

# Publication on the website

Some material released under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations may be of wider interest to the general public. Similarly, there are areas of Departmental policy that generate large numbers of related queries.

To help prevent officials consistently answering variations on the same question, it is often beneficial to make responses available on the DfT's web site.

In addition, guidance from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) makes it clear that all government departments have a responsibility to publish and disseminate material when it is in the wider public interest. MoJ's guidance also stipulates that publication should be simultaneous with the release of the information to the requestor.

To facilitate this process and to help meet the requirements of the information rights regime, the Communication Directorate has put arrangements in place to enable the simultaneous publication of information disclosed in response to requests. These arrangements and the publication scheme are kept under review.

Please note that where all information is withheld from an applicant, it is not the usual practice to publish the refusal letter on the web-site disclosure log.

## The 'wider public interest'

All requests received by the DfT are reviewed by the Communications Directorate to determine whether the response is in the wider public interest. The Department is taking a broad view of what is considered to be in the public interest, so most queries are likely to fall into this category.

Information released is likely to be in the public interest unless it is very specific to an individual or has data protection implications. There will of course be other circumstances where it is not considered prudent to publish material online but these will be relatively infrequent.

## Procedures

- Prepare a Word document copy of the response, taking care to redact the name and contact details of the applicant and of the official who sent the response. Please double-check that there is nothing in the body of the letter and supplementary information (including footnotes, footers, filenames etc) that would reveal the identity of the requestor. If there is, redact that personal data too. The usual means is to replace the text with 'xxxx', but for more information about preparing Word documents in safe mode see <http://transnet.dft.gsi.gov.uk/148358.article>.
- Once finalised, email the redacted Word version of the FoI/EIR response along with any supplementary information to the DfT web publishing email account. Include the FoI/EIR number in the subject field of the email.

- Where only a hard copy of the supplementary information is available, provide the web team with a Word version of the response letter plus an email address that the public can use to request copies of the supplementary information as redacted scanned documents.
- You should also refer to the instructions for producing content for publication on the DfT website, to ensure that it complies with government transparency, usability and accessibility requirements.
- The web team will only check that any **obvious** personal information has been redacted to ensure anonymity of the person who made the request and the DfT official who completed the FoI/EIR response (unless permission to publish their name online has been secured). Remember, the DfT official who completes the FoI/EIR response has primary responsibility for redacting personal information.
- The web team will liaise with the press office who give final confirmation that the information can be released

It is important that responses are provided to the web team as early as possible so they are able to publish the information simultaneously with its release to the person requesting it, or as soon as practicable thereafter.

### **Informing the applicant**

Where information is intended for simultaneous release, the following line should be used when replying to explain the process to all applicants:

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. The Department will, therefore, be releasing to the public the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

### **Copyright**

Request handlers should note copyright.