three breast operations on under-18s in Aberdeen in 2005, while one teenager had her breasts reduced in the Highlands. There were 11 nose reductions in the Highlands and 10 in Argyll and Clyde, and a further 28 teenagers in Argyll and Clyde had operations to pin back their ears. The youngest child to go under the knife for the ears operation was a patient at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children at Yorkhill, Glasgow, who was younger than five. The figures have been released under the FOI Scotland Act</p>	10.07.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish NHS trusts	Health
Fall in NHS cosmetic surgery <p>More breast reduction operations than breast enlargements have been carried out on the NHS in Plymouth during the past two years, figures released under the FOI act reveal. Just 31 breast enlargement operations were performed in 2005-06 and only 12 in 2006-07, all for medical reasons. By contrast, the numbers of breast reductions, again for medical reasons, were 50 in 2005-06 and 20 the year after.</p>	25.06.07	Plymouth Evening Herald	Local NHS Trusts	Health
NHS losing out as dentistry goes private <p>NHS dentistry faces a £120 million shortfall because the Department of Health wrongly estimated how many patients would contribute to the cost of their treatment. Many people appear to have abandoned the NHS to go private, reducing the amount of money that NHS dentists are able to collect through patient charges. Andrew Lansley, the Shadow Health Secretary, used the FOI Act to seek data for 51 of England's 152 primary care trusts, which pay dentists. He said that nearly all were collecting less patient revenue than they had expected. The deficit for the 51 trusts was more than £41m, which suggested, Mr Lansley said, that the deficit for all 152 trusts would be £120 million. The figures also suggested that since 2005-06 there had been a 6% drop in the level of dental care on the NHS, equivalent to 1.4 million fewer people registered with an NHS dentist.</p>	09.03.04	The Times	NHS primary care trusts	Health
Police investigate dentist <p>Concerns over disgraced Ulster dentist Bruce Kelso were raised as early as 1998 - nearly eight years before he was struck off for fraud and malpractice information released under the FOI Act has shown. In addition, the Eastern Health Board commissioned two investigations and the findings passed to the board in August 1999. These findings were then reported to the then RUC. A subsequent investigation concluded there was not enough evidence to take further action. Now, however, the PSNI is looking into allegations of possible fraud.</p>	06.11.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Health
Gaps in contracts may cost dentists <p>Dentists in South Lakeland and Eden could face financial penalties because they have not delivered on their NHS contracts. Research carried out using the FOI Act, a year after the controversial new General Dental Service Contracts were introduced, has found almost 71% of the county's dental surgeons are missing their targets. And according to private dental plan administrator DPAS, which compiled the figures, the number of dentists under-delivering by more than 25% is almost double the national average.</p>	27.11.07	Westmorland Gazette	Primary Care Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Conquest patient mix-up A son sat for hours holding the hand of an ill elderly woman he thought was his mother - whilst his own mum died in a nearby bed at the Conquest Hospital, a report has revealed. The man failed to notice that nurses had moved the two women, said to look "very similar" during a re-shuffle of the ward at the hospital in Hastings. The mix-up blunder, which happened on Mothering Sunday 2005, meant that the nurses contacted the wrong family to tell them their relative had died. But in fact she was still alive and was being tended to by the son of the dead woman - who did not learn until later that his mother had died alone in a side room. Details of an investigation into the mix-up on a medical ward at the Conquest Hospital, in Hastings, were released under the FOI Act.	12.01.06	Hastings Observer	East Sussex NHS Trust	Health
Operational botches Surgeons across Britain have operated on wrong patients, wrong parts of the body, removed healthy organs and left instruments inside people during operations. The horrors included: A man had the wrong testicle removed - meaning he ended up with none. - The wrong set of lungs were given to a transplant patient with a different blood group. - Holes were drilled into the wrong side of the head of a neurosurgery patient. - A circumcision was carried out on the wrong child because of an address mix up. - A hysterectomy was carried out on the wrong woman after a records mix-up. There were 6,721,280 NHS ops in 2004-05. But negligence cases against the NHS are on the rise with 6,708 claims in 2004-05 compared to 6,251 the previous year. And £503m was paid out in compensation in 2004-05 compared to £423m the year before according to information released under the FOI Act.	06.02.06	The Sun	Strategic health authorities	Health
Doncaster hospital compensation claims top £16m Hospital bosses in Doncaster have paid out more than £16m to patients in the last four years in medical negligence claims. The figure relates to 81 cases that have been settled out of court by Doncaster Royal Infirmary chiefs since 2002. And the information released under the FOI Act also revealed that between 2002 and 2003 the figure paid out rose from £563,684 to £6.8m.	03.03.06	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Royal Infirmary	Health
Radiation overdoses FOI Act requests have revealed that there have been around 200 deaths due to overdoses of radiation in cancer treatment; some of these mistakes have lead to serious injury and death. The figures show there were 211 incidents where patients suffered radiation exposure 20% or more higher than the intended dose in the six years between April 2000 and April 2006, equivalent to one incident every fortnight. It is not known how many of these incidents were fatal.	30.04.06	The Sunday Times	Hospital Trusts	Health
Clinical negligence claims increasing Figures obtained under the FOI Act show an increase in clinical negligence claims against Torbay Hospital over the past decade. The total awarded in damages and legal costs in 2004/05 was over £5.5m and the total for the 10-year period was £17,223,227.	08.05.06	Torquay Herald Express	National health Service Litigation Authority	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Hospitals botch 300 births a year</p> <p>More than 300 babies a year are being left with brain damage because of oxygen starvation caused by lack of proper care at birth. The National Health Service litigation authority, which handles damages claims from hospital patients, has for the first time released data from every hospital in England showing the number of babies damaged by botched deliveries. The accidents are being blamed on staff shortages leading to inadequate monitoring. In the 12 months to April more than 300 families began legal action for severe injuries suffered by their babies. Legal costs and damages for victims reached a high of nearly £ 175m in the last financial year, but the real costs are said to be much higher because special education, nursing care, continuing health problems and social services are not included. In the five years covered by the data there were 2,763 claims. Of the total, 6%-10% are estimated to be from mothers whose reproductive organs were damaged. The figures, released under the FOI Act, come days after a report condemned childbirth services at Northwick Park hospital near Harrow, northwest London, for failures that led to 10 new mothers dying between 2002 and 2005.</p>	27.08.06	The Sunday Times	NHS Litigation Authority	Health
<p>NHS accidents</p> <p>Every week during 2006, someone, somewhere, died as a result of an NHS blunder. Another 1,800 patients, expecting to be made better, were actually made worse by wrong diagnoses or careless treatment. It is estimated that injuries to patients cost the NHS £2 billion a year in compensation and legal fees. In some of the worst cases, the wrong organ was removed in operations and people were given transfusions of the wrong blood type and injected with the wrong drug. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed that more than 2,100 Serious Untoward Incidents (SUIs) - events that could cause serious harm to patients, staff or the public - were reported in 2006. At least 221 - one in 10 - of these so-called SUIs resulted in avoidable deaths. They included a 76-year-old man whose chest cavity was filled with liquid food after a feeding tube was inserted into his lungs instead of his stomach and a pensioner who suffocated after being given just air instead of pure oxygen. Other blunders, while not fatal, had a devastating effect on the victims. For example, one woman underwent chemotherapy and surgery for ovarian cancer only to discover she never had the disease.</p>	19.01.07	The Daily Mirror	DHS	Health
<p>Hospitals release list of errors and problems</p> <p>Local hospitals have revealed a catalogue of problems ranging from equipment failure to delayed diagnosis. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed at least 52 so-called Serious Untoward Incidents (SUIs) have been recorded in Staffordshire and South Cheshire Hospitals during 2006. Incidents included, unexplained deaths, equipment malfunctions, security alerts, incorrect medication an outbreaks of MRSA and Clostridium Difficile.</p>	08.04.07	Stoke Sentinel	Staffordshire and Cheshire NHS Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Patients' unwanted reminders of surgery</p> <p>Two patients a week are leaving hospital with surgical instruments still inside them. Over the last three years, the Health Service has paid £4.3m over a series of claims by patients that doctors have left foreign bodies under their skin. The list of lost implements includes swabs, a catheter, a metal clip and a contraceptive coil, according to data obtained under the FOI Act. There were a total of 283 claims against the NHS in the last three years - nearly two every week. And that figure is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg as there could be hundreds of other people who will never find out about their doctor's mishap.</p>	09.04.07	The Daily Mail	NHS Trusts	Health
<p>Maternity units on list of shame over blunders</p> <p>A dozen maternity units have been named and shamed after new documents revealed a shocking league table based on medical mistakes. Papers from NHS lawyers list 12 hospital trusts who are charged an extra premium for their insurance because of large claims in the past. Just like bad drivers who do not have a no-claims bonus, these maternity units have to pay an extra premium to be part of the Government's medical insurance scheme. The list shows the trusts where experts feel there has been an above-average number of medical negligence claims in the last few years, or where payouts have been larger than expected. They must pay up to £214,541 extra each to belong to the Government's medical insurance scheme. In contrast, good maternity units receive a discount. Documents revealed under the FOI Act show that 12 trusts pay a total of £23.3m to cover themselves against medical negligence claims in their maternity units. Of this, £1.6m is because of their poor claims history.</p>	08.10.07	The Daily Express	The National Health Service Litigation Authority	Health
<p>Extrovert US sperm donors step up to the plate</p> <p>Since the change in the law removing anonymity from donors in April 2005, sperm banks in the UK have run dry. Documents released under the FOI Act reveal that a growing number of Britons are opting for sperm from two US clinics: Xytex Corporation in Atlanta and Fairfax Cryo Bank in Virginia. One clinic said it was receiving up to four calls a day from prospective British patients. Under UK law, only licensed fertility clinics can import and store sperm. They require a special permit from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) for each individual patient. According to the information obtained from the HFEA, last year it issued permits for more than 270 vials of sperm to be imported from these two American banks in 2005. The sperm were used by patients at eight of the 21 fertility centres in Britain, including the London Women's Clinic, Essex Fertility Centre and The Bridge Centre.</p>	07.05.06	The Observer	The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	Health
<p>Fertility clinic scores</p> <p>A Swansea fertility clinic has been handed a "disappointing" score in a league table of the best and worst in Britain. Information released under the FOI Act revealed that it received a "compliance score" of 15 - with 0 being the best rating. The scoring system, which aims to show whether problems still need to be ironed out, saw centres judged on a series of categories. They included the safety of equipment, staff competence and the quality of patient information.</p>	10.01.07	South Wales Evening Post	The Human Fertilization and Embryo Authority	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Fertility clinic league table</p> <p>The fertility clinic with the highest IVF success rate in the country is the worst at meeting standards - including safety procedures - set by the fertility regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. The Assisted Reproduction and Gynaecology Centre, run by Britain's wealthiest doctor, Mohamed Taranissi, ranks the lowest among 77 clinics currently licensed for treatment. Only one other clinic, the Reproductive Genetics Institute in London, scored lower in an HFEA audit, but it no longer has a licence to practise. The league table of the best and worst fertility clinics was published yesterday following a request under the FOI Act. An initial report, published last month, revealed that six clinics were responsible for 23% of the problems found in the fertility sector, but declined to name them.</p>	11.01.07	The Guardian	Human Fertility and Embryo Authority	Health
<p>Scandal of the postcode lottery for IVF couples</p> <p>Couples in Scotland struggling to conceive face a 'postcode lottery' for fertility treatment on the NHS, with some being forced to wait as long as three years. Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show childless couples wait, on average, 18 months for in-vitro fertilisation, which involves eggs being fertilised in the laboratory before being placed inside the womb. Patients referred for treatment in the NHS Highland area have an average wait of only six to nine months. But patients in the Lothians area have an average wait of just under three years.</p> <p>Some boards have cut waiting times, with NHS Grampian patients now waiting 24-30 months, compared to five years two years ago. But they have risen in others. In Lanarkshire, the average waiting time rose to 16 months in 2005, up from 11 months the previous year.</p>	22.04.07	The Mail on Sunday	Scottish health trusts	Health
<p>More hospitals in financial difficulties</p> <p>81 NHS trusts in financial difficulties have been investigated by the accountants KPMG, figures released under the FOI act have revealed. This is far more than the Department of Health acknowledged when it announced the "turnaround teams" of accountants. It said that 50 trusts with financial problems would be visited. The disclosure, and the full list of trusts visited, was obtained by Accountancy Age. They include 20 out of the total of 28 strategic health authorities, 29 primary care trusts, and 33 hospital trusts.</p>	19.01.06	The Times	Department of Health	Health
<p>Private centres 'waste NHS millions'</p> <p>Private health centres are being paid tens of millions of pounds by the NHS for operations that are not happening. Hardly any of the independent centres set up under generous contracts are meeting their targets, an investigation by Health Service Journal has found. But they still get paid, unlike NHS hospitals, which are paid on the basis of how many operations they do. The 20 centres were open by March 2006. Information gathered by the journal from public documents, FOI Act requests and parliamentary answers indicates that so far they are doing only 59% of the operations for which they are contracted.</p>	25.09.06	The Times	NHS Trusts/ Department of Health	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Cost of curing NHS problems has quadrupled</p> <p>The cost of tackling the NHS hospitals deficit crisis is four times higher than the Government originally admitted, according to figures obtained by the Conservative Party. The Department of Health has forced deficit-hit hospitals to pay out at least £10.6m to financial consultants since 2004 to sort out their problems, according to figures obtained under the FOI Act. The fees for the consultants are added to the already existing deficits, further jeopardising frontline care. The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust has had to pay out £1.3m since 2005 on deficit consultants. Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust has paid out £617,360 since April 2006, and West Middlesex University Hospital Trust has spent £500,000.</p>	11.10.06	The Times	NHS trusts	Health
<p>NHS cash crisis may leave it £1 billion in the red</p> <p>Official figures show NHS hospitals and trusts could end the year more than £1 billion in the red. A growing cash crisis at the heart of the health service leaves the future of hospitals around the country in doubt. The Department of Health has predicted the total gross hospital deficit for the year will be £1.18 billion. The number of organisations forecasting deficits has also gone up from 120 to 175 amid a wave of job losses and hospital cuts. The department is being forced to rely on massive surpluses built up in other parts of the NHS to stave off a financial meltdown. In August 2006, the Government predicted the NHS would narrowly avoid going into the red by recording an overall £18m surplus. But the figures, released under the FOI Act, show that the overall net deficit for the NHS is predicted to be £94m.</p>	10.11.06	The Daily Mail	Department of Health	Health
<p>The 13 bankrupt NHS trusts</p> <p>At least a dozen NHS hospital trusts are technically bankrupt, with no chance of meeting a legal obligation to balance their books. Data provided by the Department of Health under the FOI Act showed 103 hospital trusts across England expect to end the year with accumulated deficits of £1.6bn, caused by overspending since 2001. Many are taking corrective action, including laying off staff, closing wards and reducing the time patients spend in hospital. The group in greatest difficulty includes Queen Elizabeth hospital in Woolwich, south-east London, which is on course to overspend by £37.1m this year after racking up deficits totalling £28.3m over the previous two years. This would bring its cumulative deficit by the end of March to £65.3m, equivalent to 56.9% of its turnover. Other trusts with irrecoverable positions include Surrey and Sussex Healthcare, Hinchingsbrooke in Huntingdonshire, Ipswich, North West London and West Hertfordshire.</p>	11.12.06	The Guardian	Department of Health	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>PFI contributes to large deficits of Scottish health boards</p> <p>Money will have to be diverted from patient care throughout the United Kingdom to pay for hospitals constructed under the government's controversial private finance initiative (PFI), a report from the University of Edinburgh has warned. It says that the schemes (now known as public-private partnerships) are already a key factor in NHS deficits and that this problem will escalate as more of these projects are completed. Under PFI, the private sector builds and pays for new hospitals and other healthcare facilities. In return, the NHS pays an annual charge to the private sector—often for 30 years or more. The study by the University's Centre for International Public Health has analysed the situation in Scotland after obtaining data from the Scottish Executive under the FOI Scotland Act. This shows that the NHS will have to pay more than £2.4bn in charges to private companies over the next 30 years for schemes that cost £602m to build.</p>	16.12.06	British Medical Journal	Scottish Executive	Health
<p>NHS repair bills</p> <p>Cash-strapped hospital bosses who asked nurses to work for free face a multi-million pound backlog of "high risk" repair work that puts patients in peril and threatens to disrupt care. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust ran into a political storm yesterday after urging staff to put in an extra day for no pay to help to clear a £5m debt. However, figures released under the FOI Act, reveal that the struggling trust also tops the league of England's "high risk" hospitals. Repairs estimated at £18.5m are needed to bring its crumbling buildings up to scratch. Across England the backlog in repair work for hospitals has grown by almost a third since Labour took office, despite record investment in the health service. The total bill now stands at £3.6 billion.</p>	28.01.07	The Sunday Express	Department of Health	Health
<p>Land clauses that could lose NHS millions on private finance deals</p> <p>Developers will be handed huge swathes of land worth hundreds of millions of pounds, if the NHS fails to maintain a string of controversial Private Finance Initiative contracts, it can be revealed. Five hospitals are being run under PFI deals that give the private-sector partners a land lease extending far beyond the original contracts to provide and maintain NHS buildings. The land at risk was originally valued at more than £500 million but could be worth far more if developed now for housing on the open market, property experts say. Hospitals signed up to contracts lasting up to 60 years, with "break points" at which the National Health Service could terminate the deal. It was never made public that if the NHS does not fulfil the entire contract, the private firms keep the land leases, which could then be used for housing developments. One lease runs for 125 years. The nature of the contracts has been disclosed under the FOI Act.</p>	20.05.07	The Sunday Telegraph	NHS trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>How the great NHS sell-off made millions</p> <p>Health chiefs have netted more than £104m in the past decade by selling off dozens of properties in the Lothians. Documents released through the FOI Scotland Act reveal for the first time precisely how much NHS Lothian has made from the sale of Victorian mansions, acres of development land and city flats. The cash has been used to build new state-of-the-art facilities and provide extra services for patients. NHS Lothian is required to get the best value from the sale of any of its land, and a buoyant property market in the Capital has seen many of its properties sell for well over £1m. The old Royal Infirmary site in Lauriston and the former Gogarburn Hospital (now the Royal Bank of Scotland headquarters) were two of the biggest sales.</p>	19.07.07	Edinburgh Evening News	NHS Lothian	Health
<p>Lives at risk as GPs miss targets</p> <p>Kernow Urgent Care Services (KUCS) has only met the required standard five times out of 49 in the last seven months according to information released under the FOI Act. In August, just over 50% of emergency calls resulted in doctors reaching their home within an hour. The rate is now around 70%, still well short of the 100% target. KUCS, run by international company Serco, which receives some 12,000 calls a month, has never met the target to attend urgent cases within two hours. It has also regularly failed to hit the 100% target for non-urgent cases, which should be attended within six hours.</p>	30.11.06	Western Morning News	Kernow Urgent Care Services	Health
<p>Patients 'at risk from late-night GP failings'</p> <p>Patients' safety is being jeopardised by widespread failings in the out-of-hours GP services in around half of the country's trusts. Figures have revealed that one in three primary care trusts - which run GP surgeries and local clinics - are not meeting the official standards for identifying life-threatening conditions over the phone. Around half of the trusts are failing to answer patients' calls quickly enough, while a quarter are not hitting standards for starting face-to-face consultations on time. Primary care trusts in England deal with just over 50 million patients, which means that as many as 16 million people - a third of the total - could potentially be affected by the failure to meet standards for identifying life-threatening conditions over the telephone. The catalogue of problems was exposed yesterday in figures obtained by the Liberal Democrats under the FOI Act. They focus on the out-of-hours GP services, which became the responsibility of primary care trusts three years ago after many family doctors opted out of offering the service.</p> <p>Growing concerns about the standards of the care on offer are underlined by the Lib Dem figures, which show that 32% of trusts do not meet standards when assessing a patient over the phone to see if they have "immediate life-threatening conditions".</p>	13.09.07	The Daily Telegraph	Primary Care Trusts	Health
<p>Police caring for mentally ill</p> <p>182 people have been taken to Lincolnshire Police cells under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act in 2005/06 according to figures released under the FOI Act. They show that officers detained the 182 individuals after they had been found to be "suffering from a mental disorder" and "in immediate need of care or control" when in a public place.</p>	02.11.06	Lincolnshire Evening News	Lincolnshire Police	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Mentally ill patients offered cash incentive to take drugs</p> <p>Mentally ill patients are being paid by the NHS to take their drugs in a radical experiment to improve compliance according to information released under the FOI Act. Four patients suffering from schizophrenia are receiving between £5 and £15 each time they have a "depot" injection - a long acting drug which is normally given once a month. The payments handed out by the Newham Centre for Mental Health in east London have dramatically improved the patients' adherence to treatment and reduced the time they spend in hospital suffering relapses, and problems with neighbours and the police. But the scheme has been attacked by mental health managers who say it is unethical, coercive and could have a negative effect on the therapeutic relationship.</p>	03.01.07	The Independent	Newham Centre for Mental Health	Health
<p>Overweight patients have a fat chance of 999 rescue</p> <p>Firemen are refusing to pick up fat people during callouts - in case they injure themselves. Firefighters in Fife say they will not pick up obese people for fear of doing themselves damage unless bosses give the go-ahead. The refusal to pick up fat people was revealed in Fife fire service's official policy on attending incidents. The Brigade says NHS staff will no longer be requesting their assistance in moving obese patients following their hard-lined policy aimed at reducing the risk to firefighters. Documents obtained under the FOI Scotland Act include instructions to forces that they should refuse to attend incidents where a person has fallen over in a hospital unless life is in danger. The starkest instructions have come from Fife Fire and Rescue service. While describing the moving of such patients as a "humanitarian service" and something they will respond to, the guidelines spell out the need to de-cline where necessary.</p>	13.01.07	The Daily Express	Fire services	Health
<p>One child in four is obese when they start school</p> <p>A third of children leaving primary school in some areas of the country are overweight, official figures have revealed. A 'snapshot' of the health of the nation's children showed that the young are getting fatter despite Government pledges to act. The latest figures are part of a nationwide survey of children's weight commissioned by the Department of Health. Although the full results will not be known until next Spring, ten primary care trusts have released their results under the FOI Act. These show that on average a quarter of children are already obese or overweight when they start school at the age of five.</p>	08.10.07	The Daily Mail	Primary Care Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Hospitals on 'supersize' alert Hospitals have doubled their spending on "supersize" beds, trolleys and mortuary fridges to cope with increasingly obese patients, writes Laura Donnelly. An investigation of 150 hospital trusts shows the amount spent by the NHS on equipment that can take the weight of increasingly huge patients has risen from £5.8m to £13m in just three years. Hospitals said they were treating increasing numbers of "super-heavy" patients weighing 40 stone and more. Several said they had been forced to ban the heaviest patients from floors which could not take their weight. Data collected by the Liberal Democrats under the FOI Act shows the average hospital spent £60,000 on supersized equipment this year, compared with £30,000 spent three years ago.	14.10.07	The Sunday Telegraph	NHS trusts	Health
Under 16 pregnancies A total of 289 under-16s became pregnant in the last three years in Wales, according to NHS trust figures, released under the FOI Act.	14.05.06	Wales on Sunday	NHS trusts	Health
Conveyor-belt babies In six of the capital's maternity units more than one woman gives birth in the same bed in a day according to information released under the FOI Act.	24.10.06	The Evening Standard	NHS London	Health
Complaints soar about maternity care at top hospital A top London hospital is receiving two complaints a week over its maternity care. The Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead has received 24 official allegations about abusive midwives and mistakes by doctors in the last three months. One mother complained that she was ordered to crawl from a wheelchair onto the operating table while her baby was emerging from the womb. Another said she had to crawl unaided to the lavatory, dragging herself by the curtains down the hall. One midwife has been referred to the Nursing and Midwifery Council over a complaint, but has been allowed to continue practising. The figures, released under the FOI Act, follow an inquest ruling last month that staff at the hospital were guilty of neglect following a string of blunders during the 10-hour delivery of Riley Croft, who died shortly after being born in March 2005.	12.07.07	The Evening Standard	The Royal Free Hospital	Health
Concern over ambulance response times Statistics released under the FOI Act show just how bad ambulance response times to accidents on the A23 are at a time when trauma patients are being taken longer distances to either East Surrey Hospital in Redhill or the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton, which has no helicopter pad. For two months running over the summer of 2006, fewer than 59% of ambulances arrived within the government's response target of eight minutes for a life-threatening call. In October the figure fell to just 57.81%. The Government target for a category A call stipulates that a patient should 'receive an emergency response within 8 minutes irrespective of location in 75% of cases'.	25.01.07	Mid Sussex Times	Sussex NHS	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

999 delays hit rural patients Patients in rural areas are much more likely to face potentially life-threatening delays during medical emergencies than city dwellers according to information released under the FOI Act. Almost 2,000 patients involved in life-or-death emergencies in rural areas during the past year had to wait more than 19 minutes for medical help to arrive. Of the 1,956 emergency patients who waited more than 19 minutes - which is well above the NHS eight-minute target - only 34 were in Plymouth or Exeter.	02.10.07	Western Morning News	Local NHS Trusts	Health
Fury grows over firm's failure to withdraw deadly pacemakers Information released under the FOI Act reveals that there were concerns about a pace-maker fitted to more than 500 people in Britain. The implants, made by the American manufacturer Guidant, are designed to provide electric shocks to revive failing hearts in people with congenital defects. However, the company has been forced to admit that the device has a tendency to short circuit. In a letter from Guidant to British cardiologists, dated June 17, 2005 the company admits that it became aware of problems with short-circuiting in February 2002 and that "changes intended to prevent this failure were made on April 16, 2002". The same letter justifies its decision to continue selling the flawed devices with the seemingly contradictory assertion that it "believed the device to be reliable".	01.01.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Department of Health	Health
Leading hospital did not reveal damning report into heart surgery Heart surgery patients at an elite teaching hospital were exposed to "serious clinical risk", according to a report that was not made public until released under the FOI Act. The hitherto confidential report by Sir Bruce Keogh, one of the most eminent cardiothoracic surgeons in Britain, said facilities for heart patients at St Mary's hospital trust in Paddington in west London, were "almost certainly the worst in the country".	08.01.07	The Guardian	St Mary's Hospital Trust	Health
Surgeons' death rates Scotland's Chief Medical Officer has clashed with the country's Freedom of Information Commissioner after patient mortality rates for almost 1,000 surgeons north of the border were made public yesterday. Harry Burns questioned why the death rates for each surgeon operating in Scotland had been published and said that the data was meaningless because it did not provide details of individual patient cases. Scotland is the first part of the UK to publish the details of how many patients died under the care of every surgeon in Scotland, following a decision by Kevin Dunion, the information commissioner. NHS Scotland had turned down a request for the data from two Scottish newspapers, but they appealed to Mr Dunion, who last year upheld their request. The highest number of patient deaths for 2004-05 was recorded by a surgeon at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness - 41 out of 1,757 patients treated. Forty of them died after being admitted as emergency or transfer patients. Twenty-five patients under the care of a general surgeon at Inverclyde Royal Hospital died out of 1,774 patients treated. A surgeon at Falkirk Royal Infirmary had 22 of his patients die, 21 of them emergency patients, out of a total of 897 patients treated.	07.02.06	The Times	NHS Scotland	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>One in four trainee nurses drop out</p> <p>A quarter of student nurses in Britain quit their training courses before they qualify, costing the health service tens of millions of pounds a year. Data obtained under the FOI Act has revealed that some courses have drop-out rates as high as 50% - almost four times higher than the Government's national estimate. Financial and social pressures have been identified as the main reasons. No official figures are available but the Government believes that the rate is about 14%. However, figures obtained by the journal Nursing Standard suggest a far more dramatic exodus. The publication said that even by conservative estimates the high drop-out rate cost the NHS about £57m a year.</p>	15.02.06	The Times	Various	Health
<p>Nurses give up on trouble-hit NHS 24 helpline</p> <p>Nurses are deserting the controversial NHS 24 helpline that has been heavily criticised for misdiagnoses and delays. Almost a fifth of its staff last year quit the emergency hotline which was blamed last week for the deaths of two patients. Figures obtained under the FOI Act reveal that 248 staff quit NHS 24 last year. Of these, 236 resigned, while eight were dismissed and four left on medical grounds. NHS 24 currently has 1,307 full time and part-time staff.</p>	19.03.06	The Mail on Sunday	NHS Direct	Health
<p>Hospital staff to be given arrest powers</p> <p>Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust is discussing plans with the Metropolitan Police to train staff to be special constables, who will patrol the corridors and wards armed with the powers of a normal police officer. The news comes as statistics obtained under the FOI Act revealed that 205 allegations of theft had been recorded from patients, staff and visitors at Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals in the past five years.</p>	30.03.06	Barnet Times	Barnet and Chase Farms Hospitals NHS Trust	Health
<p>NHS staff working second jobs</p> <p>More than 200 members of staff at NHS Grampian are working second jobs figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show. A total of 76 were trained nurses, while 29 were assistant and auxiliary nurses. Others included: 31 administrative and clerical staff, 48 ancillary workers, 15 allied health professionals, seven technical staff, one maintenance worker, two medical staff and seven pharmacists.</p>	14.04.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	NHS Grampian	Health
<p>500 doctors and nurses off on full pay</p> <p>The NHS is spending millions paying more than 500 doctors and nurses to stay at home. At least 375 nurses, 152 doctors and 35 other clinical staff are suspended on full pay from hospitals and GP surgeries. Campaigners say a number of the cases are just to "get whistleblowers to shut up". The suspensions cost the NHS up to £100m a year - a fifth of the £500m it overspent in 2005. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show doctors with lifesaving skills are paid to stay at home as trusts cancel operations and lay off thousands to balance the books.</p>	10.07.06	The Mirror	All primary care trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Complaints against NHS staff double Almost 4,000 official complaints were raised against Scottish NHS workers in 2005/06, more than double the number from the previous year according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. Issues raised include complaints about the attitude and behaviour of staff, their competence, the clinical treatment they provided and their ability to communicate with patients and their families.	10.09.06	Scotland on Sunday	Scottish NHS Trusts	Health
An NHS Little Earner Hospitals are wasting up to £300m a year hiring stand-in doctors and nurses to cover staff shortages. The money - more than half the £500m the NHS overspent last year - could build six new hospitals, pay for 15,000 courses of the breast cancer drug Herceptin or train 6,000 nurses. One struggling NHS trust last year even paid almost £3,000 to a doctor for a single day's work. Private agencies are making profits of more than £8m a year while a third of NHS trusts are forecasting losses totalling almost £1.2bn. Private nursing agencies charge the NHS up to 65% in commission, while some agency nurses are paid up to 10 times the basic rate for NHS nurses.	27.11.06	The Mirror	Individual NHS trusts	Health
£10m for agency staff Cash-strapped South Yorkshire hospitals are spending millions of pounds on agency doctors and nurses to plug gaps in health services. The region's hospitals paid out almost £10m covering staff shortages, vacancies and holidays between November 2005 and November 2006. Figures released under the FOI Act show hospitals in Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley paid more than £27,000 a day to agencies for "bank" staff.	08.01.07	Sheffield Star	Local NHS Trusts	Health
NHS crisis spreads to health visitors Training places for health visitors have been cut by 40% in the past year as the NHS struggles to cope with its financial crisis. The official figures were released yesterday in response to an FOI Act request from health union Amicus.	24.02.07	The Daily Mail	NHS trusts	Health
1 in 5 NHS staff are 'bullied' Huge numbers of doctors and nurses are being bullied at work. Nearly a fifth of NHS staff experience threats and victimisation from bosses and the public. Almost a quarter say they intend to leave the NHS within the next few months. And the Executive survey, released under the FOI Scotland Act, found that just 43% of staff think the NHS is a good place to work.	17.03.07	The Sun	Scottish Executive	Health
Patients die in ambulances with no paramedics on board In some areas of the country only 35% of ambulance service staff are fully trained paramedics according to figures released under the FOI Act. Ambulance staff say pressure to meet the government's eight-minute target for responding to life-threatening calls has resulted in "technicians" being sent instead. A patient's chance of being treated by a paramedic depends on where they live. In Wales and the West Midlands, 61% of ambulance staff are paramedics. In Yorkshire 43% of staff are paramedics and the figure drops to 35% in London.	15.04.07	The Sunday Times	Ambulance trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Mothers miss a 'friend' as health visitors decline</p> <p>The Victorian invention of 'mothers' friends', advisers who have helped generations of parents to cope with newborn babies, is in danger of disappearing, new research reveals. Health visitors, as they are better known, are hugely popular because they give shell-shocked new mothers and fathers useful tips on how to get a child to eat, sleep and use a potty. But two new reports out today warn that the service, a key part of Britain's tradition of universal healthcare, is in steep decline. A survey by the National Family and Parenting Institute reveals that the number of health visitors in England fell from 9,800 to 9,000 last year.</p> <p>FOI Act requests to England's 152 primary care trusts also found huge regional disparities. Health visitors in Doncaster, for example, look after 167 children aged under five on average, while in Redbridge, Essex, they are each responsible for 1,143 under-fives.</p>	15.04.07	The Observer	Primary care trusts.	Health
<p>Baby care in nurse crisis</p> <p>The lives of Scotland's sickest babies are being put at risk because there are not enough nurses to care for them, a study has revealed. Specialist centres that treat children who are born too soon, too small or too ill to cope on their own are 200 nurses short. A total of 8,000 babies - one in seven - are born prematurely every year, but not one neonatal unit is working within the recommended minimum nursing levels. Premature baby charity BLISS, which obtained the figures using the FOI Scotland Act, said lives were being lost because of the "critical" staff shortage.</p>	01.11.07	The Daily Mirror	Scottish NHS trusts	Health
<p>Call for testing as thousands carry superbug into hospital</p> <p>At least 100,000 people admitted to hospital each year are unknowing carriers of the MRSA superbug, putting other patients with open wounds at risk of potentially fatal bloodstream infections, research suggests. Data from 63 of the 174 acute NHS trusts of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) occurrence, obtained by the Conservatives under the FOI Act, reveal 34,432 hospital cases in 2004. Few hospitals calculate total MRSA incidence and none publishes the results. The Government collects only figures for bloodstream cases - the potentially deadly form of the infection - of which there were 7,647 in 2004.</p>	06.02.06	The Times	NHS trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

New superbug threat <p>New statistics on MRSA reveal that 7,600 hospital patients tested positive for the bug. The figures confirm an increase to almost 600 in the number of people with an infection in their bloodstream. The figures from hospitals released under the FOI Act also show two other dangerous infections are common in hospitals. Clostridium difficile has been found in 1,269 patients at 32 hospitals. This bacterium is linked to patients taking antibiotics and it is known to cause several million cases of diarrhoea. But it can kill if antibiotic treatment fails to destroy the bacteria. VRE is the name of another infection which is resistant to one of the most powerful antibiotics, vancomycin. It is commonly found among patients who have been in hospital for long periods for transplant and kidney dialysis. Almost 452 cases have been found in 22 hospitals and the intensive care unit at Cavan General Hospital was forced to close recently after the bug was discovered there.</p>	06.07.06	The Daily Mail	Hospital Trusts	Health
Superbug Super Compensation Rise <p>The NHS paid out £5m in the past two years following a tenfold increase in claims from patients who contracted a superbug, figures published under the FOI Act show. By comparison, the NHS paid out only £450,000 in the previous two years. There have been 55 successful claims by patients who said they had suffered a "hospital-acquired infection", up from 13 in the previous two-year period.</p>	28.12.06	The Daily Express	NHS	Health
Hospitals beating deadly superbugs <p>Cases of the superbug clostridium difficile are falling in the region as hospitals invest in battling the potentially deadly bacteria. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that there has been a drop in the incidence of C. difficile in four Merseyside hospitals between 2005 and 2006.</p>	13.03.07	Liverpool Daily Post	Local NHS trusts	Health
Hospital rampage of killer bug <p>Up to 26,000 cases of Clostridium difficile (C. diff) have gone unreported in the past three years because of a loop-hole in the way data is collected. It means it infects eight times as many patients MRSA does and kills twice as many. At present, NHS trusts in England are only asked to record C. diff in patients aged over 65. Data held by the Health Protection Agency shows 55,000 cases of C. diff last year, leading to 3,807 deaths in England. However, the latest figures show more than 66,000 people were infected with the bug, which led to 4,752 deaths. There were also 32,707 cases in Scotland and Wales in the past three years. Figures obtained under the FOI Act suggest that one in six cases have gone unreported in England.</p>	31.05.07	The Daily Express	NHS trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>More Scots fall prey to MRSA in community</p> <p>More and more Scots are catching the potentially fatal MRSA superbug without ever visiting a hospital. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show that NHS Grampian has dealt with 2,295 cases of MRSA at its hospitals across the north-east in the last three-and-a-half years. But the authority warned that the figures related to MRSA being identified - not contracted - at its hospitals, and said it was seeing an increasing number of cases where the bug is picked up from outside its premises.</p>	10.08.07	Aberdeen Press and Journal	NHS Grampian	Health
<p>Superbugs kill 116 at one NHS Trust</p> <p>Superbugs killed 116 patients at hospitals run by a single NHS trust. The horrifying toll tops the 90 deaths at a Kent trust blasted in an official probe three weeks ago. The figures for the St George's NHS Trust in South West London were released under the FOI Act. They showed 95 people died after catching dreaded C.diff - the clostridium difficile bug - over the last three years. Another 21 were killed by MRSA. The scandal was uncovered by would-be Tory MP Mark Clarke.</p>	01.11.07	The Sun	St George's NHS Trust	Health
<p>Mums-to-be forced to head for Brum</p> <p>Maternity treatment for overseas patients is on the increase, and is costing many hospitals more than £100,000 a year according to information released under the FOI Act.</p>	01.01.06	The Sunday Mercury	NHS Trusts	Health
<p>Health tourists from America cut deep into NHS budget</p> <p>American visitors have been identified as the biggest "health tourists" to Scotland, owing thousands of pounds to the NHS in unpaid medical bills. Health boards have instructed debt collection agencies throughout the United States and Canada to recover fees from dozens of people who were treated in our hospitals but left without paying. But their efforts are often in vain. One American owes almost £30,000 for treatment she received nine years ago from NHS Lothian. And it is almost certain that her debt will eventually be written off. Under NHS guidelines, medical treatment is provided free to everyone resident in the UK, regardless of nationality or origin. It is also extended to the many millions of people who now constitute part of the EC, under a reciprocal agreement. Foreign visitors from outwith the EC are still allowed free life-saving treatment here if they are admitted to an Accident and Emergency unit while here. But new figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show that many health boards struggle to obtain payment from foreigners who are not covered by an insurance policy. Guidelines issued to health boards stress that the patient must always come before payment. It states: "The recovery of income is secondary and the patient's need for care must always take priority over NHS charges." NHS Lothian has an accumulated debt of £130,343, owed by people living all over the world. By far, the biggest group of debtors are citizens of the United States, a pattern repeated in the accounts of other health boards in Scotland.</p>	05.06.06	The Express	NHS trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Health tourists cost £660,000 Figures released under the FOI Act to an individual requestor have revealed that more than 130 overseas patients who received treatment at the Leicester's hospitals in the past two years have returned home and not paid their bills.	09.08.06	Leicester Mercury	University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	Health
'Health tourists' leave tens of millions in NHS bills unpaid More than a third of the money spent by the NHS on treating "health tourists" last year has not been repaid. Tens of millions of pounds are outstanding because patients from outside the European Union, who are ineligible for free treatment, have not settled bills. The problem persists, despite an attempt to crack down on it by the Department of Health in 2004. A survey of 106 hospitals, ranging from large trusts in cities to smaller district general hospitals, revealed that treatment valued at £27m was given to ineligible patients in 2005. Of that, more than £10m has not been repaid. If, as is likely, the trend is repeated across more than 200 NHS hospital trusts in Britain, the cost would exceed £50m and the value of the unpaid bills would be more than £20m. There are fears that the true cost may be higher. Previous estimates have suggested that "health tourism" costs the taxpayer as much as £200m a year. The figures, obtained by Andrew Lansley, the shadow health secretary, under the FOI Act, provide the first official, country-wide picture of the cost of health tourism.	01.10.06	The Sunday Telegraph	NHS trusts	Health
Health tourists may deny NHS patients kidneys Health tourists are receiving free National Health Service kidney treatment worth about £30,000 a year, and potentially competing with British patients for scarce transplants, according to new data. The information, released under the FOI Act, shows that one hospital is spending up to £1m a year on dialysis for nearly 40 non British residents; another has placed two asylum seekers on its waiting list for transplants and a third has recovered only 2% of its costs from overseas patients.	07.01.07	The Sunday Times	Health Trusts	Health
Patients waiting up to four years for hip surgery Some patients are being forced to wait up to four years for hip replacements on the National Health Service despite a guarantee that delays should be no more than six months. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show that patients have experienced delays of up to 1,435 days for operations. The longest delays are in Dumfries and Galloway, Lanarkshire and Glasgow.	21.05.06	The Sunday Times	Scottish NHS Trusts	Health
5 year wait for hearing-aid Patients are being forced to wait up to five years for an NHS hearing aid figures released under the FOI Act ⁶ have shown. The longest delay for modern digital devices which can massively improve hearing is in the Blackpool area. Hospitals in the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Trust take 260 weeks to replace the old-fashioned aids with digital ones. At Bromley Hospital in Kent, patients wait more than two years for a test to get even an older aid. Across the country the picture is bleak with an average waiting time of 41 weeks for any device.	10.01.07	The Daily Mirror	NHS Trusts	Health

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Probe into hospital's 'hidden' waiting list Scotland's Health Minister will probe allegations that patients were removed from waiting lists because staff shortages made it hard for a Glasgow hospital to meet official targets. People waiting for hip and knee operations in one part of the city were not treated within the Scottish Executive's guaranteed time of six months. Their treatment was deemed 'highly specialised', allowing health bosses to exclude them from official figures. Mull of Kintyre GP Jim Finlayson raised concerns about Glasgow waiting lists after several of his patients were kept waiting longer than the target time for their operations. One of his patients was told the delay was because their case had been classified as an Availability Status Code (ASC) four. ASCs are given to patients who miss appointments, exempting them from waiting time guarantees. Code four applies to specialist treatment, which is exempt from the six-month target. Using the FOI Scotland Act, Dr Finlayson found that between July and December last year, there were 87 knee replacements at Glasgow's Southern General, but 46 patients were given a code four. At Glasgow Royal Infirmary, however, which does not have staff shortages, there were 239 knee operations and no ASCs.	28.02.07	The Daily Mail	Glasgow NHS hospital trusts	Health
Hundreds left with long wait in two-tier cancer list Hundreds of cancer patients, excluded from government waiting times, can wait twice or even three times as long to start vital treatment as those in the official queue. The key difference between the two groups is the way they were referred to hospital by their GP. Only those urgently referred qualify for the government's target of starting treatment within two months. However, the figures, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show that every year well over 1000 people who were not urgently referred to hospital were diagnosed with breast and bowel cancer alone.	15.10.07	Glasgow Herald	NHS Scotland	Health
Scottish Executive crashes Vehicles used on Scottish Executive business were involved in more than 80 accidents in less than two years, figures released under the FOI Scotland Act have revealed. The incidents between January 2004 and November 2005 led to repairs that cost £37,362 and third-party claims worth £12,803. Claims against third parties brought in £8,822. In more than 30 of these accidents there was no other vehicle involved.	22.03.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish Executive	Health and Safety
Legal aid for Hatfield crash companies The two companies that were fined £13.5m as a result of the Hatfield Rail crash have been given tax payers money to fund their legal defence according to information released under the FOI Act. This cost the tax payer, £20.9m, was for the costs associated with the charges of which they were found not guilty. It was the judge who ordered that these costs should come from central funds.	28.05.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Department of Transport	Health and Safety
Shell accused over oil rig safety Shell was fined £900,000 for breaches of safety codes in the north sea. The documents from the Health and Safety Executive, released under the FOI Act, appear to back up claims by a senior consultant to the company that Shell's standards are not sufficiently safety conscious.	23.06.06	The Guardian	Health and Safety Executive	Health and Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Local health and safety statistics In 2003/04, 12 companies were fined a total of £95,000, for breaches of health and safety legislation, in 2004/05, 13 companies were fined a total of £286,250. Despite the big rise in fines, the figures, released under the FOI Act, show that the total number of injuries in Coventry and Warwickshire reported to the HSE has fallen slightly, from 2,800 in 2003/04 to 2,635 in 2004/05.	14.09.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Health and Safety Executive	Health and Safety
It's not safe to work for the HSE The inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive, and the offices in which they work, appear to attract mishaps and slip-ups with unnerving regularity. Falling lavatory-roll dispensers, flea-bites and ill-fitting safety shoes were among hundreds of incidents involving the organisation's 3,500 employees. One minor injury was also reported after someone walked into a warning sign. According to data released under the FOI Act, there were more than 500 accidents and injuries in a 3-year period. The rate equates to one incident almost every two working days and far exceeds sectors such as heavy industry, farming and vehicle repairs. Inspectors were injured 96 times between April 2003 and September last year. There were a further 415 injuries on the executive's premises, 72 of which were to visitors. There were 154 slips, trips or falls. A wet tea-room floor was responsible for one employee suffering a groin strain and another slipped on a plastic bag and pulled a hamstring. Other examples included slipping on a raisin and tripping over a bin.	10.02.07	The Times	Health & Safety Executive	Health and Safety
HSE told to step up workplace legal action The workplace safety watchdog should prosecute three times as many cases as it does, campaigners said yesterday citing internal audit results released under the FOI Act. The Centre for Corporate Accountability bases its estimate on "peer review panel" scrutiny of a sample of incidents dealt with by Health & Safety Executive and local authority inspectors last year. Broad conclusions of the internal audit team had been made public but not the details of its investigation. Documents released after an FOI request show that after considering 126 sample cases, the team thought that a prosecution was "probably appropriate" in 19 instances compared with the seven that were acted upon. Moreover, the audit panel said it felt there were 18 cases that merited "significantly stronger action". There was none in which they felt an inspector had been overzealous.	25.04.07	The Financial Times	Health & Safety Executive	Health and Safety
Council's 'danger list' Thugs, drug users and sex pests are among nearly 100 people in the York area on a council "danger list". Information from York Council's Staff Warning Register, released under the FOI Act indicates that 93 individuals are deemed to pose a threat to council employees after committing offences including assault, threats of violence, racial abuse and sexual misbehaviour. They include 86 men, and seven women, including one under 18. There are a further 63 properties deemed to present a risk to council staff, for reasons including dangerous dogs, drugs paraphernalia, or unidentified dangerous people being there.	27.04.07	York Evening Press	York City Council	Health and Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Poor hygiene at care home</p> <p>A report released under the Environmental Information Regulations has revealed that a care home in York was so dirty and damaged that managers had to be hauled before top council bosses. Hygiene inspectors visited the Care Home, in Gale Lane, Acomb in Autumn 2006. Trisha Haswell, senior environmental health officer at City of York Council subsequently wrote in a report: "The premises were in a very poor state of cleanliness and repair." She said there were problems that had not been resolved since her previous visit six months earlier. Floors were dirty and torn; staff were failing to keep proper records of work; everyday kitchen items were dirty; and a number of food containers not clean enough. Home managers were summoned to a formal interview at City of York Council headquarters, and interviewed under caution. The home managers were advised to seek legal advice, and the interview was recorded in line with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. The matter culminated in the home being given a formal caution due to the cleaning offences.</p>	30.07.07	York Press	York City Council	Health and Safety
<p>Ex-factory staff in fight over 'asbestos deaths'</p> <p>Ex-employees of Golden Wonder's Broxburn factory in West Lothian have long been concerned by the high number of deaths from cancer and respiratory illness among their ex-colleagues. But there has been little evidence to link any of the deaths to the sufferers' work at the factory. A former worker, whose mother worked at the plant and died of lung cancer, has used the FOI Scotland Act to uncover witness statements from a 20-year-old incident. The statements, which have convinced MP Michael Connarty to back the fight, suggest some factory staff might have been exposed to asbestos. It is hoped the testimony will be enough to convince the Health and Safety Executive to launch an inquiry into his concerns.</p>	05.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Health and Safety Executive	Health and Safety
<p>MoD pays out £16m to asbestos victims</p> <p>Workers poisoned by asbestos at Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth have been paid nearly £16m in compensation over the last five years, the Ministry of Defence has revealed. Plymouth has among the highest rates in the country of asbestos-related illness because of the Royal Navy dockyard, where asbestos was used widely both on ships and in buildings. A lack of proper health and safety precautions meant hundreds of workers inhaled tiny asbestos fibres resulting in a range of lung diseases from pleural plaques to the fatal cancer mesothelioma. Figures released by the MoD under the FOI Act revealed that it settled 918 claims for asbestos-related illnesses from 2001 to 2006. It paid out £15.9m in compensation, including £2.9m to people killed by or suffering mesothelioma, claims of which have risen from none in 2001/02 to 21 in 2005/06. The highest amount paid, involving a case of mesothelioma, was £484,000 in 2005-06. The lowest, of £100, involved pleural plaques. Compensation to ex-Devonport workers represented almost half the MoD's payouts to asbestos victims in the past five years. In all, it received 3,095 claims from 2001 to 2006, settling 1,622. Payments totalled £32.5m.</p>	30.04.07	Western Morning News	Ministry of Defence	Health and Safety

