

Safe roads, reliable journeys, informed travellers

Our ref: 702,468

Your ref:

Mr [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Business Support Officer
4th Floor
Lateral
8 City Walk
Leeds LS11 9AT

23 January 2014

Dear Mr [REDACTED]

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REGARDING THE CLOSURE OF BUCKINGHAM PALACE ROAD.

Thank you for your e-mail Freedom of Information request regarding the closure of Buckingham and travel expenses. The answers to your request are below.

Q1 How many employees were employed at the Buckingham Palace Road office prior to its closure in March 2013?

Our Buckingham Palace Road (BPR) office closed on the 31/03/2013. On this date there were 37 permanent employees employed at this office.

At the time of the announcement of the office closure there were 60 permanent employees employed at BPR, some of which had secured other employment or moved location on or before the 31/03/2013.

Q2 Following the closure of this office how many employees were retained?

All 37 of the 37 permanent employees at BPR as of the 31/03/2013 were retained. Of the total 60 employees affected by the closure, 42 were retained.

Q3 Out of the employees retained how many were allowed the working status of "flexible/home-worker"?

It is not possible to provide a response to your question without disclosing information relating to another individual who can or could be identified from that information.

Q4 How many employees who were retained from the Buckingham Palace Road office changed their preference exercise choice after the deadline date imposed by the Agency?

There were a small number of employees that changed their first preference exercise choice after the exercise closed. However, given the number of employees involved it is not possible to provide a response to your question without disclosing information relating to another individual who can or could be identified from that information.

Q5 How many claims for mileage expenses by an employee of the Agency to travel to another office has been rejected in the last 5 years?

We cannot answer this as we do not specifically capture data as to why a claim is rejected. Claims do periodically get rejected but any claim can include a range of expense lines, we do not have the means to identify if the rejection reason was specifically mileage related.

Q6 Are employees allowed to claim different rates of mileage and if so what are these rates?

The Agency allows employees to claim mileage at two different rates provided specific conditions which apply to claiming mileage are met. The Agency policy on claiming mileage is laid out in the attached PDF document titled "Travelling expenses". An excerpt below is provided for ease of reference explaining the two rates of mileage – standard and higher and the criteria applicable to each rate.

In order to consider a claim for mileage allowance there are a number of conditions which need to be met including:

- Reimbursement can only be considered where travel costs relate to "official business." The Agency regards an employee as travelling on official business whenever such travel has been approved by their line-manager as a necessary part of their duties. It includes travelling to another Agency office, to an Agency job interview, and training courses.
- A claim can only be made if additional expenses have been incurred as part of these official duties.
- The Agency will only reimburse the cost of journeys using the most economical route and most reasonable mode of transport. The Agency will not reimburse expenses incurred unnecessarily or unreasonably.

It should be noted that all employees are responsible for the cost of travel where they are travelling between their home and permanent working location although there are a number of circumstances in which the Agency will repay, on a concessionary basis, all or some of those costs. These provisions apply in the following situations:

- making additional journeys to normal place of work outside of normal working hours. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) states that these journeys are taxable and subject to National Insurance Contributions. These journeys must be claimed through the Shared Service Centre Portal and paid via payroll
- travelling to normal place of work under the emergency arrangements when no public transport is available
- travelling to normal place of work by car, instead of public transport, because they have arranged to work beyond the time of the last reasonable public transport services

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- the full cost of travelling home from a detached duty station at weekends
- when they incur additional travelling costs on permanent and compulsory transfer
- travelling as a result of a permanent transfer after management has given you consent to move home at public expense

If the conditions for claiming mileage allowance have been satisfied there are two rates of mileage allowance available. Employees are entitled to the higher rate of motor mileage allowance in the following circumstances:

- the journey falls within the definition of 'official travel'
- the 'official journey' satisfies the criteria for prior authority
- the line-manager has given prior authority
- a private vehicle has been used which satisfies the ownership conditions*
- the general motor insurance regulations have been fulfilled
- the specific insurance requirements have been fulfilled
- no viable, cheaper alternative method of travel was available e.g. self-drive hire car or public transport

Alternatively the standard transport rate of mileage allowance will apply. This is lower than the higher rate because it reflects that either:

- the ownership conditions* are not satisfied
- a private motor vehicle has been used for a journey which the Agency does not recognise as 'official travel' by private motor vehicle
- use of a vehicle for a journey which does not qualify for the higher rate of mileage allowance

Standard Rate of motor mileage allowance

All engine sizes 25p per mile

Higher Rate of motor mileage allowance

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| First 10,000 miles | 45p per mile |
| Over 10,000 miles | 25p per mile |

** The ownership conditions are outlined at in the PDF document "Travelling Expenses" paragraph 3.22 et seq*

Q7 In the last five years how many employees of the Agency have claimed the higher rate of mileage?

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Safe roads, reliable journeys, informed travellers The iExpenses system that we have in place that can readily supply information on travel and subsistence claims by staff has only been in existence since 2010/11. Based on data that is readily available, 1,428 employees made iExpenses travel and subsistence claims for higher rate mileage between 2010/11 - 2013/14.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the legislation, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. We may therefore be publishing the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context, via our website: <http://www.highways.gov.uk/>

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request you may ask for an internal review. Our internal review process is available at <http://www.highways.gov.uk/foiresponses/FOIresponses/8024.aspx>.

If you require a print copy, please phone the Highways Agency Information Line on 0300 123 5000; or e-mail ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk . You should contact me if you wish to complain.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely


Finance and Business Support Correspondence

Email: 