



## 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](http://www.gov.uk/dhsc)

Ms Helen Thomas  
request-650630-75415580@whatdotheyknow.com

17 April 2020

Dear Ms Thomas,

### **Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1206716**

Thank you for your request dated 26 February in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

*"Dear Department of Health and Social Care,*

*In 2016, there was a cross-Government tier one pandemic influenza exercise called Cygnus. I believe this was carried out in October, between 18th and 20th.*

*As I understand, this was carried out by the Department of Health, as requested by the Cabinet Office.*

*Please provide the report produced as a result of Exercise Cygnus, including the conclusions and recommendations for changes. "*

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 recognise 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 receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to the address at the top of this letter, or the email address at the end of this letter.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Ed Franklyn  
Freedom of Information Officer  
E [freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk)