

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 22 September 2021

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 monthly use of force governance meetings held by Serco, and asked a number of questions regarding the meetings. By the date of this notice the Home Office has not issued a substantive response to this request.
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 step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - The Home Office must provide 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 14 June 2021, the complainant wrote to the Home Office and requested information in the following terms:

"According to the Independent Monitoring Board for Brook House IRC's 2020 annual report (page 17), use of force governance meetings are held monthly by Serco. Please can you provide the following information from these meetings:

1. Copies of the minutes of all Brook House use of force governance meetings held from 21 May 2020 to date. I understand these may be redacted for personal information but I ask that you redact only exempted information and justify the use of those exemptions. I also kindly remind you that the time taken for redactions does not usually contribute towards the cost cap under FOI.

1. Copies of all film footage which has been reviewed during Brook House use of force governance meetings from 21 May 2020 to date. I understand these may be redacted for personal information but I ask that you redact only exempted information and justify the use of those exemptions, as above.

2. Lists of who attended all Brook House use of force governance meetings from 21 May 2020 to date. I understand these may be redacted for personal information but I ask that you redact only exempted information and justify the use of those exemptions, as above.

3. Copies of any written documents that were distributed those attending each Brook House use of force governance meeting from 21 May 2020 to date. I understand these may be redacted for personal information but I ask that you redact only exempted information and justify the use of those exemptions, as above.

4. Copies of any presentations, such as PowerPoint slideshows, which were shown during Brook House use of force governance meetings from 21 May 2020 to date.

If this request is too wide or unclear, I would be grateful if you could contact me as soon as possible, as I understand that under the Act you are required to advise and assist requesters. If any of this information is already in the public domain, please can you direct me to it, with page references and URLs if necessary.

I understand that you are required to respond to my request within the 20 working days after you receive this letter. I would be

grateful if you could confirm in writing that you have received this request."

6. The Home Office acknowledged the request on 14 June 2021. To date, a substantive response to the request has not been issued.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 21 August 2021 to complain about the Home Office's failure to respond to their request.
8. 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

9. 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."

10. 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"*.
11. On 31 August 2021 the Commissioner wrote to the Home Office, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant's request within 10 working days.
12. Despite this intervention the Home Office has failed to respond to the complainant.
13. 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

14. 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: 0203 936 8963

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: grc@justice.gov.uk

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

15. 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.
16. 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

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