



National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending
watchdog

Switchboard +44 (0)207 798 7000
Direct Line +44 (0)207 798 7264
Email FOI@nao.org.uk

Reference FOI-1745
Date 23 September 2024

ISSUES LINKED TO DEATH BY SUICIDE OF DWP CUSTOMERS

Thank you for your FOI request to the National Audit Office (NAO) dated 24 August 2024.

You requested all correspondence, information and data exchanged or otherwise held as a result of or in the course of NAO interaction with the Department for Work & Pensions for any purposes concerning issues linked to death by suicide of DWP customers, prior and post publication of the NAO report [Information held by the Department for Work & Pensions on deaths by suicide of benefit claimants](#). We have considered your request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

While we hold information relevant to your request, our assessment is that it would be too costly for us to compile the information you have requested. Given the very broad nature of your request, we would need to search our audit, FOI and correspondence files for any information we hold as a result of our interactions with DWP at any time and that concerns issues linked to death by suicide of DWP customers. We consider the work that would be needed to locate and extract relevant information to enable us to answer your query would take more than 18 hours.

For example, the folder containing the original correspondence we received from the Rt Hon Frank Field MP that prompted us to carry out this work contains a large volume of material including data in Excel spreadsheets, as well as documents and emails some of which have further documents embedded or attached. We would also need to review the folders relating to your previous FOI requests as well as other correspondence we have received relating to DWP to determine if any additional information is in scope of your request.

For this reason, we have applied the exemption in Section 12 of the FOIA which allows a public authority to refuse a request if the cost of providing the information to the applicant would exceed the 'appropriate limit'.

Annex A provides further details of the Section 12 exemption.

You may wish to submit a refined, more focused request, for example in relation to a specific finding in our report. Should you decide to submit a refined request please describe the information as specifically as possible. You can find guidance on making an FOI request here [How to access information from a public authority | ICO](#). However, I should note that a considerable amount of the information held is likely to be sensitive and may require us to apply other exemptions.

We have previously provided you with some information in response to your previous FOI requests about our report (FOI-1303 2020 and FOI-1451 2021). This included information on the source of referrals for the 69 Departmental Internal Process Reviews since 2014-15 that were related to suicide shown in Figure 1 of the



report. We continue to be of the view that we cannot share any more detailed data we hold regarding Figure 1 as this information was provided to us by DWP for the purpose of our audit functions. DWP owns this information and given the sensitive subject matter it is best placed to consider whether it can be publicly disclosed and, if so, present it with suitable context. If you have queries about this data, you may therefore want to contact DWP. You can make a request to DWP at freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gov.uk.

Our internal review response to FOI-1303 also explained that we had found in the public domain two of the four Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report summaries held by the NAO. This information had been published by the coroner and can be accessed using the following links:

- <https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/alexander-boamah/>
- <https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/michael-osullivan>

We are now aware that the two other reports are also in the public domain and can be accessed at the following links:

- https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Faiza-Ahmed-2016-0600_Redacted.pdf
- <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Miriam-Smith-Cox-2015-0475-REDACTED..pdf>

I hope the information given above explains why we cannot comply with your request on this occasion. If you are not happy with the way we have handled your request, you can escalate your concerns. You should write to us within 40 working days, and we will carry out an internal review in relation to your original request.

Write to the NAO (FOI) Team at FOI@nao.org.uk or by post to: FOI Team, Green 2, National Audit Office, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 9SP.

Yours sincerely,

FOI and Correspondence Officer

Annex A

Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Section 12 of the FOIA allows a public authority to refuse a request if the cost of providing the information to the applicant would exceed the 'appropriate limit' as defined by the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004.

The Regulations provide that the appropriate limit to be applied to requests received by public authorities is £450. For the purposes of the estimate the costs of performing these activities should be estimated at a rate of £25 per hour. This is therefore equivalent to 18 hours work.

In estimating the cost of complying with a request for information, a public body can only take into account any reasonable costs incurred in:

- (a) determining whether it holds the information,
- (b) locating the information, or a document which may contain the information,
- (c) retrieving the information, or a document which may contain the information, and
- (d) extracting the information from a document containing it.