

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 25 April 2018

Public Authority: Home Office
Address: 2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant has requested information from the Home Office regarding the figures for self-harm in immigration detention centres for October to December 2017.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Home Office has breached section 10(1) of the FOIA in that it failed to provide a valid response to the request within the statutory time frame of 20 working days.
3. The Commissioner requires the public authority to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - The Home Office must issue a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA.
4. The Home Office must take this step 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 22 January 2018, the complainant wrote to the Home Office and requested information in the following terms:

"Would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Self-harm in immigration Detention Q4 October/November/December 2017 inclusive, under the following headings:

1. Number of individuals on formal self - harm at risk.

Number of adults / Number of children

2. Number of Incidents of self -harm requiring medical treatment.

Number of adults / Number of children

3. Number of deaths if any.

In Campsfield House, Brook House, Colnbrook, Dungavel, Harmondsworth, Morton Hall, Tinsley House, Yarl's Wood IRC's, The Verne, and any Short Term Hold Centres."

6. The Home Office acknowledged the request on 22 January 2018 but failed to provide a response within 20 working days.
7. On 28 February 2018 the complainant chased a response. The Home Office apologised for the delay on 5 March 2018 but did not provide a time frame in which it aimed to provide a response. To date a substantive response has not been issued.

Scope of the case

8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 5 March 2018 to complain about the way his request for information had been handled.
9. The Commissioner has considered whether the Home Office has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10(1) of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

10. Section 1(1) of the FOIA states 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."*

11. Section 10(1) of the FOIA states that a public authority must respond to a request promptly and *"not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt."*
12. On 8 March 2018 the Commissioner wrote to the Home Office, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 10 working days.
13. Despite this intervention the Home Office has failed to respond to the complainant.
14. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that the Home Office did not deal with the request for information in accordance with the FOIA. The Commissioner finds that the Home Office has breached section 10(1) by failing to respond to the request within 20 working days and it is now required to respond to the request in accordance with the FOIA.

Right of appeal

15. 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: 0870 739 5836

Email: GRC@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber

16. 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.
17. 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

Deborah Clark
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