

Guidance Paper Role of the Information Officer

Access to Information Act, 2018

August 2024



An Information Officer (IO)

"Information Officer" (IO) means a person designated as the Information Officer of a public body in accordance with section 7 of the Access to Information Act (ATIA), which states that, *"The head of every public body shall, in consultation with the Minister responsible for that public body, designate a suitable officer of that body as Information Officer for the purposes of this Act."*

In a nutshell, an IO is an independent public official responsible for promoting and enforcing the Access to Information Act, 2018. (ATIA). He/she is the main point of contact in a public body for people who wish to access information as stipulated by the ATIA.

Chapter 1 of the Information Commission's Access to Information Act 2018 "How to Manual" provides clear guidance in this regard as follows:

- Scope of the Position
- Key Responsibilities
- Oversight of the Information Officer
- Remuneration of the Information Officer
- Absence of the Information Officer
- Knowledge of the Information Officer

Chapter 1 has been appended as ANNEX 1 herewith for facilitating reference. A full copy of the manual can be found on the Information Commission's website.

At a Glance Summary Table

Functions of an Information Officer (IO) vs. a Public Relations Officer (PR)

IO	PR
<p>Responds to a member of the public's written request for specific information with time bound procedures as stipulated by the law Access to Information Act, 2018.</p>	<p>Manages an organization's positive public image and marketing brand at large.</p>
<p>Oversight responsibility is to the Information Commission.</p>	<p>Oversight responsibility is to the organization.</p>
<p>Handles exemptions & sensitive data for public bodies.</p>	<p>Handles publicity, press releases, campaigns or events in both private or public bodies.</p>
<p>Handles record systems and proactive disclosure as per the Access to Information Act, 2018.</p>	<p>Attends to media queries and handles strategic communication, for example, public statements during emergency situations.</p>

Best Practices

It is best to separate the roles of IO and PR if possible to ensure segregation of duties and maintain the lawful independence of the Information Officer.

ANNEX 1

Information Commission's Access to Information Act 2018 "How to Manual"

CHAPTER ONE – INFORMATION OFFICER [SECTION 7]

1.1 Information Officer

An Information Officer is an independent public official responsible for promoting and enforcing the Access to Information Act, 2018. The head of every public body shall, in consultation with the Minister responsible for that public body, designate a suitable officer of that body as the Information Officer for the purposes of this Act.

1.2 Scope of Position

The Information Officer is the main point of contact in a public body for people who wish to access information; he or she is to provide information as stipulated by the Access to Information Act, 2018. He or she is to interact with the Information Officers from other government entities and across sectors, as well as with the Information Commission, to ensure the release of accurate information to the public.

1.3 Key Responsibilities

- Provide information about the public body, produced by the public body or maintained in the public body.
- Manage and maintain the following public domain information:
 - Database;
 - Handbook;
 - Manuals;
 - Website page, and
 - Records management system.
- Maintain a social media presence.
- Identify and procure information, which cuts across another portfolio, which either started its journey from the public body, or is to end in the public body.
- Conduct information audits from time to time to make sure that the information remains relevant and add new information.
- Perform a public information-monitoring role, such as being aware of implementing measures for rumour control.
- Ensure that the information managed is kept safe, secure and easily accessible.
- Maintain records on what is being requested, the frequency of requests, and for what purpose requests are made.
- Prepare a statutory annual report for submission to the Commission.

1.4 Oversight of the Information Officer

The Information Officer, while undertaking his access to information duties, is responsible to the Information Commission.

1.5 Remuneration of the Information Officer

A person continuing with current duties and only taking on the responsibilities of the Information Officer will retain their current package and be paid the Responsibility Allowance.

1.6 Absence of the Information Officer

Should the Information Officer be absent on leave such as maternity, sick, or annual leave for a period up to 6 months, the Head of the public body shall ensure that there is a temporary replacement, that the Information Commission is notified, and that the appointment is gazetted.

1.7 Knowledge of the Information Officer

The ideal candidate would be a person of some seniority who has worked in the organisation for many years and understands its culture, operations, and terminology.

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