

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 11 March 2021

Public Authority: London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Address: Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London
E14 2BG

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (the London Borough) about payments. By the date of this notice the London Borough had not issued a substantive response to this request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the London Borough 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 the London Borough to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - The London Borough must provide a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA.
4. The London Borough 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 12 January 2021, the complainant wrote to the London Borough and requested information in the following terms:

"All written and electronic communications for the date range 1st Jan 2020 to 12th Jan 2021 in relation to the following:

1) Discussions about payments for additional hours worked by the Public Health and other LBTH Staff in relation to the COVID response

2) Discussions about payments of honorariums for public health and other LBTH staff

3) Arrangements for the part time PO9 members of staff within public health to receive additional pay relating to the COVID response

Please ensure this FOI includes the notes from discussions at Public Health Senior Management Team meetings, other team and management meetings within the council and correspondence with individuals (with redaction of personal details as required)."

6. To date, a substantive response to the request has not been issued.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 9 February 2021 to complain about the London Borough's failure to respond to their request.
8. The Commissioner has considered whether the London Borough has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10(1) of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

9. 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."

10. 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"*.
11. On 23 February 2021 the Commissioner wrote to the London Borough, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant's request within 10 working days.
12. Despite this intervention the London Borough has failed to respond to the complainant.
13. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that the London Borough did not deal with the request for information in accordance with the FOIA. The Commissioner finds that the London Borough 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.

Other matters

14. 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

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@justice.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
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Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF