



Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

www.gov.uk/dhsc

Mr Joseph Lloyd
request-657035-2ab8b581@whatdotheyknow.com

20/04/2020

Dear Mr Lloyd,

Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1213166

Thank you for your request dated 29 March, in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

*"Dear Department of Health and Social Care,
I wish to see a full copy of the 'Exercise Cygnus' report mentioned in the article below:
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/28/exercise-cygnus-uncovered-pandemic-warnings-buried-government/>
Yours faithfully,"*

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

DHSC holds the information you have requested. However, we are withholding this information under Section 35(1)(a) of the FOIA, which provides for the protection of information relating to the formulation and development of Government policy.

Section 35 is a qualified exemption and we are required to assess as objectively as possible whether the balance of public interest favours disclosing or withholding this information. DHSC recognises a general public interest in promoting openness and transparency in Government. In addition, DHSC recognises the interest in information relating to an exercise that has some relevance to systems and procedures in place for the Covid-19 outbreak.

However, this information is exempt under section 35 to ensure that the full, candid and proper deliberation of policy formulation and development is not influenced or impacted by the possibility of public exposure. We consider that the release of this information would prohibitively impact the ability of Ministers to meet with officials and external stakeholders to discuss ongoing policy development.

Civil servants and subject experts need to be able to engage in the free and frank discussion of all policy options, to expose their merits and demerits and their possible implications as appropriate. Their candour in doing so will be affected by their assessment of whether the content of such discussion will be disclosed. Disclosure of information protected under section 35 could prejudice good working relationships.

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 submitted within two months of the date of this letter and sent to FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk, or to the address at the top 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
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

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

Yours sincerely,

Le-Anne Frankson
Freedom of Information Officer
FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk