

Police Service of Northern Ireland Data Breach

PR Week: Crisis Communications

11 February 2026

Cat Evans O'Brien, Head of Communities

Dave Murphy, Head of Media



“I don’t sleep at night.
I continually get up at night if I hear a noise outside.”



“I have trouble sleeping. My children ... are all stressed about my welfare. They have nightmares about me getting attacked.”



“I am devastated. Everything has culminated and become too much for me, to the point that I have accepted another job outside of the police.”

How a crisis can be an opportunity to change perceptions and behaviour?

- When to talk - can you be proactive in the media when the full story is still unfolding?
- How to put people at the centre of your crisis comms response?
- How do you go about understanding the sensitivities of the communities you are talking to?

The data breach, August 2023

Major data breach identified
thousands of officers and civilians
LATEST | PSNI warning over data breach
downloads as officers 'shocked and

'We obviously hope for the best and prepare for the worst' says Assistant
Constable

War stalker stalks Northern Irish
police after catastrophic leak
personal data

'They would literally kill for this information — and we gave it away.'

Insident republicans obtained leaked
data, says PSNI chief

Constable believes thousands of officers' data
is in paramilitary hands



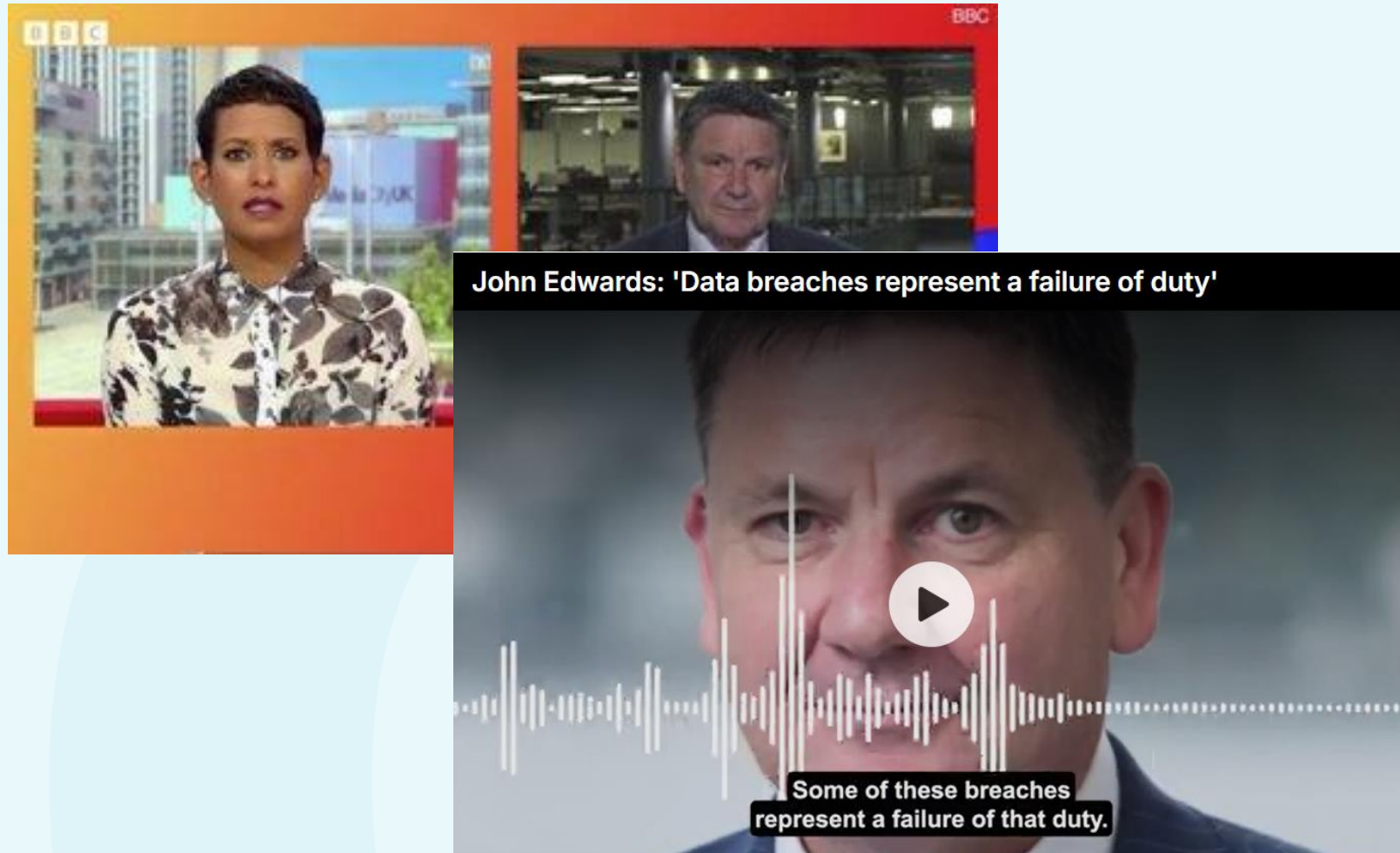
The comms plan

Objectives:

Protect the ICO's reputation

Help prevent similar mistakes being made

Takeaway 1: Think about what to say and when



Takeaway 2: Put people at the centre of your crisis comms response...

"I have spent over £1000 installing modern CCTV and lighting around my home, because of the exposure."



Recognise the human impact

"I have gone to great trouble to remain invisible, with no social media presence, removal from the electoral roll, 192.com, never revealing my job to others and lying about where I work whenever asked...."

Takeaway 3: Understand the communities you're talking to ...



The investigation closes

| What price privacy? Poor PSNI procedures culminate in £750k fine

Date **3 October 2024**

Type **News**

Preventing other mistakes



PSNI fined £750,000 for 'egregious' data breach

UTV | PSNI | DATA BREACH | ⌚ Thursday 3 October 2024 at 6:20pm



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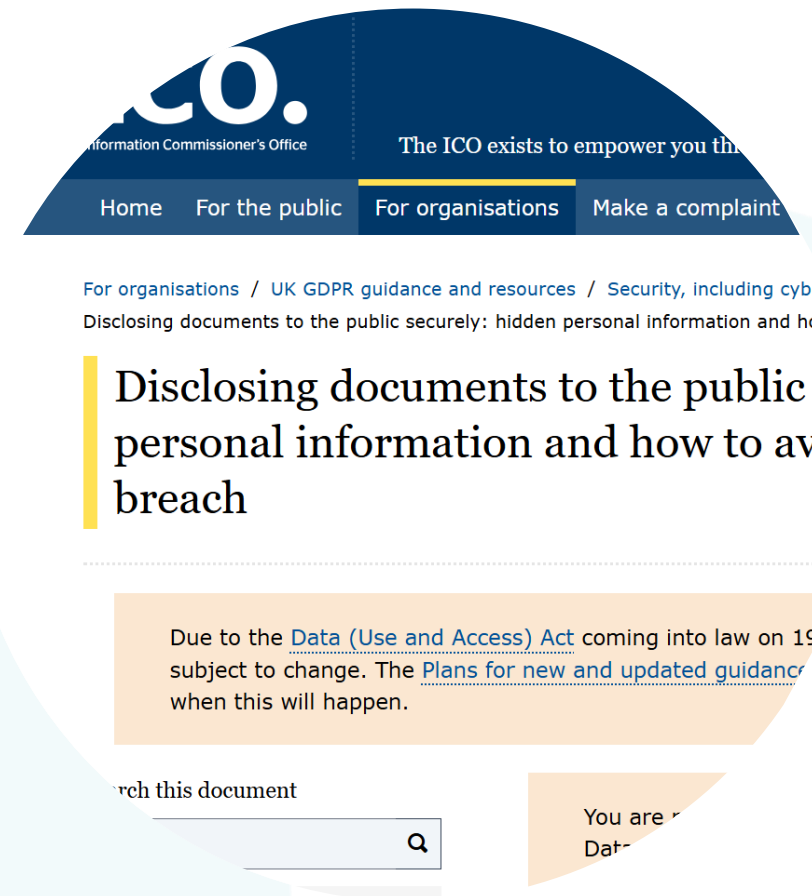
Accountability comes in many forms – Information Commissioner



