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Jonathan Edwards  
UK Information Commissioner  
Information Commissioner's Office

Sent via email -

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26 January 2023

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2022 with your proposals for the establishment of a cross-government Freedom of Information working group. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I welcome your consideration of how cross-government departments can best work together to ensure that the Act is implemented effectively and as Parliament intended. In our meeting you expressed concerns regarding systemic performance issues across Government departments. However, I do not think this assessment is borne out by the most recent FOI statistics. We all have a duty to those practitioners on the frontline to ensure that any assessment of their performance is supported by the evidence and I am pleased to note that the FOI statistics for monitored bodies released in December 2022 point to the continuing improvement in FOI performance in central Government.

You will be aware that, since 2015, The Cabinet Office has provided advice and guidance to departments across government on sensitive and complex FOI casework and matters of policy, including litigation casework and strategy. It does this through the operation of a dedicated departmental enquiries service, ad hoc guidance notes, quarterly catch-ups with departments, hosting a twice-yearly forum for FOI practitioners across government (I understand that you attended a session of the forum in May), and facilitating regular engagement between departmental FOI teams and your Office.

As well as the above, the Government has committed to establishing an information user stakeholder group under commitment 8 of the UK National Action Plan on Open Government, which was revised in August 2022. We have met with civil society with a view to finalising the terms of reference and very much hope that the Information Commissioner's Office will join those meetings.

You have said that one of the areas the working group could focus is on the outcomes of the report by Sue Langley OBE of her internal review into the Cabinet Office's Clearing House function. The

Government has already committed to a re-design and we will call upon the ICO's expert advice as part of this work, rather than establishing another forum. .

I look forward to working with you and your office on existing projects over the next year.

Warm regards

Lucy Neville-Rolfe

**Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG**