

Public Interest Test – FOI

Reference Number – DAERA/26-383

Requested Information

Requestor has asked after the June Forum meeting, written confirmation of what was discussed and concluded in respect of this case. A copy of the Forum's Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding, together with recent agendas and minutes of the Forum and of the biannual Equine Stakeholder group, would also be useful

Exemption / Exception under consideration

FOIA 2000 Exemption 31(1)(a) Law Enforcement

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

There is a strong public interest in openness and transparency in how the Department and partner agencies carry out their enforcement functions.

Disclosure would promote accountability and provide assurance that appropriate action is being taken in relation to animal welfare concerns.

It would enhance public confidence in the effectiveness of multi-agency working and decision making processes.

Animal welfare is a matter of significant public concern, and there is a legitimate expectation that enforcement activity is conducted in a transparent manner where appropriate.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

The requested minutes contain information relating to ongoing or potential investigations. Disclosure could prejudice the prevention or detection of crime and the enforcement of animal welfare legislation.

Release of operational detail, including investigative approaches and enforcement strategies, could undermine the effectiveness of current and future enforcement activity.

Disclosure may identify or indirectly reveal individuals, locations, or investigative focus, which could enable those involved in non-compliance to evade detection or take steps to conceal evidence.

There is a strong public interest in ensuring that law enforcement agencies are able to carry out their functions effectively without undue interference.

Disclosure could damage the flow of information between partner agencies, reducing cooperation and weakening the overall enforcement framework

Conclusion

Having considered this, we have redacted some information where the public interest would favour withholding. The release of data contained in the minutes may prejudice agency's ability prevention/detection of crime. For example, identifying loopholes in

legislation, details of enforcement processes and knowledge of data sharing of information between agencies, may allow offenders to change behaviours in an attempt to prevent the detection of the offence. Details of enforcement service level agreements and data sharing agreements currently are dealt with by way of confidential items within decision making processes and are not in the public domain.

Exemption / Exception under consideration

FOIA 2000 Section 38 Endangering Health and Safety

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

Full disclosure of the locations of multi-agency meetings would promote openness and transparency.

It would provide reassurance to the public that such meetings are held on Government or Council premises, ensuring value for money and protection of the public purse.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

There is a strong public interest in safeguarding the health and safety of attendees. Disclosure could increase the risk of individuals being subject to harassment, intimidation, or potential harm.

The Department is particularly mindful that those involved in animal welfare enforcement activity may be at heightened risk of targeting by individuals or groups with opposing views (for example, animal welfare activists).

Disclosure of consistent meeting locations could enable individuals with malicious intent to identify, monitor, or target these venues and those attending.

Conclusion

Having considered this, we have redacted some information where the public interest would favour withholding. The venues are generally the same and could jeopardise staff health and safety if locations became known.


Divisional Veterinary Officer