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Record numbers of firefighters off sick with stress Record numbers of Scots firefighters are unable to work because they are suffering from stress-related disorders. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show that psychological illness led to the loss of 6556 working days in the Strathclyde area alone during 2005, at a cost of £458,920. This is a four-fold increase on 2002, when 1445 days were lost and £101,150 was paid out to cover the absences of stressed-out staff. In almost every region over the past five years, the number of firefighters off with stress either increased or stayed level. It is estimated that the national stress bill is approaching £1m.	09.04.06	The Sunday Herald	Scottish Fire Services	Health and Safety
Hoax callers cost fire services £1m Fire crews in Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham spent the equivalent of four-and-a-half days tackling false fires in 2005 according to information released under the FOI Act. The 442 hoax calls attended by the Fire Brigade in the four boroughs cost it around £862,000.	10.05.06	News Shopper	Local Fire Services	Health and Safety
Fire engines too slow More than a quarter of fire engines sent to incidents around Radlett have missed their attendance targets since the village's fire station was closed. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show the attendance times of every call-out in Radlett, Aldenham, Borehamwood, Elstree, Shenley and Park Street (the area formerly covered by the retained station) between its closure in September and the end of December.	01.03.07	Borehamwood Times	Hertfordshire Fire Brigade	Health and Safety
Names that failed to win a blue plaque English Heritage's (blue) plaque selection committee's decisions for 2005 released under the FOI Act reveal those properties proposed for a blue plaque. Forty nominees were turned down and 26 were approved. A further 24 were "shortlisted". The majority of those rejected were denied on the grounds that they are not of significant-enough historical interest. However, English Heritage estimates that the present-day owners of their homes refusing permission to have a blue plaque put up veto 10% of proposals.	20.03.06	The Evening Standard	English Heritage	Historic Buildings

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Maxwell faced war crime inquiry Robert Maxwell was being investigated for war crimes in the months before he mysteriously drowned 15 years ago. The police were preparing a case against the former British Army Captain and were questioning members of his former regiment. Maxwell is alleged to have killed an unarmed German civilian on April 2, 1945. In a letter to his wife, published in a biography by Joe Haines in 1988, Maxwell recounted how he had shot the Mayor of a German town after German tanks fired on his regiment. The War Crimes Act 1991, enacted six months before Maxwell's body was found in the Atlantic, allowed investigations into war criminals. After a member of the public complained about the alleged shooting incident, two officers from the historic war crimes unit of the Metropolitan Police began tracing members of his platoon. However, they were unable to corroborate the shooting reports before he died. Police files released under the FOI Act state: "The reported circumstances of the shooting gave rise to an allegation of War Crimes. To some extent, the reporting of the shooting incident were confirmed by Mr Maxwell in an interview he gave in 1988 to the journalist Brian Walden." According to files released yesterday, the Crown Prosecution Service "determined that the case could be progressed no further and it was closed in March 1991".</p>	10.03.06	The Independent	Metropolitan Police	Historical
<p>Waffen SS medics for Birmingham hospital? Birmingham health chiefs offered hospital jobs to suspected Nazi war criminals, documents released under the FOI Act have revealed. The medics were soldiers in the Ukrainian 14th Waffen SS Galizien Division, which was accused of being involved in the massacre of men, women and children as young as three in Poland. As prisoners of war, they were controversially given refuge in Britain in 1947. A year later, Birmingham's Public Health Department sought to employ them as orderlies at a military hospital in Shugborough, Staffordshire. Now it is believed that Scotland Yard is investigating the soldiers' secret links with the Midlands as part of a renewed inquiry into war criminals.</p>	19.03.06	The Sunday Mercury		Historical
<p>Britain's secret plan to bomb China Britain was prepared for nuclear retaliation against China in the event of an attack on Hong Kong, top-secret documents have revealed. Letters circulated to Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister at the height of the Cold War in 1961, recommended nuclear force, provided by the Americans, as the only alternative to abandoning the island colony if China attacked. As a prelude to negotiations in the colony by Lord Mountbatten of Burma, the Chief of Defence Staff and ministers discussed the delicate task of ensuring that the Chinese understood that, were they to attack, retaliation would involve the US dropping nuclear bombs. At the same time, the Government was keen to avoid the impression that Hong Kong was becoming merely a military outpost of the US, though Britain relied on its ally as an effective deterrent. The secret records of the Prime Minister's office between 1957 and 1961 were made public yesterday by the National Archives, in response to a request under the FOI Act.</p>	30.06.06	The Times	The National Archives	Historical

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Honorary degrees Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal the numbers of honorary degree offers from Scottish universities that were turned down and the nominee's reasons for doing so.	23.07.06	Scotland on Sunday	Scottish universities	Honours
Increase in party donors nominated for peerages The number of donors who were nominated for peerages by political parties has risen markedly. BBC's Newsnight programme said there appeared to be "an explosion" in the number after the Labour and Tory parties hit financial trouble due to the huge amounts spent to fight the 2005 general election. The connection between donations and peerages has been scrutinised by Scotland Yard detectives for the past seven months, in an investigation now believed to be drawing to a close. The latest figures were disclosed under the FOI act by the Lords Appointments Commission, which vets nominations. In the 27 months between July 2003 and October 2005, the two parties nominated eight donors to become members of the House of Lords. In the nine months between October 2005 and July this year, they nominated 11 donors.	20.10.06	The Guardian	Lords Appointments Commission	Honours
Battling peers fall out over a house in Monaco One of the Conservative party's biggest donors misled parliamentary watchdogs when he was being vetted for a peerage, according to official papers released under the FOI Act. In April 2004, Lord Laidlaw told Lord Stevenson, the head of the House of Lords appointments commission, that he "would inform" the tax authorities he would become a British resident four days after the meeting. On this basis, Stevenson agreed to recommend Laidlaw, Britain's 79th richest man, whose wealth is valued at £730m in The Sunday Times Rich List, to the prime minister for a peerage, which was then granted in summer 2004. However, in a letter sent by Laidlaw to Stevenson last month, the Tory peer admits he did not become a British resident as promised and continues to live in the tax haven of Monaco.	22.04.07	The Sunday Times	House of Lords	Honours
Cost of honours inquiry Scotland Yard have disclosed, as a result of an FOI Act request, that the "cash-for-honours" investigation had cost £773,177 between its launch on 27 March 2006 and 30 April 2007, when papers were submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service. The cost could rise further because detectives have been asked to undertake further inquiries.	06.06.07	The Independent	Metropolitan police	Honours
Papers reveal why Stein not honoured Jock Stein received no honour after Celtic became the first British club to win the European Cup in 1967. Matt Busby was knighted when he managed Manchester United to success in the same competition the following year. Stein had to wait until 1970, after Celtic had lost the European Cup final to Feyenoord, to be made a CBE. Now government papers released under the FOI Scotland Act show that Stein was in line for a knighthood in 1967 but his name was removed because government officials were concerned giving him such an award would not look good after the violent clashes in the World Club championship match between Celtic and Racing Club in Montevideo in November 1967.	02.07.07	The Sunday Times	The Scottish Executive	Honours

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>O2 gave freebies to 15 police and fire chiefs</p> <p>O2 lavished the nation's emergency services bosses with hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of invitations to major sporting events according to information released under the FOI Act. O2's lavish treatment of emergency services chiefs began after the Home Office's Police Information Technology Office signed a 19-year, £2.9billion contract with BT in February 2000, before O2 split from BT. Individual police forces then signed up. Among the recipients were senior officers from Avon and Somerset, Wiltshire, Bedfordshire, City of London, Gwent, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire Police as well as senior fire officers from Lancashire, Shropshire and North Yorkshire.</p>	07.05.06	The Mail on Sunday	Police and Fire services	Hospitality
<p>VIP airport suites</p> <p>The Foreign office pays £2.6m for the suites at Heathrow and £350,000 a year for the suite at Gatwick for the use of travelling VIPs, including government ministers figures released under the FOI Act have shown.</p>	11.06.06	The Sunday Mirror	Foreign office	Hospitality
<p>Agency spent £25k a week on hospitality binge</p> <p>Bosses at the former Welsh Development Agency ran up a £25,000/week bill wining and dining business executives, figures released under the FOI Act have revealed. Hospitality spending increased by 67% in five years and in 2005-06 reached £1,297,000 (£232,000 more than in 2004-05 and £522,000 more than 2001-02).</p>	09.04.07	South Wales Echo	Welsh Assembly	Hospitality
<p>SNP backers 'entertained at expense of taxpayers'</p> <p>In Scottish terms, it was as exclusive a dinner-party guest list as you could wish for, since it included the most famous living Scotsman and a group of leading business figures whose personal wealth is measured in millions. But the list that was published yesterday left Alex Salmond, the First Minister, facing the damaging charge that he had been using his official residence to entertain SNP financial backers at the taxpayers' expense. The dinner, held on June 29 at Bute House, Edinburgh, was to honour Sir Sean Connery, whose Nationalist sympathies and past financial support for the SNP are no secret. The cost of the meal, which included tomatoes on bruschetta, wild sea bass with salsa verde and torta di limone, was £1,446. Attending with Sir Sean and Lady Connery were Sir Tom Farmer, the Kwik-Fit entrepreneur, and Brian Souter, the founder of Stagecoach, and their respective wives. Sir Tom and Mr Souter bankrolled the SNP election campaign this year with donations totalling £ 600,000. Also dining with the First Minister were Sir George Mathewson, the former chairman and chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and Crawford Beveridge, the former head of Scottish Enterprise, who each gave their backing to the Nationalist campaign, with their wives. The list was revealed after a request under the FOI Scotland Act. The Scottish Executive had previously refused to name those who were invited to the event.</p>	06.11.07	The Times	Scottish Executive	Hospitality

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£15,000 On Tea And Biscuits Bristol City Council spent £15,204 on tea, coffee and biscuits for committee meetings between April 2004 and March 2005 according to figures released under the FOI Act. That sum is more than two-and-a-half times greater than the £5,827 spent on biscuits and drinks over the same period between 2003 and 2004. Including sandwich buffets, juice, mineral water and cake, hungry committee members consumed food and drink worth more than £28,000 in total - while just over £9,000 provided full council meetings with refreshments. The total spent on refreshments - including tea, coffee and buffets for full council meetings and the Lord Mayor's engagements - rocketed to £46,488 – almost £10,000 more than the 2003/04 year.</p>	12.01.06	Bristol Evening Post	Bristol City Council	Hospitality
<p>Councils blow £2.5m for fun Local authorities, set to impose huge council tax increases on householders across Scotland, ran up an entertainment bill for £2.5m last year. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that councils spent more than £48,000 a week on wining and dining staff, politicians and local dignitaries. Taxpayers in East Renfrewshire were landed with a £25,000 bill for the ceremony to make Alex McLeish, the Barrhead-born manager of Rangers, an honorary freeman. A golf tournament for celebrities and politicians at Carnoustie and other events to mark Tartan Day set taxpayers in Angus back more than £15,000. They also paid £400 for a finger buffet in honour of the Scottish Association of Magical Societies.</p>	01.06.06	The Sunday Times	Individual local authorities	Hospitality
<p>Manchester's entertainment bill Manchester council spent nearly £1,500 on a party for one of the richest hotel chains in the world. Town hall chiefs spent £1,470 on food and drink to celebrate the opening of the Hilton Hotel on Deansgate. Documents released under the FOI Act showed a further £708 was spent entertaining rugby's Premiership champions, Sale Sharks. The figures show that overall the council spent £141,193 on entertaining in 2006. In July, £1,728 was spent unveiling a portrait of Margaret Ashton, Manchester's first female councillor. Other costs included £5,000 on the Irish Festival launch, £4,204 on a St George's Day reception and £895 on a reception for Muslim clerics. A sum of £603 was spent on Lord Mayor James Ashley's funeral in September and £469 on the Christmas lights switch-on celebration.</p>	22.01.07	Manchester Evening News	Manchester Council	Hospitality
<p>Council sold corroding houses A pensioner used the FOI Scotland Act to obtain documents relating to condemned homes in Cumbernauld. A document drafted by a Cumbernauld Development Corporation engineer and sent to the corporation's Sales Department in 1985 stated that the housing in question was corroding owing to the use of calcium chloride in its construction. However, this did not prevent the CDC from selling the houses on through Right to Buy legislation. For the last six years, the owner-occupiers have been desperately worried about the financial implications of being re-housed, after it emerged that the individual compensation packages offered would not be sufficient to fund the move to new housing.</p>	07.04.06	Cumbernauld News	Scottish Homes	Housing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cost of introducing HIPS Ministers have spent £6m on external consultants to advise on the planned Home Information packs, according to data released under the FOI Act. The figures reveal additional spending of £297,000 on consumer research; £112,000 on "stakeholder events"; and £95,000 on "information to stakeholders".	03.03.07	The Financial Times	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Housing
'Secret' homes list revealed Playing fields and homes for the elderly head a confidential list of county council-owned sites in Oxford that could be used for housing. The list includes the council's main offices - County Hall, Speedwell House and Macclesfield House, Cowley Marsh and Northway playing fields, Ormerod special needs school and a greenfield site in Grandpont. With consultation under way on where new homes should be built in the city, the CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) used the FOI Act to get Oxford City Council to release the list of potential development sites it asked the county council to draw up.	31.05.07	Oxford Times	Oxford City Council	Housing
New call to fill up city's empty council houses Calls are being made to hasten the filling up of empty council houses in Cardiff after it was revealed that more than 200 were lying unoccupied. Conservative councillor Jon Burns called for action after being told in an answer to an FOI Act request that 511 households in the capital were homeless.	12.06.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Housing
Council staff accused over homes fraud A corruption investigation at a Yorkshire council uncovered evidence that council houses were renovated for staff and their friends. The inquiry by Leeds Council found evidence that an employee ordered a £6,000 revamp on a property he was moving into. The same worker later allegedly moved into a four-bedroom council house, which had just been fitted with a new bathroom, kitchen, central heating and electrics costing £18,000, according to a report. In another instance work amounting to £8,000 was carried out on a council property, allegedly at the request of an employee for one of his colleagues. Although there were several allegations, the evidence uncovered by auditors led to only one member of staff being sacked for a single instance of corruption which related to the fitting of a shower unit. The revelations are contained in an internal audit report released under the FOI Act.	19.06.07	Yorkshire Post	Leeds Council	Housing
Builders hand over money to help the public House builders have handed £6m to help North-East projects in the last three years. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that £977,313 was given to Aberdeen City Council in "planning gain" (money used to offset the impact of the new houses on roads and other community facilities). In Aberdeenshire (where the bulk of the North-east's new housing has been built) planners received almost £5m.	27.06.07	Aberdeen Evening Express	Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils	Housing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Pressure group's figure more accurate than ours, Home Office admit</p> <p>A Home Office statistician admitted that, far from MigrationWatch's claims over immigration levels being wrong or exaggerated, they were often lower than the Government's own figures according to information obtained under the FOI Act and presented to the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee by the group's chairman, Sir Andrew Green.</p>	11.01.06	The Daily Mail	The Home Office	Immigration
<p>Self harm rising in asylum-seekers</p> <p>One failed asylum-seeker awaiting deportation harms himself or herself every other day, according to the Home Office, an increase of 50% on last year's statistics. Statistics released under the FOI Act revealed that the highest number of self-harm incidents took place at Colnbrook, a removal centre near Heathrow Airport. It recorded 86 incidents in the 10 months to the end of January. There were 38 cases at the adjacent Harmondsworth detention centre, 22 at the Dover centre, 16 at Oakington, Cambridgeshire, and 15 at Yarl's Wood, Bedfordshire. The Home Office said it took the cases seriously, but added: "The majority of such incidents ... occur at the lower end of severity."</p>	15.03.06	The Independent	The Home Office	Immigration
<p>Newcastle Council paying its critic</p> <p>Newcastle Council is paying the salary of the treasury official who was criticised for describing Newcastle as "hideously white". Economic adviser Neil Murphy is on secondment to Newcastle City Council from the Treasury for two years at a cost of around £40,000 a year according to information released under the FOI Act. Mr Murphy, along with the council's assistant chief executive Paul Rubinstein, was criticised over remarks at a conference in York to discuss progress on closing the North-South divide. Officers highlighted the need for more immigration to help develop the economy and Mr Murphy said: "Newcastle is hideously white. What drives creativity? It's immigration." The CRE said there was no infringement of the Race Relations Act. The council said the remarks were not intended to cause offence and were misinterpreted by the media.</p>	27.04.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Newcastle City Council	Immigration
<p>Funds for repatriation, in some cases, twice</p> <p>Asylum seekers who accepted free flights from the Home Office to leave Britain and resettle in their countries of origin have abused the system by returning and taking a second trip. The voluntary repatriation scheme, run by the Immigration Service, is intended to help refugees who abandon their attempt to stay in Britain. They get free flights and transport to their home towns and may apply for assistance to set up a business. But figures released under the FOI Act show that, since 2000, nine people have taken the package twice. Four were flown twice to Albania, three to Kosovo, one to Poland and one to Nigeria. One also got a business grant worth £797. In August 2005, the Home Office changed the rules to prevent migrants taking advantage of the voluntary assisted return and reintegration programme (VARRP) twice. The scheme is open only to failed asylum seekers or to people awaiting a decision on an asylum application. Between 2000 and 2005, 9,318 asylum-seekers and other migrants returned home under three Home Office schemes - the VAARP, the return to Afghanistan programme and the assisted voluntary return for irregular migrants programme.</p>	30.04.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Immigration Service	Immigration

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Juvenile asylum seekers Details of child asylum seekers arriving in Edinburgh were released under the FOI Scotland Act. A six-year-old Bangladeshi is by far the youngest of 19 unaccompanied children who have claimed asylum in the Capital since 2003. The other 18 children were all 15 or older, and came from countries as far flung as Sudan, China, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Iraq.	06.06.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Immigration
Migrants get £4.5m in tax cash blunder Thousands of immigrants were wrongly paid £4.5m in tax credits according to figures released under the FOI Act. Between 2003 and the end of 2004 around 2,700 immigrant families were paid tax credits they were not entitled to. The overpayments were worth an average of £1,000 a year for each family.	14.06.06	The Express	HM Treasury	Immigration
Overseas workers Records released under the FOI act show 1,836 foreign males and 1,024 women were employed in North Lincolnshire between May 1, 2004, and March 31 2006. The vast majority - 1,977 workers - were Poles, followed by Latvians numbering 319.	28.07.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	Home Office	Immigration
Immigration drive hijacked E-mails between the Scottish Executive and the Foreign Office, released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal how fraudsters have hijacked the Scottish Executive's flagship policy set up to persuade immigrants to come to Scotland. The Fresh Talent Initiative was launched in 2005 and is intended to persuade talented youngsters to stay in Scotland and find work after graduating. However, it is being use to con African students out of hundreds of pounds. Students in Nigeria have been approached by conmen posing as British airline officials promising they can get them into Scotland via the scheme.	01.10.06	Scotland on Sunday	Scottish Executive	Immigration
9,500 migrants now in Edinburgh The number of Eastern European immigrants who have settled in Edinburgh is three times higher than first thought, according to a new report. An internal report prepared by City of Edinburgh Council and published under the FOI Scotland Act highlighted pressures on the authority's homelessness, language support and rented property licensing teams. Initial estimates put the number of people coming to the capital in 2004 when eight eastern European nations joined the EU at around 3,000. But latest figures indicate the migrant population is nearer 9,500.	06.12.06	The Daily Mail	Edinburgh City Council	Immigration
Figures show number of eastern Europeans in Britain exaggerated Only 380,000 east European migrants have registered for national insurance purposes since the EU was enlarged in 2004 - far fewer than previous estimates of the number who have come to work in the UK. The figure, released under the FOI Act, suggests that either the Government has a major problem on its hands, with almost a quarter of a million EU migrants working illegally, or that the Home Office estimate of 600,000 was grossly overstated.	20.01.07	The Independent	Department for Work & Pensions	Immigration

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Paradise islands back door to U.K. The Home Office has admitted illegal immigrants could flood into Britain from the Canary. Last year, according to Spanish officials, at least 31,000 Africans arrived in the Canaries en route to what they hoped would be better lives in Europe. A Home Office report, released under the FOI Act, says that the Canaries have become the "principal conduits" for African migration, rivalling the route from Libya to Italy. It adds: "The nationality profile of the irregular migrants arriving in the Canary Islands is starting to change. As the routes have been displaced southwards, they are becoming much more accessible geographically to the Anglophone countries in the region - Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia - whose populations have much closer links to the UK."</p>	21.01.07	The Sunday Star	The Home Office	Immigration
<p>Bribed to go back Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the costs of grants given to those who asylum seekers who agree to return to their home country voluntarily. In 2006, more than 6,000 foreigners were handed up to £3,000 each plus a plane ticket to leave. But under Home Office rules, there is nothing to stop them returning to ask for asylum again. These grants cost more than £40m a year in payouts, air fares and admin costs.</p>	11.03.07	The People	Home Office	Immigration
<p>Your city's too unsafe for asylum Liverpool has been branded too dangerous for asylum seekers. The four-year-old study by Oxford Brookes University, unveiled under the FOI Act, found that there had been a "worrying level" of racial harassment and attacks. Interviews with asylum seekers said in parts of Liverpool and Manchester they experienced constant threats and verbal harassment." The report said: "Some parts of Liverpool are considered to be dangerous and unpleasant places for asylum seekers. The majority are placed in Toxteth and Everton, and many of those interviewed have experienced racial harassment and, in some cases, physical abuse."</p>	16.03.07	Liverpool Echo	The Home Office	Immigration
<p>Home Office condemned for 'dispersal' of migrants Thousands of asylum-seekers, many of them socially impoverished, were located in poorer parts of Britain already suffering high levels of deprivation, according to a report released under the FOI Act. Once there they were subjected to resistance from local people, racial harassment and attacks, as well as having a significant impact on local health and education services. In Everton, Liverpool, police expressed concern about their ability to protect them. The full extent of the problems caused by the Government's approach to dispersal is outlined in the highly critical report that was produced in 2002. It is damning about the Home Office's dispersal policy for more than 45,000 asylum-seekers. It also suggests that placing them in poorer areas simply accentuated existing deprivation among the indigenous population.</p>	16.03.07	The Guardian	The Home Office	Immigration

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Investigation started as foreign students vanish from university A Home Office investigation is under way after it emerged that 43 students have gone missing from York University. New figures reveal that the international students had dropped out of courses during the past three years without informing university officials. The university admitted it did not know whether the students had left the country, but said it was a nationwide issue. The statistics came to light after a student reporter at the university's newspaper made the request under the FOI Act.	05.05.07	Yorkshire Post	York University	Immigration
700 caught working illegally in Scotland in past three years More than 700 migrants have been caught working illegally in Scotland in the past three years, according to the first assessment of the problem across the country. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, show that between 2004 and 2006 the numbers arrested across Scotland almost doubled from 133 to 254. Immigration officials have arrested some 723 people since January 2004. The figures are expected to increase in future as a result of more pro-active work by immigration officials and increasing numbers of people being lured from abroad to work in Scotland and the UK. In Glasgow alone 201 people have been arrested for working illegally in restaurants, shops and takeaways in the city since 2004. Some 74 people have been arrested in Edinburgh, 28 in Dunfermline and 20 in Aberdeen.	24.05.07	Glasgow Herald	The Home Office	Immigration
Police pay £25m for translators Record spending on foreign-language interpreters will result in cutbacks to frontline policing, a chief constable warned last night. In the past 12 months, police forces in England and Wales have spent £25m on translators £4m more than in 2005/06. Gloucestershire Chief Constable Tim Brain said police staffing levels would suffer if the amount spent on interpreters who are needed to deal with the huge influx of immigrants continued to rise. The fresh figures for spending on translators, released under the FOI Act, show that the country's largest force, the Metropolitan Police, spent the most £9.9m last year, against £8.8m in 2005-2006.	10.06.07	The Mail on Sunday	Police forces	Immigration
Big fall in asylum seekers The number of asylum seekers in Southend has fallen dramatically during 2006-77 and there are currently just 13. The figure is in stark contrast to 2001, when at one point the town was playing host to 319 people waiting to hear if they could stay in the UK. All 13 individuals covered by the latest figures are unaccompanied children in the care of Southend Council, with Government grants covering the cost. Officials have revealed the steady decline in asylum applications in response to an application under the FOI Act.	18.06.07	Southend Echo	Southend Council	Immigration

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Police arrest 544 illegals immigrants in two years Some 544 suspected illegal immigrants were arrested in Nottinghamshire in just over two years, according to new figures. There were 296 arrests between April 1 2005 and March 31 2006. That fell by 41% to 175 arrests over the equivalent period for 2006/7. But there were 73 arrests between April 1 and July 31 this year - 42% of the total for the whole of 2006/7. The figures were released under the FOI Act and include individuals held on suspicion of committing a criminal offence, such as shoplifting or robbery, and subsequently found to be a suspected illegal immigrant.	02.10.07	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire Police	Immigration
How Thatcher tried to dodge bill for policing the miners' strike Margaret Thatcher tried to avoid paying the full £200m bill for the police officers she praised for holding back the mass pickets during the 1984-85 miners' strike. Lady Thatcher wanted individual police forces - and consequently local ratepayers - to pay for these operations. Papers released under the FOI Act show that the row went on for the first six months of the strike, despite pleas from Tory MPs, council leaders and chief constables.	03.01.06	The Guardian	Home Office	Industrial Relations
The miners' strike 1984-1985 Government papers released under the FOI Act were used to produce a number of articles addressing; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the sometimes violent treatment of women pickets; - policing costs and who should bear them; - legality of the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire's comments about a riot in Mansfield; 	23.01.06/ 24.01.06/ 26.01.06	Nottingham Evening Post	The National Archives	Industrial Relations
Rover inquiry costs £500,000 a month The government-commissioned inquiry into the collapse of MG Rover has already cost taxpayers more than £2m, with the bill increasing by about £500,000 a month and no date set for its conclusion, the Department of Trade and Industry has said. The investigation into the demise of the carmaker being undertaken by BDO Stoy Hayward, the forensic accountancy firm, and Guy Newey QC had run up a bill of £2.1m by the end of October, according to figures released under the FOI Act. This compares with a total of £1.6m at the end of September, showing costs are running at about £500,000 a month or more than £23,000 per working day. The inquiry, set up by Alan Johnson, the trade and industry secretary, at the end of May will not report "before mid-2006 at the earliest", according to the DTI.	12.01.06	The Financial Times	Department of Trade and Industry	Inquiries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Costs for Diana inquests set to soar</p> <p>The cost of the inquests into the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Fayed will eventually run into millions of pounds, the first bill for the inquiry shows. Legal fees, two coroners' wages and administrative costs reached £100,000 in 2006, months before Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, the retired High Court judge, had been appointed to chair the joint inquiries, according to figures released by the Government under the FOI Act. The final bill for this year's hearings and the full inquests, due to resume in October, 10 years after the Princess was killed in a car crash in Paris, are expected to dwarf this initial figure. It has already been confirmed that the two-year inquiry into the deaths conducted by the former Metropolitan Police commissioner Lord Stevens has cost the taxpayer £3.69m. Mohamed al-Fayed, who alleges his son was killed because of a conspiracy, is thought to have paid much more than this in legal and investigators' fees.</p>	29.03.07	The Independent	Ministry of Justice	Inquiries
<p>£1,000 a day ... how Lord Stevens doubled his pay on Diana inquiry</p> <p>Britain's former top policeman Lord Stevens was paid £1,000 a day for taking charge of the inquiry into the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Documents released under the FOI Act reveal he was being paid double what he would have earned in his former role as Met Police Commissioner. The payments, for his part-time role in charge of Operation Paget, are among a number of lucrative deals that Porsche-driving Lord Stevens has secured since he retired two years ago.</p>	23.12.07	The Mail on Sunday	Metropolitan Police	Inquiries
<p>Newspaper hoax masked Labour role in scandal</p> <p>In was one of the most audacious hoaxes played on a newspaper, the Daily Mail claimed that British Leyland was paying bribes, and was exposed for printing a ludicrous hoax. The tabloid paid the equivalent of £75,000 to buy letters that not only accused the recently nationalised company of corruption, but said the Labour government of Jim Callaghan had connived at it. In the ensuing political storm, however, the Mail's key letters were revealed to have been fabricated, and the paper's reputation suffered. But the wheel has now come full circle. Government files released under the FOI Act have revealed an unexpected truth: British Leyland did pay bribes and the Callaghan government was indeed implicated. The files disclose that, after the story broke, a handful of top Labour ministers gathered for lunch at Chequers. They were told in strict secrecy by Denis Healey, then chancellor of the exchequer, that: "There was no doubt that bribery had been going on for years on a large scale in the Middle East and Africa and that organisations responsible to government (including defence sales and nationalised industries) had been involved." The industry secretary, Eric Varley, admitted: "About 10% of our trade . . . probably involved some type of practices which we would normally consider improper in this country." Callaghan decided to hush the scandal up, ruling out a government inquiry.</p>	24.01.06	The Guardian	The National Archives	International Relations

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Concern over Gazprom's interest in Centrica Information released under the FOI Act revealed government's concerns when Russian company Gazprom showed interest in making a takeover bid for Centrica (owner of British Gas) earlier this year. It provoked a panic at the Department for Trade and Industry. Officials met ministers eight times to advise on the "impact of the proposed takeovers on the British energy sectors". "Security of supply" and "gateways for ministerial intervention" topped the agenda, and Alan Johnson, the trade and industry secretary, was told he would need to pass secondary legislation to block a Gazprom bid.	30.04.06	The Sunday Times	Department for Trade and Industry	International Relations
British blood products may pose vCJD risk in 14 countries The government has been forced to warn 14 countries that patients are in danger of developing the human form of mad cow disease as a result of contaminated British blood products sold abroad. Documents released under the FOI Act show that patients in Brazil and Turkey are most at risk from the products, although it is too early to know how many, if any, foreign patients may develop the incurable variant CJD, as it takes many years to appear. The Turkish authorities said they had traced patients at risk and were closely monitoring them, while Brazil would not comment. The contaminated blood products were exported in the 1990s by the British government to treat conditions such as haemophilia, severe burns and immune deficiency. At the time the government considered there was no risk.	02.05.06	The Guardian	Department of Health	International Relations
Twinning trip costs criticised MSPs criticised the Scottish Executive's policy on Malawi last month after it emerged the First Minister's fact-finding trip to the African country cost almost as much as the appeal fund itself had raised. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act found the visit in May last year cost £34,500 while the Scotland-Malawi Appeal raised only £35,000 in eight months.	21.05.06	The Sunday Express	Scottish Executive	International Relations
Britain gives, US takes Britain has extradited four times as many people to the US as America has sent in return since the introduction of fast-track extradition. Critics claim that the deal is one-sided because Britain brought it into force in January 2004 while the US dithered under pressure from the Irish-American lobby. The treaty was signed in 2003 but adopted by the Senate only six weeks ago. Figures released under the FOI Act revealed that while 35 suspects were sent from Britain to the US, only eight made the opposite journey. They were wanted for offences including murder, burglary, drugs, sexual offences, manslaughter and child abduction.	14.11.06	The Times	Home Office	International Relations

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Taxpayers fund banned aid policy</p> <p>A little-known organisation promoting the privatisation of infrastructure in developing countries, and which is based at the World Bank's offices in Washington DC, has received £30m of British taxpayers' money. The funding runs in direct contravention to stated UK government policy on overseas aid which says that poor nations should receive aid without strings.</p> <p>Information released under the FOI act reveals that the Department for International Development has funded the Public Private Infrastructure Facility since 1999. The organisation was founded by the World Bank but the UK government is the biggest funder by far, with a 54% stake. It is due to provide another £15m by 2008, a total of £45m. A quarter of PPIF's budget has been spent advising on water and sanitation projects. Of that, £ 5m of UK taxpayers money has been spent advocating privatisation of water - a policy that has consistently failed to improve access to water for the world's poor.</p>	26.11.06	The Observer	Department for International Development	International Relations
<p>French kept Europe in dark about infected wild duck</p> <p>France kept quiet about the discovery of a wild duck with bird flu while it encouraged the EU to soften its safety regime against the killer strain of the infection. The French told Brussels that the highly pathogenic virus had reached them five minutes before new Europe-wide rules were adopted. The official confirmation message, signed by France's chief veterinary officer, gave the wrong date for the duck's discovery. No security measures were imposed between the discovery of the dead duck and the announcement, six days later, that the H5N1 strain, which can kill human beings, was responsible. A turkey farm 200 yards away later became the first poultry business in Europe to contract the virus, prompting 49 countries to impose bans on French fowl. Another 29 wild birds have since perished locally from H5N1. Documents were obtained under Environmental Information Regulations from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in London.</p>	17.03.06	The Times	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	International Relations

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Fate of the British hostage 'killed by Amin's humiliated soldiers'</p> <p>The grisly truth about the disappearance of a British woman believed to have been murdered on the orders of the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, has been revealed for the first time in papers released by the government. Dora Bloch, a 74-year-old grandmother, was a passenger on an Air France plane from Athens to Paris when it was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists and forced down at Entebbe airport, Uganda, in 1976. During the hijack, Mrs Bloch was taken ill after choking on food and released to be treated in a hospital in Kampala. Days later, Israeli commandos stormed the airport, killing all the terrorists and destroying half of Amin's air force. But in the aftermath of the raid there was no sign of Mrs Bloch either in the hospital or with the released hostages who were flown back to Israel. Now, confidential cabinet papers released under the FOI Act show that the British High Commission in Kampala received a report from a Ugandan civilian that Mrs Bloch had been shot and her body dumped in the boot of a car which had Ugandan intelligence services number plates. The same informant said the body of a white woman had been found in a sugar plantation 19 miles from the capital. The papers go on to describe the British government's repeated requests for information as to the whereabouts of Mrs Bloch and Amin's denials of involvement in her killing.</p>	13.02.07	The independent	Foreign Office	International Relations
<p>Tories considered banning Chilean dictator from Britain</p> <p>The unannounced visit to Britain by the Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet in September 1998 presented Tony Blair's government with the first real challenge to its commitment to international human rights. But documents released by the Ministry of Justice under the FOI Act show that Pinochet's previous trips to this country had already raised concern at the heart of the Conservative administration. Correspondence between the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office three years earlier reveal that the question of Pinochet's exclusion from Britain had already been considered by previous Home Secretaries. In an illuminating letter written to the head of the Latin American Department, a senior Home Office official complained that the Foreign Office had failed to warn the Home Secretary of the previous two visits. R.G. Riley, an official at B3 Division, wrote: "As with Pinochet's last visit to the United Kingdom in June 1994, we were not informed in advance of his impending arrival here. I think it would have been helpful if we had been. Last year, we were in the less than ideal position of submitting advice to the Home Secretary about Pinochet's visit only after his presence here had been made public". Riley then adds: "You will, of course, be aware that the decision on whether or not a foreign national should be allowed entry to the United Kingdom is one for the Home Office. It was the then Home Secretary who agreed, in May 1991, that Pinochet should not be excluded from the United Kingdom."</p>	29.06.07	The Independent	Ministry of Justice	International Relations

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Gays should be hanged, says minister Homosexuals deserve to be executed or tortured and possibly both, an Iranian leader told British MPs during a private meeting at a peace conference. Mohsen Yahyavi is the highest-ranked politician to admit that Iran believes in the death penalty for homosexuality after a spate of reports that gay youths were being hanged. President Ahmadinejad, questioned by students in New York two months ago about the executions, dodged the issue by suggesting that there were no gays in his country. Britain regularly challenges Iran about its gay hangings, stonings and executions of adulterers and perceived moral criminals, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) papers show. Under the Freedom of Information Act, the FCO released papers to The Times about the death penalty being used in Iran for homosexuality, adultery and sex outside marriage.</p>	13.11.07	The Times	Foreign & Commonwealth Office	International Relations
<p>Foreign diplomats shamed on crimes Foreign diplomats have allegedly committed more than 100 offences since 1999 and almost all escaped prosecution using diplomatic immunity. For the first time, the government has published, under the FOI Act, a list of 122 serious offences allegedly committed by diplomats, including murder, child abuse, rape, money-laundering and drug-dealing. Saudi Arabia tops the list, with diplomats or their family members committing 10 alleged offences, including bribery, possession of class B drugs with intent to supply and indecent assault. Saudi sources said those involved had received "harsh" punishments, including suspension from their jobs. Nigerians allegedly committed six offences, including one of "arranging sham marriages", two of causing actual bodily harm, two of handling stolen goods and one of drink-driving. Russia topped the list of the 59 alleged drink-driving offences with four cases, followed by the Commonwealth Secretariat, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine, all on three. South Africa notched up two allegations of indecent assault.</p>	16.07.06	The Sunday Times	The Home Office	International Relations

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police losing battle over diplomatic immunity Foreign diplomats accused of crimes such as rape, drug dealing and indecent assault in this country are escaping prosecution because their embassies are refusing to co-operate with police inquiries. Governments have repeatedly refused to waive the rights of their staff serving in London to diplomatic immunity from British prosecution, according to data released under The Freedom of Information Act.</p> <p>Some of Britain's closest allies are among those who have refused requests to make staff available for interview despite the severity of their alleged offences. Under the rules, the decision to lift immunity from prosecution rests with whichever foreign embassy employs the alleged offender. But new figures reveal that embassies would rather send home staff than have them questioned or prosecuted. Since 2002, the Metropolitan Police Force has made 19 separate applications for diplomatic immunity to be waived so it can proceed with its inquiries. The majority have been rejected by embassies wanting to avoid any embarrassment or scandal. The Foreign Office is keen to stress that a refusal not to lift a waiver does not imply automatic guilt and that some of the waivers may have been requested so police could question diplomatic staff as witnesses.</p>	25.02.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Metropolitan police	International Relations
<p>Police caught Police forces have disciplined nearly fifty officers and staff for viewing pornography on station computers, information released under the FOI Act has revealed. Forty-six staff were disciplined, including a dozen who were dismissed or who resigned. Others were fined or given warnings.</p>	26.01.06	The Times	Police forces	Internet
<p>Hundreds of students and staff download offensive material Scottish academics, support staff and hundreds of students have downloaded pornography or racist and violent images using IT equipment belonging to education institutions, according to figures revealed under the FOI Scotland Act. Only 12 of Scotland's 58 colleges and universities had no incidents of staff or students attempting to download gratuitous material. The figures have triggered calls for colleges and universities to tighten their IT security networks. Since 2002, seven members of staff from some of the 58 further and higher education facilities in Scotland have been sacked, or have resigned, because of their actions. A further 15 university or college staff were suspended from their jobs, formally warned or received counselling. More than 700 students have been found to have accessed inappropriate material while attending further or higher education, with 14 of them expelled or refused a qualification because of the incident. A total of 658 students were given a formal warning by their educational institution after the downloads were detected, with many suspended from using IT facilities. The police launched investigations at four institutions following concerns raised by academic bosses about the nature of the material or because police had traced users to the education provider. This led to a number of students leaving their course after they were convicted.</p>	12.03.06	The Sunday Herald	Scottish Universities and Colleges	Internet

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Staff caught in 'net' pay a high price Hundred of workers across Yorkshire, including police officers and senior staff at hospitals and councils, have been disciplined and in some cases sacked for misusing email and the internet at work. A survey using the FOI has revealed that public bodies are taking an increasingly tough stance against staff sending and viewing offensive material and surfing the net at work.	04.04.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Various	Internet
Censors want 18 ratings applied to the internet Cinema-style ratings are to be introduced on the internet in an attempt to protect children from hardcore pornography and graphic violence. The British Board of Film Classification wants the most explicit online material to carry a version of the R18 certificate, which normally applies only to material bought in sex shops or seen in specially licensed cinemas. The online R18 ratings could be introduced by next month. It will be the first time that a British watchdog has tried to regulate internet access. The system, which is backed by the sex industry, would see porn labelled as unsuitable for children. Access would be via a "landing page" which would contain warnings, be free of sexual images and require users to verify their age. Details of the scheme are contained in correspondence between the film board and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, obtained under the FOI Act.	24.06.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Department of Culture, media & Sport	Internet
Ulster legal aid bill reaches £59m a year Over £1m a week in legal aid is being dished out in Ulster - with a bill totalling £58.9m in 12 months. And the amount of legal aid handed out in Northern Ireland has increased by £10m within a year, sparking major criticism of the government for granting "money -wasting" awards to fund "hopeless" court battles. More than half of legal aid (£32.62m) was awarded to alleged criminals fighting their cases in the courts in 2005. Just over £13m of the total bill was granted for civil cases with the remainder being paid out for advice and Children Order Proceedings. The figures, which cover the 2004-05 financial period, were obtained from the Legal Services Commission under the FOI Act. Legal officials say the hike - from £48m in 2003/04 - is due to increasing legal fees linked to big payments in court cases, but critics say it is down to the "ease" with which the money is awarded.	23.01.06	Belfast Telegraph	The Legal Services Commission (Northern Ireland)	Legal Costs
£13,000 to protect killers The government has spent £13,000 preventing overseas magazines revealing the new identities of the James Bulger murderers. Home Office figures disclosed under the FOI Act showed the sum went on legal fees, VAT and other costs. Strict guidelines restricting media coverage of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, now both 24, were imposed by the High Court in January 2001 to protect them from revenge attacks. They were granted an open-ended high court injunction protecting their anonymity. Former family division president Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss said in the high court that the two had to be protected due to a "real possibility of serious physical harm and possible death from members of the public or from the Bulger family".	09.04.07	Liverpool Echo	Home Office	Legal Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£17,000 bid to hide MPs' travel expenses</p> <p>A committee run by the Speaker of the Commons spent more than £17,000 of taxpayers' money on barristers in an attempt to keep MPs' travel expenses secret. The House of Commons Commission - chaired by Michael Martin - spent two years trying to keep MPs' car, train and plane claims, which ran into millions of pounds, from the public. But they were eventually forced to reveal details of their £5million-a-year travel costs under the FOI Act. Now figures disclosed by Parliament show the commission - which makes the rules for MPs - spent thousands of pounds on legal fees to conceal the claims. It forked out nearly £17,300 on lawyers and barristers to challenge a ruling by Information Commissioner Richard Thomas that taxpayers had a right to know much public money was being spent on politicians' travel.</p>	10.08.07	The Daily Mail	House of Commons	Legal Costs
<p>Lost and stolen from the British Library</p> <p>£100,000 worth of books and CDs have been lost or stolen from the British Library in the past five years. According to information released under the FOI Aact, Library bosses have 28 items they know have been stolen and a further 2,216 missing or mislaid. The list includes; Maps worth £15,000; a 16th-century volume on Pompeii worth £45,000; seventeen Rolling Stones albums worth £20 each; a 100-year-old Manchester City football programme with an undisclosed value; 58 newspapers; 36 science manuals; eight manuscripts; 22 diet books; 10 guides to yoga; eight bibles; four Shakespeare plays; three Asterix comic books; life stories of Bob Geldof, Tina Turner and Bob Dylan; a Jamie Oliver cookbook; 3 Good Housekeeping guides; 2 books on Jack the Ripper; and a copy of The Lord Of The Rings are also missing.</p>	27.03.06	The Evening Standard	The British Library	Libraries
<p>Vandalism hits library services</p> <p>More than £8,000 damage has been done to North Lincolnshire's libraries by vandals. Information released under the FOI Act shows that although the damage caused by vandals has halved in the past two years, cash is still being spent on repairs rather than books. The figures show that during the 2004/5 financial year, £5,749.27 was spent on repairs at North Lincolnshire's nine libraries. During 2005/6, just £2,695.33 was spent on repairs. And within that, four libraries - Barton-Upon-Humber, Brigg, Epworth and Winterton - did not need to spend any money at all.</p>	02.01.07	Scunthorpe Evening News	North Lincolnshire Council	Libraries
<p>Library users pay out £8,000</p> <p>Book borrowers from libraries in the Craven district have collectively forked out more than £8,000 in overdue fines in 2006-07. Skipton Library made the biggest profit, collecting nearly £5,800 from 2,800 customers, whilst at Settle, 485 customers were fined over £700. Figures released under the FOI Act show that even some of the smallest libraries in the county still collected hundreds of pounds worth of fines.</p>	08.06.07	Craven Herald	Local Council Libraries	Libraries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Library sees 10% rise in book loans</p> <p>More than 660,000 books were borrowed in North Lincolnshire last year, a 10% rise on the previous 12 months according to information released under the FOI Act. At a time when libraries nationwide are seeing fewer people borrow books, facilities in North Lincolnshire are seeing an upturn in visitor numbers. The figures also show that a total of 543,075 visits were made to North Lincolnshire's libraries (a large increase on the 442,884 made the previous year) and the number of web transactions rose by 25%. Bosses at the libraries believe the increase is due to investments within the region's facilities.</p>	27.06.07	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North Lincolnshire Council	Libraries
<p>Blunkett DNA firm given help by his department's staff</p> <p>Civil servants at David Blunkett's former department intervened on behalf of a company in which he had a shareholding. The row over Blunkett's stake in the firm, DNA Bioscience, ended his cabinet career shortly after last year's election. He resigned when it emerged he had failed to declare the company had made him a director, breaching the ministerial code. The new evidence, in e-mails released under the FOI Act, shows officials working under him at the Department for Work and Pensions helped ensure the firm was given court work to carry out paternity tests. This followed lobbying from the company's executives. The e-mails are the first direct evidence of officials helping the company, which has now ceased trading. The DWP has previously said simply that there had been "no meetings" between the company and officials.</p>	05.02.06	The Sunday Times	Department for Work and Pensions	Lobbying
<p>Ex-minister's lobbying activities</p> <p>The former defence secretary, now Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, has positions with companies which pay large sums to get politicians on board. The path from Whitehall to the corporate world is visible and well-trodden, but what those companies want former politicians to do is usually hidden. Documents released under the FOI Act have shed light on the activities of people such as Lord Robertson. They show that last year he obtained, among other things, a meeting with his old colleague, trade minister Ian Pearson, on behalf of the ailing multinational telecoms company Cable and Wireless. Although large parts of the minutes of the meeting are censored, they record how Lord Robertson stated that CandW wanted political help with governments in Afghanistan, Panama, the Maldives, Bahrain and some Caribbean countries.</p>	09.02.06	The Guardian	Department of Trade and Industry	Lobbying

