



April 2008

Update on Common Purpose and the Freedom of Information Act

I wrote to Advisory Groups some time ago about the numbers of Freedom of Information Act requests being received by some public authorities, about their relationship with Common Purpose. Over recent months, the number of such requests has increased considerably and has tended to focus on Advisory Group members who work for public authorities.

Common Purpose is not a 'public authority' and therefore has no obligation to release information under the Freedom of Information Act. However, in order to obtain information about Common Purpose, some individuals have been requesting information from public authorities, which may have a connection with Common Purpose, instead. Invariably the FOI request follows a standard format, which suggests the requests are coming from a small number of individuals. In some instances, individuals have specifically requested copies of Advisory Group correspondence and notes of meetings.

Some information released as part of the Public Authorities' response to FOI requests has 'found its way' onto internet sites that question the intention, independence and probity of Common Purpose so as to damage our reputation. We have received legal advice that some of these claims are defamatory. Another outcome is that our staff are spending time having to deal with unpleasant calls, which are quoting information from FOI responses.

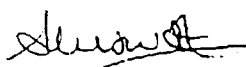
We have written to the Information Commissioner about this vexatious use of the Freedom of information Act, our Trustees have written a letter as a response to the ridiculous claims being made on the internet and we continue to monitor our internet presence in order to protect our reputation.

Common Purpose Advisory Group members receive, as part of their induction, a briefing pack that clarifies "*Members of Local Advisory Groups are senior decision makers who are recognised as leaders in the city/area. Members should reflect the diversity of the area. All are members in their own right, not as representatives of their organisations or communities.*" Our position, therefore, is that any Advisory Group correspondence they have on file is a matter for their own personal records – and in any event is potentially commercially sensitive, contains personal information and is shared in confidence. Where Advisory Group members who work

for public authorities have had correspondence with Common Purpose in their professional – rather than Advisory Group – capacity, this could be considered for release under the Freedom of Information Act. In these cases, the public authority would ask Common Purpose to review any materials being considered for release, in case any additional exemptions might apply.

If you have any queries about the Freedom of Information Act, or any advice on how to deal with these issues, please do not hesitate to contact Alex Geldart, Common Purpose Company Secretary, on direct line 020 7608 8102 or by email alex.geldart@commonpurpose.org.uk. With many thanks for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,



CD Caroline Duckworth
Managing Director, Common Purpose UK