

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 8 August 2024

Public Authority: Home Office
Address: 2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant made two information requests to the Home Office (the public authority). By the date of this notice the public authority had not issued a substantive response to either of the two requests.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the public authority has failed to complete its deliberations on the balance of the public interest within a reasonable time and has therefore breached section 17(3) of FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the public authority to take the following step with respect to both requests to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Having confirmed whether or not information is held within the scope of the requests: either disclose the requested information or, to the extent that information is to be withheld, issue a refusal notice in accordance with the requirements of section 17 of the FOIA.¹
4. The public authority must take this step within 30 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

[¹ The Commissioner expects the public authority to take appropriate precautions to protect any personal data when disclosing information in a spreadsheet or similar format; [Information Commissioner's Office - Advisory note to public authorities | ICO](#)]

pursuant to section 54 of FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 19 April 2024, the complainant made the following request for information to the public authority:

"1. All communications between Home Office officials and the Home Secretary (including communications made to the office of the Home Secretary, for example to their private secretary) regarding the interaction between Gideon Falter and the Campaign Against Antisemitism with the Metropolitan Police on 13 April 2024 (henceforth the incident);

2. All communications between Home Office officials and the Home Secretary (including communications made to the office of the Home Secretary) regarding the Metropolitan Police's handling of the incident, including their policing of the event in question, their communications with Gideon Falter and the Campaign Against Antisemitism, as well as the statement released by the Metropolitan Police on behalf of Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist on twitter.com (19/04/2024, 16:18), the public response to this statement and the subsequent retraction of it;

3. All communications between Home Office officials and Special Advisers of the Home Secretary regarding the incident;

4. All communications between Home Office Special Advisers, and between these Special Advisers and Home Office officials (and the Home Secretary) regarding the Metropolitan Police's handling of the incident, including their policing of the event in question, their communications with Gideon Falter and the Campaign Against Antisemitism, as well as the statement released by the Metropolitan Police on behalf of Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist on twitter.com (19/04/2024, 16:18), the public response to this statement and the subsequent retraction of it.

I would like you to provide me with the information in electronic format".

6. On 20 May 2024, the public authority wrote to the complainant to explain that it held information relevant to the complainant's request, but that it would need to extend the time taken to complete its public interest test considerations in respect of an exemption under section 35(1)(a) of FOIA.

7. On the same day the complainant made a further information request in relation to his first request:

"1. All Home Office communications (including communications by staff within the Home Office to external individuals and between staff and ministers) between 19 April 2024 and 21 May 2024 relating to the Freedom of Information request I made on the 19th of April, reference FOI2024/03902."
8. On 16 July 2024 the public authority wrote to the complainant seeming to amalgamate the two requests and stating that it needs further time to consider the public interest test and would aim to respond by 13 August 2024.
9. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 16 July 2024 dissatisfied with the time the public authority was taking to respond to both of his requests.

Reasons for decision

10. Section 1(1) of 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 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. Section 17(3) of FOIA states that where a public authority is relying on a qualified exemption, it can have a "reasonable" extension of time to consider the public interest in maintaining the exemption or disclosing the information.
13. FOIA does not define how long a reasonable time is. The section 45 Code of Practice on request handling states that "it is best practice for

an extension to be for no more than a further 20 working days".² This means that the total time spent responding to a request should not exceed 40 working days unless there are exceptional circumstances.

14. On 23 July 2024 the Commissioner wrote to the public authority, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 10 working days. To date, a substantive response has still not been provided.
15. In this case, the total time taken by the public authority has exceeded 40 working days. The Commissioner does not consider there to be any exceptional circumstances and finds that, by failing to complete its deliberations on the public interest within a reasonable time frame, the public authority has not complied with section 17(3).
16. The public authority is now required to finalise its public interest considerations under section 17(3) of FOIA and respond to the complainant with regards to both of his requests.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744071/CoP_FOI_Code_of_Practice_-_Minor_Amendments_20180926_.pdf

Right of appeal

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

Website: 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.

Victoria James
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