

**Companies Act 2006:  
Objecting to a Registered  
Office Address**

**CONSULTATION**

**NOVEMBER 2009 URN 09/1487**

## **Companies Act 200**

### **Objecting to a Registered Office Address**

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Companies Act 2006: Objecting to a Registered Office Address | 3       |
| How to respond   | 4       |
| Timing   | 4       |
| Additional copies  | 4       |
| Confidentiality & data protection                            | 5       |
| Help with queries  | 5       |
| The proposals  | 6       |
| Consultation questions                                       | 8       |
| What happens next?   | 9       |
| Consultation Code of Practice Criteria                       | Annex A |
| List of those we are consulting                              | Annex B |
| Consultation questions                                       | Annex C |
| Initial Impact Assessment                                    | Annex D |

## **Companies Act 2006: Objecting to a Registered Office Address**

There is some evidence that companies may incorrectly use, as their registered office address, the address of another business or private individual with whom they have no connection. While it appears that the scale of the problem is small, the impact on an individual or business who finds that their address is being misused can be significant and distressing.

This consultation seeks your views on whether and how we should change the law to deal with this issue.

Issued: 25 November 2009

Respond by: 19 January 2010

Enquires to: Julie Ford  
Department of Business, Innovation and Skills  
Corporate Law and Governance  
Bay 564  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET  
Telephone: 020 7215 2162  
Fax: 020 7215 0235  
email: [julie.ford@bis.gov.uk](mailto:julie.ford@bis.gov.uk)

This consultation is relevant to companies and their advisers, individuals and businesses whose addresses have been incorrectly used as a registered office address and those who use company information obtainable from Companies House.

## **How to respond**

1. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills invites comments on the proposal outlined in this document. When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.
2. The questions raised in the document are listed at Annex C. We would prefer to receive your response by email to: [companiesact2006@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:companiesact2006@bis.gsi.gov.uk). But you can also respond by letter or fax to:

Consultation to: Objecting to a Registered Office Address  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
Corporate Law and Governance Directorate  
Bay 564  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET  
Fax: 020 7215 0235

3. A list of those organisations and individuals we are consulting is in Annex B. We would welcome suggestions of others who may wish to be involved in this consultation process.

## **Timing**

4. The consultation runs for the eight weeks from 25 November until 19 January. We are keeping this shorter than the standard twelve weeks because the impact on individuals and businesses of this problem can be significant and distressing and we would like to be in a position to correct it as soon as possible.

## **Additional copies**

5. Additional copies of this consultation document may be made without seeking permission.
6. Printed copies of this consultation document may be obtained by post from:

BIS Publications Orderline  
ADMAIL 528  
London SW1W 8YT  
Telephone: 0845 015 0010  
Fax: 0845 015 0020  
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On-line ordering: [www.bis.gov.uk/publications](http://www.bis.gov.uk/publications)

7. Electronic versions may be viewed on the BIS website at:  
[www.berr.gov.uk/consultations/index.html](http://www.berr.gov.uk/consultations/index.html)

## **Confidentiality and Data Protection**

8. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If you want information, including personal data that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

9. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

## **Help with queries**

10. Questions about the policy issues raised in this consultation can be addressed to Julie Ford whose contact details are on the first page of this document.

11. A copy of the Code of Practice on Consultation is in Annex A.

## **The proposals**

12. There is some evidence that companies may incorrectly use, as their registered office address, the address of another business or private individual with whom they have no connection or who do not want their address to be used for this purpose. For example, individuals or businesses which are not connected with a company may discover that their address details have been registered at Companies House as the registered office of a company, and may be receiving bills and other correspondence intended for that company.

13. Companies House is the United Kingdom's public registry of company information. As a rule it accepts information in good faith and places it on the register. This includes information about the registered office.

14. During the last year Companies House received an average of 18 complaints a month relating to misuse of a registered office address in this way. This figure is extremely low when compared to the number of incorporations and changes of address that Companies House deal with each month, around 64,000. However if someone finds that their address is being misused, the impact can be significant and distressing.

