

29 August 2024

IC-328267-D8X7

Request

On 28 August 2024 you asked us:

- 1. The number of complaints received per year for each year to date since 2018 as broken down by the complaint categories used on your complaint record management system.*
- 2. The outcome of those complaints, that is, the number of complaints that were substantiated/ upheld, partially substantiated /upheld, or unsubstantiated/ rejected, for each year to date since 2018, as broken down by the complaint categories used on the complaint record management system.*
- 3. The average amount of time taken to resolve those complaints for each year to date since 2018 as broken down by the categories used on the complaint record management system and any relevant service standards concerning the timeliness of complaint-handling.*
- 4. The remedies provided in the case of complaints that were upheld or partially upheld (e.g. apology, financial payment) for each year to date since 2018 as broken down by the complaint categories used on the complaint record management system.*
- 5. Any information concerning learning from complaints, such as (but not necessarily exclusively limited to): changes made to systems, processes, and policies, training and staff development, and other service improvements.*
- 6. Any information you possess as regards the satisfaction levels of complainants whose complaints you have considered.*
- 7. Any information concerning the early resolution of complaints through informal methods, as defined at paragraphs 8.7 – 8.10 of the Parliamentary and Health*

Services Ombudsman's Model Complaint Handling Procedure for UK Central Government - <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/organisations-we-investigate/complaint-standards/uk-central-government-complaint-standards/model-complaint-handling-procedure-uk-central-government> - such as the number of such early resolutions for each year to date since 2018 as broken down by the complaint categories used on the complaint record management system.

8. Any internal policies or guidance concerning how you handle and consider complaints.

9. Any information or assessment concerning whether your handling of complaints is in line with the "UK Central Government Complaint Standards" which have been issued by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman: <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/organisations-we-investigate/complaint-standards/uk-central-government-complaint-standards>

10. Any information or assessment concerning whether the way in which you capture complaint data is line with the guidance issued by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, the Cabinet Office, the Treasury.

11. Do you prepare and/ or publish an annual report on complaints (whether standalone or as part of a more general annual report)? If so, please provide copies of any annual report on your handling of complaints prepared and/ or published since 2018.

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

Response

We hold information that falls under the scope of your request. However, we are refusing the request because to locate the information requested in entirety would exceed the cost limit set out by section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). This is due to points 4-7 and 9-10 of your request.

Furthermore, some of the information you have requested is already publicly available – we have provided links to this and suggestions on refining your request under the Advice and assistance section below.

Section 12(2) of the FOIA states that a public authority is not obliged to confirm or deny the extent to which the requested information is held if the estimated cost of establishing this would exceed the appropriate cost limit.

The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 stipulates that the 'appropriate limit' for the ICO is £450. We have determined that £450 would equate to 18 hours work.

We hold thousands of complaint cases on our case management system. In relation to point 4 of your request, there is not a category for 'remedies provided' within our case management system, so to identify any such remedies we would need to check the correspondence on each case.

In relation to point 5, learning from complaints could cover a huge range of information, ranging from information on individual cases to correspondence between staff, particular projects, reviews or engagement work. As well as thousands of case records we would also need to search these other areas for anything that might fit this description.

In relation to point 6, complainant satisfaction is a similarly broad area, and could cover any comments or complaints made about our services (which would require us to search thousands of case records), as well as any research in relation to this, such as customer satisfaction surveys. You have not provided any date range in relation to points 5 or 6, which requires us to consider all the information we hold in relation to these topics.

In relation to point 7, we do not categorise complaints in terms of whether or not these involved early resolution via informal methods (ie we cannot search electronically for cases fitting this description), so we would need to check the individual records of thousands of cases in order to answer this point.

In relation to points 10 and 11, your request for any information about whether our handling of complaints is compliant with particular standards and/or guidance is very broad. We document complaint handling on our casework management system as well as any complaints raised about our services. Compliance could be discussed as in relation to individual cases (in which case we would have to search thousands of these) as well as more broadly, for example in the development of our own policies, procedures or guidance, which again would require extensive searches to locate any relevant information.

