



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Press Release

For immediate release

Date: 17 December 2007

Information Commissioner welcomes the government's commitment to strengthen the powers of the ICO

Commenting on today's announcement Richard Thomas, Information Commissioner, said:

"Twenty five million records going missing from the HMRC is one of the most significant breaches in the history of data protection. This incident and its aftermath mark a turning point for data protection in the UK. Safeguarding large amounts of personal information – valuable assets for any organisation – has to be taken seriously from the top. The UK Data Protection Act provides the framework to handle personal information correctly. Whilst the majority of organisations process people's personal information in line with data protection requirements, the onus is on every organisation - and every leader within that body - to ensure there are clear lines of accountability to stop things from going badly wrong.

"The Cabinet Secretary's report and its recommendations place heavy emphasis on ensuring the right protection for personal information. Privacy matters more than ever before, especially as so much of our personal information is now collected and shared. Public trust and confidence must be earned through tighter security and other data protection safeguards. Retaining trust and confidence also relies on organisations not collecting or sharing excessive information in the first place. I will expect government and other organisations to carry out rigorous privacy impact assessments before new large collections of data are stored or shared.

"I welcome the government's commitment to strengthen the powers of my Office -

the ICO – enabling us to carry out inspections of organisations which collect and use personal information and to put in place new sanctions for the most serious breaches of data protection principles. These new arrangements will not be burdensome or onerous for organisations; they are a vital step to ensure there is proper protection for personal information. It goes without saying that it is essential that the ICO is properly resourced to discharge any new responsibilities effectively.

“We have received a copy of Kieran Poynter’s initial report and discussed its contents with him. It is clear that there was a breach of data protection requirements. We will decide what further action to take once the final PWC report is available.”

ENDS

If you need more information, please contact the Information Commissioner’s press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
2. For more information about the Information Commissioner’s Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
3. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - Fairly and lawfully processed
 - Processed for limited purposes
 - Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - Accurate and up to date
 - Not kept for longer than is necessary
 - Processed in line with your rights
 - Secure
 - Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection