NUCLEAR SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

Ref: FOI2026-002

[redacted]

06 March 2026

Dear [redacted]

We refer to your request for the following information:

"Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, please provide the following recorded information held by your department regarding assurance processes for software based data erasure of end of life IT equipment.

For clarity, this request relates solely to software based data destruction. Please exclude physical destruction methods such as shredding, crushing, degaussing or disintegration.

1. Please confirm whether departmental policy, contractual terms or internal procedures require an explicit outcome based warranty or guarantee confirming that personal data has been rendered irretrievable through software based erasure, whether carried out internally or by an external provider.

2. Where software based data destruction is performed internally, what recorded evidential assurance does the department rely upon to conclude that the final data state is irretrievable?

3. Where software based data destruction is performed by a third party provider, does the department hold recorded information demonstrating that any warranty or assurance provided explicitly extends to the software erasure method used and its claimed effectiveness? If so, please confirm the recorded nature of that verification.

4. Where no explicit outcome based warranty is required or provided, what recorded form of evidential assurance does the department rely upon to conclude that software based erasure has rendered personal data irretrievable?

I am not requesting technical configuration detail, security sensitive information or supplier specific vulnerabilities. I am seeking confirmation of the assurance model relied upon for software based data destruction."

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

We can confirm that AWE holds all of the information that you have requested, however we are withholding the information under section 24(1) of the Act. This exemption allow for the withholding of information where disclosure would result in prejudice to national security.

As Section 24 (1) is a qualified exemption, we have conducted a Public Interest Test (PIT). Having carefully considered the arguments for and against disclosure, we have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding the information. Our reasoning is set out below.

Section 24(1) – National Security

The Act establishes a presumption in favour of disclosure wherever possible and reflects a broader commitment to openness and transparency in public authorities. AWE recognises these principles and understands that releasing information can support public confidence in the responsible management of official information.

Information relating to AWE's data destruction processes could contribute towards transparency by demonstrating that AWE applies appropriate safeguards, follows recognised information management standards, and complies with relevant data protection and information security requirements. Disclosure could also enhance the public's interest in understanding how information is securely handled and disposed of at AWE.

However, releasing details of AWE's data sanitisation or software-based data destruction methods would prejudice national security. Such information would reveal operational aspects of AWE's cyber-security architecture that protect information relating to the UK's nuclear warhead programme.

AWE's information systems support the handling of highly sensitive scientific, engineering and operational material. Disclosure of how data is securely erased would expose elements of AWE's protective monitoring controls and overall security posture. Knowledge of these measures could assist hostile actors in identifying potential vulnerabilities or tailoring cyber operations to circumvent expected defensive mechanisms. This would materially increase the risk of unauthorised access to, or disruption of, systems that are critical to the UK's national defence.

These risks would be highly likely to prejudice national security and undermine the resilience of the UK's nuclear deterrent infrastructure. The public interest in safeguarding the Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD) and the wider national security framework is exceptionally strong and carries substantial weight.

Disclosure may also necessitate changes to AWE's systems or protective security measures in response to newly exposed vulnerabilities, diverting resources and potentially impacting operational effectiveness. Even seemingly high-level or non-sensitive information, when combined with other open-source material, could contribute to a broader intelligence picture that increases risk to AWE's security arrangements.

While AWE recognises the general public interest in openness and accountability, in this case the public interest in protecting national security and preventing harm to sensitive defence capabilities outweighs the arguments in favour of disclosure.

Accordingly, the exemption under Section 24(1) of the Act has been engaged and the public interest is best served by withholding the information requested.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to information.requests@awe.co.uk or our postal address: Information Requests Team, 'Thames Hub', AWE PLC, 43 Easter Park, Silchester, RG7 2PQ. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

AWE NUCLEAR SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team

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