



Northern
Ireland
Office

Northern Ireland Office
Freedom of Information Team
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27 October 2021

Jenna Corderoy

request-799186-025d551d@whatdotheyknow.com

Dear Ms Corderoy

REFERENCE: FOI/21/193

Thank you for your request received by the Northern Ireland Office on the 11 October 2021.
For reference your original request was as follows:

This is a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act. I would like to request the following information:

(1) For Q1 2020, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**
- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

(2) For Q2 2020, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

(3) For Q3 2020, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**
- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

(4) For Q4 2020, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**
- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

(5) For Q1 2021, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**
- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

(6) For Q2 2021, please:

- (a) State how many FOI requests were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**
- (b) For those FOI requests, please provide their reference numbers.**
- (c) Please provide copies of the FOI requests that were sent to special advisers for clearance/approval/that they wished to have sight of.**

I would like to receive the information electronically. If you feel that a substantive response to this request is not possible within a reasonable time frame, or the request

is too broad or too vague, I would be grateful if you could contact me and provide assistance as to how I could refine the request.

Your request has been considered under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

It has been estimated by the Department that to fully satisfy this information request would exceed the appropriate limit as set out at section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act. Your request, therefore, is being refused at this time by way of section 12 (appropriate limit) of the Freedom of Information Act by the Northern Ireland Office.

Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act, public authorities are not obliged to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would likely exceed the "appropriate limit". The "appropriate limit" for the purposes of section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act has been set at £600 for central government departments.

To fully satisfy elements of your request would require a manual review of all electronically held information (shared email inboxes and individually held records).

It is this lengthy review, in both terms of historical date range and volume of information, which has been estimated by the Department, would likely exceed the above-mentioned appropriate limit.

It may be that we can provide you with some information within this appropriate limit, if you are able to narrow the scope of your request.

The following may help in your decisions as to the nature of any reframed information request you may wish to re-submit:

Such as to narrow the date range to the last 12 months.

The Department does not maintain a specific log detailing which Freedom of Information requests were sighted by Special Advisors. Therefore to fully satisfy your request would require a manual review of all held Freedom of Information case correspondence to determine which enquiries were sighted by Special Advisors. Additionally owing to the time period you have requested case correspondence has been migrated to the Department's central records management system which, owing to the particular search functions, further impacts on the Department's ability to locate, retrieve and extract, within the above mentioned limit, relevant in-scope information.

It should be noted that if you did re-submit a reframed question there is still the possibility that this refined request could also be subject to the application of the section 12 provisions (or in-deed any of the other in-built Freedom of Information Act exemptions). If this is the case then of course we will endeavour to continue to assist you as much as possible in order to bring your request under the appropriate limit.

If you do re-submit a request it will be handled as a new request under the appropriate legislation.

For further information on Section 12 (appropriate limit) of the Freedom of Information Act please visit the independent regulators, the Information Commissioners Office, website:

Section 12

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

I trust that this information is of at least some use to you and I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of information Team

Corporate Operations Group

1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

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Complaints

If you believe this reply is not in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you may ask for an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you request a review you should do so in writing stating the reasons to the following:

Northern Ireland Office
Freedom of Information Team
Stormont House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SH
FOI@NIO.gov.uk

If following an internal review you were to remain dissatisfied you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner and ask him to investigate whether the NIO has complied with the terms of the FOIA. You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

The Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. Further details on the role of the Information Commissioner and the handling of appeals can be found at: www.ico.org.uk

If you wish to discuss this please contact the Freedom of Information Team using the contact details provided at the top of the first page. Please remember to quote your reference in any correspondence.