Assuming it took two minutes to check each complaint case we hold (and in many cases it would take longer, depending on the complexity of the complaint)

for the criteria specified in the above points, it would take over 33 hours just to check 1000 of these cases. This does not include the extensive amounts of information across all our other systems we would also need to check to satisfy each point within your request.

Locating all the information in scope of this request would certainly exceed the 18 hours which would accrue a charge of £450 or less, triggering the provisions of section 12 of the FOIA. On this basis, we are refusing your request.

Advice and assistance

Please note that we do not retain records of complaint cases indefinitely, and that information about complaints more than two years ago is unlikely to be retained in entirety, in accordance with our [Retention and Disposal Policy](#).

We publish information about complaints, investigations and other types of cases [here](#). Most of these can be filtered by a range of factors including date reported and completed, legislation reason and outcome. Older data is available on archived versions of our website [here](#). This information addresses points 1, 2 and 3 of your request.

If you were to refine your request to ask for this information only, it would be exempt in accordance with Section 21 of the FOIA as the information is already accessible to you and can be filtered according to your requirements. More recent data sets are due to be published, so this information would likely be exempt in accordance with Section 22 of the FOIA.

In relation to point 3 we publish information about our [service standards](#) and other aspects of case handling on our website, including what to expect when making a particular type of complaint (such as a [data protection complaint](#)) and our [policies and procedures](#). You can search our [disclosure log](#) for previous responses we have published on this topic (such as [IC-315508-B3F5](#)), and we report on our performance in areas such as timeliness within [our annual reports](#) and [here](#).

To refine part 4 to bring this within the cost limit you could provide more specific criteria, which might include a reduced timeframe (please bear in mind that even during a single month we might receive a significant number of complaints), complaints against a specific data controller or public authority (depending on whether you are interested in data protection or FOIA complaints) or complaints that relate to a specific part of the legislation (such as a particular section or

article). Please see [our data sets](#) for examples of the criteria that might be used to filter search results.

To refine point 5 you could similarly specify additional criteria, such as those mentioned above (please note that information relating to specific complaints may be subject to exemptions, particularly if it enables individuals to be identified), a particular type of change (e.g. to an individual policy, type of training or area of our work) or information held by a particular team (such as FOI complaints).

To refine point 6 you could refine your request by providing a clearer definition of what kinds of information you are looking for in relation to complainant satisfaction. If you are interested in data from complaint cases then you could provide additional criteria to narrow down search results, as advised above, bearing in mind that information relating to individual complaint cases may be subject to exemptions. It is also worth noting that we have previously published information about customer satisfactions surveys (for example [IC-200687-M4S3](#)).

To refine point 7 you could specify the types of complaint case you are interested in as mentioned above. Once again please be aware that some information relating to complaint cases may be subject to exemptions.

In relation to point 8, we have already provided details of policies and guidance that are available above, this includes details of internal materials disclosed as part of previous FOI requests on our [disclosure log](#). If these do not cover your interests then please tell us more specifically what kinds of information you are seeking in relation to this.

In relation to points 9 and 10, you could refine these points further by narrowing down the criteria (for example we could consider compliance information in relation to a specific date range, complaint or document type, or focus on any citation of the guidance named in your request within the records of particular teams, or in relation to particular types of document such as policies, for instance).

In relation to point 11 please see our [our annual reports](#) and [performance data](#), as well as our [disclosure log](#) which includes responses to previous requests on similar topics.

If you do decide to refine your request, please note that any request requiring us to manually search large numbers of records is likely to exceed the appropriate

limit, and the accuracy of any such searches could not be guaranteed. Consideration can also be given as to whether the value to the public of any resulting information is proportionate to the effort to locate it, particularly given the issues regarding accuracy described.

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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