

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Definition document for the Northern Ireland Assembly

This guidance gives examples of the kinds of information that we would expect the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly) to provide in order to meet its commitments under the model publication scheme.

We would expect the Assembly to make the information in this definition document available unless:

- they do not hold the information;
- the information is exempt under one of the FOIA exemptions or Environmental Information Regulations exceptions, or its release is prohibited under another statute;
- the information is readily and publicly available from an external website; such information may have been provided by the public authority or on its behalf. The authority must provide a direct link to that information;
- the information is archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible; or,
- it would be impractical or resource-intensive to prepare the material for routine release.

The guidance is not meant to give an exhaustive list of everything that should be covered by a publication scheme. The legal commitment is to the model publication scheme, and authorities should look to provide as much information as possible on a routine basis.

Publishing datasets for re-use

Public authorities must publish under their publication scheme any dataset they hold that has been requested, together with any updated versions, unless they are satisfied that it is not appropriate to do so. So far as reasonably practicable, they must publish it in an electronic form that is capable of re-use.

If the dataset or any part of it is a relevant copyright work and the public authority is the only owner, the public authority must make it available for re-use under the terms of a specified licence. Datasets in which the Crown owns the copyright or the database rights are not relevant copyright works.

The Datasets Code of Practice recommends that public authorities make datasets available for re-use under the [Open Government Licence](#).

The term 'dataset' is defined in section 11(5) of FOIA. The terms 'relevant copyright work' and 'specified licence' are defined in section 19(8) of FOIA. The ICO has published [guidance](#) on the dataset provisions in FOIA. This explains what is meant by "not appropriate" and "capable of re-use".

Who we are and what we do

Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts.

We would expect information in this class to be current information only.

- **The role of the Northern Ireland Assembly**
- **The role of the Assembly Commission**
- **The role of the Secretariat Management Group of the Assembly**

The Assembly should be providing both outline and detailed information about its roles and responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of those working there.

- **The roles and identity of the Speaker, First Minister and deputy First Minister, and Committee Chairs**

Identification of, responsibilities of and biographical details of senior personnel in the Assembly. Any biographical details that are not work related should be published only with consent.

- **Committee, Commission and Secretariat Management Group structure and membership**
- **Information relating to the legislation relevant to functions of the Assembly**
- **The role of and biographical details of Members of the Assembly Commission**

Identification of, responsibilities of and biographical details of senior executives of the Assembly. Any biographical details that are not

work related should be published only with consent.

- **Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly**

Details of those who sit in the Assembly as members of the legislature. Membership of committees. Composition of the Assembly by reference to party.

- **Relationship of the Northern Ireland Assembly with other UK, Irish Republic and European legislative bodies**
- **Locations and contact details**

Where possible named contacts should be provided

What we spend and how we spend it

Financial information relating to projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit.

We would expect as a minimum that financial information for the current and previous two financial years should be available.

If money is allocated to specific cost centres in the Assembly and it assists in understanding how public money is spent, the Assembly should consider publishing it.

- **Financial statements, budgets and variance reports**

Details of authority spending over £30,000.

Details of authority contracts and tenders worth over £30,000

Details of government procurement card spend over £500.

Financial information in enough detail to allow the public to see where money is being spent, where the Assembly and its Commission is or has been planning to spend it, and the difference between the two. Financial information should be published at least annually and, where practical, we would also expect half yearly or quarterly financial reports to be provided. Revenue budgets and budgets for capital expenditure should be included.

- **Audit of accounts**
- **Members' salaries, allowances and expenses**

Details of the schemes for the payment of salaries, expenses and allowances to Members. While some details of the expenses paid to individuals should not be disclosed without consent, we would expect to see that the public have ready access to at least the totals, by

reference to categories, paid to or incurred by individual MLAs on an annual basis. Categories will be such headings as travel, subsistence, accommodation. Any consultation or review procedures should also be published.

- **Workforce pay and grading details, allowances and expenses**

The pay scales for those working at the Assembly. This may be provided as part of the organisational structure and should identify, as a minimum, those at senior level, defined here as earning at least £63,994 per annum (equivalent to Grade 5 NICS), and £5,000 salary bands for them. For junior posts, levels of pay should be identified by salary ranges. In addition, any schemes for the payment of allowances and expenses. Overall figures for the expenses, by reference to categories, paid to or incurred by the senior executive officer of the Assembly Commission. Categories will be such headings as travel, subsistence, accommodation.

- **Procurement procedures**

Details of procedures for acquiring goods and services. Contracts available for public tender.

- **Financial statements for projects and events**

If there are identifiable projects, we would expect the publication scheme to cover at least the financial reports that indicate actual expenditure against original project budgets. The larger the project, the greater the detail that should be available. Similarly, where organised events are publicised, their cost should be available through the scheme.

