

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 2 October 2012

Public Authority: East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Address: County Hall
Beverley
East Riding of Yorkshire
HU17 9BA

Decision

1. The complainant has requested information relating to the declaration of interests for a named former senior council officer from the commencement of their employment, but prior to copies of more recent declarations already obtained by him. He also requested information relating to the marital arrangements of two former senior council officers. The request was refused as vexatious by the public authority.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that East Riding of Yorkshire Council has incorrectly refused the request as vexatious.
3. The Commissioner requires the public authority to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Provide the complainant with a response to his request which complies with the requirements of section 1 of FOIA.
4. The public authority must take these steps within 35 calendar days of the date of this decision notice. Failure to comply may result in the Commissioner making written certification of this fact to the High Court pursuant to section 54 of the Act and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 8 December 2011, the complainant wrote to the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (the council) and requested information in the following terms:

"[...] copies of all prior¹ such documents submitted by this employee contained in the Register of Declaration of Interests commencing at the start of her employment with the council. My understanding is that Ms Susan Lockwood's service began with the council in November 1995.

"[...] copies of all prior such documents, submitted by this employee, which make it clear to Council Officers and Elected Members, that Ms Lockwood was in fact the spouse of Mr Darryl Stephenson erstwhile CEO of the Authority during the period of her employment."

6. The council responded on 14 December 2011. It stated that the request was refused as vexatious.
7. Following an internal review the council wrote to the complainant on 17 January 2011. It stated that it had concluded that the request was obsessive and was harassing the council, imposing a significant burden in terms of expense and distraction as staff would be pulled away from dealing with other work to deal with his request. It gave its view that the request lacked any serious purpose or value, that the complainant had a fixation with the two named individuals and that his request was now moving away from matters relating to those individuals' professional activities into private ones, namely their marital status.

Scope of the case

8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner to complain about the way his request for information had been handled. He gave his view that, as there is public interest in his requests, they should not be regarded as vexatious.
9. The Commissioner considers the scope of his investigation is to determine whether or not the council has correctly refused the request as vexatious, in the terms provided at section 14(1) of FOIA.

¹ The Information Commissioner's decision notice in case reference FS50371787, also brought by the present complainant, notes that during the course of the Commissioner's investigation the complainant was provided with extracts from the council's Register of Declarable Interests for 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. See http://www.ico.gov.uk/~media/documents/decisionnotices/2012/fs_50371787.ashx

Background

10. Mr Darryl Stephenson is a former Chief Executive of the East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Ms Susan Lockwood is the former Director of Corporate Resources, a very senior position just below that of chief Executive. Both took early retirement from the council, Mr Stephenson in 2005 and Ms Lockwood in 2010. Mr Stephenson and Ms Lockwood are married.

Reasons for decision

General Right of Access

Section 1(1) provides that -

"Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

- (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
- (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him."

Vexatious or Repeated Requests

Section 14(1) provides that –

"Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the request is vexatious"

11. In consideration of whether the request can correctly be refused as vexatious, the Commissioner will consider the context and history of the request. He will consider the strengths and weaknesses of both parties' arguments in relation to some or all of the following five factors, which may be helpful in reaching a reasoned conclusion as to whether a reasonable public authority could refuse to comply with the request on the grounds that it is vexatious:

- 1) whether compliance would create a significant burden in terms of expense **and** distraction*
- 2) whether the request is designed to cause disruption or annoyance*
- 3) whether the request has the effect of harassing the public authority or its staff*

4) whether the request can otherwise fairly be characterised as obsessive or manifestly unreasonable

5) whether the request has any serious purpose or value

12. It is not necessary for all five factors to be engaged, however these are elements which are commonly encountered and the balance of these factors can be helpful in illustrating the reasons for any decision. The council has given its position, in its submissions to the Commissioner, which takes these five factors into account. The analysis below will therefore use some of these factors as a convenient headings, but the matter will also be considered 'in the round'.

Would compliance create a significant burden in terms of expense and distraction?

