

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI 50/17 Elections and Social Media Advertising Response
Date: 24 May 2017 16:41:08

Dear [REDACTED],

Our Ref: FOI 50/17

Thank you for your email to the Electoral Commission dated **27 April 2017**, received by us on 28th April 2017.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and has done so within the statutory timeframe of twenty working days.

Your request is in bold below followed by our response.

You have requested:

1. Does the Election Commission request information from online advertising platforms and companies to verify that any information provided by or on behalf of the political parties relating to social media advertising spending is accurate?

2. Where such information as identified in #2 above exists, can the information relating to the 2015 General election be made public in the interests of transparency?

3. Where the request in #2 is not possible due to contractual or commercial considerations, can the Electoral commission comment on the level of detail that such providers make available to aid verification or investigations.

Our response is as follows:

The Commission does not routinely seek verification or confirmation from any suppliers of services to political parties as to the spending reported by parties in spending returns. Parties have a legal duty to ensure those returns are complete and accurate (and to include relevant invoices and receipts), and makes a declaration to that effect. The Commission, in line with its statutory duty, then publishes these returns as delivered to us.

Where there are any specific grounds that cause us to decide to seek further information about spending by parties, the Commission will normally open an investigation in order to establish the facts. That investigation may involve seeking information from suppliers or anyone else. Our investigatory powers to require information can be used if appropriate. The level of detail requested will vary from case to case, depending what is required to establish the full facts.

Regardless of contractual or commercial considerations, the Commission does not disclose the details of investigations conducted. There are specific provisions within the Freedom of Information Act which provide exemptions from the requirement to disclose (sections 30 and 31 of the Act) in those circumstances.

We have not taken your request to be specifically asking for information held as

part of investigations conducted. Should you wish to make such a request you may of course do so, but we are likely to seek to rely on the above exemptions in not disclosing that information.

We do however publish brief details of all of our investigations, and more detailed summaries of certain cases, all of which you can find on this page (under the sub heading 'Closed cases' about half way down the page) on our website:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/roles-and-responsibilities/our-role-as-regulator-of-political-party-finance/making-an-allegation>

I trust that this information satisfies your request. The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority, but in some circumstances we cannot responsibly release requested information, and we ask for your understanding in this regard.

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information-requests/how-do-i-make-an-foi-request>

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: <http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Yours sincerely,





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