



Information Policy & Compliance
bbc.co.uk/foi

Mr Michael Jones
request-17517-a7781xxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx

25 September 2009

Dear Mr Jones,

Request for Information – RFI 2009 1266

Thank you for your email of 30 August, submitted via the 'whatdotheyknow.com' website, making a request for information about TV Licensing under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act').

It may be helpful if I first explain the nature of the relationship between TV Licensing and the BBC. 'TV Licensing' is a trade mark of the BBC and is used under licence by companies contracted by the BBC to administer the collection of television licence fees and enforcement of the television licensing system. The majority of administration is contracted to Capita Business Services Ltd., with cash related payment schemes contracted to Revenues Management Services Ltd. Over-the counter services are provided by PayPoint plc. Marketing and public relations activities are contracted to the AMV Consortium, which is comprised of the following four companies: Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO Ltd., Fishburn Hedges Boys Williams Ltd., PHD Media Ltd. and Proximity London Ltd. The BBC is a public authority in respect of its television licensing functions and retains overall responsibility.

In your email, you made the following request:

Please tell me how much (BBC licence payers) money has been spent by the BBC in the past 5 years on electronic TV detection equipment.

By this I mean only the cost of electronic tv detection equipment, not the vans that the equipment may be installed into, or other such general items, nor do I want included in the total any installation costs, or running costs etc - just the cost of the equipment.

I can confirm that we do hold the information you have requested. However, I am withholding this information under subsections 31(1)(a), (b), (d) and (g) of the Act which relate to law enforcement, specifically that disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.



I am satisfied in terms of section 2(2) of the Act that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. I have considered the public interest test in the section headed '*Why information has been withheld*', below.

I can, however, provide some figures that have been released previously relating to the cost of our detection equipment.

- The cost of a new detector van is £108,474.59. This figure includes the cost of the vehicle prior to it being modified (£14,900.36). The figure does not include all the BBC's internal costs for researching and developing the technology involved. These costs are not quantifiable as they are incorporated in non-specific costs such as staff salaries, which cover their work on a number of projects.
- The cost of a hand-held device is around £600. This figure does not include all the BBC's internal costs for researching and developing the technology involved. These costs are not quantifiable as they are incorporated in non-specific costs such as staff salaries, which cover their work on a number of projects.

Why information has been withheld

It is a criminal offence to install and use television-receiving equipment to watch or record television programme services without a valid licence. TV Licensing investigates and prosecutes such unlicensed use of television receiving equipment. It uses detection equipment to assist in this activity.

(For the avoidance of doubt, may I confirm that we are not suggesting that you would use the information for the above purpose – merely that we consider that there is a strong likelihood that others who could gain access to the information would do so. All information disclosed under the Act is considered to be effectively placed in the public domain).

I am required under section 2(2) of the Act to assess whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outlined in the sections above outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The following factors are in favour of disclosure:

1. Ensuring that public funds are being appropriately applied, and specifically that:
 - a. the TV Licensing system is being efficiently run; and
 - b. that value for money is being obtained.

I consider that the above public interest factors in favour of disclosure are already served by the following:

2. The BBC has a duty to enforce the television licensing system and it is essential that effective deterrents against evasion are maintained for this purpose. Without an effective deterrent, evasion would invariably increase. This would be to the detriment of the honest majority of people who are properly licensed and to the overall amount of revenue available to the BBC. It would also increase detection costs.

3. The fact that the BBC is required to satisfy the National Audit Office ('NAO') as to the value for money of the collection and enforcement arrangements and is accountable for the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of such arrangements. (NAO's most recent audit, dating from 18 January 2007, is published online at www.nao.org.uk/publications).
4. The fact that the BBC has reduced the cost of collection from 6.2% of the total licence fee collected in 1991/2 (when it took over responsibility from the Home Office), to 3.6% for the financial year 07/08. This demonstrates that the TV Licensing system is being efficiently run. This and further related information is available in the BBC's annual report (see www.bbc.co.uk) and the TV Licensing Annual Review (see www.tvlicensing.co.uk/aboutus).

In this instance, the public interest is served by maintaining an effective deterrent to licence fee evasion and thus in turn protecting the BBC's revenue stream.

There is hence a greater public interest in ensuring the effective collection of the licence fee than in disclosing the information you have sought. I am therefore satisfied, in terms of section 2 of the Act, that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest (outlined above) in disclosing the information.

Your appeal rights

This enquiry has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. If you are not satisfied that we have complied with the Act in responding to your request, you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager or legal adviser. Please contact us at the address above explaining what you would like us to review and including the reference number given at the start of this letter. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you may appeal to the Information Commissioner, whose contact details are as follows: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF; telephone: 01625 545700; www.ico.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Gardner
Senior Policy Adviser, TV Licensing Management Team