13. The Information Commissioner has previously published decisions on related complaints brought by the same complainant. In one of those, FS50387510², the council's position, that the request was vexatious, was not upheld, in part because the number of requests submitted on the matter in hand was not considered particularly onerous. At that time, there were four such requests, submitted over a period of more than one year.
14. In respect of the present case, the council's argument is that since the date of that decision (12 October 2011), the complainant had submitted further requests on the same general topic (the Commissioner notes two, on 16 November and 8 December 2011, plus other related correspondence). The burden is largely attributed to what the council characterises as the complainant's fixation with the named individuals and, consequently, its view that disclosure would result in further correspondence and communication about the same issues. It considers this 'highly likely' and refers the Commissioner to the complainant's pattern of requests, to-date which, it argues, show that he routinely submits further related requests and adds to, or seeks further clarification about, previous requests.
15. The complainant acknowledges that he has submitted 'several' requests for information. He claims that, in respect of his enquiries relating to the marital status of Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson, "*despite numerous FOI requests [...] this question has never been answered*". It is therefore clear that the complainant does not dispute that he has submitted a

² http://www.ico.gov.uk/~media/documents/decisionnotices/2011/fs_50387510.ashx

number of requests for information. (He counters by arguing that his requests have a serious purpose, which will be dealt with under that particular heading, below).

16. The council provided the Commissioner with a chronology which shows that, by the time of this request, the complainant had submitted nine FOI requests (including the present request) to the council since 30 April 2010, a period of about 19 months. There were also a few supplementary requests for clarification or expansion of responses provided to some of those requests. Seven of the requests were directly related to Ms Lockwood and/or Mr Stephenson.
17. The Commissioner notes that this level of engagement with a public authority is not particularly substantial. Indeed the council does not claim that the requests are, in themselves, burdensome. It argues, rather, that it appears unlikely to be able to draw the complainant's correspondence to a close by responding, and that providing a response is, on the evidence, quite likely to lead to further enquiries and requests. It is this cumulative drain on its resources which it wishes to prevent.
18. The Commissioner recognises that it is not unusual for a response to an FOI request to give rise to requests for clarification or expansion of that response, or indeed further 'follow-up' requests. This iterative process is quite common in FOI matters. Hence, that behaviour should not automatically be considered indicative of any vexatious intent, and the individual facts of a case may or may not support such a view. The council has, however, also drawn the Commissioner's attention to a follow-up request of 23 July 2011 which it received after a previous disclosure of information. The complainant indicated elements of the council's response which he was dissatisfied with, stating that "*the 'raw data' gives little explanation or understanding to the matter*". He listed various elements of the response, and stated "*Request expand*". This request is unlikely to have been of much assistance to the council in determining the nature of the information being requested. Furthermore, the right of access to information at section 1 of FOIA is, to use the complainant's term, a right of access to 'raw data'. There is no automatic right to have a public authority explain or expand on the information it discloses in response to an FOIA request.
19. It is indeed relevant if the council can show that it is unlikely to be able to draw the matter to a conclusion. If, as is claimed, the complainant is fixated on Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson and is unlikely to let the matter drop, there may come a time when it should be entitled to draw a line under the proceedings and refuse to engage with the complainant further. The issue for the Commissioner is therefore whether that point has now been reached.

Can the request otherwise fairly be characterised as obsessive or manifestly unreasonable?

20. The complainant has drawn the Commissioner's attention to a variety of press reports about the remuneration and early retirement of council's former chief executive, Mr Stephenson, and his wife. There is no suggestion by the complainant that the retirement was associated with anything improper, rather he comments on the financial implications, particularly in light of the fact that Mr Stephenson's wife has also taken early retirement from her position within the council. The complainant's concerns reflect similar stories³ published at the time.
21. The Commissioner understands the complainant's concern is that they may have 'worked the system' to their advantage. He makes no specific allegations of any impropriety, but it is apparent that he has concerns about possible nepotism in the appointment of Ms Lockwood, including the possibility that Ms Lockwood's relationship to Mr Stephenson was concealed from the council at the time of her appointment. He also expresses his view that there may have been collusion within the council to permit their early retirement, and gives voice to his general belief that the two 'took advantage' of their very senior positions.
22. The council is, in effect, suggesting that the complainant has embarked on a 'fishing expedition' to unearth evidence of wrongdoing, and which is groundless.
23. Again, speculative enquiries or 'fishing expeditions' are not, in themselves, an unreasonable use of the right of access to information under FOIA. However if taken to inappropriate lengths, which may be indicative of an obsessive interest, then that might cross a line and justifiably be classed as vexatious. The council argues that the information disclosed to the complainant to-date does not support his suspicions.
24. Of the nine requests for information, seven are directly concerned with either Ms Lockwood or Mr Stephenson, or both. The requests which do not overtly concern themselves with those individuals, also focus on senior appointments within the public authority, including the appointment of Mr Stephenson's successor. It is also noteworthy that

