

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 30 June 2022

Public Authority: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust

Address: Site 30, Ambulance Headquarters
Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road,
Belfast
BT8 8SG

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information about ambulance handovers. By the date of this notice the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust ("the Trust") had not issued a substantive response to this request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the Trust has breached section 10(1) of 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 Trust to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - the Trust must provide a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under FOIA.
4. The Trust 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 FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 7 April 2022, the complainant wrote to the Trust and requested information in the following terms:

“Under the Freedom of Information Act, could you provide me with a database extract for the period from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2022 with data for every ambulance handover, containing columns for:

- A&E department where handover took place
- date or month of handover
- notification time or time ambulance arrived at A&E
- time handover took place/handover time/turnaround time
- level of call the ambulance was on (e.g. Category 1 etc.).

Please provide this information as a spreadsheet or CSV files.”

6. The Trust acknowledged the request on 13 April 2022. To date, a substantive response has not been issued.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 8 June 2022 to complain about the Trust’s failure to respond to their request.
8. The Commissioner has considered whether the Trust has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10(1) of FOIA.

Reasons for decision

9. 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.”

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 15 June 2022 the Commissioner wrote to the Trust, 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 Trust has failed to respond to the complainant.
13. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that the Trust did not deal with the request for information in accordance with FOIA. The Commissioner finds that the Trust 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 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: 0203 936 8963
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

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