

Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Request Reference Fol/20/368
Payments to External Suppliers

Request Details

I am requesting information on all payments to external suppliers for purchases of goods and services between 2019-01-01 and 2020-12-31.

What is requested is a list of these payments, ideally in Microsoft Excel format, which contains as much of the following information for each payment as possible.

- Supplier name

Please see the attached spreadsheet.

- Amount paid, excluding VAT
- Payment date (or some other relevant transaction date)
- A unique invoice-id or a transaction-id number for each payment.
- Some description of the nature of the expense

Response Details

Please see the attached list of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (the UHB) suppliers during the stated period. After considering your request, UHB considers the remainder of the information requested to be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Section 43) Commercial Interests. This section of the Act sets out an exemption from the right to know if:

- The information requested is a trade secret, or
- Release of the information is likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person. (A person may be an individual, a company, the public authority itself or any other legal entity).

This exemption was considered by the UHB when deciding whether to disclose information because it considered that in doing so there could be a significant risk in prejudicing the commercial interests of the company in question. As this is a qualified exemption, the UHB is required to complete a public interest test in deciding whether it is in the public's interest to withhold or disclose the information.

In favour of disclosure: There is a public interest in transparency and in the accountability of spending of public funds. Furthermore, it is in the public's interest that public funds be used effectively and that public sector bodies obtain the best value for money when contracting for the provision of services.

Against disclosure: There is a risk of disclosure prejudicing the commercial interests of the UHB by affecting its bargaining position with agencies. This in turn could lead to less

effective use of public funds in future. It has been established above that releasing the information under the Freedom of Information Act, to which the UHB is subject, will give an unfair advantage to the supplier's competitors. The UHB believes that there is wider established public interest in companies not being prejudiced merely because they have contracted with a public sector body (as upheld in ICO decision notice FS50473543 ICO v Royal Marsden Hospital Trust).

Decision: The UHB considers that the public interest in withholding the information is greater than the interests in disclosing it and thereby giving unfair commercial advantage to competitors of the supplier to which this information concerns. The UHB believes that disclosure of information in a manner which fails to protect the interests and relationships arising in a commercial context could have the effect of discouraging companies from dealing with the Health Board because of fears that the disclosure of information could damage them commercially. In turn this could then jeopardise the Health Board's ability to compete fairly and pursue its function to bring forward development in the area and obtain value for money. It was therefore decided that it was not in the public's interest to disclose this information.