



Decision Notice 020/2024

Mallaig schools' budget figures – failure to respond

Applicant: The Applicant

Authority: Highland Council

Case Ref: 202400069

Summary

The Applicant asked the Authority for information about Mallaig schools' budget figures. This decision finds that the Authority failed to respond to the request and requirement for review within the timescales allowed by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

Background

1. The Applicant made an information request to the Authority on 5 November 2023.
2. The Authority did not respond to the information request.
3. On 5 December 2023, the Applicant wrote to the Authority in respect of its failure to respond.
4. The Applicant did not receive a response to his requirement for review.
5. On 20 January 2024, the Applicant wrote to the Commissioner, stating that he was dissatisfied with the Authority's failure to respond and applying to the Commissioner for a decision in terms of section 47(1) of FOISA.
6. The Commissioner determined that the application complied with section 47(2) of FOISA and that he had the power to carry out an investigation.

Investigation

7. Section 49(3)(a) of FOISA requires the Commissioner to notify public authorities of an application and to give them an opportunity to comment. The Commissioner did this on 23 January 2024.

8. The Commissioner received submissions from the Authority. These submissions are considered below.
9. The Authority confirmed that it received the Applicant's requirement for review. It commented that it had taken staff longer than expected to collate and verify the data but that it was currently working on providing a response.
10. Section 10(1) of FOISA gives Scottish public authorities a maximum of 20 working days following the date of receipt of the request to comply with a request for information. This is subject to qualifications which are not relevant in this case.
11. It is a matter of fact that the Authority did not provide a response to the Applicant's request for information within 20 working days, so the Commissioner finds that it failed to comply with section 10(1) of FOISA.
12. Section 21(1) of FOISA gives Scottish public authorities a maximum of 20 working days following the date of receipt of the requirement to comply with a requirement for review. Again, this is subject to qualifications which are not relevant in this case.
13. It is a matter of fact that the Authority did not provide a response to the Applicant's requirement for review within 20 working days, so the Commissioner finds that it failed to comply with section 21(1) of FOISA.
14. The remainder of section 21 sets out the requirements to be followed by a Scottish public authority in carrying out a review. As no review has been carried out in this case, the Commissioner finds that the Authority failed to discharge these requirements: he now requires a review to be carried out in accordance with section 21.
15. The Commissioner recommends that the Authority considers whether it would be appropriate to apologise to the Applicant for its failure to comply.

Decision

The Commissioner finds that the Authority failed to comply with Part 1 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) in dealing with the information request made by the Applicant. In particular, the Authority failed to respond to the Applicant's request for information and requirement for review within the timescales laid down by sections 10(1) and 21(1) of FOISA. The Commissioner requires the Authority to provide a response, by **29 March 2024**.

Appeal

Should either the Applicant or the Authority wish to appeal against this decision, they have the right to appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only. Any such appeal must be made within 42 days after the date of intimation of this decision.

Enforcement

If the Authority fails to comply with this decision, the Commissioner has the right to certify to the Court of Session that the Authority has failed to comply. The Court has the right to inquire into the matter and may deal with the Authority as if it had committed a contempt of court.

Jennifer Ross
Acting Deputy Head of Enforcement

13 February 2024