

2 Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

- 2.1 The purpose of this document is to provide public authorities with a generic user specification for a system (or systems) to manage Requests for Information (RFIs) and any subsequent appeals, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol) and the updated Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) that are both due to come fully into effect on 1st January 2005.
- 2.2 This document does not:
- Ensure that a public authority is fully compliant with the Act;
 - Define an interface between the management system and the public authorities own publication scheme;
 - Address system and implementation issues (as these will be specific to each public authority);
 - Cover the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.
- 2.3 Initially, the most important thing a public authority needs to consider is where the management system should sit in relation to existing systems. Implementation of a new system is not necessarily required, as the requirements could be delivered by upgrading an existing system (e.g. a correspondence system). Consideration should also to be given to the need for development of any interfaces with other systems, some examples of which are shown below, grouped by functional requirement category:



Figure 1: Interface Categories

- 2.4 It is recognised that public authorities that intend to develop such a system(s) will be coming from very diverse positions reflecting the contexts in which they operate. As a result this document avoids being overly prescriptive about the way in which requirements should be delivered (i.e. whether they are handled by a single system or some kind of

interface to other systems or indeed delivered via manually-based processes); instead it concentrates on what the requirements are. While it is recognised that manual processes can be used to implement part or all of the specification, the specification does at times use the language of IT systems. However, it is hoped that it is apparent when this is the case how they can be translated into a manual system, for example, alerts when a deadline is near or exceeded could be a telephone call or manually produced email.

- 2.5 The generic user specification cannot be seen as a full requirements specification, but it does lay out which aspects are **essential** and should form the baseline of what must be contained / delivered by such a system(s).
- 2.6 Each public authority should consider their own specific business needs when establishing their own specification, which may result in requirements listed here as **highly desirable** being promoted to **essential** (or those being listed as **desirable** being promoted to **highly desirable**) and additional requirements being added to address specific policies or practices.
- 2.7 One such example is that some public authorities may want to extend the scope of a system they are developing/procuring to handle RFIs so that it includes Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA).
- 2.8 Where a public authority intends to use a system or systems to deliver the requirements, attention should be paid to the compliance with relevant government standards outlined in section 5 of this document, as these are **essential**.

OTHER USEFUL REFERENCE MATERIAL

- 2.9 The DCA's monitoring regime for central government departments may also assist public authorities:

Defining a Request for Monitoring Purposes & Proposed Criteria for Monitoring Access to Information in Central Government (Appendix E) – Department for Constitutional Affairs

Coverage of Monitoring of Access to Information in Central Government (Appendix F) – Department for Constitutional Affairs

- 2.10 The following sources also contain additional information that may assist the public authority:

Management of Freedom of Information Requests in Other Jurisdictions – (October 2003) Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson (<http://www.dca.gov.uk/foi/impgroup/07-07c.pdf>)

Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the discharge of public authorities' functions under Part 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, issued under Section 45 of the Act – November 2002

A Guide to the "Lifecycle" of Requests under Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Information Commissioner

(<http://ico-cms.amaze.co.uk/DocumentUploads/Lifecycle%20of%20Requests.pdf>)

Office of the e-Envoy - <http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/Home/Homepage/fs/en>

Government Category List - <http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/gcl.asp>

e-Government Interoperability Framework - <http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/egif.asp>

e-Government Metadata Standard - <http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/metadata.asp>

UK Government Data Standards Catalogue -

<http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/gdsc/html/frames/default.htm>

STRUCTURE OF THE REQUIREMENTS

2.11 This document is divided up into two main sections:

- **Functional Requirements:** Effectively these are a series of statements about what the system must be able to do. In this document, these requirements have been divided up into the following categories:
 - *Logging applicants*
 - *Logging requests*
 - *Logging appeals*
 - *Audit trail*
 - *Contact history*
 - *Workflow/process support*
 - *Fees*
 - *Enquiries*
 - *Correspondence*
 - *Reporting (Central Monitoring)*
 - *Reporting (Internal)*
 - *Appeals Handling*
 - *Interfaces*
 - *Online access*
 - *Administration*
- **Non-Functional Requirements:** These define system properties and constraints; which can be at least as critical as functional requirements. Non-functional requirements cover the way in which a system should behave (e.g. performance, reliability), compliance with organisation requirements (e.g. process standards, implementation requirements) and compliance with external requirements (e.g. legislative requirements, Office of the e-Envoy's standards). As this document is intended to be generic, the requirements in this section tend to be concentrated on external requirements, although there are a number that could be categorised as "good practice".

PRIORITY OF REQUIREMENTS

2.12 Within in this document, all requirements are categorised under three priority levels:

- **ESSENTIAL (E):** This means that the requirement is crucial for all public authorities, if they are to adequately deliver commitments made on them by FoI and/or EIR.
- **HIGHLY DESIRABLE (HD):** This means that the requirement may prove extremely useful in assisting public authorities in delivering their commitments i.e. reducing the amount effort required by the organisation's staff by increasing the level of automation.
- **DESIRABLE (D):** This means the requirement could prove useful in processing FoI and/or EIR requests, but it is far more likely to only be of use to a subset of public authorities.

- 2.13 The priorities assigned in this document have been determined for a generic public authority and may need to be tailored for specific organisational needs e.g. a requirement that is categorised as high desirable here, is essential in a particular context.
- 2.14 Recognising the different environments that public authorities operate in, this document does not attempt to impose a specific single system that should be capable of delivering these requirements, as they could be achieved satisfactorily using a number of IT systems and manual processes working in conjunction with one another.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Description</i>
DPA	Data Protection Act 1998.
EIR	Environmental Information Regulations under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environment Matters signed at Aarhus on 25 th June 1998.
FoI	Freedom of Information Act 2000.
RFI	Request for Information – collective term that relates to any requests made under Freedom of Information or Environmental Information Regulations.