Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

Staff guidance

Any written request for official or business information received by the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) should, theoretically, be treated as a FOI request. However, it is not intended that the Freedom of Information Act should put unnecessary bureaucratic procedures in the way of disclosing requested information. IPS already handles a great many information requests every year as part of its normal business, and the majority of these are already being answered efficiently and to the satisfaction of the correspondent. FOI does not change the way in which these simple requests for information are handled within the operational work area.

Operational staff are not required to answer FOI requests. However, all staff are expected to know how to recognise a potential or actual FOI request and know to refer it to the Customer Services Manager or Information Adviser on the day of receipt. An FOI request could form part of a letter of complaint or other correspondence connected with a passport application.

Anything done as normal working business such as answering standard passport queries, requests for IPS publications or any other issue which operational staff have always responded to as a matter of course are not dealt with as FOI. These should continue to be dealt with as business as usual (BAU).

FOI requests are those that ask for more complex or potentially sensitive requests for information. They will include requests where the information is not already in the public domain (e.g. information not already published by IPS or on the IPS web site). or where there is uncertainty as to whether IPS can or should release the information.

FOI requests have to be in writing. This includes email. Requesters do not have to say why they want the information or prove who they are. The requester does not have to be British or resident in the UK.

Although the Act stipulates that requests must be in written format, the Act also obliges public authorities to assist even those who propose to make a request but have not yet done so. This consequently means that an oral request for information cannot be ignored; staff should advise the applicant of the need to make their application in writing.

All IPS FOI requests are dealt with by the Head Quarters FOI Team. The team deals with all requests for information from IPS which go beyond the day-to-day correspondence that regional offices normally deal with.
Customers asking about accessing information under FOI should be advised to email their request to hqenquiries@ips.gsi.gov.uk. There is a form available on the web site but callers do not have to use it.

Alternatively, they can write to:

The Freedom of Information Team,
Identity and Passport Service,
4th Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street,
London,
SW1P 4DF.

Where a request or a potential FOI request has already been received in the office, staff should refer it immediately to their Customer Services Manager or Information Adviser who will decide whether it should be dealt with as FOI or BAU.