



Access of Information

The following acts of Parliament have created access to information regimes which allow members of the public to ask The Consumer Council for certain types of information:

[Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)

[Data Protection Act 1998](#)

[Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#)

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities including The Consumer Council. It does this in two ways:

1. Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities.
2. Members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

The Consumer Council has two separate duties when responding to requests for information:

1. To tell the applicant whether The Consumer Council holds any information falling within the scope of their request; and
2. To provide that information unless it is exempt from disclosure.

The Act covers any recorded information that is held by The Consumer Council that is not environmental information or personal information.



How to make a Freedom of Information Request

Your request must:

- Be in writing (this includes letter, fax or email);
- State your name and an address for correspondence; and
- Describe the information you require.

Define your request as clearly as possible, including, for example, any dates or timescales that may help identify relevant records. Please also include daytime contact telephone number, if possible, as we may need to contact you to clarify details of your request.

You can make a request via email to info@consumercouncil.org.uk, via fax to 028 9025 1663 or alternatively you can write to the following address:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Information Exemptions

Whilst the FOIA creates a right to access information, it also recognises that certain types of information may need to be protected from disclosure by defining a number of **Exemptions**. This means that we may need to withhold some information requested. Exemptions fall into two categories, absolute and qualified and are defined under the FOIA [Part II Exempt Information](#).

Costs for Requests

The Consumer Council will not charge if the cost of locating, retrieving and extracting the information you request is less than the "appropriate limit", which is currently set at £450.



Where the estimated cost of providing information exceeds £450, The Consumer Council is not obliged to proceed with the request. However we may be able to provide some of the information requested if it can be supplied within the "appropriate limit" and in these circumstances we will contact you and assist you in redefining your request.

Timescale for Responses to FOI Requests

The Consumer Council will aim to respond to any requests promptly and no later than the 20th working day following the date of receipt.

If the requested information is subject to a qualified exemption, and we need more time to assess public interest considerations relating to disclosure, we will write to you within the 20 working days to tell you when we estimate we will be able to provide a final response to your request.

If The Consumer Council do not hold the information requested we will contact you and advise, if known, if there are any other public authorities to assist.

Refusal of a Request

The Consumer Council is not obliged to comply with a request for information if the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

If The Consumer Council refuses a request or you are unhappy with the response we will provide details on how to ask for an internal review of The Consumer Council's decision. If you remain dissatisfied you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Request Limitations

The FOIA does not specifically limit the number of requests you can make; however, it does give The Consumer Council the right to refuse vexatious or repeated requests. Where a number of requests have been received from an individual for the same or similar information, we are also allowed to aggregate the costs of these in estimating whether or not the appropriate limit would be exceeded.



Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act 1998 establishes a framework of rights and duties which are designed to safeguard personal data.

The Act applies to a particular activity – processing personal data – rather than to particular organisations or people. As The Consumer Council processes personal data we are required to comply with the Act.

How to make a Subject Access Request (SAR)

Your request must:

- Be in writing (this includes letter, fax or email);
- State your name and an address for correspondence; and
- Describe the information you require.

Define your request as clearly as possible, including, for example, any dates or timescales that may help identify relevant records. Please also include daytime contact telephone number, if possible, as we may need to contact you to clarify details of your request.

A fee of £10 may be charged at The Consumer Council's discretion and all SAR's will be responded to within 40 calendar days.

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Environmental Information Regulations 2004

The Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004 provide a similar access regime for environmental information to that above:

1. Public authorities must make environmental information available proactively; and
2. Members of the public are entitled to request environmental information from public authorities.

EIR's can be requested orally or in writing and The Consumer Council will seek to provide the information within 20 working days of receiving the request.