15. The Companies Act 2006 provides for the removal of fraudulent or inaccurate material from the register. But in our view these provisions do not allow for the removal of a registered office address filed by the company itself e.g. in the scenario where an innocent third party's address is wrongfully being used by a company. This consultation seeks your views on whether and how we should change the law to deal with this issue.

16. It is quite usual for a company to have no assets at its registered office. Indeed the registered office is often the same as the address of its accountants or legal advisers. We are not suggesting any change to this. This consultation is only about the case where the legal occupiers of an address want to stop the company from using it as the registered address.

## **A possible way forward?**

17. One way forward might involve creating a specific procedure to ensure that a registered office address should no longer be used where the occupier does not want it to be used for this purpose. Instead there would be another way for serving documents on the company.

18. This could work by introducing a new statutory procedure under which the legal occupier of premises could object (by notice to the registrar of companies) to the use

of the premises as the registered office address of a company. On receipt of such a notice of objection, Companies House would:

- approach the company, directors, secretaries and the person who filed the registered office address to tell them that the registrar has received such notice and to require the company to change its registered office.
- give the company a set period within which to either change its registered office or seek agreement with the occupier to keep the registered office as it is.
- if the company disputes the notice, allow it a set period within which to apply to the court for a ruling on whether the person who submitted the notice is in fact the legal occupier of the premises.
- if the company does not change its registered office within the period required, does not apply to the court within the period required, or applies to the court but loses, the address on the register will cease to be the company's registered office address and Companies House will make a note on the company's file (which will be visible to those searching the company's records) to show that until further notice, documents may no longer be served on the company at that address and instead can be served on the company by placing a notice in the Gazette<sup>1</sup>
- take action to strike off the company if it does not provide a new registered office address within a certain timescale.

19. This procedure would have no impact on companies who are not incorrectly using another person's address as their registered office address.

20. Neither would such arrangements leave existing creditors or shareholders in a worse position than they were in already, as it would provide them with a way to serve documents on the company in place of the incorrect address. It would also alert new creditors and shareholders to the fact there was a question about the registered office address being used by the company.

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<sup>1</sup> The Gazette is the Official Newspaper of Record for the UK. It is the means to disseminate and record official, regulatory and legal information in print, online and electronic forms for insolvency data, public notices or honours and awards (for government, business or individuals).

## Consultation questions

- Q1. Do you agree that there is a problem that needs a solution?
- Q2. If you do agree, does the proposal set out above address the problem or is there another process we should consider?
- Q3. We have referred as shorthand to the 'legal occupier' of the premises. Who should be allowed seek a change of a company's registered office address?
- Q4. Should the legal occupier of an address (or any other person) have the right to object at any time to the use of the address by a company as its registered office?
- Q5. When such a person writes to the registrar to seek a change in the registered office details, how should this be done? For example, would a simple statement, letter or Companies House form be sufficient or should something more formal be required such as an affidavit or confirmation by a trusted source (e.g. the police)? Why?
- Q6. Who should Companies House inform about an objection (e.g. the directors and/or secretary of the company) and what should they tell them? (For example just that there had been an objection, or the details of the person who had lodged the objection?)
- Q7. How long should the registrar give the company to provide a new address or apply to court before annotating the register to confirm that the address is no longer the address of the company's registered office?
- Q8. Is advertising in the Gazette an appropriate means to serve documents on the company in the absence of any other address?
- Q9. Do you agree that, in the event of a successful objection, the address should cease to be the company's registered office but should remain on the register as part of the historical record? Will this cause any difficulties? Is anything else required?
- Q10. Is strike –off an appropriate sanction in these circumstances? If so how rapidly? And what protections, if any, should there be for third parties?
- Q11. Are there any other comments you wish to make relating to this issue?



