



Scottish Information
Commissioner
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Decision Notice 260/2024

Planning Applications – failure to respond

Applicant: The Applicant

Authority: Highland Council

Case Ref: 202400894

Summary

The Applicant asked the Authority for information relating to two specified planning applications. This decision finds that the Authority failed to respond to the Applicant's requirement for review within the timescale allowed by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (the EIRs).

Background

1. The Applicant made an information request to the Authority on 6 March 2024.
2. The Authority responded to the information request on 3 April 2024.
3. On 5 April 2024, the Applicant wrote to the Authority requiring a review of its decision.
4. The Applicant did not receive a response to her requirement for review, but received an acknowledgement from the Authority on 5 April 2024 that it was treating her email as a request to review its response. The Applicant contacted the Authority again on 16 May 2024, as she still had not received a response from the Authority to her requirement for review.
5. The Applicant wrote to the Commissioner on 1 July 2024, stating that she 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. The enforcement provisions of FOISA apply to the enforcement of the EIRs, subject to specified modifications – see regulation 17.
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 9 July 2024.
8. The Commissioner received submissions from the Authority. These submissions are considered below.
9. It is apparent from the terms of the request that at least some of the information caught by it will be environmental information as defined by regulation 2(1) of the EIRs. In [Decision 218/2007 Transport Scotland](#)¹, the Commissioner confirmed at paragraph 51 that where environmental information is concerned, there are two separate statutory frameworks for access to that information and, in terms of the legislation, an authority is required to consider the request under both FOISA and EIRs.
10. The Authority acknowledged that it had failed to respond to the requirement for review on time, explaining this was due to the other competing priorities and resourcing at that time.
11. 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. This is subject to qualifications which are not relevant in this case. The same timescale is laid down by regulation 16(4) of the EIRs.
12. 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 and regulation 16(4) of the EIRs.
13. The Authority responded to the Applicant's requirement for review on 9 July 2024, so the Commissioner does not require it take any further action in relation to the Applicant's application.
14. The Commissioner notes that the Authority apologised to the Applicant for its failure to comply with the requirement for review.

Decision

The Commissioner finds that the Authority failed to comply with Part 1 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) and with the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (the EIRs) in dealing with the information request made by the Applicant. In particular, the Authority failed to respond to the Applicant's requirement for review within the timescales laid down by section 21(1) of FOISA and regulation 16(4) of the EIRs.

¹ <https://www.itspublicknowledge.info/decision-2182007>

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.

Colin MacFadyen
Freedom of Information Officer

18 November 2024