

18 February 2026

Dear

Request for information - ATISN 26600

Thank you for your request which I received on 21 January 2026. You asked for:

- Any correspondence between the Welsh Government and UK Government since May 2025 relating to Northern Powerhouse rail project.
- Any correspondence between the Welsh Government and UK Government since May 2025 relating to the designation of English rail projects as 'England and Wales'

Our response

Following a search of our records, I have established that all information requested, where held, is exempt under Section 28. My reasons for withholding the information can be found at Annex 1.

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 Email: Freedomofinformation@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.

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

Yours sincerely

Annex 1

Application of exemptions

The Freedom of information Act provides a right for anyone to ask a public authority to make requested information available to the wider public. As the release of requested information is to the world, not just the requester, public authorities need to consider the effects of making the information freely available to everybody. Any personal interest the requester has for accessing the information cannot override those wider considerations.

The information requested that is captured by section 28 relates to intergovernmental correspondence, briefings and meeting notes.

This Annex sets out the reasons for the engagement of section 28 of the Freedom of Information Act and our subsequent consideration of the public interest test.

Engagement of Section 28 – Relations within the UK

The Welsh Government believes that section 28 is engaged in relation to the information requested.

Guidance from the Commissioner on section 28 states:

Section 28(1) of FOIA states that information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice relations between any administration in the UK and any other such administration. The administrations referred to are the Government of the United Kingdom, the Scottish Government, the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Welsh Government.

The arrangements in place between the four UK administrations provide for the sharing of information between them in appropriate circumstances. The success of these arrangements requires the UK administrations to work together in an environment of mutual trust, cooperation and respect. The purpose of the exemption is therefore to protect good relations between the different administrations within the UK, and the Commissioner considers that the exemption will be engaged where the disclosure of the information would be likely to harm trust, openness and the free and frank exchange of views between any of the administrations.

As set out above, the expectation of confidentiality of discussion between Ministers is well established in both convention and in practice and is set out in the Devolution Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and the subsequent Review of Intergovernmental Relations, both jointly agreed between the four UK administrations.

The Welsh Government considers the release of the information requested would amount to a break from the convention, MoU and Review. It would represent the removal of the presumed 'safe space' created by the convention/MoU. It follows that it is likely to make relations with the UK Government more difficult in that it is likely to prejudice the Welsh Government's ability to continue constructive discussion at Ministerial and official level with UK Government.

The Welsh Government is actively pursuing the areas covered in this request.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government considers the release of information requested may prejudice relations with the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

The balance of public interest

Welsh Government acknowledges the general public interest in openness and transparency that release would engender. We recognise there are public interest considerations which would favour disclosure; disclosure could inform the public about the Welsh Government's actions and may add to understanding of relations between the Welsh Government and UK Government and the matters under consideration.

However, there is a significant public interest in ensuring there are effective relations between the Welsh Government and UK Government, and the Welsh Government and other administrations. At this stage of dialogue, the Welsh Government believes it is in the public interest for trust and confidence between the administrations to be maintained. The material reflects an ongoing process rather than completed policy and disclosure would lead to misunderstanding of the negotiations.

The prospect of future disclosure of the nature or content of discussions risks affecting the levels of candour and confidentiality between the Welsh Government and UK Government on these and other issues in future, as well as between the two administrations and the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive. If the content of discussions were routinely made public there is a risk this will inhibit the ability of ministers and officials to be frank with one another. In all cases, the Welsh Government would likely need to take mitigating measures to address concerns and risks in relationships with other administrations.