

## 3 A Request for Information

- 3.1 One of the key elements in the process of managing requests for information will be to determine early on in the process whether requests should be entered on to the relevant system for managing requests. The definition of a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations is so broad that potentially most of what a public authority does could come under these access regimes. This section sets out some of the factors that public authorities should take into consideration when considering what their criteria for putting requests on to their monitoring system should be.
- 3.2 The key factor will be to enter information onto a system requests when the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations are consciously engaged. In other words, when thought is given to complying with the Act, such as through searching for information, releasing actual documents, charging fees or not providing the information requested.
- 3.3 What may be excluded for a system managing RFIs:
- ***RFIs where the information is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means:*** It will be important to ensure that releasing information does not become difficult, time consuming or resource intensive. New requirements to enter data into a management system to deal with requests where information is already given out routinely or that is given out without a second thought could slow down or even act as a disincentive to openness. The types of information this could include are requests for published reports, information leaflets or information in the publication scheme. However, there may be appeals made that information in publication schemes isn't available or that a request has not been answered. It may be that public authorities already have systems for logging where information is routinely given out, for example to demonstrate that published leaflet and reports have been sent in response to requests.
  - ***Information that is released as part of a public authority's normal business process:*** Many public authorities will be providing information as part of their day to day business processes, for example job application forms, information on the way they work or information relating to case work. It is not intended that systems for managing requests replace existing business processes that are functioning adequately. It will be for public authorities to decide what their normal business process is.
  - ***Correspondence that is not a request for information.***
  - ***Requests that do not include a name and address for correspondence (or an email address).***
  - ***Requests that are not made in writing (in writing includes emails and web-based forms),*** although if the request is for environmental information, requests may be made in any form or context, including oral requests.

3.4 What may be included for a system managing RFIs:

- **Requests which result in information being withheld under an exemption or exception from the right of access** (either the FoI or the EIR).
- **Requests which are not processed because the public authority estimates the cost of complying would exceed the appropriate limit** (section 12 of the FoI Act).
- **Requests which are not processed because the public authority considers the request to be vexatious or repeated.**
- **Requests where a search is made for information sought and it is found that none is held.**
- **Requests for information that related to information which is contained in a transferred public record** and the procedures in section 15 of the FoI Act are followed.
- **Where advice or assistance is offered to the applicant.**
- **Where the public authority requires further information from the applicant in order to identify and locate the information requested.**