

4 July 2022

Dear

ATISN 16386 – First Minister meeting with Qatar Ambassador

Thank you for your request which I received on 10 June 2022. You asked for:

- *A copy of the minutes of the First Minister with HE Ambassador Fahad Al-Attiyah on June 9th, 2020*

which I interpreted to mean the minutes of the most recent meeting held between the First Minister and the Qatar Ambassador on 9 June 2022; therefore, I processed this request based on the most recent date.

The information requested is exempt under Section 21 (Information accessible to applicant by other means) and/or Section 27 (International Relations) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

A post was made on [social media](#) which outlines the high level content of the meeting. The First Minister also set out the main points of discussion during a Senedd Scrutiny Committee session, which was broadcast on [senedd.tv](#) on 23 June 2022, and the [transcript](#) is available on the Senedd website with the relevant detail at paragraph 23. Therefore, this request is exempt under s21 (Information accessible to applicant by other means).

Section 27 (International relations) is a qualified exemption and a Public Interest Test has therefore been applied to the full detail of the minutes as requested. Reasons for withholding the information are set out in Annex 1.

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,

ATISN 16386

Section 21 – Information accessible to applicant by other means

The exemption states:

(1) Information which is reasonably accessible to the applicant otherwise than under section 1 is exempt information.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) —

(a) information may be reasonably accessible to the applicant even though it is accessible only on payment, and

(b) information is to be taken to be reasonably accessible to the applicant if it is information which the public authority or any other person is obliged by or under any enactment to communicate (otherwise than by making the information available for inspection) to members of the public on request, whether free of charge or on payment.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (1), information which is held by a public authority and does not fall within subsection (2)(b) is not to be regarded as reasonably accessible to the applicant merely because the information is available from the public authority itself on request, unless the information is made available in accordance with the authority's publication scheme and any payment required is specified in, or determined in accordance with, the scheme.

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 and that the release of the information could lead to greater transparency and openness in the way the Welsh Government conducts business with other administrations, which can improve accountability and public trust.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding

I have considered the information held and believe that releasing the detailed minutes would be prejudicial to the Welsh Government's future ability to have frank and open discussions with international stakeholders, including governments, and would affect the 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. It is important that we maintain a relationship with individual governments and countries and 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, particularly where the withheld information involves a subject matter which may still pertain to current and or future considerations by the Welsh Government and the UK Government. 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.