

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 24 May 2021

Public Authority: Kent County Council

Address: County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XQ

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information from Kent County Council (the Council) regarding payments made by the Council to individuals with significant control of each of the Council's wholly owned trading vehicles. The Council had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Council failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached section 10 of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the Council to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Issue a substantive response, in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The Council 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 23 February 2021, the complainant wrote to the Council and requested information in the following terms:

"For each of the last 3 calendar years, please provide the payments made to each person with significant control (as listed on the Companies House website) for each of your wholly owned trading vehicles. I would like the total annual sum paid to each person, it does not need to be broken down."

6. The Council acknowledged the request on 24 February 2021 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 11 April 2021 to complain about the failure, by the Council, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the Council on 7 May 2021 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the Council respond to the request within 10 working days. The correspondence was neither acknowledged nor responded to.
9. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the Council has complied with section 10 of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

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 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."*

12. 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 Council has breached section 10 of the FOIA.

Other matters

13. The Commissioner wishes to place on record her understanding of the immense pressures placed on public authorities during the coronavirus pandemic. She is sympathetic to the difficult decisions such authorities must make, between prioritising front-line services and continuing to meet their obligations under 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: 0300 1234504
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

Susan Duffy
Senior Case Officer
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF