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Ref: 10/1/1 2016-07

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Martin James Keatings

14 March 2016

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Dear Mr Keatings

Thank you for your email of 12 February requesting the following information:

“Please provide information under freedom of information as to how much the current Trident nuclear system costs to operate & maintain per annum.”

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that we hold some information in scope of your request.

The information in scope of your entire request is not held in a central location and the staff costs involved in complying fully with it would be way in excess of the appropriate cost limit. I therefore, find, that the most appropriate response to your request should have been to apply section 12(1)(exceeding the cost of compliance) of the Act.

That is not saying that the Department does not hold any information about the operating and maintenance costs of the deterrent programme; it's simply that the information held is not a meaningful description of costs that could be deemed to be characterised as a forecast of costs that would fall within the scope of your request. Such a forecast could be compiled based on the recorded cost information held, but this would require more than a simple aggregation. Compiling a forecast of this nature would require complex analysis to ensure that the estimate was based on consistent and logical assumptions (e.g. what is and what is not legitimately included or excluded). This would not be a straightforward task given the uncertainty of such long-range forecasting and the numerous assumptions that would have to be made by subject matter experts about the cost implications of operational, technical, procurement and policy decisions (many of which have still to be made) and how they will impact on the operation of the nuclear deterrent over the next 30 years

The appropriate cost limit for a central government department is set at £600 and this represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days (or 24 man-hours' effort) in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it on the basis of the flat rate of £25 per hour. Several different business units within MOD would need to conduct the relevant searches to check their holdings and perform the permitted activities in order to provide you with the information in scope of each element of your request.

The estimated cost of complying with any element of the request can be taken to be the estimated total cost of complying with all of it. Although the Department holds some information in scope of your request, it would exceed the appropriate cost limit to locate, retrieve and extract the information in scope of your entire request and MOD is, therefore, not obliged to comply. MOD is also not obliged to compile the requested information before refusing a request that it estimates will exceed the appropriate limit.

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, it is the duty of the public authority to provide advice and assistance, so far as it would be reasonable to expect the authority to do so. The 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review updated the overall expected costs of the Successor programme. It has been assessed that MOD can safely manage and maintain the Vanguard boats until the successor submarines are introduced into service in the early 2030s. The marginal costs associated with maintaining the Vanguard class submarines can be contained within the existing running cost of the nuclear deterrent, which is around 6% of the annual defence budget. Please find below links that outline Government plans on the UK's nuclear deterrent.

- *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent, December 2006* (available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/27378/DefenceWhitePaper2006_Cm6994.pdf)
- *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015* (available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf)

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

Nuclear Capabilities Team