



# Decision Notice 118/2024

---

## Corran Ferry Service – failure to respond

**Applicant: The Applicant**

**Authority: Highland Council**

**Case Ref: 202400465**

### Summary

The Applicant asked the Authority for various pieces of information relating to its duty to comply with public transport general policies under sections 63(2)(b) and 64 of the Transport Act 1985. This decision finds that the Authority failed to respond to the request and 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 17 November 2023.
2. The Authority did not respond to the information request, so the Applicant chased it up on 18 January 2024.
3. On 25 January 2024, the Applicant wrote to the Authority again. This time, requiring a review in respect of its failure to respond. This was acknowledged on 26 January 2024.
4. The Applicant did not receive a response to their requirement for review, so chased it up again on 13 February 2024.
5. The Applicant wrote to the Commissioner on 1 April 2024, stating that they were 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 20 May 2024.
8. The Commissioner received submissions from the Authority on 4 June 2024. 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](#)<sup>1</sup>, 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 accepted that it had failed to respond to the Applicants' information request and requirement for review within the timescales allowed under FOISA and the EIRs.
11. It explained that the reasons for the considerable delay in responding to this request was due to a combination of issues relating to staffing and the workload concerning the number of information requests that the Council receive daily and those that are outstanding.
12. The Council commented that it had recently held a series of staff briefing sessions to give staff that deal with information requests the opportunity to ask questions from the Central Teams. The Council advised that the main focus that came from these sessions was the need to engage with the Central Teams to seek advice and assistance at the earliest opportunity to ensure legislative deadlines are met. *The Commissioner notes this and encourages staff to seek advice early in order that requests are responded to in a timely manner, i.e. within the 20 working days allowed under FOISA and the EIRs.*
13. 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. The same timescale is laid down by regulation 5(2)(a) of the EIRs.
14. It is a matter of fact that the Authority did not provide a response to the Applicants' request for information within 20 working days, so the Commissioner finds that it failed to comply with section 10(1) of FOISA and regulation 5(2)(a) of the EIRs.
15. 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. The same timescale is laid down by regulation 16(4) of the EIRs.
16. It is a matter of fact that the Authority did not provide a response to the Applicants' 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.

---

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

17. The Authority responded to the Applicants' requirement for review on 4 April 2024, so the Commissioner does not require it to take any further action in relation to the Applicants' application.
18. The Commissioner notes that the Authority apologised 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) 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 Applicants' request for information and requirement for review within the timescales laid down by sections 10(1) and 21(1) of FOISA and regulations 5(2) and 16(4) of the EIRs. Given that the Authority has now responded to the Applicant's requirement for review, he does not require the Authority to take any action.

## **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.

**Jill Walker**  
**Deputy Head of Enforcement**

**5 June 2024**