

## What I Need to Know

There is a variety of correspondence that Brigades are required to submit, to a variety of addressees. This might include incident reports or minutes of meetings provided to Rural Operations, grant acquittals provided to the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund, financial or audit statements provided to Shire Councils, or general letters and e-mails. All such correspondence is placed on file, and is accessible by the public under *Freedom of Information Act 1992*. For this reason, it is essential that anyone preparing any form of correspondence on behalf of a Brigade is mindful of the appropriateness of their comments and language.

## How I do it

- All comments made should be factual.
- Refrain from making personal comments or judgements. For example, when completing an incident report, identify the source of the fire, such as an escaped burn, without making a judgement as to who was at fault.
- Anyone offering advice, making decisions or writing reports should ensure that they do so based on sound information, and that all decisions reached are properly documented. Check all facts and relevancy of content.
- All reports should be written in a formal tone. Other general correspondence may be more informal, particularly where you have a close relationship with the addressee, but content should still be kept factual. No correspondence should ever contain profanity.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act may protect some information, such as personal affairs, however, these exemptions are also subject to a public interest test, so they might also be released.
- Everything may be requested under FOI, including e-mails, handwritten notes (such as Post-It notes) and work diaries or logs. Therefore, all such documentation should be treated as you would any other form of correspondence. Anyone forwarding an e-mail from another author should also consider the content of the initial e-mail. In some cases, it might be more appropriate to paraphrase the other person's comments, rather than forward them.
- Do not mix personal and professional information in a single form of correspondence, as the whole document can be accessed under FOI provisions, not just the relevant passages.

## Reference Materials

- *Freedom of Information Act 1992*
- *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*
- Codes of Practice
- *Anti Discrimination Act 1991*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Human Rights & Equal Opportunities Commission Act 1986*
- *Disabilities Discrimination Act 1992*
- Area Reference Manual - Business Rule: D2.1 Manage Ministerial Correspondence and Briefings
- Department of Emergency Services Policies
- DES Internet and Email Usage Practice Statement