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>How Coca Cola tried acting like a school bully</p> <p>Coca-Cola has claimed in an extraordinary row with the Government that its drinks not only "hydrate" the nation's schoolchildren but also prevent them from behaving badly. The company warned of the impact on children's health and behaviour if it pulled its vending machines from school dining halls. The claims were made after ministers announced plans to remove sugary drinks and high-fat snack foods from vending machines in a bid to combat obesity. Food and drink machines can raise an extra £15,000 a year for hard-pressed school budgets, but letters released under the FOI Act reveal that the proposed removal of the machines prompted threats from Coca-Cola to pull its vending machines from 1,600 secondary schools in Britain. Charlotte Oades, UK president of Coca-Cola, warned in a letter to ministers and senior education officials that there was no research to back Government belief that children would opt for healthier options if the range of drinks on offer was restricted.</p>	11.06.06	The Sunday Express	Department for Health	Lobbying
<p>How salt campaign was scuppered</p> <p>Britain's biggest food companies united to convince regulators to reduce tough targets for cutting the level of salt in their products. Household names were prominent in campaigning for a gentler approach by the Food Standards Agency, according to documents released under the FOI Act. Marks and Spencer, Tesco, Waitrose and Nestle were some of the powerful players who pushed hard to persuade the FSA to adopt less demanding goals, the papers reveal. When the agency published its final voluntary targets in March, nutritionists and campaigners were dismayed to see that they were much lower than had been suggested. In their successful attempt to water down the proposed salt cuts, industry emphasised the risk of food poisoning and loss of flavour. Some said that so little of their product was eaten that changes would make scant difference to overall salt intake. Perhaps the most nakedly honest lobbying came from Nestle. "Reduction in salt levels, even by a very small amount, significantly increases the overall cost of manufacturing the product, mainly because the ingredients used for the replacement of salt are much more expensive, e.g., herbs or meat extracts. These costs will inevitably be passed on to consumers (including schools)," Nestle said.</p>	03.08.06	The Times	The Food Standards Agency	Lobbying

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Drug firms' lobby tactics revealed</p> <p>Multinational drug companies have been lobbying ministers in an attempt to subvert the independent appraisal process and get their expensive new medicines approved for large-scale use in the NHS.</p> <p>Over the eight months from October 2005 to May 2006, senior executives from 10 drug companies met ministers to press for favourable decisions on their products. The executives were highly critical of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice), an independent expert body set up to decide which drugs are cost-effective for use in the NHS. Documents obtained under the FOI Act reveal that, the world's biggest drug company, Pfizer, warned ministers that it could take its business elsewhere, whilst two companies lobbied ministers for wider access by patients to their drugs, both of which were later turned down by Nice on the grounds that they were not effective enough and too expensive.</p>	28.09.06	The Guardian	NICE	Lobbying
<p>Scientologists target London's boys in blue</p> <p>Records released under the FOI Act by the police show a list of gifts from Scientologists ranging from refreshments worth up to £ 5 to tickets to the gala premiere of Mission: Impossible III. Staff at Bishopsgate police station were treated to a concert by the Jive Aces, a Scientologist-filled band specialising in "hot jive and "big band swing", and one chief superintendent enjoyed a lunch worth £20 courtesy of the Hubbard Foundation, the Scientology organisation named after the church's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. The relationship began after the London bombings on July 7 last year, when Scientologists offered support to people involved in the emergency operation.</p>	22.11.06	The Times	City of London Police	Lobbying
<p>Scientologists get £270,000 from the public purse</p> <p>The controversial Church of Scientology has been granted a subsidy of more than £270,000 a year in public money. City of London twice refused rates relief before relenting under legal pressure. Papers released by the corporation under the FOI Act state: "Reliance was placed on a European Court of Human Rights decision concerning a challenge by the church against Sweden, which the church drew to our attention." Scientology's lawyers used European rulings and Government equality regulations to force the City of London corporation to grant an 80% rates discount for its new centre near St Paul's Cathedral. The "church", it is believed, is now pressing to pay nothing at all. The corporation confirmed that this discount was on the basis that Scientology is a "charity", despite the fact that the Charity Commission has refused to register it. The discount, referred to as a "mandatory rate relief", has been granted even though the Church of Scientology has estimated global assets of £203m, is supported by film stars including Tom Cruise and John Travolta, and was once described as "corrupt, sinister and dangerous" by a High Court judge. The Scientologists' £10m, Grade II-listed London centre would normally have incurred £343,045 in non-domestic rates; the organisation has, however, secured a £274,436-a-year subsidy.</p>	10.12.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Possibly City of London Corporation	Lobbying

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Scientists pay the labour party</p> <p>The Labour Party received thousands of pounds from an offshoot of Scientology. The National Executive Committee allowed the charity, the Association for Better Living and Education (ABLE), to take a stall (costing £13,500) at the party's annual conference in Manchester. The stand was part of an extensive lobbying operation by Scientology members to promote its drug treatment programme, Narconon, and the criminal rehabilitation scheme Criminon. Correspondence released under the FOI Act reveals how Graeme Wilson of the Church of Scientology met Baroness Scotland - then a Home Office minister - in Manchester in September.</p>	12.01.07	The Evening Standard	The Home Office	Lobbying
<p>£1m cost of BBC's failed bid to up the licence fee</p> <p>The BBC spent more than £1m lobbying the Government for a rise in the licence fee. Despite the work of the BBC's public affairs department and the thousands spent with private lobbying firms, the BBC failed in its bid to get a licence fee increase of 1.8% above inflation. Instead, the licence fee will rise by three per cent in each of the next two years, by two per cent for the following three and by between zero and two per cent in the final year. Papers released by the BBC under the FOI Act reveal that the BBC's internal public affairs department last year cost just over £1m to run.</p>	11.03.07	The Sunday Express	BBC	Lobbying
<p>How Cornwall's battle for regional independence was lost</p> <p>The campaign to establish a directly elected Cornish assembly and give the ancient county a distinctive voice in national affairs was lost five years ago, according to letters released under the FOI Act. Correspondence between the St Ives MP Andrew George and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister shows that by November 2002 ministers had committed themselves to a regional, rather than a county-based, body to represent the interests of the South West. The decision, confirmed in a earlier government White Paper, infuriated pro-assembly campaigners who had put their names to the Cornish declaration, bearing over 50,000 signatures in support of separate representation, which had been delivered to Downing Street. Three of the county's six district councils had lent their support to the campaign and an academic study showed there was a "strong case" that the county's 480,000 people have a distinct identity and concluded that a Cornish assembly would be "administratively feasible". But in November 2002, Christopher Leslie wrote from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to Mr George, dismissing the idea of a special assembly for Cornwall. He explained that the Government's preferred option was an assembly for the South West region.</p>	08.06.07	The Independent	Department for Communities & Local Government	Lobbying

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>All in a days schmoozing for men from the ministry</p> <p>The giant oil company Chevron has provided an all-expenses-paid day out at Wimbledon for Jim Campbell, the civil servant in charge of regulating Britain's oil and gas industry, including responsibility for pollution and oil spills. The company says the invitation is an annual event - Mr Campbell went last year. The Wimbledon gift is only one example of the treats oil companies are showering on a single, sensitive, section of the Department of Trade and Industry - now renamed the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. Documents obtained from the department's Energy Development Unit (EDU) show that in the course of a single year, officials were given, among other things, a racing day at Glorious Goodwood. They also got private art views, a trip to the ballet, a golf outing, a party visiting the crown jewels at the Tower of London, tickets to balls, dinner in a Michelin-starred restaurant, and a case of champagne from Shell for Christmas. Officials were also invited to a more conventional round of company banquets, presentations, lunches and dinners, at hotels such as the Savoy and Claridge's. From May 4 2006 to April 26 2007, EDU staff received a total of 170 gifts and invitations from companies including Shell, Total, Exxon Mobil, Amerada Hess and Chevron. The hospitality has to be recorded in an EDU register, which has now been disclosed under the FOI Act. It shows that Mr Campbell, the head of the energy unit, recorded receiving a benefit of some kind more than once a month. The EDU unit, based in London and Aberdeen, has sections dealing with the award of exploration licences, mop-ping up oil spills, decommissioning of old oil rigs, inspection of offshore installations, permits for private electricity generators, and the encouragement of renewable energy.</p>	06.07.07	The Guardian	Department of Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform	Lobbying
<p>House of Lords passes</p> <p>Peers are handing out exclusive access to the Houses of Parliament to lobbyists and pressure groups, who pay them thousands of pounds a year. While MPs have been forced to disclose the names and outside interests of their staff since 1985, peers have repeatedly blocked the release of the full list of names until a request under the FOI Act forced its disclosure. Peers linked to the organisations which benefit from the pass include: Lord Howie of Troon, a Labour peer, gives a pass to Doug Smith, a veteran Westminster lobbyist who is chairman of Westminster Advisers, whose clients include French multinationals Sodexo and Accor. Lord Berkeley, a Labour peer, gives a pass to Neil Stevens, the development and communications manager of the Rail Freight Group, whose members include Maersk, the container shipping line. Lord Hogg of Cumbernauld, a Labour peer, gives a pass to Simon Posner, of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, the chief lobbyist for the bus industry, whose members include Stagecoach and Arriva. Lord MacKenzie of Framwellgate, a Labour peer, gives a "research assistant" pass to Gary Markham, chief executive of Legal Solutions group.</p>	17.07.07	The Times	The House of Lords	Lobbying

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>DTI fought to retain high roaming call charges Under the Freedom of Information Act, the DTI (now the Department for Business) has released e-mails and minutes of contacts between officials and phone giants discussing responses to European moves to restrict roaming charges. The gratitude of phone chiefs is evident from a round of get-togethers with Margaret Hodge, then Industry Minister. The Government has censored the documents to hide the identity of individuals from mobile businesses. On November 16, 2006, T-Mobile "thanked MH for the Government's help and support on European regulations, particularly mobile roaming", minutes state. Mrs Hodge met Orange on November 29. "Orange is pleased with the work DTI is doing on roaming but adamant that regulation in this area was not necessary," minutes say. Mrs Hodge's position was that competition would drive down prices. A rash of e-mails is disclosed through the Freedom of Information Act involving the DTI official Nigel Hickson, Britain's negotiator on a European working party on roaming.</p>	25.10.07	The Times	The Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform	Lobbying
<p>552 antidepressants prescribed in Sunderland every day Medics are handing out 552 anti-depressant prescriptions every day in Sunderland, at an annual cost of £1.9m. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed that patients were given 201,692 prescriptions for antidepressant drugs in 2006, an increase of 15,000 over 3 years. Yet while antidepressant use has soared, the cost of the drugs has plummeted. In 2003/04, more than £2.6m was spent on 186,690 antidepressants.</p>	12.03.07	Sunderland Echo	Local NHS Trusts	Medicines
<p>Generation of children growing up on drug North East doctors wrote nearly 8,000 prescriptions for Ritalin in the last 12 months. The number of prescriptions in Newcastle, Northumberland and Gateshead has risen by hundreds in the past two years. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] makes children restless, impatient and impulsive and they find it hard to concentrate. Ritalin, a brand of Methylphenidate, is used to control ADHD symptoms and help sufferers lead normal lives but not everyone is in favour of prescribing the drug to children and believe alternative methods should be used. At around £20 a prescription for Ritalin, the condition is costing the local NHS around £130,000 a year.</p>	02.01.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Various North Eastern Health Trusts	Medicines

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Revealed, how youngsters attempted suicide while taking hyperactivity drug Fears have been raised over the safety of a hyperactivity drug after it emerged two British children have tried to kill themselves after taking it. Launched in June 2004, Strattera was initially seen as a welcome alternative to Ritalin, the most widely-used drug for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. But new figures show that two children taking Strattera have attempted suicide and eight have had suicidal thoughts. Nearly 200 others have suffered serious side-effects including fits, palpitations, liver disorders and feelings of aggression and anxiety, a report by the medicines' watchdog, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, revealed. The MHRA report, released under the FOI Act, also reveals that Strattera has been linked to a spate of child suicides around the world. Twenty children and adults have killed themselves after taking the medicine and 63 tried to commit suicide.</p>	18.02.06	The Daily Mail	The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency	Medicines
<p>Spending on child psychiatric drugs rockets The NHS in Scotland is spending more than £2.5m a year on controversial mind-altering drugs designed to help calm hyperactive children. Doctors now write more than 1,000 prescriptions a week for Ritalin as an increasing number of parents find they cannot control disruptive kids. Prescriptions for the drugs, which cost around £200 a year per child, have risen by 102% since 2001 - despite warnings that the drugs can lead to potentially deadly side effects including heart problems, nervous system disorders and psychiatric conditions. New figures, released under the FOI Scotland Act, also reveal the cost to Scottish taxpayers has increased by almost £600,000 since 2005/06 - and by nearly £2m in the last five years. The revelation comes just three weeks after the press reported that Ritalin and similar drugs used to treat children's behavioural problems had been linked to at least 11 deaths in the UK.</p>	17.06.07	The Sunday Express	NHS trusts	Medicines

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Report reveals 18 child deaths following vaccinations</p> <p>Eighteen babies and toddlers have died following childhood vaccinations in just four years, a Government report released under the FOI Act reveals. Four deaths have been linked to suspected adverse reactions to the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) triple jab, according to documents prepared for the Government's expert advisers on immunisation. The report, covering the period between 2001 and 2004, details how one baby suffered a cot death following MMR vaccination in 2003. Two more infants were reported to have died after having the MMR jab in 2001, but the cause of death in both cases was unknown. Six fatalities followed meningitis C vaccinations between 2001 and 2003. The deaths of seven other babies were linked to combined vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough and reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Another died after a polio jab. Almost 800 other reports of suspected complications of childhood vaccination - including convulsions and hyptonia, in which the baby becomes floppy like a "rag doll" - were also made, including 160 for MMR. Medics raised the alarm under the MHRA "yellow card" warning system, set up to monitor suspected adverse drug reactions. Although making such a report does not prove that vaccination caused death or injury, it means that doctors fear it may have played a part. Their reports were considered by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which concluded that no significant safety issues were identified.</p>	12.02.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Department for Health	Medicines
<p>MMR scare doctor got legal aid fortune</p> <p>Andrew Wakefield the former surgeon whose campaign linking the MMR vaccine with autism caused a collapse in immunisation rates, was paid more than £400,000 by lawyers trying to prove that the vaccine was unsafe. The payments, were part of £3.4m distributed from the legal aid fund to doctors and scientists who had been recruited to support a now failed lawsuit against vaccine manufacturers. According to the figures, released under the FOI Act, Wakefield was paid £435,643 in fees plus £3,910 expenses. Wakefield's work for the lawyers began two years before he published his now notorious report in The Lancet medical journal in February 1998, proposing a link between the vaccine and autism.</p>	31.12.06	The Sunday Times	Legal Services Commission	Medicines

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Early fears about MMR revealed in secret papers Following the debate over MMR and its alleged link with autism, government documents just released under the FOI Act show there was another, earlier concern for which there was more evidence and, apparently, more immediate risk. Whitehall experts knew of it before MMR's mass introduction into Britain, but the public was kept in ignorance. Mass immunisation with the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine began in Britain in October 1988. Ten years later, Andrew Wakefield, a researcher at the Royal Free Hospital in London, suggested the vaccine might increase the risk of autism and bowel disorders. But at least eight months before the first British children were injected with MMR, the government working party set up to introduce it was already aware of another potentially dangerous side-effect. The newly released documents include the minutes of a meeting of 15 experts and officials held in February 1988. According to the minutes, the group "read a report of cases of mumps encephalitis which had been associated with MMR vaccine containing the Urabe strain of the mumps virus. The Canadian authorities had suspended the licences of MMR vaccines containing the Urabe strain."</p>	05.03.07	The Daily Telegraph	Department for Health	Medicines
<p>MMR jab risks covered up Health officials have been accused of covering up serious risks linked with the controversial MMR jab before it was introduced. According to a secret dossier, five cases were reported of potentially deadly brain inflammation following the use of MMR in Canada before it became part of standard childhood vaccinations in Britain. The internal documents from the Westminster's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) also reveal reports that another brand of MMR caused "neurological complications" from the measles component of the vaccine in the US. Despite this, from 1988 both brands were administered routinely without any warning of serious risk until they were withdrawn four years later. The minutes of the JCVI meeting held in March 1988 and, released for the first time under the FOI Act, blame the mumps component of the vaccine, called Urabe, for five cases of brain inflammation - mumps encephalitis. The minutes state: "Four of these cases definitely followed the use of vaccine containing Urabe mumps virus and the fifth probably did." The report added: "In the United States many of the reported neurological complications were clearly related to the measles component." But despite these reports, experts at the meeting decided the rate of adverse reactions to the mumps element from Canada was "in keeping with that expected". Seven months later, both brands of MMR were introduced. But the MMR vaccines containing Urabe were with-drawn in 1992 because it caused potentially deadly meningitis.</p>	15.07.07	The Sunday Express	Department of Health	Medicines
<p>Foreign Office threatened Meyer with visit from the heavy mob Correspondence between Sir Christopher Meyer and Sir Michael Jay released under the FOI Act reveals Foreign Office mandarins were extremely concerned about the publication of the former ambassador's memoirs and even threatened to set Jack Straw on him.</p>	01.01.06	The Sunday Times	Foreign Office	Memoirs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Fire Service reveals cross-border link-ups The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service show that firefighters crossed the border, mostly into Donegal, 248 times between January 2002 and September 2005 according to figures released under the FOI Act. Co-operation between the Northern Ireland fire service and Donegal Council is regulated by a formal agreement. Donegal council pays an annual fee of £4,000 for assistance from Northern Ireland and in addition pays each time personnel from Northern Ireland make the trip across the border to help their colleagues in the Republic.	04.01.06	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service	Northern Ireland
Bombing 'cover-up' A government document accuses Sinn Fein of supporting an inquiry into the 1972 Claudy bombing because of allegations of an RUC cover-up. The confidential memo was released under the FOI Act. The IRA has been firmly linked to the attack but has never publicly admitted involvement. The document says interest was focused on allegations of a cover-up by the Secretary of State, and the RUC and may explain Sinn Fein backing an inquiry.	08.01.06	The News Of The World	Northern Ireland Office	Northern Ireland
Mothballed Stormont's £50,000 bill for flowers Information obtained under the FOI Act has revealed the cost to taxpayers of maintaining the mothballed Stormont Assembly building. Over £50,000 of taxpayers money was spent on floral arrangements as it lay suspended for over three years and that with ongoing costs the total bill amounted to around £2,170,000 every month and is likely to reach £100m before the assembly is reinstated.	31.05.06	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Assembly	Northern Ireland
Attendance at DPP meetings On 11 occasions Direct Policing Partnership meetings went ahead without a single member of the public in attendance, and on 39 further occasions there were three or less people at the meeting according to information released under the FOI Act. The partnerships were established in 2003 as a Patten recommendation and have been hailed a success by the Policing Board, the PSNI leadership and the Police Oversight Commissioner.	13.06.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland
UDA link to cops Four serving police officers are being investigated for allegedly colluding with loyalist terrorists. Under the FOI Act, the Police Service of Northern Ireland admitted six officers have been quizzed about links with the UDA, UVF and other terror groups in the past three years. Four are at the centre of inquiries while a fifth left the force before "formal misconduct proceedings". It is the first time such details have been made public.	25.06.06	The News of the World	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland
Gunmen get secret pardons The Queen has secretly pardoned gunmen, terrorists and robbers in Ulster. Government officials asked Her Majesty to sign mercy warrants for convicts responsible for 33 crimes across the province. They ranged from shootings and bombings to hijacking and robbery. Under the FOI Act, the Northern Ireland Office has told how the Royal Prerogative of Mercy has been used to free 16 republican terrorists since the year 2000.	14.01.07	News of the World	The Northern Ireland Office	Northern Ireland

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Superspy quizzed on shootings IRA superspy Stakeknife has been arrested for questioning over his alleged role in up to 16 murders. Freddie Scappaticci, 61, was arrested and detained by Stevens Inquiry officers over allegations that he ran a campaign of murder while being paid hundreds of thousands of pounds by security agents. The veteran republican is now set to face further questioning by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and may face charges as a result of the probe into the 16 shootings. Documents officially released under the FOI Act reveal the exact number of murders that he has been linked to while working as the number one British agent inside the Provisional IRA.</p>	04.03.07	The News of the World	Stevens Inquiry	Northern Ireland
<p>Sectarian split over further investigation of troubles Protestants and Catholics are deeply divided over dealing with Northern Ireland's troubled past, a private poll conducted for the Northern Ireland Office has revealed. The poll, released under the FOI Act, indicates that Protestants are overwhelmingly opposed to more inquiries and other investigations into the Troubles. But Catholics are largely in favour of thorough investigations to find out what happened in many acts of violence. The poll, which was conducted among voters after they cast ballots in the March Assembly election, is believed to have informed the thinking of Peter Hain, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State as he decided to set up a commission to review the Troubles.</p>	21.06.07	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Office	Northern Ireland
<p>More than 100 republicans still on run from justice More than 100 republican fugitives are waiting to have their cases resolved, official figures released under the FOI Act have revealed. Another 84 "on the runs" have already been cleared to return to Northern Ireland without facing jail time. That includes almost 50 people who spent at least a decade on the run, but were never wanted in the first place.</p>	22.06.07	Belfast Telegraph	Attorney General's Office	Northern Ireland
<p>IRA 'were pros' Defence experts admitted that the IRA was a "professional" force that the Army failed to defeat, it was revealed yesterday. A Ministry of Defence report, released under the FOI Act, said the Provisional IRA were "dedicated, highly skilled and resilient". Loyalist paramilitaries and other republican groups were described as "little more than gangsters".</p>	07.07.07	The Sun	Ministry of Defence	Northern Ireland

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>After 38 years, the Army's longest campaign draws to a quiet close</p> <p>The Army's longest continuous military campaign in its history will come to an end at midnight on 31 July 2007, but there will be no fanfare for the passing of Operation Banner: soldiers are too busy for that. For decades the Northern Ireland Troubles came to define what the Army was about. Now, after 38 years of constant service, with more than 300,000 military personnel serving there and 763 killed as a direct result of terrorism, it is over. The 5,000 soldiers stationed in Northern Ireland will remain, but no longer as part of the security forces. However, an official judgment is available in a fleeting sentence, buried inside a report on Operation Banner. The report was never intended for public perusal but came to light thanks to a canny veteran Ulster reporter and the FOI Act. "Operation Banner: an analysis of military operations in Northern Ireland" has a security clearance that states: "This document is issued for the information of such persons who need to know its contents in the course of their official duties." In his foreword to the report, General Sir Michael Jackson writes that Banner will come to be seen as one of the most important campaigns to be fought by the Armed Forces, "the longest to date; one of the very few waged on British soil; and one of the very few ever brought to a successful conclusion by the armed forces of a developed nation against an irregular force". Elsewhere the report claims that "by 1980 almost all the military structures which eventually defeated PIRA (the Provisional IRA) were in place".</p>	30.07.07	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Northern Ireland
<p>Partnership is working well, figures show</p> <p>Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness are working together effectively in tandem as heads of the newly devolved Assembly. Information released under the FOI Act show the once sworn enemies are developing a successful and apparently robust partnership. In their first 50 days in office as heads of the Stormont administration, Dr Paisley and Mr McGuinness were involved jointly in a total of 29 meetings and engagements in their capacity as First Minister and Deputy First Minister respectively. Up to and including June 25, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have had five joint update meetings since the return of devolution on 8 May. There was also in that time frame, four meetings of the Executive which were hosted by both men, eight meetings together to receive visiting dignitaries and three joint public engagements, at their request in Parliament Buildings. These included an event for Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities and receptions for both the Irish cricket team on their return from the World Cup and the Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Sector.</p>	09.08.07	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Assembly	Northern Ireland
<p>Met's intelligence failure over CND</p> <p>The Metropolitan Police underestimated the support for CND in the 1980s, and in particular the support for a huge 1983 CND march in London that attracted about 200,000 people according to information released under the FOI Act.</p>	15.06.06	The Daily Telegraph	Home Office	Nuclear
<p>BNFL funds pro-nuclear lobbying</p> <p>Expenses claims released under the FOI Act reveal that Nuklear21 (a group representing trades unionists in British nuclear power stations and campaigning for more reactors) is receiving funding from BNFL.</p>	20.08.06	The Sunday Herald	British Nuclear Fuels Limited	Nuclear

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Faulty nuclear reactor was allowed to operate without safety alarm</p> <p>Britain's nuclear watchdog last month allowed a faulty nuclear reactor to start up even though it had not been fitted with an important safety system, internal documents reveal. The documents also show that the Nuclear Installation Inspectorate (NII) judged that the reactor, at Oldbury nuclear power station in Gloucestershire, was not safe enough to operate for the next 18 months, but allowed it to go onstream until November anyway. The heavily censored documents - released under the provisions of the FOI Act to the Stop Oldbury campaign - come from an investigation into the safety of reactor 2 at the power station. They reveal a one-in-1,000 risk of a fire in the highly radioactive nuclear fuel. They show that the NII pressed for the installation of a safety system, called "a failed fuel trip system", which would automatically shut down the reactor if such a fire broke out. But it accepted the response of the power station's operator, the British Nuclear Group, that "it would be disproportionate to further delay the return to service of the reactor" while it was fitted. The NII also cast doubt on the company's ability to cope with exceptional circumstances. But the watchdog still allowed the reactor to start up last month and operate until November. In the event, within two weeks an unrelated fire broke out in a non-nuclear part of the plant, and the power station had to be shut down indefinitely.</p>	17.06.07	The Independent on Sunday	Nuclear Installation Inspectorate	Nuclear Power
<p>Streamlined planning procedures aid nuclear plans</p> <p>The Government is proposing to streamline major planning inquiries but information released under the FOI Act show that senior nuclear industry figures also want to strip public inquiries of the power to investigate the safety of Britain's new generation of nuclear reactors. Documents reveal that officials in the nuclear power industry want ministers to reduce public scrutiny on planning applications in order to keep down costs and secure the support of investors.</p>	14.01.06	The Independent	Department for Trade and Industry	Nuclear Power
<p>Staff at a nuclear station threw out radioactive waste at the local dump</p> <p>Radioactive waste from Torness power station was thrown out with ordinary rubbish at a local dump.</p> <p>A report, released under the FOI Scotland Act, revealed workers at the nuclear plant failed to check if the waste was radioactive before disposing of it. It was taken to a landfill site in Dunbar, East Lothian to be buried with household waste. In a report into the incident in August 2003, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency said there was a 'fundamental lack of control' at Torness and ordered an immediate safety review.</p>	18.02.06	The Daily Mail	Scottish Environment protection Agency	Nuclear Power
<p>Cracks are showing in reactor cores</p> <p>A report reveals that the Nuclear Safety Directorate were concerned about cracks in reactor cores at Somerset's Hinkley B and other nuclear power stations. The concerns were raised in a report produced in April 2006. British Energy, the report says, knows too little about the cracks to be confident the plants can operate without incident. According to the NSD report, British Energy does not fully understand why the bricks are cracking; how many are damaged; and the number of cracks that would make the reactor unsafe.</p>	05.07.06	The Guardian	Nuclear Safety Directorate	Nuclear Power

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Nuclear business as usual</p> <p>In its recent six-month review, British Energy (BE) told investors and shareholders it was bullish about reopening its troubled Hinkley Point B and Hunterston B nuclear power plants - closed since cracks were discovered in boiler tubes - by the end of the year. That was news to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII), which must first inspect the sites and give its approval. The NII responded to a request by anti-nuclear campaigners, under the FOI Act, stating: "There has been no correspondence between NII and BE that specifically states any expected restart dates."</p>	06.12.06	The Guardian	Nuclear Installations Inspectorate	Nuclear Power
<p>Nuclear weapons plant 'should be rebuilt'</p> <p>The UK's nuclear bomb factory has been struggling to remedy as many as 1000 safety defects uncovered by the government's official watchdog. It is only allowed to stay open because the Ministry of Defence (MoD) says the work it does is vital for national defence. The remarkable story of the serious problems faced by the nuclear weapons complex at Burghfield, Berkshire, is revealed in 12 internal reports released by the UK's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate under the FOI Act. For the past five years the NII has been trying to force Burghfield's operator, the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), to tackle 1000 "shortfalls" inspectors identified in its safety procedures. Yet an inspection in April 2007 found that more than 300 of them were still outstanding, and they will not now be completed by 27 September 2007 as promised.</p>	20/09/07	The New Scientist	Nuclear Installations Inspectorate	Nuclear Weapons
<p>Civilian workers exposed to excessive radiation</p> <p>A series of safety lapses at the Faslane nuclear submarine base on the Clyde, including one in which workers were over-exposed to radiation from a reactor, worried government inspectors. Internal documents released under the FOI Act reveal that the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has been concerned about poor supervision at the base and is monitoring the situation. The inspectorate's governing body, the Health and Safety Executive, has also expressed frustration at the failure of the Ministry of Defence to respond to repeated requests for information. Concern was sparked by a hitherto unreported incident on 13 January 2005, when workers were called in to remove scaffolding from above a submarine reactor. They were not told, however, that the reactor was "hot" as it had been conducting high-power trials prior to sailing. As a result, four workers were exposed to excess radiation beaming through the reactor casing. Faslane health monitors, who conducted a survey, which detected "a measurable dose" of radiation, noticed their plight.</p>	12.03.06	The Sunday Herald	Health and Safety Executive	Nuclear Weapons
<p>'Casual' attitude to radioactive material</p> <p>Attitudes to recording radioactive material leaving Devonport Dockyard were "casual" and implied "a culture of routine and unimportance", according to a damning inquiry, the report of which has been released under the FOI Act. The investigation headed by the Royal Navy was launched in April 2005 after paperwork covering two massive flasks of nuclear fuel from the dockyard was found to be inaccurate.</p>	07.07.06	Western Morning News	Ministry of Defence	Nuclear Weapons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Nuclear subs in 100 safety alerts</p> <p>Nuclear-powered submarines docked at Devonport naval base have been involved in a catalogue of safety scares in the past three years, according to reports released under the FOI Act. More than 100 incidents were reported at the Plymouth port between 2004 and 2006 which could have led to "serious radiological consequence" or affected its safety licence. Six of the seven Trafalgar-class submarines based at Devonport suffered incidents including breaches of nuclear protocols, monitoring errors and equipment defects. In addition to crane accidents and numerous emergency siren failures were incidents on board submarines which one expert described as "major system failures". They included a gaffe in March 2006 when staff monitored another submarine instead of HMS Tireless which was undergoing "high power reactor operations". The Royal Navy blamed that on the "failure of management controls". In December 2005, HMS Turbulent "vented" its nuclear reactor compartment within 18 hours of shut-down and without taking samples, breaking established protocols. Then on Christmas Eve 2005, the temperature on HMS Torbay's nuclear reactor was allowed to fall below the minimum authorised level. That was caused by poor watch-keeping standards. In January of the same year, an unnamed submarine was allowed to drift away from the wharf causing "minor damage" to the gangway, guard rail and lighting.</p>	22.10.07	Western Morning News	Ministry of Defence	Nuclear Weapons
<p>UK radiation jump blamed on Iraq shells</p> <p>Radiation detectors in Britain recorded a fourfold increase in uranium levels in the atmosphere after the "shock and awe" bombing campaign against Iraq, according to a report. Environmental scientists who uncovered the figures through the FOI Act say it is evidence that depleted uranium from the shells was carried by wind currents to Britain. Government officials, however, say the sharp rise in uranium detected by radiation monitors in Berkshire was a coincidence and probably came from local sources. The results from testing stations at the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston, Berkshire, and four other stations within a 10-mile radius were obtained by Chris Busby, of Liverpool University's department of human anatomy and cell biology.</p>	19.02.06	The Sunday Times	The Environment Agency	Nuclear Weapons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Britain gave Israel plutonium Britain secretly supplied Israel with plutonium during the 1960s despite a warning from military intelligence that it could help the Israelis to develop a nuclear bomb. The deal, made during Harold Wilson's Labour government, is revealed in classified documents released under the FOI Act and obtained by BBC2's Newsnight programme. The documents also show how Britain made hundreds of shipments to Israel of material that could have helped in its nuclear weapons programme, including compounds of uranium, lithium, beryllium and tritium, as well as heavy water. Israel asked Britain in 1966 to supply 10mg of plutonium. Israel would have required almost 5kg of plutonium to build an atomic bomb, but British defence intelligence officials warned that 10mg had "significant military value" and could enable the Jewish state to carry out important experimental work to speed up its nuclear weapons programme. Documents show that the decision to sell plutonium to Israel in 1966 was blocked by officials in both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office, who said: "It is HMG's policy not to do anything which would assist Israel in the production of nuclear weapons." But the deal was forced through by a Jewish civil servant, Michael Michaels, in Tony Benn's Ministry of Technology, which was responsible for trade in nuclear material, according to Newsnight.</p>	10.03.06	The Guardian		Nuclear Weapons
<p>Risks of moving nuclear warheads by road A document, obtained by New Scientist magazine, says that an accidental explosion of a Trident nuclear warhead in transit could potentially deliver a lethal radiation dose to the surrounding area. The MoD describes the risk as significant enough for drawing up contingency plans to deal with such an event. The warheads are regularly transported by road convoy between military facilities in the UK. The weapons are moved between submarine bases in Scotland and repair and maintenance facilities at the Berkshire sites of Aldermaston and Burghfield. One convoy round trip happens roughly every two to three months. The January 2005 report, by the MoD's defence logistics organisation, which has its headquarters in Bath, assessed the risks posed by the transportation of the weapons at 2.4 in a billion.</p>	06.07.06	The Guardian	Ministry of Defence	Nuclear Weapons
<p>Nukes risk to 10 million The placement of American cruise missiles at Greenham Common threatened millions of innocent people. All of London would have been exposed to "inhalation hazard" from plutonium in a nuclear accident, said The Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston. The missiles were flown back to the US in 1991-2. The reports were released to New Scientist magazine after an FOI Act request.</p>	12.07.07	The Daily Mirror	Atomic Weapons Research Establishment	Nuclear Weapons
<p>Contaminated Olympics site A map released under the FOI Act reveals that large areas of the Olympic Park site are afflicted with "high-risk" contamination, including one area where radioactive waste is buried,</p>	24.11.06	The Evening Standard	London Development Agency	Olympics

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Uncertainty over costs is 'damaging London Olympics' Information released to Private Eye magazine under the FOI Act shows concern about the rising costs of the London Olympics. A PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2004 told ministers that the bill for the London Olympics would be £2.75 billion, not the £2.375 billion that was subsequently quoted.	01.02.07	The Daily Telegraph	Department for Culture, media & Sport	Olympics
Sponsorship plan for Games is 'unrealistic' Ministers were warned they had overestimated the amount of sponsorship money the London Olympics would raise before the bid for the Games was even made. A confidential report by PricewaterhouseCoopers told the Government that it might not have allowed for enough Olympic staff and that hitting Londoners with a heavy council tax bill to pay for the Games risked turning people against the event. The report, released under the FOI Act, highlighted long-term concerns about how to pay for the day-to-day running of the Games.	27.02.07	The Evening Standard	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Olympics
Part-time Olympic staff 'paid £7m' London's 2012 Olympic authority spent more than £7m hiring 65 temporary workers last year, adding to concerns that the cost of the Games is spiralling out of control. The agency staff were brought in to help with the planning of the event and were paid, on average, £118,500 each. Figures released under the FOI Act showed that the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) spent a total of £7,707,700 hiring recruitment experts and managers from outside companies. The highest-paid member of staff, who was not identified, was paid £1,200 a day.	18.09.07	The Daily Telegraph	The Olympic Delivery Authority	Olympics
3 years to fix Bournemouth car park Documents released under the FOI Act, detail the work necessary to the Castlepoint shopping centre car park following its temporary closure in November due to health and safety reasons. A design statement submitted to the council by building contractors Kier in December 2005, said: "A semi-permanent propping structure is required which provides full vertical support to the existing car park structure. It's envisaged that repairs to the car park may take up to three years to complete." A subsequent release revealed structural inadequacies in a main supporting beam.	27.03.06	Bournemouth Echo	Bournemouth Council	Parking
Parking cheats leave capital with a £3m Bill Car parking cheats and foreign tourists have escaped paying nearly £3m in fines in Edinburgh after thousands of unpaid penalty tickets were written off. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show that the city council has cancelled more than 35,000 fines since it took over responsibility for parking offences eight years ago.	10.06.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Parking

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Missing markings let drivers escape fines In a series of e-mails released under the FOI Scotland Act, traffic wardens have reported nearly 100 defects in the marking of Edinburgh's Greenways between January and June 2006. Each of these defects prevents traffic wardens from issuing fines. The number of motorists caught parking in the bus lanes has dropped in recent years, and council chiefs have previously complained in private about the police force's "lack of interest" in tackling the problem.	26.09.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Lothian Police	Parking
More parking permits than spaces Almost 10,000 parking permits have been sold to people living in the centre of Edinburgh, but there are only enough spaces for 7,700 cars according to information obtained under the FOI Scotland Act.	22.01.07	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh Council	Parking
Parking cheats in £6m win Parking cheats have had £6.5m worth of fines torn-up by a city council after a legal blunder. Transport chiefs in Edinburgh have been forced to stop chasing unpaid tickets, leaving the authority with a massive cash headache. It was revealed last year all tickets issued up until June 2006 were 'illegal', as they did not bear both the date of issue and offence as the law requires. Now, following an FOI Scotland Act request, it has been found all debt owed prior to then has been wiped. Sheriff officers must stop chasing outstanding offences dating back to decriminalisation in 1998 - understood to be around 70,000. The council has also ditched 4,327 fines it had not yet passed to sheriff officers.	15.02.07	The Sun	Edinburgh City Council	Parking
Drivers win half of fine appeals More than half the motorists who appeal against parking tickets in the Capital are getting their fines quashed. A total of 2842 drivers successfully appealed against unfair fines after landing £60 penalty notices in 2006. The number of drivers challenging their fines each month has risen over the last three years, while the proportion of them winning their cases has also gone up. The results of the appeals have been revealed under the FOI Scotland Act.	02.03.07	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh Council	Parking
No targets for parking tickets Parking attendants working in Doncaster do not have targets for how many tickets they have to issue. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the salaries and bonuses of Doncaster's 21 parking attendants and confirmed that there is definitely no bonus scheme if more notices are handed out.	26.03.07	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Parking
Parking zones fiasco leaves taxpayers with £200,000 headache The abortive controlled parking zones scheme, abandoned after massive public opposition, cost Cardiff taxpayers £201,000, it has been revealed. The bill was revealed after anti-CPZ campaigner Terry Phillips of Severn Grove, Canton, requested it under the FOI Act. Cardiff council, which defended the cost, said employing a consultant, providing information packs and other consultation work came to £185,000. In addition, the cost of time spent by transport officials between November 2005 and June 2000 was estimated at £16,000.	19.11.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Parking

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£1m in parking fines and £5m car park fees Motorists in Liverpool paid more than £1m in parking fines in 2005. It has been added to the £5m raised by council car parks to pay for more traffic wardens. Full details of the income is obtained from each of Liverpool City Council's 80 car parks and parking bays in the city centre has been released under the FOI Act.	03.01.06	Liverpool Echo	Liverpool City Council	Parking
Edinburgh's income from fines Fines for library offences, dog fouling and illegal parking have netted the city council more than £10m in the space of a year figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show. Late payment of council tax and fees for the release of impounded vehicles also boosted council coffers. Parking fines were the biggest contributor, with some £7m paid by motorists in 2004-2005.	18.04.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Parking
Town damaged by expensive car parking Parking charges in Scunthorpe totalled £1.224m according to figures released under the FOI Act. In nearby Brigg, where the first 2 hours parking is free, charges amounted to only £41,000.	02.05.06	Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph	North Lincolnshire Council	Parking
Streets where traffic wardens rule George Street in Edinburgh is the most lucrative street in the UK for traffic wardens, with tickets worth £1.25m issued in 2005-6. But that sum was dwarfed by the £3.2m collected by the London borough of Haringey in Lordship Lane, although that figure includes fines imposed for driving in a bus lane and other offences. Motorists can expect more tickets from 2008 when authorities outside London also get the power to fine for moving traffic offences. The figures were obtained by Channel 4 News under the FOI and FOI Scotland Acts. They represent the face value of tickets and do not take account of the 50% discount for those who pay within 14 days or of motorists who dodge or appeal successfully against the fines.	27.10.06	The Daily Telegraph	Local authorities	Parking
Parking ticket hotspots revealed Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the hotspots for York's traffic wardens. The figures, released by City of York Council, show North Street, between Ouse Bridge and Lendal Bridge, is the most fruitful area for wardens, with 583 penalty charge notices (PCNs) being issued in 2006/07. Second top is Piccadilly with 416 PCNs, followed by Walmgate with 330; St Saviourgate with 317; Fossgate with 292; and Marygate with 283. Duncombe Place (281); Davygate (280); Micklegate (267) and Goodramgate (256) complete the top ten.	04.10.07	York Press	York City Council	Parking
Hospital car parking charges Lancashire's hospitals and health centres are making millions in car park charges from patients and visitors every year according to information released under the FOI Act. Department of Health figures reveal in the 12 months up to April 2005 Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust made £744,610 in parking charges - the highest in the county. Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust picked up £352,370, while Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Hospitals NHS Trust collected £419,000 West Lancashire PCT £6,573 and East Lancashire NHS Trust £120,270.	28.03.06	Lancashire Evening Post	Department of Health	Parking

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Hospitals charge visitors £95m to park cars</p> <p>Sick and vulnerable patients were charged more than £95m in hospital parking fees last year, despite a Government pledge to bring down charges.</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act show that 30 hospital trusts netted more than £1m a year each from car parks, with two raking in more than £2m from patients and relatives. And the number of trusts notching up an annual £1m in fees has almost trebled in the past year, despite a campaign to cut fees and the issuing of new Government guidelines.</p> <p>The worst offender was Southampton University NHS Trust, which collected £2,414,672 in car park fees from visitors to Southampton General and other hospitals.</p>	18.03.07	The Sunday Express	Hospital Trusts – various.	Parking
<p>Parliament of pilferers</p> <p>Almost £160,000 of valuables have been stolen from the Palace of Westminster, 119 weapons have been confiscated from people entering the grounds, and there have been two instances of vandalism. The largest of the 20 reported thefts is £131,000 plundered from the accounts of the Speaker of the House of Commons Art Fund by its charity manager Paul Olden. The list, released under the FOI act, also includes the theft of £20,000 of laptop computers; several mobile phones and Sim cards taken from MPs' offices; a £250 bicycle; a £100 scarf; and two pairs of £30 shoes.</p>	24.10.06	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Parliament
<p>Support for ID cards does not add up</p> <p>Government claims that Scotland is backing plans for a national identity card are based on a survey of fewer than 200 people. Following an FOI Act request, the Home Office has admitted that its main poll of public opinion in Scotland used a sample group of just 158 people. That is just a small fraction of the size, which independent pollsters say is required for reliable results. The Home Office claims that 69% of Scots endorse the government's plans. Until now, the department has not admitted that claim, but it indicates only that 109 people in Scotland have said they are in favour of ID cards.</p>	01.04.06	The Scotsman	The Home Office	Passports and ID Cards
<p>Gaffes force city passport office to pay out £45,000</p> <p>Belfast's passport office paid more than £8,000 to one customer who missed the holiday of a lifetime because of a mistake on his passport. In less than six years the office has paid more than £45,000 in compensation because of mistakes by staff, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. The figures also show complaints by customers of the Belfast office have almost trebled in the space of five years. In 2001, the office, which issues British passports in Northern Ireland, received 34 complaints. In 2005, 94 complaints were made and by August last year the office had already been the subject of 87 complaints.</p>	10.01.07	Belfast Telegraph	The Passport Office (Northern Ireland)	Passports and ID Cards

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

'Millions to rebel' over ID cards The government is predicting that some 15m people will revolt against the controversial ID card scheme by refusing to produce the new cards or provide personal data on demand. The forecast is made in documents released by the Home Office under the FOI Act. The papers show ministers expect national protests similar to the poll tax rebellions of the Thatcher era, with millions prepared to risk criminal prosecution. The first cards are due in 2009, alongside new passports. Labour has said it will make the scheme compulsory if it wins the next election.	08.04.07	The Sunday Times	Department for Work and Pensions.	Passports and ID cards
Secret papers that reveal lies over ID cards Whitehall papers, which the Government has fought for two years to suppress, disclose that Labour intended to force the public to sign up to ID cards. They appear to contradict commitments given by Labour in its 2005 Election manifesto, which pledged that the cards, and the national identity register containing people's names, addresses, fingerprints and other information, would be 'on a voluntary basis'. The briefing notes, released under the FOI Act, show that civil servants had already been told ID cards would be compulsory for everyone by 2014.	08.04.07	The Mail on Sunday	Department for Work and Pensions	Passports and ID cards
Brown knew pension fund raid would rob employees of £12bn Gordon Brown was warned he would rob pension funds of nearly £12 billion when he decided to bring in a tax on private pensions in 1997. The Chancellor's raid on funds is widely blamed for creating the crisis that has left huge shortfalls in pension pots and forced hundreds of firms to wind up their final salary schemes. Mr Brown's decision abolished tax relief on income from share dividends, a key source of cash for pension funds. But Treasury documents, released under the FOI Act, show Mr Brown was well aware of the financial consequences this would have on those saving for their retirement. Documents in the Treasury archive show the tax, introduced in the Chancellor's first Budget, could cut the income of private pension schemes by up to 10%. It calculated that Mr Brown would be able to increase his own coffers, at the expense of savers, by at least £6.2 billion in the first 20 months and £11.6 billion over the first two and a half years.	15.02.06	The Daily Mail	HM Treasury	Pensions
Government pensions liabilities The Government's pensions liabilities were £530 billion on March 31 2005, a rise of £70 billion since the end of the 2003/04 financial year according to figures released under the FOI Act.	27.04.06	The Guardian	HM Treasury	Pensions
Compensation for lost pensions Retired former ASW steelworkers have been awarded an average compensation of less than £4,000 according to figures released under the FOI Act. And only 22 people - out of hundreds affected when the Cardiff steel plant collapsed four years ago - will get that. In all, £81,399 has been paid out to the 22 workers - an average of £3,719 each - under the Government's Financial Assistance Scheme up to October 13 2006.	14.11.06	South Wales Echo	Department for Work and Pensions	Pensions

