

Information Commissioner calls on public authorities to stop using spreadsheets in FOI responses

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- Advice comes following recent high profile data breaches
- Alternative approaches should be used to mitigate risk to personal information
- ICO creating checklist for safe and appropriate disclosure of information

The Information Commissioner, John Edwards, has issued an advisory notice to public authorities calling for an immediate end to the use of original source excel spreadsheets when responding publicly to Freedom of Information Act (FOI) requests.

The notice follows a number of recent high profile personal data breaches, where personal information was inadvertently included in spreadsheets that were shared as part of a FOI response.

The advisory notice includes recommendations that public organisations should:

- Immediately stop uploading original source spreadsheets to online platforms used to respond to FOI requests
- Continually provide training to staff who are involved with disclosing information
- Avoid using spreadsheets with hundreds or thousands of rows and instead invest in data management systems which support data integrity

“The recent personal data breaches are a reminder that data protection is, first and foremost, about people. We have seen both the immediate and ongoing impact that the release of such sensitive personal information has had on the individuals and families involved, and that is why I have taken this action.



“It is imperative that robust measures are in place to protect personal information. The advice we have issued sets out the bare minimum that public authorities should be doing to protect personal data when responding to information access requests, and to reassure the people they serve, and their staff, that their information is in safe hands.

- John Edwards, Information Commissioner

FOI requests are an obligation for public bodies, but personal information is exempt from release and should be redacted before the request is actioned. However, there have been numerous cases where employees have not received enough training to fully redact spreadsheets before release. Breaches such as these show that data is not just at risk from hackers, but also from general incompetence and highlights the importance of cyber literacy within organizations.

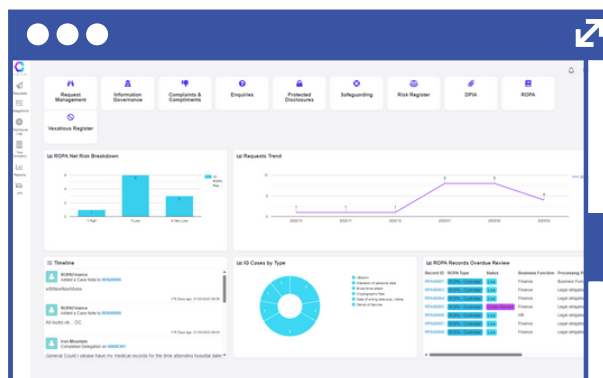
WHY EXCEL ISN'T ENOUGH FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Time to move beyond excel

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has called on public authorities to stop using spreadsheets for critical tasks like FOI responses due to high risks of error and inefficiency. Excel may seem convenient, but it's far from reliable for managing compliance and complex processes.

Key Issues with Excel

- Human Error: Prone to mistakes, especially with multiple users.
- No Audit Trail: Hard to track changes—bad for compliance.
- Limited Security: Sensitive data at risk with minimal protections.
- Scalability Problems: Becomes unmanageable as demands grow.
- Collaboration Issues: Multiple versions cause confusion and delays.



How ComplyKEY Solves These Problems

Enhanced Accuracy

Automate workflows to reduce manual errors and ensure regulatory compliance. Track every change with built-in audit trails, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Security You Can Trust

ComplyKEY ensures sensitive data is protected, with robust security controls that meet government standards.

Scalable & Efficient

Designed for public sector organisations, ComplyKEY adapts to evolving demands, allowing for real-time collaboration and centralized management without version confusion.

For over 20 years ComplyKEY software has been trusted by numerous government departments to ensure data compliance and management. Our platforms will transform your compliance efforts, making them seamless and efficient.

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