

Freedom of Information

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Headlines

- Commissioner agrees with Tfl that requests are manifestly unreasonable, p.18
- ICO upholds authority's use of section 14, p.19
- Migration of benefits claimants data does not fall under section 22, says ICO, p.20

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Cease using excel spreadsheets in FOI responses, instructs ICO

The Information Commissioner's Office has called for an immediate end to the use of Excel spreadsheets to publish FOI data following a spell of serious data breaches.

The call comes in an [advisory notice](#) addressed to all public authorities, advising about the risks of personal information within spreadsheets being disclosed inadvertently in response to FOI requests. From now on, alternative approaches should be used to mitigate risk to personal information.

The advisory note follows high profile accidental data breaches at the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Norfolk and Suffolk police constabulary that exposed highly sensitive information stored in spreadsheets following FOI requests.

The note says that as a "matter of urgency," all public authorities must implement a moratorium on the disclosure of original source spreadsheets to online platforms in response to FOI requests, and convert spreadsheets and sensitive metadata into open reusable for-

mats such as comma-separated value (csv) files.

It also advises public authorities to avoid using spreadsheets with hundreds or thousands of rows, and invest in data management systems which support data integrity.

Authorities should continually train staff who use common data software and are involved in disclosing information, and ensure that there are no unexpected data included if the original format of

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ICO issues Enforcement Notice to City of York Council over FOI backlog

City of York Council ('the Council') has been issued with an [Enforcement Notice](#) after the Information Commissioner's Office found the local authority had a backlog of more than 250 unanswered freedom of information requests.

The ICO found the local authority to be in breach of its duties under section 1(1) and section 10(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Section 1(1) provides that a person requesting information from a public authority has a right, subject to exemptions, to be informed by the public authority in writing whether it holds the information and to have that communicated to them if the public authority holds it.

Section 10(1) specifies that public authorities must respond to requests within 20 working days.

These sections of FOIA remain the most commonly breached parts of the legislation.

In correspondence between the ICO and the Council, the latter said that it met the time requirements for responding to 85.5% of requests received between January 2023 and June 2023.

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