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Pension timebomb - Brown defied advice</p> <p>Gordon Brown defied repeated warnings from his own officials about the potentially devastating impact of his £ 5 billion-a-year raid on pension funds and went ahead with it regardless. Pensions campaigners described the revelations - the result of a two year battle by The Times - as an absolute disgrace, and said that it showed the Chancellor "knowingly set about destroying" Britain's pensions system. Mr Brown announced the scrapping of tax relief on dividends paid into pension funds in his first Budget in July 1997, in the single biggest change to the pensions system in a generation. Documents released to The Times under the FOI Act show that officials told Mr Brown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The lower paid would be worse off under the new rules * Pensioners due to retire would lose out immediately * Businesses would struggle to adjust to the change * It would cost pension providers £4 billion a year * Pension benefits would be cut * Shares could drop by between 6% and 20% * The value of existing pension funds could fall immediately by £50 billion * Local authority schemes would need topping up, leading to higher public spending <p>The Department of Trade and Industry would be "gravely concerned" about having to bail out pension schemes driven into insolvency.</p>	31.03.07	The Times	HM treasury	Pensions
--	----------	-----------	-------------	----------

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>500,000 mothers short-changed by £1bn on their state pensions Up to 500,000 women pensioners are owed at least £ 1 billion in unpaid state pension benefits. Flaws in the pension system and the failure of successive governments to record women's tax details properly means that hundreds of thousands of mothers who gave up work to care for their children have lost out. A six-month investigation using the FOI Act, parliamentary questions and analysis by accountancy firm Grant Thornton, has found that many female pensioners are unaware that they are missing out on an average of several thousand pounds each. Under Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP), introduced in 1978, women who stopped working to bring up children and received child benefit should be automatically rewarded in retirement with a boost to their state pension. It is not the responsibility of the pensioner to claim HRP: the Pension Service should do it for them. If the system is working properly, HRP reduces the number of years of national insurance contributions women need under their belt to qualify for a full state pension. Accurate national insurance records are crucial. However, no checks were made by the Child Benefit Office to verify national insurance numbers until 1994 because women did not have to supply these details on their forms. It was not until May 2000 that it became mandatory for child benefit customers to do so. In a response to an FOI Act request, Revenue & Customs admitted that it knew of the problem with HRP. "We have been made aware of certain instances where HRP has not been recorded on customer's accounts, and to raise customer awareness of how HRP's work, the DWP's (Department for Work and Pensions) pension literature contains extensive HRP information."</p>	12.05.07	The Times	HM Revenue & Customs	Pensions
<p>37 ASW staff get pension payouts A total of 37 former ASW steelworkers in Cardiff have now been partly compensated for their lost pensions, it has been revealed. Figures released under the FOI Act show the highest award made to them under UK Government's Financial Assistance Scheme has been £7,560, with the lowest of £400. A total of £4,351,024 gross had been paid as at May 11 2007 to 1,166 UK workers who had lost their pensions.</p>	23.05.07	South Wales Echo	Department for Work and Pensions	Pensions
<p>How you put £3 into MSPs pension fund for every £1 they pay Details of the MSPs pension fund have been released under the FOI Scotland Act. MSPs paid £420,924 into the scheme in 2003-04 but Scottish taxpayers ploughed in just under £1.3m. In the following financial year, the MSPs total contribution fell to £395,606 but the states increased to £1.33m. In 2005-06, MSPs paid in £442,654 while taxpayers contributed £1.36m. But that figure increased by 10% in 2006-07 to just over £1.5m, while the MSPs contribution was £448,828. Between April 2003 and August last year, almost £6million of taxpayers money was pumped into the scheme.</p>	19.09.07	The Daily Mail	Scottish Executive	Pensions

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Civil service pensions Almost 4,000 ex-civil servants have pension pots of more than £1m. And the total value of retirement funds for the ex-Whitehall workers is almost £3.7 billion, the TaxPayers' Alliance found by using the FOI Act. Almost nine out of 10 of the 5.8 million public sector workers are in final salary schemes and some analysts have estimated civil service pension liabilities will cost every household £40,000.	11.12.07	The Daily Mirror	Government departments	Pensions
Unethical pensions? Millions of pounds in pension contributions paid by Northeast councils and their employees have been invested in chewing-gum firm Wrigley. Fund managers have bought up nearly £3.5m of the company's stock - despite the region's local authorities spending a small fortune removing gum from pavements. A further £26.5m has been spent on shares in arms, cigarette and booze firms because they offer safe returns for the scheme's 24,447 active members. Details of the fund, operated by Aberdeen City Council but including staff from neighbouring local authorities, colleges, universities, First, Scottish Water and Grampian Police civilian staff, have been released under the FOI Scotland Act.	17.02.06	Aberdeen Evening News	Aberdeen City Council	Pensions
Mayor's pension fund includes shares in arms manufacturers 21 London local authorities and the Greater London Authority between them have £124m invested via pension schemes in arms companies according to information obtained under the FOI Act.	27.04.06	The Evening Standard	London authorities	Pensions
Big cats at large Hundreds of big cats could be roaming Scotland, it has been revealed. More than 200 Scots have reported seeing giant leopard-like panthers, pumas and big black cats throughout the country. And Scotland's eight police forces have investigated 185 sightings of the fierce creatures in the past six years, according to figures released yesterday. Grampian is the big cat hotspot, with 55 of the mystery animals spotted, followed by Fife with 42 sightings. Strathclyde Police investigated 27 sightings, while 30 have been sighted in the Lothian and Borders force area. Central Scotland is the safest place, with just three big cats sighted. In Tayside 13 animals were spotted while 15 were seen in Dumfries and Galloway, according to data obtained under the FOI Scotland Act.	19.03.07	The Daily Star	Police forces	Pets, Wildlife and Zoos
Poaching "Nessie" Civil servants working for Margaret Thatcher found there were no explicit laws in place to prevent poachers hunting and killing Scotland's most famous tourist attraction, the Loch Ness Monster according to information contained in correspondence released under the FOI Act. Fortunately, they decided that no new legislation was needed because the Secretary of State for Scotland had powers under the 1981 Wildlife Act to add Nessie to the schedule of endangered animals.	08.01.06	The Sunday Times	The Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Dolphins to find Nessie Maggie Thatcher's government wanted to import dolphins from the US to hunt for Nessie. Officials believed the discovery of the Loch Ness Monster would lead to a tourism explosion. Papers released under the FOI Act show the plan was discussed in a letter in May 1979 from David Waymouth, a civil servant at the Department of the Environment, to Stewart Walker at the Scottish Development Department. The letter states: "This department is presently considering the issue of a licence to import two bottle-nosed dolphins from America for the purpose of exploring Loch Ness, a scheme which has already resulted in opposition from the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Inquiries have been made with the mammal experts on the Scientific Authority for Animals and their advice is that there are no conservation, or indeed welfare, reasons for refusing a licence. Clearly, however, there are other factors, mainly political, that you might wish to consider before the licence is issued."	16.01.06	The Sunday Times	The National Archive of Scotland	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
Dog attacks Savage dogs have attacked and mauled 245 people in Wearside during the past two years. It means that, on average, a dog attacks a person every three days, sparking concerns about the number of family Pets, Zoos and Wildlife not under control. But despite the high number of reported assaults, just 34 were recorded as a crime, while only 14 people were summoned to court to face action. Figures obtained under the FOI Act from Northumbria Police reveal 116 attacks by dogs during 2005, while 129 people were bitten in 2004.	21.02.06	Sunderland Echo	Northumbria Police	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
Littering and dog-fouling in NE Lincolnshire Information released under the FOI Act reveals the number of fines issued for dog fouling and littering in North East Lincolnshire. No fines were issued for dogs fouling the pavements between 1996 and 2003 and no one was fined for littering between 1990 and 2002. Following the introduction of the Neat Streets team, North East Lincolnshire Council's Neighbourhood Environmental Action Team, 2005 was a crackdown year for dog fouling and littering, resulting in 23 and 78 £50 fines respectively.	22.03.06	Grimsby Evening Telegraph	North East Lincolnshire Council	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
National Marine Aquarium costs The National Marine Aquarium has received an additional £137,623 of taxpayers' cash in the past year - towards the cost of the Phase II shark tank extension it opened in 2002. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that the South West Regional Development Agency made the extra payment, during the 2005/06 financial year 'to take into account increased costs on the project' even though it was completed four years ago. It brings SWRDA's total funding for the project, phased in through annual payments from 2001, to £2,312,618, up from the £2,174,995 SWRDA had originally invested.	28.03.06	Plymouth Evening Herald	South West Regional Development Agency	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Big cats and snakes take root in sheds Twelve lions, 14 tigers, 50 leopards and 250 poisonous snakes are among the tally of dangerous wildlife kept in garden sheds and spare rooms across the country. Figures released by local authorities under the FOI Act have revealed the surprising extent of wildlife - excluding zoo animals - owned by private licensed keepers. Big Cats in Britain, a research group, discovered that 154 assorted non-domestic cats are owned privately, along with even larger numbers of other dangerous species, after requesting information from 408 local authorities.	28.12.06	The Guardian	Individual local authorities	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
The plight of Chessington's gorillas Two unpublished official reports under the FOI Act have expressed grave concern at conditions for the zoo's western lowland gorillas. The local authority has issued the theme park with an ultimatum - to build a new home for the primates, or risk losing its licence.	12.04.07	The Independent	Local authority	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
Scandal of dogs left to die Almost 5,000 dogs have been thrown out on to the streets of Wearside and East Durham in the past five years - with up to one in five put to sleep because homes couldn't be found for them. Figures obtained under the FOI Act reveal that Sunderland and Easington council dog wardens have picked up 4,522 dogs since 2002. And kennels have had no choice but to put 810 of the animals to sleep.	30.05.07	Sunderland Echo	Local councils	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
A law unto themselves Natural England has licensed the re-release of 257 grey squirrels into the wild over the past 18 months, despite government moves to restrict the release of non-native plants and wildlife. That figure has been obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by a body called the European Squirrel Initiative, which thinks that Britain has been doing far too little to defend its native wildlife from the invading greys.	09.11.07	The Daily Telegraph	Natural England	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
Rise in big cat reports show more on the prowl Hundreds of people have reported sightings of wild big cats the length and breadth of Scotland in recent years. Grampian, Fife and Angus have been a hotspot for reports, while helicopters have been called out in Strathclyde to search for big cats. There have been around 50 sightings in the Grampian region in the last five years, according to figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act.	16.03.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Scottish police forces	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Report reveals new proof of big cats</p> <p>Journalists used the FOI Act to see a 15-year-old report on the finding of a lynx, which had been shot. The body of the 59lb adult cat was discovered in a gamekeeper's freezer by police officers investigating reports of shooting of birds of prey. The officer involved states: "Many years ago we were conducting a search warrant on a gamekeeper who was suspected of killing birds of prey. At the start of the search in an outhouse, which contained a large chest freezer, I asked him what he had in the freezer, and he replied: 'Oh only some pigeons and a lynx'. On opening the freezer there was a large lynx lying stretched out in the freezer on top of a load of pigeons. He had shot this when he saw it chasing his gun dog." The discovery was made in Beccles, East Anglia in 1991. The gamekeeper admitted shooting the lynx about 30 miles away in Great Witchingham.</p>	22.03.06	Western Morning Mail		Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
<p>Warning: zoo animals could escape</p> <p>In Regent's Park's 140 acres of greenery, visitors may spot a variety of animals: hedgehogs, foxes, grey squirrels, tawny owls, bats, damselflies and butterflies. And, perhaps, a tiger. An unpublished inspection of London Zoo has warned that dangerous animals could quickly emerge into the outside world, after leaping an inadequate perimeter fence. That would lead to big cats surprising, not to say terrifying, the picnickers, joggers and tourists enjoying the adjoining park, central London's biggest. The warning came in an official inspection report by vets obtained under the FOI Act. Their criticism is something of an embarrassment to the Zoological Society of London, which runs the oldest and most famous public menagerie in Britain. Although the zoo's tigers and lions are held in high security compounds, the Government-approved vets feared that if they did escape a 6ft perimeter fence would not hold them back for long. In fact they would be able to climb the metal railings before marksmen fired their tranquilliser guns. Once out, the creatures would be faced with dodging traffic on the Outer Circle or roaming Regent's Park, a few miles from the West End and the Houses of Parliament. The vets visited London Zoo for two days in January and warmly welcomed improvements for the animals, visitors and research. They singled out the zookeepers for praise.</p>	23.03.07	The Independent	Westminster Council	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife
<p>Expensive newts</p> <p>Figures obtained under the FOI Act by a Crewe and Nantwich borough councillor show that protecting just 56 great crested newts cost £414,479, against an original estimate of just less than £85,000. £7,400 was the price per newt of saving a colony from disappearing under a road-building scheme.</p>	03.04.07	The Times	Crewe & Nantwich Council	Pets, Zoos and Wildlife

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>PFI hospital AandE over capacity</p> <p>A Scottish hospital built using private finance five years ago has exceeded its capacity by more than 20%. The accident and emergency department at Wishaw General in Lanarkshire was designed to treat 50,000 casualties a year, according to details released under the FOI Scotland Act request. However, in the 12 months to April 2006, more than 61,000 patients passed through the unit. Proposals by NHS Lanarkshire to close nearby AandE units would only increase pressure on Wishaw, which had recently been named as the source of the longest AandE delay in Scotland (20 hours).</p>	22.06.06	Glasgow Herald	NHS Lanarkshire	PFI
<p>Flagship hospitals are 'overcrowded and poorly cleaned'</p> <p>Hospitals built under the private finance initiative have fewer beds and are less well cleaned, according to an official report. Watchdogs warned that the scheme, used to fund dozens of hospitals, has led to overcrowded wards. They also found that while cleaning costs were higher, standards were seen to be lower. Under private finance schemes, firms build and run hospitals in return for annual payments. The serious problems with the initiative were identified by the National Audit Office in a 2005 report that was never published. Last night its draft findings were released under the FOI Act. The report concluded: 'The majority of the first wave PFI hospitals were running at occupancy rates higher than the Department of Health's target.' Seventy per cent of such hospitals of Health's target.' Seventy per cent of such hospitals had fewer beds than the facilities they replaced.</p>	21.06.07	The Daily Mail	National Audit Office	PFI
<p>£5.5m earned in rent</p> <p>84 councils made more than £5m last year from renting out spaces on public buildings for phone masts. That includes homes and offices as well as primary, nursery and even special schools. The figures show Leeds City Council pocketed the most, earning £410,000 from masts, including 38 on the roofs of council flats. The information was provided under the FOI Act, a further 50 councils said they would not, or could not, reveal their figures.</p>	03.12.06	The News of the World	Individual Local authorities	Phone Masts
<p>'Common-good' land</p> <p>After a request under the FOI Scotland Act revealed that some of the land earmarked for a new development was held in the "common good", protestors are planning a legal challenge to a £180m development in the Old Town. They claim the proposed Caltongate scheme, which includes offices, shops and a five-star hotel, would be built on land belonging to the people of Edinburgh. Critics have obtained a century old map, which marks out land to be held in the "common good". And they believe the council may not have had the right to sell the land on East Market Street to developer Mountgrange for £2.5m, or that the proceeds should go to the common-good fund. The Canongate Community Forum is taking legal advice over whether the council's authority to sell the land was valid. The forum is made up of people concerned about the impact of the massive development set to destroy listed flats to make way for offices, modern apartments and a five-star hotel.</p>	20.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Planning

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>A Derry confusing city</p> <p>Government officials purposely avoided using the term "city" when drafting controversial laws that allowed Londonderry Corporation to change its name to Derry City Council more than 20 years ago. Official also show that the name altered to Derry by a 1984 order was the title of the district covered by the council, not the council itself. The change of the council's name led to major divisions between nationalists and unionists and still causes confusion and anger to this day. The correspondence, held by the Department of Environment (Northern Ireland), was obtained under the FOI Act.</p>	23.01.06	Belfast Telegraph	Department for Environment (now Department for Communities and Local Government)	Planning
<p>Poundbury 'carbuncle'</p> <p>Residents of Prince Charles' dream village Poundbury were furious last night after discovering that his architects have suggested a "carbuncle" design once again - despite losing a planning inquiry in 2005. They accuse the Duchy of Cornwall, and West Dorset District Council planning officers, of ignoring the report of the planning inspector who threw out the scheme for flats and shops, which included a five or four storey tower. Residents are incensed that an email, released to them by the council under the FOI Act, appears to show that a council officer has now advised the Duchy to reinsert the five-storey tower for the latest plan for the site.</p>	27.02.06	Western Daily Press	West Dorset District Council	Planning
<p>Red tape slashed for Gloag's castle</p> <p>Documents released under the FOI Scotland Act show that Perth and Kinross planning officials might have taken too lenient a line on developments around Kinfauns castle following its purchase by Stagecoach tycoon Ann Gloag. The council's handling of the affair, which culminated in Gloag receiving planning permission for a 'prison camp' fence around her home, is now under investigation by Historic Scotland.</p>	26.03.06	Scotland on Sunday	Perth and Kinross Council	Planning
<p>Hoogstraten's £40m folly 'will never be finished'</p> <p>Construction of the country's most expensive private home, which has been standing half-built for five years, might never be completed, a confidential report says. Nicholas Hoogstraten, the property tycoon who was freed on appeal two years ago after being jailed over the killing of a business rival, yesterday dismissed the building inspector who compiled the report as "mad". But he admitted that his £40m Hamilton Palace was unlikely to be finished until 2020. Work on the gold-domed building, set in 100 acres of parkland near Uckfield, East Sussex, came to a halt in 2001. Since then a building inspector from Wealden council has produced a damning report. His findings, which were obtained under the FOI Act, point to damage caused by water leakage; damp seeping into the penthouse, making the walls look like "contour maps"; and vegetation flourishing on the unfinished roof. The report also says that there may be insufficient specialist craftsmen to complete the building, which includes a mausoleum for when Mr Hoogstraten dies.</p>	04.04.06	The Daily Telegraph	Wealden Council	Planning
<p>Airport expansion</p> <p>Confidential documents released under FOI Act show Derry City Council faced financial penalties if delays in a runway extension in 1999 forced Ryanair to fly from Belfast.</p>	30.06.06	Belfast Telegraph	Derry City Council	Planning

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Ministers are ruining our world heritage, says UN The scene was described by Monet as "dazzling" and "beautiful" and inspired the Impressionist master to paint some of his best loved works. Now the Palace of Westminster has joined a list of heritage sites that ministers are accused of failing to protect. A United Nations body overseeing "world heritage sites" is threatening to put several British areas on its Heritage in Danger List, a register of 31 historic places whose futures are in jeopardy, according to documents released under the FOI Act.	04.03.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Department of Culture, Media & Sport	Planning
Massive costs at mothballed visitor attraction Taxpayers have paid more than £325,000 in maintenance costs for Doncaster's Earth Centre in the two-and-a-half years since the site was mothballed. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal the cost to the council taxpayer of keeping the site ticking over was £189,639.22 for the 2005-06 financial year, and £137,961.37 for the 2006-07 financial year up to March 7.	21.03.07	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Planning
Baronet rides to the rescue of parkland under threat A baronet in shining armour has come to the aid of a group of residents in Salford who are campaigning to block a proposed housing development. Through detective work and with help from the FOI Act, the residents discovered that the plot was once a farm owned by the ancestors of Sir Peter Heywood, the 6th Baronet of Claremont, and that they had sold it to the council in 1902 on the condition that it be used only for recreation. Council officials had claimed that there was little chance of tracking down descendants or relatives of the original landowners, until the 6th Baronet stood up during a council meeting and announced: "I'm pleased to say I do exist, and as a baronet I'm not hard to find." He is listed in Who's Who. Sir Peter, 59, had been tracked down to his home in Bath and agreed to make the 350-mile (560km) round trip to address a Salford council meeting. Now the council may be forced to rethink its plan to sell the land for £1.5m. Although partly used for recreation the site also contained Oakwood High School, demolished last year. A petition opposing its use for housing has attracted 450 signatures. Sir Peter told councillors: "The council is looking at selling the land for a housing development. That was always against my family's wishes and it is still against my wishes. I have thought hard about it and I will not give my consent for lifting the covenant."	14.04.07	The Times	Salford council	Planning
Prescott ignored his own advisers to approve tower John Prescott gave planning permission to the Vauxhall Tower despite emphatic recommendations from his own advisers that he should refuse it. Letters sent to Mr Prescott by his officials and released under the FOI Act say that the 600ft tower of flats would "be damaging" to views of the Palace of Westminster World Heritage Site. They complained that it would "cause harm to a number of conservation areas," that its provision of affordable housing would not be "adequate" and that it would not "bring material benefits in terms of regeneration" above another, less obtrusive, plan for the site.	02.07.07	The Evening Standard	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Planning

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£140,000 spent on Falmer fight Lewes District Council spent £140,000 on lawyers to fight plans for Albion's Falmer stadium, figures obtained under the FOI Act show. Since 2001, £138,988 has been spent trying to stop the 22,000 seater ground.	26.07.07	Brighton and Hove Argus	Lewes District Council	Planning
True cost of council land sale Oxford City Council received just £1.1m for land it sold to former Oxford United owner Firoz Kassam - even though it was valued at £3.8m, a senior council officer has admitted. Figures released under the FOI Act show the details of the sale of land at Minchery Farm, where the Kassam Stadium, Holiday Inn Express Hotel and the Ozone Leisure Zone now stand (all properties owned by Mr Kassam's companies).	18.10.07	Oxford Mail	Oxford City Council	Planning
2,000 Scots police given 'inadequate' body armour Two thousand Scottish police officers were exposed to danger after their managers ordered below-standard body armour. Frontline officers at Lothian and Borders Police spent up to four years performing their duties in the belief their body armour gave them higher protection than it really did. Documents obtained under the FOI Scotland Act reveal the force opted for different covers for its body armour so officers could wear them on top of their clothing instead of underneath. The decision led to a drop in the vests' effectiveness compared with vests with the original covers, used by other forces in Scotland.	02.04.06	Scotland on Sunday	Lothian and Borders Police	Policing
Met fears on De Menezes 'cover-up' Sir Ian Blair's own officers concluded that the Metropolitan police commissioner's decision to block an independent inquiry into the fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes left the force open to accusations of a cover-up. Their findings are contained in an internal Metropolitan police document that was written hours after Mr de Menezes was killed in Stockwell tube station in July 2005 after police mistook him for a terrorist. Just after the shooting, Sir Ian tried to stop the Independent Police Complaints Commission investigating the case, informing the Home Office in writing that he would deny IPCC staff access to the scene at Stockwell. As events unfolded on July 22 2005 - the day after the failed terrorist attacks on London's transport network - a police team wrote an assessment of the impact of the shooting on community relations. Documents showing the internal police assessments have been released under the FOI Act.	17.07.06	The Guardian	Metropolitan Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

