

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 2 June 2025

Public Authority: Oxford City Council
Address: Business Improvement
St Aldates Chambers
St Aldates
Oxford
OX1 1DS

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information relating to various officers within Oxford City Council (the Council). The Council relied on section 14(1) of FOIA (vexatious requests) to refuse the request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Council is entitled to refuse to comply with the request under section 14(1).
3. The Commissioner does not require any steps.

Request and response

4. On 22 September 2024, the complainant wrote to the Council and requested information in the following terms:
 - ""a) who is the OCC specified officer under the ECC Act [Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act] of 2023?
 - b) who is the 'link officer' who acts as a single point of contact for Ombudsman enquiries and casework as specified by the Local Administration laws
 - c) who is the authorised officer for the purposes of the administration and enforcement of any Act, regulations or local laws which relate to

the functions and powers of the Council see 224(1) amended by No. 125/1993 s. 26(2). (1)

d) who is designated officer under the Public Interest (whistleblower protection) sections 1 e and 7 1 and 2

e) For items sent by SWS to OCC via Customer services as requested are they read by Customer services or not before onward information to parties as [name redacted] alleges is done by Customer services. Of if they are forwarded without reading.”

5. The Council responded on 21 October 2024. It provided a response to parts a, d, and e of the request, cited section 40(2) (personal information) to withhold information for part b, and requested clarification for part c of the request.
6. Within their internal review request, the complainant made no complaint about the responses to points b and d, advised that they were unable to provide clarification for part c, and asked further questions about parts a and e of the request.
7. Following the internal review, the Council applied section 14(1) of FOIA to refuse the request.

Scope of the request

8. Within their submission to the Commissioner, the complainant has raised various grounds for complaint. Some of these relate to accusations of wrongdoing against officers of the Council and abuse of processes. These concerns do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner and will not be covered in this decision notice.
9. The complainant also objected to the refusal of their request under section 14(1) of FOIA, therefore the scope of the following analysis will be to consider the Council’s application of section 14(1) to the request.

Reasons for decision

Section 14(1) – vexatious requests

10. This decision notice concerns section 14(1) of FOIA. Details of this section of FOIA and how it is applied in a decision notice can be found in the Commissioner’s [decision notice support materials](#).

The complainant's view

11. In summary, the grounds for complaint are:

- a. That the Council has not properly considered the serious value and purpose of the request;
- b. That the Council has not demonstrated a burden in dealing with the request; and
- c. That there is a wide public interest in knowing whether the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act of 2023 (the ECC) applies to the Council.

The Council's view

12. Within its submission to the Commissioner, the Council has provided background and context to the request. It explained that it is part of a chain of requests, complaints and general correspondence stemming from April 2024 in relation to a dispute between the Council and complainant.
13. The Council stated that between April 2024 and April 2025, the complainant sent over 300 pieces of correspondence which relate, in some way, to the dispute. Between April 2024 and 21 October 2024, they submitted 10 information requests. These requests have been answered subject to exemptions.
14. The Council stated that the basis of these requests and follow up correspondence, are an attempt to obtain information that may support the complainant's dispute with the Council. The correspondence includes accusations about various Council officers' wrongdoing as well as questions which were unclear and never clarified.
15. To demonstrate the volume of correspondence the Council provided the following information:
 - That 40 emails were sent by the complainant to eight different officers within the Council over an 11 week period. Following this, on 12 June 2024, the Council requested the complainant to direct all their correspondence to a single email address in order that it could be properly dealt with.
 - Six responses to that request were received from the complainant on the same day and, up to the 23 June 2024, the Council received a further 21 related emails from the complainant.

- Between 24 June 2024, and 8 July 2024, the complainant responded to a further email from the Council 13 times. Of these emails, one had 10 attachments and another 14.
16. The Council has stated that these emails are often very long and/or are difficult to understand and continue to raise points from earlier correspondence. These either relate to the dispute, are continued accusations of wrongdoing against named members of staff, or are other general complaints including those already addressed by the Council.
 17. The Council states that this level of correspondence puts it under a considerable burden given the disproportionate amount of time and resources being used to manage correspondence from a single individual.
 18. It explained that, within the complainant's correspondence, they continue to make unsubstantiated allegations against the Council in general and towards specific officers of the Council.
 19. It is concerned that these continued allegations are having a negative effects on these named members of staff who are the subject of repeated accusations, stating that this has, and is continuing to cause distress and worry to those individuals.
 20. The Council believes that all the above shows that there is no serious value or purpose to the request because the overall pattern of behaviour by the complainant appears not to be a genuine attempt to access recorded information, but is an attempt to prolong correspondence in relation to the dispute, or to continue to keep open matters that have already been addressed.

The Commissioner's decision

21. The Commissioner emphasises that in every case in which section 14(1) is cited, the question is whether the request itself is vexatious, rather than the individual who submits it.
22. In reaching a decision in this case, the Commissioner has balanced the purpose and value of the request against the detrimental effect on the Council of responding to the request.
23. The Commissioner has considered the public interest argument put forward by the complainant, that there is wide public interest in knowing if the ECC applies to the Council. The request in question here, however, is not primarily concerned with the ECC, which is only mentioned in one part of the request. Compliance with this request would therefore do very little to serve any public interest in this matter.

24. In the Commissioner's [guidance](#) on section 14(1) of FOIA, consideration of the background and history of the request can be taken into account. The Commissioner notes the length of time over which requests have been made, the number of requests, the frequency of other correspondence, and the amount of time the Council has already spent addressing the various requests and complaints which have already been addressed.
25. From the information available to him, including examples of correspondence sent to the Council from the complainant which demonstrate frequent and repeated requests for the same or similar information, including the information laid out at paragraph 15 of this decision notice, the Commissioner is of the view that the high volume of emails being sent by the complainant demonstrates a pattern of behaviour which shows an unreasonable level of persistence.
26. The Commissioner notes the Council's representations that, given the on-going dispute and the complainant's unhappiness with how this is being handled, responding to this request would likely generate further related requests and correspondence, thereby placing an extra burden on the resources of the Council.
27. The Commissioner's view is that it is not appropriate for finite public resources to be further expended in this way so, in all the circumstances of this case, and based on the evidence provided, the Commissioner has concluded that the request was vexatious. Therefore, the Council was entitled to rely on section 14(1) of FOIA to refuse the request.

Other matters

28. As well as objecting to the refusal of their request as vexatious, the complainant also raised a specific concern about section 14(1) only being cited by the Council for the first time at internal review.
29. However, paragraph 5.8 of the [FOIA Code of Practice](#), which covers internal reviews, provides that a public authority can apply different or additional exemption(s) at review stage. This is also well established in FOIA case law.

Right of appeal

30. 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)
General Regulatory Chamber,
PO Box 11230,
LEICESTER,
LE1 8FQ

Tel: 0203 936 8963

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: grc@justice.gov.uk

Website: www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber

31. 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.
32. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this decision notice is sent.

Ben Tomes
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