



PHSO The Facts Pressure Group  
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FOI Reference: FOI318917  
04<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Dear PHSO The Facts Pressure Group

I refer to your request where you asked:

“It has been publicised that Oliver Letwin is due to commence two reviews into the way that public service complaints are handled.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24548731>

We are requesting information concerning both reviews. Can you provide us with a remit which would indicate the areas of interest to Mr. Letwin? We would also be interested to know how this review compliments the key target areas already identified by the Cabinet Office.

Can you tell us the time scale for the review?

Will members of the public be able to provide evidence to either or both reviews?

How will members of the public be informed about evidence gathering opportunities?”

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that some of the information you request is held by the Cabinet Office. As the reviews are still in the early stages, the information you have requested is therefore exempt under section 35(1)(a) as it relates to the formulation or development of government policy.

Section 35 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours our release of this material. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government.

However, the public interest has to be weighed against a strong public interest that policy-making and its implementation are of the highest quality and informed by a full consideration of all the options.

As part of the review process it is important that Government has a clear space to consider the policy options free from external pressure to act, in which it can debate matters internally with candour and free from the pressures of public debate.

Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information as it relates to the formulation or development of government policy.

However, you may be interested in the evidence provided by Oliver Letwin and others to the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) inquiries into Government complaint handling and the role of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/news/iq-complaints-handling/>

It was in response to the Committee's inquiries that the Minister gave a commitment to undertake further work to investigate how public services can ensure complaints are welcomed as a valuable source of information about where improvements are required, and to take a wider look at the role and powers of the public sector ombudsmen.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact the FOI team. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

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:

Roger Smethurst  
Head of Knowledge and Information Management  
Cabinet Office  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

email: [foi.team@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foi.team@cabinet-office.gsi.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



**FOI Team  
Cabinet Office**