³ For example: BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/humber/8586614.stm>

See also Private Eye magazine, 'Rotten Boroughs' October 2005

when the complainant refers to Ms Lockwood, he often refers to her as 'AKA Mrs Darryl Stephenson'.

25. The council also argues that, in requesting information relating to when the council learned that Ms Lockwood was married to its chief executive, the broad thrust of the complainant's requests is now moving away from Mr Stephenson and Ms Lockwood's professional activities and into their personal relationship.

Does the request have the effect of harassing the public authority or its staff?

26. The council does not suggest that the request has the effect of harassing or causing distress to its staff, however it argues that there is an element of harassment in the complainant's implied criticism, and his suspicion that the public authority has behaved improperly in respect of Mr Stephenson or Ms Lockwood. This is apparent both in the complainant's requests to the council, and also in his complaints to the ICO, which the Commissioner commented on in his decision notice for case reference FS50357370⁴:

"If the complainant had provided evidence to suggest public concern, or that the appointment [of Mr Stephenson's successor] was in some way improper, the Commissioner would consider that a valid proposition which warranted due consideration. He has not done so, and his arguments amount to little more than unsubstantiated supposition. While the complainant may have such concerns, he has produced no evidence that they are more widely shared, nor that there are reasonable grounds for that concern."

27. The council explains that the complainant has not raised his concerns directly with it, and has not engaged with it to air those concerns overtly, so it has not had an opportunity to address them, nor to understand the sort of information which he is seeking. Consequently, the council's view is that *"the unexpressed thrust of [the complainant's] enquiries is to demonstrate non-existent wrong doing [...] where there is no evidence of wrong-[d]oing"* and that this approach is *"moving towards"* harassment of the public authority.
28. The Commissioner has asked the complainant about some of the comments he has made in the course of his complaints. For example,

⁴ http://www.ico.gov.uk/~media/documents/decisionnotices/2011/fs_50357370.ashx at paragraph 21.

the comment reproduced at paragraph 15, above. The Commissioner had been unable to locate the 'numerous FOI requests' (about the marital status of Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson) which the complainant alluded to, and asked the complainant to draw them to his attention.

29. The complainant admits that he was in error in using that phrase, and accepts that the first request for such information was contained in the present request. The Commissioner notes that the complainant has implied a negative inference, where none actually exists. This is consistent with his earlier impressions in case reference FS50357370, above. The complainant also stated *"It would appear that their marriage was not disclosed formally to their Tax paying electorate, or indeed to the elected councillors [...]"*. He offered no evidence for this assertion and, in light of previous unsupported assertions which have proven mistaken, the Commissioner is unwilling to accept it at face value. The council comments that the relationship is well-known locally.
30. Similarly, the complainant accepts that he has never suggested to the council that Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson have behaved improperly, or that their being married has been used to any improper advantage. He gives his view that it is not for him to make accusations, but rather to seek the facts and others may reach their conclusions based on those facts. This is understood to be one part of the complainant's view that his requests have a serious purpose, namely to uncover wrongdoing.
31. The Commissioner agrees that receipt of veiled accusations might cause some annoyance or concern within a public authority, however in this case, the council's evidence is that this behaviour is 'moving towards' harassment. Also, the complainant's tone is moderate, and he does not adopt the sort of haranguing and tendentious language which is often a feature in cases where a request is refused as vexatious. The council has not sought to claim actual harassment, consequently while the Commissioner does not discount the negative effect of the complainant's implied accusations, he gives it only a small amount of weight.