## **What happens next?**

21. A summary of the comments received in response to this consultation, and the government response will be published within 3 months of the closing date of this consultation.

### **The Consultation Code of Practice Criteria**

1. Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence policy outcome.
2. Consultation should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.
3. Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.
4. Consultation exercise should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.
5. Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.
6. Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.
7. Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

### **Comments or complaints**

If you wish to comment on the conduct of this consultation or make a complaint about the way this consultation has been conducted, please write to:

Tunde Idowu,  
BIS Consultation Co-ordinator,  
1 Victoria Street,  
London  
SW1H 0ET

Telephone Tunde on 020 7215 0412  
or e-mail to: [Babatunde.Idowu@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Babatunde.Idowu@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

### List of those we are consulting

This consultation document will be sent to those of the following list. We shall also draw it to the attention of the approximately 800 interested parties who have chosen to be on the circulation list of the Corporate Law and Governance Directorate of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Companies Investigation Branch (CIB)  
Serious Fraud Office  
Citizens Advice Bureau  
Consumers/Consumer direct  
HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)  
Institute of Directors  
Confederation of British Industry - and Northern Ireland Branch  
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales  
Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland  
Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland  
Institute of Chartered Secretaries  
Trade Union Congress  
Federation of Small Businesses (England and NI)  
British Chambers of Commerce  
ACAS  
Information Commissioners Office  
Experian  
Bisnode  
City of London Police  
HM Treasury  
Law Commission  
Ministry of Justice  
Metropolitan Police  
The Law Society (England, Scotland and Northern Ireland)  
Participation & the Practice of Rights Project  
Civil Law Reform Division  
Northern Ireland Court Service  
Law Centre (NI)  
HM Council of County Court Judges  
Northern Ireland Court Service  
Belfast Solicitors Association  
The Executive Council of the Inn of Court of NI  
Community Relations Council  
The Northern Ireland Ombudsman  
The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland  
NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux  
Food Standards Agency  
The NI Council for Voluntary Action  
Equality Commission for NI

NI Chamber of Trade  
NIC/ICTU  
Ministry of Defence  
Northern Ireland Court Service  
Human Rights Commission  
Court of NI  
Head of School of Law University of Ulster  
Northern Ireland Local Government Association  
Society of Local Authority Chief Executive  
Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland  
Participation & the Practice of Rights Project  
Community Relations Council  
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

This list is not definitive.

## **Companies Act 2006: Objecting to a Registered Office Address**

### **Consultation questions**

Q1. Do you agree that there is a problem that needs a solution?

Q2. If you do agree, does the proposal set out above address the problem or is there another process we should consider?

Q3. We have referred as shorthand to the 'legal occupier' of the premises. Who should be allowed seek a change of a company's registered office address?

Q4. Should the legal occupier of an address (or any other person) have the right to object at any time to the use of the address by a company as its registered office?

Q5. When such a person writes to the registrar to seek a change in the registered office details, how should this be done? For example, would a simple statement, letter or Companies House form be sufficient or should something more formal be required such as an affidavit or confirmation by a trusted source (e.g. the police)? Why?

Q6. Who should Companies House inform about an objection (e.g. the directors and/or secretary of the company) and what should they tell them? (For example just that there had been an objection, or the details of the person who had lodged the objection?)

Q7. How long should the registrar give the company to provide a new address or apply to court before annotating the register to confirm that the address is no longer the address of the company's registered office?

Q8. Is advertising in the Gazette an appropriate means to serve documents on the company in the absence of any other address?

Q9. Do you agree that, in the event of a successful objection, the address should cease to be the company's registered office but should remain on the register as part of the historical record? Will this cause any difficulties? Is anything else required?

Q10. Is strike-off an appropriate sanction in these circumstances? If so how rapidly? And what protections, if any, should there be for third parties?

