



# Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
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[www.gov.uk/dhsc](http://www.gov.uk/dhsc)

Mr Gabriel Kanter-Webber

By email to: [request-849151-93f4650a@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-849151-93f4650a@whatdotheyknow.com)

29 April 2022

Dear Mr Kanter-Webber,

## Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1400451

Thank you for your request dated 30 March, in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

*“This request relates to the Public Health England report entitled ‘Report - Exercise Alice, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)’ dated 15 February 2016.*

*Please provide an electronic copy of the complete text of paragraph 2 (headed “Scenario”).”*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

As the title of Section 2 of *Report: Exercise Alice, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) 15 February 2016* is ‘Aim and Objectives’, we have interpreted your request to mean the text of Section 3, which is titled ‘Scenario’.

DHSC holds information relevant to your request.

A review of our records indicates that you have not requested a copy of the document *Report: Exercise Alice, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) 15 February 2016* from the department previously. We therefore attach an extract of Section 3 as released under the FOIA to other individuals to ensure that we have correctly identified the document you are referring to in our response (please see the accompanying annex).

However, we are withholding an unredacted version of the text of Section 3 ‘Scenario’ under Sections 27(1)(a) and 38(1)(b) of the FOIA.

The information redacted under Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA, which if disclosed would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between the UK and any other State. Section 27(1) is a qualified exemption, and we are required to assess whether the balance of public interest favours disclosing or withholding the information.

The department recognises that there is a strong public interest in information being made as freely available as possible, allowing the general public to understand decisions made by public authorities that affect their lives.

However, the department has considered the public interest in maintaining the exemption and this outweighs the public interest in its disclosure. The department believes that release of this information would be likely to prejudice relations between the UK and the State named in the purely hypothetical scenario upon which Exercise Alice was based.

Some information was also redacted under Section 38(1)(b) of the FOIA, which states that if information is disclosed it would, or would likely, endanger the safety of individuals. This information remains redacted in the extract in the annex.

Section 38 is a qualified exemption, and we are required to assess the public interest in withholding this information against that of its release. The department acknowledges that the public has an interest in this information. However, we believe that releasing it would be likely to endanger the safety of individuals, and we therefore consider that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.

If you are not satisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to appeal by asking for an internal review. This should be sent to [freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk) or to the address at the top of this letter and be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communication.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have already appealed our original response and received our internal review decision. You should raise your concerns with the ICO within three months of your last meaningful contact with us.

The ICO can be contacted at:

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

Website: <https://ico.org.uk/concerns>

Yours sincerely,

Freedom of Information Team  
[freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk)

## ANNEX

### Extract from Report: Exercise Alice, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) 15 February 2016

#### **3. Scenario**

A group of [REDACTED] travelled to [REDACTED]. Some of the group were from London [REDACTED] and the others were from the Birmingham area [REDACTED]. When they returned, all appeared fit and well. Ten days later, three of the group presented at three different hospitals with flu-like symptoms.

All the A & E departments were busy with a high prevalence of patients presenting with flu-like symptoms, however all the patients were admitted. Once the travel history was analysed, MERS-CoV was suspected and a process of contact tracing was initiated and samples were taken for testing. After two days, two of the cases were lab-confirmed with MERS-CoV and a further case at St Thomas' hospital was strongly suspected. Prior to arriving at the hospitals, two of the patients had been part of a large gathering at [REDACTED].

The scenario develops with 50 lab-confirmed cases and 650 possible contacts, various elements of the NHS are under pressure from the cases and the media take a keen interest.

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