Does the request have any serious purpose or value?

32. The Commissioner believes that the complainant's position might reasonably be summarised as concern at possible impropriety on the part of Mr Stephenson or Ms Lockwood or that, in any event, they took advantage of their senior positions. Some of the press reports allude to the couple having 'feathered their nest' at the expense of the public purse. The complainant is careful not to overtly claim any wrongdoing and merely voices his misgivings. His claim is that he wishes to uncover the facts, which will then speak for themselves.

33. In and of itself, this is not an unreasonable use of FOIA, indeed it goes to the heart of the concept of accountability to the public which is embodied in FOIA. By the time of the current request, the complainant has received responses to seven previous requests. He cites some of the disclosed information he has received over the period.
34. The complainant has explained to the Commissioner that the declarations of interest which he received show that Ms Lockwood did not declare a shareholding in a company, Hardmoor Associates⁵, a company incorporated in February 2006, which has her husband and other family members as directors and shareholders. He argues that this is improper, that Ms Lockwood should have declared this shareholding and that, according to the council's own rules, undertaking additional employment without the express consent of the council is a serious disciplinary matter.
35. However, the Commissioner understands, from the council's submissions in a previous, related case⁶, that the council's own rules on the declaration of interests do indicate that company shareholdings are not generally required to be declared and its view is that acting as a shareholder is not 'undertaking additional employment'. It is not claimed that Ms Lockwood took any active part in Hardmoor Associates prior to her retirement from the council. Her declaration of interest records the directorships of her husband and other family members in Hardmoor Associates.
36. The complainant also says that Ms Lockwood's declarations of interest omit the directorship of the Haltemprice Crematorium, to which she was appointed in late 2005 and held until early 2007. The complainant acknowledges that this is *"likely that this was a ERYC Council nominated position"* however he questions why it was not declared in her declarations of interest for the material period.
37. These are not matters for the Information Commissioner. He notes, however, that the complainant has again drawn negative inferences in circumstances where it is not clear that those inferences are justified. He claims that a failure to declare a shareholding is in some way improper, when the council's own view suggests that shareholdings need not be

⁵ Hardmoor Associates is understood to be a provider of consultancy services to local government, see <http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/City-council-s-new-study-problems/story-12233702-detail/story.html>

⁶ FS50371787 again, see paragraphs 18-30.

declared, and he also claims that a failure to make a declaration of a directorship is improper, when he accepts that the directorship is likely to be a council nominated position in any event.

38. The request under consideration here has two parts. The first part is a request for copies of the declarations of interests for Ms Lockwood from her appointment (in 1995) to 2006 (ie, the date of the more recent declarations he has already received). Given that Hardmoor Associates was incorporated in 2006, earlier declarations are unlikely to provide any further insight into that particular matter. Similarly, the appointment at the Haltemprice Crematorium occurs within the period of the declarations already received. Therefore it is not clear that the complainant expects to achieve any specific outcome from the requests and they might arguably be considered as further 'fishing'.
39. The second part of the request relates to any documents submitted by Ms Lockwood which make it clear that she was the spouse of Mr Stephenson. The complainant claimed, in his complaint to the Commissioner, that *"the council admits that it 'encourages' the local press not to mention the fact that they're husband and wife"* but he offered no evidence for this assertion. Indeed he referred the Commissioner to a number of press reports from 2002 and later, which highlight the marital connection. In light of other unsubstantiated or disproven claims from the complainant, the Commissioner cannot simply take the complainant's assertion at face value.
40. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the complainant's misgivings are not entirely fanciful or groundless, and the council's responses to his enquiries, particularly about whether or not the marital relationship was known at the time of Ms Lockwood's initial appointment, are inconclusive. It would not be fair, therefore, to dismiss his requests as entirely lacking in serious purpose.

Summary and conclusions

41. The complainant has now been making requests for close to two years (the requests continue beyond the one under consideration here). He believes he has a serious purpose, in uncovering possible misuse or abuses of the system by two former, very senior, council officers. He has given the Commissioner his view, which is that he intends to let the facts speak for themselves. Insofar as the facts show anything, to date, the Commissioner is not aware that the complainant has achieved the outcome he anticipated and, moreover, the complainant has been shown to make claims or draw conclusions to which he is not entitled. There may come a time, therefore, when 'fishing expeditions', if fruitless, ought to be abandoned.

