

Ministerial expenses for official Government business



Category of Information:

1. Ministerial expenses incurred in the course of official Government business, including the cost of entertainment (e.g. hosting dinners); overseas visits; mobile phone bills and use of official cars etc.
2. **Note:** such requests will often be received as part of a wider request related to e.g. diary and personal information. This working assumption applies only to information related to expenses (the costs, not the details). Nor does this working assumption cover requests for information related to hospitality or gifts *received*.

Working Assumption:

3. For information held about Ministerial expenses incurred as part of official Government business – **release**, answering factually.

Reason for the working assumption:

4. The cost of entertainment undertaken by Ministers as part of official Government business is factual information. There is a general public interest in disclosure. Disclosure increases the transparency in the use of public funds by Government.

Referral Points:

5. Working assumptions do not fit all situations. The referral points set out below describe specific situations where the working assumption (either to release information or withhold information) should not be used. The fact that the assumption does not apply **does not mean you should automatically release the information**. In these circumstances, the information request should be **referred** to a more senior member of staff, or a dedicated FOI practitioner, for them to consider:

- The request is for an event that has not yet taken place but information on the cost of the event is held (e.g. an invoice);
- Whether the request is related to wider information, such as diary information or personal information.
- The request states that the applicant is asking for internal review of an earlier decision to refuse to release information – working assumptions are only designed to be used on the first occasion that information is requested. Appeals against decisions to withhold information may need more careful consideration and should therefore be referred;
- The information relates to a matter covered by the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs). The EIRs have been closely aligned with the FOI Act to ensure that there are as few operational differences as possible. However, there are some differences between the two regimes, particularly in that some of the exceptions in the EIRs are worded differently from the FOI Act exemptions, and all of the EIR exceptions are subject to the public interest test. If there is any doubt as to whether or not information is covered by the EIRs, the case should be referred. Further guidance on the EIRs can be found at <http://www.foi.gov.uk/guidance/exguide/sec39/chap02.htm> and <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/envinfo/index.htm>