ASBO breaches In West Yorkshire, where courts have handed out 459 ASBOs, there were a staggering 1,301 breaches last year. Durham's 74 ASBOs banning thugs from town centres or housing estates were breached 204 times. And in Sussex, there were 272 breaches of the 179 ASBOs given last year. In Essex, the picture is almost as bleak as in West Yorkshire. Of 102 ASBOs issued, there have been 210 breaches. In Thames Valley, there have been 150 breaches of the 104 ASBOs given out since 1999. In Leicestershire, where 69 ASBOs have been given to thugs, there have been 109 breaches in only 12 months. Northumbria Police could not reveal how many breaches there had been but said 53% of ASBOs had been broken at least once. The figures, released under the FOI Act are much higher than the Government's last published statistic of 40%.	14.01.06	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
ASBOs work Humberside courts have given out 159 ASBOs since 1999 according to figures released under the FOI Act. Crime dropped by more than a third in one area of Grimsby after four ASBOs were issued. The orders were given out to individuals in the East Marsh during 2005. As a result crime there has dropped by 37%, compared to the same period in 2004.	18.03.06	Grimsby Evening Telegraph	Local Police and Courts	Policing
Two out of three ASBOs breached The government's drive to curb yobbish behaviour was dealt a serious blow as it emerged that rising numbers of ASBOs were being flouted. Two out of three antisocial behaviour orders obtained by councils in areas where the Home Office pioneered the policy were being breached, it was revealed. The figures will fuel suspicions by opponents of the orders that the overall breach rate in England and Wales has risen and has exceeded 50%. Home Office officials have been unable to disclose the breach rate for 2004 despite saying in May that they hoped to publish the figures within two months. But figures obtained under the FOI Act show that a large percentage of ASBOs issued in Sheffield and Westminster - two of ten areas where the order was pioneered - were being breached by yobs.	30.09.06	The Times	Sheffield and Westminster City Councils	Policing
£21,000 spent on ASBOs Ashfield Homes (the company responsible for Ashfield's council housing) has spent more than £21,000 on securing anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) on trouble-making yobs in the last three years. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show the organisation spent an average of £3,053.33, which included staff time, on the seven cases it has handled since 2004. The average cost to Ashfield Homes of obtaining ASBOs has also dropped from £4,267.04 in 2004 to £2,594.36 in 2006. The organisation, which manages the district's council houses, secured two ASBOs in 2004 at a cost of £8,534.08, three ASBOs in 2005 for of £7,650.54 and two ASBOs in 2006 for £5,188.72 bringing the three-year total to £21,373.34.	02.02.07	Ashfield Today	Ashfield Council	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Big disparity in ASBO breaches Seventy-four per cent of antisocial behaviour orders issued in Co Durham were contravened between June 2000 and December 2005, according to Home Office figures. The North East county tops a table of ASBO breaches. Northamptonshire is at the bottom on 11%. Figures released under the FOI Act show that Dorset is second on 66% and North Wales and Cleveland joint third on 64 % Greater Manchester 56% of the 1,227 ASBOs issued were breached and in Greater London 40% of 1,163 ASBOs were broken, the figures, published in Regeneration and Renewal, show.	10.02.07	The Times	Local police and courts	Policing
Electronic tagging 1,510 offenders ripped off their electronic tags between April 1 2005 and December 31 2005 in East Anglia. 2,555 offenders removed electronic devices in the same period in the East, London, West Midlands and Wales. The Home Office, who released the information under the FOI Act, did not provide figures for other areas but confirmed 15.2% of offenders in England and Wales fitted with tags breached home detention curfews in 2005.	27.05.06	Eastern Daily Press	Home Office	Policing
'Supervised' criminals continue crime wave Criminals who are spared prison and given community punishment under the supervision of probation officers commit more than 6,000 offences a month, Home Office research has revealed. An internal Home Office report, obtained under the FOI Act, reveals the extent of re-offending by criminals under supervision. On any given day, the Probation Service in England and Wales monitors about 160,000 offenders in two categories - those on community orders and those released early from prison on licence. Across both categories, offenders carry out 9,726 crimes a month - including 1,859 violent crimes, 205 robberies, 653 burglaries, 48 sexual crimes, 17 child sex crimes and 2,059 motoring offences.	22.10.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Home Office	Policing
3,000 danger men jump bail and are never tracked down Thousands of dangerous criminals are roaming the streets because police are failing to track down bail jumpers. A total of 3,273 accused rapists, robbers and violent offenders remain at large after absconding before their court appearances. The worst area is London, where 997 'category A' suspects are on the loose, followed by Merseyside with 416 and Greater Manchester with 141. The figures were released by 36 forces under the FOI Act. When bail jumpers accused of lesser crimes such as motoring offences and theft are included, the total reaches 37,429. A further seven forces were unable to provide the data, suggesting the final figure could be much higher.	28.12.06	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
Dangerous criminals on loose in Notts Dangerous criminals are roaming the streets after jumping bail in Nottinghamshire. A total of 27 Category A offenders are at large having failed to attend their court appearances, according to figures released under the FOI Act. A quarter are believed to have fled overseas, 17 have been at large for more than a year and two for more than six months.	13.02.07	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>216,000 crimes by villains out on bail</p> <p>More than 200,000 crimes could have been committed by suspects on police bail for other offences. At least 19 murders, ten attempted murders and 22 rapes were carried out by suspects arrested by police but later released. There were also 189 other sex offences and 453 robberies. The statistics were released under the FOI Act. Of the 43 forces in England and Wales, 12 who responded showed 60,537 offences were committed by people on bail. Adjusted figures for all the forces show the total could be as high as 216,000.</p>	30.08.07	The Sun	Police forces	Policing
<p>Tagging is hit by a great rip-off</p> <p>Official figures showed the number of criminals who cut off or sabotage their electronic tags has nearly trebled in a year. Tampering incidents - including the times when offenders cut off their electronic tags and go on the run - soared last year from 1,700 to 4,200, according to statistics released by the Department of Justice. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, are equivalent to one incident every two hours.</p>	11.09.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Justice	Policing
<p>Crime toll of bail crooks</p> <p>People released on bail in Worcestershire have committed 550 new offences in 18 months, including two attempted rapes. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show that between January 2006 and July 2007 a vast range of crimes were carried out by people freed on bail at courts and by the police. They include one case of detaining a child without lawful authority, three of sexual activity with a child, one sexual assault on a female, one failing to comply with the terms of the Sex Offenders Register and two arson attacks. The figures also show individuals committing violent offences, including 14 of wounding and eight assaults causing actual bodily harm. There were 12 cases of people intimidating a juror or witness, two of possessing an imitation firearm in a public place and six of carrying a blade/sharp item.</p>	25.09.07	Worcester News	Worcestershire Police	Policing
<p>Little terrors</p> <p>Vandals aged as young as three and four have been apprehended by Grampian police. The figures were released under the FOI Scotland Act. The number of incidents of vandalism involving youngsters aged 16 and under is at a three-year high in Grampian. In 2005 there were 1,476 incidents in the force's area compared to 1,114 in 2004 and 986 in 2003. Over the last 12 months police spoke to two four-year-olds, two five-year-olds and seven six-year-olds.</p>	16.02.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Grampian Police	Policing
<p>Children as young as eight caught on the streets with knives</p> <p>Statistics obtained under the FOI Scotland Act by the SNP from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration reveal the extent of knife culture among young people. More than 1,150 youngsters under 15 were caught carrying knives - 150 of them under 12 - in 2004/05. Some 297 under-15s were caught carrying knives in Glasgow, 98 in North Lanarkshire, 83 in South Lanarkshire, 58 in Dundee and 55 in Renfrewshire. In Edinburgh, 59 children, some as young as 11, were caught carrying knives.</p>	09.03.06	The Scotsman	Scottish Children's Reporter Administration	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>The Young Guns At least one child is charged with a firearms crime every day. Nearly 800 youngsters - some as young as 10 - have appeared in court on gun charges since January 2005. A further 2,200 were arrested. Sixteen teenagers, including a 14-year-old, have been charged with gun murder. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, could be even worse because 11 police forces did not supply statistics. The trend is all the more worrying because in general gun crime is down. The Metropolitan Police charged 244 under-18s between January 1, 2005, and September 30, 2006. Until April 2005, officers from Operation Trident - which investigates fatal shootings in the black community - had not charged anybody younger than 20 with murder. Since then, 16 teenagers have been charged, including one who was just 14. Greater Manchester Police arrested 549 children, charged 187 and issued 220 cautions over the same period. Among them were six 10-year-olds, including two charged with imitation firearm offences, a 15-year-old charged with possessing a handgun and a 14-year-old charged with possessing a firearm with intent to cause fear of violence. West Midlands Police arrested 321 children and charged 74, including a 10-year-old for possessing an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence.</p>	01.11.06	The Daily Mirror	Individual police forces	Policing
<p>Ten-year-olds charged with sex crimes Hundreds of 10-year-old children were charged with crimes last year, including serious sexual offences, robbery, actual bodily harm and assaulting a police officer. In Lancashire a 10-year-old boy was arrested in May 2005 for raping a young girl with another boy. The 10-year-old was later charged with "aiding and abetting" her rape and engaging in "penetrative sexual activity" with the girl. The case will be heard in a youth court next year. It is one of at least three sexual offences committed by 10-year-olds where the police pressed charges, according to details released under the FOI Act by 27 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.</p>	12.11.06	The Sunday Times	Police Forces	Policing
<p>12-year old caught in stolen car A Child aged 12 has been caught driving a stolen car on North Lincolnshire's roads. Police arrested the subject, who cannot be identified, in November last year for theft of a motor vehicle. The child was the youngest person in the region arrested by police for driving a stolen vehicle according to figures released under the FOI Act.</p>	04.01.07	Scunthorpe Evening News	Lincolnshire police	Policing
<p>120 children mugged each day At least 120 children are mugged every day. A total of 23,698 youngsters aged 11 to 16 were robbed in 12 months during 2005-2006. Most are thought to be teen-on-teen crimes as they make their way to and from schools. The figures heighten fears that teens are suffering from a rising tide of afternoon crime when few police officers patrol the streets. Official Government data suggest only a fifth of robberies are reported. That means the true number of robberies on secondary school pupils could be as high as 118,000 a year. It would be the equivalent of 604 muggings on each of the 195 school days in any year. The figures were gathered by the Tories under the FOI Act.</p>	12.01.07	The Daily Mirror	Police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Kids aged 7 arrested with guns <p>Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show how Scottish children are being pulled into a life of crime. Within the last two years, police have arrested a string of pre-teens for dealing drugs and stealing cars. According to the statistics, Lothian & Borders police arrested a 13-year-old for intent to supply coke, while a 12-year-old was caught dealing cannabis. The force also arrested a nine-year-old last year on firearms charges. In 2005, they arrested a seven-year-old in possession of a firearm. In Strathclyde, another seven-year-old was found in possession of a firearm and a primary pupil of just eight registered as the force's youngest arrest for carrying a blade.</p>	28.01.07	The News of the World	Scottish Police forces	Policing
Little terrors <p>Children as young as 11 have been convicted of sex attacks in Northern Ireland. Since 2004, 41 children have been found guilty of assaulting women. Four of those were 11-year-olds who were charged and convicted of indecent assault in 2005. PSNI documents obtained under the FOI Act show a rise in crime among young children since 2004. In 2004, the number of youngsters between the ages of 10 to 15 who committed an offence was 2,410. An increase of over 20% means last year there were 2,922 kids convicted of crimes including rape, dangerous driving, bomb hoaxes, assaults on police and possession of drugs.</p>	17.07.07	The Daily Mirror	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing
Primary children blamed for 3,000 crimes <p>Children under the age of ten were the prime suspects in nearly 3,000 crimes last year, according to figures released under the FOI Act. Police statistics show that 2,840 crimes, including harassment, wounding and burglary, were thought to have been committed by children younger than ten, the age of criminal responsibility. Nearly half of the alleged offences, about 1,300, involved criminal damage and arson. Under-tens were also suspected of committing 66 sex offences, including sexual assaults on children under the age of 13. The figures, obtained by BBC Radio 5 Live, were released by 32 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.</p>	03.09.07	The Times	Police forces	Policing
Canine payouts <p>Police dogs sinking their teeth into the wrong people led to compensation payments of more than £100,000 last year. Payments went from £40 to £42,500. Thirteen of the 36 claims, settled by 17 forces, were made by officers, according to figures released under the FOI Act.</p>	08.05.07	The Times	Police forces	Policing
Knife brawl boy who fled from police gets £42k for dog bite <p>A teenager who took part in a knife brawl has been awarded £42,500 - after he was bitten by a police dog. The compensation and costs, revealed under the FOI Act, are thought to be Britain's largest payout for a dog bite. Police dog Bruce and handler PC Pete Tatum were breaking up a street fight involving youths with knives and bottles in Brighton in 2002. Officers shouted for the youngsters to stop - but one fled and was caught by Bruce. In the scuffle, Bruce bit off part of one of the 14-year-old's ears. Sussex Police responded by putting Bruce down.</p>	11.05.07	The Daily Express	Sussex Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Public complaints against Norfolk police officers Public complaints against Norfolk police officers - including allegations of serious and sexual assault - rose by more than 40% in 2005/06. The statistics, released under the FOI Act, show 138 reports of assault between April 2005 and March 2006. Among these are three claims of sexual assault and one of serious assault all lodged in the first quarter of 2006. The figures show 862 complaints compared with 607 in 2004/05.	01.08.06	Eastern Daily Press	Norfolk police	Policing
Trainees in probe Three trainee PSNI cops have been suspended over a string of alleged crimes. The student officers, who were all based at the training college in Garnerville, Belfast, were suspended for alleged theft, fraud and indecent assault. Under the FOI Act, the PSNI also revealed that since November 2001 when Sir Hugh Orde's force took over from the RUC, superior officers have issued 88 verbal and 66 written warnings to trainees. A further four students faced points or fines after being caught speeding.	01.07.07	The News of the World	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing
50% of on-the-spot fines for shoplifters are going unpaid Half of all fines handed out to shoplifters are not paid, it has emerged. On-the-spot penalties for thieves were introduced two years ago to deliver 'swift justice'. But although police issue an average of 30,000 each year, 50% are not being paid within the allotted time frame. Offenders are supposed to hand over the money within 21 days, or their £80 penalty is increased to £120 and passed to the courts. The amount later collected by the courts has not been revealed. A random sample of six police force areas, using the FOI Act, showed a payment rate of only 50% in 2006. In 2005, it was 49%. The total lost income to the Government, which receives the proceeds from fixed-penalty notices, is up to £1.2m.	10.03.07	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
Yobs flout system of on-the-spot fines Almost half of the on-the-spot fines dished out to yobs and petty criminals in West Yorkshire have gone unpaid. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal widespread flouting of Penalty Notice for Disorder (PND) punishments. Only 55% of fines were paid in West Yorkshire within the 21-day deadline in the 2005/06 financial year. A total of 7,700 fines were left outstanding at the end of last year. A total of £621,600 was left unpaid, based on an average fine being £80. The responsibility for clawing back the fines passes to the courts after the deadline. Nationally, a total of 150,520 notices were issued last year and 77,091 went unpaid - a payment rate of just 49%.	11.04.07	Yorkshire Evening Post	Home Office	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police issue on-the-spot penalty fines once every three minutes</p> <p>On-the-spot fines for crimes such as being drunk and disorderly, destroying property and shoplifting are being issued at a rate of one every three minutes, according to figures released under the FOI Act. The number handed in England and Wales rose by almost 40% in a year as police officers on the streets made use of a swift and economical way of dealing with offenders. But the surge in the use of penalty notices for disorder (PND) has also helped police to meet a key government target because they count towards a ministerial pledge to increase the number of crimes "brought to justice". Offenders pay either a £50 or £80 penalty even though they may have caused criminal damage of £500 or stolen up to £200 of goods from a shop. The big growth in the use of PNDs indicates that large numbers of offenders are being dealt with by means other than a formal prosecution in the courts. A total of 1.3 million offences were brought to justice in the year to the end of March 2006, in excess of the Government's target of 1.2 million between 2007 and 2008. Yet the target figure was exceeded only because of the number of offences dealt with outside the court process. Only 53% of offences brought to justice in the year to the end of March 2006 were dealt with by conviction in a court, with the remaining 47% being cautions, PNDs, offences taken into consideration and official warnings for possessing cannabis.</p>	13.08.07	The Times	Police forces	Policing
<p>Kids roam the streets with knives</p> <p>Martial arts weapons, including a samurai sword and a ninja death star, have been seized by police from youngsters in the Northeast. A total of 109 weapons were confiscated from youngsters aged 16 and under during 2005, according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	30.03.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Grampian police	Policing
<p>Amnesties 'do nothing to reduce knife crime'</p> <p>Knife amnesties have no long-term impact on knife crime, according to a police report. An eight-week amnesty run by the Metropolitan force over the summer of 2006 achieved only a slight dip in knife related crime, with levels returning to normal within weeks, the review found. The average of 34.9 knife offences every day in London dropped to 31 a day during the operation, but rose back up to 34.2 a day within six weeks of it finishing. More than 100,000 knives were handed in to police forces during the five-week nationwide campaign in May and June. The Met extended the amnesty by three weeks, with more than 9,000 knives surrendered or seized and more than 1,000 people arrested during Operation Blunt. Officers carried out high visibility patrols, searches and gave lectures at schools. But the report, released under the FOI Act, questions the operation's effectiveness.</p>	08.12.06	The Daily Mail	Metropolitan Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Asian knife killings double in ten years</p> <p>Asian people are twice as likely to be stabbed or "bottled" to death as they were a decade ago, according to Home Office figures released under the FOI Act. The statistics, until now unpublished, reveal that the proportion of Asians - particularly those from the Indian sub-continent -among those killed "by sharp instruments" has risen from 4.5% to 8.5%.</p> <p>An alarming surge in such killings happened around the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Although the overall number of killings using knives and other sharp instruments has remained stable at about 200 a year, the racial breakdown of those being attacked has altered significantly.</p> <p>The proportion of blacks fatally stabbed or bottled increased from 7.5% to 11.8%. By contrast, the proportion of whites fell from 84% to 73.6%. The turnaround happened between 1997 and 2005-06.</p> <p>Experts believe that homicide figures are the most reliable indicator of the underlying rate of violence because, unlike other crimes, nearly every killing is reported.</p>	26.04.07	The Times	The Home Office	Policing
<p>That criminal with a knife: does he want money or your life?</p> <p>Black criminals use knives to scare people in muggings, whereas white criminals tend to use them to stab each other, police figures suggest.</p> <p>A startling contrast in the way offenders from different ethnic groups treat knives is found in statistics released under the FOI act. Most muggers in the capital are described as African or Caribbean although the last census shows that only 11% of Londoners are black. While knife muggings have fallen in the past four years, from 820 a year to 575, more than half of those accused are black, with the figure currently standing at 323 of the 575 suspected muggers (56%). The ethnic breakdown for "knife-enabled violence against the person", such as stabbings without the ulterior purpose of robbery, burglary or sex, is starkly different. This type of crime has been steadily rising from 1,168 to 1,234 a year and the main offending ethnic group is white Europeans (525, or 43%). Such mindless violence is more common among other ethnic groups too. The proportion of Indian and Pakistani people accused of knife crime against a person is 12%, although Asians form 10% of London's population. Of the 21 Chinese and Japanese people accused of knife crime in London, only one was a mugger. These figures indicate that black criminals use knives almost as tools of a trade: an economic way of increasing their possessions, be they MP3 players, mobile phones, laptops or wallets. By contrast, other ethnic groups are becoming increasingly prone to stabbing people for no economic gain, whether after disagreements or perceived slights. Of those on the receiving end of knife crime, white Europeans formed the largest group of victims (5,626 or 46%). Statistics released by Greater Manchester Police showed that black Mancunians are at higher risk of being victims of knife violence.</p>	02.07.07	The Times	Police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Hundreds of victims of knife crimes each week The full extent of stabbings and robberies at knifepoint is made clear in the country's first census of knife crime. Police recorded 5,023 serious knife crimes in England and Wales in the first three months after they began to count the offences as a separate crime category in spring 2007. It is equivalent to about 400 offences per week. The highest rate is in London, where every resident has a one-in-1,100 chance of falling victim over the course of a year. Londoners stand more chance of being stabbed or robbed at knifepoint than of being killed or seriously injured in a road accident. Manchester and Birmingham are near the top of the league with shire counties having much lower rates of knife crime. However, Bedfordshire, a predominantly rural county, reports the third-worst rate. The findings give the clearest picture yet of the extent of the "knife culture" on the nation's streets. The statistics, compiled in line with Home Office instructions, include only such serious offences as attempted murder, wounding and knifepoint robbery. Totals would have been higher had ministers not told forces to exclude thousands of less serious offences, including possession of knives and stabbings that caused only minor injuries. Until April, official statistics counted knife offences with other assaults involving weapons, making it harder to detect emerging trends. Police began to keep a separate tally of serious knife crimes after a series of high-profile stabbings earlier this year. The new figures were obtained from 37 of the 43 forces in England and Wales under the FOI Act. The remaining six, mostly smaller forces, said they were unable to provide data.</p>	28.10.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Police forces	Policing
<p>Rule of the knife Police let off almost 9,000 individuals with a caution after being found in possession of knives during 2006-07. Despite a flood of fatal stabbings and government promises to crack down hard on those carrying deadly blades, many offenders escape with a mere slap on the wrist. The figures include 176 youngsters caught with knives in schools. The figures for knife-related crimes in 2006/07 were obtained under the FOI Act and will not be released until summer 2008. Only 39 of the 43 forces in England and Wales were able to supply data, so the 8,789 cautions their officers issued is likely be even higher when the final tally is officially announced. In 1999, by comparison, officers issued just 5,597 knife cautions.</p>	29.07.07	The News of the World	Police forces	Policing
<p>Blue rinse crimewave More than 2,300 offences were committed by over 65s in 2005, including rape, theft and murder. The statistics show that OAPs are becoming increasingly criminal, even targeting fellow pensioners. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act have revealed that Scotland is plagued by OAP crime. There has been a 9% rise in the number of criminal charges against pensioners across Scotland since 2003, excluding motoring offences. In 2003, there were 2,161 charges brought against over 65s, while in 2004, there were 2,115 offences.</p>	20.11.06	The Daily Star	Scottish police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Never too old to be on the wrong side of the law</p> <p>A 103-year-old man arrested in Nottingham on suspicion of possessing cannabis is believed to be the oldest person arrested in Nottinghamshire and one of 11 aged over 70 arrested for a criminal offence here in the past three years. Figures released under the FOI Act by Nottinghamshire police show that 11 people aged 70 or over to have been arrested for a drugs, firearms or vehicle theft offence in the county over the past three years.</p>	11.01.07	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire Police	Policing
<p>Race-hate crimes fall in north-east after July 7 bombings in London</p> <p>The number of race-hate crimes in the northeast dropped in the wake of the terror attacks on London. However most of Scotland saw a rise in the number of racist incidents in the months following the July 7 bombings on the London transport network. The Lothian and Borders region, which includes Edinburgh, saw an increase of 41% in the two months after the attacks. Grampian Police figures show a fall on the previous year. One of the region's Moslem leaders has praised the work of Grampian Police in preventing racially motivated attacks. The figures, obtained using the FOI Scotland Act, show there were 176 racist incidents between July 7 and December 12 in the area. That compares to 205 incidents during the same period in 2004.</p>	19.01.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Grampian Police	Policing
<p>Race killings are no longer a matter of black and white</p> <p>Both victims and killers are of increasingly diverse ethnic origins. Home Office figures on racially motivated homicides, released under the FOI Act, detail 22 killings from 2001 to 2004. The figures show that the patterns of racism are much more complicated than the stereotype of shaven-headed neo-Nazis abusing and attacking black and Asian people. In 12 of the 22 homicide cases categorised as racially motivated, the ethnicity of the victims was white. In four killings the victims were Asian and in three others, black. The remaining three victims were categorised as "other".</p>	27.05.06	The Times	The Home Office	Policing
<p>Racially motivated incidents on the rise</p> <p>Racially motivated incidents reported to Ashfield Police are at a five-year high, according to figures released under the FOI Act 2000. They show the number of incidents rose to 57 in 2006 since a lull of 31 in 2004. But they also reveal a lack of detection rates, with only 85 detections out of 333 cases reported since 2000.</p>	04.01.07	Ashfield Today	Local police	Policing
<p>Police figures reveal inequalities</p> <p>People of ethnic minority backgrounds in Scotland are more than twice as likely to be victims of crime as others, according to police figures. Statistics released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal approximately one in 20 victims of crime are from ethnic minorities, despite the fact they make up just one in 50 of Scotland's total population.</p>	23.07.07	Glasgow Herald	Scottish police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>(Gloucester) police cars in 1,000 crashes</p> <p>Police officers in Gloucestershire have been involved in more than 1,000 road accidents in the last five years - and were at fault in more than half of them. Statistics obtained under the FOI Act also reveal that the cost of the repairs involved was £155,656. The figures include every crash involving police, including those that occurred during high-speed chases, as well as every off-road scrape and bumper dent.</p>	02.01.06	Gloucester Citizen	Gloucestershire Police	Policing
<p>25 fined every day using phones in their cars</p> <p>New figures, obtained under the FOI Act, indicate that motorists are not taking new legislation, banning mobile phone use whilst driving, seriously. Nearly 9,000 fixed penalty notices were awarded by Midland police forces from April 2004 to April 2005 - around 750 per month. But from just April to September 2005 that figure had already reached 6,400 - up to 1,066 per month.</p>	15.01.06	The Sunday Mercury	Midland Police Forces	Policing
<p>Mobile phone fines</p> <p>Police are demanding tougher penalties for drivers who use mobile phones after figures show thousands of Welsh motorists are flouting the law. More than 8,500 people have been fined for using their mobile phones while driving in Wales. Around 13 people per day have been hit with £30 fixed penalty notices since the ban was introduced in 2004. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal Welsh police forces issued 8,759 penalty notices to motorists flouting the law up to last month - taking in a £ 260,000 of fines. The busy roads of South Wales recorded the highest number of fines.</p>	19.02.06	Wales on Sunday	South Wales Police	Policing
<p>Northern Ireland's fastest roads</p> <p>Statistics released under the FOI Act reveal the top speeds, which PSNI Roads Policing officers have recorded throughout 2004 and 2005. The figures show that police caught more than 1,350 motorists driving at speeds above 90mph in the two-year period. More than 100 of these were driving above 100mph. Over a third of all the fastest drivers were caught on one stretch of road - the M2 at Rathbeg near Antrim - where police detected 451 motorists travelling 90mph or more. Another high speed road is the Warrenpoint Road in Newry where 10 motorists were detected driving at 100mph or above. Ten motorists were also caught in excess of 100mph on the A5 in Omagh near the Ballygawley roundabout. One of Northern Ireland's most dangerous roads is the single carriageway A26 Frosses Road in Co Antrim but the statistics reveal that motorists are regularly travelling in excess of 95mph despite a history of collisions on the route.</p>	09.03.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Top cop attacks go-slow on A90 Documents released under the FOI Scotland Act reveal that Grampian Police's top traffic officer opposes moves to introduce 20mph limits to sections of the A90. Chief Inspector Mark McLaren says the move would make one of the Northeast's busiest commuter routes more dangerous. He also claimed the reduced speed limit could cause huge tailbacks on a stretch of road with a good accident record. Aberdeenshire Council, with the backing of local communities, wants to introduce the zones near Foveran and Longhaven primary schools to improve safety.	04.04.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	The Scottish Executive	Policing
Speeding police 298 on-duty Grampian police officers were caught by speed cameras in 2005 according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act.	15.04.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Grampian Police	Policing
Car-seat law nets only six parents Only six parents in Scotland have been fined for flouting new car seat regulations. A crackdown three months ago meant parents risked fines of up to £500 if they failed to strap in children below the age of 12. Under an EU directive, child or booster seats became compulsory for youngsters up to that age and who were less than 4ft 5in. But figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show only six fines have been issued in Scotland. Campaigners believe children's welfare is being put at risk as police turn a blind eye to parents flouting the rules. Police insist their 'softly softly' stance is justified as it will take time for parents to get to grips with the changes.	19.12.06	The Daily Mail	Scottish police forces	Policing
Met cars are causing three crashes a day Police are responsible for more than three road accidents in London every day. Officers with the Met, which has paid almost £1.5m in compensation for crashes in the past year, have accepted liability on 1,213 occasions between March 2006 and February 2007. This equates to about 23 accidents every week, or just over three per day. The figures, released under the FOI Act, include 195 cases where a member of the public was put in hospital. Of those, 72 victims were driving another vehicle involved in a crash, 18 were cyclists, four were pedestrians and one involved the death of an animal.	09.05.07	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>90,000 speeding cops are 'let off'</p> <p>Ninety thousand police were caught on camera speeding or jumping red lights last year - but only 354 were punished. Just one in 250 officers faced a £60 fine or three penalty points compared to 84% of regular drivers. The figures were obtained under the FOI Act. They cover 28 of the 43 forces in England and Wales, suggesting many more officers are not being punished for motoring offences. The other 15 forces would not reveal their figures. In a quarter of the cases, officers stopped were travelling with blue lights flashing as if on an emergency call. A manager can cancel tickets if persuaded that an officer had a good reason for speeding. The Metropolitan Police logged the most offences - 48,222 - and issued the most tickets, 57. In comparison Cleveland issued 20 tickets for 48 officers caught out. Thames Valley, the City of London, Humberside, Merseyside and West Yorkshire forces failed to issue one ticket despite cameras recording thousands of officers breaking the law.</p>	29.05.07	The Daily Mirror	Police forces	Policing
<p>More people drink driving</p> <p>After decades of the dangers of drink-driving being highlighted and declining numbers charged with the crime, 2006-07 saw an increase in the number of people charged. Figures released under the FOI Act show more people were caught drink-driving in south Worcestershire during the year than in 2005-06. The figures also showed a worrying 23% increase in women drink-drivers.</p>	13.07.07	Worcester News	Worcestershire Police	Policing
<p>Child sex attack figures</p> <p>2,216 children aged 15 or under were victims of sexual abuse in just one year. Fifty-eight of these attacks happened in or just outside schools. There were 83 child rapes in the Strathclyde area alone. The new figures were gathered from seven of Scotland's eight police forces under the FOI Scotland Act. Identical statistics for the previous 12 months were not available for comparison, but police and support groups confirm that the new figures are up at least 10%. The country's largest force, Strathclyde, topped the list with 873 attacks reported.</p>	16.01.06	The Sun	Scottish police forces	Policing
<p>365 sex offenders living in Gwent</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act also show 160 sex offenders were released from prison or detention into the community over the last ten years. In 2005, 31 were released. Gwent has more sex offenders per head of population than anywhere else in Wales. A report shows there were 365 registered sex offenders living in the Gwent police force area up to March 2005, up from 319 in 2003/04. There were 65 sex offenders per 100,000 people in Gwent, the highest in Wales' four police force areas.</p>	28.03.06	South Wales Argus	Gwent police	Policing
<p>Local rape statistics</p> <p>Figures revealed under the FOI Act reveal how few rape cases end up in court. In the year to March 2006, 113 rapes were reported to police in Coventry. Only 17 men ended up in court and six of them were convicted. In Warwickshire, 118 rape allegations were made to police. Some 78 people were arrested and 21 people were charged with rape.</p>	02.10.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	Crown Prosecution Service	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Six 'high-risk' sex offenders caught breaking ban orders 6 of the most dangerous sex offenders in Edinburgh have been caught breaking banning orders restricting their contact with women and children according to information released under the FOI Act.	27.11.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Lothian Police	Policing
City prosecutors hail big rise in conviction rate for cases of rape Eleven of the 16 rape cases dealt with by Exeter's Crown Prosecution Service in 2006 ended with a conviction. The figure is equivalent to 69% - higher than the 62% conviction rate in 2005. It also beats the average for Devon and Cornwall, which stands at 62%. The statistics show four of the defendants pleaded guilty and seven were convicted after a trial. The CPS offered no evidence in three cases and juries acquitted two defendants. The figures were released FOI Act and cover all cases in 2006 up to November 30.	02.01.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Crown Prosecution Service	Policing
Girl selling sex on the street at 15 A schoolgirl has been found working as a prostitute on the streets of Edinburgh. Police caught the 15-year-old, who is believed to have run away from home, selling her body in Leith. She was given a formal juvenile warning and later taken into care. The girl was one of 56 people charged with prostitution offences, mainly soliciting for sex, in the city between April 2005 and March 2006, statistics released under the FOI Scotland Act show.	11.01.07	Edinburgh Evening News	Lothian Police	Policing
322 sex fiends on loose Police have lost track of 322 sex offenders now at large. In Scotland alone, at least a dozen dangerous predators on the loose. Information released under the FOI and FOI Scotland Acts showed how many registered sex-offenders were not at their registered addresses and whose whereabouts were unknown to the police force tasked with tracking them.	28.01.07	The News of the World	Home Office	Policing
Rapists and paedophiles 'let off with cautions' Police are releasing rapists and paedophiles without prosecuting them. Hundreds of sex attackers each year are given a caution, with one force issuing nearly 800 in the past five years. In accepting a caution, an offender must admit their crime. Those let off without being prosecuted include 12 men who admitted rape, which usually results in at least five years in jail. Details released by police forces under the FOI and FOI Scotland also revealed more than 20 cautions were given to paedophiles who admitted sexual activity with children.	05.02.07	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
Child sex offences drop across Ashfield Ashfield residents have reported more than 300 child sex offences to police since 2001, according to figures released under the FOI. The number of reported sex attacks on children in the Ashfield area have been decreasing since a five year high in 2004. The figures show that last year 60 offences were reported compared the five year high of 83 in 2004 and the lowest number reported of 38 in 2002.	16.02.07	Ashfield Today	Local police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cautions for sexual offences 93 people who committed a sexual offence in Worcestershire, were let off with a caution. The list, released under the FOI Act, included eight rapes, one charge of gross indecency with a child, 41 indecent assaults, six charges of unlawful sexual intercourse and 17 sexual assaults.	02.04.07	Worcester News	Worcestershire Police	Policing
100,000 images of child porn seized Police seized more than 100,000 pornographic images of children from Leicestershire paedophiles last year. The images were taken from computers and videotapes and ranged from pictures of naked children through to rape, sadism and bestiality. The total is one of the highest in recent years and surpasses the 75,000 seizures made in Leicestershire during the two years of Operation Ore - the largest-ever international hunt for on-line paedophiles. Police revealed they have created a unit of specialist investigators to track down on-line paedophiles that try to buy or distribute vile images of abuse or groom children. The figures were released under the FOI Act.	21.04.07	Leicester Mercury	Leicestershire Police	Policing
Sussex sex attackers on the run 32 suspected sex attackers are on the run after being given bail for crimes in Sussex. The suspects were arrested for a range of offences between March 2005 and March 2007. They were given police bail but failed to return to stations as required. The 32 are among 807 suspects at large in Britain after being arrested for crimes including violent attacks and burglaries, as well as drugs and firearms offences. A further 502 suspects, charged with crimes and bailed, are also on the run according to the statistics, released under the FOI Act.	23.04.07	Brighton and Hove Argus	Sussex Police	Policing
Suspected rapists among 4,000 who have skipped bail Eight suspected rapists are on the run after jumping bail in London. The alleged offenders, who were all charged with attacking women in the capital last year, are among almost 4,000 absconders being hunted by the Met. Another 16 are charged with other sexual offences, according to figures obtained under the FOI Act.	11.06.07	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Policing
Child sex abusers escaping charges Sex offenders who have admitted abusing children are amongst those being let off with a caution rather than being brought before the courts. Almost 90 sex offenders have been cautioned in the province over the past two years rather than being charged. The information, which was obtained under the FOI Act, includes 14 cautions for indecent assault on a child, two for taking indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children, 20 for indecent assault on a female, 10 for indecent assault on a male and eight for gross indecency.	02.07.07	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Sex-offender doctors free to practise in NHS Eleven doctors convicted of sex and child-pornography offences remain free to practise within the NHS. Figures released under the FOI Act show that six have child pornography convictions and can work on condition that they have no contact with children. The others may treat patients unsupervised. The General Medical Council said last night that it had no access to the sex offenders register and relied on the police to inform it of doctors' convictions or cautions. Doctors themselves are required to notify the GMC. The GMC has been told that automatic striking off of convicted doctors would breach human rights laws.	24.09.07	The Times	The General Medical Council	Policing
Scandal of police with second jobs on the side Thousands of police are moonlighting to earn extra cash as Britain buckles under record levels of violent crime. Second jobs range from drivers and florists to therapists and, surprisingly, magicians. Figures released under the FOI Act have revealed a startling pattern of officers getting other work. Essex Police revealed that 229 of its 3,349 officers have second jobs - one in 15 officers while the force detects just 27% of crimes. They include two chief superintendents even though they are earning up to £70,000 a year	10.01.06	The Daily Express	Essex Police	Policing
Stress toll on police in county Gloucestershire County police officers spent more than 3,600 days off work suffering from stress and other mental health problems during 2005. The figures, obtained under the FOI Act, bring into focus the pressure that officers are under in their work. In 139 separate absences, Gloucestershire Police lost 3,607.5 duty days to stress, depression, anxiety and fatigue. The force currently employs around 1,270 officers. And the number of hours lost increased in each three-month period as the year went on, culminating in 1,129 days in October to December.	06.02.06	Gloucester Citizen	Gloucestershire Police	Policing
Police retirements A Quarter of the North-east of Scotland's current police officers are due to retire over the next decade according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act. More than 330 of the force's 1,349 bobbies will have hung up their truncheons by 2016. But chiefs are planning a huge recruitment campaign starting this month to boost ranks.	05.07.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Police forces	Policing
Part-time police According to figures released under the FOI Act the Metropolitan Police Force has 1,744 officers on restricted duties for health reasons. Some officers receive a full salary for just one hours work a day. The nation wide bill for officers on restricted duties is around £243 million a year.	05.02.07	The Times	Police Forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£1m cost of cop stress</p> <p>Stressed-out police are costing the taxpayer an astonishing £1m every week in sick leave. Rising crime and increasing red tape have sent morale tumbling among Britain's 140,000 cops who say they can no longer cope with the pressures. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that an astonishing 1,131 officers are off with stress every day. The total - which does not include ordinary sickness or injury - adds up to enough officers to staff a small force and the problem is hampering the fight against crime.</p>	18.02.07	The News of the World	Police forces	Policing
<p>Crisis as 6,000 police quit force</p> <p>More than 6,000 police officers resigned in the last three years. Officers say they are fed up with red tape, political correctness and endless targets. Last night, police leaders warned morale is falling "year-on-year" among rank-and-file officers who "cannot wait to get out". In figures requested under the Freedom of Information Act, Police Review discovered that more than 2,714 officers had left in the calendar year 2006 alone.</p>	10.04.07	The Daily Express	Police forces	Policing
<p>Third of our police are 'baby bobbies'</p> <p>More than a third of officers patrolling our streets have less than five years' experience, new figures reveal. The statistic, which was released under the FOI Act, shows that out of the 1,235 Lincolnshire Police officers, 391 have been in the job no longer than five years - 31.66%. This demographic trend is reflected nationally and the Police Federation for England and Wales says it may be having an adverse effect on performance.</p>	18.05.07	Lincolnshire Echo	Lincolnshire Police	Policing
<p>The £10m bill for suspended police officers</p> <p>Hundreds of police officers suspected of crimes are sitting at home on full pay - at a cost to taxpayers of £10m a year. All are suspended pending investigations or court cases. Many are highly-paid senior ranks, including a chief inspector. Some are civilian staff, others are the new Police Community Support Officers. Their alleged crimes include porn offences, assault, rape, possessing drugs and drink driving. One was suspected of attempted murder. Information released under the FOI Act shows that 686 police workers were suspended on full pay in 2006. London's Metropolitan Police had the most, with 107 officers off duty. The large Northumberland force was second with 54, while Greater Manchester had 39 and Nottingham 38. Strathclyde, 29, Northern Ireland, 24, and Kent, 23, came next. Out of all Britain's police forces, only Cambridgeshire had no one suspended.</p>	03.06.07	The People	Police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>'Plastic bobbies' replace full time police</p> <p>The biggest forces are taking on significantly more police community support officers, or PCSOs, while employing fewer better-trained staff. Figures released under the FOI Act disclose that over the next 12 months the number of PCSOs is set to soar. Support officers cost the taxpayer at least £10,000 a year less than fulltime police and their training lasts just three weeks instead of six months. The increasing use of PCSOs has led to accusations that the Government is guilty of policing 'on the cheap'. Eight of the 43 forces in England and Wales predicted they would recruit more support officers than police by 2008. Only Derbyshire forecast a fall in support officers and an increase in fulltime police. Cheshire Police said it would employ 102 fewer policemen and women - a drop from 2,258 to 2,156 - by March 2008, while recruiting a further 51 support officers in addition to the 186 it currently employs. Humberside is set to lose 39 police officers while gaining 132 support officers. Greater Manchester is taking on a further 66 PCSOs while cutting police numbers by 48. The Metropolitan Police, Britain's biggest force, plans to recruit a further 585 police but an extra 879 support officers.</p>	05.08.07	The Mail on Sunday	Police forces	Policing
<p>Plastic police solve just one case every 6 years</p> <p>Police community support officers (PCSOs) solve an average of just one crime every six years according to statistics released under the FOI Act. The PCSOs were introduced in 2002 in a bid to provide a reassuring police presence on the streets. But in some areas they have failed to detect any crime in the past year. On average each one solved a crime every six years. A "proper" police officer detected an average of 11 per year. The PCSOs have the power to detain a suspect until the police arrive and can hand out a range of fixed penalty notices for traffic and public order offences. But the statistics also reveal that 27,711 fixed penalty notices were issued last year by 9,923 PCSOs in 29 forces. That averages out at the equivalent of 2.8 fines each - one every four months. The PCSOs were introduced to be the "eyes and ears" of the force on the UK's streets and there are currently 14,000.</p>	20.08.07	The Daily Express	Police forces	Policing
<p>Gangs doing battle is one reason for rise in violent crime</p> <p>Violent youths are thought to be behind a crime rise in Plymouth's biggest parks. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal there have been 341 recorded crimes, including 140 of violence, in seven city parks during the past three years.</p>	14.01.06	Plymouth Evening Herald	Devon and Cornwall Police	Policing
<p>Violent crime in Sunderland</p> <p>There have been 537 reports of violent attacks in Wearside where a weapon was used during the past two years. According to the figures, released under the FOI Act, knives were the most commonly used weapons. In 2004, 127 violent crimes involving a knife were reported. This increased to 135 in 2005. However, police have successfully tackled gun crime across the city. In 2004, there were 57 violent incidents involving guns, compared with 29 in 2005. Crimes involving bottles and screwdrivers have also fallen.</p>	28.02.06	Sunderland Echo	Wearside Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>5,000 yobettes are fined over drunk rampages</p> <p>Evidence of Britain's rowdy yobettes emerged yesterday in a police survey on young women behaving badly on boozy nights out. It revealed that more than 5,000 were hit with on-the-spot fines for drunken anti-social antics last year. The disgraced young women paid a total of £400,000 for drunkenness, public disorder and harassment.</p> <p>The survey of half the country's police forces using the FOI Act showed that 2,599 women under 21 have been hit with £80 fixed penalty notices for disorder. It means that in the whole of England an estimated 5,000 at least would have paid up.</p>	06.03.06	The Daily Express	Police Forces	Policing
<p>Violence doubles in Barnsley pubs</p> <p>Police recorded 41 violent crimes in or near Barnsley pubs and nightclubs in the last quarter of 2005 compared to 21 in the same period in 2000. Of the 41 incidents, 19 were linked to premises on Wellington Street which has more than 10 pubs according to information released under the FOI Act.</p>	27.03.06	Sheffield Star	Yorkshire police	Policing
<p>Violent Sussex streets</p> <p>Robertson Street is the most violent street in Hastings, being the site of 37 attacks between February 1 2005 and January 31 2006. These incidents of mugging, violence and other similar crimes place the road among the 13 worst in the county, according to figures released by Sussex Police under the FOI Act. But these numbers are dwarfed by figures for other streets in Sussex. West Street in Brighton saw 143 offences over the same period, while Kings Road racked up 53 and Crawley High Street totalled 46. Robertson Street even fared better than neighbouring Eastbourne, which was forced to deal with 44 attacks in Terminus Road. The figures show a total of 911 violent crimes were recorded in Sussex during the period, more than double the amount seen two years ago.</p>	31.03.06	Hastings Observer	Sussex police	Policing
<p>Violent crime in Winchester</p> <p>Violent crime in Winchester has risen by 47% during the past five years, according to figures revealed today. The city witnessed an even bigger rise of more than 100% between 2001 and 2005. Conservative city councillor, George Hollingbery, who asked for the figures from police under the FOI Act, claims people do not like visiting the city centre at night, particularly at weekends.</p>	06.04.06	Winchester Echo	Hampshire police	Policing
<p>Armed police alerts rise to over 1,000</p> <p>The use of armed police was considered in more than 1,000 incidents in Devon and Cornwall over the last year, it has been revealed. The police assessed the need to send armed response units to 1,076 incidents believed to involve a firearm, imitation gun, blade or other weapon in 2005 according to information released under the FOI Act. That compared with 985 in the previous year. Around 10% of the incidents resulted in armed police officers being despatched.</p>	13.04.06	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon and Cornwall police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Scots police treat only 1 in 7 calls as emergencies</p> <p>Only one in seven 999 calls to police in Scotland is dealt with as a real emergency. Every 32 seconds, someone dials 999 asking for police, fire or ambulance - with half the calls put through to the police. However, only 14% of them get an immediate response. Strathclyde police, which looks after nearly half of the Scots population, gives only one call in twelve a top priority rating. The police always send officers immediately to a Grade 1, which are life-threatening situations. But of an estimated 456,724 requests for help last year, just 68,766 were classed in this group. In Strathclyde, most calls - 111,110 - were classed as high priority Grade 2 - ongoing incidents but with no hint of threats to life. A further 28,098 were rated Grade 3, meaning someone should turn up but not necessarily right away. Some 2,168 cases were put on hold with no one going to the remaining 531. One in 30 calls was a false alarm while hoaxers wasted valuable time by ringing in 1,500 times. Lothian and Borders police have just two grades. Of 122,770 calls in 2005, they classed 19,863 (one in six) as a real emergency. Tayside respond immediately to one in three. Central Scotland police gave the lowest priority rating to every fifth call while Grampian had to handle more than 7,000 malicious 999 calls.</p>	07.05.06	The News of the World	Scottish police forces	Policing
<p>Log reveals police force's "real" average weekend</p> <p>A log of actual incidents released under the FOI Act, taken between 6pm on Friday, August 18, and 9am on Monday, August 21, reveals that North Wales police dealt with 1,557 incidents. These included one rape claim, a sudden suspicious death, two indecent assaults on women, one arson, two hate crimes and a mountain rescue. However, only 2 incidents (a road traffic accident and the force's success in a 21 mile Snowdon run) were mentioned to the media in the regular press briefing.</p>	20.09.06	Liverpool Daily Post	North Wales Police	Policing
<p>Fear of strangers</p> <p>Random killings have increased by a third in just eight years to the point where they now equal the number of murders carried out as crimes of passion. Under the FOI Act, specific data on random homicides was obtained. Stranger murders, which rose from 99 in 1997 to 130 last year, still account for less than 10% of the annual total. The number of random killings is regarded by criminologists as one of the best measures of the overall level of violence in a society. Such acts are often preceded by other violent incidents. Figures for random killings are also more reliable than for many other crimes because they are not skewed by reporting rates.</p>	27.12.06	The Times	Individual police forces	Policing
<p>Homophobic attacks on the rise</p> <p>The number of homophobic attacks reported to police across Ashfield has steadily increased over the past three years. Figures released under the FOI Act, show there were 32 offences reported across the area in 2005 and 2006, compared to just seven between 2000 and 2002. The figures also show offences rose since 2002 from two to nine in 2003, 11 in 2004, 17 in 2005 and 15 during the last calendar year.</p>	12.01.07	Ashfield Today	Local Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Drunk and Miss-orderly The number of teenage girls given on-the-spot fines for public drunkenness rose by 40% to more than 10,000 in the first year of 24-hour drinking. The number aged under 20 given the £80 fines was 10,225 in 2006, up from 7,325 in 2005, according to figures released under the FOI Act. There were an estimated 28,900 fines issued to women of all ages last year for offences such as being drunk and disorderly, drunk in the highway, drinking in a public place, vandalism and disorderly behaviour up 26% from 22,890. The worst behaved were in Thames Valley, where 2,008 girls aged under 20 were fined.	23.04.07	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
Revealed street crime hotspots Cardiff's top robbery hotspots have been revealed for the first time by information released under the FOI Act. A street-by-street breakdown shows that most muggings take place in Lloyd George Avenue, in Cardiff Bay, and Bute Street, Butetown, which are connected by a series of underpasses. Improvements are being made and so far in April 2007 there have been 22 robberies with 17 people having been arrested and charged. Some men have been charged with up to four robberies and even those with no previous robbery convictions are being refused bail.	27.04.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff Police	Policing
Thieves targeting sat-nav sets Thefts of satellite navigation systems in Leeds have rocketed six-fold between 2005 and 2006. Information obtained through the FOI Act shows that between January 1 and December 31 2005, there were 289 such thefts reported to West Yorkshire Police in the city. But between January 1 and December 31, 2006, the figure rose to 1,735. 412 thefts having already been reported up to April 1 2007.	03.05.07	Yorkshire Evening Post	West Yorkshire Police	Policing
25% of domestic violence is against men More than 850 men living in Gloucestershire were victims of domestic violence last year. Figures released by Gloucestershire Police under the FOI Act reveal that 886 men were abused last year, a quarter of all the 3,655 domestic violence incidents recorded. Statistics show 85% of domestic violence crimes against men were physical assaults and resulted in grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm or common assault. Domestic violence crimes range from threats to kill and stalking to minor physical assaults to serious assaults with weapons or even homicide.	22.06.07	Gloucester Citizen	Gloucestershire Police	Policing
Foreigners commit 20% of crime in London One in five crimes committed in London in the first six months of 2007 were carried out by a foreign citizen according to information released under the FOI Act. During the period there were 22,793 crimes in the capital for which a foreign national has been charged. More than a quarter were violent offences, ranging from murder to assault. There were also nearly 6,000 drug offences, 414 sex crimes, 522 robberies and almost 1,000 burglaries. The highest number of offences were carried out by Poles, charged with 2,310 crimes between the start of January and the end of June. Jamaicans, Irish nationals, Somalians and Romanians accused of more than 1,000 crimes had the next worst levels of offending.	14.08.07	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Rate of unsolved murders doubles in decade to one a week</p> <p>Unsolved murders have doubled over the past decade, raising fears that police and courts are unable to tackle violent crime. Last year, an average of one murder a week was committed only to remain unsolved. In 1997, the number was almost one a fortnight. There have been 564 unsolved murders across the country in the past 10 years, with the majority occurring in urban areas. The Metropolitan Police Force area covering London accounts for 269. Greater Manchester Police is next with 41 unsolved murders, followed by the West Midlands with 30 and West Yorkshire with 20. Under the FOI Act, the number of unsolved murders year-on-year was requested from all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Extrapolating the data of the 38 forces that responded to cover the whole country, it means that 564 murders over the past decade remain unsolved. Merseyside Police Force was the only major metropolitan force to withhold the figures. In 1997, there were 30 unsolved murders but by last year, the number had almost doubled to 52.</p>	02.09.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Police forces	Policing
<p>Manchester is the crooked goods capital.</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act show the city came top of a list of seized items of fake clothes - 151,534 items since 2002, with Stockport at 39,700 and Oldham 6,662. Manchester was also top for smuggled tobacco, at 61,420 packets with 12,500 in Stockport. The figures were obtained by the Liberal Democrats using the FOI Act. Amounts seized have almost quadrupled since 2002.</p>	03.09.07	Manchester Evening News	Local Councils	Policing
<p>Police write off 50,000 Mersey crimes a year</p> <p>Almost 50,000 crimes on Merseyside were deemed "unsolvable" by police in 2006 and so weren't subject to further investigation. Information released under the FOI Act revealed that 49,717 crimes (approximately a third of all reported crime in the region) were "screened out" by police last year, effectively filed away after an initial look at the crime had resulted in officers deeming it "unsolvable". That figure is slightly down from the 2005 figure of 52,048 crimes being declared unsolvable, but just under 10,000 up on the 39,769 figure given for 2004.</p>	18.09.07	Liverpool Daily Post	Merseyside Police	Policing
<p>Business crime falls</p> <p>Businesses in Plymouth reported 5,546 crimes in 2006/07, down from 6,107 the previous year. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that criminals have targeted most of the 7,000 or so businesses in Plymouth in the previous 12 months. The figures show that there were 34 incidents of violent crime, including robbery, in 2006/07 compared to 27 the previous year and 26 in the year before that. There were 662 burglaries reported by businesses, 281 reports of vehicle crime, 1,616 of shoplifting, 2,006 of criminal damage and 311 cases of fraud or forgery.</p>	10.10.07	Plymouth Evening Herald	Plymouth Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police seize £30,000 of fake cash in three years</p> <p>Thousands of pounds in fake cash has been seized in the North-east in the last three years. In 2005, Grampian Police confiscated £23,426. In 2006, the amount was £5,023 and so far in 2007 £3,285 has been taken off the streets. The most common note was £20 notes, followed by tenners and fivers. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show there was also a handful of £50 notes and nearly 200 £1 coins.</p>	05.11.07	Aberdeen Evening News	Local Police forces	Policing
<p>£60m cost of time off for 'stressed' officers</p> <p>Police took more than 280,000 days off work in 2005 suffering from 'stress' costing the taxpayer £60m. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show that each of the 142,000 police officers in England and Wales took off an average of two days each for stress. Officers took an average of 9.3 sick days a year, compared with 6.4 in the private sector. The £60m figure is based around the number of days for which officers were paid but did not work. Gloucestershire Police has introduced a 24-hour telephone counselling service for its staff as well as counselling sessions with a therapist, which cost £75 each, but officers still took an average of 1.8 days each off with stress. Merseyside paid for almost 2,000 counselling sessions for its staff last year at a cost of £68,000. Officers were off with stress for an average of 2.3 days. Thames Valley spent £162,000 on counselling, but officers took an average of 1.9 days off with stress. Greater Manchester spent £206,000 on psychologists and counsellors, but officers were off with stress for an average of 2.8 days. Northamptonshire Police where staff took an average of 2.4 days off with stress is using psychiatrists who can charge more than £150 per session.</p>	17.01.06	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing
<p>Annual bill for sick police on full pay reaches £245m</p> <p>Thousands of police officers are receiving full pay costing up to £245m a year for doing backroom work and part-time duties after being sick or injured. A snapshot of 47 British forces released under the FOI Act shows that 8,167 officers out of more than 160,000 across Britain were on recuperative or restricted duties on one day last September. The estimated salary bill was £665,000 for one day and across a year the cost would reach £245m based on an average officer's salary of £30,000 a year. The number of officers is almost equal to the total manpower of Greater Manchester Police, the second-biggest force in mainland Britain. Under current legislation sick or injured officers can spend up to a year on recuperative duties after examination by doctors. The officers may return to work, gradually increasing the number of hours.</p>	14.02.06	The Times	Police forces	Policing
<p>Better training cuts police injuries</p> <p>1,088 working days were lost as a result of injuries to 87 on-duty police officers in 2005/06 according to figures released under the FOI Act. This is down from 2004/05 when 89 officers were forced to take time off and 1,268 working days were lost. Of the 422 injuries to on-duty officers recorded in 2005/06 176 were caused when officers were assaulted. The year before on-duty officers reported 379 injuries, with 193 caused by assaults.</p>	04.04.07	South Wales Argus	Gwent Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Half of Met police off sick for three weeks Half of the Met's officers took an average of almost three weeks off sick last year. They were signed off suffering from conditions which range from stab wounds, gunshot injuries and broken legs to insect bites, colds and vertigo. Some politicians have called for an inquiry into these sickness levels which cost the force £36m. But the Met said the figure indicated the increasing danger and stress faced by police officers. The average sickness rate in other jobs was seven days last year. Figures released under the FOI Act show a total of 15,519 officers took an average of 14 days off sick and more than 2,158 were off for more than 28 days. Of those on long-term sick leave, 1,212 were off because they were injured on duty.	11.04.07	The Evening Standard	Metropolitan Police	Policing
£35,000 of property stolen from police stations Figures released under the FOI Act show that more than 114 thefts from Ulster police stations have occurred between 2001 and 2006. The statistics include internal thefts as well as those by opportunists bold enough to steal from under the nose of the law. From April 2005 to February 2006, thieves struck 26 times - a record for the last five years - taking items worth £7,471.	05.05.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing
Thieves hit police cars Three satellite navigation systems were among £1,700 items stolen from Nottinghamshire police vehicles over a 16-month period, according to figures released under FOI Act.	05.06.06	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire police	Policing
Nicked from the nick Property and cash worth more than £250,000 was stolen last year - from the police. Two thirds of thefts from police cars and stations across the country went unsolved, and seven forces failed to clear up a single theft from their premises and vehicles with total losses of £11,000. Digital cameras, radios, body armour, handcuffs, helmets and phones were among the items taken in figures obtained under the FOI Act. Thieves got away with one £10,000 Dorset police car. Another worth £8,000 was taken from Northumbria police, who also lost £2,000 of photographic gear. Derbyshire police reported £50,000 in cash taken from their Alfreton station, though a suspect has been charged. Staffs police failed to solve the theft of £1,000 of video equipment from one of its stations. A criminal who took a £1,300 mountain bike from Thorpe Wood police station in Peterborough, Cambs, has not been caught. One officer lost a fridge from Dunstable station, Beds. A George Foreman grill was pinched from a station in Middlesbrough. Property stolen from stations belonging to officers and staff included bikes, MP3 players, DVDs, cash and phones. Sixteen forces were unable to supply figures so the £175,000 reported stolen is well below the true total.	08.08.07	The Daily Mirror	Police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>'Alley gates' blamed for increase in crime</p> <p>Statistics from South Yorkshire Police released under the FOI Act show total offences in Balby jumped from 2,408 in 2003-4 to 3,239 in 2004-5. Recorded violent crime leapt from 246 incidents to 607, sexual offences were up 50%, from 26 to 39, and robberies increased from 21 to 38. There were also substantial increases in both dwelling and non-dwelling burglaries, vehicle crime and criminal damage. The campaigner who requested the information, said: "The increase in crime in Balby has happened after the alley gates were put in. I'm worried the same will happen in Nether Hall."</p>	14.01.06	Sheffield Star	South Yorkshire Police	Policing
<p>How police panic played into the hands of the poll tax rioters</p> <p>The scale of the chaos and panic at the heart of the police response to the Poll Tax riots of 31 March 1990 - one of the most violent protests to ever take place in Britain - is revealed for the first time in classified documents released under the FOI Act. Confidential police radio messages and surveillance reports show how officers made strategic mistakes, surrendered control of parts of central London and ended up calling for armed response teams when all appeared lost. By midnight nearly 5,000 civilians and police officers had been injured and 339 people had been arrested. The final bill for damages ran into millions of pounds. But the political cost was even greater as many believe the protests signalled the demise of Margaret Thatcher, who was forced to resign eight months later.</p>	21.01.06	The Independent	Metropolitan Police	Policing
<p>Police told to let off more offenders with cautions</p> <p>The police have been instructed to let off offenders with a caution if they commit any one of more than 60 types of crime, ranging from assault to some types of theft, criminal damage and under-aged sex. The instructions are contained in a government document sent to forces and released under the FOI Act. They are designed to reduce inconsistencies that can see offenders in one area escaping with a caution while elsewhere they would be prosecuted for the same offence. Now, as long as there are no aggravating factors, first-time criminals can escape court for nearly a third of all types of crime. Supporters argue cautions help the legal system function smoothly by keeping minor offenders out of court. Critics claim it is evidence the government is "soft" on antisocial behaviour and that it is an expedient to stop the prison population growing. The document, the Gravity Factor Matrix, has been circulated by the Home Office as part of a strategy to widen use of cautions.</p>	02.04.06	The Sunday Times	The Home Office	Policing
<p>Globe-trotting Chief Constable</p> <p>In the last two years Northern Ireland Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde has been on duty for 604 days. However, figures released under the FOI Act show that he was working outside Northern Ireland on 178 of those days. In 2005 alone Sir Hugh spent one third of his working days outside the province - he was away 99 days out of 296.</p>	26.05.06	Belfast Telegraph	Police Service of Northern Ireland	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Yorkshire ripper probably guilty of more crimes The Home Office has released a 1981 report into the Yorkshire ripper under the FOI Act. It says that it is highly unlikely that the crimes for which Sutcliffe was convicted are the only ones he committed. The report also highlights a number of blunders in the police investigation.	02.6.06	The Times	Home Office	Policing
Theft of council equipment Information released under the FOI Act has revealed that a total of £91,847 of Basildon Council vehicles and equipment have been stolen or damaged since 2001. These included three anti-graffiti machines, called Grime Busters, worth a total of £35,000.	29.08.06	Basildon and Wickford Recorder	Basildon council	Policing
Attacks on court staff Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that in just over a year, a total of 42 court staff have been attacked in Newcastle area court buildings.	29.08.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	The Courts Service	Policing
James tops list of likely Merseyside criminals A report released under the FOI Act reveals how Merseyside police identified the 10 most likely first names of offenders. The top 10 Merseyside bad boys, in order, are: James, Michael, John, Paul, Stephen, Anthony, David, Thomas, Lee and Christopher. Next are Kevin, Mark, Daniel, Robert, Ian, Joseph, Peter, Andrew, Alan and Carl.	06.09.06	Liverpool Echo	Merseyside police	Policing
New security finds weapons being taken into court In the 25 days since security was stepped up in Aberdeen courts, security guards have dealt with 25 separate incidents according to information released under the FOI Scotland. Three cases involved unidentified substances and 15 related to syringes, commonly associated with illegal drug use. Guards also seized one hammer, five knives and one telescopic baton. Five of the incidents, two involving knives, one syringe, one unidentified substance and the telescopic baton, were reported to Grampian Police.	07.10.06	Aberdeen press and Journal	Scottish Courts Service	Policing
A quarter of bars and shops sell alcohol to children Almost one in four pubs and off-licences has sold alcohol to children in the last two years, Government figures have revealed. A study carried out in the wake of the liberalisation of drinking laws found huge numbers of shops and bars have broken the law by serving under-18s. The survey found that 23% of licensed premises sold alcoholic beverages to under-18s between November 2005 and the same month in 2006. Town hall chiefs collated the figures after sending youngsters into pubs and off-licences undercover to test whether retailers would ask for proof of age before selling them drinks. In some areas, nearly half of all pubs and off-licences sold alcohol to children. Those with the worst offenders included North Somerset, Southwark and Chelsea. A total of 168 local authorities in England and Wales were asked to produce figures for underage drinking after the Liberal Democrats filed a request under the FOI Act. A total of 69 responded.	27.12.06	The Daily Mail	Local authorities	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>'Summer of race riots' feared after clashes in 2001</p> <p>The government was secretly warned to expect "a long, hot and tense" summer in 2001 with race riots feared in nine other towns across Britain following disturbances in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. The potential hotspots were disclosed to the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, by the head of the Commission for Racial Equality, Gurbux Singh. The warning is given in Home Office papers obtained under the FOI Act. It comes as leaked documents have shown that Downing Street strategists have privately questioned whether it is time for the government to directly intervene in preventing segregated housing and/or schools developing and whether it should be made clear that wearing a veil in public has potential consequences for social cohesion.</p>	28.12.06	The Guardian	Home Office	Policing
<p>Police use of tasers</p> <p>Controversial stun-guns have been used by Humberside Police a total of 17 times since the weapon was introduced. The force has drawn and aimed the weapon 14 times since 2004. Officers have also shot the Taser twice as a "demonstration or warning" and fired it once during an incident. The figures were released under the FOI Act, and show Humberside Police is now one of the country's top users of the weapon, which temporarily incapacitates a suspect with 50,000 volts. Only nine other forces, including the Metropolitan Police, North Wales Police and West Yorkshire, have used stun-guns more often against their targets.</p>	11.01.07	Hull Daily Mail	Humberside Police	Policing
<p>Police met officials four times about overseas offenders</p> <p>Senior police officers held at least four meetings with Home Office officials last year over British citizens convicted abroad, according to information released under the FOI Act. The officers warned the department that more than 500 serious offenders had been identified among 27,520 files that had been gathering dust in the Home Office for seven years. The disclosure that police officers met Home Office officials raises questions about how ministers were kept in the dark. A statement from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) said that the backlog of 27,500 files on offenders convicted abroad was handed to it in June. It said: "We prioritised the notifications according to the offence categories of murder, manslaughter, sex offenders, serious assaults, drug offences receiving at least one year's imprisonment, robbery and any other offence that the unit classed as serious where information was limited about the offence but the sentence indicated it was of a serious nature. Of the 540, 260 were entered on to the Police National Computer which feeds into other public protection processes and databases."</p>	12.01.07	The Times	Home Office	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Cops clueless on missing evidence</p> <p>Nearly half of police forces in England and Wales have no idea how much evidence has gone missing.</p> <p>Twenty two forces were unable to answer an FOI Act request asking how many items had been re-corded as lost. Many forces said they had no central register to record missing evidence such as fingerprints and murder weapons and it would take weeks to check with officers. Several revealed they did not make a record when a piece of evidence was lost unless it was so serious an officer was disciplined. Some forces admitted that even if they checked every individual case file, the information would not necessarily be accurate.</p> <p>Missing items included cash, personal property, mobile phones and forensic evidence such as fingerprints and DNA samples.</p>	12.02.07	The Daily Mirror	Police forces	Policing
<p>500 blades taken at door of Holyrood</p> <p>Nearly 500 potential weapons are being confiscated from visitors to the Scottish Parliament every month, new figures have revealed. More than 11,600 knives and sharp objects were found during security checks at Holyrood since 2005. The weapons seized included flick knives and lock knives with illegal blades more than three inches long, according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. But police said today only 49 of the confiscated items were offensive weapons, with the rest mainly sharp objects, such as nail clippers and scissors. The Scottish Parliament operates similar security procedures to those found in airports.</p>	19.02.07	Edinburgh Evening News	Scottish Parliament	Policing
<p>This isn't just shoplifting ... this is MandS shoplifting</p> <p>Marks and Spencer has been revealed as a shoplifters' favourite, according to crime figures released under the FOI Act. The Gemini store has had 257 reports of theft over between 2003 and 2006, second only to Asda Cockhedge with 258 over the same period. Most other supermarkets in town had around 100 thefts or less during the same period.</p>	06.04.07	Warrington Guardian	Cheshire Police	Policing
<p>Alleygates scheme</p> <p>Shortcuts through housing estates used by yobs and burglars could be closed with gates. Information released under the FOI Act reveals 60 gulleys have been earmarked by Cardiff council in the city for 'assessment'. Five are in the Caerau area of the city, 14 in Ely, one in Fairwater and three in Gabalfa. A single passageway in Grangetown, between South Clive Street and Ferry Road, is facing scrutiny as well as eight in Llandaff North, 12 in Llanrumney, nine in Splott, six in Trowbridge and one in Pentreban.</p>	10.04.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Policing
<p>SAFC hooligan 'fans' ignore banning orders</p> <p>Hooligans blacklisted from Sunderland matches have breached their football banning orders on 50 different occasions and failed to hand their passports to police during overseas England football matches. There have been 40 orders obtained against so-called Sunderland AFC fans during the past three years. Figures obtained under the FOI Act reveal that, last year, repeated breaches were carried out so that thugs could get to see World Cup matches.</p>	08.05.07	Sunderland Echo	Tyne and Wear Police	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Churches use CCTV to tackle thefts Churches in Nottinghamshire are increasing security to combat a rising tide of theft and vandalism. CCTV cameras and warden patrols are being used. Church leaders say the cost of crime is increasingly falling on parishioners. Thefts from local churches have risen by 27% in the last three years - from 62 in 2004-05 to 87 in 2006-07, according to police figures released under the FOI Act. Figures for criminal damage rose from 141 to 142.	28.05.07	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire Police	Policing
'Epidemic' of abuse takes toll in homes The number of domestic violence cases reported to police is increasing in Yorkshire, with almost 70,000 abuse cases in the last year. Figures from Yorkshire police forces show there has been a sharp rise in the number of incidents reported by victims in North Yorkshire and a steady increase in the Humberside force area. The figures came as a report published yesterday by the British Medical Association (BMA) warned there was an "unspoken epidemic" of domestic abuse. Domestic violence reports rose by almost a fifth in North Yorkshire - from 4,903 in 2004/5 to 5,709 in 2006/7, according to figures released under the FOI Act. The number of cases in the Humber region rose from 12,499 to 12,759 during the same period.	20.06.07	Yorkshire Post	Local Police Forces	Policing
How the anti-apartheid movement was spied on by Special Branch It was the civil rights issue that helped launch the political careers of Jesse Jackson, Ken Livingstone, Paul Boateng and an enigmatic black activist from Brixton known as Spartacus. On a cold winter's day in November 1985, these rising stars of the anti-apartheid movement led a crowd of 20,000 demonstrators into Trafalgar Square where they called for the release of Nelson Mandela and the downfall of Margaret Thatcher. What they didn't know was that among the crowd were plain-clothed officers from Special Branch who had come to assess the threat posed by this eclectic mix of political firebrands. Their observations were recorded in a confidential report released now, 22 years later, under the FOI Act. In the report the police blamed the violence that erupted at dusk on militant groups from the Socialist Workers Party and a contingent of Rastafarians associated with the "Mangrove Restaurant" in Notting Hill, west London.	15.09.07	The Independent	The Home Office	Policing
Social cost of 24 hour opening Ministers said their laws allowing bars to open all night would not lead to an increase in drunkenness and violence. However, serious violence and murder near pubs between 3am and 6am rose by 127%, according to official figures. These statistics were deliberately omitted from a Home Office report in July into the impact of 24-hour drinking and were only released after demands under the FOI Act.	21.09.07	The Daily Mirror	Police forces	Policing

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police 'ignore' 60,000 crimes Police in Scotland have refused to investigate almost 60,000 offences in the past three years -including 100 violent and sexual crimes - as part of a controversial screening policy. The Grampian and Lothian and Borders forces admitted that they routinely ignore reported crimes where there are no witnesses, where there is little or no evidence or where they do not believe there is a realistic chance of conviction. Since 2004, 56,000 offences were "screened out", resulting in no investigation. In Lothian and Borders, 32,000 crimes of dishonesty and vandalism - one in six reported to the force - were immediately closed without an inquiry. A further 2,500 "miscellaneous" crimes such as racial harassment and cruelty to animals were also shelved. Over the same period, 22,000 crimes were dropped by Grampian police. The practice only came to light after information was released under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	04.11.07	The Sunday Times	Police forces	Policing
<p>Theft and vandalism costs Theft and vandalism has cost council taxpayers in Cardiff more than £700,000 in the past two years, it has been revealed. There were 136 incidents of theft totalling £197,000 from schools, libraries and council buildings, according to figures released under the FOI Act. And Cardiff council said vandalism and malicious damage to council property cost £507,000 over the same period.</p>	30.03.06	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Policing Costs
<p>Costs and benefits of police helicopter Gwent Police's helicopter cost almost £400,000 to run during 205. Figures released under the FOI Act also showed that 74 arrests were made through using the helicopter.</p>	24.04.06	South Wales Argus	Gwent Police	Policing Costs
<p>Police pay out £395,000 in compensation over last five years Nottinghamshire Police have paid out £395,000 in compensation and employment tribunal losses over the past five years. Figures released under the FOI Act revealed that members of the public who lodged complaints received £275,623 and employees won £119,100 in tribunals.</p>	24.04.06	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottinghamshire Police	Policing Costs
<p>Police weapons bill Devon and Cornwall police spent over £200,000 on firearms in 2004/05 figures released under the FOI Act have shown. They show the force spent a total of £226,573 on guns, ammunition, clothing, other equipment and weapons training in the financial year 2004/2005. The setting up of an extra crack firearms team and the rolling out of US-style Taser stun guns were responsible for a near 50% increase on the £146,211 bill in 2002/2003.</p>	01.05.06	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon and Cornwall Police	Policing Costs
<p>Police spending on taxis for suspects Sussex Police spent more than £21,000 sending suspects home by taxi in the 11 months to 28 February 2006, according to figures obtained under the FOI Act.</p>	08.05.06	The Evening Standard	Sussex Police	Policing Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