42. The council argues that it is "*moving towards*" being harassed by the subtext of the requests, namely that there is serious wrongdoing which will be uncovered. It argues that no such evidence has been found in the responses, to date, and gives its view that the complainant is likely to continue his quest until he finds what he believes exists. If he does not find it (eg, because it does not exist) the likelihood is that he will simply continue with his requests. This prospect does present the council with some grounds for its view that the requests have reached a point at which they may be considered burdensome to it.
43. However, the Commissioner considers that, while the council may be annoyed or irritated by the complainant's line of questioning, this is in large degree a normal part of the cut and thrust of public life. Public authorities can expect to receive probing enquiries about their conduct, and some of those enquiries will doubtless be from people who start from a position of distrust in that authority. This is not the same as harassment and the Commissioner does not find that the council is justified in claiming any harassment from the complainant's requests. Similarly, a degree of annoyance or irritation is something which public servants will experience from time to time and can be expected to rise above, unless it approaches levels which will indeed constitute harassment. The Commissioner does not consider this is such a case.
44. The Commissioner recognises a reasonable ground of concern underlying the complainant's activity. Remuneration at a senior level within local government has attracted considerable adverse comment in recent years and there can be little doubt that the two individuals referred to here have benefitted considerably from the outcome. The complainant suspects wrongdoing, but has not uncovered any evidence that they have done anything other than, perhaps, profit from the existing system.
45. He has drawn some negative inferences in circumstances where, in the Commissioner's view, he is not entitled to reach the conclusions he has. Furthermore in some cases his direct claims have been shown, when challenged, to be mistaken. He has embarked on 'fishing expeditions' to uncover evidence for his suppositions, which look increasingly ill-founded.
46. On the other hand, the council does not appear to have made any real attempt to deal with the complainant's suspicions. It argues that his continued questioning is approaching harassment, by its implied criticism, but that he has never engaged with it so that it can take steps to allay that criticism.
47. The Commissioner considers that if the council was indeed feeling harassed by the implied criticism, it would be capable of discerning the

gist of that criticism, at least in a general sense, and could have engaged with the complainant, for example by exercising its duty to provide advice and assistance to discover his underlying concerns, if it chose to. Its responses to the complainant's requests can appear, at times, somewhat cautious and this will do little to allay his suspicions that it is attempting to conceal some uncomfortable information. It is therefore not entirely unreasonable to pursue the matter further, and the Commissioner would hesitate to classify such behaviour as obsessive.

48. The information which has been requested is not substantial and the council has not argued that locating or disclosing it would be burdensome. It argues, instead, that doing so would be likely to elicit further contact from the complainant.
49. The complainant, for his part, suspects that Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson may have concealed, or at least 'downplayed', the fact that they were married, at the time of Ms Lockwood's initial appointment, to a very senior position within the council. The council's responses to-date have not allayed that suspicion and the complainant's correspondence shows that he considers its approach to be somewhat evasive. Its responses indicate that the marital connection is well-known locally, and press reports from 2002 confirm it, but nothing the Commissioner has seen leads him to be sure that that was also the situation in November 1995 when Ms Lockwood was appointed, shortly after Mr Stephenson took on the post of chief executive earlier in 1995, which was also when the council was first created as a Unitary Authority.
50. The council's argument, at paragraph 25 above, that the complainant is now moving away from legitimate interest in public matters and into the personal relationship of Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson, is not a persuasive one. The request is clearly interested in circumstances surrounding the council's knowledge of the relationship between Ms Lockwood and Mr Stephenson given that Ms Lockwood's appointment was made shortly after Mr Stephenson had taken up the post of chief executive of a newly-formed public authority.
51. While the complainant asserts that failing to declare the shareholding in Hardmoor Associates is evidence of impropriety, the council has previously explained that its guidelines don't require declarations of shareholdings, and it does not consider acting as a shareholder to be 'additional employment'.
52. This is clearly a valid position in circumstances where a shareholding is part of a general investment portfolio. Hardmoor Associates, however, appears to be a 'family firm' – documents from Companies House provided by the complainant show that all the material interests, ie

directorships and shareholdings, are held within the Lockwood/Stephenson immediate family. The company has undertaken consultancy work for public authorities in local government and it is reasonable to conclude that its activities allow Mr Stephenson and/or Ms Lockwood to generate income from their considerable expertise in the field of local government.

