

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 22 November 2021

**Public Authority:** Department of Health and Social Care  
**Address:** 39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

#### **Decision (including any steps ordered)**

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1. The complainant requested information from the Department of Health and Social Care ("the DHSC") about Hospital Safety Index evaluation reports. By the date of this notice the DHSC had not issued a substantive response to this request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the DHSC has breached section 10 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 DHSC to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
  - The DHSC must provide a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA.
4. The DHSC 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

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5. On 12 September 2021, the complainant wrote to the DHSC via the WhatDoTheyKnow website and requested information in the following terms:

*"Dear Department of Health and Social Care*

*Under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I am writing to request the latest versions of any Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization Hospital Safety Index evaluation reports held by DHSC for NHS hospitals in England.*

*Given the potentially sensitive nature of some of this information, I ask you to redact any exempt information instead of refusing disclosure. This would be in accordance with guidance on best practice from the Information Commissioner's Office."*

6. The DHSC acknowledged the request on 1 November 2021 and apologised for the delay in providing a response.
7. To date, a substantive response to the request has not been issued.

## Scope of the case

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8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 3 November 2021 to complain about the DHSC's failure to respond to their request.
9. The Commissioner has considered whether the DHSC has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10 of the FOIA.

## Reasons for decision

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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 November 2021 the Commissioner wrote to the DHSC, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant's request within 10 working days.
13. Despite this intervention the DHSC has failed to respond to the complainant.
14. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that the DHSC did not deal with the request for information in accordance with the FOIA. The Commissioner finds that the DHSC has breached section 10 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

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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: 0203 936 8963

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: [grc@justice.gov.uk](mailto:grc@justice.gov.uk)

Website: [www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber](http://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 .....**

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