



Information Policy & Compliance  
[bbc.co.uk/foi](http://bbc.co.uk/foi)

Mark on behalf of LicenceFree.co.uk

Via email: [request-97270-f9c43150@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-97270-f9c43150@whatdotheyknow.com)

19 January 2012

Dear Mark,

**Request for Information – RF120111564**

Thank you for your request of 17<sup>th</sup> December 2011 under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act') seeking the following information:

*I am aware that the Corporation has used the following wording in some of its TV licensing mass-mailings to innocent citizens: "We want to ensure you have the information you may need before a hearing is set at your local court".*

*Please can you tell me the following:-*

- 1. How many letters that include this wording have been sent, in total.*
- 2. A summary, by month, of the number of these letters sent during 2010 and 2011.*
- 3. The nature and/or name of the specific hearing process that "TVL" refers to in this wording, given that the process clearly differs from standard legal practice in not requiring evidence of the occurrence of an offence.*
- 4. The approval process and sign-off authority for "TVL" letters that include misleading information.*

Please note that "TV Licensing" is a trade mark used by companies contracted by the BBC to administer the collection of television licence fees and enforcement of the television licensing system. The majority of the administration of TV Licensing is contracted to Capita Business Services Ltd (which undertakes the majority of the administration of the TV Licensing system), with the administration of our cash related payment schemes contracted to iQor UK Limited. PayPoint Network Ltd and PayPoint Collections Ltd are contracted to provide over-the-counter services. Marketing and printing services are contracted to Proximity London Ltd as are public relations and advertising services. The latter are subcontracted by Proximity to Fishburn Hedges Boys Williams Ltd, Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO Ltd and PHD Media Ltd. The BBC is a public authority in respect of its television licensing functions and retains overall responsibility.

I shall respond to each of your questions in turn.

**Question 1: *How many letters that include this wording ["We want to ensure you have the information you may need before a hearing is set at your local court"] have been sent, in total.***

A total of 3,162,532 individual letters containing the wording cited in your request have been sent out since 2010.

Each individually addressed letter may have a number of minor differences in wording dependent on the recipient's geographic location.

The letter is sent to unlicensed addresses where we have a valid reason to believe a licence is required. For example, where an expired licence has not been renewed, or a current licence holder has moved out and no other TV Licence has been moved to the address.

**Question 2: *A summary, by month, of the number of these letters sent during 2010 and 2011.***

The letter containing the wording in question mailed for the first time in 2010. In 2010, it mailed in August only, to approximately 57,000 live customers as part of a larger test programme. It then did not mail again until it was rolled out as a live letter in January 2011.

In 2011, it was then mailed to a total of approximately 3 million customers at four points in the year, specifically January, end April / beginning May, end August / beginning September, and December.

The figures breakdown as follows:

**2010**

Aug-10 - 57,000

**2010 total - 57,000**

**2011**

Jan-11 - 209,811

Apr-11 / May-11 - 1,260,668

Aug-11 / Sep-11 - 866,786

Dec-11 - 768,267

**2011 total - 3,105,532**

**Question 3: *The nature and/or name of the specific hearing process that "TVL" refers to in this wording, given that the process clearly differs from standard legal practice in not requiring evidence of the occurrence of an offence.***

We're not able to answer your question above by reference to recorded information because the letter does not refer to a specific hearing process. Rather the letter you received contains general information about what can happen if a person is asked to appear in court, it does not say that court action will be taken. Instead, it says, "If you are asked to appear in court...". The letter also explains that enquiries will be stopped if TV Licensing is told that a licence is not needed or if a licence is bought. TV Licensing has a policy in place to minimise contact with those who do not require a licence, once they have been notified this is the case.

**Question 4: *The approval process and sign-off authority for "TVL" letters that include misleading information.***

The BBC does not agree that any approved letter contains misleading information.

Please find attached a matrix (Disclosure Document 1) which shows down the left hand side each stage of the BBC approvals process for TVL letters and along the top who needs to approve at each stage of the process.

I have also attached two further documents (Disclosure Documents 2 & 3) containing information which I consider relevant to this question, specifically flowcharts identifying the approvals process at each stage of the campaign development process. These two documents are very similar and show the same stages of the process but reflect the slight differences in the processes followed dependent on the way the data for the campaign is selected.

**Appeal Rights**

If you are not satisfied that the BBC has complied with the Act in responding to your request you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager or legal adviser. Please contact us at the address above, explaining what you would like us to review under the Act and including your reference number. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545 700 or see <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

Kind regards

Louise Wright  
Senior Policy Advisor, Licence Fee Unit