

Reference: 2169481

Information Requests

information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

23 April 2026

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about correspondence and meetings with representatives of sex workers relating to the Online Safety Act.

We received this request on 27 February 2026 and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the FOI Act'). We wrote to you on 26 March 2026, explaining that we needed more time to consider where the public interest lay in withholding or disclosing the information requested. We have now concluded our consideration.

Your request

Please provide the following information covering the period from 1 January 2022 to the present:

- 1. A list of all meetings (including in-person meetings, virtual meetings, roundtables and formal or informal discussions) held between Ofcom officials and representatives of sex worker/prostitution organisations or businesses facilitating the advertising of sexual services.*
- 2. For each meeting identified, please provide any agendas, minutes, briefing notes or summaries produced in relation to the meeting.*
- 3. Copies of any correspondence (including emails, letters or briefing materials) exchanged between Ofcom and representatives of adult services websites or sex industry organisations relating to the Online Safety Act and its implementation during the same period.*

Our response

For the purpose of this request, we have interpreted "officials and representatives of sex worker/prostitution organisations or businesses facilitating the advertising of sexual services" and "representatives of adult services websites or sex industry organisations" to exclude pornography sites, and pornographic content creators.

You may wish to review public responses to our consultations regarding duties introduced as a result of the Online Safety Act, which can be found on our website:

[Consultation: Protecting people from illegal harms online](#)

[Consultation: Protecting children from harms online](#)

[Consultation: Guidance for service providers publishing pornographic content](#)

[Consultation: Online Safety - Additional Safety Measures](#)

We can confirm that we attended a report launch by the Fairwork Sex Work Project on 15 May 2025. We enclose our readout of this meeting.

We attended conferences with the Sex Workers Union on 3 April 2023 and 4 March 2024. We enclose information about the topics presented at the meeting of 4 March 2024.

We also attended a Webinar hosted by Thornhill Digital on 2 May 2025, and attended a roundtable hosted by SWGfL on 4 June 2025. No readouts of these meetings are available.

We have redacted some information in the enclosed documents as it is exempt from disclosure under Section 40(2) of the FOI Act, as it includes personal information regarding Ofcom employees. S40(2) provides that personal information about persons other than the requester is exempt where, among other things, its disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles in the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. Section 40 is an absolute exemption under the Act and does not require a public interest test.

We have also redacted information within the documents and are withholding some further information in scope of your request, including the readout of the meeting with the Sex Workers Union on 3 April 2023, under Section 36(2)(b)(ii) and (c) of the FOI Act. This provides that information held by a public authority is exempt from disclosure if, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person, disclosure of the information:

- would, or would be likely to, inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation; and/or
- would otherwise prejudice, or would be likely otherwise to prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.

Section 36 is a qualified exemption, which means that Ofcom is required to consider whether or not the public interest in disclosing the information you have requested outweighs the public interest in withholding the information. In this case, we consider that the public interest favours withholding the information for the reasons set out in **Annex B** to this letter. In **Annex A** of this letter, the qualified person, the Corporation Secretary for Ofcom, has confirmed that the exemption applies.

We also consider that disclosure of some further information in scope of your request regarding engagement with our stakeholders is exempt under section 44(1)(a) of the FOI Act, which exempts disclosure of information if its disclosure is prohibited under another enactment. Ofcom is prohibited under section 393 of the Communications Act 2003 ('the Communications Act') from disclosing information about a business which we have obtained in the course of exercising a power conferred by the Communications Act among others, unless we have the consent of that business or one of the statutory gateways under section 393(2) of the Communications Act is met, neither of which applies here. Section 44 is an absolute exemption and therefore is not subject to a public interest test.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Annex A

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Section 36 exemption

I am a "qualified person" as referred to section 36(2) of the Act and duly authorised by a Minister of the Crown for the purposes of that section. In my reasonable opinion, disclosure of the relevant information requested

- would, or would be likely to, inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation; and/or
- would otherwise prejudice, or would be likely otherwise to prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.

In applying this exemption, I have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information.

I have set out in **Annex B** the exemption in full, as well as the factors I considered when deciding where the public interest lay in relation to the information concerned. If you have any queries about this letter, please contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk.

Corporation Secretary

Date: 23 April 2026

Annex B

Section 36: Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs

Section 36 exempts information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, have any of the following effects:

- inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation, or
- otherwise prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

Key points:

- Section 36 can only be used if, in the reasonable view of a "qualified person", disclosure of the requested information would have one of the specified effects.
- In this case it is considered that disclosure would inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation, and prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs
- The application of section 36 is subject to a public interest balance.

Factors for disclosure	Factors for withholding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofcom recognises that its approach to its duties under the Online Safety Act 2023, is a matter of interest to the wider public. Releasing such information could be said to increase transparency in our work and allow for discussion in a public forum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The documentation in relation to which the exemption is claimed is documentation reflecting Ofcom’s contact or meetings with representatives of sex worker/sex industry/adult services organisations and representatives. • In order to fulfil its regulatory functions effectively, Ofcom needs to be able to engage internally and externally in frank discussions, and engage with members of organisations relevant to our functions as the online safety regulator. • Disclosure of information about such discussions would, or would be likely to, inhibit free and frank discussions in the future and this in turn would likely lead to less robust decision making, and less effective regulation. • Given the above, disclosing such communications would also likely prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

Reasons why public interest favours withholding information

- At this time, Ofcom is withholding the requested information. The public interest test has been applied on the basis of disclosing information which would reveal details of regulatory

discussions or engagement with external organisations.

- This is because the disclosure of this information is likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs, as it would affect Ofcom ability to engage internally and externally in frank discussions, and engage with members of organisations relevant to our functions as the online safety regulator.
- Whilst there may be some weight attached to the public interest in disclosing to enable the public to understand how Ofcom is facilitating its role as online safety regulator, we consider that significant prejudice would be caused by such a disclosure.

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).