MP to question cost of probe A local MP is to quiz the Home Office after it emerged that 38,000 police man hours and £234,000 were spent on a misconduct investigation, which was thrown out of court. A local newspaper used the FOI Act to find out that 19 police officers and six civilian staff worked on Operation Reproof, a two-year Devon and Cornwall police probe into whether information had been leaked from police records.	30.05.06	Plymouth Evening Herald	Crown Prosecution Service/ Devon and Cornwall police	Policing Costs
Probe ordered on top cop's shower Upgrading the en-suite shower for North Yorkshire's Chief Constable cost £28,000 according to figures released under the FOI Act. Plumbing cost £15,000, building work £5,500, electrics £4,000, furniture £1,200, plus flooring, ceilings and painting at £900 each.	21.10.06	The Evening Gazette	North Yorkshire Police	Policing Costs
A police station shuts every week Police stations have been closing at the rate of more than one a week since Labour came to power. Figures show that 582 local stations have shut since Labour's 1997 election victory. The Liberal Democrats, who uncovered the figures under the FOI Act, said closures appeared to have been targeted on areas represented by its MPs and by Conservatives. Its analysis suggests police stations in seats with Liberal Democrats and Conservative MPs are twice as likely to be shut down. The hardest-hit regions have been Essex with 57 closures, South Wales with 24 and Gloucestershire with 23. The closures have been partly counterbalanced by the opening of stations in the same period. Overall, there were 2,059 police stations in 1997 but by 2005 this had fallen to 1,791 a net loss of 268.	26.01.07	Daily Mail	Police forces	Policing Costs
Scandal of part-time police stations Nearly four out of five police stations in Scotland close at night abandoning huge areas of the country to crime. Only 85 of Scotland's 380 stations are open to the public 24 hours a day, with the vast majority closing some time between early evening and midnight. One area Central Scotland has no police stations open round-the-clock at all, while Grampian has only one and Tayside and Dumfries and Galloway two each. The figures, obtained from the country's eight forces under the FOI Scotland Act, reveals only 22% of stations are open to the public 24 hours a day. When Strathclyde is removed, the proportion falls to 10%.	12.02.07	The Daily mail	Scottish police forces	Policing Costs
Cost of investigating "cold cases" More than £750,000 was spent last year investigating old murders in South Wales. The vast majority of the money will have been spent on forensic work, including re-examining crime scenes and evidence. Figures, released under the FOI Act, reveal that South Wales Police spent £772,000 on five of what are called legacy investigations. Just one of the five cases has been solved - in 2003 Jeffrey Gafoor was jailed for life for the murder of Lynette White.	27.03.07	South Wales Echo	South Wales Police	Policing Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police borrow choppers 50 times in two years</p> <p>North Yorkshire Police used a helicopter for 33 incidents last year - even though the force does not have one. Police in the county borrowed helicopters from neighbouring forces 50 times between April 2005 and March 2007 at a cost of more than £125,000. Figures released under the FOI Act, show a helicopter was scrambled for an incident in North Yorkshire on 33 occasions between April 1 2006 and March 31, 2007. The aircraft were borrowed from West Yorkshire, Humberside and even Durham and cost the force a total of £61,031. In the 2005/2006 financial year, North Yorkshire Police used helicopters belonging to other forces on 17 occasions at a cost of £64,592.63. Police in North Yorkshire also do without police horses and divers, opting to pay other forces to use theirs instead.</p>	05.09.07	York Press	North Yorkshire Police	Policing Costs
<p>'Too many paper pushers', says would-be MP</p> <p>Five per cent of North Yorkshire Police force's 3,099 employees work in human resources (HR), an FOI Act request made by a prospective Conservative Parliamentary candidate has revealed. But a North Yorkshire Police spokesman said the current number of HR staff was 120 (a reduction of 19.5% on the same time last year), as the force is no longer expanding and its "training and recruitment needs are reducing". The figures revealed the force had 1,628 police officers, 188 Special Constables and a police staff of 1,283, including Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), but the HR department had 142 people working in it.</p>	09.10.07	York Press	North Yorkshire Police	Policing Costs
<p>Tribunals cost force £82,000</p> <p>Devon and Cornwall Police has spent £82,271.42 since January 2005 on settlements and legal fees arising as a result of legal action taken by staff according to figures released under the FOI Act. The figures show that in 2006, the force spent £1,645 on legal fees, and this figure has risen to £10,426 this year. The figures also show that Devon and Cornwall police spent almost six times as much - £70,200 - on paying money to claimants in settlement of employment tribunals. In 2005, £31,700 was paid out. In 2006, the amount dropped to £22,500 and this year so far it is £16,000.</p>	10.10.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon and Cornwall Police	Policing Costs
<p>Targets blamed as cops' overtime bill hits £55m</p> <p>Welsh police forces have paid out more than £55m in overtime in the past three years. Figures released under the FOI Act show the nation's four forces spent an average of £18.5m each year.</p>	14.10.07	Wales on Sunday	Welsh Police forces	Policing Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Home Office agency scraps “world-first” online police system</p> <p>The National Policing Improvement Agency has scrapped a “world-first” secure, online crime reporting system which helped to reduce crime by linking the public and police forces across the UK. The multi-million pound project is now the subject of a legal dispute between the National Policing Improvement Agency and IT supplier Qinetiq. The National Policing Improvement Agency confirmed that the original site is no longer operational, and it has cancelled a contract for the replacement of the system with Qinetiq. The Police Portal, which went live in April 2001, ran under a contract with BT which expired at the end of March this year. The cancellation of the Qinetiq project has left the National Policing Improvement Agency with no national website for reporting crimes online. The National Policing Improvement Agency declined to say how much has been spent on the police portal in total. But revealed, under the FOI act, that the government spent £5.1m running of the Police Portal in 2006/7.</p>	14.12.07	Computer Weekly	The Home Office	Policing Costs
<p>Kane's protest cost £11,000</p> <p>The taxpayer was left with a bill of at least £11,413 for policing an anti-Trident protest and subsequent three-day trial according to figures released under the FOI Scotland Act. MSP Ms Kane was amongst a group of campaigners who staged a sit-down protest in a mock submarine outside the Scottish Parliament in March 2005. Ten of them, including Ms Kane, were fined £300 each last month at Edinburgh Sheriff Court for blocking the road and obstructing police.</p>	08.01.06	The Daily Express		Policing Costs
<p>Big game cost you £1,800 a minute</p> <p>Policing at 2005's Wales v England World Cup qualifier clash cost £1,800/minute. The Millennium Stadium September fixture required almost 1,000 police officers amid fears of ugly scenes between rival fans. Police were forced to cancel all leave and bring in extra officers from forces over the border for what was one of the biggest operations ever launched for a British football match. According to figures released under the FOI Act, the final bill for the game - which England won 1-0 - was £163,719. Some 990 officers manned the event, a helicopter was used to patrol Cardiff and 69 vans were used. Extra police were borrowed from Dyfed-Powys, Staffordshire, Hampshire, West Mercia and Avon and Somerset forces. The game was a 72,000 sell-out, with 6,800 England fans making the trip to Cardiff but, in the event, passed off with only 18 arrests, mainly for public order offences.</p>	19.02.06	Wales on Sunday	South Wales Police	Policing Costs
<p>Policing costs of royal visit</p> <p>Protecting the Queen for her visit to Baglan Energy Park cost local police £40 a minute, it has emerged. An FOI Act request has revealed policing the event cost South Wales Police more than £7,000. The Queen and Prince Philip made a three-hour visit to Port Talbot in October 2004. The royal couple took a tour of the new Baglan Bay power station, met workers and enjoyed a lunch hosted by operator General Electric.</p>	17.03.06	South Wales Evening Post	South Wales police	Policing Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Taxpayers got £18,000 bill for Blair visit security Local taxpayers picked up an £18,000 bill for policing the Scottish Labour Party conference in Aviemore in 2006 after a visit by Prime Minister Tony Blair. The figures were released under the FOI (Scotland) Act.	13.07.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Northern Police	Policing Costs
Costs of policing the Meadow Well riots Documents released under the FOI Act have revealed the cost to Northumbria police of dealing with the 191 Meadow Well riots. They show additional policing costs of over £2m, in respect of overtime, support facilities, helicopter surveillance and support units from other forces and claims for £6.5m in compensation (the liability of the police authority in cases of riot).	15.07.06	Newcastle Evening Chronicle	Northumbria police	Policing Costs
Police bill for rooftop protest cost £14,000 The policing of a rooftop Fathers 4 Justice protest on a judge's home near Exeter cost more than £14,000. Campaigner Jolly Stanesby staged the protest, dressed as Father Christmas, on the roof of Judge David Tyzack's home in Farringdon, near Exeter. Information released under the FOI Act has shown that it cost £14,396 to have an inspector, two sergeants and 12 constables at Judge Tyzack's house during the two-and-a-half-day incident in November. The request revealed that overtime payments for officers for the incident amounted to £6,537. The police also said the daily cost per inspector, sergeant and constable was £269, £218 and £181 respectively. Catering costs were £650.	03.03.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon and Cornwall Police	Policing Costs
BB's £350K bill Police probes into Channel 4's Big Brother have cost around £350,000 in the last six years, figures have revealed. The inquiry into racism allegations in the row between Jade Goody and Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty in the recent Celebrity BB cost just over £14,500. But figures, revealed to the BBC under the FOI Act, show overall the policing bill for the reality show have increased from £13,655 in 2002 to £115,983 in 2006.	30.04.07	The Daily Mirror	Channel 4	Policing Costs
Bollywood Oscars policing bill More than 160 police officers were needed to ensure this summer's Bollywood Oscars celebrations in Yorkshire went smoothly. Officers from three of the region's police forces were on duty for the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) weekend in June, which attracted thousands of visitors from across the globe. Most were deployed by South Yorkshire Police, which was responsible for policing the glitzy IIFA awards ceremony in Sheffield, attended by celebrities including Geoff Boycott, Aishwarya Rai and Amitabh Bachchan. Other events requiring a police presence included a world film premiere at Xscape Castleford, dance and music performances in Bradford and an international polo competition in Beverley. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that South Yorkshire Police's IIFA operation involved one superintendent, one chief inspector, five inspectors, 14 sergeants, 92 police constables, 40 police community support officers, five special constables and five support staff.	22.08.07	Yorkshire Post	South Yorkshire Police	Policing Costs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

One wedding and a funeral On April 8, 2005, the Prince of Wales and Camilla Parker Bowles (as she then was) postponed their wedding by a day to avoid a clash with the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Tony Blair, the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury had already made it plain that they would be attending the funeral. Ultimately the Prince went to Rome, too. Two years on, it emerges that the delay cost the Metropolitan Police £52,266, largely as a result of overtime and cancelled leave. The BBC requested the figure under the FOI Act almost immediately, but the police refused to release it until now.	21.09.07	The Times	Metropolitan Police	Policing Costs
Police overtime Overtime payments totalling tens of millions of pounds went to around 6,800 officers in Strathclyde during the year from April 2005, according to figures obtained under FOI Scotland Act. Policing world leaders at the G8 summit in Gleneagles last summer was partly to blame for the extra hours.	04.05.06	Glasgow Evening Times	Strathclyde police	Policing Costs
£1bn police overtime bill Police are wasting hundreds of millions of pounds every year on officer overtime because of the Government's failure to slash red tape and tackle staff shortages. Forces around the country have spent more than £1 billion in the past three years on extra duties in a huge drain on the public purse. It is enough money to put 25,500 extra police on our streets for a year. The waste is revealed in figures released under the FOI Act.	25.08.07	The Daily Express	Police forces	Policing Costs
Postal deliveries by car increasing risk of thefts The security of the Royal Mail is being put at risk by widespread use by postal workers of unauthorised private cars to carry mail on their rounds. Growing numbers of postmen are using their own vehicles to transport postal sacks, placing the bags at risk from thefts and break-ins. In response to a series of FOI Act request, the Royal Mail admitted it did not keep "exact records" of stolen items, but showed that private cars are often used, frequently without proper risk assessments having been carried out.	11.03.06	The Guardian	The Royal Mail	Post Office
Postal staff charged for theft Figures released under the FOI Act show that the number of postal workers prosecuted for stealing mail in the Lothians has increased in the past three years. A total of ten Royal Mail employees were taken to court for theft in 2005, compared with only two in 2002. The company also received more than 8000 complaints over mail, which was never delivered.	12.05.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Royal Mail	Post Office
Theft of mail There were 21 thefts from supposedly safe drop-off points (used to allow postal workers to refill their sacks in mid-round, rather than having to return to the depot) in Walsall between June 2004 and March 2006 according to information released under the FOI Act.	12.11.06	Walsall Sunday Mercury	The Royal Mail	Post Office

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Maxwell tried to get Thatcher to bail him out The media baron and fraudster Robert Maxwell tried to get Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government to back him in a barter deal with the Soviet Union worth up to \$20 billion (£11.2 billion). Maxwell talked his way into meeting her at 10 Downing Street in 1990, the year before his death, to reveal details of the scheme. He claimed to be a confidant of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet president, and to be advising him on a planned exchange in which the Russians would provide Ilyushin passenger jets, chemicals and coal in return for credit to buy food and supplies. Maxwell's percentage as fixer could have given him enough money to stay afloat and prevented his £450m raid on the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund ever coming to light. But the Tories saw through his claims and Thatcher sent him away without any commitment. Thatcher even developed her own way of deflating Maxwell by saying he looked ill whenever they met. Maxwell's proposed deal is revealed in Cabinet Office papers released under the FOI Act.</p>	29.01.06	The Sunday Times	Cabinet Office	Prime Minister
<p>Thatcher faced disaster over son's business dealings Margaret Thatcher was poised to make a remarkable admission about a financial scandal involving her son which might have led to her early resignation, documents have revealed. But the former prime minister never had to make the statement to the House of Commons because Labour failed to press home its attack over the issue. The undelivered speech focuses on the conduct of her son, Mark, during the Oman affair, a controversy concerning his secret financial links that dogged her premiership in the mid-1980s. Politicians from that era say that had she made those disclosures at the time she might have been forced to resign midway through her 11-year premiership. Inside No 10 she drafted a statement disclosing a conflict of interest over a construction deal she promoted in the Gulf state of Oman. Her son was secretly paid by the firm which got the £216m contract. Yet because the Labour frontbench let go their attack, the prime minister was never obliged to tell parliament. The scandal died away and she remained safe. Her undelivered draft remained a secret in a Whitehall dossier, until it was released under the FOI Act.</p>	01.02.06	The Guardian	Cabinet Office	Prime Minister

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Young Gordon's class war manifesto</p> <p>The roots of the chancellor Gordon Brown's campaign for social engineering at universities have been revealed in newly released documents from his university days as a student agitator. The papers from Brown's time as the elected student rector of Edinburgh University in the early 1970s show he tried to wear down the authorities with heavyweight documents on the need to tackle elitism and introduce positive discrimination to help working-class students. There is no record of how the Edinburgh authorities reacted to Brown's proposals from 1975, his last year as rector. They were never implemented. The documents, released under the FOI Scotland Act, show Brown wanted a formal installation ceremony after his election as rector in 1972. He would have liked the Duke of Edinburgh, chancellor of the university, to attend, a request turned down after a lengthy correspondence with Buckingham Palace.</p>	19.02.06	The Sunday Times	Edinburgh University	Prime Minister
<p>Blair used royal jet for family holidays</p> <p>Tony Blair was accused of using the Queen's Flight as his personal taxi service after it emerged that he had spent more than £130,000 of taxpayers' money on a string of family holidays. In the first detailed breakdown of government air travel, it was revealed that the Prime Minister uses the royal flight up to 60 times a year and regularly commandeers it to fly him to and from his Sedgefield, Co Durham, constituency. He also uses it to go to Labour Party conferences. The Prime Minister's four holiday trips included his Christmas 2004 holiday to Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt with his wife and children, for which the flight cost £31,000. His holiday in Italy in August 1997 cost £17,000; in France £18,000 in August 1998; in Italy £19,300 in August 1999; and Italy again £16,000 in August 2000. In 2004 Mr Blair and his family combined his holiday to Italy with a trip to the Athens Olympics at a cost of £18,000. In contrast, the Queen uses the ageing royal fleet of planes, operated by 32 Squadron at RAF Northolt, around eight times a year. "She often uses a scheduled train too," a Buckingham Palace official said.</p>	12.04.06	The Times	Ministry of Defence	Prime Minister
<p>Ted Heath invited to strike up the band by Idi Amin</p> <p>Ted Heath was once offered concert work by Idi Amin of Uganda. The eccentric dictator made his offer in a 1977 telegram, released under the FOI Act. "I understand that you have now been demoted to the rank of obscure music band master," writes Amin, confusing the musical ex-prime minister with a band leader of the same name. "Despite that, I understand that you have established yourself well in your new profession." Inviting Heath and "your band" to play at a national celebration, Amin says Ugandans would be happy to have a whipround or pay in goats and chickens.</p>	01.10.06	The Sunday Times	National Archives	Prime Minister

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Blair's butler The Prime Minister has decided to hire a £50,000 a-year butler to ensure he and wife Cherie spend their final days in Downing Street in style. The Cabinet Office secretly advertised for the 'new post of house manager' Whitehall speak for butler for an un-named 'prestigious office at the centre of government'. The Prime Minister was so determined to bury the appointment it took a request under the FOI act before Ministers were forced to admit the mysterious 'prestigious office' was No10. The job description spells out the tasks of Mr Blair's very own 21st Century Jeeves. These include polishing the 'antiquities and silverware and preparing front of house staff' as well as keeping a 'VIP database' of the likes and dislikes of world leaders and celebrities to make sure they get five-star treatment when they visit.</p>	14.01.07	The Mail on Sunday	Cabinet Office	Prime Minister
<p>Brown accused over breach of ministerial code on travel Gordon Brown has broken the official code governing cabinet ministers' behaviour and failed to comply with Government rules on overseas travel. Mr Brown failed to gain written permission from the Prime Minister to travel to Nigeria in May 2006. The Treasury later said that arrangements for the trip were "in line with normal procedures", but information released under the FOI Act has revealed that the Chancellor did not gain the Prime Minister's written permission to travel abroad. The ministerial code states that cabinet ministers travelling outside the EU on official business must "seek the Prime Minister's written approval".</p>	11.02.07	The Independent on Sunday	HM Treasury	Prime Minister
<p>Blair came to Ulster more often than he visited Wales Prime Minister Tony Blair visited Northern Ireland almost 40 times between 1997 and 2007. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that Mr Blair visited Ulster almost twice as often as he has commuted to Wales throughout his 10 years at Downing Street, calling with his Welsh neighbours only on 20 occasions. Mr Blair is set to make his 38th and final official visit to Northern Ireland - equalling his Scottish visits - when he attends the historic opening of the new power-sharing Executive at Stormont in May 2007.</p>	04.05.07	Belfast Telegraph	10 Downing Street	Prime Minister

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>How Murdoch had a hotline to the PM in the run-up to Iraq war</p> <p>Tony Blair had three conversations with the media magnate Rupert Murdoch in the nine days before the start of the Iraq war, the Government has disclosed. Details of the former prime minister's contacts with Mr Murdoch have been released under the FOI Act. After trying to block disclosure for four years, the Government backed down in a surprise change of heart the day after Mr Blair resigned last month. Requests for information under the Act were submitted by the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Avebury and The Independent journalist James Macintyre. An appeal was pending and evidence was about to be served in a case before an Information Tribunal. Yesterday the Cabinet Office said there were six telephone discussions between Mr Blair and Mr Murdoch in 20 months, all at crucial moments of his premiership. The subject of their calls was not revealed. In 2003, Mr Blair phoned the owner of The Times and The Sun on 11 and 13 March, and on 19 March, the day before Britain and the United States invaded Iraq. The war was strongly supported by Murdoch - owned newspapers around the world. The day after two of the calls, The Sun launched vitriolic attacks on the French President Jacques Chirac. Mr Blair and Mr Murdoch spoke again on 29 January 2004, the day after publication of the Hutton report into the death of Dr David Kelly. Their next conversation was on 25 April 2004, just after Mr Blair bowed to pressure led by The Sun for him to promise a referendum on the proposed EU constitution. They also spoke on 3 October that year, after Mr Blair said he would not fight a fourth general election. The Cabinet Office also said Mr Blair had three meetings with Richard Desmond, the proprietor of Express News-papers, between January 2003 and February 2004. The Government had said releasing the information would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs, and disclosure of the timing of exchanges with "stakeholders" could reveal the content of the discussion.</p>	19.07.07	The Independent	Cabinet Office	Prime Minister
<p>Prime-Minister's make-up</p> <p>Since becoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown's has spent no public funds on make-up, hair treatment, clothes and footwear. This compares to Tony Blair's liking for make-up, which alone cost taxpayers £1,800 in the first six years of his premiership. Figures have been released by the Cabinet Office under the FOI Act</p>	20.09.07	The Sun	Cabinet Office	Prime Minister
<p>How the taxpayer threw a party for prisoners</p> <p>Some of the country's most dangerous criminals were treated to Christmas with all the trimmings at taxpayers' expense. Inmates enjoyed festive dinners, presents and games including karaoke sessions. Some were even allowed to invite their children in for a party where Father Christmas handed out goodies. The details of Christmas and New Year arrangements at 13 jails, released under the FOI Act, angered taxpayers' groups.</p>	14.01.06	The Daily Mail	Prisons	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Mobile phones recovered from prisoners 1386 mobile phones were recovered from prisoners in 2005, a 66% increase on the 843 recovered in 2004. In 2000, only 10 were recovered. The actual figure is expected to be higher, since the reported figures, obtained under the FOI Act, included only 100 of the 139 prisons in England and Wales.	24.04.06	The Daily Express	Home Office	Prisons
Watching porridge costs £147,821 in jails More than 200 televisions are bought every year for Ulster's prisoners, the highest amount paid out for TVs in one year was almost £50,000 according to information released under the FOI Act.	26.04.06	Belfast Evening Telegraph	Northern Ireland Prison Service	Prisons
Hangman 'nearly killed assistant by mistake' As the longest-serving member of the Pierrepoint dynasty of Britain's chief executioners, Thomas Pierrepoint prided himself on the speed with which he dispatched his clients. His record from cell to gallows was 60 seconds. But records released under the FOI Act show the Home Office faced an unprecedented rebellion from prison governors and doctors. They were concerned that, when Pierrepoint was still working at 72, his eyesight was fading and he had become so obsessed with carrying out super-efficient hangings that he nearly sent his assistant through the trapdoor. Memos from the Prison Commission, part of the Home Office, detail how officials agonised over whether to force the executioner into retirement after suggestions from reports of his executions that he was "past the job".	01.06.06	The Independent	The National Archives	Prisons
2,500 jailed sex-offenders out early More than 2,500 paedophiles have been released from jail early in the past five years, including at least 600 criminals a year serving time for serious sexual offences against a child are being freed on licence. And the Home Office admitted there could be many more on the streets. It said: "Unfortunately complete information on those released on licence is unavailable before 2002." The statistics, obtained under the FOI Act, also show more than 100,000 prisoners have been let out on licence since 2002.	27.06.06	The Mirror	Home Office	Prisons
Inmates are drunk at weekend prison Criminals are being allowed to go on binge drinking sessions before sleeping off their hangovers in a controversial £3m weekend jail. The 'intermittent custody' sentence is supposed to punish criminals by depriving them of their leisure time. But, under Prison Service rules, they are allowed to go on alcohol benders before arriving at HMP Kirkham on a Friday night. They then sleep off their session in one of 40 en-suite bedrooms at a special prison wing, which is also equipped with a communal dining room and a classroom. The admission that inmates are free to go on drinking sprees was made in a release under the FOI Act.	21.10.06	The Daily Mail	Home Office	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Regime of torture in Wormwood scrubs</p> <p>More than 160 prison officers were involved in inflicting and covering up a regime of torture which saw savage beatings, death threats and sexual assault inflicted on inmates at Wormwood Scrubs, a secret report has revealed. Many incidents which the Prison Service had refused to publicly admit are acknowledged in the reports, which remained confidential until now. Some managers colluded in the abuse and turned a blind eye, says one report, which brands the terror as the worst case of prisoner abuse in modern history with 164 officers involved from 1992 to 2001. The reports were obtained under the FOI Act and have fuelled demands for a full inquiry into the scandal, which the government has opposed.</p>	13.11.06	The Guardian	Home Office	Prisons
<p>Compensation bill soars behind bars</p> <p>Compensation payouts to prisoners leapt to nearly £9m in the past 12 months, more than a fourfold increase in a year. The handouts to those who claimed they were unfairly treated in the prison system is almost 15 times the amount paid just two years ago. The latest figures were revealed by the Home Office under the FOI Act. In the financial year that ended in March 2006, compensation to prisoners reached £8.8m, according to the figures. Claims included £200 each for prisoners at Wakefield, in West Yorkshire whose DVD players were taken away because they used them to watch pornography. £2.8m for one prisoner's failed suicide bid and £750,000 for nearly 200 drug-addicted inmates who had their drug supply cut off by prison officers, giving them withdrawal symptoms.</p>	18.12.06	The Daily Mail	Home Office	Prisons
<p>Ripper is left off jailed-for-life list</p> <p>Thirty-five lifers have been told they will die behind bars but the Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe is not one of them. Despite murdering 13 women Sutcliffe's name is missing from a list of killers facing a "whole life" tariff, it emerged. The "life means life" list was released after a request under the FOI Act. Other notorious inmates are also left off the Home Office document. They include Angel Of Death nurse Beverly Allitt, 38, who was given 13 life sentences in 1993 for giving children fatal injections, Stockwell Strangler Kenneth Erskine, 44, and Soham killer Ian Huntley, 32. Sutcliffe, 60, was told he should serve a minimum of 30 years at his trial in 1981. But the tariff was never formalised because his legal team didn't supply all the paperwork. If he appeals it will be up to the High Court to review his case and decide whether the lifer should ever be eligible for release.</p>	21.12.06	The Sun	Home Office	Prisons
<p>Foreign lags cost £796k</p> <p>Cash spent on foreign translations in jails more than doubled in a year. Figures released under the FOI Act showed £796,000 was spent on translation for non-English speakers in 2005/06 compared to £353,000 the previous year. The total for England and Wales had more than quadrupled - from £196,000 in 2002/03. Up to 1,200 foreigners are held in jail.</p>	13.01.07	The Daily Star	Home Office	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Compensation to prisoners Compensation to prisoners and ex-prisoners increased to more than £8m in 2006 according to information released under the FOI Act. A judge's decision that sharing cells and "slopping-out" infringed human rights legislation was significant in the £2.3m increase on the 2005 figure.	04.02.07	The News of the World	The Prison Service	Prisons
Prisoners with cell keys Thousands of prisoners have the keys to their own cells. The inmates have been given "privacy locks" to allow them personal space and protect belongings, inquiries by MPs showed. Information released under the FOI Act showed that in Yorkshire alone 5,747 inmates have keys, some at open prisons and young offenders' centres, but also at standard jails which hold serious criminals.	26.03.07	The Daily Express	Prison service	Prisons
Inmates of Cardiff prison fed better at Christmas than those in hospital More money is spent on Christmas dinners for prisoners in Cardiff than patients in the city's hospitals according to information obtained under the FOI Act. Up to £4 a day is set aside for meals, including turkey dinners, on Christmas Day and New Year's Day at Cardiff Prison. During the same period, the average spend in hospitals is just £3.	02.04.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff prisons and NHS trusts	Prisons
Stiff sentence Prisoners at a cushy open prison are still having a hard time inside - after taking Viagra. Warders at Ford Open Prison, confiscated the sex-aid drug from inmates. Staff also confiscated heroin, cocaine, steroids and cannabis - as well as mobile phones, knives and home-made weapons. Sources at the Sussex prison - which holds 541 low-risk inmates - believe men are taking Viagra before their home visits. Prisoners have also been caught returning from a nearby Tesco carrying cans of lager and bottles of spirits. Details of 182 banned items seized in 2006 were obtained under the FOI Act.	27.04.07	The Sun	Ford Open prison	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Corruption squads for prisons rejected by the Home Office</p> <p>Proposals for a powerful anti-corruption unit to tackle widespread bribe-taking by prison officers have been rejected by the Home Office. An internal investigation found "intelligence of corruption" against 1,277 serving warders, with staff routinely smuggling drugs and mobile phones into jails for prisoners. A report on the findings of last year's investigation, called for the establishment of two or three anti-corruption squads in the Prison Service. The report's authors, DI Jonathan Cox, of the Metropolitan Police Force, and Peter Siddons, head of the Prison Service Professional Standards Unit at the time of writing, warned current anti-corruption structures in jails were "no longer fit for purpose". They claimed the scale of corruption was growing and failure to take urgent action could leave the Prison Service criminally liable for a "lack of duty of care to employees". However, since the report was handed to the Home Office last May, no action has been taken. A spokesman confirmed there were no plans to set up the anti-corruption squads the report proposes. The strength of the report's criticism has angered Prison Service chiefs, who accuse the authors of exaggerating corruption to make the case for squads modelled on those at Scotland Yard. But the report, obtained under the FOI Act, says: "Professional opinion believes the size of the problem to be growing."</p>	06.05.07	The Sunday Telegraph	Home Office	Prisons
<p>90% of sex offenders not interested in rehab plan</p> <p>More than 90% of Ulster's jailed sex offenders and paedophiles are not participating in a treatment programme to address their offending behaviour. Information released under the FOI Act shows that, while all the convicted sex offenders are due back on the streets after serving half of their sentence, just 12 of 153 are currently undergoing any sort of official programme to help them confront or treat their offending pattern. Although the Prison Service provides a range of cognitive programmes for male sex offenders, participation is not compulsory and as offenders know they will be freed under the controversial 50% remission scheme - regardless of whether they take part in a programme - there is little incentive to participate.</p>	31.05.07	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Prison Service	Prisons
<p>Reid deported 109 foreign prisoners Clarke managed 136</p> <p>Only 109 convicted foreigners - fewer than one per cent - were repatriated to serve their sentences at home in 2006/2007 according to information obtained under the FOI Act. John Reid replaced Charles Clarke following a series of Home Office problems, including a failure to deport foreign prisoners and ex-prisoners.</p>	10.06.07	The People	Home Office	Prisons
<p>Jails' taxi bill is over £44,000</p> <p>Two prisons notched up more than £44,000 worth of taxi bills in a year. HMP Exeter in Devon spent £32,747 on taxi journeys between 2005 and 2006. Nearby Channings Wood prison in Newton Abbot spent £11,554 - including £4,698 on moving prisoners. Colin Breed, MP for South-east Cornwall, said he was "amazed" at the figures, which were released under the FOI Act.</p>	28.07.07	The Daily Express	Individual prisons	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Sussex jail deaths unacceptable Inmates of Sussex prisons are dying in custody at a rate of three a year according to information released under the FOI Act. A total of nine inmates have committed suicide in HMP Lewes since 2002, which is officially overcrowded. Five of those occurred in one year. A further three prisoners died from natural causes between 2002 and 2007. Two died while serving time at HMP Ford.	14.08.07	Brighton and Hove Argus	Local prisons	Prisons
Hunt for danger teens unit site Four Leeds sites have been earmarked for a new centre to house some of the country's most dangerous youngsters. Murderers, arsonists, drug dealers and sex attackers are among the under 17s held at East Moor Secure Children's Unit in Adel, Leeds. But the building is 31-years-old and within two to five years is deemed unlikely to be fit for purpose, according to a Leeds City Council report. There are proposals to build a new 48-bed facility, costing £18m, on an alternative site and information released under the FOI Act shows that 4 sites in the Leeds area are being considered. They are; the Redhall Playing Fields, next to the A58 Wetherby Road, Whinmoor; Moorfields, near Garforth; next to junction 7 of the M621, Stourton; and Stourton Industrial Estate.	05.10.07	Yorkshire Evening Post	Leeds City Council	Prisons
One in five convicts addicted to drugs One fifth of convicts become hooked on drugs while behind bars. The Home Office has revealed the figures in response to an FOI request from a local MP. The information included research, which suggested that nationally one in five men (and fewer than one in ten women) who had used at least one of six drugs (cannabis, heroin, illicit methadone, amphetamine, crack and cocaine) reported first using one of them in prison.	22.11.07	Bradford Telegraph and Argus	Home Office	Prisons
Prison riots cost taxpayers £725,000 The total cost of a number of riots at a young offenders' institution is likely to exceed £725,000, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. In February, Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institution, near Barnard Castle, County Durham, suffered a turbulent week, during which a residential wing was destroyed and another was badly damaged. Four officers are still on sick leave following the trouble on D Wing, which started on February 25, when inmates began fighting with staff. Pool balls were thrown at officers and four were seriously injured, one with a fractured skull. Staff were forced to retreat from the residential wing, leaving inmates to wreak havoc for about eight hours. Two days later, another riot erupted in F Wing, as prisoners watched a news report on the previous trouble. Prisoners destroyed sinks, showers, doors and lights, causing £32,290-worth of damage.	30.11.07	Northern Echo	Prison Service	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Prisoners collect almost £1m in compensation</p> <p>Almost £1m in compensation has been paid out in compensation to Ulster prisoners for complaints as wide ranging as stress, food poisoning or annoyance at cell searches. Some other bizarre awards - branded "frivolous" and "incomprehensible" by a member of the Policing Board - have been for incidents such as dog bites, sports injuries and prisoners hurt in traffic accidents while being transported to and from jail. Information released under the FOI Act shows that, since 2003, 211 inmates were awarded a staggering £862,320 for grievances while in jail.</p>	10.02.06	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Prisons Service	Prisons
<p>Prisoners rake in £1.3m compensation</p> <p>Prisoners are collecting thousands of pounds in compensation from the Home Office for everything from assault, medical negligence and harassment.</p> <p>A sample of 10 jails found that almost 500 inmates made claims over the past two years with those who were successful pocketing a total of £1.26m. The biggest payouts were made at Wormwood Scrubs, London, where 48 lodged claims for assault by staff and received more than £1m between them. But the statistics disclosed after an FOI act request showed that inmates at other prisons have latched on to the "compensation culture". Figures from the 10 jails showed £17,000 paid for injuries sustained in attacks by fellow prisoners. A total of £16,000 was paid to inmates injured in falls and £31,000 for alleged medical negligence.</p>	05.04.06	The Daily Telegraph	The Home Office	Prisons
<p>Drug smuggling in city's prisons</p> <p>Officers at HMP Liverpool and Altcourse have seized hauls of cannabis, heroin, cocaine, amphetamines and steroids according to figures released under the FOI Act.</p>	02.01.06	Liverpool Echo	HMP Liverpool and HMP Altcourse	Prisons
<p>Drugs taken into prison</p> <p>More than a dozen people have been caught trying to smuggle drugs into Lincoln Prison in the past year. Figures released under the FOI Act show that 14 people have been banned from visiting HMP Lincoln for "attempting to smuggle drugs through visits". The incidents took place between October 2004 and September 2005. A further nine prisoners have been subjected to "closed visits" during the same time period "where it was proven or where there was reasonable suspicion of involvement in smuggling drugs through visits or were considered to pose a reasonable risk of involvement".</p>	10.01.07	Lincolnshire Echo	Lincoln Prison	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Blunders allowed violent mental patient to escape A Broadmoor patient escaped after a series of mistakes by hospital chiefs, a secret inquiry has found. Mark Ricketts, 39, a schizophrenic convicted of attempted murder after stabbing a stranger 20 times, absconded during a day trip to a mental hospital in south London. He out-ran guards and scaled a low fence to get away, spending six days on the run before being recaptured. At one point, police were searching outside the home of his victim, who was not told that Ricketts was at large. The escape was the first in more than a decade by a patient at the Berkshire hospital. A report on the escape in September 2004, obtained under the FOI Act, makes 13 recommendations to tighten security. The findings raise questions for Broadmoor and Britain's two other high-security mental hospitals - Rampton, in Nottinghamshire, and Ashworth, near Liverpool - which house killers and other violent patients.	29.01.06	The Sunday Telegraph	The Home Office	Prisons
Fugitives on loose More than half the prisoners who escaped last year from a jail nicknamed Holiday Bay are still at large. New figures, released under the FOI Act, show that 14 men vanished from Hollesley Bay open prison near Woodbridge, in Suffolk, in 2005. Only six have been recaptured.	03.02.06	The Times	Home Office	Prisons
Hospital blunder led to dangerous convict's escape Serious blunders at Springfield Hospital led to a highly dangerous attempted murderer going on the run in Tooting, an inquiry has revealed. Broadmoor patient Mark Ricketts, 39, a schizophrenic convicted of attempted murder after stabbing a stranger 20 times, absconded during a day-trip to Springfield Hospital in Tooting. The independent inquiry, obtained under the FOI Act, blames both Springfield and Broadmoor staff for the absconction on September 8, 2004.	04.02.06	Balham and Tooting Guardian	Home Office	Prisons
Prison breaks Prison officers have foiled 16 attempted escapes from Norwich Prison over the past decade, whilst only 2 prisoners managed to escape according to information released under the FOI Act. The Home Office would only confirm that the prisoners who did escape were convicted of theft and burglary and would not give further details other than to say neither was still at large.	14.11.06	Norwich Evening News	Home Office	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Prison escape officers keep jobs</p> <p>Prison guards whose negligence allowed criminals to escape from Ulster's jails have been allowed to keep their jobs. Since 2001 no prison officers whose actions contributed to the escape of an inmate have had their employment terminated. Information released under the FOI Act shows that between 2001 and 2006, six warnings have been issued to officers for their failure to prevent escapes and escape attempts. The information shows that prison chiefs have dished out almost 80 warnings to guards for being drunk on duty, contributing to the escape of prisoners, assaulting and molesting fellow officers and having a relationship with an ex-prisoner. Eight prison officers have also been sacked for a series of wrongdoings that include associating with an ex-female prisoner, borrowing tobacco from a prisoner, not taking action against an inmate who urinated in an open area of the prison, neglecting their duties and bringing the service into disrepute. In addition, 15 prison officers are currently awaiting the outcome of investigations into alleged offences that include assaulting a 16-year-old boy, breaching duty of confidence by taking part in a TV programme, being drunk during a management course, negligence and serious misconduct.</p>	05.01.07	Belfast Telegraph	The Prison Service (Northern Ireland)	Prisons
<p>Nearly 1,800 escape from region's open prisons</p> <p>Almost 1,800 inmates have escaped from Yorkshire's open prisons in the past 10 years, figures released under the FOI Act reveal. Hundreds of criminals deemed suitable for Category D accommodation are slipping away at the first opportunity.</p>	18.06.07	Yorkshire Post	Yorkshire Prisons	Prisons
<p>Killers among record number of country club prison escapees</p> <p>Record numbers of violent criminals including killers and attempted murderers strolled out of Scotland's two open prisons last year. The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) yesterday revealed the absconders lengthy criminal backgrounds after previously keeping them secret. 81 inmates went on the run in 2006, including 39 who had previous convictions for violent offences. They included ten killers and 29 jailed for attempted murder. The criminal backgrounds of last years escapees were obtained under the FOI Scotland Act. Among the offences they had been convicted of were rape, culpable homicide, robbery, serious assault and drug dealing. Most had lengthy criminal records and were serving hefty sentences. The previous highest recorded annual total for absconders was 48 in the 2005-06 financial year.</p>	25.10.07	The Daily Mail	Scottish prisons	Prisons
<p>Cop cells hold cons</p> <p>Eight police stations across London are to hold prisoners when prisons across the UK reach bursting point. A maximum of 80 people can be held in the cells at Catford, Orpington, Harrow Road, Kensington, Brentford, Hornchurch, Barnet and Whetstone police stations. Local officers are being drafted in to do overtime to guard prisoners under the scheme, called Operation Safeguard. The Home Office is paying the police around £385 per prisoner per day as part of the deal. Figures released under the FOI Act, show all of Catford's 12 cells were used under the scheme on January 22. This would have cost the Home Office £4,620.</p>	08.02.07	News Shopper	Metropolitan Police	Prisons

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>North-east prisons 'bursting at the seams'</p> <p>Overcrowded north-east prisons have regularly exceeded their capacities during the last three years. Figures obtained under the FOI Scotland Act show that both Peterhead and Craiginches were at maximum capacity in July 2007. At one point in 2006, Aberdeen's Craiginches was almost 20% over capacity, with 263 prisoners crammed into a prison, which should hold only 225. Peterhead prison is at its 306 capacity.</p>	23.07.07	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Local prisons	Prisons
<p>DVLA was warned not to sell drivers' personal details four years ago</p> <p>DVLA chiefs faced fresh criticism after it was revealed they were warned four years ago that the sale of drivers' personal details was probably illegal. Documents obtained under the FOI Act reveal that the Government's data protection watchdog told officials in 2002 they could be breaking the law by selling motorists' names and addresses to private car park and wheel-clamping operators. Yet nothing was done, leaving the DVLA free to rake in more than £9m by passing information from its database to the firms and other organisations including banks, solicitors and debt collectors.</p>	05.02.06	The Mail on Sunday	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Privacy
<p>Oyster cards used to track criminals</p> <p>Oyster cards, the electronic season tickets designed to reduce bus queues and cut the cost of travel in London, are being used by the Metropolitan police to track criminals, new figures reveal. Statistics obtained under the FOI Act show police are increasingly using the electronic travel records to trace people on the capital's bus, Tube and train networks. Although the Met made only seven requests in 2004 for Oyster card information, 61 were made in January this year alone. Overall, police have requested journey information 243 times, and been given it on 229 occasions. A spokeswoman for the Metropolitan police said yesterday that requests to access Oyster data were a "straightforward investigative tool", and officers decided on a "case by case" basis whether to request it.</p>	14.02.06	The Guardian	Metropolitan Police	Privacy
<p>Toddlers used in trial of identity biometrics</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>A Home Office department is fingerprinting under-fives, and may include babies, in a biometrics ID scheme. The trial ends the department's technological taboo on enrolling very young children in identity checks. Details of the scheme emerged after the Home Office released an internal report under the FOI Act, which contained a section on fingerprinting under-fives. The UK could be one of the first countries to fingerprint under-fives – and possibly the first. When Malaysian police last year proposed fingerprinting of babies there were strong protests from civil liberties groups in the country. If the trial is successful, it could encourage the government to consider gathering fingerprints from very young children for passport applications. The legal framework exists for this to happen.</p>	16.05.06	Computer Weekly	Home Office	Privacy

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Sinister security <p>American law-enforcement and intelligence agencies are now empowered to inspect the credit-card and email details of any Briton buying a transatlantic air ticket. If they wish to delve deeper, they need only a court order to seek details of other credit-card transactions on that account, as well as other email correspondence. Travellers who object to being snooped on by the US government in this way (and its record on intelligence matters in recent years has not been wholly reassuring) will, it appears, have to go to an American court to challenge it - yet if they are under investigation, will they even be allowed into the country? Information released under the FOI Act reveals that the UK government endorsed and supported this proposal.</p>	01.01.07	The Daily Telegraph	Department for Transport	Privacy
Children fingerprinted by local schools <p>Thousands of children in York are being fingerprinted by their schools, including one school that is acting without parents' knowledge. Documents released under the FOI Act show 11 schools in the city are using personal biometric data to identify pupils, but one said they had suspended the practice, after a local politician voiced concerns.</p>	08.01.07	York Press	York City Council	Privacy
Fail to pay the C-charge and police may be told <p>The personal details of thousands of drivers have been passed to the police after they failed to pay the London congestion charge. Transport for London can retain the details of drivers who forget to pay the charge even if they pay the subsequent fine. It can also keep photographs of their cars, which provide a record of their journey. The police can ask for this information to hunt for criminals. A request under the FOI Act found that the details of almost 1,500 motorists were passed to the police by TfL between July 25, 2005 and December 10 2006.</p>	19.02.07	The Daily Mail	Transport for London	Privacy
Schools may fingerprint six million children <p>Almost six million children at 17,000 schools could have their fingerprints taken, intensifying fears of the growth of a "surveillance society" where personal information is gathered from cradle to grave. As soaring numbers of schools require pupils to have biometric checks to register in the morning, buy canteen food or borrow a book, it emerged that less than one-quarter of local education authorities have banned collecting finger-prints. The rest either allow it or have no policy on the issue, potentially enabling headteachers to gather biometric data from about 5.9 million English schoolchildren as young as four without telling their parents. The number of schools that could potentially fingerprint pupils was obtained by the Tories in FOI Act requests to all English and Welsh local education authorities.</p>	09.04.07	The Independent	Local education authorities	Privacy
Councils sell off your name <p>Merseyside's town halls have brought in almost £20,000 over the past two years from companies willing to pay for their electoral registers according to information obtained under the FOI Act. People's names and addresses have been sold to firms ranging from credit agencies to health clubs. Council officials today insisted they have to make at least an edited version of the electoral register available to buy by law.</p>	28.05.07	Liverpool Echo	Liverpool area councils	Privacy

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Watchdog criticises government for spying on miners</p> <p>The Department of Trade and Industry (now the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform) has been criticised by a government watchdog for unjustifiable spying on former coalminers claiming compensation for industrial injuries. The department used investigators in clandestine surveillance operations to verify claims from miners who say they have suffered illnesses from working down the pits. Sir Andrew Leggatt, the chief surveillance commissioner, warned that the department had overstepped the mark while covertly investigating potentially fake claims, and had laid itself open to being sued by the miners for violating their civil liberties. The documents, released under the FOI Act after months of delay by BERR, show that the watchdog has been repeatedly scathing over the past two years.</p>	18.08.07	The Guardian	The Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform	Privacy
<p>Police DNA database 'out of control'</p> <p>The security of the police National DNA Database is in question following the disclosure of confidential e-mails which reveal that a private firm has secretly been keeping the genetic samples and personal details of hundreds of thousands of arrested people. Police forces use the company, LGC, to analyse DNA samples taken from people they arrest. LGC then supplies information to the National DNA Database. Yet rather than destroy this data afterwards, the firm has kept copies, together with highly personal demographic details of the individuals, including names, ages, skin colours and addresses.</p> <p>In a separate twist, evidence has emerged that the Home Office has given permission for a controversial genetic study to be undertaken using the DNA samples on the police database to see if it is possible to predict a suspect's ethnic background or skin colour from them. The information was released following a series of FOI Act requests by The Observer and the campaign group GeneWatch.</p>	16.07.06	The Observer	Home Office	Privacy
<p>DNA database rises by 600,000 in just one year</p> <p>Almost 600,000 people have been added to the national DNA database in the past 12 months, according to new. They show that the Government now holds samples of almost four million individuals and one in four has no criminal record or even a police caution. The database is expanding rapidly as all suspects arrested in connection with any imprisonable offence now routinely have DNA swabs taken. The samples remain on official records even if the alleged offender is never charged or is later cleared by a court. The new figures, released under the FOI Act, show the database now holds 3.98m DNA samples from people in England and Wales up from 3.4m the previous year.</p>	18.03.07	The Mail on Sunday	Police Forces	Privacy

