



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

Press Release

02 September 2009

Wigan Council improves security after details on most school children are stolen

Wigan Council has agreed to take action to comply with the Data Protection Act after the theft of a laptop computer containing personal information relating to approximately 43,000 children and young people. The laptop included personal details on most children and young people in Wigan's schools. The information had been downloaded on to the laptop in breach of council policy. Although the laptop was stored in a locked office, the data on the device was not protected as the laptop was not encrypted.

The ICO found Wigan Council in breach of the Data Protection Act and Joyce Redfearn, Chief Executive at Wigan Council, has now signed an [Undertaking](#) confirming that the organisation will take a number of steps to improve data security.

Sally-Anne Poole, Head of Enforcement at the ICO, said: "I strongly advise organisations to avoid instances where employees can download large volumes of personal information. This incident could have been averted if the data was simply accessed from the main council computer network. Storing large volumes of personal information on portable devices is unnecessarily risky. If personal details fall into the wrong hands, individuals can experience considerable distress. It is vital that personal information is handled securely, especially where so many children and young people are concerned. I am pleased that the council has taken action to guard against security breaches of this nature."

Wigan Council has agreed to ensure that portable and mobile devices, including laptops and other portable media used to store and transmit personal data, are encrypted. Staff will be appropriately trained and made aware of the policy for the

storage and use of personal data, and the council will ensure that staff adhere to the policy. The council will also implement other appropriate security measures to ensure that personal data is better protected.

A copy of the Undertaking can be downloaded from

http://stg.ico.gov.uk/what_we_cover/data_protection/enforcement.aspx

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

Notes to Editors

1. The data controller shall, as from the date of this Undertaking and for so long as similar standards are required by the Act or other successor legislation, ensure that personal data is processed in accordance with the Seventh Data Protection Principle in Part I of Schedule 1 to the Act, and in particular:
 - (1) Portable and mobile devices including laptops and other portable media used to store and transmit personal data, the loss of which could cause damage or distress to individuals, are encrypted using encryption software which meets the current standard or equivalent;
 - (2) The policy covering the storage and use of personal data is followed by staff;
 - (3) Staff are aware of the data controller's policy for the storage and use of personal data and are appropriately trained how to follow that policy;
 - (4) The data controller shall implement such other security measures as it deems appropriate to ensure that personal data is protected against unauthorised and unlawful processing, accidental loss, destruction, and/or damage.
2. The Information Commissioner's Office promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is the UK's independent influential and practical authority on information rights and responsibilities, making a difference to people.
3. The ICO has 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.
4. Organisations can now sign the Personal Information Promise to demonstrate their commitment to protecting people's personal information by visiting the website at www.ico.gov.uk
5. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
6. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - a) Fairly and lawfully processed
 - b) Processed for limited purposes
 - c) Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - d) Accurate and up to date
 - e) Not kept for longer than is necessary

- f) Processed in line with your rights
- g) Secure
- h) Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection