

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 16 December 2021

**Public Authority:** The National Archives

**Address:** Kew  
Richmond  
TW9 4DU

#### **Decision (including any steps ordered)**

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1. The complainant requested information from the National Archives (TNA) relating to an information request for a specific file held by TNA. By the date of this notice, TNA had not issued a substantive response to the request.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the TNA has failed complete its deliberations on the balance of the public interest within a reasonable time and has therefore breached section 17(3) of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires TNA to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
  - Having confirmed that information is held within the scope of the request, either disclose the requested information or, issue a refusal notice in accordance with the requirements of section 17 of the FOIA.
4. TNA 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 Act and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

## Request and response

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5. On 9 September 2021 the complainant wrote to TNA and requested information in the following terms:

*"This is a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act.*

*I understand that [name redacted] submitted a FOI request for the file titled "CJ 4/4402: [name redacted]: killed by a plastic baton round, April 1981". I also understand that the National Archives had to consult other government departments in relation to this request. In light of this, I would like to request the following information:*

*(1) Please indicate which government departments the National Archives had to consult over the file CJ 4/4402. Please also indicate whether the National Archives flagged the request to the Cabinet Office Clearing House.*

*(2) Please provide all external correspondence and communications between the National Archives and government departments which refer to, or relate to, the file CJ 4/4402.*

*(3) Please provide all internal correspondence and communications held by the National Archives which refer to, or relate to, the file CJ 4/4402. I expect this to include internal communications in relation to the processing of [name redacted] FOI request for this file.*

*I would like to receive this information in an electronic format. If you feel that a substantive response to this request is not possible within a reasonable time frame, I would be grateful if you could contact me and provide assistance as to how I can refine the request. If you need any clarification, please contact me. I look forward to receiving a response in 20 working days. Many thanks."*

6. TNA wrote to the complainant on 7 October 2021 and stated that it was extending the time to respond to the request in order to complete its public interest test.
7. TNA stated that it was considering the public interest test in line with section 10(3) of the FOIA. It stated that it was currently assessing the public interest test in relation to section 38 (health and safety). TNA stated that it intended to respond to the request in full by 3 November 2021.

8. On 3 November 2021, TNA wrote to the complainant to inform her that it required further time to complete its public interest test. TNA stated that it intended to respond to the request by 1 December 2021.
9. By the date of this notice, TNA has not issued a substantive response to the request.

### **Scope of the case**

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10. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 26 November 2021 to complain about the delay in TNA's consideration of the public interest test.
11. The Commissioner contacted TNA on 2 December 2021 reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 10 working days.
12. The Commissioner also contacted the complainant on 2 December 2021 to explain that TNA had been given 10 working days from that date within which to provide a response to their request.
13. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether TNA has complied with its obligations in relation to section 17 of the FOIA.

### **Reasons for decision**

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14. 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."*

15. 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"*.
16. Section 17(3) of the FOIA states that where a public authority is relying on a qualified exemption, it can have a "reasonable" extension of time to

consider the public interest in maintaining the exemption or disclosing the information.

17. Although the FOIA does not define what constitutes a reasonable time, the Commissioner considers it reasonable to extend the time to provide a full response, including public interest considerations, by up to a further 20 working days. This means that the total time spent dealing with the request should not exceed 40 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances. A public authority would need to fully justify any extension beyond 40 working days.
18. In this case, the total time taken by TNA to respond to this request has exceeded 40 working days. The Commissioner does not consider there to be any exceptional circumstances and finds that, by failing to complete its deliberations on the public interest test within a reasonable timeframe, TNA has not complied with section 17(3).
19. TNA is now required to finalise its public interest considerations under section 17(3) of the FOIA and respond to the complainant.

## Right of appeal

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20. 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](mailto:grc@justice.gov.uk)

Website: [www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber](http://www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber)

21. 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.
22. 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 .....**

**Michael Lea**  
**Team Manager**  
**Information Commissioner's Office**  
**Wycliffe House**  
**Water Lane**  
**Wilmslow**  
**Cheshire**  
**SK9 5AF**