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Our ref: RFI 3395  
Date: 5 August 2010

Ganesh Sittampalam  
[request-38478-5ee07b18@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-38478-5ee07b18@whatdotheyknow.com)

Dear Mr Sittampalam

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: COPY OF PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING  
CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESSED TO A MINISTER**

Thank you for your request for a copy of the procedures followed on initial receipt of correspondence addressed to a minister from (a) The Prince of Wales, (b) an MP, and (c) a member of the public, which we received on 16 June 2010. We are dealing with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Defra has a central Customer Contact Unit (CCU) which handles almost all policy-related correspondence for the Department, with advice from policy officials as required.

Defra adheres to the Cabinet Office Guidelines for handling correspondence from MPs, members of the House of Lords and members of the devolved authorities. There is also a section within the guidance stating that the handling of letters from the public should be treated using the same principles as those for handling letters from MPs and Peers. This guidance is available at:

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/propriety\\_and\\_ethics/assets/handlingcorrespondencefrommps%20guidance.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/propriety_and_ethics/assets/handlingcorrespondencefrommps%20guidance.pdf)

As the information is publicly available from the above source, we are exempt from providing a copy under section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act.

I attach a flowchart showing how correspondence passes through the Defra CCU. Essentially, all correspondence follows a similar handling process. It is logged on receipt, then allocated to a CCU drafting team. A draft reply is prepared by officials and checked for quality, then either sent directly to the correspondent by post or email, or sent for Ministerial signature and posted.



Letters from MPs are known as 'Ministers' Cases' (MCs), while letters from most members of the public are known as 'Deal With Officially' (DWO or DWOE, depending on whether they are received in hard copy or by email).

Defra does not discuss details of private and confidential correspondence which might be received from the Royal Household or Members of The Royal Family, but in the event that any correspondence is received it may be dealt with as a "Private Office" case. A Private Office case is a letter from someone other than an MP, but to which it may be appropriate for a Minister to reply. Private Office cases can include correspondence from Ministers' constituents, private and third-sector individuals and organisations with an interest in particular policies, former MPs and Ministers, senior local government officials and councillors etc.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. I also attach an annex concerning copyright issues and an annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

Yours sincerely

Charlotte Mercer

[ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Annexe A**

### **Copyright**

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by Defra will have been produced by government officials and will be Crown Copyright. You can find details on the arrangements for re-using Crown copyright on OPSI (Office of Public Sector Information) at:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/index.htm>

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## **Annex B**

### **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Clive Porro, Head of Defra's Information Rights Team at, Area1B Ergon House, Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AL, (email: [informationrights@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:informationrights@defra.gsi.gov.uk)) who will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure can be found at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/policy/opengov/complain/info.htm>

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF