

Thank you for your e-mail of 16 July 2010 in which you asked to be provided with information for Communities and Local Government about i) hospitality received by ministers; ii) hospitality received by senior civil servants; iii) ministers' meetings with external organisations; and iv) ministers' travel overseas.

For each of these categories of information you asked to be told i) the Department's intended date of publication; ii) the URL for where the Department intends to publish the information; and iii) the file format in which the Department intends to publish the information.

You specified the period you were asking about in your request as "Q1" and "Q2" 2010. We have interpreted this to be for the periods January to March and April to June 2010.

In light of your previous request in March of this year for "all hospitality and expenses received by senior civil servants at director general level and above", we have interpreted your present request for information about senior civil servants' hospitality in the same way.

Your request has been considered under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000.

I can confirm that the Department holds the information for the categories you have asked about in your request.

From the start of the present Government the *Ministerial Code* commits departments to publish, at least quarterly, details of:

- hospitality received by ministers in a ministerial capacity;
- ministers' external meetings; and
- all travel overseas by ministers.

Under the previous administration there was a commitment to publish:

- quarterly information on ministers' hospitality over £140;
- quarterly information on ministers' meetings with outside interest groups; and
- an annual list of ministers' overseas travel over £500.

Departments have been expected to publish information about hospitality received by senior civil servants (director generals and above) on a quarterly basis since April 2009.

In respect of the specific information you have asked for:

Date of publication

The Department has published the information about senior civil servants' hospitality for Q1, which is therefore exempt, under section 21 of the FOI Act,

from separate disclosure in response to a request for the information as it is readily accessible. The information can be found on the Department's web-site at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/about/howwework/corporatereports/businessexpenses/>

The information about senior civil servants' hospitality for Q2, and former ministers' hospitality over £140 and meetings with outside interest groups, is still being collated and will be published on the Department's web-site as soon as it is practical to do so.

The information about former ministers' overseas travel over £500 will be included in the annual Cabinet Office publication for 2009-10. The information is being collated and will be published as soon as it is practical to do so.

The information about current ministers' hospitality, meetings with external organisations and travel overseas, for which the first period to be covered will be 13 May to 31 July 2010, is also being collated and will be published as soon as it is practical to do so.

All the information that is intended for future publication is exempt, under section 22 of the FOI Act, from disclosure in response to a request for the information.

Section 22 of the FOI Act is a qualified exemption which means that information falling within the exemption may only be withheld where the public interest in disclosure is outweighed by the public interest in maintaining the exemption.

The Department recognises the general principle of openness enshrined in the FOI Act and that provision of information held by public authorities to the public helps, as a general principle, increase accountability and transparency and thus public trust and confidence. The Government has recognised how the public disclosure of the information you have asked for helps meet those aims.

However, there is a definite intention to publish the information you have asked for. We take the view that there is little public interest served by disclosing the information on request ahead of that planned publication.

On balance therefore we have concluded that the exemption at section 22(1) should be maintained in this case and the information should be withheld until the time that it is published.

URL of publication

Previously the categories of information that you have asked about have been published on the Department's web-site at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/about/howwework/corporatereports/>

However, the Department's website is presently undergoing some reorganisation and so it is possible that the information in future, when published, may be in a different location on the web-site. We would be happy to update you as to this location, once it has been confirmed.

Format of publication

The Department publishes text data in PDF format and quantitative data in XLS or CSV format on its web-site and aims to adhere to the principles on publishing data in a re-usable format