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Website

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Date

13 November 2019

R Jones
request-544367-323aa532@whatdotheyknow.com

Ref: IR2019/23463 IRO FOI2019/23458

Dear R Jones

Internal Review

Thank you for your Freedom of Information internal review request received on 18th June 2019 in which you asked:

It is now three months since you said you would reply "shortly".
I await the fulfilment of your statutory duties.
Meanwhile urgent and distressing, sometimes fatal, cases continue to be referred by MPs.
The number, according to official government statements lies somewhere between "one or two" and "thousands". I look forward to receiving the exact figure very very soon.

Original Request

I am very confused that the Secretary of State appears to have access to enough data to be able to say <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/t...>
"Some of the criticisms that have come from various publications have been based on ONE OR TWO particular individuals where the advice hasn't worked for them."
and the official who replied above had access to enough data to be able to say to me in their reply <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/5...>
"Members of Parliament raise THOUSANDS of benefit-related constituency issues with DWP Ministers each year. It is not possible to identify their motivation for raising cases. "
so I will try again with a further AMENDED request, refining my original request again, based on the data available to that official who made the above statement. forget the motivation, forget the type of welfare benefit concerned, lets just have the number of referrals made, relating to welfare benefits. I won't even ask for a breakdown according to benefit, or a breakdown between MPs, MSPs and AMs. How many cases, in total, concerning welfare benefits paid by the UK government, to individual constituents, have MPs, MSP and AMs referred to DWP Ministers in the last full twelve month period, for which figures are available?

Your request for an internal review is upheld and I apologise for failing to respond to your original request and your request for an internal review within the prescribed time limits.

I now can provide a response to your original Freedom of Information request:

It may help if I explain in greater detail how the Department handles correspondence from MPs, MSPs and AMs or their offices. As we previously advised you, tens of thousands of such items of correspondence are sent to the Department each year. Such correspondence is submitted and handled in a number of different ways, including by the Ministerial Correspondence team, the Operations Correspondence team, individual Ministers' private offices, Jobcentre Plus district managers and individual policy or programme teams. There is no business requirement for the correspondence to be collated centrally and of the correspondence that is collated within individual teams, none categorise it according to whether it relates to welfare benefits or not. Many items of correspondence will relate to general policy or operational issues as well as referring to constituents' claims.

To provide the information you have requested would therefore require all of the teams mentioned above and potentially other members of departmental staff examine each item of correspondence individually to establish whether or not it is in scope of your request and if so, to extract it and provide it to you, which would exceed the FOI cost limit by a considerable margin.

The cost of complying with your request would exceed the appropriate limit for central Government, set by regulations at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it.

As such under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act the Department is not therefore obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing it further.

Under section 16 of the Act we should help you narrow your request so that it may fall beneath the cost limit. However, in this instance even if you reduced the period that your request relates to substantially, the time which would be required to check each item of correspondence would still exceed the cost limit. If you were to restrict your request to correspondence handled by a specific team or teams over a much shorter period, it may be possible to provide some information to you within the cost limit.

We will consider afresh any revised request however we cannot guarantee that any revised request will fall within the cost limit. We are sorry that we cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP MGSD FOI Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

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