

Statement



11 August 2010

ICO defends privacy interest over benefit crackdown

A spokesperson for the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) said:

"The ICO is seeking further clarification from the Department of Work and Pensions in relation to the government's proposal to use information provided by credit reference agencies to combat benefit fraud. The Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sensible information sharing and some sharing already takes place with credit reference agencies. However it appears that the latest proposals may go further. The details in relation to these plans therefore need to be further explored.

"Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham, has written to the Welfare Reform Minister Lord Freud suggesting a meeting. 'I hope the Government is going to hold to the good practice of considering the data protection implications of policies at the earliest stage,' the Commissioner says.

"A common sense approach should be applied to information sharing. This includes letting people know how their information will be processed. Most organisations make it clear that should they need to they will share details with authorities for the prevention and detection of crime. It is reasonable to expect that if you are committing benefit fraud your details will be shared with the appropriate authorities dealing with this. But any information sharing should be made clear in privacy policies. Credit reference agencies handle sensitive personal information. We work closely with the agencies and industry representatives to ensure the industry complies with the requirements of the Act."

For all media enquires, please contact the ICO press office on 0207 025 7580.

For all general enquires, please contact the ICO customer service team on 0303 123 1113.