

Reference: 01662184

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

20 September 2023

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning parcels and letters received by Ofcom. Your request was received on 22 August 2023 and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI Act).

Your request & our response

1. From August 1st 2022 to July 31st 2023, how many parcels (ie. not a postcard, letter, or flat envelope) did your organisation receive? If the precise data isn't available, please provide an estimate.

Approximately 1100.

2. From August 1st 2022 to July 31st 2023, how many letters did your organisation receive? If the precise data is not available, please provide an estimate.

We do not keep a record of the number of incoming letters.

3. From August 1st 2022 to July 31st 2023, how many mail items (including packages, letters, and flat envelopes) did you receive that were deemed 'suspicious'?

This might include:

- *Parcels with protruding wires, aluminium foil, or oil stains*
- *Mail items emitting a peculiar odour*
- *Greasy or oily patches on the mail item*
- *Mail items sealed in such a way so as to encourage opening them at a particular end*
- *Unusually printed address that might include spelling errors*
- *Adverse physical reaction to the handling of the mail item – e.g., itching or irritation*
- *No return address or return address that cannot be verified*
- *Unusual postmark or no postmark*

4. In relation to question 3, how many of these suspicious mail items actually contained something dangerous / unpleasant / illegal?

This might include:

- *Substances and objects which may explode*

- Gases which have been compressed, liquefied, or dissolved under pressure
- Flammable liquids and solids
- Biological substances
- Asbestos
- Controlled drugs and narcotics
- Corrosives
- Live creatures, insects, and invertebrates
- Waste, dirt, filth, or refuse
- Weapons and sharp objects
- Poisons, toxic liquids, solids, and gases
- Obscene publications or unlawful indecent images

5. In relation to question 4, how many of these mail items did your organisation report to the police?

6. From August 1st 2022 to July 31st 2023, how many unpleasant / threatening letters did your organisation receive?

This might include:

- Letters containing threats to the organisation or a member of the organisation
- Letters containing hate speech
- Letters containing blackmail
- Letters constituting harassment

7. If possible, what process do you have in place for receiving inbound mail?

Please select all that apply.

- a) A record is kept of all packages and letters that arrived
- b) All mail items are scanned on delivery
- c) The mailroom is under 24/7 surveillance
- d) All mail is tracked all the way to the end recipient (if an individual)

Generally under the FOI Act, any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information requested, and if that is the case, to have that information communicated to them. However by virtue of section 31(3) of the FOI Act, the duty to confirm or deny holding information does not arise if the confirmation or denial that would be given would or would be likely to prejudice, among other things, the prevention or detection of crime.

In answer to questions 3 to 7, Ofcom deploys a wide range of industry best in class policies, protocols and processes across all security pillars which include incoming mail management. However, we consider that information about suspicious parcels, letters etc, confirmation of whether or not we hold it, could potentially aid malicious attacks against Ofcom and its staff. We therefore can neither confirm nor deny whether we hold the information you requested.

Section 31(1)(a) of the FOI Act is a qualified exemption which means that we have had to consider whether or not the public interest in disclosing the information you have requested outweighs the public interest in withholding the information. In this case, we consider the public interest favours withholding the information.

The attached Annex A to this letter sets out the exemption in full, as well as the factors Ofcom considered when deciding where the public interest lay.

We also consider that other exemptions under the FOI Act such as section 38 may be applicable in this case. Section 38 of the FOI Act relates to information whose disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or endanger the safety of any individual.

If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Information Requests

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#). Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Annex A

Section 31(1) of the FOI Act:

“Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice –

(a) the prevention or detection of crime;”

Section 31(3) of the FOI Act:

“The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1)(a) would, or would be likely to, prejudice any of the matters mentioned in subsection (1).”

Factors for disclosure	Factors for withholding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling the public to gain a better understanding of how Ofcom performs its functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosure of detailed information about Ofcom’s mail and security management relating to that mail (including whether or not we hold the information) may aid malicious parties to compromise/attack the systems concerned. Release of this information will prejudice the prevention of crime by facilitating the possibility of criminal offences being carried out. • The consequences of releasing the information include undermining our incoming mail security and making it a vulnerable target to abuse and attack, this may also result in health and safety concerns to our staff.
<p align="center">Reasons why public interest favours withholding information</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that on balance, it is in the public interest to withhold the information requested. Disclosure of detailed information about Ofcom’s incoming mail information and security management for incoming mail may provide insight into information which may be used to attack Ofcom’s incoming mail systems. It is in the public interest for this not to happen to protect Ofcom against a potential compromise so that Ofcom can carry out its functions efficiently and its staff are safeguarded against any malicious attacks. 	