



## Definition document for Northern Ireland government departments

This guidance gives examples of the kinds of information that we would expect Northern Ireland government departments to provide in order to meet their commitments under the model publication scheme. We would expect departments to make the information in this definition document available unless:

- they do not hold the information;
- the information is exempt under one of the FOI exemptions or Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) exceptions, or its release is prohibited under another statute;
- the information is archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible; or,
- it would be impractical or resource-intensive to prepare the material for routine release.

This information should also be provided for any executive agencies or other bodies within the department. References to “departments” in this guidance include these bodies. For example, we would expect an executive agency to publish information about its management board and accounts in the same way as the principal department.

The government department retains legal responsibility for ensuring that this information is made available in accordance with the publication scheme, even if practical responsibility for implementing it is delegated to the other body.

Please note that the guidance is not meant to give a definitive list. The legal commitment is to the model publication scheme, and authorities should look to provide as much information as possible on a routine basis.

<b>Who we are and what we do</b>
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Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts.
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We would expect information in this class to be current information only.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Roles and responsibilities</b></li></ul>
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Departments should be providing outline and detailed information about their roles and responsibilities, and the roles and responsibilities of people working in them at senior level.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Organisational structure</b></li></ul>
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An explanation of the internal structures of the department: referring to their functions; indicating the relationship of different departmental sections with other departments, internal and external; and how the structure relates to the roles and responsibilities.

- **Information about legislation relevant to the department's functions**

An explanation of the legislative basis of the department's activities. An explanation of any legislation for which the department is the lead government department.

- **Lists of and information about organisations the department is responsible for, those it works in partnership with and those it sponsors**

As most of these bodies will be responsible for their own affairs, we expect this information needs only to be enough to identify the relationship between these bodies and the department.

- **Department Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Chief Executives, management board members and senior executives**

Identification of, responsibilities of and biographical details of Ministers, senior civil servants in the department and those making strategic and operational decisions about the provision of the department's services. Any biographical details that are not work related should be published only with consent.

- **Locations of, and contact details for, the authority**

This should cover the department at all levels, from the central body to offices open to the public for the conducting the department's business. Where possible, give named contacts.

### **What we spend and how we spend it**

Financial information about projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit.

The minimum we would expect is that financial information for the current and previous two financial years should be available.

If money is allocated to specific cost centres in a department and this information helps to explain how public money is spent, departments should consider publishing it.

- **Financial statements, budgets and variance reports**

Financial information in enough detail to allow the public to see where money is being spent, where a department is or has been planning to spend it, and the difference between the two. Financial information should be published at least

annually and, where practical, we would also expect half yearly or quarterly financial reports to be provided. Revenue budgets and budgets for capital expenditure should be included.

- **Capital programme**

Information should be made available on major plans for capital expenditure including any private finance initiative and public-private partnership contracts.

- **Spending reviews**
- **Financial audit reports**
- **Staff and board members' allowances and expenses**

Details of the allowances and expenses that can be claimed or incurred. It should include the total of the allowances and expenses paid to individual senior staff and management board members by reference to categories. These categories should be produced in line with the department's policies, practices and procedures and will be under headings like travel, subsistence and accommodation.

- **Ministerial expenditure**

The total of the allowances and expenses paid to or incurred by department Ministers by reference to categories. These categories should be produced in line with government guidelines and will be under headings like travel, subsistence and accommodation.

- **Pay and grading structures**

This may be provided as part of the organisational structure and should indicate, for most posts, levels of pay rather than individual salaries.

- **Procurement procedures**

Details of procedures for the acquiring goods and services. Contracts available for public tender.

- **Lists of contracts awarded and their value**

We would normally expect the department to publish details only of contracts that are large enough to have gone through formal tendering.

