National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending watchdog

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Reference FOI-1782
Date 13 December 2024

GIFTS TO DAME MEG HILLIER MP AND RICHARD BACON

Thank you for your request dated 9 December 2024 for information relating to gifts that were presented by the National Audit Office (NAO) to Richard Bacon and Dame Meg Hillier MP in recognition of their long service on the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts Commission. The C&AG has reflected on the cost of the framed photographs, and having considered this further, the C&AG and Board members have now paid for these items themselves by reimbursing the NAO in full.

Your request has been handled under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). Your specific request is set out in **Annex A** where we have supplied our responses to each part of your request. A very small amount of information has been withheld under section 31(1)(a) (law enforcement) and section 40(2) (personal information) of the FOIA. The reasons for this and our consideration of the public interest test in relation to section 31(1)(a) are explained below.

Reasons why we have applied section 31(1)(a):

This exemption applies where the disclosure of information would or would be likely to prejudice the prevention of crime. We have applied this exemption to the bank account of the supplier. We consider that disclosure of these details would be likely to leave the supplier more vulnerable to fraud.

Public interest test

The section 31(1)(a) exemption is subject to the public interest test set out in section 2(2)(b) of FOIA. This requires the NAO to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in favour of disclosure. We consider there is a public interest in promoting transparency about the NAO and are disclosing the invoices. However, we believe the public interest favours maintaining the s31(1)(a) exemption for the supplier's bank details in the interests of preventing financial crime.

Reasons why we have applied section 40(2):

We are not obliged, under section 40(2) of the FOIA to provide personal information if releasing it would contravene the Data Protection Act 2018. In this instance we believe releasing the name of an individual NAO officer would contravene the first data protection principle which requires the processing of personal data to be lawful, fair and transparent. In this instance we do not believe it is necessary or fair to the individual officer to disclose this personal information. This exemption is absolute and is not subject to the public interest test.

Our policy is to respond to requests as helpfully and promptly as possible. I hope this information is helpful and you are happy with the way we have handled your request. If you are not happy with this response, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days by writing to the NAO FOI Team at FOI@nao.org.uk. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The primary way of escalating your concerns to the Information Commissioner is at: https://ico.org.uk/foicomplaints.

Yours sincerely

NAO FOI Team

Annex A

Request for information:	**NAO Response**
In October the NAO gave Meg Hillier MP and Richard Bacon framed engraved photographs of the NAO building in recognition of their service on the Public Accounts Committee. The photographs cost c£882 each.	The gifts were presented to Richard Bacon and Dame Meg Hillier MP after they had given a talk to NAO staff on 27 June 2024 and 17 September 2024 respectively. The costs were as follows: Richard Bacon: £882.62 + £89.69 extra charge for non-reflective glass. Dame Meg Hillier MP: £882.62.
1. I would like to obtain documents which show *(a) why the photographs cost so much and* *(b) who decided to award them to the two MPs.*	(a) Invoices for both photographs providing a breakdown of the costs are attached to this response's covering email. (b) Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General. The framed photographs were given to mark longstanding contributions on the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts Commission. The C&AG has reflected on the cost of the framed photographs, and having considered this further, the C&AG and Board members have now paid for these items themselves by reimbursing the NAO in full.
2. (a) Any documents ordering the framed photographs - like an invoice with the supplier, a receipt or any similar communication with the supplier	Invoices for both photographs are attached to this response's covering email.
(b) Any more available description of the photographs, giving the size, material etc. *If there was a photograph of Hillier or Bacon receiving the framed photos for e.g. a staff newsletter or an email to staff, I would like to see that.*	A photograph of Dame Meg Hillier MP and the Comptroller and Auditor General is attached to this response's covering email. We do not hold a photograph of Richard Bacon receiving the photograph.
(c) I would like to see copies of the letters sent to Hillier and Bacon telling them about the gifts and inviting them to pick them up	We did not send either Richard Bacon or Dame Meg Hillier MP any letters informing them they were to receive a gift or inviting them to pick them up. They had no knowledge of the gifts until they were presented with them.