

11 March 2024

Dear

ATISN 20204 – Qatar Meetings

Thank you for your request which I received on 13 February 2024. In your email, you asked for records of any official meetings and correspondence between Welsh Government and the following:

- Q.1 *Qatari state ministers*
- Q.2 *Qatari civil servants*
- Q.3 *Qatari businesspeople*

All of the requests above relate to the period from August 2018 to January 2024 and include agendas, minutes, emails, and any official communications.

A response to each question is set out in **Annex A**.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
or e-mail: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 0303 123 1113
Website: www.ico.org.uk

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Meetings with Qatari State Government and Civil Servants

The information requested is exempt from disclosure under Section 27 (International Relations) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Section 27 is a qualified exemption, and a Public Interest Test has therefore been applied. Reasons for withholding the information are detailed below.

Section 27 (International Relations)

The exemption states: Section 27(1) Information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, harm UK interests which are set out in the exemption. Sections 27(2) and (3) provide an exemption for information obtained in confidence from another state, international organisation or international court. Section 27(4) provides an exemption from the duty to confirm or deny whether information is held if doing so would or would be likely to prejudice the interests protected by section 27(1) or would involve the disclosure of confidential information protected by section 27(2).

Public interest arguments in favour of release:

The Welsh Government acknowledges the general public interest in openness and transparency that release would engender. Further, we recognise that there is public interest in understanding the process by which the Welsh Government discusses certain policy matters with foreign governments and that the release of the information could lead to greater transparency and openness in the way the Welsh Government conducts business with other governments, which can improve accountability and public trust.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding:

We have considered the information held and believe that its release would be prejudicial to Welsh Government's future ability to have frank and open discussions with international stakeholders, including foreign governments and state-owned organisations, and would affect Welsh Government's ability to gather information to conduct effective policy making across a wide number of areas with countries where we have common interests. The release of this information will inhibit the openness of discussions. Disclosure of the information, which was generated within this climate of trust and expectation of confidence, would be likely to result in the same trust and confidence being eroded and a reluctance to share information which would be likely to prejudice relations between both parties on both this and other matters. Such prejudice would not be in the public interest.

I believe therefore that the balance of the public interest falls in favour of withholding the withheld information for the reasons outlined above.

Meetings with Qatari Businesspeople

During the period covered by the request, there are records of two meetings held between Welsh Government's Qatar Office and Qatari businesspeople. Details of the correspondence around these meetings are at **Annex B**, with commercially sensitive (section 43 – see below) and/or personal information redacted.

Section 43 (Commercial Interests)

The exemption states: Section 43(2) exempts information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any legal person (an individual, a company, the public authority itself or any other legal entity).

Section 43 is a qualified exemption, and a Public Interest Test has therefore been applied. Reasons for withholding the information are detailed below.

Public interest arguments in favour of release:

The Welsh Government acknowledges the general public interest in openness and transparency that release would engender. Further, we recognise that there is public interest in understanding the process by which the Welsh Government discusses economic opportunities with overseas investors, and potential customers for Welsh exporters, and that the release of the information could lead to greater transparency and openness.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding:

I have considered the information held and believe that the release of the company names (both Welsh and Qatari) contained within the correspondence would be prejudicial to these companies and their commercial interests. Companies have an expectation that their commercial interests remain protected during discussions with government and releasing commercial information could damage future trade and investment opportunities and economic partnerships for those companies. Furthermore, disclosure of the information, which was generated within a climate of trust and expectation of confidence, would be likely to result in the same trust and confidence being eroded and a reluctance to share information, which would be likely to prejudice relations between both parties on both this and other matters. Such prejudice would not be in the public interest.

I believe therefore that the balance of the public interest falls in favour of withholding the withheld information for the reasons outlined above.