

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

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 5 January 2023

**Public Authority:** HM Treasury  
**Address:** 1 Horse Guards Road  
Westminster  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

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

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1. The complainant submitted a request to HM Treasury (HMT) for a copy of the then Chancellor's ministerial diary for the period February 2020 to March 2021. HMT refused the request on the basis of section 14(1) (vexatious) of FOIA.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that HMT is entitled to rely on section 14(1) of FOIA to refuse to provide the requested information.
3. No steps are required.

#### **Request and response**

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4. On 29 March 2021 the complainant submitted the following request to HMT:

'From 13th February 2020 to the day this request is processed, please provide a copy of Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak's ministerial diaries.

Please note, I am making this request out of the public interest. It is absolutely essential for the public to know - in full detail - the calls, events and meetings that took place across the year when the pandemic gripped the UK and beyond'

5. HMT responded on 28 April 2021. It refused the request on the basis of section 14(1) of FOIA because of the burden that would be placed on it to answer the request which it considered amounted to one which represented a disproportionate effort. HMT explained that if she amended her request, for example, by being more specific about the subject and type of information that she was particularly interested in, it may be able to comply with a future request.
6. The complainant contacted HMT on 14 May 2021 and asked it to conduct an internal review of its response. She set out why in her view section 14(1) of FOIA did not apply to her request, focusing on what she considered to be the public interest in the disclosure of the requested information.
7. HMT informed her of the outcome of the internal review on 14 June 2021. The review upheld the application of section 14(1).

### **Scope of the case**

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8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 7 September 2021 to complain about HMT's reliance on section 14(1) to refuse her request.

### **Reasons for decision**

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#### **Section 14(1) - vexatious**

9. Section 14(1) of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to comply with a request if it is considered to be vexatious.
10. In the Commissioner's view, section 14(1) is designed to protect public authorities by allowing them to refuse any requests which have the potential to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress. This will usually involve weighing the evidence about the impact on the authority and balancing this against the purpose and value of the request. This should be judged as objectively as possible; in other words, would a reasonable person think that the purpose and value are enough to justify the impact on the public authority.
11. In particular, the Commissioner accepts that there may be cases where a request could be considered to be vexatious because the amount of time required to review and prepare the information for disclosure would place a grossly oppressive burden on the public authority. This is the position adopted by HMT in this case.

12. In reaching a decision in this case the Commissioner has considered the detailed submissions provided to him by HMT and the arguments presented by the complainant. He has also referred to recent decision notices he has issued in relation to similarly constructed requests submitted by the same complainant.<sup>1</sup>
13. The Commissioner appreciates that the complainant has made a detailed case for why, in her view, there is a compelling interest in the disclosure of the requested information. The Commissioner is also sympathetic to the complainant's argument given that this request covers an unprecedented time, ie the Covid 19 pandemic. For these reasons, the Commissioner accepts that the complainant's request does have a clear purpose and value.
14. However, because of the volume of information in the scope of the request, the Commissioner accepts that the burden placed on HMT in complying with it will be a grossly oppressive one. In the Commissioner's opinion despite the clear value in the disclosure of this requested information, he does not accept that this is sufficient to justify placing such a burden on the HMT.
15. Having considered the relevant facts the Commissioner is satisfied that the request, HMT's position, the complainant's arguments, the scope of information captured and the burden that compliance would impose are sufficiently similar to the scenarios addressed in the recent decision notices cited in paragraph 12. He, therefore, transposes the arguments and conclusions reached in these decision notices to this decision notice.
16. In light of the above, the Commissioner's decision is that the request is vexatious. Therefore, the HMT is entitled to rely on section 14(1) of FOIA to refuse to comply with the request. The Commissioner requires no further action to be taken by HMT in relation to the request.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the following: <https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2022/4022384/ic-129067-f2l3.pdf>, <https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2022/4022827/ic-148740-m6d1.pdf>, <https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2022/4022381/ic-128331-r7h1.pdf>, <https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2022/4022383/ic-129066-d1g1.pdf>

## Right of appeal

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17. 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)

18. 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.
19. 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 .....**

**Jonathan Slee**  
**Senior Case Officer**  
**Information Commissioner's Office**  
**Wycliffe House**  
**Water Lane**  
**Wilmslow**  
**Cheshire**  
**SK9 5AF**