Q11. Are there any other comments you wish to make relating to this issue?

| <b>Summary: Intervention &amp; Options</b>   |   |                            |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| <b>Department /Agency:</b><br>Department for<br>Business, Innovation<br>and Skills (BIS)   | <b>Title:</b><br>Impact Assessment of Correcting Registered<br>Office Addresses |                            |
| <b>Stage:</b> Consultation   | <b>Version:</b> One   | <b>Date:</b> November 2009 |
| <b>Related Publications:</b> Implementation of the Companies Act 2006 - Consultative Document February 2007 and Government Resonse June 2007 |   |                            |

Available to view or download at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/consultations/page37980.html>

**Contact for enquiries:** Julie Ford email:  
[julie.ford@bis.gov.uk](mailto:julie.ford@bis.gov.uk)

**Telephone:** 020 7215 2162

**What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary?**

In the UK the requirement for a company to have a registered office is set out in the Companies Act 2006. This legislation needs to be changed to enable an individual or business to apply to the Registrar of Companies (Companies House) to stop a company from using their address as its registered office address where they do not agree to its use for this purpose. Use of addresses in this way can in the very worst cases lead to distress for those involved - as credit ratings are affected and bailiffs become involved..

**What are the policy objectives and the intended effects?**

To allow anyone whose address is being used by a company that they have no connection with, to seek redress by asking for the removal of their details from the register (or an update of the companies details) as quickly as possible.

**What policy options have been considered? Please justify any preferred option.**

Option 1: Do Nothing

Option 2: Amend Company Law to reduce the risk of companies incorrectly using the addresses of other businesses or private individuals as their registered office address and set out a process for third parties to challenge the information on the register. This is the preferred option.

**When will the policy be reviewed to establish the actual costs and benefits and the achievement of the desired effects?**

To be reviewed from 2011 as part of the Companies Act 2006 evaluation.

**Ministerial Sign-off** For Consultation Stage Impact Assessments:

*I have read the Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that, given the available evidence, it represents a reasonable view of the likely costs, benefits and impact of the leading options.*

Signed by the responsible Minister:

..... Date:

## Summary: Analysis & Evidence

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Policy Option: 2</b> | <b>Description: Amend Company Law to reduce the risk of companies incorrectly using the addresses of other businesses or private individuals as their registered office address and set out a process for third parties to challenge the information on the register. This is the preferred option</b> |
|-------------------------|--|

|  |  |   |             |
|--|--|---|-------------|
| <b>COSTS</b>   | <b>ANNUAL COSTS</b>                            | Description and scale of <b>key monetised costs</b> by 'main affected groups'<br>Costs to companies and those using the register should be negligible. It may cost creditors £55 to publish a notice in the Gazette – we would expect them to choose to take this option. |             |
|  | <b>One-off (Transition) Yrs</b>                |   |             |
|  | <b>£ 00</b>                                    |   |             |
|  | <b>Average Annual Cost (excluding one-off)</b> |   |             |
|  | <b>£ 00</b>                                    | <b>Total Cost (PV)</b>  | <b>£ 00</b> |
| Other <b>key non-monetised costs</b> by 'main affected groups' |  |   |             |

|                 |                               |  |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>BENEFITS</b> | <b>ANNUAL BENEFITS</b>        | Description and scale of <b>key monetised benefits</b> by 'main affected groups'<br>Other <b>key non-monetised benefits</b> by 'main affected groups: Individuals and businesses will have some means to apply to stop their address being incorrectly used reducing the effect of receiving unwanted correspondence and associated problems such as impact on credit rating and in worst cases involvement of bailiffs. Creditors will have a new address to send their correspondence to - improved accuracy of information on the register. |
|                 | <b>One-off Yrs</b>            |  |
|                 | <b>£ 00</b>                   |  |
|                 | <b>Average Annual Benefit</b> |  |

**Key Assumptions/Sensitivities/Risks** We would want to avoid a situation where the solution to this problem will result in bureaucratic procedures which may result in additional admin burdens and costs.