What are our priorities and how are we doing

Strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews.

We would expect information in this class to be available at least for the current and previous three years.

Below is a list of the type of information we would expect the Assembly to have readily available for publication. Any other reports or recorded information showing the Assembly's planned or actual performance should normally be included.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly Business <p>An indication of how business is allocated to the Assembly and its committees. Calendars of business to be conducted. The legislative programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic plans • Annual business plan • Assembly Commission Annual Report • Organisational, service provision and performance reviews • Progress reports • Impact assessments • Privacy impact assessments (in full or summary format) • Service standards • Statistics produced in accordance with Assembly requirements
<p>How we make decisions Decision making processes and records of decisions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings and proceedings <p>Records of proceedings of the Assembly and its committees, minutes of the Secretariat Management Group and the Commission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports and papers provided for consideration at meetings • Internal communications guidance, criteria used for decision making, internal instructions, manuals and guidelines <p>Where access to internal instructions, manuals and guidelines for dealing with the business of the Assembly would assist public understanding of the way decisions are made these should be readily available. We would not expect information that might damage the operations of the Assembly to be revealed.</p>
<p>Our policies and procedures Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering our services and responsibilities.</p>
<p>We would expect information in this class to be current information only. If there is particular reason to provide information that is not still current, this should also be included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and procedures for the conduct of the business

of the Assembly

- **Policies and procedures for the provision of services**

Policies and procedures for handling information requests should be included.

- **Policies and procedures for the recruitment and employment of staff**

Such items as Standing Orders of the Northern Ireland Assembly, procedural guidance, Speaker's rulings, terms of reference, codes of practice, memoranda of understanding and the like should be included. A number of policies, for example equality and diversity, health and safety, will cover both the provision of services and the employment of staff. It will include the equality scheme/statement produced in accordance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and policies and procedures for dealing with information requests. If vacancies are advertised as part of recruitment policies, details of current vacancies will be readily available.

- **Customer service**

Standards for the provision of services to the NDPB's customers, including the complaint procedure. Complaints procedures will include those covering requests for information and operating the publication scheme.

- **Records management and personal data policies**

This will include information on security policies, a records retention and disposal schedule (approved by the Public Records Office Northern Ireland) any archive policies, and data protection (including data sharing) policies.

- **Fileplans (high level, for current records management systems)**

- **Charging regimes and policies**

Details of any statutory charging regimes should be provided. Charging policies should include charges made for information routinely published and clearly state what costs are to be recovered together with the basis on which they are made and how they are calculated.

If the Assembly charges a fee for licensing the re-use of datasets, it

should state in its guide to information how this is calculated and whether the charge is made under the Re-use Fees Regulations or under other legislation. It cannot charge a re-use fee if it makes the datasets available for re-use under the Open Government Licence.

Lists and registers

- **Public registers and registers held as public records**

If the Assembly is required to maintain any register and make the information in it available for public inspection, the existing provisions covering access will usually be adequate. We would expect however the Assembly to publicise which public registers it holds, and how the information in them is to be made public. Where registers contain personal information, authorities must ensure that they consider the data protection principles.

- **Asset registers and information asset register**

We would not expect the Assembly to publish all details from all asset registers. We would, however, expect the location of public land and building assets and key attribute information that is normally recorded on an asset register to be available along with some other information from capital asset registers. If the Assembly has prepared an information asset register for the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005, it should publish the contents.

- **CCTV**

Details of the locations of any overt CCTV surveillance cameras operated by or on behalf of the Assembly. The Assembly should decide on the level of detail which is appropriate. This could be by building or more general geographic locations, such as postcodes or partial postcodes, depending on the security issues raised.

- **Disclosure logs**

Where an information disclosure log is produced indicating the information that has been provided in response to FOI requests it should be readily available. Disclosure logs are recommended as good practice.

- **Register of gifts and hospitality provided to Members and senior staff**

Details of gifts given or received; hospitality and from which

organisation; travel (including overseas, detailed unless properly regarded as non-routine).

- **Any register of interests kept by the Assembly**
- **Other lists as required by law**

The services we offer

Information about the services the Assembly provides including leaflets, guidance and newsletters.

Generally this is an expansion of part of the first class of information. While the first class provides information on the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly, this class includes details of the services which are provided by it, internationally, nationally and locally as a result of them. The starting point would normally be a list or lists of the services that fall within the responsibility of the department, linked to details of these services.

- **Arrangements for visiting the Assembly**
- **Services for which the Assembly is entitled to recover a fee together with those fees**
- **Ceremonies and occasions**
- **Assembly circulars**
- **Leaflets, booklets and newsletters**
- **Advice and guidance**
- **Media releases**