

Alicia Bonneday

By Email:

request-801421-53250bdc@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: FOI 11148

Your ref:

Date: 2nd December 2021

Dear Alicia Bonneday

Freedom of Information Request 11148 BONNEDAY

I am writing regarding your request for information, which was received on 21st October 2021. In that request you asked us the following questions and I can confirm that the search for the information you requested has been completed and our responses are given below:

This Freedom of Information requests concerns 'Pepper the Robot' which you purchased for £15,199.

1. Please provide a copy of the business case for the purchase of Pepper.

A business case was not required to facilitate the purchase of Pepper.

Pepper was purchased on an academic licence so the Council could begin to understand how people and robots interact and the impact upon social isolation. The plan was for work to be carried out across a range of age groups and abilities and feedback from interactions informed development and next steps. We also were conscious that Pepper would spark the debate on how emerging technology could help and shape social care in the future.

2. Please provide a copy of the Outcomes Evaluation Framework, or same by another name, for Pepper (if this is not included in the business case for purchase.)

The work with Pepper has been varied and has encompassed a range of targeted groups and individuals. Each interaction has been evaluated to inform learning, development, and forward planning for Pepper. We are unable to share individual evaluations as they contain personal data and the individuals have not provided consent.

We have attached a case study where the individual concerned has provided consent for the study to be published.

3. Please tell me the number of unique locations Pepper was deployed to for work purposes.

We have attached FOI 09274 that provides unique location data.

From 7th January to 16th March 2020 Pepper was based in the community accessible to people with Autism.

4. Please tell me the number of unique locations Pepper was deployed to for publicity and public relations purposes.

We have attached FOI 09274 that provides unique location data.

5. Please provide a copy of the latest completed outcomes evaluation, or same by another name, for Pepper.

As per Q2.

6. Southend Council is on record as saying Pepper could "go up to someone of his own volition and on the back-end he could send an email back saying: 'I spent some time with Henry. He says he's happy, but he looks sad', and you could gain more knowledge about the service users." Please tell me whether your Pepper has ever recorded or reported information or observation about an individual citizen in the UK, or a group of citizens in the UK.

(Source for quote <https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2017/oct/16/pepper-robot-southend-social-care-recruit>)

Pepper has not recorded or reported information or observation about an individual citizen in the UK, or a group of citizens in the UK.

Meaningful interaction with people is very much an aspiration and the Council is engaging with academic partners who are keen to progress this.

7. Southend Council staff consistently refer to Pepper by male pronouns. Please tell me why the council deem this machine to be male gendered.

The Council do not deem Pepper to be male gendered. Pepper has been variously referred to as male or female or a robot by a range of individuals within and outside the Council. We are content for individuals to make their own personal choice when interacting with Pepper.

If Pepper is asked, Pepper will say "at the end of the day I am just a robot".

If you wish to discuss any of the above, please contact me. 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 and wish to request a review of our response, you should write to the Knowledge and Information Manager, PO Box 6, Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 6ER.

If you are not content with the outcome of your review, you can make a complaint under the Council's complaints process by writing to Corporate Complaints Officer, Office of the Chief Executive, PO Box 6, Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 6ER.

You can also apply directly to the Information Commissioner (ICO) for a decision although generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the Council's complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

Business Support Administration

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