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Director

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Main Number 0208 854 8888

Dear Mr Chamberlain

Internal Review: FOI-IR-48208

Thank you for your request for an Internal Review dated 26 April 2021 regarding our response to your Freedom of Information request.

FOI Request

On 5 February 2021 you wrote to ask:

- a) How much has been spent on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in the past three financial years - 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21?
- b) How much has been received from the Home Office in each financial year for the scheme?
- c) Could you tell me how much each organisation involved has been given by Greenwich in each financial year?
- d) Could you please send me copies of the reports from the organisations concerned detailing what has been done with the money?

Our response was as follows:

Response:

The information you have requested at questions a, b c, and d is withheld in accordance with section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 43(2) states:-

Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

The Council considers disclosure of the funding amounts and any reports provided will prejudice its commercial interests as these agreements were finalised by the Council when commissioning for delivery of services by each organisation.

If this is publicly disclosed this could be open to unwarranted and unnecessary scrutiny and criticism by third parties who have no connection to this arrangement or to the delivery of services to the various organisations.

The council has consulted with GIC and their views as to why disclosure would prejudice their commercial interests are:-

The reports from the organisations detailing what has been done with the money contains sensitive information.

Sharing these reports will have an impact on other negotiations of future projects as it can be used against our interest.

Disclosing these reports could potentially lead to threats or harassment of the GIC staff due to the sensitivity of the information contained in the reports.

The Council is of the view that disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of these organisations. A number of these organisations are faith-based community establishments which is accessible to the public.

Disclosure could open such organisations, who are public service providers, up to unwarranted scrutiny and may result in these organisations becoming the target of a possible backlash which may involve violence which could pose a danger to staff and the respective establishments. This would upset the functioning of the various roles of these organisations.

The Council has considered the public interest for disclosing this information. We have acknowledged that there is a broad public interest in maintaining the transparency and accountability of its actions and that disclosure would facilitate this.

The Council has considered the public interest factors for not disclosing this information, they are:-

In addition to the reasons stated above the Syrian families settled under the GSP may also become targets of violence or repercussion if the specific funding amounts provided by the council to each organisation / statutory body to help the families to settle into the UK is placed in the public domain.

The resettled Syrian families receive local authority housing stock, free NHS treatment, are prioritised for educational services and are assisted with practical and emotional support

from dedicated support staff and other services. If the specific yearly funding amounts for each organisation is placed in the public domain this may cause upset, incite protest and anti-refugee action or violence which may also affect wider members of the community including migrants, migrant organisations and the Council.

Disclosure is likely to result in the reputation and credibility of the GSP being undermined and leading to commercial detriment through a loss of confidence in its provision of its services within the competitive commercial market.

The Council is also of the view that disclosure will prejudice the commercial interests of the Home Office as this is a confidential arrangement with the Home Office, the Council and the commissioned organisations. It is commonly understood that there are many individuals and groups who are against settling refugees into the UK. If the specific details of the funding arrangements in terms of the extensive support provided to refugees from Home Office to the specific parties where to be placed in the public domain this may cause an unwarranted backlash for the Home Office and its associated partners in delivering the Refugee Resettlement Programme.

If the confidential arrangements relating to the specific funding amounts provided to the commissioned agencies and statutory bodies for the resettlement of refugees (which is a UK National programme in conjunction with the Home Office and the United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees) are in the public domain this could pose a threat to local and national security should a back-lash occur.

Having considered the public interest test the Council considers that the public interest favours maintaining the exemption.

The requested information is withheld in accordance with section 43(2).

Internal Review

On 26 April 2021 you wrote to ask:

I am writing to request an internal review of your decision to refuse to answer what I hoped would be a routine Freedom of Information request into Greenwich's participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

Particularly with councillors voting last November for Greenwich to become a borough of sanctuary, it seems at odds with this spirit of openness that Greenwich is unwilling to give even basic financial figures for its current scheme.

To take each point in turn:

a) "The Council considers disclosure of the funding amounts and any reports provided will prejudice its commercial interests as these agreements were finalised by the Council when commissioning for delivery of services by each organisation."

It is unclear how asking how much has been received from central government prejudices the council's commercial interests. In addition, if residents are not allowed to know how much of this money is being spent, how are residents supposed to have confidence in any future "borough of sanctuary" scheme?

b) "If this is publicly disclosed this could be open to unwarranted and unnecessary scrutiny and criticism by third parties who have no connection to this arrangement or to the delivery of services to the various organisations."

Since this is taxpayers' money, everybody in the United Kingdom has a connection to this arrangement. It is also unclear how any scrutiny can be "unwarranted" - this is a council contract, not a private arrangement.

c) "The council has consulted with GIC and their views as to why disclosure would prejudice their commercial interests are..."

Assuming this means Greenwich Islamic Centre, you have now named an organisation that is presumably involved in this scheme - despite you saying doing this would cause harm.

d) "The reports from the organisations detailing what has been done with the money contains sensitive information."

If there is sensitive information about individuals, then please redact it. This is a request for information on where money is being spent, not on individuals.

e) "[from GIC] sharing these reports will have an impact on other negotiations of future projects as it can be used against our interest."

The public interest lies in scrutinising how public money is being spent by GIC. Why is it in the public interest to help GIC in future negotiations for public money when other organisations could possibly provide a better service? It appears that Greenwich Council is yielding to the commercial interests of GIC and not the interests of local residents or taxpayers more widely.

f) "Disclosing these reports could potentially lead to threats or harassment of the GIC staff due to the sensitivity of the information contained in the reports."

