

12 August 2026

Dear

ATISN 27232 – FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES
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Information requested

Thank you for your requests which I received on 20 and 21 July 2026. You asked for:

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1. Copies of all progress or monitoring reports, including any appendices, annexes and attachments, submitted by the Commissioners to the Welsh Ministers pursuant to the Directions, from February 2024 to the date of this request.
2. Copies of any formal responses, feedback, correspondence, or directions, including any appendices, annexes and attachments, given by Welsh Ministers to the Commissioners in respect of the reports at item 1.
3. Copies of any advice, briefing, submission or assessment prepared for Ministers since 1 January 2026 on the criteria for ending the intervention and returning the Authority to local control, including any advice underpinning the Cabinet Minister's written statement of 13 July 2026 announcing the continuation of the intervention until after the 2027 local government elections.
4. The total cost of the intervention to date, broken down by financial year, including the remuneration and expenses of each Commissioner and any associated support, secretariat or consultancy costs borne by the Welsh Government or by the Fire and Rescue Authority.
5. Confirmation on whether the Commissioners' progress reports referred to at item 1 have been published. If not, provide copies of any policy, decision record, advice or correspondence concerning the decision not to publish them, including the reasons for non-publication.

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1. A copy of the final report from the leading academics referred to in the written statement.
2. The terms of reference, specification or commissioning brief provided to the authors.
3. The names, roles, institutional affiliations and organisations of the report's author(s).
4. The contract, grant agreement, purchase order or other commissioning documentation relating to the preparation of the report, including the total cost paid or payable.
5. The date on which the report was received by the Welsh Government.

6. Any executive summary, covering submission or briefing prepared for Ministers that accompanied or summarised the report.
7. Any ministerial submission, advice, briefing or recommendation prepared in reliance upon the report when deciding to extend the intervention until after the 2027 local government elections.
8. Any correspondence between Welsh Government officials and the report's authors relating to the report's conclusions, recommendations or publication.

Our response

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Copies of all progress or monitoring reports (including any appendices, annexes and attachments) submitted by the Commissioners to the Welsh Ministers in respect of item 1, and responses from Welsh Ministers in respect of item 2 are attached at Annex 2.

There has been 1 piece of advice prepared for Ministers since 1 January regarding the intervention. That advice is attached at Annex 3.

The Commissioners are remunerated at the rate of £550 per day plus expenses. These and all other direct costs of the intervention have been borne by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, and the Welsh Government does not hold this information. The previous Government provided £106,250 across 2024-25 and 2025-26 to support an external assessment of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, contracted by the Commissioners. £3,000 has been committed, but not yet paid, to cover the cost of independent advice on options to mitigate the risk of ineffective transition from the intervention.

It has never been the Welsh Government's practice to routinely publish correspondence, or minutes and papers of meetings with stakeholders, nor is there any legal obligation to do so. No separate decision about this was taken as regards correspondence from Commissioners or in respect of the Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services.

I have decided that some of the information is exempt from disclosure under sections 21, 40(2), and 42 of the Freedom of Information Act and is therefore withheld. The reasons for applying these exemptions are set out in full at Annex 1 to this letter.

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The report was commissioned and received by the South Wales Commissioners, not the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government therefore does not hold the information requested at items 1,2,4 and 5. The Welsh Government did receive a presentation from academics about their findings. That is provided at Annex 4. The Commissioners confirmed to the Welsh Government that they commissioned Professor Rachel Ashworth, Rebecca David-Knight, Professor Catherine Farrell and Dave McKenna to undertake the work. The letter referring to this is included in Annex 2.

Advice to the Cabinet Minister regarding the extension of the intervention is provided at Annex 3 as already referred to above.

Copies of Correspondence between Welsh Government officials and academics relating to the report's conclusions, recommendations or publication are provided at Annex 4.

I have decided that some of the information is exempt from disclosure under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act and is therefore withheld. The reasons for applying these exemptions are set out in full at Annex 1 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

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/exceptions

The Freedom of information Act (FoIA) 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.

