

Freedom of Information – Response – 26665

This request is made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and relates only to citizen-facing online services (for example, housing portals, council tax accounts, or benefits portals). It does not concern internal staff systems or administrative tools. The research does involve information on detailed technical configurations for public-facing web portals. Please provide the following information/documents:

- 1. A copy of (or extract from) your current policy that governs user authentication for citizen-facing online services.*
- 2. The specific password rules that apply when citizens create an account or perform a password reset. For example, password character minimum and maximum limits, special character enforcement.*
- 3. Whether MFA is offered or required for citizen-facing services, and, if so, what types are supported (e.g. SMS, email, or authenticator app).*
- 4. A brief description or document outlining how password resets or account recovery are handled for public users (e.g. email verification, security questions, or other processes).*

Suffolk County Council (SCC) has considered your request and is refusing it under s.31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA.). s.31 enables a public authority to withhold information where disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

In your request you have asked for detailed password rules, multi-factor authentication options and account recovery processes. All FOI responses become public documents available for anyone, anywhere to access, if SCC discloses these technical details it would create a real and significant risk of enabling individuals with malicious intent to exploit vulnerabilities in our systems increasing the likelihood of fraud, identity theft and other cyber-crimes.

S.31 is a qualified exemption so we must consider the Public Interest Test. SCC acknowledges that there is an inherent public interest in promoting the transparency of our activities however, in this instance, with cyber-attacks and cyber-crimes becoming more advance and more common protecting the personal and sensitive data held on our systems is vital. It is also worth noting that releasing any information that could assist attackers in targeting SCC would further increase the costs to the public purse of responding to cyber-attacks.

Taking this into consideration SCC has concluded that the public interest in maintaining security and preventing crimes outweighs the interest in disclosure.

- 5. The date these policies were last reviewed or updated, and whether the policies align with any national or international guidance (e.g. NCSC, NIST SP 800-63, or ISO 27001). NCSC and once year.*

