



Home Office

Information Rights Team

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Richard Taylor

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9 November 2016

Dear Mr Taylor,

Thank you for your email of 4 June 2016 in which you ask for details of diagrams “purporting to show the scale of databases held by Home Office directorates”. You asked for fully legible versions of the diagrams presented by the Home Office's Head of Strategy and Architecture, Simon Bond. A full copy of your request can be found at **Annex A**.

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I apologise for the time taken to provide you with a substantive response.

Please note that the slide used for the presentation was illustrative only of an approach rather than intending to show detail. The aim was to give a general overview of Home Office direction rather than discuss solutions in detail and this was explained to the attendees at the time. The diagrams do not show any scale or relation to databases within the Home Office. The picture refers to common capabilities and common platforms.

It may be helpful if I explained that capability mapping is a technique to determine what a business does and you can find out more about this here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_management_in_business

Information on how the Home Office operates is already published online and an example can be found here. <https://www.gov.uk/topic/immigration-operational-guidance/modernised-guidance>

Common platforms are a government strategy and more information can be found here <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2015/03/29/government-as-a-platform-the-next-phase-of-digital-transformation/>

After careful consideration we have decided that the requested information is exempt from disclosure under section 24(1), 31(1)(a) & (e) and 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. This provides that information can be withheld where disclosure would prejudice the national security of the UK, the prevention and detection of crime and the operation of immigration controls, and commercial interests. The public interest falls in favour of withholding the information.

Sections 24(1), 43(2) and 31(1)(a) & (e) of the Act are qualified exemptions and require the consideration of the public interest test. These arguments are set out at **Annex B**.

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to the address below, quoting reference 39935. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

Information Rights Team
Home Office
3rd Floor,
Peel Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
E-mail: info.access@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

M Seedansingh
Information Rights Team

Annex A

From: Richard Taylor [<mailto:request-338251-c4d3d6d2@whatdotheyknow.com>]

Sent: 04 June 2016 10:43

To: FOI Requests

Subject: Freedom of Information request - Diagrams Showing Databases Held by the Home Office

Dear Home Office,

Diagrams purporting to show the scale of databases held by Home Office directorates were reportedly shown at a Hadoop Users Group UK (HUGUK) in 2016 by the Home Office's Head of Strategy and Architecture, Simon Bond. The diagrams were present on a slide titled: "Our Approach". Labels on the diagrams shown were deliberately illegible. This is a request for the information present in the original, readable, versions via the release of fully legible versions of the diagrams presented.

This request follows an article by The Register which reports on the presentation and includes an image of the illegible slide:

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2016/06/03/home_office_mega_database/

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Richard Taylor

Cambridge

<http://www.rtaylor.co.uk>

Annex B

Public Interest Test considerations

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in favour of withholding the information, or the considerations for and against the requirement to say whether the information requested is held or not. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT, we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. The 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

Explanation of the exemptions at sections 24 – national security and sections 31 – law enforcement

24(1) *Information which does not fall within subsection 23(1) is exempt information if exemption from section 1(1)(b) is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security.*

31(1) *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

(e) The operation of the immigration controls

Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

The Home Office recognises that there is a general public interest in openness and transparency in all aspects of Government. Transparency in this matter would enhance the public's knowledge of systems and processes in place, and to some limiting degree, how public money and resource is used, in securing the UK border and safeguarding national security.

Considerations in favour of withholding the information

Disclosure of information would not be in the interest of the UK's national security. Disclosure would undermine the Home Office's key role in the infrastructure of the UK and its ability to safeguard national security. There is clearly a strong public interest in doing everything we can to detect and prevent crime, and protect the public at large. It is considered that disclosure of the requested information would prejudice the prevention of crime, the operation of immigration controls and national security.

We conclude that the balance of the public interest lies in withholding the information

Annex B – continued

Explanation of the exemption Section 43

43 - Commercial interests.

(2) Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

Section 43(2) allows us to exempt information if its disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any persons. If we were to disclose the information to you, this would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of both the Home Office and those companies with whom the Home Office enters into contracts.

This exemption requires us to consider whether, in every respect the public interest in maintaining the exemption stated above, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

There is a public interest in Government departments being able to secure contracts that represent value for money and anything that would undermine this is not in the public interest. Value for money can be best obtained where there is a healthy competitive environment, coupled with protection of the Government's commercial relationships with industry, where this is not the case, there would be a risk that:

- Companies would be discouraged from dealing with the public sector, fearing disclosure of information that might damage them commercially, or
- Companies would withhold information where possible, making the choice of the best contractor more uncertain as it would be based on limited and censored data.

We have therefore concluded that the balance of public interests identified lies in favour of maintaining the exemption. This is because the overall public interest lies in ensuring that the Home Office's ability to protect its commercial competitiveness and relationships with its current service providers is not prejudiced.