

Decision Notice



Decision 276/2013 Mr Paul Hutcheon and the Scottish Ministers

Hospitality received by First Minister: failure to respond within statutory timescales

Reference No: 201302746

Decision Date: 6 December 2013

www.itspublicknowledge.info

Rosemary Agnew

Scottish Information Commissioner

Kinburn Castle
Doubledykes Road
St Andrews KY16 9DS
Tel: 01334 464610



Summary

This decision considers whether the Scottish Ministers (the Ministers) complied with the technical requirements of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) in responding to an information request made by Mr Hutcheon.

Background

1. On 24 June 2013, Mr Hutcheon wrote to the Ministers requesting certain specified information.
2. Mr Hutcheon received no response to his request for information.
3. On 8 October 2013 Mr Hutcheon wrote to the Ministers requesting a review of their failure to respond.
4. Mr Hutcheon did not receive a response to his requirement for review and on 19 November 2013 wrote to the Commissioner's Office, stating that he was dissatisfied with that failure and applying to the Commissioner for a decision in terms of section 47(1) of FOISA.
5. The application was validated by establishing that Mr Hutcheon had made a request for information to a Scottish public authority and had applied to the Commissioner for a decision only after asking the authority to review its response to that request. The case was then allocated to an investigating officer.

Investigation

6. On 20 November 2013, the Ministers were notified in writing that an application had been received from Mr Hutcheon and were invited to comment on the application.
7. The Ministers responded on 6 December 2013 by providing a copy of the review response sent to Mr Hutcheon on 4 December 2013. The Ministers did not make any other submission to the Commissioner.



Commissioner's analysis and findings

8. 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, subject to certain exceptions which are not relevant in this case.
9. Since the Ministers did not provide a response to Mr Hutcheon's request for information within 20 working days, the Commissioner finds that they failed to comply with section 10(1) of FOISA.
10. 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, subject to certain exceptions which are not relevant in this case.
11. Since the Ministers did not provide a response to Mr Hutcheon's requirement for review within 20 working days, the Commissioner finds that they failed to comply with section 21(1) of FOISA.
12. Given that the Ministers have now responded to Mr Hutcheon's requirement for review, the Commissioner does not require them to take any further action in this case, in response to Mr Hutcheon's application.

DECISION

The Commissioner finds that the Scottish Ministers (the Ministers) failed to comply with Part 1 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) in dealing with the information request made by Mr Hutcheon, in particular by failing to respond to Mr Hutcheon's request for information and requirement for review within the respective timescales laid down by sections 10(1) and 21(1) of FOISA.

Given that a response has now been provided to Mr Hutcheon's requirement for review, the Commissioner does not require the Ministers to take any action in response to this failure.

Decision 276/2013
Paul Hutcheon
and the Scottish Ministers



Appeal

Should either Mr Hutcheon or Scottish Ministers 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.

Alison Davies
Deputy Head of Enforcement
6 December 2013



Appendix

Relevant statutory provisions

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

1 General entitlement

- (1) A person who requests information from a Scottish public authority which holds it is entitled to be given it by the authority.

...

10 Time for compliance

- (1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a Scottish public authority receiving a request which requires it to comply with section 1(1) must comply promptly; and in any event by not later than the twentieth working day after-

- (a) in a case other than that mentioned in paragraph (b), the receipt by the authority of the request; or

...

21 Review by Scottish public authority

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), a Scottish public authority receiving a requirement for review must (unless that requirement is withdrawn or is as mentioned in subsection (8)) comply promptly; and in any event by not later than the twentieth working day after receipt by it of the requirement.

...