

24 November 2010

**Royal Mail Group**

Robert Whittaker

By Email: Request-21238-bxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Freedom of Information Unit  
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Dear Mr Whittaker

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Since my letter to you dated 30<sup>th</sup> June, Royal Mail has been in further communication with the Information Commissioner's Office regarding your request for information on the cost of maintaining the Postcode Address File. We recognise that in this case there are a number of areas where we could have done better, and I am therefore writing to apologise for our handling of this particular request and your subsequent complaint to Royal Mail, and to address the points of concern that you have raised.

Royal Mail works extremely hard to ensure that the statutory deadline for requests and timescales set out for appeals by the Information Commissioner are met. In each of the past 12 months over 90% of all requests dealt with under the terms of FOIA have been answered within 20 working days. We also recognise that responses should be provided promptly within that time, and we make a concerted effort to do this. However on many occasions, due to the processes and checks involved in replying to requests for information under FOI, this does mean that we cannot provide an immediate response and often replies are necessarily sent on the 19th or 20th day. I regret that in this case it was not possible to reply to you before day 20, but can assure you that we close all cases down as soon as practically possible.

After discussion with the Information Commissioner's Office, I accept that our refusal of your request failed to properly address the balance of public interest in this information, in that it did not cite the public interest factors in favour of disclosure. We look to identify and correct issues such as this when a case is considered at Internal Review and on this occasion this did not happen, for which I apologise. I will review this and feed back in to our internal review and request handling procedures to ensure that our teams are fully aware of the requirements of Section 17 of the Act.

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When a case proceeds to Internal Review our target is to complete the review and reply within 20 working days, or in exceptional circumstances 40 days. This target is met in the majority of cases, though clearly we failed to do so in this case. A number of factors contributed to the length of time taken to respond to your request for an Internal Review, and on several occasions our Review Panel required more evidence to reach a decision. However, we accept that the time taken on this occasion was not acceptable and that a decision should have been reached much sooner.

Royal Mail also recognises the duty to provide advice and assistance with requests, and to those considering making a request, under section 16 of the FOIA. In this instance, the FOI Unit could have worked more closely with you and provided more help in dealing with your request. In hindsight, if we had discussed your requirements with you directly and at an earlier stage in the process, the information which was later disclosed to you could have been provided much sooner and the matter hopefully resolved to your satisfaction.

I would therefore like to apologise for the way in which this case was handled and for the delays you experienced, but hope that the information which was ultimately disclosed to you was of use. We take our obligations under FOI very seriously and have robust procedures in place to meet them. Where things do go wrong, we look to improve going forward and will use this case to review our case handling procedures and the quality of our responses.

If you have any queries or concerns regarding this, please contact me at [foi@royalmail.com](mailto:foi@royalmail.com).

Yours sincerely

Colin Young  
Freedom of Information Manager  
Freedom of Information Unit

CC: Thomas Thwaites, Senior Case Officer, Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.