

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 1 March 2019

Public Authority: Chief Constable of Surrey Police
Address: Surrey Police
PO Box 101
Guildford
GU1 9PE

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information from Surrey Police relating to contracts with legal firms.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that Surrey Police 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 Surrey Police to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Surrey Police must issue a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA.
4. Surrey Police 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 10 October 2018, the complainant wrote to Surrey Police and requested information in the following terms:

"Information requested covers each of the past five years.

1) Does Surrey Police, or Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner, have a contract, or contracts, with any legal firms for services to be provided to either Surrey Police, or Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner?

2) Which legal firms hold contracts with either of these bodies?

3) When did the contracts commence and what work do they cover?

4) How much as either Surrey Police, or Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner, paid to any legal firm in each of the past five years?

5) Have any legal actions been taken on behalf of Surrey Police, or Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner, by legal firms in each of the past five years? What was the nature of any work carried out by an outside legal firm?

6) Were the contracts put out to tender? How many firms were approached and sent estimates?

7) Has either body used the services of Weightmans LLP, and, if so, when were these services provided and at what cost?"

6. Surrey Police acknowledged the request on 11 October 2018.
7. The complainant contacted Surrey Police on 6 December 2018 regarding the overdue response.

Scope of the case

8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 21 December 2018 to complain about Surrey Police's failure to respond to her information request.
9. On 17 January 2019 the Commissioner wrote to Surrey Police, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 10 working days.
10. Despite this intervention Surrey Police has, to the date of this notice, failed to respond to the complainant.
11. The Commissioner has considered whether Surrey Police has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10(1) of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

12. 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."

13. 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."*

14. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that Surrey Police did not deal with the request for information in accordance with the FOIA. The Commissioner finds that Surrey Police 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

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: 0300 1234504

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: GRC@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

Website: 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

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