|                      |                        |   |   |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|---|
| Price Base<br>Year 0 | Time Period<br>Years 0 | <b>Net Benefit Range (NPV)</b><br><b>£ 00</b> | <b>NET BENEFIT (NPV Best estimate)</b><br><b>£ 00</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|---|

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| What is the geographic coverage of the policy/option?  | UK                         |
| On what date will the policy be implemented?           | To be Confirmed            |
| Which organisation(s) will enforce the policy?         | Companies House/The Courts |
| What is the total annual cost of enforcement for these | £ not known                |
| Does enforcement comply with Hampton principles?       | Yes                        |
| Will implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements? | Yes/No                     |

|  |                  |                       |        |       |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|
| What is the value of the proposed offsetting measure per year? |                  | £ 00                  |        |       |
| What is the value of changes in greenhouse gas emissions?      |                  | £ 00                  |        |       |
| Will the proposal have a significant impact on competition?    |                  | No                    |        |       |
| Annual cost (£-£) per organisation<br>(excluding one-off)      | Micro            | Small                 | Medium | Large |
| Are any of these organisations exempt?                         | Yes/No           | Yes/No                | N/A    | N/A   |
| <b>Impact on Admin Burdens Baseline</b> (2005 Prices)          |                  | (Increase - Decrease) |        |       |
| Increase    £ 00   | Decrease    £ 00 | <b>Net</b>            | £ 00   |       |

Key:

Annual costs and benefits: Constant Prices

(Net) Present Value



## Evidence Base (for summary sheets)

### Objecting to a Registered Office Address

#### **PROPOSALS**

1. During implementation of the Companies Act 2006, and the Registrar of Companies and Applications for Striking Off Regulations 2009 (S.I. 2009/1803) it became apparent that legislation did not address occasions when companies are incorrectly using the address of other businesses or private individuals with whom they have no connection, or who no longer agree to this, as their registered office address.
2. To help address this issue we have outlined a process by which a third party can apply to stop their address being used as a company's registered office address. On receipt of a notice from a third party, Companies House would notify the company and require a new registered office address from the company. If the company does not provide a new address within a set timescale, Companies House may put a note on the register to indicate that documents and notices to be served on the company may instead be published in the Gazette or some other publication and strike off action may be taken.
3. The consultation document seeks views on these proposals to help establish what if any changes should be made to the Companies Act 2006 to improve the effectiveness of legislation in this area.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

4. The overall objective is to provide third parties with a process to seek redress if their address is being used by company for which there is not connection, and to reduce the incidence of inaccurate information being held on the register of companies.

#### **BACKGROUND**

5. Section 86 of the Companies At 2006 requires every company to have a registered office to which all communications and notices may be addressed. Apart from the requirement for the physical location of the office to be in the UK jurisdiction stated in its incorporation document no other restrictions apply to the choice of address. There is no requirement for there to be a link between that address and the company. This would enable a company to use the address of a third party as the registered office.

6. Companies House is the United Kingdom's public registry of company information; as a rule it accepts information in good faith and places it on the register.

### **Options for implementing the proposals.**

#### **OPTION 1: Do Nothing.**

7. When implementing the Companies Act 2006 it became apparent that provisions about rectification of the Companies House register would not enable a third party to make an application to have a company details changed when the company had incorrectly used their address as the companies registered office address. BIS made a commitment to consult on this issue.

#### **OPTION 2: : Amend Company Law to reduce the risk of companies incorrectly using the addresses of other businesses or private individuals as their registered office address and set out a process for third parties to challenge the information on the register. This is the preferred option.**

8. Changing legislation will address an issue that could not be addressed when implementing the Companies Act 2006 and supporting Regulations. This consultation seeks views on what action should be taken to help inform the policy. Although the number of complaints received by Companies House concerning company registered office addresses is small, around 18 per month, the impact on individuals and businesses whose address is used can be significant. For example an individual whose address is being used as the registered office address may receive bills and correspondence intended for that company, it may also affect someone's credit rating and lead to the involvement of bailiffs. The proposal also provides an address for those doing business with the company such as creditors. To leave information on the register that may be incorrect may also have a small but cumulative impact on the accuracy of the information which in turn may affect confidence in the reliability of information on the register without annotation.

