

Wolverhampton City Council – Briefing Note: Government Security Classifications

Summary:

On the 2nd April 2014 the UK Government changed the way it classifies and protects its information. It adopted a simpler approach of three levels of security classification: OFFICIAL, SECRET AND TOP SECRET.

Why was the classification system changed?

Government requires robust and effective security processes to protect information and other assets. The previous Government Protective Marking Scheme (UNCLASSIFIED, RESTRICTED, CONFIDENTIAL, SECRET AND TOP SECRET) had been in place for decades. Although the core requirements of protecting information have not changed, many of the supporting processes were developed for a paper-based system and are now complex, poorly understood and unsuited to the modern workplace.

Who does it apply to?

All central government departments and agencies, the Armed Forces and HMG's external partners. Adoption across the wider public sector is to follow in time.

What does this mean for the Council?

Employees should be aware of the UK Government levels of security classification and treat any information received with these markings appropriately. UK Government security classifications should only be applied to communications with central government departments and agencies etc. in all other cases the Council's information protective marking scheme must be applied.

All employees are personally responsible (and accountable) for exercising good judgement when assessing how information should be classified.

Whilst there is no direct mapping from the old UK Government marking system to the new classifications an indication of the approximate equivalent is provided in the diagram at the end of this briefing note.

Further information in respect of the [Government Security Classification policy and accompanying guidance](#) can be found via the Cabinet Office.

How does the new system work?

Security classifications indicate the sensitivity of information and the need to defend against a broad profile of threats to it. Each classification will attract a level of security controls appropriate for managing the information risks involved.



Key points

The **OFFICIAL** classification covers up to 90% of Public Sector business, including most policy development, service delivery, legal advice, personal data, contracts, statistics, case files, and administrative data.

- Security controls at OFFICIAL are based on good, commercially available products, in the same way that the best-run businesses manage their sensitive information.
- Particularly sensitive OFFICIAL information will be controlled through local handling arrangements that reinforce the 'need to know' principle.

The **SECRET** classification concentrates security resources on particularly sensitive defence, diplomatic and other assets that require protection against heightened threats. Whilst IT solutions may be bespoke overall, the aim is to reuse very good commercial products as far as possible.

The **TOP SECRET** classification will continue to provide extremely high levels of protection for exceptionally sensitive assets. Very little change is anticipated to current Top Secret standards and procedures.

GOVERNMENT PROTECTIVE MARKING SCHEME
(GPMS)
LABELLING PRE - APRIL 2014

NEW GOVERNMENT SECURITY CLASSIFICATIONS
(GSC) POLICY
LABELLING FROM - APRIL 2014

