



Briefing Paper 02/11

Freedom of Information Act

What is the Freedom of Information Act?

The FOI gives you the right to ask any public body for all the information they have on any subject you choose. Unless there's a good reason, the organization must provide the information within 20 working days. You can also ask for all the personal information they hold on you.

Who can make FOI Requests

Everyone can make a request for information – there are no restrictions on your age, nationality, or where you live.

What are the restrictions?

You can ask for any information at all - but some information might be withheld to protect various interests which are allowed for by the Act. If this is case, the public authority must tell you why they have withheld information.

Can I ask anyone for information?

The Act applies to public bodies including Government departments and local assemblies, Local authorities and councils, Health trusts, hospitals and doctors' surgeries, Schools, colleges and universities, Publicly funded museum, The police, Non-departmental public bodies, committees and advisory bodies

How do I make a request for information?

Write to (or email) the public body and include your name, an address where you can be contacted, a description of the information that you want.

To help the public body find the information, give as much detail as possible.

For example, say 'minutes of the meeting where the decision to do X was made', rather than everything you have about X'.

An example

Dear Sir or Madam,

The TSA recently concluded an inquiry into the Novas Scarman Group, and has published on its web site a statement regarding its findings.

TSA has decided that it will not publish the report produced by BDO Stoy Hayward.

Under the Freedom of Information Act I wish to request a copy of the full report.

I wish to request also any notes or minutes taken at the meeting where it was decided not to publish the report.

I wish also to request notes or minutes taken at the meeting where the TSA reached its judgment.

I wish also to request notes or minutes taken when TSA met with BDO to discuss the report.

Finally I wish to ask the cost of conducting the inquiry, specifically how much was BDO paid for its work

Yours faithfully,

xxxx

What does it cost?

Most requests are free. You might be asked to pay a small amount for photocopies or postage.

If the public authority thinks that it will cost them more than £450 (or £600 for central government) to find the information and prepare it for release, then they can turn down your request. They might ask you to narrow down your request by being more specific in the information you're looking for.

Exemptions

- Cost
- Commercially sensitive information
- Asking for information about a person who can be identified, which is covered by the Data Protection Act
- Information provided in confidence
- Asking for information that may prejudice effective conduct of public affairs
- Asking for information that is scheduled for publication 'at some point' in the future

Helpful tips?

www.whatdotheyknow.com

www.direct.gov.uk

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/transparency

You can make your request privately, or publicly using the 'What do they know' website.

Information developed by



Adapted by

**MANCHESTER
BMENETWORK**

Manchester Equality Hub is a new Third Sector development in Manchester, which aims to support all sectors to reduce inequality across Manchester. Manchester Equality Hub is currently being hosted by the Manchester BME Network