

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

### **Decision notice**

**Date:** 31 July 2019

**Public Authority:** Chief Constable of Sussex Police  
**Address:** Sussex Police Headquarters  
Malling House  
Church Lane  
Lewes  
East Sussex  
BN7 2DZ

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

---

1. The complainant requested information relating to Sussex Police's criminal investigations of the company Countyline.
2. The Commissioner's decision is that Sussex Police has breached section 10(1) of the FOIA in that it failed to provide a valid response to the request within the statutory time frame of 20 working days.
3. The Commissioner requires Sussex Police to take the following step to ensure compliance with the legislation.
  - Sussex Police must provide a substantive response to the request in accordance with its obligations under the FOIA.
4. Sussex Police must take this step 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 Act and may be dealt with as a contempt of court.

#### **Request and response**

---

5. On 28 December 2018, the complainant wrote to Sussex Police and requested information in the following terms:

*"Under the Freedom of Information Act can I please request that, in relation to Lewisham Trading Standards, you supply me with the following:*

- 1) What offences you were investigating against Countyline*
- 2) How many complainants there were*
- 3) How many statements have been made*
- 4) How many arrests have been made*
- 5) How many persons have been spoken to under caution*
- 6) Approximately how many hours have been spent by staff investigating County Line.*

*I would be grateful if you could please forward this email onto your Detective Inspector and bring them up to speed on the situation, advising me of when you have done this. As Sussex Police also have jurisdiction over this offence due to where the company were based and operated i.e. where a number of their victims are located, under the Freedom of Information Act could you please provide me with the following from Sussex Police:*

- 1) The crime number(s) for allegations made against Countyline*
- 2) What offences Countyline was being investigated for*
- 3) How many complainants there were*
- 4) How many statements have been made*
- 5) How many arrests have been made*
- 6) How many persons have been spoken to under caution; and*
- 7) Approximately how many hours have been spent by staff investigating County Line"*

6. Sussex Police acknowledged the request on 2 January 2019. The complainant contacted Sussex Police on multiple occasions in February, March and April 2019 regarding the overdue response. On 12 April 2019 Sussex Police acknowledged the complainant's email thread of February and March 2019.
7. On 29 April 2019 the complainant contacted Sussex Police asking for a further update on progress. On 30 April 2019 Sussex Police informed the complainant that his response was being prepared and would be

provided around the week of 7 May 2019. To date, a substantive response has not been issued.

## Scope of the case

---

8. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 16 June 2019 to complain about Sussex Police's failure to respond to his request.
9. The Commissioner has considered whether Sussex Police has complied with its obligations in relation to the time for compliance at section 10(1) of the FOIA.

## Reasons for decision

---

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 10(1) of the FOIA states that a public authority must respond to a request promptly and *"not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt"*.
12. On 2 July 2019 the Commissioner wrote to Sussex Police, reminding it of its responsibilities and asking it to provide a substantive response to the complainant within 10 working days.
13. Despite this intervention Sussex Police has failed to respond to the complainant.
14. From the evidence provided to the Commissioner in this case, it is clear that Sussex Police did not deal with the request for information in accordance with the FOIA. The Commissioner finds that Sussex Police has breached section 10(1) by failing to respond to the request within 20 working days and it is now required to respond to the request in accordance with the FOIA.

## Right of appeal

---

15. 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)

16. 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.
17. 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 .....**

**Ben Tomes  
Team Manager  
Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF**