The Data Protection Commissioner Billy Hawkes has issued interim guidance on how organisations should deal with a loss of personal data.

A working group established by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform is currently examining whether changes to Ireland's data protection law are necessary to deal with such data breaches.

The working group will report to the Minister over the coming months, and the guidance in the note represents "best practice" in the meantime.

The guidance recommends the immediate reporting of data breaches to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, either by phone or email. The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner will then decide whether to carry out an investigation.

The guidance states that "The investigation may include an on-site examination of systems and procedures and could lead to the use of the Commissioner's legal powers to compel certain actions."

"However, this is very much the exception and the experience to date suggests that investigations are conducted on a co-operative basis with the entity keen to respond on a voluntary basis to any recommendations that we make."

In his Press Release, the Commissioner said: "we recognise that mistakes do happen and it is vital that organisations are ready to react. That means having plans in place to trace and secure the data that has been compromised, to prevent further security breaches and to warn those affected by the data security breach."

The guidance and Press Release are available on the Commissioner's website www.dataprotection.ie