

20 October 2022



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: Freedom of Information request ref CA189

Thank you for your request for information received on 23 September 2022. The response is given below:

Request

Covid Recovery Grant

Question (1) A statement released this week (link below) states Stagecoach have only just been given 6 months' Covid Recovery Grant funding " to ensure the current network of bus services can be sustained":

<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/our-statement-on-stagecoachs-withdrawal-of-services/>

I'd like to know:

Question (a) How much did Stagecoach receive for this Covid Recovery Grant for our area?

Response

This information is not held by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as the grant was issued by Department for Transport (DfT) and not Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

Question (b) Which months was that recent funding intended to secure the 'current network of bus services' for during 2022?

Response

October 2022 – March 2023

Question (c) Did the CPCA consider this funding amount adequate to secure the 'current network of bus services' for the agreed duration (b)

Response

This information is not held by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as the grant is issued by Department for Transport (DfT) and not Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Question (d) Did Stagecoach notify you of any planned upcoming changes to their timetable during the period of time (b) that the funds were allocated for, as they should have done to claim this relief?

Response

In advance of claim period as per current legislation

Question (e) At the time of claim, what occupancy rate did Stagecoach say they were running at?

Response

The period of claim hasn't started yet and therefore no information can be provided.

Question (f) Please provide a copy of the service level agreement relating to how those public funds would be allocated and tracked - or details to that effect. Including: whether the funding was considered by Stagecoach as being enough to secure all of the 'current network of bus services' at the same service levels for the duration of (b), or just some networks and if so, which routes would be kept and which routes would be dropped?

Response

There is no SLA with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. The grant is issued by Department for Transport (DfT) and not Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Question (g) How is use of the above grant tracked by the CPCA to ensure public funds are used for the agreed objectives? Are shortcomings investigated? What are the penalties for breaches?

Response

The grant is not tracked by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as it is not a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority grant.

Stagecoach's route cancellation announcement at very short notice

Question (2) I'd like to know when you were first made aware of Stagecoach's intention to cancel these services. To that effect I request the following:

Question (1) Copies of emails between yourself and other decision-makers at CPCA and Stagecoach relating to the upcoming cancellation of routes.

Response

The Combined Authority does hold the information you have requested. There is one email from Stagecoach to the Combined Authority but this has been classified as commercially sensitive and disclosure of the information would severely prejudice the commercial interests of the company. Disclosure has not been granted on the grounds set out in Section 43 of the 2000 Act.

The Authority has also considered the application of the exemption at Section 43 of the Act.

Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ["the Act"] provides that:

(2) 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 Information Commissioner's guidance on the commercial interests exemption at Section 43 is available at:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/section-43-commercial-interests/>

In order for this exemption to be engaged the following criteria must be met:

- *the actual harm which the public authority alleges would, or would be likely to, occur if the withheld information was disclosed has to relate to the applicable interests within the relevant exemption;*
- *the public authority must be able to demonstrate that some causal relationship exists between the potential disclosure of the information being withheld and the prejudice which the exemption is designed to protect. Furthermore, the resultant prejudice which is alleged must be real, actual or of substance; and*
- *it is necessary to establish whether the level of likelihood of prejudice being relied upon by the public authority is met – ie disclosure 'would be likely' to result in prejudice or disclosure 'would' result in prejudice.*

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The guidance explains that:

“would...prejudice” means that prejudice is more probable than not, ie that there is a more than 50% chance of the disclosure causing the prejudice, even though it is not absolutely certain that it would do so. “Would be likely to prejudice” is a lower threshold. It means that there must be more than a hypothetical or remote possibility of prejudice occurring; there must be a real and significant risk of prejudice, even though the probability of prejudice occurring is less than 50%.

And defines “commercial interest” as follows:

“...a commercial interest relates to a person’s ability to participate competitively in a commercial activity, i.e. the purchase and sale of goods or services.”

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption and is therefore subject to public interest considerations.

It is the Combined Authority’s view that disclosure of the details would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of both the Authority and Stagecoach for the reasons given above.

The Section 43(2) exemption is therefore engaged. The Combined Authority must therefore consider the balance of public interest in deciding whether to disclose the information.

There is clearly a general public interest in public bodies being open, transparent and accountable particularly in the context of the expenditure of public funds.

However, there is also a public interest in third parties who are seeking funding having confidence in commercial information that they provide as part of the funding relationship being treated confidentially, given that it may provide a competitor advantage to know that information.

On balance the Combined Authority takes the view that the public interest arguments in favour of maintaining the exemption and withholding the information, in particular the arguments about the likely prejudice to both the Authority’s and participants’ commercial interests, outweigh the public interest arguments in favour of disclosure.

The Authority has also considered the application of the exemption from disclosure under section 41 of the Act

Section 41(1) of the Act provides that:

41.— Information provided in confidence.

(1) Information is exempt information if—

(a) it was obtained by the public authority from any other person (including another public authority), and

(b) the disclosure of the information to the public (otherwise than under this Act) by the public authority holding it would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person.

