

County Council Meeting – 14 June 2011

STATEMENTS/UPDATES BY CABINET MEMBERS

Information Commissioner's Office

Members may be aware of recent press coverage regarding the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and I thought it might be helpful if I updated the Council on the reasons for the fine and the work already undertaken to improve data security.

Under its powers, the ICO has fined Surrey County Council for 3 serious breaches of personal data. All three breaches took place in 2010 and were as a result of sending information to the wrong e-mail addresses. The Council has a large number of group e-mail addresses that are required to be maintained for legitimate business purposes. On each occasion the wrong address was typed in. It should be noted that Surrey County Council delivers around 5 million internal emails each month and sends/receives close to 7 million emails.

The Country Council reacted very swiftly in order to contain and recover the information by contacting the relevant recipients to ensure destruction and providing those affected with full support and advice.

The Service conducted an investigation of each breach and the Council's Auditors also undertook a review of e-mail security. A number of technical recommendations were identified and implemented such as appropriately using protective marking when delivery is made to an external address and establishing a naming convention when using group email addresses that would prevent text being mistyped.

As a result, staff training and awareness has been high on the agenda amongst the services and there is a strong continued communications campaign underway internally to ensure that information security is at the forefront of staff thinking when they are handling sensitive information.

Although the Information Commissioner was informed of the number of technical security and organisational measures that were in place both before and after the incidents, the ICO still continued to impose a fine of £120,000. The County Council is committed to paying the fine early and therefore it will be reduced to £96,000. The ICO only received its powers to fine authorities last year and SCC is the now the sixth authority to be fined.

SCC has always taken information security seriously and is extremely sorry for these incidents. We fully accept the commissioner's findings but feel the money we were fined by another public sector organisation would have been better spent making further improvements in Surrey.

Tim Hall
Cabinet Member for Change and Efficiency
14 June 2011