

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

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 19 April 2021

**Public Authority:** Department of Health and Social Care  
**Address:** 39 Victoria Street  
LONDON  
SW1H 0EU

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

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1. The complainant requested information from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) about a 2 year contract awarded to Palantir Technologies. The DHSC had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that the DHSC failed to respond to the request within 20 working days and has therefore breached section 10 of the FOIA.
3. The Commissioner requires the DHSC to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation.
  - Issue a substantive response, in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA, to the request.
4. The DHSC 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 FOIA and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

## Request and response

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5. On 24 February 2021, the complainant wrote to the DHSC and requested information in the following terms:

*"Palantir was recently awarded a new 2 year contract. I was a contracts engineer and would like to know the following things about the contract:*

*1) Please provide a copy of the invitation to tender or extension of contract if applicable. Also a copy of the scope of works included in the 2 year contract. This is standard contract information that is not commercially sensitive.*

*2) If not clear in the scope of works does the contract forbid Palantir from using any public health information it may obtain from the contract for its own commercial use?"*

6. The DHSC acknowledged the request on 24 February 2021 but had failed to provide a substantive response by the date of this notice.

## Scope of the case

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7. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 1 March 2021 to complain about the failure, by the DHSC, to respond to the request.
8. In line with her usual practice, the Commissioner contacted the DHSC on 25 March 2021 to highlight the outstanding response. She requested that the DHSC respond to the request within 10 working days. The correspondence was neither acknowledged nor responded to.
9. The scope of this notice and the following analysis is to consider whether the DHSC has complied with section 10 of the FOIA.

## Reasons for decision

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10. 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.*

11. Section 8(1) of the FOIA states:

*In this Act any reference to a "request for information" is a reference to such a request which –*

- (a) is in writing,*
- (b) states the name of the applicant and an address for correspondence, and*
- (c) describes the information requested.*

12. The Commissioner considers that the request in question fulfilled these criteria and therefore constituted a valid request for recorded information under the FOIA.

13. Section 10 of the FOIA states that responses to requests made under the Act must be provided "*promptly and in any event not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt.*"

14. From the evidence presented to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that, in failing to issue a response to the request within 20 working days, the DHSC has breached section 10 of the FOIA.

### **Other matters**

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15. 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

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

17. 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.
18. 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 .....**

**Susan Duffy**  
**Senior Case Officer**  
**Information Commissioner's Office**  
**Wycliffe House**  
**Water Lane**  
**Wilmslow**  
**Cheshire**  
**SK9 5AF**