



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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

[REDACTED]

Our ref: RFI 7239
Date: 3 March 2015

Dear [REDACTED]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: SICKNESS ABSENCE

Thank you for your request for information, which we received on 3 February 2015, about sickness absence in Defra. As you know, we have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You asked for the following:

- Over the course of 2014, how many sick days employees of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs took.
- The number of employees of the department on the last working day of 2014.
- The dates of all sick days taken
- Total cost of sickness absence for the department over the year
- Who took the sick days. If the identity cannot be given, I would like to know how many times each person took a sick day.
- The reasons given for sickness

Following careful consideration, we have decided not to disclose some of this information.

The information that can be disclosed is set out below.

- 5,423 working days were lost due to sickness in Defra during 2014.
- Defra employed 2,127 staff on 31 December 2014.
- The dates of the sickness absences are provided in a separate document.
- The estimated cost of the sickness absences in 2014 was £942,218. This is based on the number of absences taken in each Civil Service grade equivalent multiplied by the average salary for that grade.
- The number of sickness days taken by each person is provided in a separate document.

The information requested on who took the sick days is being withheld as it falls under the exemption in section 40(2) of the FOIA, which relates to personal data relating to persons



other than the requester. I confirm that Defra does hold the information that you have requested, but we have decided that the information should be withheld. Section 40(2) of the FOIA provides that personal data relating to other persons is exempt information if disclosure would breach the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA).

We consider that disclosure of this information is likely to breach the first data protection principle in Schedule 1 to the DPA, which relates to the fair and lawful processing of personal data, as disclosure would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data because details of sickness absence contain sensitive personal data and the staff involved would not reasonably expect Defra to publish this information. Therefore, we have concluded that this information is exempt from disclosure under section 40(2) read in conjunction with section 40(3)(a)(i) of the FOIA.

The reasons given for sickness absence are not held centrally. Employees either enter their reason for sickness absence on a paper self-certification form or provide a doctor's or hospital's certificate. 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. On the basis of our estimates, we consider that the cost of providing the reasons given by employees for their sickness absence would exceed this limit and, as such, we are refusing this part of your request.

In such cases we usually ask requesters to consider narrowing down their request to bring it below the cost limit. However, as the information is not held centrally there does not appear to be a way that this could be done. However, if you are able to modify your request, we will handle it as a new request and so the 20-working-day deadline for responding to requests would then commence from the date that we receive the modified request.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA and 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 the address below.

Yours sincerely,


Information Rights Team
InformationRequests@defra.gsi.gov.uk

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 within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to [REDACTED] 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 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