

22 February 2013

Royal Mail Group

Mrs T Begum

By Email: request-143813-51c1fc40@whatdotheyknow.com

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Dear Mrs Begum

Re: Internal review of Freedom of Information request – Postbox Collection Times

I am writing in response to your email dated 30 January 2013. You asked for an internal review of your recent request for information from Royal Mail. We have therefore carried out a review of our handling of the request in line with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the associated Code of Practice.

Your request of 02 January 2013 related to specification and final collection times for postboxes within the E2, E5, E8, E9 and E13 postcode districts. Your request was refused because the cost of complying with it would exceed the appropriate limit under section 12 of the FOIA. After reviewing your request we continue to believe that it would exceed the appropriate limit to search for recorded information relating to all postboxes within the scope of the request you submitted. I will provide further details of our reasoning for this decision below. However, in light of comments made in your email of the 30 January, it may help to first explain why some final collection times are at an earlier time than the 'Town & City' specification stipulates.

In connection with the introduction of collection time regulation in 2006, Royal Mail reviewed the application of the 1996 specification across its postbox estate and found that the Final Collection time for some post postboxes was earlier than the collection specification window for them. Royal Mail advised Postcomm that, pending a full overhaul of the collection specification, any postbox with a Final Collection time earlier than its 1996 classification would not be moved later into the time window for the classification, but that thereafter it would not be permitted to move any earlier. This approach has been strictly applied and any change request for postbox Final Collection time change has been and continues to be closely monitored to ensure compliance with this approach. There are some exceptions to this that include situations where there are risks or concerns regarding

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the safety and or security of employees and or members of the Public as well as access issues – although these are low in number. Please note that any postbox that has a Final Collection time later than the specification window is permitted to move earlier but no earlier than its 1996 classification and those in the correct specification must stay there.

Royal Mail has an ongoing modernisation programme to improve customer service and efficiency in our business. Being efficient means optimising the way we organise collections. We collect and deliver six days a week. In addition to collecting from postboxes, we also collect from over 11,500 Post Office branches and tens of thousands of business addresses. We may sometimes therefore need to make adjustments to the final collection times within the permitted times, or the number of collections per day. We may plan earlier collection times for low volume boxes and later collection times for high volume boxes. In urban areas some boxes may be used far more than others but we will maintain boxes wherever possible rather than take them out of service.

To inform our customers of any such changes, Royal Mail publishes a notice on each post box concerned, with contact details for customers to use if they need more information or details of the collection times of other postboxes nearby.

Turning to your request for information; in your email dated 02 January 2013 you requested the following information:

'Can you explain why the following boxes are not 'Town and City' specification, and do not fall into a latest collection time specification of 17:30 – 18:30 hours?'

E2 14 E28 210 KINGSLAND ROAD

E2 4 E28PJ THURTLER ROAD

E2 17 E28DY KINGSLAND ROAD

E2 22 E28PR 328 HACKNEY ROAD

'Can you tell me why some post boxes in E8, E9 and E5 (London) are not within 'Town and City' specification?'

'Can you explain why post boxes in E13 (London) are within 'Town and City' specification, which fall into a latest collection time specification of 17:30 – 18:30 hours?'

As we have explained above, some Final Collection times may have been existing collection times outside the specification window which, as noted by the regulator, were not required to be changed following the 2006 review. However, as we have also indicated above, some collection times may be based on access issues or safety and security requirements. To gather information relating to each and every individual postbox covered by your request, in order to confirm the reasons for any postboxes with an earlier final collection time, would clearly be extremely time consuming.

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Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it reasonably estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to:

- either comply with the request in its entirety or;
- confirm or deny whether the requested information is held.

The appropriate limit for Royal Mail Group is £450, which equates to 18 hours spent locating and retrieving requested information. We estimate that it would take significantly longer than this to search for all information relevant to your request. In addition to 4 specific postboxes in the E2 postcode district, your request covers postboxes in the whole of the E5, E8 and E9 areas. We are satisfied that it would take one person more than 18 hours to search for all relevant information. Consequently, we believe that the cost-limit exemption under section 12(1) of the FOI Act was correctly applied and Royal Mail is not obliged to comply with your request in its entirety.

Where the cost limit applies, we do have a duty to provide you with advice and assistance about relevant information which could be retrieved under the cost ceiling. If you were to limit the scope of your request to information relating to a single or small group of postboxes, then it may be possible to complete a search for specific records relating to those postboxes. We will consider any request in line with the requirements of the FOIA. However, I hope that information provided in this response suitably explains why some final collection times may be earlier than the 'Town and City' classification states.

In the event that you are not satisfied with this reply, you also have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner who can be contacted at the address below:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 01625 545 700
www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

Kate Fearn
Information Rights Manager
Information Governance Team