



Northern
Ireland
Office

Northern Ireland Office
Freedom of Information Team
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Dear [REDACTED]

28 June 2021

REFERENCE: FOI/21/89

Thank you for your email dated 28 May 2021 in which you requested the following information from the Northern Ireland Office:

I would like to submit a Freedom of Information request please in relation to WhatsApp messages.

- 1. Can you please tell me how many WhatsApp messages that Special Advisors working in your department sent as part of their work as civil servants on the 26th May, 2021.***
- 2. Can you also provide me with copies of those messages on WhatsApp sent on that day by your Special Advisors that were specifically discussing Mr Dominic Cummings.***

If the cost limit of FOI exceeds No 2. Can you please just send me details of No. 1

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

RESPONSE

We are writing to advise you that the Northern Ireland Office is unable to confirm or deny whether the information you have requested in your request 1 is held under section 31(3) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act').

We consider that confirming or denying that such information is held would be likely to prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime, (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders and (c) the administration of justice. A confirmation or denial that Northern Ireland

Office officials used WhatsApp would provide information as to which messaging service those officials used.

It would either confirm that those officials use WhatsApp (which is neither confirmed nor denied) or it would deny that those officials use it, which leaves open the possibility that it uses other messaging services. It would then be open to other requests for information as to whether Northern Ireland Office officials use those other messaging services.

We can confirm that special advisers receive appropriate advice on the security of their Communications.

If you believe this reply is not in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you may ask for an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you request a review you should do so in writing stating the reasons.

If following an internal review you were to remain dissatisfied you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner and ask him to investigate whether the NIO has complied with the terms of the FOIA. You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

The Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. Further details on the role of the Information Commissioner and the handling of appeals can be found at: www.ico.org.uk

If you wish to discuss this please contact the Freedom of Information Team using the contact details provided at the top of the first page. Please remember to quote your reference in any correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Manager