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Police's growing database of DNA samples revealed</p> <p>The DNA of more than 23,000 Worcestershire people is being stored on a police database. West Mercia Police is keeping the samples in the hope of solving crimes through the latest forensic techniques. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed that police have taken and stored DNA samples from 23,478 people in the county since 1995. The vast majority of samples have been taken since 2001 when new laws enabled the police to keep DNA, even when a person is not guilty of a crime. The samples have been taken directly from the scenes of crimes or by taking swab samples from the mouths of those arrested.</p>	11.04.07	Worcester News	West Mercia Police	Privacy
<p>Psychics 'hired to find Bin Laden'</p> <p>Psychics were recruited by the Ministry of Defence to locate Osama Bin Laden's secret lair. Newly declassified documents revealed that the MoD conducted an experiment to see if volunteers could 'see' objects hidden inside an envelope. It is claimed the ministry hoped positive results would allow it to use psychics to 'remotely view' Bin Laden's base and also to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.</p> <p>However, after running up a bill of £18,000 of taxpayers' money, defence chiefs concluded there was 'little value' in using psychic powers in the defence of the nation and the research was taken no further. The study, conducted in 2002, involved blindfolding test subjects and asking them to 'see' the contents of sealed brown envelopes containing pictures of objects and public figures. The MoD tried to recruit 12 'known' psychics who advertised their abilities on the Internet, but when they all refused they were forced to use 'novice' volunteers. The report, released under the FOI Act, shows 28% of those tested managed to guess the contents of the envelopes, which included pictures of a knife, Mother Teresa and an 'Asian individual'. But most subjects, who were holed up in a secret location for the study, were hopelessly off the mark. One even fell asleep while he tried to focus on the envelope's content.</p>	23.02.07	The Daily Mail	Ministry of Defence	Psychic Powers
<p>Sale of council assets</p> <p>The sell-off of Doncaster Council assets has so far raised more than £18m according to information obtained under the FOI Act. Dozens of properties have gone under the hammer at three major auctions in London during the preceding 12 months. And more than £5m has been collected by other means including private treaty sales and sales by competitive tender.</p>	02.11.06	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Regeneration
<p>Council could spend £600,000 renting land it already owns</p> <p>Scarborough Council could end up spending £600,000 on land it already owns. Originally the council wanted the site for a £250m scheme to create an ambitious domed futuristic entertainment complex on the site and leased it to a private contractor. However, after 10 years, during which no progress was made and proven attractions remained boarded up, an alternative, more modest scheme, was put in its place and the council needed to reclaim the land. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that the cost of compensating the leaseholder could be as much as £600,000.</p>	06.01.07	Yorkshire Post	Scarborough Council	Regeneration

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Jews far more likely to be victims of faith hatred than Muslims</p> <p>Jewish people are four times more likely to be attacked because of their religion than Muslims, according to figures compiled by the police. One in 400 Jews compared to one in 1,700 Muslims are likely to be victims of "faith hate" attacks every year. The figure is based on data collected over three months in police areas accounting for half the Muslim and Jewish populations of England and Wales. The crimes range from assault and verbal abuse to criminal damage at places of worship. Police forces started recording the religion of faith-hate crime victims only this year on the instruction of the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo). However, the first findings, for July to September, released under the FOI Act, show that it is Jews who are much more likely to be targeted because of their religion. The figures also suggest that many faith-hate crimes remain unsolved, contrary to the picture painted by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in a report this month. The CPS said only 43 people were charged with "religiously aggravated" offences last year, and concluded that the large rise expected after the July 7 bombings had not materialised.</p>	17.12.06	The Sunday Telegraph	Police	Religion
<p>Hospitals cut back on chaplaincy care</p> <p>The think-tank Theos found in a study, conducted using information obtained under the FOI Act, that of 198 NHS trusts chaplaincy care has been cut by 54,127 hours a year since 2005. Only two trusts, Lincolnshire Partnership and County Durham and Darlington, reported an increase in the number of chaplaincy sessions available. The average cut in chaplaincy care was 19 hours a week, with the highest loss at Epsom and St Helier hospitals, in Surrey, where 77 hours were lost, representing more than half of the service. There are about 400 full-time chaplains and 3,000 part-time chaplains from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths in NHS trusts.</p>	08.10.07	The Times	NHS Trusts	Religion
<p>Costs of failed police merger scheme</p> <p>Devon and Cornwall constabularies had to spend £64,300 in dealing with the aborted Home Office merger proposals figures released under the FOI Act have shown. And a total of 890 staff days were diverted from normal duties - at an estimated cost of £256,100 in lost staff time.</p>	17.08.06	Exeter Express and Echo	Devon police and Cornwall police	Restructuring
<p>Battle over City's unitary bid costs over £200,000</p> <p>More than £200,000 of taxpayers' money has been spent on the battle over Exeter's bid for home-rule. Figures, obtained under the FOI Act, show Exeter City Council has so far spent a total of £166,462 as it makes its case to the Government on the merits of its bid for unitary status. Meanwhile, Devon County Council has forked out £46,831 arguing against the plans. A large proportion of both authorities' expenditure has gone on hiring consultants and producing communications on the bid. Under the current system, responsibility for public services is split between the city and county councils. But following a 12-week consultation, the city council is expected to hear in July 2007 if it can realise its ambition to take control over all services in Exeter.</p>	24.05.07	Exeter Express and Echo	Local Councils	Restructuring

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Government tried to stop county's bid for assembly Ministers tried to kill off the campaign for an elected Cornish assembly in 2002 according to documents released under the FOI Act. A string of letters sent from John Prescott's former department to St Ives MP Andrew George sought to dismiss the centuries-old campaign for Cornish independence and talk up the prospect of a regional assembly covering the whole of the South West.	09.06.07	Western Morning News	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Restructuring
State powers of entry A study by the Centre for Policy Studies, using the FOI Act has revealed the numerous powers of entry to private property and the differing standards of record keeping relating to them. Defra were able to lay out in detail how often it had exercised power of entry under the Bees Act 1980 to ensure that bee colonies are free from disease and foreign bees (during 2006, 3,190 apiaries were inspected in England, and a further 940 in Wales). The detail of Defra's record-keeping for this trivial power contrasts markedly with HM Revenue and Customs, who had no comprehensive record of its use of Writs of Assistance.	23.04.07	The Times	Government departments etc	Rights of Entry
Queen sacked us over Diana interview, says BBC The BBC was "sacked" as producer of the Queen's Christmas message because Buckingham Palace sought revenge after the notorious Panorama interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, senior corporation figures believed. The interview, in which the Princess talked candidly of her failed marriage to the Prince of Wales, was watched by 21 million viewers. The BBC had sole responsibility for producing the Christmas message up until 1996. Shortly after the broadcast of the Panorama interview, however, Buckingham Palace announced that ITV would be producing the 1997 and 1998 broadcasts. BBC memos, released under the FOI Act, show that the corporation did not accept the Palace's explanation that it was bringing ITV on board because it was keen to try out "fresh ideas". They also reveal that the BBC tried to retaliate for the "public slap in the face" by refusing to assist ITV with its broadcast.	29.01.06	The Sunday Telegraph	BBC	Royal Family
Royal wedding The marriage of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall is illegal - according to the official advice of 1996. A briefing paper from the Cabinet Office, released under the FOI Act, stated then that, under the Royal Marriages Act 1772, the marriages of members of the Royal Family in England and Wales must be performed by Anglican clergy.	09.06.06	The Times	The Department for Constitutional Affairs (now Ministry of Justice)	Royal Family
Charles' £94,000 subsidy Prince Charles has received £94,000 in taxpayers' handouts for farming in the past year - despite raking in £14m from his Duchy of Cornwall estate. The heir to the throne has been given a 3.6% rise in subsidies from the taxpayer, even though he has privately voiced his opposition, in principle, to farmers getting handouts. He received a further £1.5m from the taxpayer in the last financial year, to support his official duties. Details of the farm subsidies were obtained from the Government's Rural Payments Agency under the FOI Act.	20.01.07	The Daily Express	The Rural Payments Agency	Royal Family

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Duchy of Cornwall finances <p>Figures released under the FOI Act by the Treasury show how much income the Duchy of Cornwall receives from a variety of sources. The Duchy it would seem obtains considerable income from a property portfolio and also benefits from a deal with the Treasury whereby it pays no capital gains tax. The revelations are included in a Channel 4 documentary.</p>	11.03.07	The Mail on Sunday	HM Treasury	Royal Family
Conspiracy to prevent a marriage between a princess and a commoner <p>Winston Churchill was told the relationship between Princess Margaret and her lover Group Captain Peter Townsend was doomed to failure a year before the Queen's sister made a public statement officially ending the affair, according to papers released under the FOI Act. They also reveal the growing concern among ministers and senior military figures about the constitutional implications of the secret trysts between the Princess and the former Battle of Britain Spitfire pilot. Margaret became embroiled in a public scandal over her wish to marry Townsend, who had been a trusted member of the royal household. Sixteen years the princess's senior, Townsend was also a divorcee, which, in the eyes of the Government and the Church of England, made him an unsuitable husband for a royal princess, despite the fact that he had been the innocent party in his divorce from Rosemary Pawle.</p>	21.04.07	The Independent	National Archives/ Churchill College Cambridge	Royal Family
Row over Queen's wedding 'tat' <p>Courtiers were horrified to learn that a proposed Royal Wedding souvenir was a handkerchief with a picture of the Queen and Prince Philip. The Palace aides took the view 60 years ago that it implied people could blow their nose on the royal pair. So they objected to the product on the grounds of "good taste". The shocked reaction to some items of memorabilia is revealed in documents released from the National Archives under the FOI Act. The handkerchief was not the only idea which failed to find the approval of those closest to the Queen. The "tat" to which royal aides and Government officials objected also included a plastic Union Jack and a souvenir programme said to be "more suitable for a funeral". There was also a snooty reference to "the type of person who buys this kind of thing". The documents, from 1947, when Princess Elizabeth married Prince Philip, are revealing insights into how aides dealt with merchandise firms seeking permission to use royal images.</p>	01.05.07	The Daily Express	The National Archive	Royal Family
The scandal of secrecy at the Conquest <p>Letters held by the Strategic Health Authority and released under the FOI Act have shed more light on the controversial departure of Annette Sergeant (chief executive of Hastings Conquest Hospital between 2002 and 2005). The Letters show it was agreed to keep her pay-off secret. They also mention huge problems among management at the Conquest hospital. They talk of management instability, as well as challenging and complex issues. There were also 37 bullying claims made by staff.</p>	20.01.06	Hastings Observer	The Strategic Health Authority	Salaries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

District council redundancy payments Redundancy payments to staff at Fenland District Council have reached nearly £500,000 in the last three years. Figures released under the FOI Act show £370,000 was paid out in 2003, when the council underwent a major reorganisation. Around £13,000 was handed over in 2004 and £85,700 in 2005.	13.03.06	Eastern Daily Press	Fenland District Council	Salaries
Cash incentives halved for new TfL chief Hendy London's new transport commissioner will be entitled to half the bonus of his predecessor. Details released under the FOI Act reveal that former bus conductor Peter Hendy, 52, who gained responsibility for the capital's public transport network last month, is entitled to bonuses of £160,000 a year on top of his £320,000 annual salary. His unspecified pension and "miscellaneous travel and health benefits" will push his earnings above £500,000 a year. But the package is still worth about £200,000 a year less than that given to his predecessor Bob Kiley.	14.03.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Salaries
Redundancy costs The cost of early retirement and redundancy payments to five of its leading officers in four years has cost Torbay Council over £700,000 and left the Town Hall with an annual bill of over £26,000 according to figures released under the FOI Act.	10.05.06	Torquay Herald Express	Torbay Council	Salaries
No 10's man to get paid £900 a day to scrap CSA The man appointed by the government to scrap the Child Support Agency is being paid £900 a day to find a solution. The appointment of Sir David Henshaw, the former chief executive of Liverpool council, was rushed out by Tony Blair and John Hutton, the works and pensions secretary, in February after ministers came under enormous pressure over the failure of the agency to meet government targets on maintenance payments, and had built up a backlog of 350,000 unsolved cases. At the time the ministry refused to disclose Sir David's salary or the appointment procedure. Information released under the FOI Act now gives his payment details for a three-day week and disclosed that ministers did not draw up a short list of candidates. Instead his appointment was made by Mr Hutton and the prime minister.	30.05.06	The Guardian	Department for Work and Pensions	Salaries
Temporary manager's pay Aberdeen City Council is hiring a temporary manager from employment agency SOLACE Enterprises, at a cost of £750 a day for his services, £170 flying him to and from London each week and £593 a month on a flat for him according to information obtained using the FOI Scotland Act.	21.06.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Aberdeen City Council	Salaries
Part-time cultural manager Between September 2004 and July 2006, the woman charged with drawing up the programme of events for Liverpool's Capital of Culture celebrations (and paid £150,000 a year), spent just 97 working days in the city according to information released under the FOI Act.	03.08.06	Liverpool Daily Post	Liverpool City Council	Salaries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Bonuses paid to Home Office bosses</p> <p>Senior Civil servants in the Home Office have been paid more than £2m in bonuses over the past two years despite the myriad scandals that have engulfed the department. The bonuses were agreed by the Prime Minister. In May, Home Secretary John Reid famously declared part of his department was not 'fit for purpose' after a firestorm of problems ranging from the release of foreign prisoners to the failure to control immigration. Reid said other problems showed the Home Office could be 'dysfunctional' and 'wholesale transformation' was 'probably needed'. He expressed the possibility of sacking senior civil servants found responsible. Today's revelations of the bonuses have been described as 'extraordinary' and 'shocking'. They were released by the Home Office under the FOI Act, and disclose the scale of hundreds of 'performance-related' bonuses being paid out by the Home Office to the majority of its top mandarins. The sums range from £ 3,000 and £ 15,000.</p>	03.09.06	The Observer	The Home Office	Salaries
<p>Police spin doctors earn double the salary of PCs</p> <p>Figures released under the FOI Act show that a police communications manager earns up to £39,000 a year while a constable starts on just over £22,000. Even junior police press officers are paid more than £24,000. The pay rates for staff at Northumbria Police were gleaned under the FOI Act by the Taxpayers' Alliance.</p>	14.11.06	The Express	Northumbria Police	Salaries
<p>Revenue offers incentives to tax inspectors</p> <p>Tax inspectors are being offered bonuses to encourage them to collect more money from individuals and businesses. Bonuses paid out by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) are worth up to £2,000 for inspectors who meet their targets. HMRC has also told its tax compliance teams across the country to increase the amount of unpaid tax that they recover by a quarter over the next year. The instruction came on the back of a separate set of targets published by HMRC. Under measures set out in the Public Service Agreement, an extra £11 billion in outstanding tax must be recovered by tax inspectors by 2008. Information released under the FOI Act show that HMRC employees, including tax inspectors, who are top performers are now entitled to a bonus of 3% of salary. Staff who are awarded a good performance mark can receive a bonus of 1.8% of salary.</p>	02.01.07	The Times	HM Revenue & Customs	Salaries
<p>Transport for London perks</p> <p>Transport for London has handed out 11,000 free oyster to cards to its employees and their relatives according to figures released under the FOI Act. This is estimated to have cost in the region of £10m a year.</p>	07.01.07	Observer	Transport for London.	Salaries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

'Project for poor' chief's £60k pay Bosses of a £52m scheme set up to regenerate one of Doncaster's poorest areas have received pay rises of up to 50% in the last two years. The figures obtained under the FOI Act show the chief executive of the Doncaster New Deal for Communities, Clare Bonson, now earns over £60,000 a year, £20,000 more than was paid in 2004. Mayor of Doncaster Martin Winter's allowance is in the region of £62,000 for a job that carries with it borough-wide responsibilities. The NDC's deputy chief executive enjoyed a 42% salary rise and now earns £50,000. However, a monitoring officer on the organisation's top rate of pay would only have received a nine per cent pay increase during the same time period. When the NDC was set up in 2001 the board initially elected to cap the salary of its senior managers.	18.01.07	Doncaster Free Press	Doncaster Council	Salaries
London's £100k council workers Two hundred council staff in London have salaries in excess of £100,000 a year according to figures collected using the FOI Act. Tory-run Wandsworth paid 20 employees six-figure sums - the greatest number of any London borough - in the financial year 2005-06. The council is also thought to have the best-paid chief executive in Gerald Jones, who is believed to earn more than £200,000 a year. His total package is estimated at £227,424 once performance-related bonuses and health benefits are added. Lambeth - officially the capital's worst council - the City of London Corporation and the Greater London Authority each paid 14 staff more than £100,000.	08.03.07	The Evening Standard	London Borough Councils	Salaries
Council 'fat cats' Local authorities were last night accused of using council tax hikes to pay massive salaries to town hall chiefs. 578 council officials are recorded as earning six-figure salaries last year. The highest wage was paid to Peter Gilroy, chief executive of Kent Council - who earned £229,999. One of Britain's poorest areas, Tower Hamlets in East London, has 27 employees on six figure sums - including heads of street management, customer access and cultural services. The figures were obtained under the FOI Act by the Taxpayers' Alliance.	08.03.07	The Times	Local authorities	Salaries
£12m: that's what our MLAs are really costing Payouts to MLAs are expected to top £12m this year - including a golden handshake to one ousted member that amounted to £15,000 for less than two months. A UK-wide comparison also shows that basic Assembly wages cost almost twice as much per head of population as the Scottish parliament and nearly four times as much as Westminster pay. Paying the basic salaries of Assembly members costs £2.59 per person in Northern Ireland. By comparison, the Scottish Parliament's wages cost £1.32 for every person in Scotland, the Welsh Assembly's pay is 94p per head in Wales and Westminster pay costs 65p for every UK resident. Last year, when MLAs had no responsibilities for governing Northern Ireland, Assembly wages and salaries cost £8.7m. Figures were obtained under the FOI Act.	31.05.07	Belfast Telegraph	Northern Ireland Assembly	Salaries

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£700,000 arrears handed to workers</p> <p>More than £700,000 in wage arrears has been paid to workers by their bosses after they were found to have flouted the national minimum wage. Figures released under the FOI Act show that payouts were made to 2,170 people working for 731 employers across the country over the past five years. HM Revenue and Customs, which administers the law, said that 516 complaints had been made about Welsh employers since January 2002, when Welsh-only figures first became available.</p>	21.06.07	South Wales Echo	HM Revenue and Customs	Salaries
<p>BBC bonuses approach £20m despite cuts</p> <p>BBC staff were paid almost £20m in bonuses last year. The director general, Mark Thompson, refused to accept a bonus last year because of a cost cutting programme which led to 6,000 job losses, but his staff were paid a total of £19,429,853. The data, released under the FOI Act, showed that nearly half of the BBC's 23,000 employees received bonuses during the period from July 2006 to June 2007. Most of the bonuses were paid last August and the BBC said the total amount, an increase of more than £2m on the previous year, represented less than 2% of its wage bill. The average bonus totalled £1,805, an increase of £237 on the previous year, with 4,107 staff receiving more than £1,000.</p>	08.08.07	The Guardian	BBC	Salaries
<p>Wage hike for council bosses</p> <p>The number of top bosses at Swansea Council on £60,000plus salaries has increased over the last five years. In 2002, there were just 12 staff earning that much. But by 2007 that figure had almost tripled - with two bosses getting more than £90,000. The figures, which include head and deputy head teachers' pay, were released under the FOI Act and show that Swansea Council has to spend more money each year to attract and retain staff. Last year, the authority advertised for a new chief executive, offering £150,000-a-year for the role.</p>	10.09.07	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea Council	Salaries
<p>Dastardly plot</p> <p>Scottish Parliament bosses plagued by pigeons at Holyrood considered having them shot. Officials also discussed bringing in hawks to kill the birds after their droppings messed up the new building, documents released under the FOI Scotland Act show. Netting has now been put up to deal with the problem.</p>	17.02.06	The Sun	Scottish Parliament	Scottish Parliament
<p>Holyrood's roof garden costs £20,000 a year to tidy</p> <p>Safety support for grass roofs at the Scottish Parliament cost nearly £70,000, Holyrood officials have revealed. Figures released under the FOI Scotland Act show that the cost of a "man-safe" system came to £59,573.05. A further £8,500 was spent on scaffolding and protective netting to protect workers cutting grass. The total landscaping, including grass cutting and maintenance of trees, flowers and shrubs, involves a recurring cost of £20,000 a year.</p>	23.02.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	The Scottish Executive	Scottish Parliament

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Deposed MSPs cash in as party 'consultants'</p> <p>MSPs have paid thousands of pounds of public money to members of their parties on "consultancy fees" - in many cases to former Holyrood colleagues who have lost their seats. Politicians of all parties have used the Scottish parliament's allowance system to hire friends and colleagues to give advice, carry out research, write reports, or work in their offices. Since the parliament was created, MSPs have spent £149,300 on consultancy fees, of which £135,000, or 90%, has gone to people with links to the same party as the hiring MSP. The scale and pattern of consultancy payments since 1999 is revealed in documents released under the FOI Scotland Act as Holyrood begins an inquiry into MSP allowances.</p>	01.07.07	The Sunday Times	Scottish Executive	Scottish Parliament
<p>Labour under fire over free limo trips</p> <p>Jack McConnell, the former First Minister and cabinet colleagues made more than 40,000 trips in official government cars during the four years of the last Labour-led administration. According to the figures, disclosed the FOI Scotland Act, chauffeur-driven cars were used by 27 MSPs appointed Ministers or Deputy Ministers by Jack McConnell. The detailed two-page list reveals 40,344 journeys were taken in official cars from the Government Car Service between May 2003 and April 2007 - an average of 27 trips a day. The first vehicle was sometimes followed by a second "for the transportation of official documents".</p>	29.07.07	The Sunday Express	Scottish Executive	Scottish Parliament
<p>Cash, computers and kettle gone in great Holyrood pilfering spree</p> <p>Holyrood is full of petty pilferers. Dozens of items have been stolen from Executive buildings over the last two years. Items taken include cash, computers, laptops and a hi-tech Blackberry e-mail device. And some of the more unusual items removed by thieves included a kettle, an unofficial file and even the bolts from a bike pedal. Details released under the FOI Scotland Act showed that there had been 44 thefts over the two-year period, with 33 of these occurring in 2005-06 and 11 in 2006-07. During 2005-06 there were eight incidents of cash being stolen, three wallets were taken and there was one case each of a credit card and a cheque going missing. On one occasion a PC and screen were taken and, on another, a PC base unit was taken. In addition four laptop computers, three projectors, two mobile phones and one Blackberry device were stolen from Executive buildings. There were three cases where clothing was taken and a mountain bike was also stolen. There were fewer thefts in 2006-07, with two cases where cash was stolen and one wallet taken.</p>	09.08.07	The Daily Express	Scottish Executive	Scottish Parliament

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>The death of 'Buster' Crabb</p> <p>The headless body of Commander Lionel "Buster" Crabb was washed up on the Sussex shore 14 months after he carried out a covert surveillance operation to examine the sonar equipment fitted to the Soviet cruiser Sverdlov and other warships when they visited Portsmouth in 1956. After Crabb's mysterious disappearance, officials at the Ministry of Defence found themselves having to deflect some rather persistent and searching questioning about what the naval diver had been doing so close to the ships that had brought the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev on an official visit to Britain. The Government was worried that if it became known that he was spying on the warships, a diplomatic incident could have been triggered. A secret document prepared at the time and released under the FOI Act, set out exactly how government spokesmen and their press officers should deal with the media. They were instructed to say that Crabb, a war hero and holder of the George Medal, had been killed while working on an experimental mine in Stokes Bay, a few miles away from Portsmouth Harbour. The top-secret briefing paper says that if asked the question: "Can HM Government give categorical assurances that these trials were not in any way connected with the Russian ships?" They should reply: "Yes, sir" or "The Admiralty instructions to Commander Crabb contained nothing connected to the Russian ships." But the advice then suggests: "If the spokesman can get away with it, [they should say]: 'I am not prepared to enter any detail as to the trials in which he was engaged.'"</p>	09.11.07	The Independent	The National Archives	Security
<p>First prosecution for flouting smoking ban</p> <p>One of Glasgow's top Chinese restaurant was the first venue in Scotland fined for flouting the smoking ban according to information released under the FOI (Scotland) Act. The Peking Inn on Hope Street was hit with a fixed penalty within a day of the ban coming into force.</p>	01.06.06	Glasgow Evening Times	Glasgow City Council	Smoking Ban
<p>Bid to retain social workers</p> <p>195 staff are employed by Gloucestershire County Council as social workers. There are also 372 employees in posts such as team managers, deputy team managers, senior practitioners, social workers, adoption and fostering officers and care managers. All these post holders carried out roles that include social work. There were 12 vacancies for social workers in children and family services. Also revealed were details of new retention measure being introduced to help fill the vacancies. The information was released under the FOI Act.</p>	04.01.06	Gloucester Citizen	Gloucestershire County Council	Social Services
<p>Child care figures</p> <p>Almost one in three children living in the Scarborough area have a poor quality of life according to figures released under the FOI Act. 11,000 out of the 33,997 children living in Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale are vulnerable due to problems including unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill-health and family breakdown. North Yorkshire County Council has also revealed more than 1,000 children are likely to be referred to social services at some point during their childhood.</p>	02.06.06	Scarborough Evening News	North Yorkshire County Council	Social Services

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Injuries in council care An average of 40 injuries are reported in each council-run residential care home in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire each year according to figures released under the FOI Act. Residents and workers have suffered from a catalogue of injuries including cuts, burns, sprains, and bruises, and even electric shocks and human bite marks.	17.09.06	Stoke Sentinel	Local authorities	Social Services
SCRA must prioritise cases Margaret Cox, head of the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, has written to chief police officers warning them of the "critical" need to make fewer referrals following the Scottish Executive's rejection of a bid for increased funding. The letter has been released under the FOI (Scotland) Act. Children's reporters decide whether children should go before a children's panel following referrals on care and protection grounds or because of offending behaviour. In 2005-06, they dealt with 54,000 individuals, up from 50,529 in 2004-05, a 10% rise from the previous year.	23.09.06	Glasgow Herald	Scottish Executive	Social Services
Sheltered housing complexes closed on the basis of wrong figures Councillors who decided to close two sheltered housing complexes were not given the full story about residents' feelings. Derby City Council decided in November to shut Rodney House and Sancroft Court, claiming the cost of modernising the 1960's buildings was too great. Councillors were told 77% of Sancroft residents and 69% of those at Rodney supported the closure plans when consulted by Derby Homes, which manages the buildings. But copies of the actual questionnaires released under the FOI Act show that the simple question - do you support the closure of the home? - was not directly put to residents. The questionnaires showed that only 46.7% of people in Sancroft Court and 35.7% of those in Rodney House clearly supported the proposals.	05.01.07	Derby Evening Telegraph	Derby Council	Social Services
Thousands of our elderly are living in filthy care homes Thousands of elderly people are living in filthy care homes exposed to the risk of infections and malnutrition. Inspectors found one in three homes provides barely 'adequate' living conditions, and rated hundreds as 'poor'. It means many residents are at risk from untrained staff and low standards of cleanliness. In addition, some are not being helped to eat or are given unappetising food, while others struggle to get their medication or see doctors when ill. The catalogue of failings is exposed after the Liberal Democrats used the FOI Act to obtain details of inspections in England. The information was collected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, which monitors care homes, but has not been released ahead of a new rating scheme to be introduced next year. The homes are divided into four categories: poor, adequate, good and excellent. In total, 732 were rated poor, and 3,086 were adequate. More than 400,000 of those aged 65 and above live in care homes.	08.05.07	The Daily Mail	The Commission for Social Care Inspection	Social Services

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Services that help keep our kids safe</p> <p>Figures released by Swansea Council under the FOI Act show the high workload the authority's social services department is dealing with on a daily basis. A spokesman for the council said: "During the financial year 2005/06, Swansea social services children's services received nearly 2,600 referrals. This amounts to around 50 referrals a week or 10 every working day. We are unable to determine accurately how many referrals that came into children's services related to allegations of abuse. This is because people make referrals to social services' children services for help, advice or support as well as for abuse or protection issues.</p>	18.06.07	South Wales Evening Post	Swansea Council	Social Services
<p>Babies taken from their parents</p> <p>Around 30 babies each year are taken away from their parents before they even reach the age of one. In the past four years, the courts have granted care orders for 119 babies across Norfolk, more than for any other age group. The most common reason for children to be taken from their parents is because of abuse or neglect. Other cases include where parents have drug or alcohol addictions or where they are too unwell to look after a child. The figures, released under the FOI Act, come against a backdrop of controversial decisions by the family courts and Norfolk Social Services over the care of children.</p>	29.06.07	Norwich Evening News	Norfolk Courts	Social Services
<p>Three children taken into care for obesity</p> <p>At least three children have been taken into care this year because of fears about their obesity.</p> <p>Their local councils removed them from their family homes because they believed that allowing the children to become dangerously overweight amounted to neglect. In July Cumbria County Council said it had taken an eight-year-old girl into care because her obesity was causing a range of health problems. Information obtained under the FOI Act shows that Lincolnshire County Council and Tower Hamlets Council in East London had also taken children into care because of their obesity before July.</p>	09.09.07	The News of the World	Local authorities	Social Services
<p>Pool closures in capital make it tougher for swimmers to win in 2012</p> <p>A lack of publicly funded swimming facilities in London could threaten the emergence of medal-winning contenders at the Olympics. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that there are only 107 public swimming pools in the capital - one for every 69,000 residents. And the shortage is expected to worsen over the next decade, when the population will increase faster than new pools are built despite London hosting the 2012 Olympics.</p>	04.01.06	The Evening Standard	London Borough Councils	Sport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>How Thatcher tried to stop Olympic hero Coe from winning gold in Moscow</p> <p>Sebastian Coe and his family came under concerted pressure from Margaret Thatcher's government to support her boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, according to newly released documents seen by the Guardian. Lord Coe and Lord Moynihan, former members of Conservative governments and now the two most powerful men in British Olympic sport, defied Mrs Thatcher's campaign to stop British athletes competing in the Moscow games as a protest against what she called the "brutal" Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In January 1980, the US president, Jimmy Carter, proposed that the Moscow games should be moved, postponed or cancelled. The International Olympic Committee rejected this call, but the US tried to recruit other countries to join a boycott of the games. Amid mounting political controversy, 81 countries took part, while 62 stayed away. In what was seen as retaliation, the Soviet Union boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. The documents, released under the FOI Act, show how Douglas Hurd, then a junior Foreign Office minister and now Lord Hurd, held a secret meeting with Coe's father and manager, Peter, to urge his son to join the boycott. Mr Hurd's note of the meeting in April 1980 records that Coe senior spoke with "some bitterness . . . he was naturally concerned about the degree of sacrifice which we are asking of athletes like his son . . . Mr Coe said that he hoped that when it was all over the government would make an effort to repair the damage to sport in this country". Mr Hurd replied that "sport had itself lost support in parliament by the British Olympic Association's decision to go to Moscow . . . It was certainly in everyone's interest that fences should be mended when this affair was all over". He lamented: "I do not think that I had any success in altering his views . . ."</p>	24.02.06	The Guardian	The Foreign Office	Sport
<p>Groundshare plans revealed</p> <p>Documents released under the FOI Act have revealed the details of the proposed sports facilities that could have been constructed had Notts County and Nottingham Forest agreed to ground-share in 1990. The initial plans were for a 60,000 capacity all-seater stadium, which would have been the biggest in the country bar Old Trafford and Wembley. A 15,000-capacity covered arena would also have been built next door for concerts and a home for the Nottingham Panthers. The £184m scheme included a sports village and many other facilities.</p>	15.07.06	Nottingham Evening Post	Nottingham City Council	Sport
<p>Backlash against "anyone but England" comment</p> <p>The extent and bitterness of the backlash against Jack McConnell from English voters following his comments about not supporting England during the 2006 World Cup has been revealed in documents released under the FOI (Scotland) Act. Letters to McConnell's office revealed some people cancelled holidays to Scotland in protest, saying they wouldn't spend money where they felt unwelcome. One letter said: "My family, friends and I have spent many happy holidays in Scotland, but no more. I will never again set foot in your country." Another said: "This year we have decided as English visitors we would spend our hard-earned money in a country that welcomes English visitors."</p>	17.09.06	Scotland on Sunday	Scottish Executive	Sport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Nine sports centres are closed down in two years London has lost nine swimming pools or other sports facilities since it was chosen to host the 2012 Olympic Games. The number of publicly-funded venues in the capital has declined from 152 to 143 over the past two years, according to information gathered by the London Assembly Green party. The facilities provided by London's 33 boroughs include 112 swimming pools and 31 other sports venues, according to answers supplied under the FOI Act. New facilities include the Willesden sports centre in Brent, which has a swimming pool and running track and was opened by Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell in 2006, and the London Fields lido in Hackney. But boroughs such as Bromley, Ealing and Harrow admitted having two fewer facilities compared with 2005. There have also been losses in Barking and Dagenham, Croydon, Hounslow, Islington, Lewisham and Westminster. Southwark was the only other borough to open a new facility.</p>	18.07.07	The Evening Standard	London Borough Councils	Sport
<p>Council manager 'ordered us to fiddle' An internal audit report on a housing scam at Doncaster Council has revealed that officers were instructed to "fiddle" the books to mask the authority's real performance on filling empty properties. A senior housing manager, who has not been named, told staff to backdate the commencement of numerous tenancies to the previous financial year to create a more favourable impression following a poor Audit Commission inspection report. In the report, released following a request under the FOI Act, housing officers are quoted as saying they knew what they were being told to do was illegal but felt powerless because if the manager "tells us to jump we ask how high". Last night, it emerged that the manager, who ran council housing for an area which covered the town centre, Balby, Edlington and Southern Parks wards, was able to leave the council with a redundancy payment and without going through a disciplinary procedure. Earlier this month, the Audit Commission revealed that the scam had resulted in the authority receiving housing benefit it was not entitled to but the council insists the manager's actions were primarily aimed at fixing performance figures rather than increasing income.</p>	11.02.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Doncaster Council	Standards in Public Life
<p>Minister told: return EU cash or resign Scotland's minister responsible for relations with the European Union is facing calls to resign amid claims that he has breached Holyrood rules by accepting a £70,000 grant from Brussels for his own private business. George Lyon, the deputy finance minister, was given the subsidy, as part of the common agricultural policy (CAP), to support his farm on the Isle of Bute. The payment of £69,119.74 - part of the CAP single farm payment scheme was revealed in documents released by the Scottish executive under the FOI Scotland Act. Recipients were advised how much they would receive last June and payments were sent out in December. Lyon was appointed a minister on June 27.</p>	12.02.06	The Sunday Times	Scottish Executive	Standards in Public Life

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Mayor's designs on fashionable living Details of a former Morley South councillor's high living were revealed by an FOI Act request. The information was released by local government watchdog, the Standards Board for England, which last month strongly criticised Mr North for inappropriate and unreasonable spending during his year as lord mayor. The Standards Board has now revealed that he spent more than £2,000 on "excessively high value" luxury goods.	01.03.06	Yorkshire Post	The Standards Board For England	Standards in Public Life
Jowell 'misled' officials over Mills Iran link Tessa Jowell has been accused of misleading the most senior official in her department over her husband's Iranian business dealings. The culture secretary told Dame Sue Street, her permanent secretary, in February 2005 that her husband David Mills had resigned his position as managing director of a firm that was attempting to sell £ 115m worth of British Aerospace jets to Iran. She was attempting to draw a line under a growing controversy after it emerged that her husband had lobbied a fellow minister over the deal. The record of the disclosure that Jowell made to Street states: "Secretary of state's spouse: resignation from his position as managing director of BDIC (UK) (the firm behind the aircraft deal) with effect from the end of this month." Street "noted" the disclosure but did not consult the prime minister. However, there is no record of Jowell telling the permanent secretary that her husband was the legal owner of BDIC (UK). Documents filed at Companies House earlier this year and released under the FOI Act show that at the end of 2005 the firm's only shareholder was Mayfair Corporate Services, a company wholly owned by Mills.	12.03.06	The Sunday Times	Companies House	Standards in Public Life
The Commissioner and Lord Levy Metropolitan Police chief Sir Ian Blair met Labour's millionaire fundraiser Lord Levy at his private members' club in London's Pall Mall and put the £140 dinner bill on his police expense account. Sir Ian, with his own wife Felicity, invited Lord Levy and his wife Gilda to the meal when London was at the height of the terror alert last year. The dinner came in between the July 7 attacks and the failed July 21 bombings when Sir Ian claimed to be engaging in a 'relentless' pursuit of those behind the atrocities. The disclosure, under the FOI Act, raises fresh questions about the independence of Scotland Yard's investigation into the Labour Party's alleged sale of honours.	18.06.06	The Mail on Sunday	Scotland Yard	Standards in Public Life
Donor's 'dirty secret' A millionaire businessman who secretly loaned £1m to Labour was chosen to head a flagship Government project. Rod Aldridge, boss of technology firm Capita, was recommended by one of his own companies, which had won the recruitment contract. Official documents released under the FOI act show civil servants regarded the process as a 'dirty secret'.	04.11.06	The Daily Mail	Cabinet Office	Standards in Public Life

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

36 suspected breaches dealt with by Standards Board The Standards Board for England has dealt with 36 suspected breaches of the Code of Conduct by Ashfield district councillors in the last two years, according to figures released under the FOI Act. Of the 36 suspected breaches of the Code of Conduct by 12 councillors, 16 led to further investigation. And of those 16 cases, six are still ongoing, five did not reveal a breach, three needed no further action and two were investigated locally.	05.01.07	Ashfield Today	The Standards Board for England	Standards in Public Life
Demand for Auditor General to investigate sale to McConnell's millionaire relative First Minister Jack McConnell is facing fresh controversy over the sale of NHS property at a knock-down price to his millionaire brother-in-law. The Inland Revenue has raised serious questions about the deal. After finding evidence of what appeared to be inappropriate payments of public money to Robert McLuckie's company, one official sent an urgent email to NHS chiefs, warning the deal could be in breach of the strict conditions of sale. But the extraordinary transaction was pushed through only six months later at the behest of a senior Labour Party official. Documents released under the FOI Scotland Act also turned the spotlight on Health Minister Andy Kerr, who now faces claims he misled parliament over the affair.	04.03.07	The Mail on Sunday	HM Treasury	Standards in Public Life
Saudi firm gifts Rolexes to UU chiefs The University of Ulster's £170,000-a-year boss is among a group of senior employees who received luxury watches from a top Saudi company. It has also been revealed that UU staff have accepted a total of nine Rolex watches from the Middle Eastern business empire since 2005. The watches were personally kept in each case. The University's top official, Vice Chancellor Professor Richard Barnett, received his Rolex from Saudi Arabia's SAAD Trading and Construction Company in March. The UU has defended acceptance of the gifts on the grounds that refusal may have caused offence. It also emphasised the multi-million pound benefits to the Northern Ireland economy from its educational partnership with the SAAD group. This involves the provision of undergraduate nursing education for a Saudi college run by the company. Details of gifts received by senior UU staff were released under the FOI Act.	16.05.07	Belfast Telegraph	University of Ulster	Standards in Public Life
Councillors paid for outside work Five senior Plymouth city councillors have earned £20,000 between them by acting as troubleshooters at other local authorities. Details released under the FOI Act revealed that current deputy leader Ted Fry and transport supremo Kevin Wiggins, from the Tories, and Labour's deposed leader and deputy Tudor Evans and Chris Pattison, plus Nicky Wildy, have been involved in the national peer accreditation scheme, during the past four years. Each of the five has been paid £300 a day for their involvement in a project, which allows councillors to earn from public funds while spending time away from their council work. The council, which has defended its involvement in the scheme by saying it helps local authorities to improve their performance, would not reveal how many days each member worked under the project, but the combined total was 67 days - which means they earned £20,100 between them.	30.05.07	Plymouth Evening Herald	Plymouth Council	Standards in Public Life

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Taxpayers funding MSPs' 'family policy' Almost a quarter of MSPs have put members of their immediate family on the public payroll as office staff or researchers. Wives, husbands, children and in-laws feature among staff employed by MSPs from all parties, earning tens of thousands of pounds each year through Holyrood's expenses system. The practice, which is not against parliamentary rules, means that proposals to increase the level of office expenses given to MSPs would lead to more public money being paid to politicians' families. New documents released by the parliament under the FOI Scotland Act show 35 MSPs have hired family members since 2003. Of these, 18 are doing so at present, half of them nationalists.	23.09.07	The Sunday Times	Scottish Executive	Standards in Public Life
Councillor's £1,300 phone bill Kirklees Labour group leader Councillor Mehboob Khan is the subject of two separate inquiries into allegations he ran up a £1,300 personal phone bill at taxpayers' expense. Information released under the FOI Act has revealed a number of calls were made on August 27 and 28, 2006, a Sunday and a bank holiday. On August 27, four calls were made, the first at 5.07pm, the last at 7.10pm. On August 28, five calls were made, the first at 12.16pm, the last at 1.23pm. One call made on August 31, was made at 10.37pm. The calls made included a number to Russia. Others included one lasting 1hr 20mins on August 30, at 6.30pm, costing £29.79; one on September 3, at 6.53pm, (1hr 18mins, £26.40); and one on September 9, at 6.47pm (1hr 25mins, £28.72). Numerous other calls were made to a mobile number.	27.09.07	Yorkshire Evening Post	Kirklees Council	Standards in Public Life
First Minister's angry letter The Rev. Ian Paisley supported a controversial visitor centre at the Giant's Causeway, proposed by a fellow-DUP party member. A letter written by the First Minister on headed Commons paper denounced the grounds for turning down the grant bid as "absolute rubbish". It also claimed, more than once, that Mr Sweeney's visitor centre plans had the support of UNESCO, the UN body that oversees world heritage sites like the Causeway. UNESCO has denied adopting such a stance. It actually issued its own mission team report on the visitor centre issue later in 2003, with recommendations that would rule out the proposed development. The letter has been released under the FOI Act.	04.10.07	Belfast Telegraph	Heritage Lottery Fund	Standards in Public Life
Super rich paying no income tax Only a fraction of Britain's super-rich are paying income tax. At least 400 UK-based individuals earn, or are capable of making, £10m a year. But only 65 paid income tax, according to the latest returns obtained under the FOI Act. The rest use a battery of sophisticated but legal techniques to avoid paying.	21.06.07	The Evening Standard	HM Customs & Excise	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Welcome to London, the onshore tax haven</p> <p>London, the great global financial centre, has another claim to fame: it has become the fastest growing destination for international tax avoiders. The world's super-rich and an elite cadre of financiers working in the Square Mile are increasingly using non-domicile tax status to sidestep paying tax on their fortunes. Thanks to 208-year-old laws designed to ensure British colonialists kept their overseas income intact, billionaires are now flocking to London in rapidly increasing numbers. Those benefiting from non-dom status have increased over the last five years. Information released by the Treasury under the FOI Act confirmed that 112,000 individuals indicated non-dom status in their self-assessment returns in the tax year to April 2005. This is a 74% increase over 2002's figures.</p>	08.07.07	The Observer	HM Treasury	Taxation
<p>The 'paparazzi' home snoopers</p> <p>Council tax inspectors are building up a giant database of photographs of millions of homes which could pave the way for more hikes in bills. The number of images of properties stored by valuation officers has soared from just half a million last year to 2.2 million today, official figures reveal. Millions more photos are expected to be taken when a revaluation of homes in England moves ahead. A manual for the photo database, released under The FOI Act, suggests inspectors are being armed with telescopic lenses and cameras, clipboards, laser measuring devices and plans of every home.</p>	29.01.07	The Daily Mail	English Councils	Taxation
<p>Guide will help snoopers raise your council tax</p> <p>Inspectors will use an illustrated guide to houses to help assess every home in England as part of the Government's campaign to increase council tax.</p> <p>The snoopers will be issued with a booklet featuring 168 pictures of different types of properties to divide homes into 99 different grades. Householders could then be forced to pay higher bills according to the quality of their home - with factors such as age, number of bedrooms and extras like conservatories, swimming pools and balconies adding to the cost. Granny flats and parking spaces are also set to help push up the tax rating - as will the affluence of the neighbour-hood and even the view from the property.</p> <p>A home judged to be a "quality dwelling" will be marked up regardless of its state of repair and location, according to the guide. For example, a pre-1919 villa or small Georgian house is judged "a quality dwelling and in this respect no regard should be had to its present condition or location when allocating the group". The guide for council tax inspectors has been made public under the FOI Act.</p>	09.03.07	The Daily Express	Valuation office Agency	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Tax on your garden</p> <p>Homeowners already facing higher council tax bills for carrying out house improvements or living in a desirable neighbourhood will now also be stung because of the size of their garden. Ministers have confirmed that the Valuation Office Agency has signed a legal agreement with the Land Registry, which will give it access to Britain's biggest land database. From October 2007, the size of every garden, patio and outbuilding will be electronically submitted to the agency every time a house is sold.</p> <p>And proposals are also being drawn up to make land registration compulsory, even if a property is not sold.</p> <p>Documents released under the FOI Act reveal the agency's plans to detail any "value significant" garden features. These include larger than average gardens, patios, leisure facilities, outbuildings, greenhouses and potting sheds.</p>	29.04.07	The Sunday Express	Valuation Office Agency	Taxation
<p>Whitehall guide to fobbing off angry council tax payers</p> <p>Set responses to tackle angry homeowners who are upset that their council tax bills are about to soar have been issued to officials by the Government. They have been advised to beware of being swayed by emotional blackmail when confronted by householders who have had their properties revalued. The advice is contained in a "workbook on resolving appeals", which was prepared in June by the Valuation Office Agency - the Government organisation which has to provide councils with accurate bandings for houses. The document, which was obtained by the Conservatives under the FOI Act, details how listing officers should cope with taxpayers who want to appeal against a banding to their local valuation tribunal. In one instance, homeowners might pursue what the document describes as a "poor me" approach, which is "a plea for special sympathy" in the hope that the inspector will "give more because you feel sorry for them". The document urges officials not to be swayed. "Don't be put off or be overly sympathetic; your duty is to be fair to all." Instead: "Acknowledge the problem. Restate your position and take the conversation back on track."</p>	21.08.07	The Daily Telegraph	The Valuation Office Agency	Taxation
<p>Companies House admits losing 10 accounts a month</p> <p>Companies House has admitted that it has been losing companies' reports and accounts at a rate of nearly 10 a month. Responding to an FOI Act request, the official registry of UK companies admitted that it lost 190 accounts between March 2004 and October 2005. The figure applied to cases identified through the "late filing penalty regime" - meaning companies were mistakenly pursued for not having filed their accounts within the correct time frame. There were 5,514 cases logged for the four and a half years between June 2001 and January 2006, including the 190 cases identified through late filing penalties. Every year Companies House receives 1.43m registered accounts. Trading British companies must lodge their annual accounts with the agency within either seven or 10 months of the end of their financial reporting year.</p>	24.04.06	The Daily Telegraph	Companies House	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

