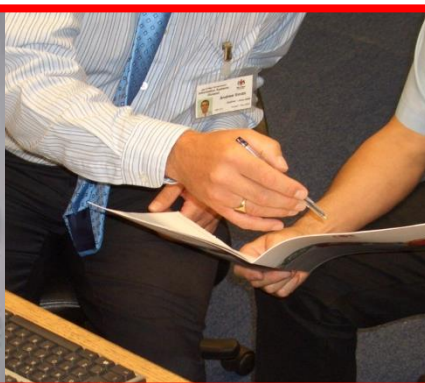




**Isle of Man
Government**

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Isle of Man Government

Handling Correspondence Guidance

Issued by the Office of Human Resources
on behalf of the Council of Ministers
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Handling Correspondence - Guidance

1. Policy Statement

The Isle of Man Government is committed to providing an efficient, professional and courteous service to everyone.

This policy and guidance applies to all types of written correspondence, including letters and electronic communications.

2. Purpose and Objective

Purpose

The purpose of this policy and guidance is to provide a framework for ensuring that letters, enquiries and emails are responded to in a timely and courteous manner.

Objective

This policy and guidance sets the minimum standards that people should expect when they correspond in writing with public servants on any matter.

This Policy and Guidance should be read in the conjunction with the following policies, codes and guidance:

- Code of Practice for Public Servants 2009
- Electronic Communications and Social Media – Policy, Standards and Guidelines
- Freedom of Information Act 2015 Code of Practice
- Isle of Man Government Policy for managing vexatious complaints, correspondence and behaviour
- Departmental complaints procedures

3. General Principles

When Government communicates, there should be a purpose to all correspondence. It should be constructive in addressing the issue at hand, and take account of the interests of the correspondent.

In general, correspondence should:

- State its purpose
- Be factual, clear and precise
- Use simple, jargon-free, language
- Be professional and courteous in language and tone

4. Timescales for responding to correspondence

In general, when a straightforward letter or email is submitted it should be responded to, or acknowledged, within 10 working days.

If the response is particularly complex or requires longer to investigate/research, then the individual should be advised in writing accordingly, and provided with an indication of when the enquiry will be fully responded to. Ideally, a full 'substantive' response should take no longer than a maximum of 20 working days.

However, where there are multiple or complex requests for information/clarification or some other input from the Department requiring extensive research, a period longer than 20 working days may be required.

'Holding replies' should explain that it will not be possible to send a substantive reply within the time limit, setting out the action that is being taken to answer the enquiry, and advise on likely timescales for a substantive reply.

5. Guidance

All emails should be handled in accordance with the Electronic Communications and Social Media – Policy, Standards and Guidelines

Departments should ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for the handling of enquiries when staff are on leave. All email accounts should have an 'out-of-office' automated message, which should advise who to contact during the period of absence. If an enquirer receives an out of office message, it is their obligation to contact another person.

Where an enquiry is sent to the wrong Department or where responsibility for an enquiry needs to be transferred elsewhere, the originating Department should acknowledge the correspondence and notify the enquirer of the transfer, by way of a holding letter or email. The time period for response should start the day after it was received by the department that agreed to receive the transfer. The receiving Department should also acknowledge the letter and set out when a reply can be expected.

Where Departments are unable to agree who should handle certain correspondence, or where it is unclear which Department has lead policy responsibility, it should be resolved within 5 working days as to who will take the matter forward.

Replies to correspondence should be properly referenced. When the incoming item of correspondence has a reference number, this must be quoted in the reply. Letters concerning confidential, personal or classified information should be marked in accordance with the Government Security Classification Policy¹.

Where a matter appears not to materially affect a correspondent, the Department is not bound by the standard timeframe. The Department should manage such correspondence on a case by case basis, taking care to be clear with the correspondent the grounds on which their correspondence is being handled.

Where correspondence relates to an issue where a Member of the Public who claims to have suffered injustice or hardship due to the actions of a Department, the Department should ensure it responds within 10 working days.

¹ <http://rheynfys/Government/CoMin/Documents/Government%20Security%20Classification%20Policy.pdf>

On occasion, correspondents may exhibit conduct or engage in correspondence which is vexatious, malicious or manifestly unreasonable. In such instances, Departments should give careful consideration as to whether action should be initiated under the Policy for managing vexatious complaints, correspondence and behaviour.

6. Confidentiality

Individuals frequently write about personal matters and/or attach confidential information that relates to them or other matters. Where this is the case, Departments should treat correspondence with great care to ensure that confidentiality is not broken. Departments should also consider the requirements of any relevant legislation when handling or disclosing personal information to third parties.

7. Review of the Policy and guidance

This Policy and the Guidance made under it will be reviewed from time to time as required.

This document can be provided in large print or as an audio recording on request.

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