



DAN FARTHING

By email: request-615427-e9f1f29b@whatdotheyknow.com

FOI Reference: FOI328873
22/11/2019

Dear DAN FARTHING

I refer to your request where you asked:

“On the 21st January 2019 the then Minister, David Lidington MP, met with a group of 12 people who campaign on the issue of contaminate blood and blood products, currently being investigated by the Infected Blood Inquiry.

My request if for a copy of,

- a) any briefing prepared for that meeting*
- b) any minute or note of the meeting”*

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you requested is held by the Cabinet Office.

The information you have requested is exempt under s.35 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (information relating to the formulation or development of government policy). This is because the issue under consideration at the 21 January meeting (concerns about access to, and variations in, financial support for the people infected and affected by the infected blood scandal), is an issue of continuing consideration by government. Disclosure of the information in scope would not aid the public understanding of government's position, as this remains a live and developing issue. As such, disclosure of the information might lead to misperceptions about the government position on the issue of financial support.

Section 35 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours release of this material.

In favour of disclosure: there is a general public interest in disclosure of public information and the Cabinet Office recognises that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. Specifically, there is a public interest in the Infected Blood scandal, and the important issue of financial support for people infected and affected. There is particular concern in the context of the Infected Blood Inquiry that Government be as open and transparent as possible.

In favour of withholding the information: there is a stronger public interest that government is able to maintain a safe space for the development of policy. The disclosure of information such as that within the scope of this request would not aid public understanding of government's position on this important issue, as the issue is still under active consideration, and policy is developing.

We therefore consider there is no compelling public interest that overrides the very strong public interest in maintaining the confidentiality of this information.

Taking into account all the circumstances of this case we consider that the public interest favours maintaining the exemption and withholding the requested information.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Eirian Walsh Atkins
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

email: foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House

Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. B. Smith', written on a light blue background.

FOI Team
Cabinet Office