

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 22 August 2018

Public Authority: London Borough of Hounslow

Address: Civic Centre
Lampton Road
London
TW3 4DN

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant requested information about policies regarding children in care.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the London Borough of Hounslow ("the London Borough") failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached Section 10 of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the London Borough to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
 - Issue a substantive response, under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The London Borough must take these steps 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 FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

Request and response

5. On 24 May 2018, the complainant wrote to the London Borough and requested information in the following terms:

"We write to submit a Freedom of Information Act request for the following documents:

1. *"Copies of the London Borough of Hounslow's external and internal policies, guidance or any other documents on Section 23CA of the Children Act 1989.*
 2. *"Copies of the London Borough of Hounslow's external and internal policies, guidance or any other documents on funding higher or further education for former relevant children support by the local authority under either Section 23C or Section 23CA of the Children Act 1989."*
 3. *"Copies of the London Borough of Hounslow's external and internal policies, guidance or any other documents on Section 23CZB of the Children Act 1989.*
 4. *"Copy of the London Borough of Hounslow's local offer to care leavers as required by Section 2 of the Children & Social Work Act 2017. The local offer available on the London Borough of Hounslow's website (found here https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/downloads/file/1069/local_offer_to_care_leavers) has not been updated to reflect the new statutory duties set down in Sections 2 and 3 of the Children & Social Work Act 2017 which came into effect on 1 April 2018."*
6. The London Borough had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 19 July 2018 to complain about the failure, by the London Borough, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the London Borough on 31 July 2018 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the London Borough respond to the request within 10 working days. The correspondence was neither acknowledged nor responded to.
9. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 15 August 2018 to request a decision notice considering the London Borough's compliance with the FOIA.
10. The scope of this Notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the London Borough has complied with Section 10 of the FOIA.

Reasons for decision

11. 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.*

12. Section 8(1) of the FOIA states:

In this Act any reference to a "request for information" is a reference to such a request which –

- (a) is in writing,*
- (b) states the name of the applicant and an address for correspondence, and*
- (c) describes the information requested.*

13. The Commissioner considers that the request in question fulfilled these criteria and therefore constituted a valid request for recorded information under the FOIA.

14. Section 10 of the FOIA states that responses to requests made under the Act must be provided "*promptly and in any event not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt.*"

15. From the evidence presented to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that, in failing to issue a response to the request within 20 working days, the London Borough has breached Section 10 of the FOIA.

Right of appeal

16. 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

17. 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.
18. 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
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Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF**