

LUKE POLLARD MP
Minister for the Armed Forces

14 August 2025

Dear Dame Karen,

Update on Government's Response to Afghan Data Incident

Following the Secretary of State for Defence's statement to the House on 15 July regarding the February 2022 MOD data incident relating to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), which occurred under the previous government, I am writing to explain the approach the Government is taking to protecting the sensitive personal data contained in the compromised dataset. I also wanted to take this opportunity to update you on our immediate response to informing affected people.

Protecting the Dataset

The Government is committed to taking all necessary steps to enable full transparency and accountability following this regrettable incident. As such, we are not seeking to continue to withhold any information beyond what is absolutely necessary to protect the personal data of those affected by the 2022 data breach.

As you know, the previous government decided to seek an injunction concerning the breach on 25 August 2023. The High Court granted a superinjunction as a result. The ARR was created to support a limited cohort of people who were affected by the data loss incident and who were previously thought to be at the highest risk, into the UK. Former Ministers started work on this in autumn 2023 and it was up and running by April 2024.

Under this Government, the Defence Secretary then commissioned an independent Policy Review from ex Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence, Paul Rimmer. This began earlier this year and concluded and was presented to Ministers in June. The review examined the overall policy context in spring 2025, three years since the data incident and concluded that it appears "highly unlikely" that merely being on the dataset would be grounds for targeting.

As the Defence Secretary outlined in his oral statement dated 15 July 2025, the Rimmer review was a very significant element in the Government's decision to change policy to close the Afghan Response Route (ARR), though not the sole element. This was not a decision taken lightly. Following receiving the results of the review, the court lifted the

superinjunction, and we have now made the matter public so it can be subject to full Parliamentary scrutiny.

Following this, the Government wrote to the Court on 25 July to request that we remove the provision in the enduring injunction that prevents publication of details in the case notes column. This means that there will be no legal restriction on reporting these details contained within the case notes column of the ARAP dataset (with the exception of personal data as set out below). This has now been agreed by the courts.

Given the volume and nature of sensitive personal data contained within the spreadsheet, the Government has decided to maintain a limited injunction on the dataset to prevent its inappropriate use and the potential harm that could arise from its misuse. This requires anyone in unauthorised possession of the dataset to return it to MOD or delete it within seven days of a request from MOD, as well as prohibiting the publication, disclosure, or dissemination of any personal data it contains without the express consent of the Ministry of Defence or the data subject. In line with our commitment to transparency and accountability, the right to request return or deletion of the dataset cannot be exercised by MOD in respect of journalists or legal representatives without further application to the Court.

Given the media interest in this issue, there may be more reporting about the contents of the case notes section of the dataset in the coming weeks and months. The restrictions described above aim to prevent any personal details from being published. MOD and partners across government have been reviewing the dataset which will help to better understand any potential implications. MOD will continue to engage with and advise the media in the usual way, where information they might wish to report could cause harm to national security.

Immediate Crisis Response

As the Defence Secretary set out in his statement to parliament, on 15 July we established an Information Service Centre to assist individuals in understanding whether or not they were affected by this data incident. We believe we have been able to reach 96% of affected individuals through our notification system and provided them with security advice.

A self-checker (which is available on GOV.UK) and an email and telephone service have also been stood up to enable people to contact the MOD for assistance in understanding whether or not they have been affected. The majority of individuals have used the self-checker to find out if they are affected (over 15,000 people), with reasonable volumes coming through the email service and less through the telephone line. This system has worked well, and we are seeing that overall demand has been lower than expected. We are likely to reduce the email and telephone services in the coming weeks.

Where we have been able to establish contact details, we have also engaged with the small number of UK personnel whose information was included in the dataset, including some parliamentarians. We continue to respond to correspondence, parliamentary questions, FOIs and other queries as quickly as possible as they continue to come in.

Commitment to Transparency and Accountability

We recognise the importance of working closely with all relevant oversight committees to ensure lessons from this data incident are learned and so that Parliament can effectively hold the Government to account.

This Government remains firmly committed to the principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness and we welcome the intent expressed by parliamentary committees (including the Defence Select Committee, Public Accounts Committee and Intelligence and Security Committees) to conduct their own inquiries to ensure there has been proper scrutiny of government decision-making. We have already started preparations to respond to these inquiries, including establishing a dedicated team within the department to manage the MOD's response to inquiries and ensure we can meet our obligations as quickly and as comprehensively as possible.

I trust this update is helpful, and I remain open to further enquiries should you require additional information or wish to discuss these matters in more detail. I am happy meeting to discuss further as required.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement on the matter.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke', written in a cursive style.

LUKE POLLARD MP