

26 July 2010

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

I am writing in response to your e-mail of 28 June 2010 requesting information about Department for Communities and Local Government's estates efficiency programme. Your request was received by Communities and Local Government on 28 June 2010.

Your request has been considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

You asked for information concerning CLG's central London estate reduction programme. You are correct that CLG has reduced its property footprint from four buildings to one - this has been done in two phases. The first was delivered by the Open Space Works project and saw CLG consolidate into Eland House and Ashdown House Victoria by February 2008, releasing its space in Allington Towers and Stockley House. The SpaceFlex project delivered the second phase and saw CLG contract into Eland House, returning Ashdown House Victoria to the landlord at the beginning of October 2009.

The reductions in the estate allowed savings in the department's running costs of £3.5M per year and £4.5M per year respectively. Aggregated these equate to 18% of CLG's property and estates budget when compared to the costs of the 4-building estate. Notwithstanding, the costs of the refurbishment of the atrium at Eland House to which you refer was £287,850 including VAT. The cost of the glass meeting pods as an element of this refurbishment was £83,506 including VAT. The cost of the red sofas placed at various points in the building was £134,503 including VAT. The total cost of the furniture for SpaceFlex was £2,783, 433 including VAT.

The approvals process for both projects was largely dealt with by the CLG Management Board of senior officials. Direct Ministerial approval was given to the deal that secured the return of the lease on Ashdown House Victoria to the landlord. This was a complex deal directly affecting CLG, DEFRA and DfT, brokered jointly by the CLG estates team and OGC, and ultimately requiring the approval of Treasury Ministers. The Treasury Minister who approved the overall deal on the move out of Ashdown House and the spending on SpaceFlex was the then Chief Secretary,

Yvette Cooper, in a letter of 2 June 2008 to the then Secretary of State, Hazel Blears.

Communities and Local Government as an organisation aims to be as helpful as possible in the way it deals with requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If, however, you are not satisfied with the way in which your request has been handled or the outcome, you may request an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. Information about the Department's review procedures and how to apply for an internal review of your case is contained on the Department's website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1384250.pdf>. This also explains your right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision in the event that you remain dissatisfied following the Department's review.

Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted this Department's Internal Review procedure. The Information Commissioner's address and contact details are set out in the above leaflet.