



Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

www.gov.uk/dhsc

Mr Louise Brown
request-724786-f6ede552@whatdotheyknow.com

05 March 2021

Dear Mr Brown,

Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1302094

Thank you for your request dated 6 February, in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

“Please answer the following questions in relation to Lighthouse labs and the Mega Lab being created in Leamington Spa, for Covid testing.

For Lighthouse labs, please provide the following financial information relating to the period since March 2020 to 31st January 2021:

- *The amount of capital investment made*
- *The amount paid to third party suppliers to the Lighthouse lab programme who have been paid over £1 million in this period, with the total amount paid, including Astra Zeneca, Randox, suppliers of equipment and consultancies*
- *The amount paid in salaries and on-costs*
- *The amount paid for temporary and locum staff*

For the mega lab in Leamington Spa

- *The date the decision was made to create this lab*
- *A copy of the full business case supporting this*
- *A list of other options considered. As part of this, was the option to invest in creating additional capacity within existing NHS labs considered*
- *The total expected capital investment including lease commitments made or entered into during 2020 and 2021*
- *Please provide details of any plans which the authority has to use this facility for testing after the Covid pandemic.*

- a) Will the facility be used to provide testing for the NHS or other customers?*
- b) What types of testing will be undertaken*
- c) Does the authority have any agreements in place to undertake such testing”*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

For Lighthouse labs, please provide the following financial information relating to the period since March 2020 to 31st January 2021.

DHSC holds the requested information.

However, we consider that this information is exempt under Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which exempts from the general duty to release information which would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any entity, including the public authority holding the information.

Section 43 is a qualified exemption and, as such, we are required to assess the public interest in withholding this information against that of its release. We recognise the public interest in this information.

However, we also take into account the fact that this information is commercially sensitive, and we consider that releasing this information would not be in the public interest, as it could discourage future commercial partner relationships with the DHSC and our ability to secure best value for money if this information were to be disclosed into the public domain.

For the mega lab in Leamington Spa, the date the decision was made to create this lab.

DHSC holds the requested information. The board approved the mega lab to go ahead 16th November 2020.

- A copy of the full business case supporting this; the total expected capital investment including lease commitments made or entered into during 2020 and 2021.

DHSC holds the requested information.

However, we consider that this information is exempt under Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which exempts from the general duty to release information which would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any entity, including the public authority holding the information.

Section 43 is a qualified exemption and, as such, we are required to assess the public interest in withholding this information against that of its release. We recognise the public interest in this information.

However, we also take into account the fact that this information is commercially sensitive, and we consider that releasing this information would not be in the public interest, as it could discourage future commercial partner relationships with the DHSC and our ability to secure best value for money if this information were to be disclosed into the public domain.

- A list of other options considered. As part of this, was the option to invest in creating additional capacity within existing NHS labs considered?

DHSC does not hold the requested information.

Outside the scope of the FOIA, and on a discretionary basis, you may be interested to know that since the start of the pandemic, we have vastly expanded the nation's testing capacity, more than doubling the capacity of the NHS and Public Health England laboratories as well as setting up an entirely new nationwide network of testing sites and new Lighthouse Laboratories and partner laboratories to process COVID-19 swab samples. To complement this, a business case was made for a very high-throughput laboratory to dramatically increase the number of coronavirus tests that can take place each day to support the national effort against the coronavirus pandemic.

- Please provide details of any plans which the authority has to use this facility for testing after the Covid pandemic.

DHSC holds the information requested.

The laboratory will in the immediate term be dedicated to COVID-19 testing for the National Testing Programme, working alongside a network of Lighthouse Laboratories and partnerships with public, private and academic sector laboratories. The laboratory will form part of the UK's future diagnostic capability. There are no detailed plans for future use.

a) Will the facility be used to provide testing for the NHS or other customers?

The laboratory will process test samples from the network of testing sites across the UK and from routes such as home testing and mobile units.

b) What types of testing will be undertaken?

The laboratory will process PCR tests utilising high throughput ePCR platforms.

c) Does the authority have any agreements in place to undertake such testing

The laboratory will be run by DHSC. Agreements in place to undertake processing of test samples are commercial confidential.

If you are not satisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to appeal by asking for an internal review. This should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter and sent to FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk, or to the address at the top of this letter.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communication.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have already appealed our original response and received our internal review decision. You should raise your concerns with the ICO within three months of your last meaningful contact with us.

The ICO can be contacted at:

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

<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

Yours sincerely,

Le-Anne Frankson
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