

30 July 2026

Dear ,

ATISN 27220 Government Childcare pledge

Information requested

Thank you for your request which I received on 15 July 2026. You asked for the latest information held by the Welsh Government about its universal childcare pledge. This includes any modelling, calculations, forecasts, analysis or estimates on the likely cost of delivering the pledge, expected take-up rates, the number of children who may be eligible, workforce requirements, proposed phases and implementation timetable. The request also asks for written communications between the Deputy First Minister, her Private Office and officials about this analysis during the period 14 June to 14 July 2026.

Our response

I have enclosed information from the Office for National Statistics on population projections for children in Wales. This formed the basis for determining eligible population estimates.

I have decided that the rest of the information requested in the enclosed list is exempt from disclosure under Section 35(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act – Formulation or development of government policy and is therefore withheld. The reasons for applying these exemptions are set out in full at Annex A to this letter.

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: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales



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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

Application of exemptions/exceptions

The Freedom of information Act/Environmental Information Regulations provide 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.

In response to your request for information on estimated number of eligible children I can confirm we have used the 2024-based national population projections by age and year for Wales as the base to determine the number of eligible children for the Welsh Government childcare expansion.

Link to data source, published in Stats Wales: [2024-based national population projections by age, sex and year | StatsWales](#)

Table with figures:

Age of children Mid-year 2026

Age 0	26,385
Age 1	26,612
Age 2	27,995
Age 3	28,976
Age 4	30,979

I have decided to withhold the following information:

current or most recent version of any model, calculation, forecast, analysis, estimate for the Welsh Government's universal childcare pledge, including:

1. The range of estimated costs to meet this pledge
2. Models of take up rates
3. The estimated number of full-time staff needed to meet the pledge
4. Any proposed timescales for different phases, and timetable for implementation
5. All written communication to / from the Deputy First Minister, and her private office, on the above analysis of costs between 14 June – 14 July 2026

These are all exempt from disclosure under section Section 35(1)(a) – Formulation or development of government policy. This Annex sets out the reasons for the engagement of section(s) 35(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act and our subsequent consideration of the Public Interest Test.

Engagement of Section 35(1)(a) – Formulation or development of government policy of the Freedom of Information Act

For this exemption to be engaged, the information needs to relate to the formulation of government policy.

Whilst the Welsh Government has made it known that it intends to bring forward policy to implement its pre-election pledge to expand universal childcare, the detail of the policy is in the early stages of being formulated.

Public Interest Test

In order to satisfy the public interest test in relation to the exemption, it is necessary to conclude that the public interest arguments in favour of withholding the information are sufficient to *outweigh* the public interest arguments in favour of release.

Public interest arguments in favour of disclosure

Aside from the general presumption of openness that underpins the FoI legislation, we recognise that there is a strong public interest in knowing how the Government intends to bring forward its pledge on expanding universal childcare, what this will look like and what it will cost.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding

We are of the view that section 35(1)(a) is intended to ensure that the possibility of public exposure does not deter from officials and ministers undertaking full, candid, and proper deliberation of all options as to what the policy would look like and what it would cost.

There is a strong public interest argument in ensuring that Ministers and officials have a safe space to consider the evidence and develop policy effectively, particularly where issues are complex.

The early stages of policy formulation are heavily reliant on officials being able to provide advice and exchange views in an open and frank way, exploring various options as part of the normal working process.

The initial indicative modelling has not yet been finalised. Disclosure at this stage could risk misinterpretation of such incomplete preliminary modelling where



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individuals or groups interpret the policy to be heading in one direction or another, that may bear no resemblance to what the final policy looks like, potentially affecting public confidence and stakeholder engagement.

Timing is important here also, as disclosure at this stage, may also disrupt the progress of policy development and potentially its effectiveness. Publishing this information could also lead to premature public pressure or lobbying that could distort the process necessary to finalise policy.

Balance of public interest test

While we recognise the value of openness and transparency, and the strong public interest in delivering this manifesto commitment, we consider that, on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure at this time. Releasing the information before policy development and further modelling has progressed, would not serve the wider public interest in good policy-making or effective government.

There will be opportunities for the public and politicians to scrutinise the draft policy, including the data that informed the policy direction, in due course once we have something more substantive to share, via plenary scrutiny.

Accordingly, the information requested has been withheld under section 35(1)(a) of the Act for the reasons set out above.