The Information Commissioner's guidance on the application of this exemption is available at:

[information-provided-in-confidence-section-41.pdf \(ico.org.uk\)](#)

The guidance confirms that:

Information will be covered by Section 41 if:

- *it was obtained by the authority from any other person,*
- *its disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence.*
- *a legal person could bring a court action for that breach of confidence, and*
- *that court action would be likely to succeed*

When determining if disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence, the authority will usually need to consider:

- *whether the information has the quality of confidence,*
- *whether it was imparted in circumstances importing an obligation of confidence, and*
- *whether disclosure would be an unauthorised use of the information to the detriment of the confider.*

[...]

When determining if an action for breach of confidence would be likely to succeed, the authority will need to consider whether there would be a public interest defence to the disclosure.

The exemption is designed to give those who provide confidential information to public authorities, a degree of assurance that their confidences will continue to be respected, should the information fall within the scope of a freedom of information request.

In considering whether disclosure would be a breach of confidence the following is noted:

- The information is confidential between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the provider.
- Given that the information provided is more than trivial and is not otherwise accessible it has the necessary quality of confidence and those providing the information have a genuine interest in the contents remaining confidential. The guidance confirms that the information does not have to be highly sensitive, but nor should it be trivial. The preservation of confidences is recognised by the courts to be an important matter and one in which there is a strong public interest.

- The content of the information, due to its commercial sensitivity, makes it implicit that there is an obligation of confidence.
- Disclosure of these elements of the requested information would be an unauthorised use of the information to the detriment of those providing the information because the disclosure of commercially sensitive information will be detrimental to their commercial interests by making that information available to potential competitors.

In considering whether the section 41 exemption would apply to disclosure of the requested information:

- The information was obtained by the Authority from other persons, namely Stagecoach
- Disclosure of the information would constitute a breach of confidence;
- Those providing the information could bring a court action for that breach of confidence in order to protect their commercial interests from detriment

It is also necessary to consider whether such court action would be likely to succeed. Although section 41 is an absolute exemption, meaning that it is not subject to the application of a public interest test, the issue of public interest does still arise because a public interest defence would be available to a legal action for breach of confidence. The caselaw referred to in the Information Commissioner's guidance confirms that the test is now whether there is a public interest in disclosure which overrides the competing public interest in maintaining the duty of confidence. The test assumes that the public interest in maintaining confidentiality will prevail unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in maintaining the confidence. As the guidance puts it:

[...] in cases where the duty of confidence protects a person's private interests, it is hard to envisage circumstances where the public interest in transparency and accountability alone, would be sufficient to override the public interest in maintaining that individual's privacy

Your request is therefore refused on the basis that the information requested is exempt from disclosure under section 41 of the Act.

Question (2) Specifically, on what date were you first aware of Stagecoach's plans to drop the routes now planned for cancellation?

Response

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority were first made aware of an initial longlist of potential service cuts at the end of June 2022 – a long list that we were not permitted to disclose as it was commercially sensitive and that was still subject to further assessment by Stagecoach before it was finalised and formally communicated to the Combined Authority.

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A final list of these confirmed service withdrawals was received on August 15 giving at least 70 days' notice to the Combined Authority as required by the Transport Act. The Act stipulates that the first 28 days of this notice are on a confidential basis.

Other questions

Question (1) I'd also like to know why our area hasn't received a share of the millions other Mayors in different regions have received for public transport overhaul?

Response

This information is not held by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as the funding is issued by Department for Transport (Department for Transport (DfT)) and not Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Question (2) There is word that more money (£1m+) is being made available to ensure the continuation of all local routes cancelled beyond October. Can you categorically say that will save all routes and services? For how long?

Response

Please see press release which was released by Mayor Dr Nik Johnson [Mayor Dr Nik Johnson statement on Stagecoach's withdrawal of bus services from October 30 - Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority \(cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

Question (3) What bigger plans are there to secure public transport in all Cambridgeshire (& Suffolk) areas so that we can all get to college/hospital/work etc.? I am left with the distinct impression that Stagecoach could, and may well, announce short notice cancellations again at any time.

Response

A paper 'Emerging Bus Strategy' was presented at the Combined Authority Board meeting on Wednesday 19 October 2022. A link to the agenda and papers for the meeting can be found below:

[CMIS > Meetings](#)

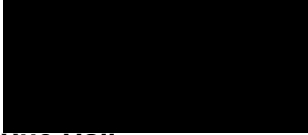
I hope this information is helpful but if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review, you should write to us via our contact us email address: democratic.services@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk or write a letter to Complaints, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, 2nd Floor, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 3TN within 40 days of the date of this e-mail.

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If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, or via their website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Generally, the ICO will not undertake a review or make a decision on a request until the internal review process has been completed.

Yours sincerely



Sue Hall
Acting Data Protection Officer



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