

**FOI DOF/2024-0243**

**Request**

I can confirm the department holds information in relation to your request, however some information has been withheld as it falls within an FOI exemption, further details are provided below.

Your questions and our response will follow in turn.

**Response**

1. Over the last 18 months, has your department modernised any portion of its existing mainframe IT systems to improve speed, security, cost, or performance?

Yes. The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has put in place a new contract for its core Shared Cloud Infrastructure which included the replacement of Servers and Storage Devices.

2. When is your primary mainframe system contract due for a refresh/review?

The above contract commenced in January 2023 for a 10-year period, with the first review point in February 2030.

Land & Property Services, within the Department of Finance (DoF), is also currently in the process of awarding or going to market to replace two main systems:

- Land Registration (in process of award)
- Valuation – (in process of going to market)

Two other main systems in LPS have been awarded following an open market competition:

- Address Management System (now Live)
- Revenue & Benefits

3. Are your employees allowed to use generative AI services like ChatGPT?

NICS staff can use generative AI services, once certain criteria have been met.

- 3a) Can you link to or outline your usage policy for generative AI services?

This information is exempt from release under s.31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which relates to 'the prevention and detection of crime'.

As Section 31 is a qualified exemption, we have carried out a Public Interest Test as part of the decision-making process. This has concluded that the balance of the public interest has been found to fall in favour of withholding the information covered by the section 31 exemption (see Annex B for further information).

- b) Have there been any incidents in the last 12 months of employees contravening the usage policies? If so, can you provide examples?

There have been no incidents of this nature within the last 12 months.

4. Does your department currently use AI to optimise business operations? If not, are you planning to explore AI implementation in the next 18 months?

DoF has started to explore AI technology, but this is not widespread at present. However, it is anticipated that this will increase over the next 18 months.

5. What is the annual % of your budget spent on digital skills training or upskilling in your department?

0.1% (2023/24)

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST				ANNEX B	
Request Ref:	DOF/2024-0243				
Request summary:	Usage policy for Generative AI services				
Exemption Applied	Section 31 Law Enforcement – Section 31(1(a))				
Information details:	Disclosure		Non-disclosure		
Can you link to or outline your usage policy for generative AI services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a general public interest in the disclosure of information;</li> <li>• Openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government; and</li> <li>• There is a public interest in assuring the public that effective arrangements are in place for the prevention and detection of crime and that their information is fully protected.</li> </ul>		<p>Providing this information will disclose how effective our cyber security processes are, which could facilitate the possibility of crime, or hinder its detection. This risk would not be in the public interest.</p> <p>Government has a duty to maintain the integrity of personal and sensitive information, in accordance with legislation such as the Data Protection Act, so increasing the chances of an attack would have potentially serious repercussions.</p> <p>Revealing information which would give cyber criminals an insight into the security posture of systems and usage processes may help facilitate inappropriate access, destruction and / or exfiltration of data. This would result in not only the misuse of business, personal and sensitive data, but could also increase the likelihood of business interference and the disruption of government services to the public. It would also result in a loss of confidence in Government and the services it provides.</p> <p>A cyber-attack would also result in increased government expenditure, due to the cost of managing and recovering from the incident as well as implementing system fixes and dealing with compensation claims etc. Industry figures show the average cost of a cyber security incident is £4.2m.</p>		
<p><b>PUBLIC INTEREST DECISION:</b> I am satisfied there is a fundamental need and requirement to protect the security of government systems, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs that of releasing the information.</p> <p><b>Signed:</b> Gerry Thompson <b>Date:</b> 20 June 2024</p>					