

RJT4

Richard Thomas

From: Richard Thomas
Sent: 14 November 2003 17:57
To:
Cc: Adams, Edward; Francis .Aldhouse; Nick Tyler; Phil Jones; Jean Lockett; Alec Owen; Roy Pollitt; Tanya Croft
Subject: Message for Lord Filkin - Unlawful obtaining of personal data
Importance: High
Attachments: Press Complaints letter - 4 Nov 03.doc

Dear Geoff

Thank you very much for a very worthwhile lunch today.

I promised to give you further material about the investigations we have been conducting into the activities of various enquiry agents who are able to sell to "media" customers a wide variety of personal confidential information - obtained from government departments, the police, and private companies. The information concerned includes vehicle keeper details, criminal records, itemized telephone call records and ex-directory numbers. I anticipate prosecuting a number of individuals in due course for the offence (section 55 of the Data Protection Act) of recklessly or knowingly obtaining personal information without the consent of the data controller. At the moment, I am waiting while the Metropolitan Police investigate serious offences relating to corruption in public office arising from the same activities. The latest information - received in confidence - is that the Metropolitan Police may be charging a number of public employees on 26 November. In that event, the police are likely to issue a press release on that day and we will probably do likewise. I am not, at that stage, proposing to refer directly to the role of the media as customers.

As I mentioned, I wrote to Sir Christopher Meyer, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, on 4 November seeking a meeting about the matters uncovered by our investigations and the involvement of the press. A copy of my letter is attached. The penultimate paragraph suggests a possible role for the PCC. I am now due to meet Sir Christopher on 27 November.

I will be telling him then that our investigations have produced documentary evidence of some 5,500 transactions, involving more than 250 reporters from a wide range of newspapers and magazines. The documentary material includes written records about these transactions and invoices and remittance advices which refer explicitly to 'confidential information'. The sums involved include £75 for each ex-directory number, £150 for a vehicle check, £500 for a criminal record check and up to £750 for "Family and Friends" information.

You will appreciate the sensitivity of this matter - not least the need to safeguard the evidence that has been collected and to ensure that nothing is said or done which could prejudice any of the criminal or other proceedings which are in contemplation.

I will keep you, through your officials, informed about developments. Please let me know if you need any further information at this stage.

Yours sincerely

Richard

Richard Thomas
Information Commissioner

richard.thomas@ico.gsi.gov.uk

26/08/2011

MOD100000362