



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Freedom of Information Act

Practical Guidance: Redacting and extracting information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) provide rights of public access to information held by public authorities. This is part of a series of guidance notes produced to help public authorities understand their obligations and to promote good practice.

Overview

This guidance will explain:

- what we mean by redaction and extraction;
- what authorities can legitimately take into account when estimating the costs of compliance; and
- what costs can be legitimately included in a fees notice.

What is meant by redaction and extraction?

Extracting information from documents, of any type, and redacting exempt material are different. These are separate tasks that would be carried out once the requested information or the document containing the requested information has been located and retrieved.

Redaction

In the context of FOIA, redaction is the process of editing the requested information to remove exempt material. It is the removal of exempt information from that which can be disclosed by blocking out or otherwise deleting words, names, phrases, sentences, paragraphs or sections of a document before release.

Extraction

In the context of FOIA, extraction is the process by which information included in the request is separated from other information contained in the same document.

What can be included when estimating the costs of compliance?

A public authority may take account only of the costs it reasonably expects to incur in relation to the request in:

- determining whether it holds the information;
- locating the information, or a document which may contain the information;
- retrieving the information, or a document which may contain the information; and
- **extracting** the information from a document containing it.

If the task can clearly be identified as extracting information falling within the scope of the request, the time that is likely to be taken can be included in the estimate of costs.

What cannot be included when estimating the costs of compliance?

A public authority is **not** permitted to take into account any time likely to be spent:

- in considering exemptions that may apply to the information requested; and
- in **redacting** exempt material.

Example:

“The Tribunal agrees with the Commissioner that such an act of deletion, i.e. removal of what may be thought to be exempt material, even at the stage at which the exercise is carried out, cannot sensibly be viewed as coming within the provisions of Regulation 4(3)(d) as it is presently drafted.”

Mr J Jenkins v Information Commissioner and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [EA/2006/0067](#) (2nd November 2007).

What costs can be included in a fees notice?

The maximum fee that can be charged for the provision of information is the total cost the public authority reasonably expects to incur in:

- informing the person making the request whether it holds the information; and
- communicating the information to the person making the request - this could include the costs of specialised stationery used to hide exempt material and any costs incurred for photocopying or postage.

What costs cannot be included in a fees notice?

A public authority **cannot** include in this fee:

- any costs resulting from the time spent by its staff or others working for it in handling the request;

- The actual or anticipated costs of the time spent in considering exemptions; and
- **redacting** exempt material.

More information

This guidance will be reviewed and considered from time to time in line with new decisions of the Information Commissioner, Tribunal and courts on freedom of information cases. It is a guide to our current recommended approach to this area.

If you need any more information about this or any other aspect of freedom of information, please contact us.

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