

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 8 November 2018

Public Authority: Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Address: King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information about the UK's funding of the Syria Civil Defence.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Foreign & Commonwealth Office ("the FCO") failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached Section 10 of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the FCO to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Issue a substantive response, under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The FCO 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 FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 4 July 2018, the complainant wrote to the FCO and requested information in the following terms:

"Could you please provide me with the written record of the latest review of the financial reports of UK funding to 'Syria Civil Defence (SCD)'.

"Could you also provide me with the written evaluation criteria which are used to assess these financial reports."

6. The FCO acknowledged the request on 5 July 2018 but had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 19 September 2018 to complain about the failure, by the FCO, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the FCO on 12 October 2018 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the FCO respond to the request within 10 working days.
9. The FCO responded on 26 October 2018 to request a short extension to provide its response and the Commissioner agreed to extend the deadline by a further week. However, the FCO failed to meet this deadline and requested a further extension.
10. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the FCO has complied with Section 10 of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

11. 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.*

12. Section 8(1) of the FOIA states:

In this Act any reference to a "request for information" is a reference to such a request which –

- (a) is in writing,*
- (b) states the name of the applicant and an address for correspondence, and*
- (c) describes the information requested.*

13. The Commissioner considers that the request in question fulfilled these criteria and therefore constituted a valid request for recorded information under the FOIA.
14. Section 10 of the FOIA states that responses to requests made under the Act must be provided "*promptly and in any event not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt.*"
15. From the evidence presented to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that, in failing to issue a response to the request within 20 working days, the FCO has breached Section 10 of the FOIA.

Right of appeal

16. 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

17. 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.
18. 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
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Cheshire
SK9 5AF**