



# Ministry of Defence

FOI 2015/01926

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8 May 2015

Thank you for your email dated 3 March 2015 requesting the following information:

- 1) *Full job descriptions and person specifications for all members of staff currently working in the Secretary of States Private Office;*
- 2) *Number of personnel in each position within the Secretary of States Private Office;*
- 3) *Secretary of States Private Office Budget for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm some information is held in the scope of your request.

Part 1 of your request is exempt under Section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act – Formulation of Government Policy. Section 35(1)(d) protects information relating to the administration of a ministerial private office. The information sought in this case engages this exemption, relating as it does to *'full job descriptions'* and *'person specifications'* for all members of staff currently working in the Secretary of State's Private Office'. Section 35(1)(d) is a qualified exemption and therefore subject to a public interest test.

I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours our release of this material. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in, and engagement with, the government. I recognise that there is a public interest in understanding how ministerial private offices operate; however this information on its own will not add anything to the sum of public knowledge in terms of the way in which the offices are run, or in respect of the administrative support provided to Ministers.

By contrast to this minimal public interest in disclosure, we are of the view that disclosure would prejudice the effective running of ministerial private offices. The generic public interest in transparency must be weighed against a stronger public interest that ministerial private offices must be free to organise themselves in the most efficient and effective to facilitate ministerial business. Ministers must be able to rely on their private offices, and be confident that their staff members remain independent, and do not allow extraneous considerations, such as possible public perception of the various roles within their private office, to affect their judgement in administering the office.

There is a strong interest in ensuring that there is sufficient protected space around Ministers to ensure good decision making is supported. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I consider that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.

In answer to Part 2 of your request, there are currently 9 individuals working in the Secretary of State's Private Office. The breakdown is shown in the table below:

Post Title	Number
Chief of Staff/Principal Private Secretary	1
Private Secretary	1
Deputy Private Secretary	1
Military Assistant	1
Assistant Private Secretary	2
Diary Secretary	1
Administrative Support	1
Special Advisers	0 <sup>1</sup>
Private Secretary to Special Advisers	1

Note 1: At the time of writing, during the election period, there are no Special Advisers working in the private office. Typically there are two.

In answer to Part 3 of your request, the Secretary of State's Private Office does not have its own annual budget but we have provided the staff costs for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 as shown in the table below:

Year	Total
2011-2012	£689,840
2012-2013	£707,369
2013-2014	£783,686

Note: These are the pay costs for the staff shown and exclude the costs of the Special Advisers. These costs do not include overtime or allowances.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

Top Office Group Manager