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By e.mail only to: request-539969-4361dc50@whatdotheyknow.com

Dear Ms Corr,

Freedom of Information Act 2000

I refer to your request for information under the terms of the above Act, dated 17th December 2018.
You asked:

“Can you send me details of the current permanent secretary's expenses since they took up the role.”

Information you have requested is being withheld as it is exempt under section 22(1) of the Act, which protects information intended for future publication. This is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours maintaining the exemption in section 22(1) or disclosing the information. The information requested will be published as soon as possible at the end of the current financial year. You may be aware our Permanent Secretary is on secondment from the Cabinet Office; it will therefore also publish any associated expenses falling to it.

The Department recognises there is a general public interest in disclosure and the fact that openness in government may increase public trust in, and engagement with, the government. The planned release however of checked and audited information in order to properly inform the public should not be prejudiced by premature release. In the light of this, the balance of public interest is in favour of the temporary withholding of this information.

Please find attached a Public Information Leaflet to this letter which provides information on FOI procedures and some useful contact points.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan McNaught
Head of Central Support Team

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE
Public Information Leaflet
on
The Freedom of Information Act 2000

Note: This guide is an overview of some of the main provisions of the Act and should not be regarded as a legal interpretation.

1. What does the Freedom of Information Act do?

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 gives everyone the right to request information from public authorities. The FOI Act means that, from 1 January 2005, you can get information to help you to understand better how this department works, how we spend public money, and how and why we make our decisions.

2. You can also get information under:

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) & Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) which, amongst other things, give individuals access to their own personal information.
- The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) which gives people access to environmental information. EIRs apply to “environmental information” held by organisations that perform functions of a public nature.

3. How do I get information about the department under the FOI Act?

If you have access to the Internet you can get information on the departmental website at www.finance-ni.gov.uk; or visit www.nidirect.gov.uk for further information on accessing the websites of all Northern Ireland Government departments. Alternatively you can write to us at the address on the letter accompanying this leaflet.

4. How long does it take to get information?

Once a written request for information is received, we have 20 working days to respond – although that time can be extended where a “qualified” exemption applies and we need to consider the public interest.

5. Is there a cost for getting information?

This depends on a number of factors including the volume of material requested. Responses to enquiries that cost the department less than £600 to process will normally be provided free of charge. The department has the right to refuse to respond to a request that is estimated to cost more than £600 to process.

6. What happens if the information I want is not available?

The FOI Act does not require us to gather or create information that does not already exist. We will contact you and tell you that we do not hold the information and may suggest another public authority who may hold the information you are looking for.

7. Can I have any information at all?

The FOI Act allows you access to almost all information that a public body holds. But there are some things that cannot be given to the public. For example, information about national security, law enforcement or personal information – you can obtain your own personal information through the GDPR/DPA 2018 (see above). Personal information supplied by, or in relation to, third parties may be available in certain circumstances. The Department is not obliged to send you information that is already freely available elsewhere e.g. in our publication scheme at www.finance-ni.gov.uk (or request a copy by writing to us at the address in the accompanying letter), or available for purchase e.g. at The Stationery Office.

8. What if I am refused information?

You have the right to request a formal review by the Department within two calendar months of the date of the Department's response and if you wish to do so, please write to foi@finance-ni.gov.uk or Department of Finance Information Management Unit, Room 23, Dundonald House, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 3SB.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner (contact details below).

9. Where can I get more information about the FOI Act?

You can get more information about FOI from the Information Commissioner's Office. The contact details are:

Website: www.ico.org.uk

Phone: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

Post: Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF