

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 22 February 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 specified 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 16 October 2020, the complainant wrote to the London Borough and requested information in the following terms:

"In January and March this year, rent payments totalling over £1m per month were made to 'EID Limited Partnership'. No information on this company is provided by Companies house. What did these payments relate to?"

6. The London Borough acknowledged the request on 19 October 2020. To date, a substantive response to the request has not been issued.

Scope of the case

7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 21 January 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 3 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
Team Manager
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF