



Homes
England

Date: 7 December 2021

Our Ref: RFI3678

Tel: 0300 1234 500

Email: infogov@homesengland.gov.uk

Making homes happen

By Email Only

Information Governance Team
Homes England
Windsor House – 6th Floor
50 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0TL

Dear [REDACTED]

RE: Request for Information – RFI3678

Thank you for your request for information which was processed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You requested the following information:

Please find below my FOI request regarding malicious emails sent to the department.

The date range for the requests is from 2018 to present day. The data shall include a breakdown by year and by individual departments (e.g. separate departments, agencies, or public bodies within the main government agency), if applicable.

- 1. How many malicious emails have been successfully blocked?*
- 2. What percentage of malicious emails were opened by staff?*
- 3. What percentage of malicious links in the emails were clicked on by staff?*
- 4. How many ransomware attacks were blocked by the department?*
- 5. How many ransomware attacks were successful?*

Response

We can confirm that we do hold some of the requested information. We will address each of your questions in turn.

1. How many malicious emails have been successfully blocked?

We can confirm that, Homes England only stores this data for the last 90 days and therefore, as of August 2021 to present, 982 malicious emails have been successfully blocked by our threat detection system for the whole of Homes England.

2. What percentage of malicious emails were opened by staff?

3. What percentage of malicious links in the emails were clicked on by staff?

Neither Confirm nor Deny

Homes England can neither confirm nor deny that we hold the information requested.

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On receipt of a valid request for information, section 1(1) of the FOIA obliges a public authority to inform the requestor under section 1(a) if they hold the information requested, and under section 1(b) communicate that information to them.

However, the duty under section(1)(a) does not apply to your request by virtue of sections 31(3) FOIA.

The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if to comply with this duty would be likely to constitute an actionable prejudice to the prevention or detection of crime (section 31(1)(a)).

The full text in the legislation can be found here:

[Freedom of Information Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

Section 31 – Law Enforcement

Under section 31(1)(a) Homes England is not obliged to disclose information that would, or would be likely to, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

Homes England has identified that to confirm or deny that information is held in relation to malicious links clicked on by staff engages section 31(1)(a) of the FOIA as release could result in it being used fraudulently by third parties to target cyber-attacks on our systems and information storage by criminal means.

Section 31 is a qualified exemption. This means that once we have decided that the exemption is engaged, Homes England must carry out a public interest test to assess whether or not it is in the wider public interest for the information to be disclosed.

Arguments in favour of disclosure:

- Homes England acknowledges there is a general public interest in promoting accountability, transparency, public understanding and involvement in how Homes England undertakes its work.

Arguments in favour of withholding:

- To confirm or deny the information is held could put Homes England at risk of cyber-attack and put our information and systems at risk. It would not be in the public interest to release this information as Homes England have a legal duty to protect our own information and information regarding third parties that is held in our systems. Homes England would suffer reputational damage and risk of legal ramifications if our security were compromised, and confidential information accessed. This would not be in the public interest as Homes England would not be able to achieve its objectives as set out in our strategic plan; and
- Homes England has been unable to identify a wider public interest in disclosing the information requested.

Having considered the arguments for and against disclosure of the information, we have concluded that at this time, the balance of the public interest favours neither confirming nor denying that the information is held.

The public interest arguments to confirm or deny should not be interpreted as evidence that Homes England does or does not hold information that falls within the scope of your request.



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4. How many ransomware attacks were blocked by the department?

We can confirm that Homes England does not hold the information detailed in your request.

To conclude that the information is not held, we have searched with our Digital team who would have the requested information if held.

The FOIA does not oblige a public authority to create information to answer a request if the requested information is not held. The duty under section 1(1) is only to provide the recorded information held.

The full text of section 1 in the legislation can be found here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/1>

Advice and Assistance

We have a duty to provide advice and assistance in accordance with Section 16 of the FOIA. We can advise that the reason we do not hold data on how many ransomware attacks were blocked is because, it would not be possible for us to determine how many "attacks" we experience on a daily basis as they would have resulted in ransomware being deployed. Therefore, any ransomware is blocked by our anti-malware tools before any cyber threats can be made.

5. How many ransomware attacks were successful?

We can confirm that between 2018 to present, there were 0 successful ransomware attacks as no malware breached our perimeter.

Right to Appeal

If you are not happy with the information that has been provided or the way in which your request has been handled, you may request an internal review. You can request an internal review by writing to Homes England via the details below, quoting the reference number at the top of this letter.

Email: infogov@homesengland.gov.uk

The Information Governance Team
Homes England – 6th Floor
Windsor House
50 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0TL

Your request for review must be made in writing, explain why you wish to appeal, and be received within 40 working days of the date of this response. Failure to meet this criteria may lead to your request being refused.

Upon receipt, your request for review will be passed to an independent party not involved in your original request. We aim to issue a response within 20 working days.



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You may also complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) however, the Information Commissioner does usually expect the internal review procedure to be exhausted in the first instance.

The Information Commissioner's details can be found via the following link:

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

Please note that the contents of your request and this response are also subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Homes England may be required to disclose your request and our response accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

The Information Governance Team

For Homes England

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