### **COSTS AND BENEFITS**

9. During the last year Companies House has received an average of 18 complaints per month relating to a company using a third party address, this is compared to a monthly average around 64,000 company incorporations and subsequent notices of a change to a company's registered office address.

#### ***Costs***

10. The present proposals involve a third party notifying Companies House that they do not or no longer give permission for their address to be used as a companies registered office address. There may be costs for Companies House in processing these complaints – these are not known at present. However the number is small

and we aim to address this issue a minimum cost. It may cost creditors £55 to publish a document in the Gazette.

### ***Benefits***

11. The proposals in this consultation will provide a means for a third party to have the register updated if their address is used incorrectly by a company. This should help should reduce the impact on a individual of a company using their address. Which in many cases is distressing and in practical terms can affect an individuals credit rating and ultimately involve bailiffs. This in turn should help to improve the accuracy of information on the register of companies and increase confidence in and reliability of the information on the register. The proposals aim to strike a balance between the need of third parties whose details have been incorrectly used by a company – without creating additional burdens on companies or Companies House.

### **RISKS**

12. In addressing this issue we will need to carefully consider any potential solutions so as to avoid the creation of bureaucratic procedures which may impose administrative burdens or costs on Companies and Companies House.

### **WHO WILL BE AFFECTED?**

13. The proposals would apply to all companies. However, the main parties affected would be those individuals and businesses whose addresses may be incorrectly used by a company as a registered office address, the companies using incorrect address and the creditors of those companies.

### **EQUALITY IMPACT TESTS**

14. We have considered the three mandatory impact tests in respect of gender, race and disability and:

#### **Gender**

We consider that the recommended option is unlikely to have any discriminatory effects in respects of Gender.

#### **Race**

We consider that the recommended option is unlikely to have any discriminatory effects in respects of Race.

#### **Disability**

We consider that the recommended option is unlikely to have any discriminatory effects in respects of Gender.

### **SMALL FIRMS IMPACT TEST**

15. There is no change in nature or number of the overall population of companies affected by these provisions. The proposals apply to small business but do not impose new requirements on small business.

### **ENFORCEMENT AND SANCTIONS**

16. Companies House will be responsible for enforcing the amended law.

### **CONSULTATION**

17. The issue covered in the consultation came to light when implementing sections 1095 and 1096 of the Companies Act 2006 and supporting regulations the Registrar of Companies and Applications for Striking Off Regulations 2009 (SI 2009/1803). This shortened consultation is to seek views on what if any action should be taken in address this issue.

### **COMPETITION ASSESSMENT**

19. The competition filter has been applied. It is considered that these proposals will not give rise to disproportionate costs of entry or administrative costs for either small or large business. The proposals are not anticipated to restrict innovation in sectors characterised by rapid technological change and would not impair freedom to provide services.

## Specific Impact Tests: Checklist

Use the table below to demonstrate how broadly you have considered the potential impacts of your policy options.

**Ensure that the results of any tests that impact on the cost-benefit analysis are contained within the main evidence base; other results may be annexed.**

| Type of testing undertaken | <i>Results in Evidence Base?</i> | <i>Results annexed?</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Competition Assessment     | Yes                              | No                      |
| Small Firms Impact Test    | Yes                              | No                      |
| Legal Aid                  | No                               | No                      |
| Sustainable Development    | No                               | No                      |
| Carbon Assessment          | No                               | No                      |
| Other Environment          | No                               | No                      |
| Health Impact Assessment   | No                               | No                      |
| Race Equality              | Yes                              | No                      |
| Disability Equality        | Yes                              | No                      |
| Gender Equality            | Yes                              | No                      |
| Human Rights               | No                               | No                      |
| Rural Proofing             | No                               | No                      |