

Dear Mr Martin,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 13 February 2012. You asked:-

*Could you please advise me on the policies of DWP about keeping copies of letters and their contents sent out by Job Centre managers/Manageress.*

*Do they keep copies of all these letters?*

*How long are these letters, or electronic copies kept?*

*Who has access to such letters?*

*Can the content of them be passed on to third party service providers?*

*To clarify the types of letters I am referring to, these are specific complaints, requests for clarifications, and specific questions about incidents.*

The Departments retention policy/periods for benefit documentation and data is contained in the DWP Benefits Document and Data Retention Guide, I have attached a copy for your information. How long we keep records for depends on the type of record, further details are contained within the Guide.

We have a specific policy on complaints. This is referred to by DWP as "customer feedback". Such records are treated as Exceptions and can be found in paragraph 111. Action regarding exceptions, including noting the case as Not For Destruction can be found in paragraph 112.

Paragraph 118 provides some detailed guidance for Customer Feedback;

**"118.** As the initial contact may be followed up at other levels e.g. Customer representatives, Ministers etc, documents/data should be retained to refer back to, in order to avoid embarrassment and contradictory information being given. As it may be difficult to predict which contacts may be followed up at other levels, all MPs correspondence, Customer Feedback and the Departments response should be retained for periods in line with those for supporting documents/data."

Requests for clarification and specific questions about incidents are classified as either "supporting" or "ephemeral". This depends on whether the information contained is needed by a Decision-maker to decide on the claim to benefit or not. Details can be found at paragraphs 42 and 43.

Turning to your question around passing information to a third party, the DWP takes its responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 1998 very seriously and will only share your

personal, sensitive information in certain circumstances. Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act allows us to direct you to information which is already reasonably accessible to you. Further guidance relating to how we use and protect any information we collect about you is available on the Department's website. The appropriate web pages are:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-information-charter.pdf>

and

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/privacy-policy/>

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

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#### **Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act**

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing [freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, 5th Floor The Adelphi, 1-11, John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)