

Reference: 1552865

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3 February 2023

## Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about emergency text alert sent in March 2020.

We received this request on 9 January 2023 and have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the FOI Act”).

### Your request

You asked: *‘Please provide me with any information you have on the coordinated effort (including timeframe) between the UK Government, mobile network providers and Ofcom in regard to the emergency alert system text received by the population of the UK of the lockdown rules in March 2020.’*

### Our response

By way of background, the initiative to deploy an emergency alert system was instigated by the UK Government in 2020. Emergency alerts will warn the public if there’s a danger to life nearby. It will enable the Government to be able to communicate quickly and securely with citizens at times of crisis on either a localised or national basis.

The government expects to launch the Emergency Alerts service in 2023. Emergency alerts will warn you if there’s a danger to life nearby. For more information on this, please visit the government’s webpage on [emergency alerts](#).

Whilst Ofcom as the communications regulator has been asked to make some specific contributions to the emergency alerts initiative, it has not been setting policy or test schedules and procedures.

Turning to your request, we consider that it is very broad in scope and a considerable amount of time would be required to locate, retrieve, identify and extract the information. Section 12 of the FOI Act provides that we are not obliged to comply with a request for information if we estimate that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the “appropriate limit”. The appropriate limit is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the “Regulations”), and is, for Ofcom, £450. That sum is intended to cover the estimated costs involved in determining whether Ofcom holds the information requested, locating, retrieving and extracting the information from any document containing it. The Regulations provide that costs are to be estimated at a rate of £25 per person per hour, which equates to 18 hours of time.

We estimate that it would take over 18 hours to locate, identify and extract the information you requested due to the number of different email accounts and files we would have to search through to identify those linked to the information you have requested about the specific emergency text alert in March 2020.

You may wish to consider submitting a narrower, more focused request and we would be happy to consider this under the FOI Act. Should you decide to make a further request for information, please note that other exemptions may apply. For example, information which relates to a particular business, such as mobile network providers which we have obtained in exercise of our powers, would be exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act unless we have the consent of that business or one of the statutory gateways for disclosure apply<sup>1</sup> (for further information on the exemptions under the FOI Act, see the Information Commissioner's Office's website).

If you have any further queries, then please send them to [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Gloria Akinyemi

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<sup>1</sup> See section 44 of the FOI Act and section 393 of the Communications Act 2003

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

#### **Timing**

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact [information.requests@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:information.requests@ofcom.org.uk).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#).

Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF