Statement

ico.
Information Commissioner's Office

1 November 2010

The ICO's latest position on Google Street View

An ICO spokesperson said:

"Enforcing and defending the rights of the UK public under the Data Protection Act has always been - and remains - central to the work of the Information Commissioner. However, as a regulator, the ICO must take a calm and measured approach to the issue of data privacy and ensure that we do not get caught up in the emotive arguments which will only naturally take place around sensitive issues such as the inadvertent collection of data by Google Street View. We must remain evidence based and although our enquiries, along with the enquiries of our international counterparts, are taking longer than many people might like, it is of paramount importance that we get our decision right in order to ensure the public can be confident that their long term privacy interests are being maintained.

"Having followed the debate on Thursday 28 October, it became apparent that a great deal of misunderstanding exists about what actions we have already taken and what we are doing in relation to Google Street View. We are keen to discuss with MPs and Ministers how we can further defend privacy on the internet as technologies and applications develop. As an organisation we are already looking to the future with the ICO recently advertising for a new technology adviser post and we will be looking to setup an industry panel of experts to advise on our work in this area in future. This is the start of important changes within the organisation to better meet the future privacy needs of the UK public.

"The situation as it stands is this. Earlier this year the ICO visited Google's premises to make a preliminary assessment of the 'pay-load' data it inadvertently collected whilst developing Google Street View. Whilst the information we saw at the time did not include meaningful personal details that could be linked to an identifiable person, we have continued to liaise with, and await the findings of, the investigations carried out by our international counterparts.

"Now that these findings are starting to emerge, we understand that Google has accepted that in some instances entire URLs and emails and passwords have been captured. We have already made enquires to see whether this admission relates to the data inadvertently captured in the UK, and we are

now deciding on the necessary course of action, including a consideration of the need to use our enforcement powers.

"It is also important to note that none of the regulators currently investigating Google Street View have taken direct enforcement action at this stage, with the US investigation led by the US Federal Trade Commission for example ruling out direct action, although mirroring our own concern that this data was allowed to be collected by an organisation who showed such disregard for international data protection legislation. This week the Metropolitan Police have also closed their case believing it would not be appropriate to pursue a criminal case against Google under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). Whilst we continue to work with our other international counterparts on this issue we will not be panicked into a knee jerk response to an alarmist agenda."

For all media enquires, please contact the ICO press office on 0303 123 9070.

For all general enquires, please contact the ICO customer service team on 0303 123 1113.