

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Our Ref: FOI2018/10171

10 January 2019

Dear Natasha Bernal,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 18 November. You asked:

Following the launch of artificial intelligence software to detect benefit fraud in January 2018,

- 1. could you please provide details of how many fraudsters this technology was able to detect, and*
- 2. how much it has been able to save taxpayers please.*
- 3. I would also like to know the name of the provider of this technology and the cost of implementing it on the benefits system.*

If it is not possible to provide the information requested due to the information exceeding the cost of compliance limits identified in Section 12, please provide advice and assistance under the Section 16 obligations of the Act, as to how I can refine my request.

DWP Response:

In respect of your requests numbered 1 and 2, I confirm that the Department holds information in scope of your request. However it engages an exemption from disclosure because it relates to law enforcement – Section 31(1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act. This exemption covers certain information which, if released, would be likely to prejudice the prevention and detection of fraud and crime.

As required by the Act, I have also assessed the public interest for against disclosure. There is a public interest in greater transparency which makes government more accountable to the electorate and increases trust. There is also a public interest in disclosing information that holds public bodies to account and increases transparency about how they perform their functions.

However, there is a very strong public interest in protecting society from crime and preventing the disclosure of information that would facilitate or encourage criminal activity. The prejudice test is not limited to the harm that could be caused by the requested information on its own. We have taken account of harm likely to arise if the requested information were put together with other information already in the public domain, commonly known as the “mosaic effect”. We have also considered the prejudice that would be caused if the requested information was combined with information which we could be forced to subsequently provide if this request was complied with, which is known as the “precedent effect”.

On balance and taking all of the above factors into consideration, DWP is satisfied that in this instance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure. Therefore, the information you seek will not be released.

In respect of your request numbered 3, the requested information is not held by the department.

This is because we are developing this solution with our in-house Digital and Analytics teams using freely available open source machine learning software. We are using an Agile approach in order to develop the technology at low cost. DWP takes its responsibility to prevent detect and recover benefit fraud very seriously. As the money paid in benefits is taxpayer's money it is right that we ensure it is paid correctly, and recover any money that is paid incorrectly.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact us quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF
https://ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745