



The *Consumer Focus*
Freedom of Information Policy

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Section 1 : Introduction

1.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public, the media and organisations the right to request information from Consumer Focus.

1.2 The information requested can cover any aspect of Consumer Focus's activity and also any information from a third party that Consumer Focus holds. Consumer Focus is expected to respond to requests for information within 20 working days.

1.3 This policy details how Consumer Focus will comply with the Act, and forms a critical part of Consumer Focus's wider commitment to effective Data Protection, Environmental Information, Publication, Records and Knowledge Management.

Section 2 : Principles

Commitment

2.1 In keeping with Consumer Focus' Vision and Values, which commits the organisation to working for consumers' interests, we aim to be open and accountable to the public and to develop and support staff. Consumer Focus will therefore embrace the ethos of the Act and will aim to meet every request we receive as fully as possible.

Responsibility

2.2 The Secretariat develops the policy on behalf of the Board and the Director of Finance and Operations is charged with delivery. Responsibility is shared by all staff.

Section 3 : Delivery

Requests relating to Staff

Personal Information

3.1 Requests for personal information relating to named members of staff will be treated as subject access requests and subject to the Data Protection Act. The Freedom of Information law will be applied to requests related to members of staff's professional status unless established that disclosure of information would be damaging to the individual.

Travel and Subsistence

3.2 Details of all travel and subsistence claims will be made available upon request for all members of staff.

Gifts and Hospitality

3.3 Details of all gifts and hospitality will be readily available on the Consumer Focus website in the gifts and hospitality register.

Salaries and pay awards

3.4 Salaries and remunerations for senior managers, lay committee members and council members will be made available on request by salary band. Salaries and remunerations will be available but will not be identified to individual staff.

Appraisals and Staff Development

3.5 No information on individual staff performance and individual staff development will be made available. Generic information about training provided will be treated as a Freedom of Information request.

Internal Requests for Information

3.6 When requests are made by our own staff Consumer Focus will provide, through the internal intranet and other appropriate media, all information unless there is an identified business need not to do so. Requests from staff for information not readily available through these methods will be treated as Freedom of Information requests. Subject Access requests for information held about individuals will be processed according to Data Protection Act Policy. Simple requests for information to help or to facilitate the day to day

work will not be treated as Freedom of Information requests.

Consumer Complaint Data

3.7 Consumer Focus will provide details of complaints received through its Extra Help Unit for vulnerable consumers as a ratio to certain factors in the marketplace such as the number of complaints in relation to transfer activity. This information will be placed on the website.

Briefings and Press Releases

3.8 We will make available all press releases and public briefings. Internal briefings and evidence used to compile press releases and public briefings will be treated as Freedom of Information requests.

Financial Information

3.9 Consumer Focus will proactively publish its accounts in the publication scheme and on the organisation's website. Requests for other financial information will be treated as a Freedom of Information request.

Freedom of Information requests and Information requests

3.10 Consumer Focus receives thousands of requests for information each week. Our Freedom of Information process will operate for all requests outside of our normal daily business.

Complaints

3.11 Anyone not satisfied with the response to their request may seek a review by writing to Consumer Focus. Anyone who remains unsatisfied with the outcome of a review may apply to the Information Commissioner, who enforces and oversees the Act.

Information released details

3.12 Details of all information released will be made available through the website and other media in terms of 'information released title' and 'date released'.

Other procedural issues

Consumer Focus Contracts

3.13 Consumer Focus will refuse to include contractual terms which purport to restrict the disclosure of information held by us and relating to the contract beyond the restrictions permitted by the act.

Risk Assessment and Release of Information

3.14 Prior to the release of information a risk assessment and an impact analysis will be carried out. Anyone impacted by the release of the information will be notified twenty four hours in advance.

Confidentiality and Third Parties

3.15 In some cases the disclosure of information resulting from a Freedom of Information request may affect a third party. Where information is to be released the third party will be notified twenty four hours in advance.

"In Confidence" information

3.16 Consumer Focus will not agree to hold information "in confidence" unless doing so could be justified to the Information Commissioner.

Security

3.17 Requests for Information that may compromise the security of staff, offices or technical systems will be refused.