The Information Commissioner’s Office has said that there has been a ‘misunderstanding’ over claims made by the Culture Media and Sport Committee about information handling at the ICO. The comments came as part of the Committee’s report, ‘Press Standards, Privacy and Libel’, which is the product of the Committee’s recent enquiry into illegal phone hacking by News International.

In the report, the Committee states “[w]e have been surprised by the confusion and obfuscation in the Information Commissioner’s Office about the format of the information it holds, and to whom that information has been released.” The criticism was apparently prompted following the Committee Chairman’s visit to the ICO during the investigation. Mr John Whittingdale went to inspect invoices obtained during the ICO’s investigation into journalists’ ‘blagging’ — the practice of impersonating someone to obtain information from official databases.

A total of 17,000 invoices or purchase orders had been seized in Operation Motorman in 2003, but the ICO said they could not provide the redacted versions to publish as part of the inquiry. They said it would take too long to perform the redaction of all personal information that would be needed to comply with sec 59 of the Data Protection Act. The Commissioner also doubted “whether [it] would serve any useful purpose.”

The Committee was dissatisfied: “we would have expected to be told that the information was available in an electronic...

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