

Information Released under Freedom of Information Act

Subject: Post handling processes

Date Released: 7 April 2008

Summary of request: The enquirer

Information released:

You have requested information under Freedom of Information legislation. I have identified the various questions contained in your letter and have attempted to provide answers to them all as follows:

- Q1**
- a) How many mail deliveries are normally made by the Royal Mail to Companies House on a Friday?**
 - a) Three deliveries

 - b) At what times of the day are they delivered?**
 - b) 6:15 am, (newly introduced Jan 08), 07:00 am and 9:00 am

 - c) Specifically, were all these deliveries received on Friday, 30 November, at the normal times?**
 - c) Royal Mail provided an enhanced service on the 30th November because of increased post weights. We had the following deliveries:-
 - (7:00 am 1st/2nd class mail)
 - (8:16 am 1/2nd class mail and some Registered and Recorded mail)
 - (8:43 am Registered and Recorded mail)
 - (9:25 am 1st/2nd class mail)
 - (10:24 am Registered and Recorded mail)
 - (12:12 pm 1st and 2nd class mail)
- Q2**
- a) How many staff normally deal with the receipt and sorting of mail that determines when a specific piece of correspondence is received?**
 - a) At the time of delivery mail is pre-sorted to ensure work is correctly allocated. There are 10 people assigned to this task each time a delivery is received.

 - b) Specifically, how many of the normal staff complement were on duty for Friday, 30 November?**
 - b) Total staff compliment was 72 people of which 50 people were in work.

 - c) How many were absent / on other duties?**

c) Of the 50 Postal Services people available 3 were assigned to other duties, however an additional 17 fully trained staff from other areas within the organisation were assigned to post opening duties on 30th November 2007.

d) Was the mail date bar coding function understaffed on Friday, 30 November?

d) No

Q3 a) What is the process to separate mail deliveries between times of delivery?

a) There is no process to separate mail between the times of delivery. All mail is pre-sorted ready for allocation at the time of delivery. However segregation is made between receipt dates.

b) How is that evidenced and double-checked?

b) At the point of receipt, the pre-sort process mail is bundled into one or two batches ready for allocation to post openers. A barcode evidencing the date of receipt is applied to the top envelope in each bundle. Work awaiting distribution is placed in a secure lockable bath that is clearly marked with the receipt date until distribution to post openers. A check is made of the weight of work distributed against the post weight received for that particular calendar/barcode day.

c) What additional measures are taken to process time-sensitive documentation, particularly accounts?

c) There are no additional measures in place to process accounts because the barcode date determines the status of the document as far as filing requirements are concerned.

d) What processes and checks are done to prevent human or machine error whereby a bag or item of mail is physically misplaced or incorrectly date-allocated?

d) There is no mechanical mail handling process in Companies House. The pre-sort process that takes place immediately on receipt of post into the building prevents misappropriation or allocation of work.

e) Are additional processes and checks applicable at month ends?

e) There are no additional processes in place or checks made at month end.

f) Have there ever been incidences of incorrect mail date allocation?

f) None with Royal Mail deliveries but there have been a few occasions this has happened with recorded or couriered mail delivered outside office hours. For example, mail delivered late on Friday has been inadvertently placed with recorded/courier mail received on Saturday

g) **How many incidences in the last 5 years?**

g) Statistics are not available

Q4 a) On Friday 30 November 2007, by what time of the day had all the mail deliveries to Companies House been fully sorted and time/date stamped?

a) All mail received from Royal Mail on 30th November 2007 had been barcoded and processed by 1:30pm. The only mail processed after 1:30 pm was additional courier mail.

b) Had mail not been processed by the end of that day?

b) All mail received in Companies House Cardiff on the 30th November 2007 was barcoded and processed by the Postal Services area on that day. No backlog of work was carried forward to Saturday 1st December 2007.

Q5 a) Are all members of the Postal Service Team on the payroll of Companies House?

a) Yes all staff employed in the Postal Services area are currently and were at the time in question on the Companies House payroll.

b) Are temporary or contract workers used in that Team?

b) Some staff are employed on long term temporary fixed term contracts.

c) Is it quite normal for members of the Postal Services Team work Saturdays?

c) Postal Services staff will work weekends when the need arises, this is often at month end to deal with increased mail weights.

d) Does the Saturday date shown on the barcode indicate there was a backlog on Friday 30 November?

d) There was no backlog of unopened post in Companies House Cardiff on Friday 30th November 2007. The Saturday date shown on the barcode indicates that the item was received on the 1st December 2007.

e) Was there a backlog?

e) As above there was no backlog in the Cardiff Postal Services area on the 30th November 2007.

Q6 a) How often are the processes and practices subject to independent external audit e.g. by the Auditor General

a) External Audit (the Auditor General) place reliance on the work of the Internal Audit within Companies House when it comes to assurance on the performance internal controls around operational procedures such as those practised in of Postal Services. An annual Finance Compliance Review has in scope the main Postal Services process – i.e. document handling. This primarily covers fee-bearing documents, but the same controls largely apply to non fee-bearing

documents also.

b) When was the most recent review?

b) The last review was for the year ending March 2007. (The review for the year ending March 2008 has not been finalised yet)

c) What were the results?

c) Internal Audit consistently give a 'Satisfactory' rating as a result of this review – i.e. a sound system of control exists which is consistently applied and should be effective in providing for management of risks to objectives.

Q7 a) Are there different/additional procedures for premium types of mail e.g. Recorded, Signed for, Special Delivery and Courier etc

a) Registered, Recorded or Courier mail is listed as a requirement for the Royal Mail.

Q8 a) If there is a backlog, how are the previous days' barcodes provided to post openers

a) It is the responsibility of the workflow distributor to allocate the mail and barcodes to post openers. The barcode dates are checked against the barcode date applied to envelopes being distributed. Allocation of work and barcodes assigned to each post opener is recorded by the workflow distributor with any unused barcodes being accounted for and signed back in on completion of processing.

b) What extra procedures and supervision is implemented to ensure the correct date of barcode is applied?

b) As above. Barcode allocation is controlled by the workflow distributor. A second check being made by the post opener on commencement of each bundle of work allocated.

Q9 a) Are date barcodes applied by hand or machine?

a) By hand.

b) Is it impossible to remove a barcode?

b) It is possible to remove a barcode; however, this usually damages the document. If an error should occur normal practice would be to apply a new barcode over the existing one.

Q10 a) Are any members of staff of Companies House rewarded by some kind of bonus or incentivised for increases in certain revenues e.g. late filing penalties?

a) Staff are not given a bonus or incentives for increases in certain revenues. I should stress that Companies House has no financial interest in late filing

penalties. All monies collected via the late filing penalty regime are remitted directly to the Treasury.