

FOI DOF/2023-0256

Request

In early 2021 Teagasc, the Republic of Ireland's Agriculture and Food Development Authority, notified DAERA regarding a "significant level of falsification" of official Teagasc documents in pig and poultry planning applications across councils in Northern Ireland. DAERA then notified DfI and other authorities by July 2021.

The letters, which are used to demonstrate that the manure from the new developments will be properly disposed of and not harm the environment, were found to be falsified or altered without permission in 60% of the 38 sample cases that Teagasc examined.

Additional Teagasc letters had been submitted in at least another 42 additional planning applications.

Please provide as much of the following as possible under FOI limits:

1. A list of the planning applications where "falsified" or "altered" Teagasc documents were submitted;
2. Copies of all outgoing and incoming correspondence, and relevant attachments, regarding issue of Teagasc letters (i.e. to/from Teagasc; departments; agents etc).
3. Copies of all internal correspondence and attachments on the Teagasc issue;
4. Any internal reports prepared on this Teagasc issue; meeting minutes; etc;
5. Please also provide a schedule of records showing a summary of decision making.

DoF Response

I can confirm the department holds some of the information requested.

For points 1, 4 and 5 – The department have applied the exception at Regulation 12(4)(a) – Information not held. Exceptions under the Regulations are subject to the public interest test, however the Information Commissioners office recognises

that it can be impossible to do a meaningful public interest test if we don't hold the information. The Department of Finance (DOF) can advise that when the DOF Group Fraud Investigation Service (GFIS) are engaged by departments to assess / investigate potential fraud matters, all documents / correspondence generated are held by the respective referring department in their own electronic records management system, therefore this information is not held by DoF.

In relation to your request for information in this case, you may wish to contact the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) via daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk.

For points 2 & 3, the information is attached at Annex B, however some information has been withheld under EIR 12 (3) and 13 (1) – Third Party Personal Information.

Disclosure of any personal information is subject to a Lawful and Fairness test (attached at Annex C). Having considered all of the information contained within the Lawfulness, Fairness and Transparency Test, the department has established that, on balance, there is no lawful basis for the disclosure of third-party personal information.