



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.defra.gov.uk

Your ref: 516/13
Our ref: RFI 6042
Date: 27 November 2013

Dear

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Forms of data relating to invoices from Futerra Sustainability Communications and similar

Thank you for your request for information about invoices from Futerra Sustainability Communications and similar, which we received on 12 October 2013. I apologise for the delay in responding. We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You asked:

What should someone who requests information know about the data held on Futerra's services? More specifically...

- their invoices are on file. Is there a cluster of documents linked to each invoice to say what projects they worked on, and how these projects progressed? Or any other data linked to each invoice?
- is there a series of meeting minutes, reports, or other feedback that lists their services, that is not closely linked to each invoice and best requested in another way

In response:

Invoices received by the Department normally contain a very brief summary of the work the invoice relates to. It is possible that there will be other documentation attached to an invoice, but it would be unusual as invoices are normally sent directly to our Accounts Payable section, which don't have any use for such additional information. They will arrange the payment provided the costs have been approved by the business area receiving the service.



Defra receives thousands of invoices per year. Tracking down individual invoices going back several years would be time-consuming and would incur a significant cost in terms of staff time. This cost would be multiplied should each invoice need to be further interrogated to understand the project's progression and find further associated documents. These documents, such as meeting minutes and reports, are not stored in a cluster and would sit with the specific team that requested the work.

Using the Freedom of Information Act is the best way to request information from public bodies. However, as I set out in my letter of 9 September 2013, Section 12(1) of the FOIA allows us to refuse a request for information if we estimate that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit, which currently stands at £600. This helps to ensure that staff costs and time are not diverted from delivering the department's strategic aims. For this reason, drilling deeply into the department's historic records is not normally viable.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, and in keeping with the government's Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on www.gov.uk together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you.

I also attach Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours

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Annex A

Copyright

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Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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