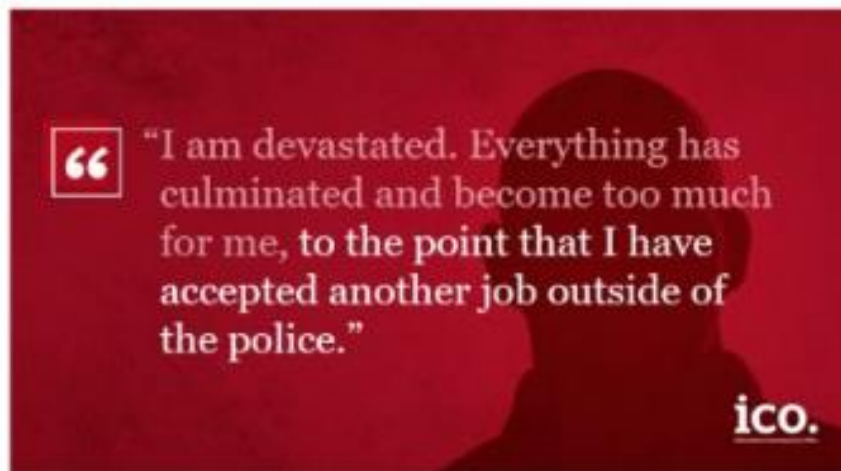
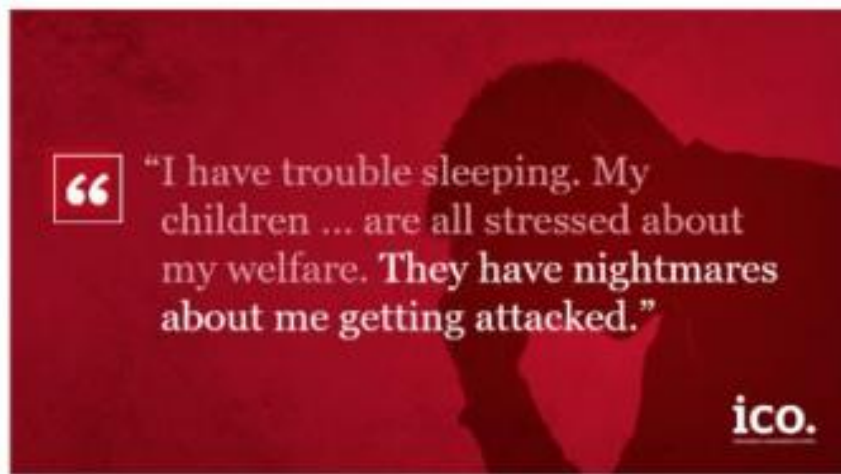
UK INFORMATION COMMISSIONER JOHN EDWARDS ADDRESSED A MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD IN BELFAST ON THURSDAY MORNING (NIPB/PA)

Preventing other mistakes

- Point your colleagues handling Freedom of Information requests in the direction of our guidance:
- ico.org.uk/crisis



Social media content focussed on human impact



“The ICO’s fine on PSNI brings to light critical lessons for organisations handling sensitive personal data.”

“Data Privacy is not just a tick box exercise to comply with regulations, it affects real people in real ways.”

“Absolutely heartbreaking. Data/information is so powerful. So valuable and simply a part of life that we all have to take seriously at work.”

BelfastLive

Police officers have left the force and spend thousands on home security as a result of PSNI data breach



THE IRISH NEWS



PSNI facing £750k fine following data breach that exposed personal information of more than 9,000 staff

The fine could have been £5.6 million if a 'public sector approach not been applied'

itv NEWS

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PSNI fined £750,000 for 'egregious' data breach

UTV | PSNI | DATA BREACH | ⌚ Thursday 3 October 2024 at 6:20pm



Belfast Telegraph

PSNI gets £750k slap on the wrist after data breach that exposed almost 10,000 people

Information Commissioner's penalty could have been £5.6m but for the well-documented budgetary pressures on the force

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Any questions?