City fails to collect £83m tax <p>£83m of Edinburgh council tax is still outstanding, some of it dating back to 1996 according to figures released under the FOI (Scotland) Act. And £15.7m is still outstanding in unpaid council tax from the 2004/05 financial year.</p>	18.05.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Edinburgh City Council	Taxation
NHS trusts owe £280m in unpaid income tax <p>NHS trusts have been striking illegal deals with the authorities to delay paying an estimated £280m in income tax. Many withheld payments for January, February and March to flatter their financial position before the end of the NHS year. A fifth of hospital trusts responding to requests under the FOI Act admitted they had failed to pay income tax due on staff wages on time in the past 12 months. Several stated they delayed payments with the "prior agreement" of Revenue and Customs. The NHS deficit this March was £512m, double the 2005 figure. But the amount would have been much higher if trusts had not been allowed by the tax authorities to write IOUs to government for such staggering sums.</p>	13.08.06	The Sunday Express	NHS trusts	Taxation
Council tax mistakes costs £6,500 <p>Due to computer problems, Aberdeenshire Council processed direct debit council tax payments from 10,470 residents four days early according to information released under the FOI (Scotland) Act. The mistake saw the local authority take in more than £1.4m and caught out council taxpayers many of whom did not have funds to meet the unexpectedly early payment. Reimbursing those who suffered financially as a result of the error has so far cost the local authority £6,512.</p>	30.09.06	Aberdeen Evening Express	Aberdeenshire Council	Taxation
Taxman sends more bankrupt <p>The number of people driven to bankruptcy by the taxman has increased by nearly a third over the past year. The disclosure, published in response to an FOI Act request, is further evidence of the greater aggression being shown by HM Revenue and Customs. HMRC has also revealed that around 10% of the people who go bankrupt in Britain each year do so as a result of petitions lodged by the department. In all, 3,972 people were petitioned by HMRC in 2005-06, compared with 3,052 the year before. This is an increase of more than 30%. However, the figures do not include many thousands of individuals who choose to bankrupt themselves while being pursued by HMRC for unpaid tax. In 2002 HMRC lost its preferential status as a creditor, a possible factor contributing to a more aggressive approach when pursuing debts.</p>	29.10.06	The Sunday Telegraph	HM Revenue and Customs	Taxation
Cos I'm the taxman... <p>The Bank of England investigated John Lennon and George Harrison after they left the Beatles according to correspondence released under the FOI Act. The bank was intrigued by how they were shifting large sums of cash in and out of the UK and concluded they had committed technical offences. But officials decided not to prosecute. The correspondence about the financial activities of the two Beatles brightened up the life of one mandarin. He scrawled on a letter: "This is fascinating stuff - we clearly see some most famous names at one time or another."</p>	09.11.06	The Guardian	Bank of England	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Tories accuse Treasury in row over tax cut proposals</p> <p>A treasury analysis shows that a Conservative policy group's proposals for tax cuts would benefit the wealthy most and slash revenues by £29bn a year - far more than the Tories had projected. The Treasury report was released in response to an FOI Act request from Conservative researchers. It was based on a report from the Conservative tax reform commission in October that proposed a series of business and personal tax cuts which it said would cost £21bn. The official costing of the measures concluded that they would constitute a much bigger drain on the public finances. It also said that proposals to abolish the starting 10p rate of income tax and cut the basic rate to 20p would benefit those on higher incomes the most. Married couples would be the biggest winners, with one-parent families and pensioners benefiting less.</p>	22.12.06	The Financial Times	Treasury	Taxation
<p>Decline in council tax write-offs</p> <p>The amount of council tax written off by Ashfield District Council as unrecoverable has sharply declined over the last five financial years, according to new figures released under the FOI Act. The figures reveal a continual year-on-year decline in the amount of unrecoverable council tax, which has fallen from £88,452 in 2001/02 to £74,067 in 2002/03, £54,766 in 2003/04, £46,248 in 2004/05 and £25,558 in the last financial year.</p>	11.01.07	Ashfield Today	Ashfield District Council	Taxation
<p>Half of research tax credits 'are wasted'</p> <p>Half of the £580m cost of Gordon Brown's research and development (R&D) tax credit is wasted because firms are claiming the cash for research they were already planning to carry out, the Treasury has admitted to Shadow Chancellor George Osborne. The R&D tax credit is one of the Treasury's key policies for promoting innovation and raising the productivity of the UK economy. But survey results revealed to Osborne under the FOI Act show, in the Treasury's words, that only 'half of respondents whose company had made a successful claim for the R&D tax credits said that it had had some impact on either their R&D spend or R&D projects.'</p>	14.01.07	The Observer	HM Treasury	Taxation
<p>McConnell 'cost firms £1bn in tax'</p> <p>Jack McConnell has cost Scottish firms almost £1billion through his decision to increase their taxes, it was revealed yesterday. The First Minister scrapped a system which kept Scottish business rates pegged to those in the rest of the UK when he was finance minister in 1999. After worried business chiefs mounted a campaign to have the move reversed, the Scottish Executive last year agreed to restore the link with English business rates from this April. But the SNP, using the FOI Scotland Act, found that businesses suffered a £900m hit since 2000.</p>	20.01.07	The Daily Mail	Scottish Executive	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>£224m write-off</p> <p>The biggest councils in England "threw away" £224m during 2006 in debts that they gave up chasing - and passed the bill to taxpayers. Millions of pounds in unpaid council tax has been wiped from the ledgers, along with council rent and business rates arrears. Thousands of housing benefits cheats also had their debts cleared because councils considered it uneconomic to keep chasing them. But the debt is not only that of residents unwilling to pay service bills. Some of the debts included overpaid salaries to council employees, other workers reneging on council car loans and students who disappeared after being provided study grants. Unpaid parking fines also accounted for a large proportion of the waived debts, along with failed businesses that went into liquidation owing councils thousands in unpaid rents and rates.</p> <p>There were also cases of councils taking up to four years to prepare an invoice, by which time the debt was classified as being too late to pursue. Hundreds of thousands of pounds were also "lost" in costs for social care where patients died without an estate from which the debt could be reclaimed. A survey of the 150 biggest councils in England, using the FOI Act, showed the average authority wrote off £1.5m in debts last year. The London borough of Lambeth declared a write-off total of almost £19.5m, the biggest amount among the 106 councils that provided an overall figure.</p>	26.03.07	The Daily Express	Local Councils - various	Taxation
<p>Lamont paved way to Browns tax credit cut</p> <p>Norman Lamont was told by senior civil servants in 1993 that he could raise £1bn a year if he reduced the tax credit on dividends to 20%. Similar advice was given to Gordon Brown when he abolished the credit four years later. Documents released by the Treasury yesterday under the FOI Act showed mandarins told the then chancellor Mr - now Lord - Lamont that reducing the tax credit from 25% to 20% would be a relatively painless way to raise about £1bn a year.</p> <p>The documents showed that, like Mr Brown, Mr Lamont was concerned at the fact British companies were paying out too much in dividends rather than spending it on investment. But the documents also reveal Mr Lamont had no intention to use the revenue raised to cut corporation or capital gains tax, as Mr Brown did. At the time, the Conservative government was reeling from the humiliation of Black Wednesday the previous October and was desperate to rein in the biggest budget deficit the country had suffered. The documents showed civil servants, whose names have been blanked out by the Treasury, said Mr Lamont's proposal to reduce the credit and change the advanced corporation tax (ACT) system was "extraordinarily well adapted to our current need".</p>	05.07.07	The Guardian	HM Treasury	Taxation

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>200,000 'friends' inform on tax cheats Nearly 200,000 people have informed on friends, colleagues and family to the taxman in the year since a confidential hotline was set up. In just over a year, Revenue & Customs has received more than 155,000 telephone calls to its tax evasion hotline, 12,083 items of post (including faxes) and 17,952 e-mails. In addition, 3,819 referrals came from the Customs confidential hotline, set up in October 2005. The scale of the response emerged in documents released under the FOI Act.</p>	07.07.07	The Times	HM Revenue & Customs	Taxation
<p>Top footballers play non-dom tax game Irish footballers playing in Britain are claiming "non-domiciled" status to avoid paying millions of pounds in tax. More than 300 top-flight footballers, including a number of Irish internationals, are availing themselves of loop-holes that British prime minister Gordon Brown pledged to close more than a decade ago. The players and dozens of managers are declaring themselves non-domiciled or claiming non-resident status by commuting in and out of Britain for matches and training sessions. The tax breaks have helped to attract some of the world's best footballers to the Premiership, but also means that, despite their multi-million-pound earnings, many of them are paying lower rates of tax than their supporters. Irish players represent one of the largest groups of overseas players in the English league. In total, 302 footballers or managers have "non-domiciled" status in Britain and a further 67 claim they are "not resident" for tax purposes, according to Treasury documents released under the FOI Act. Among those who qualify for non-domiciled status are Sunderland manager Roy Keane and Irish internationals Robbie Keane, of Tottenham Hotspur, and Damien Duff and Shay Given, of Newcastle United. The Manchester United stars Cristiano Ronaldo, who is Portuguese, and Owen Hargreaves, who was born in Canada but plays for England, also qualify.</p>	22.07.07	The Sunday Times	HM Revenue & Customs	Taxation
<p>How suicide bomber used to work for the Government Mohammad Sidique Khan's extraordinary and rapid transition from law-abiding citizen to terrorist is revealed in documents showing he used to work for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), helping promote British firms overseas. He also helped Leeds police deal with confrontations between rival gangs of youths. Leeds education authority's personnel file on Khan, obtained under the FOI Act, shows details of his work for the DTI's export arm in Yorkshire in the mid-1990s, when Britain was seeking more trade links with Asia. But the investigations reveal that Khan lied on his CV about the seniority of his role at the DTI, which escaped the Leeds primary school that hired him on the basis of it. But he did help in the government led drive to get more trade missions off the ground between 1995 and 1996. Khan prospered as a primary school learning mentor, and his file provides the first real sense of the charisma and empathy with young people which enabled him ultimately to recruit fellow suicide bombers Shahzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain. But it also charts his sharp decline from 2003. Prolonged absences from school - when it is now known he was visiting Pakistan - were followed by an unexpected failure to return from extended sick leave in 2004.</p>	11.03.06	The Independent	Leeds Education Authority	Terrorism

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Tanweer was a 'modest and unassuming' pupil</p> <p>Shahzad Tanweer, who killed eight people at Aldgate Tube station on 7 July last year, was a model pupil and showed no sign that he might be radicalised into one of Britain's first home-grown bombers, his school record shows. The record, obtained under the FOI Act, reveals that English was one of Tanweer's strongest subjects, providing him with the chance to articulate his views, which he evidently relished. He enjoyed studying Romeo and Juliet, contributed well to a "TV debate" on crime and excelled at an assignment examining a newspaper report on violent crime. Tanweer's report demonstrates that he lacked self-confidence at times. "I would like to see Shahzad have more confidence in himself and his ideas," one teacher observed in a report from his penultimate year. His form tutor added the following year: "He may find a more assertive attitude will help him make stronger contributions in class discussions, although no one who knows him would like to see Shazad lose his calm and friendly personality." His maturity was one of the attributes which impressed his teachers most, according to his reports which, apart from his struggles with French and lack of interest in musical theory, contain barely a single negative comment. "He is living proof that hard work at school need not entail giving up everything you enjoy," his Year 9 form tutor observed. "Despite his achievement he is modest and unassuming." Awarding him an A in his GCSE year, Tanweer's religious studies teacher remarks on his "growing maturity".</p>	11.03.06	The Independent	Wortley High School	Terrorism
<p>100 landings on Scots soil by US jets with torture links</p> <p>After an FOI Act request from the Liberal Democrats, DfT released air traffic control records of flights made by 20 US-registered aircraft operated by CIA front companies and hire firms known to rent planes to the agency. These aircraft have landed at Scottish airports more than 100 times in recent years. Private jets used by CIA front companies and contractors have routinely used runways at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Prestwick, Aberdeen, Inverness, Wick and the RAF base at Leuchars in Fife.</p>	08.04.06	The Scotsman	Department for Transport	Terrorism
<p>Government ran exercises for 'unthinkable' threat</p> <p>Despite claiming that nuclear terrorism was "unthinkable", between the 1970s and 1990's a confidential programme known as the Criminal Improvised Nuclear Device Emergency Response (Cinder) existed. It involved the Ministry of Defence, the police and scientists from the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston in Berkshire. Cinder's existence has been revealed in documents released under the FOI Act</p>	14.05.06	Scotland on Sunday	Ministry of Defence	Terrorism
<p>Birmingham city centre evacuation</p> <p>Documents released under the FOI Act reveal what happened on the night of 9 July 2005, when Birmingham City Centre was closed off and evacuated following a credible terrorist threat.</p>	02.07.06	The Sunday Mercury	West Midlands Police	Terrorism

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Ministers had bizarre plan for tourism as Saddam fell Burnt-out tanks and spent shells should become tourist attractions in Iraq, according to extraordinary proposals in a taxpayer-funded report. The Government dossier suggests drumming up foreign visitors by placing battlefield debris at strategic points around the country and transforming northern areas into upmarket ski resorts. The £80,000 report was commissioned in 2004 to examine ways Iraq could be opened up to tourists after the fall of Saddam Hussein. With the monthly death toll topping 3,000 and most Westerners confined to guarded compounds, the ten-page report released under the FOI Act now seems hopelessly optimistic. Among nine sites it lists as potential tourist attractions are the Jewish quarter in Basra now a hotbed of anti-British insurgency. The Shatt Al Arab waterway, identified as the location of the Garden of Eden, is also mentioned.	27.08.06	The Mail on Sunday	Department of International Development	Tourism
Britain's worst telecoms firms Regulator Ofcom has compiled a blacklist highlighting the UK's worst telecoms companies in terms of complaints from their new customers about miss-selling. Information released under the FOI Act shows once company, Hertfordshire based Lo-Rate Telecom, received complaints from more than one in five new customers. The company with the second worst record, Orb Communications in Birmingham, saw complaints from nearly one in ten new signups. Despite promising Ofcom to halt sales, Orb was still quoting call packages prices in May 2006.	07.05.06	The Mail on Sunday	Ofcom	Trading Standards
Foreign speeders in £4m fines let-off Foreign drivers escape paying £4m in traffic camera fines on our roads every year. Authorities routinely abandon cases against international motorists because it is takes too long to track them down. British tourists caught speeding on the Continent are much more likely to have to pay up because EU police prefer on-the-spot fines to automatic cameras. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show that at least 65,000 foreign cars and lorries escaped speeding penalties last year, 180 every day. The true figure could be far higher. In many areas traffic camera images showing foreign number plates are simply thrown in the bin.	14.01.06	The Daily Mail	Police forces	Traffic cameras
Drivers escape speeding fines A computer blunder has allowed 88,253 motorists who broke the speed limit on Tower Bridge to escape fines. Although the 20mph limit was broken almost once every five minutes between April 2004 and April 2005, only 1,440 drivers were prosecuted because the computer system had not been upgraded to issue fixed penalty notices for the bridge, say documents released under the FOI Act.	17.02.06	The Times	Transport for London	Traffic cameras

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Drivers urged to slow down Forty drivers a day are being caught speeding or jumping red lights - proof, say safety campaigners, that Sunderland needs to slow down. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal that 29,812 motorists have been fined for motoring offences on Wearside during the past two years. This means drivers caught by traffic cameras face an estimated fines bill totalling almost £1.5m.	08.03.06	Sunderland Echo	Northumbria Safety Camera Partnership	Traffic cameras
£1m speed trap A temporary traffic camera on the M62 has earned more than £1m in fines in just 18 months. The camera at roadworks at Ferrybridge, near Pontefract, has caught more than 18,000 drivers. It was installed in September 2003 when the speed limit was cut to 50mph for roadworks to build the new intersection with the A1. According to figures obtained under the FOI Act, motorists caught by the machine have been charged £1,088,000 in fines.	18.04.06	Yorkshire Evening Post	Highways Agency	Traffic cameras
Bus lane camera earns £2m Britain's highest-earning bus lane camera was responsible for fines worth nearly £2m last year. Almost 20,000 motorists were caught in Camberwell New Road in the London borough of Lambeth. The second highest-earning camera was at Vine Street, Uxbridge, operated by the London borough of Hillingdon. It captured 17,727 drivers, issuing fines worth around £1.7m. The figures, produced revealed under the FOI Act, show that last year Transport for London, which is responsible for bus lanes on main roads across the capital, sent out a total of 185,347 bus lane penalties worth around £18.5m.	03.05.06	The Daily Mail	Transport for London	Traffic Cameras
Speed and red light monitors make a difference of ... one! Figures released under the FOI Act show how many crashes occurred at traffic camera sites monitoring speed or red light traffic signals in the three years before they were installed up to 2004. At each site in Birmingham before they were fitted there was an average of 4.67 accidents per year. Since their introduction, that figure has fallen to 3.57 accidents a year. This includes everything from minor bumps to fatalities. But while the number of accidents has dropped marginally, money made from speeding tickets has continued to rise.	31.05.06	Coventry Evening Telegraph	West Midlands Casualty Reduction Partnership	Traffic cameras
The foreign drivers who escape fines worth £5m A foreign driver is let off a speeding ticket every six minutes because the authorities can't be bothered to chase them up, figures reveal today. Tens of thousands of foreign drivers dodged nearly £5m in speeding tickets last year. Police and the speed camera authorities are turning a blind eye and 'throwing their tickets in the bin' they admit. The huge influx of workers from the enlarged European Union is adding to the problem. Britain has more than 6,000 speed cameras and drivers paid £114m in fines last year. But the number of scrapped speeding tickets for foreign drivers soared by 25% to almost 80,000 last year representing a potential £4.8m in lost revenue. This is equivalent to a ticket being scrapped every six minutes. The statistics were revealed by 15 of the 38 speed camera safety partnerships across the UK under the FOI Act.	12.02.07	The Daily Mail	Speed Camera Safety Partnerships	Traffic cameras

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

£500k war on gatsos Vigilantes wrecked £500,000 worth of speed cameras in 2006/07. More than four of the hated Gatsos were destroyed a week by angry drivers. Many areas now stock spare lenses for on-the-spot repairs. Borders Police have even considered using CCTV to protect their Gatsos from attack. The figures released under the FOI Act show arson is the most common attack. But on the A57 at Dinting Vale, Derbyshire, one was injected with expanding foam. On the A505 at Baldock, Herts, a large vehicle was used to drag the camera pole out of the ground. And on the A1 in Lincolnshire a disc cutter was used to cause more than £90,000 worth of damage. Next came Essex with 36 attacks and a repair bill of £57,000. In Kent damage increased to £26,000 last year, a rise of £10,000 on the previous year.	24.06.07	The Sunday Star	Speed Camera Safety Partnerships	Traffic Cameras
Foreign planes fly in with hundreds of faults Aircraft safety inspections have uncovered hundreds of dangerous flaws in foreign aircraft flying in and out of Britain. A litany of structural faults, including leaking engines and worn tyres, was disclosed by the Department for Transport in a dossier released under the FOI Act. The DfT has refused to name the offending foreign airlines, arguing that it would impede frank reporting by inspectors and future co-operation. The complaints filed by Civil Aviation Authority inspectors include an aircraft that flew for 38 days without the legally required equipment designed to prevent mid-air collisions. On another aircraft, inspectors registered 75 findings, including a concern that a training captain did not have the bifocal glasses stipulated by his medical certificate. Another inspector noted: "General condition of aircraft was of poor standard. It was difficult to assess the extent of damage." Worn tyres were a common problem found in the inspections, carried out between 2003 and 2005. One aircraft was found to have seven tyres that were worn to the canvas, split or damaged.	30.12.06	The Times	Department for Transport	Transport
Embassies owe £3.6m in unpaid C-charge penalties Foreign embassies have amassed more than £3.6m in unpaid congestion charge fines according to figures released under the FOI Act. Countries including the United States, South Africa and Zimbabwe have run up six-figure debts since the levy was introduced three years ago.	02.05.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
Thousands of cars registered abroad dodge C-charge Owners of thousands of foreign-registered cars are evading the congestion charge each month. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show a sharp rise in the number of drivers with overseas plates who failed to pay the £8 per weekday toll. Numbers increased from an average 4,230 a month in the first half of 2006 to 5,540 a month during the second half, according to data from Transport for London. TfL has been able to identify only about 32% of foreign owners.	13.02.07	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Foreign drivers owe £8m in C-charge fines; Drivers of foreign-registered cars have run up more than £8m in unpaid congestion charge fines. Figures obtained under the FOI Act show more than 97,000 have dodged the £8 toll since the scheme was launched in 2003. Thousands were traced and paid the £100 fine for non-payment. But 49,957, who amassed 81,534 penalties, are still being hunted.</p>	08.10.07	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
<p>Skye Bridge toll protests The Skye Bridge, built to span the 400-metre channel between Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland and Kyleakin on Skye, is almost certainly the most controversial public transport project in Scotland in recent years. Hundreds of islanders were fined and, in one case, jailed, for refusing to pay tolls on the Skye Bridge. Now a leading law officer has revealed that the convictions may have been unsound and there may not have been any legal basis for the toll charge. Documents obtained by the BBC under the FOI Scotland Act show that £33.3m was collected in tolls over the nine years up to the point when the Scottish Executive bought out the concession and ended them.</p>	04.01.06	The Times	Scottish Executive	Transport
<p>Escalator faults cause disruption at nine stations on Underground During at least one month of 2005, 185 of the Tube's 412 escalators had some loss of service - 55 of them for more than 10 hours. London Underground also revealed, in information released under the FOI Act, that five per cent of escalators were out of service at any time in 2005.</p>	25.01.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
<p>Two-thirds of Edinburgh bus services face axe if tram plan gets go-ahead Up to two-thirds of bus services will be axed from key routes through Edinburgh if trams get the go-ahead. A new study into the impact of trams has revealed that at least 31 buses will be taken off the roads every hour in areas such as Leith Walk. The hugely successful airport bus link will also be cut back by 50%. A new body - Transport Edinburgh Limited - made up of Lothian Buses, Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE) and the city council has been set up to oversee the "integration" of trams and buses in the Capital. The company will own both trams and buses, with all profits collected under the one roof so as to avoid competition. A confidential study compiled by Lothian Buses for TIE but has now been released under the FOI Scotland Act.</p>	30.01.06	Edinburgh Evening News	Transport Initiatives Edinburgh	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Private operator hits out over CalMac subsidy cash</p> <p>Ferry operator Caledonian MacBrayne stands accused of using £10.6m of taxpayers' money over the past five years to compete against a private ferry operator. Information released by CalMac under the FOI Scotland Act revealed where it spent the subsidy it receives. The most highly subsidised CalMac route on the Clyde was revealed as the Gourrock-Dunoon service - the only one where CalMac competes against a private operator, Western Ferries (who receive no subsidy). A CalMac spokesman stated that the comparative costs of the two operators were significantly different, CalMac being required to provide a service to meet train timetables and therefore having to dock at more expensive sites and use more and faster ferries.</p>	31.01.06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Caledonian MacBrayne	Transport
<p>Council complaint letters 'don't exist'</p> <p>Angry councillors in Tywardreath and Par have discovered that 46 letters allegedly received by the local authority complaining about speeding drivers using a road to Par beach do not exist. The borough council erected a nighttime barrier across the Restormel-owned road to stop motorists accessing a car park, and used the letters about boy racers to support the action. However, it emerged this week that no letters at all were received from the public and Restormel itself in fact made the "complaints". The details have now been provided to Tywardreath and Par parish council after it requested sight of the letters under the FOI Act.</p>	02.02.06	Cornish Guardian	Restormel Borough Council	Transport
<p>London Underground passenger accident statistics</p> <p>More than 12,000 people have been injured while travelling on the Tube in the past five years. More than half of all accidents reported on London Underground involved falls on escalators or stairs. Eleven were fatal, and another 551 were serious. And, the information, released under the FOI Act, reveals that almost £5m was paid out in compensation over the same period.</p>	20.03.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
<p>Most overcrowded trains all in London</p> <p>The 10 most overcrowded rail services in the country are all rush-hour routes into and out of London. Figures released under the FOI Act show each train carries hundreds more passengers than there are seats available. Classified as the worst is the 7.51am from Cambridge to Liverpool Street operated by One, which runs at 85% above its capacity. It has seating for 234 but carries an average of 433 - meaning 199 passengers stand. Next is the 4.33pm Sutton to Luton service operated by Thameslink with a 50% overload. It has 412 seats but carries an average of 618, meaning 206 people are standing. Third worst is the 7.51am Victoria to London Bridge via Clapham Junction service, operated by Southern. It has 635 seats but 309 people are forced to stand, meaning it runs 49% above its seating capacity most days.</p>	21.03.06	The Evening Standard	Department for Transport	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Jodie revs up - for a tidy sum DVLA spent almost £700,000 on a Government campaign telling people they can renew their tax disc online. A significant portion of that sum was spent on hiring Jodie Marsh as the face of the campaign. The figures, released under the FOI Act, show the DVLA's marketing budget for the new service was £671,000.	20.04.06	The Independent	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Transport
Government opposition to new rail operator Information released under the FOI Act and published in Rail Magazine by the former rail regulator, Tom Winsor, shows that the transport secretary, Alistair Darling, fiercely opposed Grand Central's bid to run services between London and Sunderland because any damage to GNER could hamper its ability to pay £1.3bn in profit premiums to the government over a decade. Government officials told the rail regulator that any approval of Grand Central would unsettle train operators across the industry, leading to more caution, lower bids for franchises and higher government subsidies.	27.04.06	The Guardian	Department for Transport	Transport
Falling cost of leisure flights The cost of the average short-haul leisure flight has fallen from over £100 in 1994 to around £63 in 2004 according to information released under the FOI Act.	01.05.06	The Guardian	Department of Transport	Transport
Secure stations Gatwick is the only railway station in Sussex that remains signed up to the national Secure Stations Scheme launched in 2000 by the Department of Transport and British Transport Police (BTP). The scheme covers all rail and underground networks which are policed by the BTP. It establishes standards of good practice and accredits individual stations which have worked with the BTP and other local partners to implement security measures. Eastbourne, Horsham and Worthing all lost their accreditation during the 6 years. The three stations are among 101 in the UK to have allowed their accreditation to lapse according to information released under the FOI Act.	05.05.06	Brighton and Hove Argus	British Transport Police	Transport
Banned number plates Thousands of number plates have been banned because they're too rude. A list drawn up by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has been released under the FOI Act. It includes registration numbers such as AA55HOL (asshole) and D055ERR (dosser) deemed too rude, those with religious implication such as JE55USS and terrorist links such as HA06MAS (Palestinian group Hamas).	14.05.06	The Express	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Transport
Increasing motorway speed limits Raising the speed limit on Britain's motorways to 80mph would save businesses and motorists up to £460m year, although only 35% of traffic would travel at times when congestion levels would allow the higher speed, but it would also cause a 4% increase in motorway carbon emissions.	13.06.06	The Daily Telegraph	Department of Transport	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Aviation emergencies Six aircraft made distress calls over Aberdeen in the last two years. Two military jets and four passenger planes had to take action, but all six landed safely after the scares according to the information released under the FOI Act.	22.07.06	Aberdeen Evening News	Civil Aviation Authority	Transport
Advertising campaign costs TfL's "Your Transport for London" campaign cost more than £2.5m according to information released under the FOI Act.	31.07.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
The 40 most dangerous bus routes Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the 40 London bus services with the largest number of "code red" emergency calls from drivers. Between them they are responsible for 11,564 emergency calls - the equivalent of almost 32 every day. Problems range from knife or gun attacks to verbal abuse, egg-throwing and rowdiness.	01.08.06	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
Helping 700,000 extra passengers fly into Scotland The Scottish Executive's route development fund spent £1.23m attracting 696,512 passengers into Scotland on 24 new services in 2004-5 according to information released under the FOI Scotland Act.	01.09.06	The Scotsman	Scottish Executive	Transport
Rowdy air passengers Statistics released by the Civil Aviation Authority under the FOI Act show that rowdy airline passengers are reported for drunken or disruptive behaviour on Ulster flights almost once a week.	02.10.06	Belfast Telegraph	Civil Aviation Authority	Transport
Manchester Airport near-misses Aircraft flying to and from Manchester airport have been involved in 29 'near misses' in the last six years. Five of the incidents, revealed in information released under the FOI Act, took place above Manchester, one in the city's airspace, and another near Ashton-in-Makerfield.	29.11.06	Manchester Evening News	Civil Aviation Authority	Transport
TfL travel freebies Transport for London is spending more than £10m each year giving free Oyster Cards to people who live with TfL employees. Figures released under the FOI Act show that 10,574 people have a free Oyster Card, courtesy of the Staff Nominee Oyster Card scheme. This allows TfL workers to propose a member of their household for the pass, regardless of their relationship. On the basis that an annual Oyster Card for Zones 1-2 costs £928, rising to £1,720 for Zones 1-6, the well-established perk costs TfL well over £10m.	03.01.07	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>10p of benefits made the difference</p> <p>A rival scheme to the axed Leeds Supertram was given hundreds of millions of pounds of public cash despite both offering similar financial benefits. In 2006 ministers provided £244m for the expansion of the Manchester Metrolink (on top of £200m already handed over) just months after scrapping the Leeds Supertram on cost grounds. But Department for Transport officials classed both schemes as "high value for money" and decided there was little difference between the two. For every £1 of public money spent, the Leeds tram scheme offered benefits of up to £2.40 (excluding advantages such as 140 new jobs) compared to £2.50 for the Metrolink expansion, documents released under the FOI Act show. The DfT's guidelines say a scheme will generally be "high value for money" if the so-called benefit cost ratio is more than £2 and that "most, if not all" such schemes should normally be funded.</p>	17.01.07	Yorkshire Post	Department for Transport	Transport
<p>Subsidies to bus firms</p> <p>Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the subsidies paid to bus companies to keep little used routes open. Nationally, bus subsidies to companies running vehicles on rural routes total £2.5bn. Darlington Borough Council paid bus companies £631,036 in the 2005/06 financial year. In 2001-2, it was £ 249,072. The figures also reveal that Green Bus, a company that operated for only 18 months, received £881,979 in subsidies between December 2003 and May 2005.</p>	09.02.07	Northern Echo	Darlington Council	Transport
<p>TfL pays £5m in refunds for Tube delays</p> <p>London Underground has been hit by a record number of claims for refunds from delayed passengers, figures released under the FOI Act show. Transport for London has paid nearly £5m to dissatisfied travellers in the past three years. Almost every Tube line saw a rise in the number of complaints, with the total number of claims almost doubling from 261,725 in 2004 to 447,626 last year. The majority of claims are for refunds caused by delays. Anyone whose journey is delayed by more than 15 minutes is entitled to a refund.</p>	26.02.07	The Evening Standard	Transport for London	Transport
<p>Safety concerns at Norwich station</p> <p>Rail passengers are becoming increasingly worried about train station safety as figures released under the FOI Act show that British Transport Police had to deal with on 145 separate crimes at Norwich station last. It compares with just 93 call-outs in the previous year. Some of the city's taxi firms are refusing to stop there because they say it is too dangerous and violent, drunken scenes outside the station have been filmed and posted on the internet site YouTube.</p>	24.04.07	Norwich Evening News	British Transport Police	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Transport police keep on track of criminals Police are solving more crimes on Sunderland's Metro system than on any other rail network across the UK. The city's branch of British Transport Police has the highest rate of detections in the country. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal 152 reports of crimes on the Sunderland extension of the system in the last year - with more than half solved. Almost a third of the offences reported involved people risking their lives while trespassing on the tracks. The run-down Sunderland Central railway station remains the city's worst hot spot, with 50 crimes reported during 2006, while University Station is the safest, with no recorded crime.	26.04.07	Sunderland Echo	British Transport Police	Transport
Dangerous truckers Almost one in 10 lorries involved in accidents on British roads comes from overseas. More than 2,200 crashes a year involve foreign registered vehicles of all types, according to figures from the Department of Transport released under the FOI Act. Out of a total of 12,120 UK accidents involving HGVs, 1,031 involved a foreign registered left-hand drive lorry.	05.05.07	The Daily Star	Department for Transport	Transport
The cost of vandalism Information released under the FOI Act has revealed the extent of bus-stop vandalism in the North-East. Vandals are destroying one bus shelter a day, with 473 attacks on 305 different stops in the last 12 months. The cost of repairing the damage is rising too, and has more than doubled in two years - it cost £21,985 to fix vandalised shelters in 2004/5, but was up to £47,518 in 2006/7.	22.06.07	Sunderland Echo	Sunderland Council	Transport
The bus with a £1m subsidy A bendy-bus service funded with £1m of public money is carrying an average of just 13 passengers per trip. Meanwhile, Assembly workers are travelling a similar route on their own subsidised buses costing £120,000 a year. The 133-capacity Baycar buses between Cardiff city centre and the Bay carried 383,000 passengers on 30,000 journeys over the last financial year, according to information released under the FOI Act. The Welsh Assembly Government and Cardiff council are jointly funding the service, aimed at improving transport links between the city centre and the Bay, at a cost of £200,000 annually for five years.	25.07.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Transport
Buses rake in £37k from your change Cardiff Bus is making £700 a week from passengers who don't have the right change to pay for their tickets. In the 2006-07 financial year, £37,500 in excess payments was handed over by passengers. Bus managing director David Brown said: "Were we to give change, the additional costs of cash handling, coupled with delays in boarding times, would have to be passed on in the form of either higher fares or a reduced level of service."	12.09.07	South Wales Echo	Cardiff City Council	Transport
Motorway death toll Fourteen people died and 287 were injured on just one section of the M4 in a year. Figures released under the FOI Act reveal there were 107 collisions in which drivers or passengers were hurt on the 25-mile stretch between junction 37 at Pyle, near Bridgend, and junction 29 at Castleton, near Cardiff, between July 1, 2006 and July 31, 2007.	11.10.07	South Wales Echo	South Wales Police	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>Cycling for health? It's good for you so long as you don't get killed</p> <p>Cyclists and motorcyclists are at far greater risk of being killed on the roads than previously admitted by the Government. Published statistics from the Department for Transport suggested that motorcycling was just three times as dangerous as riding a bike which, in turn, seemed safer even than walking. Under the FOI Act, figures have now been obtained showing that riding motorcycles is between 10 and 12 times deadlier than using pushbikes. And pedal cyclists are three or four times more likely to be killed than pedestrians. The discrepancies arise because of the different ways figures can be collated. The Department publishes fatality statistics based on deaths per kilometre travelled. This makes faster modes of transport, which are used for longer journeys, look safer. But new figures show deaths per journey and per hour. These unpublished numbers show a very different pattern of death rates. The most disturbing new figures involve motorcycles. Previously released numbers show 9.7 deaths per 100 million km travelled by motorbike. That was only a little higher than the 3.62 by foot and 3.34 by bicycle. But the new figures show that, when measured by journeys taken, a huge gulf emerges between motorcyclists and the rest. There are 153.45 deaths per 100 million by motorcycle, 13.05 by bicycle and 3.68 on foot.</p>	15.10.07	The Times	Department for Transport	Transport
<p>Ministers push ahead with third runway plan</p> <p>Ministers will launch a public consultation on building a new runway and terminal at London's Heathrow airport, giving the clearest signal yet that its controversial expansion will go ahead. But the consultation, could be overshadowed by fresh evidence that BAA, the airport owner, has been closely involved in shaping its remit. Questions have been raised about data supplied to the government by the company. Ruth Kelly, the Transport Secretary, will launch the three-month consultation and publish the results of a four-year study expected to say a third runway and a sixth terminal could be built at the west London airport without exceeding noise and pollution limits. The exercise is also expected to seek public support for using Heathrow's existing runways in 'mixed mode'. At present one runway is used for landings and the other for take-offs, but in future both could be used for arrivals and departures simultaneously, allowing the airport to handle more services. Mixed-mode operations could be in place by 2015, and a third runway by 2020. If the plans are approved by government, BAA will have to make formal planning applications, though a public inquiry could be avoided by using proposed new planning laws which would fast-track major projects. However, documents released by the Department for Transport (DfT) under the FOI Act show BAA was closely involved in drawing up the framework for the consultation, and provided data for calculations about pollution and noise. The documents, obtained by Justine Greening, the Tory MP for Putney, whose constituency is one of those affected, also show that during the study questions were raised about the quality of some data supplied by BAA, including assumptions about pollution from new aircraft.</p>	18.11.07	The Observer	Department for Transport	Transport

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Costs of illegal travellers' camps Illegal travellers' sites have cost council taxpayers in the region almost £750,000 over the past five years. A survey of local authorities using the FOI Act has revealed that massive amounts of public money are being spent on evicting and clearing up after hundreds of illegal encampments. Playing fields, football pitches and public areas have been left strewn with rubbish. The total cost since 2001 has been at least £741,000 - and the worst hit area has been Leeds, where the council paid out £143,000 in 2003, £232,000 in 2004 and £240,000 between April and December 2005.	08.03.06	Yorkshire Post	Yorkshire Councils	Travellers
The EsseX Files Secret Ministry of Defence records reveal that Essex is one of Britain's UFO hotspots. Mystery objects have been sighted over a series of locations in the county - with Loughton its UFO capital. The MoD files disclose six sightings in the area over the past four years, five of them on one night. The 10 September 2005 series of reports in Essex remain officially unexplained. Essex's UFO secrets were disclosed under the FOI.	14.02.06	The Evening Standard	Ministry of Defence	UFO's
Secret US spy plane worried MoD A top secret, hypersonic, cold war spy plane was allegedly flown by the Americans in UK airspace without the government's permission. Publicly, the UK government played down newspaper stories about people who reported seeing UFO-like phenomena. But documents released under the FOI Act suggest the Ministry of Defence took the rumours much more seriously. Its investigations even threatened to strain the special relationship. The United States has never confirmed the existence of the mysterious aircraft, called Aurora, which was supposedly designed to sneak at very high speed over the Soviet Union and take covert snaps of what the enemy was up to. It was rumoured to be capable of flying at up to mach 8 and so could reach anywhere on the planet in less than three hours. In the early 1990s there was a string of supposed sightings and strange sounds over Scotland which some bewildered locals attributed to UFOs. Rumours in the press that Aurora was operating secretly out of RAF Machrihanish on the tip of Kintyre prompted Scottish MPs to ask questions in parliament. Briefing notes given to the then defence secretary, Tom King, on March 4 1992 show that civil servants did give the idea credence. "There is no knowledge in the MoD of a 'black' programme of this nature, although it would not surprise the relevant desk officers in the Air Staff and (Defence Intelligence Staff) if it did exist." The response suggested to an MP's question was rather less revealing: "The existence of any such project (or operation) would be a matter for the US authorities." The Americans denied everything, but the reports kept coming.	24.06.06	The Guardian	Ministry of Defence	UFOs

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

FOI exposes urban myth A lawyer reckons he's cracked the truth behind the bizarre tale of a Scots tot called Pocahontas McGinty - and it's an urban myth. Joel Conn turned amateur sleuth to investigate rumours about a girl, said to be from Greenock, named after the 1995 Disney hit. But now after spending seven months trying to track down the weirdly named tot's parents the 31-year-old from Glasgow insists it's all made up. Joel used the FOI Scotland Act to confirm no child named Pocahontas has been recorded by the General Register Office for Scotland since at least 1974.	24.02.07	The Sun	General Register Office for Scotland	Urban Myth
Incinerator proposal Friends of the Earth has accused Warwickshire County Council of covering up plans and failing to consult the public properly after a request under the FOI Act revealed a proposal for a waste incinerator.	24.01.06	Birmingham Post	Warwickshire County Council	Waste
Abortive costs of recycling plant Lancashire County Council has been criticised for spending £0.5m in an attempt to build a waste plant in Leyland. The cash was spent on technical, legal and financial advice during negotiations with recycling company Herhof Environmental. But the multi-million pound deal fell through after Herhof's sister company in Germany, which was to supply the technology for the mechanical biological treatment plant, went into administration. County Hall bosses are being criticised because Herhof remained the preferred bidder for the scheme eight months after the German arm hit financial problems. However, council chiefs insist the money has not been wasted. The £510,909 cost of the council's abortive appointment was revealed to Conservative Wyre MP Ben Wallace under the FOI Act.	10.03.06	Lancashire Evening Post	Lancashire County Council	Waste
Rise in bags of rubbish dumped illegally Almost 1,000 black bin bags were illegally dumped in the first five months of 2006, figures released under the FOI Act show. Between January and May 2006, environmental officers at North Lincolnshire Council collected 986 bags, an increase of more than 300 bags on the previous year. Opponents of the council's controversial new waste collection scheme, implemented in March last year, believe the new arrangement for collection of household rubbish is the reason why the extra bags have been ditched.	02.01.07	Scunthorpe Evening News	North Lincolnshire Council	Waste
Fly-tipping bill is £100m Fly-tippers struck 2.5 million times last year, costing taxpayers £100m, figures show. They dump rubbish illegally every 12 seconds on average, said the Countryside Alliance, but less than one per cent are prosecuted. In addition, it costs farmers £47m a year, say figures obtained under the FOI Act.	20.03.07	The Sun	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Waste

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

<p>'Envirocrime' snoops paid £30,000 to check your rubbish</p> <p>A council is paying plain-clothes snoopers £30,000 a year to track down homeowners who put their rubbish out at the wrong time of the week or in the wrong place. The 'envirocrime' officers are employed to enforce environmental regulations and have the power to fine residents who 'offend'. Ealing Council in West London is spending nearly £150,000 on recruiting and employing four new enforcement patrollers to add to its 23-strong team that already monitors 'waste disposal' regulations. Of more than a dozen councils levying fines since the introduction of legislation a year ago enabling local authorities to pursue residents, Ealing charges what it calls 'envirocriminals' the most, with a £110 penalty notice. According to facts released under the FOI Act, Birmingham issued the most with 592 penalty notices for envirocrimes in the past 12 months, Kensington and Chelsea 365 and Cardiff 264. Ealing issued just 11 but its charge was the highest, equal with Medway.</p>	22.04.07	The Mail on Sunday	Local authorities	Waste
<p>Fortnightly bin collections increase fly-tipping</p> <p>Figures obtained under the FOI act by the Countryside Alliance show that incidents of fly-tipping have increased where local authorities have reduced rubbish collections from weekly to fortnightly.</p>	28.04.07	The Daily Telegraph	Local Councils	Waste
<p>County landfill deals to run for years</p> <p>Oxfordshire County Council will still have contracts with landfill sites for as long as 16 years after it chooses it's preferred waste disposal option. County Hall, the waste disposal authority, is no nearer finalising the way it will dispose of the county's residual household waste beyond 2012 - despite a self-imposed deadline of autumn 2008. The authority said it has not chosen incineration although documents released under the FOI Act revealed incineration could be the most likely solution to future waste disposal problems. 10 waste disposal companies - all likely to bid for the disposal contract - told the authority their preferred option would be to burn non-recyclable rubbish. The new waste disposal technology should be up and running in 2012, but the four landfill sites the county council uses are subject to contracts which run until 2009 at the earliest, and in one case, until 2028.</p>	21.05.07	Oxford Mail	Oxfordshire County Council	Waste
<p>'Chip-and-bin' tax aims to force more recycling</p> <p>Figures published by the Conservatives after an FOI Act request show that one in seven town halls already have bins fitted with microchips, affecting up to four million households. These chips could be used to charge for rubbish collection by weight, in an effort to encourage recycling.</p>	24.05.07	The Times	Local authorities	Waste

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Spies in bins scheme put to the test in Yorkshire <p>Hundreds of thousands of household rubbish bins across Yorkshire have already been installed with "spy" microchips in anticipation of a possible new bin tax. Five councils in the region - Leeds, Wakefield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley - have taken part in a Whitehall-funded scheme to fit chips in bins that can "speak" to computers and weighing equipment on dustbin lorries, allowing officials to record how much waste a house or street is discarding. Figures released under the FOI Act show that 121,000 recycling bins across Doncaster have the chips installed, as have all the bins issued in Leeds in the last three years, plus 12,000 garden waste bins in Wakefield.</p>	24.05.07	Yorkshire Post	Yorkshire Councils	Waste
Rising cost of the bin snoops <p>Taxpayers are being hit by soaring bills for town hall "rubbish police" as councils wage war on householders who fail to meet strict refuse laws. Local authorities across the country have seen the cost of tackling "envirocrime" more than double in the past year. Some councils have even recruited officers to spy on householders who fail to put their rubbish out at the right time or in the correct place. Burgeoning town hall waste budgets over the past three years are revealed for the first time under the FOI Act. In Peterborough, the cost of enforcing and monitoring waste disposal regulations has soared by 173% from £68,279 to £187,078. Staff numbers have doubled to six, and the amount of recycling and composting has risen from 35.6% to 43% in the past year. Tower Hamlets in east London has doubled its staff to 28 in three years and last year invested £3.5m to improve recycling and extend it to high-rise flats.</p>	08.10.07	The Daily Express	Local authorities	Waste
Refreshment charges at the National Assembly <p>Visitors will have to pay up to 3 times more than Assembly members for refreshments at the National Assembly's new £70m chamber. Details obtained under the FOI Act have revealed wide differences between the proposed prices in the public cafe and the members' tearoom. The biggest difference is for tea where the cost of a pot to visitors will be £1.25 and just 35p for Assembly Members. Coffee is also 80p cheaper for AMs, while sandwiches and drinks offered to AMs are also vastly cheaper in almost every case than the price the public will have to pay.</p>	26.01.06	South Wales Echo	The National Assembly for Wales	Welsh Assembly
Welsh Assembly petty thefts <p>Theft figures released under the FOI Act show that despite the Welsh National Assembly's strict security regime, there have been 16 thefts reported in the past two years, with thieves making off with £14,974 worth of cash and valuables.</p>	19.03.06	Wales on Sunday	Welsh Assembly	Welsh Assembly

1000 FOI Stories from 2006 and 2007

Cost of a seat in the Welsh Assembly Information released under the FOI Act reveals how expensive the Welsh Assembly building was to the taxpayer. The cost of furnishing the building has so far cost the taxpayer £1.3m, including a seat for use by mothers feeding their babies that cost £1,782, presiding officer Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas's upholstered leather chair costing £1,111. 118 swan chairs upholstered in leather cost £219,220, 209 Oxford low-backed chairs with black leather upholstery came to £243,443 and a sofa/bench designed by Welsh designer Angela Gidden cost £6,394	13.06.06	The Sun	Welsh Assembly	Welsh Assembly
Chamber of horrors It may have become one of the new icons of Wales, but the landmark Senedd building has suffered from a host of defects. In the 12 months following its opening in February 2006, 46 problems were identified in the £67m showpiece Cardiff Bay chamber, according to details released under the FOI Act. Water leaks, cracking timber, ill-fitting doors, loose slates and light fittings hanging loose, were among the defects identified.	28.05.07	South Wales Echo	Welsh Assembly	Welsh Assembly