

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 19 June 2018

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

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information from the Home Office about requests received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR).
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 Home Office to take the following steps 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 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 20 December 2017, the complainant wrote to the Home Office and requested information in the following terms:

"A list of all FOI and EIR requests received by the Home Office since 8 May 2015, to include the following information for each request:

a) the Home Office reference number

b) the date on which the request was received

c) the date on which a substantive answer was sent (ie an answer which either supplied the information requested or constituted a refusal notice)

In the case of those requests received since 1 September 2016, the following additional information for each request listed:

d) whether or not the request was passed to a special adviser for consideration of and/or input into the response

e) if so, the date on which it was passed to a special adviser

f) again if so, the date on which the special adviser signed off on it or otherwise passed it back".

6. The Home Office acknowledged the request on 21 December 2017, but did not provide a response within 20 working days.
7. The complainant wrote to the Home Office again on 18 March 2018 to chase a response, on 27 March 2018 the Home Office replied apologising for the delay.
8. On 5 April 2018 the Home Office wrote to the complainant again stating the matter was closed as they understood a response had now been provided. The complainant replied on the same day confirming he had not received any substantive response.

Scope of the case

9. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 1 May 2018 to complain about the Home Office's failure to respond to his information request.

10. On 25 May 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.
11. Despite this intervention the Home Office has failed to respond to the complainant.

Reasons for decision

12. 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."*

13. 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."*
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

Ben Tomes
Team Manager
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF