

07 March 2024

Dear

ATISN 20188 – Mbale Tree Project

Thank you for your email in response to your previous request for information (ATISN 20114) received on 9 February 2024. In your email you asked:

- Q1. *In what year did the Welsh Government commence spending on this project?*
- Q2. *You say funds are channelled through a Fiduciary Management Agent. When was that Agent appointed and who is it?*
- Q3. *The Size of Wales Charity does not appear to have filed accounts since March 2021. Why is the Welsh Government committing public funds to a charity that does not appear to be transparent about its expenditure?*
- Q4. *Of all the taxpayers money spent on this project how much has gone towards payments to the Fiduciary Management Agent and to staffing costs at the Size of Wales Charity?*
- Q5. *Given the failure of Size of Wales to post its accounts do you agree that a public audit should be undertaken given the amount of taxpayers' funding it continues to receive?*

As outlined in the Acknowledgement Letter, Q5 is out of scope of the Freedom of Information Act, as it is requesting an opinion rather than recorded information.

After I issued the Acknowledgement Letter, I received a copy of your correspondence to the Minister for Finance and Local Government dated 11 February 2024. Given the links between your email to the Minister and this Freedom of Information request, a decision was taken to include the information requested from the Minister within this response. These questions are below:

- Q6. *Can you explain why a sum of £450,000 has been set aside in next year's budget for the Mbale Tree Project? This is in addition to the almost £4 million that has already been spent.*
- Q7. *How many front line staff would this money pay for?*
- Q8. *What benefit do the people of Wales derive from this project?*
- Q9. *Can you tell me when did Size of Wales last publish their accounts?*

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

Question 1

In what year did the Welsh Government commence spending on this project?

Welsh Government commenced spending on this project in 2013-14.

Question 2

You say funds are channelled through a Fiduciary Management Agent. When was that Agent appointed and who is it?

The Fiduciary Managing Agent is Blue Bolt Uganda Limited, which was appointed in 2017.

Question 3

The Size of Wales Charity does not appear to have filed accounts since March 2021. Why is the Welsh Government committing public funds to a charity that does not appear to be transparent about its expenditure?

Size of Wales accounts are up to date and have been reported on time for the last five years. Size of Wales' accounts, on the Charity Commission's website, can be found [here](#).

Question 4

Of all the taxpayers' money spent on this project, how much has gone towards payments to the Fiduciary Management Agent and to staffing costs at the Size of Wales charity?

The Welsh Government gives Size of Wales a grant to run the project. Size of Wales determines how much is spent on each element of the project.

Question 5

Given the failure of Size of Wales to post its accounts do you agree that a public audit should be undertaken given the amount of taxpayers' funding it continues to receive?

See Question 3 above.

Question 6

Can you explain why a sum of £450,000 has been set aside in next year's budget for the Mbale Tree Project? This is in addition to the almost £4 million that has already been spent.

Size of Wales has a 3-year grant from the Welsh Government. Financial year 2024-25 is the final year of this 3-year grant period.

Question 7

How many frontline staff would this money pay for?

Information not held by Welsh Government.

Question 8

What benefit do the people of Wales derive from this project?

Wales has a long-standing partnership with the Mbale region of Uganda, which was initiated by groups such as PONT, the Saltpeter Trust and Engineers for Overseas Development. Over a thousand people have visited the Mbale region of Uganda. The

relationship with Mbale is a strong one and many different funders have been involved in Welsh projects in Mbale such as the UK Government, the UN Development Programme and the Waterloo Foundation, as well as the Welsh Government.

The Mbale Tree Planting Project grew out of the people-to-people partnership and, since its launch, it has won a UN Lighthouse Project Award for Climate Change impact and has distributed nearly 24 million trees to coffee and subsistence farmers. The project, delivered by Size of Wales and its partner in Uganda, the Mount Elgon Tree Growing Enterprise, is now based in 7 districts in the regions and employs 87 people in Uganda and 5 in Wales.

As a globally responsible nation, we believe that supporting a programme that funds planting of trees on the equator, where growth rates are more than 4 times that of our own, brings benefit to the people of Wales as we attempt to fight the climate crisis. Climate change does not respect national boundaries and we are supporting communities on the forefront of the climate crisis.

The Mbale Tree Planting Project, through the planting of trees, has sequestered an estimated 1,213,541 tonnes of CO₂ since the project began – equal to 22% of Wales' transport emissions in 2021. As we contribute to the reduction of CO₂ emissions, we help tackle the climate crisis, which is perhaps the biggest threat to humanity.

Through the Mbale Tree Planting Project, Wales is supporting the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to alleviate poverty for those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The work being delivered in Mbale is shared through educational workshops with schoolchildren across Wales reaching 200+ schools a year, via 260 bilingual sessions to more than 6,000 pupils, inspiring global citizens of the future. During the sessions, the pupils learn about the Mbale Tree Planting Project, and they have used this as inspiration to plant trees in their own school grounds in collaboration with Keep Wales Tidy.

The sessions inspire them to take climate action and also explain the links between deforestation and climate change, connecting the dots about how our actions here in Wales also affect deforestation. For example, by sharing testimonies from fairtrade coffee farmers, children learn about how Wales as a Fairtrade Nation can bring about change.

Feedback from schools about the sessions has been extremely positive. From a survey filled out by 193 schools:

- 100% would recommend the workshops to other schools (94% strongly agree, 6% agree)
- 100% say their pupils have gained an understanding of why tropical forests are so important (93 % strongly agree, 7% agree)
- 100% say the workshops were enjoyable and informative (96% strongly agree, 4% agree)
- 100% say children's ideas were valued and all opinions were respected (97% strongly agree, 3% agree)

Size of Wales is the only organisation in Wales producing bilingual education material on tropical forests and climate change and has published resources for teachers and young people to access on its website.

Question 9

Can you tell me when did Size of Wales last publish its accounts?

See Question 3 above.