ico.
Information Commissioner's Office

Can freedom of information requests be submitted using Twitter?

Many public authorities, including the ICO, have created Twitter accounts to communicate with their customers. Does this mean that people can use Twitter to submit freedom of information requests?

Answer
While Twitter is not the most effective channel for submitting or responding to freedom of information requests, this does not mean that requests sent using Twitter are necessarily invalid. They can be valid requests in freedom of information terms and authorities that have Twitter accounts should plan for the possibility of receiving them.

The requester's name
The key requirements for a request are in section 8 of the Act. The request must state the name of the applicant; our view is that this must be their real name.
A Twitter name may not be the requester's real name, but the real name may be shown in their linked profile. If the requester does not give their real name, it is technically not a valid freedom of information request. Whilst the authority may still choose to respond, the requester should be made aware that the Information Commissioner will not be able to deal with any subsequent complaint.

Their address
The request must also state an address 'for correspondence'. Does this include Twitter names? The length of a tweet makes it difficult for the authority to respond fully, but there are ways of dealing with this. The authority could ask the requester for an email address in order to provide a full response. Alternatively, it could publish the requested information, or a refusal notice, on its website and tweet a link to that.

@mentions
The ICO has also been asked whether a request in a tweet that only refers to an authority in an @mention, for example @ICOnews, is really directed to and received by that authority. The ICO's view is that it is. Twitter allows the authority to check for @mentions of itself, and so it has in effect received that request, even though it was not sent directly to the authority like an email or letter.
While authorities that have Twitter accounts should be prepared to receive freedom of information requests through this channel, we encourage requestors to use it responsibly. If they do not, the authority could consider using the exemptions for vexatious and repeated requests in section 14 of the Freedom of Information Act.