



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Use of Personal Information available on the Electoral Roll

Background

Before 2002, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1990 placed Electoral Registration Officers under a duty to sell copies of the electoral register to anyone who wished to buy them. This meant that before 2002 commercial companies could legally obtain the entire electoral roll to use for their own purposes.

Our long held view was that the sale of the entire electoral roll to anyone prepared to pay for it was inconsistent with the requirements of the Act and the Human Rights Act 1998. As individuals are legally required to supply personal information to Electoral Registration Officers, we considered that extra, non-electoral uses of this information should be kept to a minimum. A related court case in 2001 confirmed this view.

Following this court judgement, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 2002 were introduced. These new regulations meant that from the 2002 electoral roll canvass there were two versions of the register, a full and an edited version. Everyone who provides their details is included in the full register which is only available for certain statutory purposes (such as electoral purposes) and to credit reference agencies. However, as you may be aware, when you now provide your details for the electoral roll the forms contain an option to choose whether or not your name should also be included on the edited register. The edited register is now the only register available for general sale.

Current Situation

Although you do now have the option to decide whether or not the details you provide for the electoral roll are made available for general sale, information which companies purchased from pre-2002 electoral rolls could still be available on websites like B4U, as a consequence of the previous law.