- **Financial statements for projects and events**

If there are identifiable projects, we would expect the publication scheme to cover at least the financial reports that indicate actual expenditure against original project budgets. The larger the project, the greater the detail that should be available. Similarly, where organised events are publicised, their cost should be available through the scheme.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Internal financial regulations</b></li></ul>
<b>What are our priorities and how are we doing</b> Strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews.
<p>We would expect information in this class to be available at least for the current and previous three years.</p> <p>Below is a list of the type of information that we would expect departments to have readily available for publication. Any other reports or recorded information showing the department's planned or actual performance should normally be included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Strategic plans</b></li><li>• <b>Annual business plan</b></li><li>• <b>Annual report</b></li><li>• <b>Internal and external performance reviews</b></li><li>• <b>Inspection reports</b></li><li>• <b>Impact assessments</b></li><li>• <b>Service standards</b></li><li>• <b>Statistics produced in accordance with departmental requirements</b></li><li>• <b>Public service agreements</b></li></ul>
<b>How we make decisions</b> Decision making processes and records of decisions.
<p>We would expect information in this class to be available at least for the current and previous three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Major policy proposals and decisions</b></li></ul> <p>Information that can be made available to the public without damaging relations with other governments or the development of government policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Background information for major policy proposals and decisions</b></li></ul> <p>This will include facts, and analyses of facts, relevant and important to framing major policy proposals and decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Public consultations</b></li></ul> <p>Details of consultation exercises with access to the consultation papers or information about where the papers can be obtained. The results of and outcomes of consultation exercises.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Minutes of senior-level meetings</b></li></ul>

We would expect management board minutes and the minutes of similar meetings where decisions are made about providing services to be readily available. This excludes information that is properly regarded as private to the meeting.

- **Reports and papers provided for consideration at senior-level meetings**

Information presented to those at meetings making executive decisions. This excludes information that is properly regarded as private to the meeting.

- **Internal communications guidance, criteria used for decision making, internal instructions, manuals and guidelines**

If access to internal instructions, manuals and guidelines for dealing with the business of the department would help the public understand how decisions are made, these should be readily available. We would not expect information that might damage the department's operations to be revealed.

#### **Our policies and procedures**

Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering services and responsibilities.

We would expect information in this class to be current only.

- **Policies and procedures for conducting departmental business**
- **Policies and procedures for delivering our services**
- **Policies and procedures for the recruiting and employing staff**

Codes of practice, memoranda of understanding and similar information should be included. A number of policies, for example equality and diversity, and health and safety, will cover both the provision of services and the employment of staff. If vacancies are advertised as part of recruitment policies, details of current vacancies will be readily available. It will include the equality scheme/statement produced in accordance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and policies and procedures for dealing with information requests.

- **Customer service**

Standards for providing services to the department's customers, including the complaint procedure. Complaints procedures will include those covering requests for information and operating the publication scheme.

- **Records management and personal data policies**

This will include information security policies, records retention, destruction and archive policies, and data protection (including data sharing) policies.

- **Charging regimes and policies**

Details of any statutory charging regimes should be provided. Charging policies should include charges made for information routinely published. They should clearly state what costs are to be recovered, the basis on which they are made, and how they are calculated.

### **Lists and registers**

We would expect this to be information in currently maintained lists and registers only.

- **Public registers and registers held as public records**

If a department is required to maintain any register and make the information in it available for public inspection, the existing provisions covering access will usually be adequate. However, we expect authorities to publicise which public registers they hold, and how the information in them is to be made available to the public. Where registers contain personal information, departments must ensure that they consider the data protection principles.

- **Asset registers and information asset register**

We would not expect departments to publish all details from all asset registers. We would expect some information from capital asset registers to be available. If a department has prepared an information asset register for the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005, it should publish the contents.

- **Disclosure logs**

If a department produces a disclosure log indicating the information provided in response to requests, it should be readily available. Disclosure logs are recommended as good practice.

- **Register of gifts and hospitality provided to Ministers and senior personnel**
- **Any register of interests kept in the department**
- **Other lists required by law**

### **The services we offer**

Information about the services the department provides including leaflets, guidance and newsletters.

Generally this is an extension of part of the first class of information. While the first class provides information on departmental roles and responsibilities, this class includes details of the services the department provides, internationally,

nationally and locally as a result of them. It will benefit the public to have ready access, for example, to everything from information about the services the department provides for the government, to the information readily available to individuals at a public counter. The starting point would normally be a list or lists of the services the department is responsible for, linked to details of these services.

- **Regulatory responsibilities**
- **Services for public authorities**
- **Services for industry**
- **Services for other organisations**
- **Services for members of the public**
- **Services for which the department is entitled to recover a fee, together with those fees**
- **Government department circulars**
- **Leaflets, booklets and newsletters**
- **Advice and guidance**
- **Media releases**