



Ministry of JUSTICE

Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service
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Mr M Wild

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Via email:
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www.justice.gov.uk

11th October 2011

Our Reference: FOI-72392 - Wild

Freedom of Information Request

Dear Mr Wild,

Thank you for your email of 15th September 2011, in which you are seeking to obtain the following information from the Ministry of Justice:

*“Information about the total current amount outstanding in court fines;
The amount of any fines that may have been written off within the past 5 years;
Details of how many private bailiff companies are working on behalf of HMCTS and the names of these companies;
Confirm whether these companies have a contract with HMCTS and when it expires;
A copy of any such contact”*

Your request is being handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I can confirm that the department holds the information you have requested, and I am pleased to provide this to you.

I have provided a breakdown of the figures requested in the table below which provides details of Administrative cancellations and Legal cancellations of fines.

Just to clarify Administrative cancellations are only carried out in accordance with a strict criteria, accounts that are administratively cancelled can be reactivated if further information is found about an offender at a later date. Legal cancellations however, can be made after a case has been re-considered by a judge or magistrate and cases can be fully or partially remitted.

Fines Data	
Outstanding balance in court fines at the end of August 2011	£608,910,827
Administrative cancellations of fines in the last five years	
2010/11	£50,713,367
2009/10	£47,387,108
2008/09	£55,666,410
2007/08	£53,150,325
2006/07	£38,594,998

Legal cancellations of fines in the last five years	
2010/11	£62,263,872
2009/10	£58,274,570
2008/09	£47,408,421
2007/08	£53,872,252
2006/07	£69,461,044

The re-tendering of contracts between HMCTS (formerly HMCS) and private bailiff companies were completed in August 2009. As a result contracts were awarded to four private bailiff companies The Marston Group PLC, Philips Collection Services, Swift Credit Services and Excel Civil Enforcement.

The contracts commenced on 1 December 2009 and will run for a minimum of three years; provisions include an option to extend these contracts at one year intervals which are restricted to a maximum of two additional years. The contracts cover all fine enforcement warrants issued by Magistrates Courts in England and Wales.

For your ease of reference I have attached a copy of the service specification, which details the contractual requirements for the above mentioned private bailiff companies working on behalf of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. Also attached is a document entitled 'The Good Governance Standards for Public Services' which is an annex that is referred to within the service specification.

Having supplied the requested information I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that the Government takes the issue of fine enforcement very seriously and HMCTS is working to ensure clamping down on fine dodgers is a continued priority nationwide.

The courts will do everything within their powers to trace those who do not pay. Money can be taken from an offender's earnings or from benefits if they are unemployed. Warrants can be issued instructing court employed agents to seize and sell goods belonging to the offender. Ultimately an offender can be imprisoned for non-payment of their fine.

HMCTS is currently implementing the Criminal Compliance and Enforcement Services — A Blueprint for 2008 to 2012 which sets out HMCTS's strategic objective for a cheaper, faster and more proportionate system that primarily focuses on 'first time' compliance whilst continuing to apply the principles of rigorous enforcement to the hard core of fine dodgers.

Steps taken to improve fine enforcement across England & Wales include:

- Better trained and equipped civilian enforcement officers, with more tracing tools at their disposal to track down fine dodgers and the completion of a national rollout of secure cell vehicles.
- Working with magistrates to get more fines paid on the day they are imposed.
- Full access to the DWP benefits information for HMCTS staff to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of collection and enforcement.
- Full rollout of new payment methods including payment cards and the ability to pay fines on line.

- Increased telephone debt chasing.
- Texting non-compliant offenders to warn them of the consequences of non-payment.

I trust this goes some way in explaining the Government's views on fine collection and covers your specific requests

Yours sincerely

Meena Pabla
HMCTS Operations

How to Appeal

Internal Review

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to an internal review. The handling of your request will be looked at by someone who was not responsible for the original case, and they will make a decision as to whether we answered your request correctly.

If you would like to request a review, please write or send an email to the Data Access and Compliance Unit within two months of the date of this letter, at the following address:

Data Access and Compliance Unit (6.25),
Information & Communications Directorate,
Ministry of Justice,
102 Petty France,
London
SW1H 9AJ

E-mail: data.access@justice.gsi.gov.uk

Information Commissioner's Office

If you remain dissatisfied after an internal review decision, you have the right to apply to the Information Commissioner's Office. The Commissioner is an independent regulator who has the power to direct us to respond to your request differently, if he considers that we have handled it incorrectly.

You can contact the Information Commissioner's Office at the following address:

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

Internet address: https://www.ico.gov.uk/Global/contact_us.aspx