

Fol body orders Eastell report be made public

THE TIMES HIGHER OCTOBER 12 2007

The Government's freedom of information watchdog has ordered the publication of a confidential audit report into allegations of financial irregularity against medical scientist Richard Eastell.

Graham Smith, the Deputy Information Commissioner, has ruled that Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust was in breach of the Freedom of Information Act when it refused last year to provide *The Times*

allegations, which had provided the basis for the trust's decision to instigate disciplinary proceedings against Professor Eastell, but the trust refused to release it.

But in a ground-breaking formal decision notice this week the Information Commissioner's Office said: "The commissioner believes that the general public has a strong legitimate interest in access to information about the efficient and proper use of public money in the NHS, especially

Higher with a copy of an audit report into allegations against Professor Eastell, who is the trust's former director of research governance and a professor of bone metabolism at Sheffield University.

The Times Higher reported in January 2006 that Professor Eastell, one of the world's leading experts on osteoporosis, had resigned from his NHS post before the trust was able to conclude disciplinary proceedings

given the fundamental role that the NHS has in the life of the population of the country as a whole.

"The commissioner also believes that the general public has a legitimate interest in the accountability of public officials and the spending of public money and, in the particular circumstances of this case, in gaining an understanding of the results of a review of the events which gave rise to allegations that there had been irregularities in the spend-

ing against him over the alleged irregularities.

A spokesman for the trust said at the time that there had been allegations that Professor Eastell had wrongly charged the trust for a number of laboratory tests carried out for his university work, outside the NHS. But as Professor Eastell resigned before the conclusion of disciplinary proceedings no conclusions were ever made.

The Times Higher requested a copy of an audit report into the

ing of public money by a senior member of staff in an NHS trust. Because the professor resigned before the disciplinary hearing concluded there has been no further information put into the public domain, and therefore disclosure of the report may provide greater clarity to what is already in the public domain."

The trust said it would comply with the decision notice and would provide the report within the specified 35 days.