53. This is clearly reasonable and permissible, provided there is no conflict of interest, and no such conflict has been claimed. Ms Lockwood's declaration of interests shows her husband's directorship of Hardmoor Associates, but does not declare her one-third shareholding in the same company, at the same time. This may not have been required under the 'letter' of the rules, but the complainant's argument does support a view that disclosure would nevertheless be in the 'spirit' of the principle behind declarations of interests, ie openness about extra-mural activities or interests which may potentially conflict with, or otherwise affect, the council's interests.
54. While the earlier declarations of interests which the complainant has requested are unlikely to show anything material to Hardmoor Associates, which was incorporated in 2006, the complainant's view that those declarations may not disclose the full story cannot be dismissed as groundless. There is public interest in going back further and examining earlier declarations, if only for the sake of openness and accountability.
55. The public authority argues that his line of questioning, by focussing on their married status, is moving into the parties' private lives and away from their public ones. This argument lacks substance and the complainant has concerns that their marital status may well be relevant to their public service. Essentially, the complainant has unanswered questions about very senior officers, and limited reassurance that the council's processes are sufficiently robust that no impropriety could have, or may have, occurred.
56. The council's claim that the complainant's questioning may constitute harassment is weak and carries no real weight. There is no suggestion that the request, in itself, would constitute a burden. The argument that the complainant's ongoing line of questioning will be likely to constitute a burden is more persuasive.
57. It is also fair to say that the complainant may not always have helped his own cause. His, somewhat brusque, "*Request expand*" enquiries of 23 July 2011 for example, examined at paragraph 18 above, do little to assist the council in engaging with him. For this reason, while the Commissioner is not yet persuaded that the requests entirely lack serious purpose, nor that the complainant's line of questioning has progressed beyond 'persistence' into 'obsession' he is also mindful of the

difficulties the council might face when confronted by the complainant's requests.

58. While the complainant's efforts to-date may not have borne much fruit (in terms of supporting his suspicions), the council may, to some extent, have failed to allay those suspicions by what the complainant perceives as evasiveness or reluctance. Balancing this, the Commissioner notes the complainant's tendency to infer negative interpretations on the basis of only sketchy evidence.
59. The question of when a request should be refused as vexatious is a question of balance. It is clear that the threshold for refusal should not be set too high, so that a public authority would need to go to extraordinary lengths in dealing with a difficult applicant. By the same token, the bar should not be set too low, so that legitimate enquiries might be unfairly refused.
60. The Commissioner is in no doubt that the complainant is very close indeed to the point at which the line should be drawn. There will come a point at which the complainant must consider whether the evidence he has gathered is enough to confirm his suspicions, and act on them accordingly, or let the matter drop as, essentially, groundless.
61. Either way, if he persists in submitting requests on this topic to the council beyond this point, the Commissioner is less likely to be as sympathetic to any argument that the requests continue to have serious purpose, such that any associated burden ought to be borne by the council in the public interest. It is also more likely that the complainant's activity will risk crossing the line from persistence into obsession.
62. It is, however, the Commissioner's considered view that the complainant has not yet reached the point at which his determined pursuit of his quest has become an abuse of the right of access to public information provided at section 1(1) of FOIA. The request is for information which he has not previously requested, or received, and there is some public interest in disclosure.
63. He finds that, on balance, the present request was incorrectly refused as vexatious.

Right of appeal

64. Either party has the right to appeal against this decision notice to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights). Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)
GRC & GRP Tribunals,
PO Box 9300,
LEICESTER,
LE1 8DJ

Tel: 0300 1234504

Fax: 0116 249 4253

Email: informationtribunal@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/courts-and-tribunals/tribunals/information-rights/index.htm

65. If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.
66. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this decision notice is sent.

Signed

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