How on earth does asking for details of where public money has been spent put GIC staff at risk?

g) "The Council is of the view that disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of these organisations. A number of these organisations are faith-based community establishments which is accessible [sic] to the public. Disclosure could open such organisations, who are public service providers, up to unwarranted scrutiny and may result in these organisations becoming the target of a possible backlash which may involve violence which could pose a danger to staff and the respective establishments. This would upset the functioning of the various roles of these organisations."

The public interest lies in scrutinising how public money is being spent by the council's partner organisations. If these organisations are unable to withstand scrutiny, why are they being awarded contracts? In other sensitive fields, we are able to see where money is being spent - on care homes and children's services, for example. I am not asking for people's personal details, I am asking to find out where public money is being spent.

h) "In addition to the reasons stated above the Syrian families settled under the GSP may also become targets of violence or repercussion if the specific funding amounts provided by the council to each organisation / statutory body to help the families to settle into the UK is placed in the public domain."

Nobody is asking for personal details of the Syrian families. Indeed, transparency regarding how much money is being spent housing them may help them in terms of scrutinising the services offered to them.

i) "The resettled Syrian families receive local authority housing stock, free NHS treatment, are prioritised for educational services and are assisted with practical and emotional support from dedicated support staff and other services. If the specific yearly funding amounts for each organisation is placed in the public domain this may cause upset, incite protest and anti-refugee action or violence which may also affect wider members of the community including migrants, migrant organisations and the Council."

It is unclear why disclosure of commercial contracts (as in point c) would be an incitement to violence.

j) "Disclosure is likely to result in the reputation and credibility of the GSP being undermined and leading to commercial detriment through a loss of confidence in its provision of its services within the competitive commercial market."

If you are not willing to reveal how money is being spent, this is more likely to result in a loss of credibility. Either this is a normal commercial contract process or it is not.

k) "The Council is also of the view that disclosure will prejudice the commercial interests of the Home Office as this is a confidential arrangement with the Home Office..."

The Home Office would appear to disagree, as it provides information about funding arrangements with local authorities on request.

l) "If the confidential arrangements relating to the specific funding amounts provided to the commissioned agencies and statutory bodies for the resettlement of refugees (which is a UK National programme in conjunction with the Home Office and the United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees) are in the public domain this could pose a threat to local and national security should a back-lash occur."

The national figures are open to scrutiny (National Audit Office <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Syrian-Vulnerable-Persons-Resettlement-programme-Summary.pdf>) and it is a publicly-known fact that Greenwich participates in the programme, as seen in this tweet from the council leader: <https://twitter.com/DanLThorpe/status/1186678543662702592>. This has not resulted in any threat to national or local security. It is hard to see why disclosing details of which organisation gets funding, and outlines of what they spend this money on, would result in any threat.

Response

The Council's response is set out below.

The requested information at questions a & b is disclosed and the responses are:-

- a) How much has been spent on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in the past three financial years - 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21?

The Council strictly operates according to Home Office funding arrangements as set out in the Home Office Funding Instruction for Local Authorities in support of the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme.

These details are publicly accessible from the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-resettlement-programmes-funding-instruction-2020-to-2021>

Expenditure:

2018 /19 - £192,989.26

2019/ 20 - £489,340.57

2020/ 21 - £315,656.55

b) How much has been received from the Home Office in each financial year for the scheme?

Amounts received from the Home Office

2018 /19 - £221,642.00

2019/20 - £538,392.00

2020/ 21- £304,740.00

c) Could you tell me how much each organisation involved has been given by Greenwich in each financial year?

| Organisations paid | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | £ | £ | £ |
| RBG | 67,933.26 | 100,105.37 | 68,459.77 |
| Greenwich Islamic Centre (GIC) | 91,106.00 | 268,303.20 | 182,844.00 |
| Schools | 32,850.00 | 63,000.00 | 24,525.00 |
| ESOL Providers | 1,100.00 | 34,600.00 | 4,827.78 |
| Greenwich Inclusion Project (GRIP) | | 23,332.00 | £35,000 |
| Total | 192,989.26 | £ 489,340.57 | 315,656.55 |

d) Could you please send me copies of the reports from the organisations concerned detailing what has been done with the money?

I have considered the reports which we receive from the organisations stated above. The reports which the Council receives details about the progress of families resettled under the scheme. I have, therefore, decided to exempt this information under section 40(2)

Section 40(2)

This information is exempt in accordance with section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (The Act). This information constitutes third party data. Section 40(2) provides that personal data about third parties is exempt information if one of the conditions set out in section 40(3)A of the Act is satisfied. Under the Act disclosure of this information would breach the fair processing principle contained in the Data Protection Act 2018.

The requested information constitutes personal data. Disclosure of this information would contravene the first data protection principle, which requires that personal data be processed fairly and lawfully. These individuals would have an expectation that this information would not be released without their consent. It is important to note that consent is not a determining factor; however, it is a factor that has been considered when taking into account the reasonable expectations of the data subjects. These individuals would also have a reasonable expectation for the requested information to be withheld and not placed in the public domain.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has resettled 20 Syrian refugee families in the borough during a 5 year period from 2017 through the Greenwich Sanctuary Project (GSP).

The Home Office publishes quarterly statistics, a full listing of the detailed asylum and resettlement datasets are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>

The Council's response is partially upheld.

If you have any queries, please contact me, quoting the reference number.

If you are not content with the outcome of the Internal Review, you can apply directly to the Information Commissioner (ICO) for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the Internal Review procedure provided by the Council. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliff House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah McClinton, Director
Health & Adult Services