

11 April 2024

IC-298663-Q5T3

Request

You asked us:

"I would like to request copies of all documents related to the data breach at the Electoral Commission that was reported in August 2023. Specifically, the timeline of the Electoral Commission's disclosure to you."

We received your request on 5 April 2024.

We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOIA).

Our response

We have consulted with the relevant areas of the ICO can confirm that we do hold information in scope of your request. However, we can also confirm that at this time it is being withheld under section 31 of the FOIA.

Section 31 – Law enforcement

Information in relation to the data breach reported to the ICO by the Electoral Commission is exempt from disclosure under section 31(1)(g) of the FOIA. We can rely on section 31(1)(g) of the FOIA where disclosure:

"would, or would be likely to, prejudice... the exercise by any public authority of its functions for any of the purposes specified in subsection (2)."

In this case the relevant purposes contained in subsection 31(2) are 31(2)(a) and 31(2)(c) which state:

"(a) the purpose of ascertaining whether any person has failed to comply with the law...

(c) the purpose of ascertaining whether circumstances which would justify regulatory action in pursuance of any enactment exist or may arise ..."

Section 31 is not an absolute exemption, and we must consider the prejudice or harm which may be caused by disclosure. We must also carry out a public interest test to weigh up the factors in favour of disclosure and those against.

Our investigation into the Electoral Commission is still ongoing. To release the information that you have requested could prejudice the ICO's ability to conduct the investigation in an appropriate manner. Disclosure at this stage would discourage our ongoing discussions between the ICO and Electoral Commission and may damage our ability to conduct and conclude the investigation fairly and proportionately.

Disclosure could also jeopardise the ICO's ability to obtain information relating to this case or others in the future, and it is possible that other parties could be reluctant to engage with the ICO in the future.

Any information released at this stage could be misinterpreted, which in turn could distract from the investigation process.

With this in mind, we have then considered the public interest test for and against disclosure.

In this case the public interest factors in disclosing the information are:

- increased transparency in the way in which the Electoral Commission has responded to the ICO's enquiries; and
- increased transparency in the way in which the ICO conducts its investigations.

The factors in withholding the information are:

- the public interest in maintaining organisations' trust and confidence that their replies to the ICO's enquiries will be afforded an appropriate level of confidentiality;
- the public interest in organisations being open and honest in their correspondence with the ICO without fear that their comments will be made public prematurely or, as appropriate, at all; and
- the public interest in maintaining the ICO's ability to conduct the investigation into complaints as it thinks fit.

Having considered these factors, we are satisfied that it is appropriate to withhold the information at this time.

This concludes our response to your request.

Next steps

You can ask us to review our response. Please let us know in writing if you want us to carry out a review. Please do so within 40 working days.

You can read a copy of our full [review procedure](#) on our website.

If we perform a review but you are still dissatisfied, you can complain to the ICO as regulator of the FOIA. This complaint will be handled just like a complaint made to the ICO about any other public authority.

You can [raise a complaint](#) through our website.

Your information

Our [privacy notice](#) explains what we do with the personal data you provide to us, and sets out [your rights](#). Our [Retention and Disposal Policy](#) details how long we keep information.

Yours sincerely,



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