

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 8 May 2019

Public Authority: Cabinet Office
Address: 70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested all correspondence sent to/from the Infected Blood Policy Team at the Department for Health and Social Care during the month of October 2018.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Cabinet Office failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached section 10(1) of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the Cabinet Office to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation:
 - Issue a substantive response, under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The Cabinet 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 FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 3 February 2019, the complainant wrote to the Cabinet Office and requested information in the following terms:

"Under FOI I am requesting the below information:

Copies of all correspondence to/from the Infected Blood Policy Team at DHSC during the period 1st October 2018 - 31st October 2018."

6. The Cabinet Office acknowledged the request on 4 February 2019 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 14 March 2019 to complain about the failure, by the Cabinet Office, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the Cabinet Office on 1 April 2019 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the Cabinet Office respond to the request within 10 working days. The correspondence was neither acknowledged nor responded to.
9. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 15 April 2019 to request a decision notice considering the Cabinet Office's compliance with the FOIA.
10. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the Cabinet Office 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 FOIA 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 Cabinet Office has breached section 10(1) 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@justice.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

Sarah O’Cathain
Senior Case Officer
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Wycliffe House
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Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF