

# Complaints about the ICO's handling of your information

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## Introduction

You can complain to the ICO about the way we have treated your information. This guide explains how you can complain to us if you believe we have not followed data protection law when handling your information.

When we receive a complaint, we refer to them as **data protection reviews**. We do this because the ICO already uses the term “data protection complaint” to describe complaints about other organisations and we want to avoid any confusion.

Referring to your complaint as a data protection review does not affect how we will consider it. We will treat it as a complaint and handle it with appropriate seriousness and care.

The remainder of this guide will explain:

- how to ask for a data protection review;
- how we conduct data protection reviews; and
- what happens after a data protection review.

## Does this relate to me?

You can ask for a data protection review if you consider we are not following our data protection obligations. This could include:

- where we have responded to your information request, such as a subject access request; or
- how we're processing your information in general, such as if you have been affected by a security incident.

In this guide, we will explain how you can ask for a review and what to expect when you have.

This guide does **not** cover:

- complaints about the standard of service you have received (see our [Service Complaint Policy](#));
- complaints about responses issued under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (see [request an internal review of an FOI or EIR response](#)); or
- Complaints about other organisations.

Additionally, this guide only applies to responses we issue, and processing we carry out, on or after 19 June 2026.

## Asking for a data protection review

### How do I submit a data protection review?

When we respond to an information request, we will provide details of how you can request a review at the end of our response. You can respond directly to our email or letter.

You can also request a data protection review by:

- contacting us using the details provided on the [request information from us](#) section of our website; or
- using the form in our [privacy notice](#).

## How long do I have to ask for a review?

The law does not set a limit on how long you have to raise a complaint with us. However, we ask that you make your request within 40 working days of from the date of our response or when you became aware of the issue.

We will consider requests made after this time, but delays make it harder to investigate your concerns and may affect the decisions we reach.

## Do I have to use technical legal language?

We would recommend you explain in your own words why you are unhappy with the way we've handled your information.

You do not need to use legal terms, quote legislation, or explicitly ask us to treat your correspondence as a complaint. If it is clear to us that you believe we have not met our data protection obligations, we will treat your correspondence as a data protection review.

If your complaint, or the reasons for it, are unclear, we will contact you to seek clarification before beginning the review.

## Can I request a review verbally?

If you submit a data protection review verbally, we will usually write to you to acknowledge receipt and to confirm our understanding of your concerns, unless you've asked us to contact you in a different way.

## Can I make a request via social media?

If you submit a data protection review via social media, we will ask you to provide an alternative means of contact. Social media is not a secure channel for handling complaints. Additionally, we will need to be sure we're responding to the right person. Because of this, we will not be able to respond to your review until we have an alternative contact method and have confirmed your identity.

# How we will conduct the review

## How long will the review take?

The law says that:

- We must acknowledge your complaint within 30 days.
- We must respond without 'undue delay'.

Under our service standards, we will:

- Acknowledge within 5 working days.
- Respond within 20 working days.

If your data protection review is especially complex, we may need additional time to consider it. We aim to respond to even the most complex reviews within 60 working days.

If we consider your review is especially complex, we will write to you to let you know and tell you when you can expect a response.

## Who will conduct the review?

A member of ICO staff with an appropriate level of seniority and expertise will conduct the data protection review. The person who made the original decision will not carry out the review.

## Will you contact me if anything isn't clear?

If we require further information because:

- we do not consider your reasons for asking for a review are clear;
- we need to verify your identity; or
- we need a signed letter of authority to act on someone's behalf

then we will contact you. We will not be able to respond to your review until we have received the information requested.

## What happens during a review?

If your data protection review is about an information request, we will:

- Consider your comments and evidence.
- Consider how we handled the request.
- Consider whether we identified all relevant information.
- Consider whether any exemptions applied were appropriate.
- Disclose any additional information if we conclude that you are entitled to receive additional information.
- Tell you whether we consider we have met our data protection obligations.

If your data protection review is about other processing (eg a security incident), we will:

- Consider your comments and evidence.
- Explain what actions we have taken to remedy the situation, if any.
- Tell you whether we consider we have met our data protection obligations.

We will normally communicate the outcome of the data protection review to you in writing unless you have requested otherwise.

## What happens after a data protection review?

When we have issued a data protection review response, that is the end of our process, and we will not issue any further responses.

If you remain dissatisfied, you can make a Data Protection Complaint to the Information Commissioner in its role as the UK data protection regulator. This complaint will be handled independently of the team that carried out your data protection review. You can find further information about how to [raise a complaint](#) on our website.

## Notice to other organisations

The purpose of this document is to explain to members of the public how we're going to handle complaints under 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018. It explains what our service standards are and what we might do in some of the common circumstances that we anticipate we may see when handling such complaints.

It is important to make it clear that this guide is not the ICO's official policy position on section 164A. Compliance with the standards in this document are not mandatory or an expectation and copying this guide does not mean that your organisation is meeting its data protection obligations.

If you are an organisation who is looking to implement their own data protection complaints process, you must consider the ICO's guidance on [how your organisation can prepare to handle data protection complaints](#).

## Version history

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0.1	Document created	March 2026	■
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