

14th January 2010

Our ref: R257

RE: Freedom of Information request – Comprehensive Spending Review and Public Bodies Review.

Introduction

Thank you for your request dated 14th December 2010 made under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

For ease of reference your individual questions and our response are given below:

(a) Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide me with all documents - including emails - submitted by your organisation to central government departments and/or government ministers, as part of the Coalition Government's Comprehensive Spending Review since 12th May 2010. This would include any letters, briefings or option papers prepared by your organisation outlining the impact that changes and/or reductions to its budget(s) may have on the service(s) you deliver.

As stated in our initial response to your previous request, which was sent to you on the 10th November 2010, no formal submissions relating to the effects of budget cuts on our organisation have been made to Government departments as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review by SEEDA since the 12th May 2010.

On the 8th December 2010 we provided a further response which included a copy of a letter sent from [REDACTED] - lead Chief Executive for the RDA Network at the time, to [REDACTED] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, dated 8th June 2010. This letter included a consolidated spreadsheet showing the indicative impact of the budgets cuts for all Regional Development Agencies.

On the 21st September 2010 SEEDA submitted to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills a paper which set out a scenario in which SEEDA lives within a budget from April 2011-April 2014 that is constrained to 30% of our 2010/11 budget after cuts for all three years. We are unable to provide you with a full copy of this submission as the report contains a significant amount of material that is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. Some of the material is considered to be commercially sensitive as it relates to ongoing negotiations regarding specific contractual commitments and also provides details of liabilities relating to particular assets. Disclosing this information at this time would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of the Agency by adversely affecting our bargaining position during any related current or future contractual negotiations. This would potentially result in the less effective use of public money.



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Therefore, although SEEDA recognises the public interest in promoting accountability and transparency in decision making and the spending of public money, we believe that in this case this is outweighed by the need for SEEDA to achieve the best use of public money. We believe that exemption under Section 43(2) of the Act therefore applies to this document and we are unable to release it in its entirety. However we have published information extracted from this report in response to a previous Freedom of Information Act request and I enclose a copy of this response as Annex 1.

The outcome of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review was publicly announced on the 20th October 2010.

(b) Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide me with all documents - including emails - submitted by your organisation to central government departments or government ministers, as part of the Coalition Government's Public Bodies Review since 12th May 2010. This would also include any letters, briefings or option papers prepared by your organisation outlining the impact that reform or abolition would have on the services you deliver.

In June 2010 the Government announced that all RDAs were to be abolished by April 2012. Therefore SEEDA was not involved in consultations regarding the Public Bodies Review. As a result of the closure of RDAs all of SEEDA's 218 employees will be made redundant or transferred to other organisations under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protecting Employment) regulations and as required under the Cabinet Office Statement of Policy (COSOP). The information provided to you at Annex 1 includes estimates of redundancy and other unavoidable closure costs.

(c) Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide me with any revised business, explanatory papers, options papers or letters submitted by your organisation (including electronic communications) to central government departments or government ministers to accommodate changes to your organisation's budgets following this year's Comprehensive Spending review.

SEEDA has provided the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills with a significant amount of data and information on SEEDA's forward commitments and changes to those commitments, as part of the transition to closure process. We are currently in the process of collating non-commercially sensitive elements of the changes to SEEDA's budget following receipt of our indicative budget allocation for 2011/12, for a letter which will be sent to all regional partners and stakeholders by the end of January 2011. We will provide you with a copy of this letter once it has been finalised.

(d) Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide me with any revised business, explanatory papers, options papers or letters submitted by your organisation (including electronic communications) to central government departments or government ministers to accommodate changes to your organisation's structure following this year's Public Bodies Review.

Please see response given above to question (b).

(e) Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide me with any further correspondence (i) received by your organisation directly from ministers, or their offices, and (ii) sent to ministers, or their offices, regarding the affect of the (A) Comprehensive Spending Review and (B) Public Bodies Review on your organisation since 12 May 2010.

For our response to part A of this question, please see the answer to question (c) which is provided above.

For our response to part B of this question, please see Annex 2 which includes a copy of a letter that was sent to SEEDA from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (via One North East) on the 2nd November 2010. Please note that the names of two Department for Business, Innovation and Skills staff members have been redacted from the copy released, as this is personal information that is exempt from disclosure under Section 40 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This letter was sent to SEEDA for information only and included a copy of the Public Bodies Review Bill and its explanatory notes, which are not included in Annex 2 as they are publicly available documents.