

29 August 2012

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0776-12

Thank you for your email of 21 July requesting information on the following:

1. What is the budgeted cost (including security, travel and life support) to the FCO of the running of the UK diplomatic presence in Afghanistan (including the Helmand PRT) for the financial year 2011-2012, and;
2. How much in total has the FCO spent on Afghanistan since 2001, including subventions to Conflict Pool, counternarcotics (eg ADIDU) and the funding of diplomatic and other personnel both in London and Afghanistan.

The UK Government wants Afghanistan to become a stable and secure state that is able to suppress terrorism and violent extremism itself. The reason our troops and civilians are working with the Government of Afghanistan is simple – to protect our own national security by helping Afghans take control of theirs. The FCO's diplomatic presence is an essential element of this work.

The British Embassy in Kabul represents the British Government in its relations with the Afghanistan Government and is responsible for presenting and promoting the UK Government's policy in Afghanistan. The Embassy also provides consular assistance and advice to British nationals. The Embassy comprises of approximately 240 staff. Around a third of these are locally engaged Afghans.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is a UK-led, multinational effort working with ISAF's Regional Command South West, helping the Afghan government deliver governance and improved development across Helmand Province. The PRT is funded by the UK, USA, Danish and Estonian Governments and comprises of some 200 staff based in Lashkar Gah and district centres across Helmand. Around 60% of staff are civilian, 20% are military and police and 20% Afghan.

The British Embassy in Kabul and the PRT in Helmand also provide a safe and secure platform for our partners across government to live and work from. Their costs associated with being based in our Embassy and the PRT are recovered from our Government partners on a monthly basis.

With regard to your first request, I have reviewed our financial data for the financial year 2011-2012 and can confirm that the FCO spent a total of £29,739,716 on its presence in both Kabul and the Helmand PRT. This covers the costs associated with security, life support, travel and staff salaries and allowances. In addition to this amount, our partners across government paid £6,420,894 for services provided.

With regard to your second request, Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. For central Government the appropriate limit is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 3 ½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the

information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it. Your request as presently formulated covers a considerable period of time and I estimate that it will take more than 3 ½ days to locate, retrieve, and extract the relevant information. In these circumstances we are not obliged to comply with your request. You may therefore wish to refine your request to narrow its scope to bring it within the appropriate limit.