I have decided to withhold the following information:

- Information which is in the public domain, withheld under s21 of the FoIA, namely embedded links in updates from the Commissioners which link to documents on the South Wales Fires and Rescue Service Website.
[Home - South Wales Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- The content of any letters, e-mails or reports about third parties not named in your request, withheld under s40(2) of the FoIA.
- Personal details (eg names, phone numbers and email addresses) of the individuals included in emails or letters they sent or were copied into, also withheld under s40(2) of the FoIA.
- Legal advice to the Welsh Ministers withheld under section 42 of the FoIA.

This Annex sets out the reasons for the engagement of Sections 21, 40(2) and 42 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 21 – Information accessible to applicant by other means

Section 21 of the FoIA provides an absolute exemption where the information is reasonably accessible to the applicant. The links provided in updates to Ministers and the Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services, are to documents and updates published on the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service website. We believe that means they are easily accessible to the applicant.

Section 21 is an absolute exemption and is not subject to the public interest test.

Section 40(2) Personal Data

Section 40(2) of the FoIA, together with the conditions in section 40(3)(a)(i) or 40(3)(b) provides an absolute exemption if disclosure of the personal data would breach any of the data protection principles.

‘Personal data’ is defined in sections 3(2) and (3) of the Data Protection Act 2018 (‘the DPA 2018’) and means any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual. An identifiable living individual is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural, or social identity of the individual.

We have concluded that, in this instance, the information requested contains personal data in the form of e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of individuals, and names and personal details of third parties not named in the request.

Under Section 40(2) of the FoIA, personal data is exempt from release if disclosure would breach one of the data protection principles set out in Article 5 of the GDPR. We consider the principle being most relevant in this instance as being the first. This states that personal data must be:

“processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject”.

The lawful basis that is most relevant in relation to a request for information under the FoIA is Article 6(1)(f). This states:

“processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data”.

Section 42 – Legal Professional Privilege

Section 42(1) of the FoIA provides a qualified exemption in respect of legal professional privilege.

In this case Section 42(1) is engaged in respect of the legal paragraphs in Annex 3 as they are communication:

- (a) between a client and their lawyer, where the lawyer is acting in the course of their professional relationship and within the scope of the lawyer’s professional duties;
- (b) under conditions of confidentiality; and
- (c) for the dominant purpose of enabling the client to seek, or the lawyer to give, legal advice or assistance in a relevant legal context.

We do not believe that disclosing legal professional advice is necessary in this case. Ministers must be able to obtain full and frank legal advice in confidence. The Legal Advice section of Annex 3 contains detailed legal analysis of strengths, weaknesses and risk of challenge. Disclosure would reveal privileged legal reasoning to potential litigants. Disclosure of such material would adversely affect the candour with which legal advice is sought, given and recorded in the future.

Public Interest Test

In considering the application of Article 6(1)(f) in the context of a request for information under FoIA it is necessary to consider the following three-part test-

- **The Legitimate interest test:** Whether a legitimate interest is being pursued in the request for information;
- **The Necessity test:** Whether disclosure of the information/confirmation or denial that it is held is necessary to meet the legitimate interest in question;
- **The Balancing test:** Whether the above interests override the interests, fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject.

Our consideration of these tests is set out below:

1. Legitimate interest

Whilst you have not stated any specific interest of your own in seeking the release of this information, the Welsh Government acknowledges the legitimate interests of openness and transparency that release would engender.

2. Is disclosure necessary?

We do not believe disclosure of personal data about individuals is necessary in this case. The legitimate interests of openness and transparency in disclosing communications between the individuals named in that request relate, we believe, to the frequency and substance of those communications. Detailed personal information about those individuals or about third parties who were copied in or being discussed does not need to be disclosed to meet those interests.

3. The balance between legitimate interests and the data subject's interests or fundamental rights and freedoms

None of the individuals copied into or named in e-mails or other correspondence, particularly where this is linked to other personal information about the individual, consented to their personal details or identifying information being shared publicly. Disclosure of this information could therefore cause unjustified harm or distress to the individuals and, as such, we believe the legitimate interest of those individuals outweigh any potential interest in disclosure, particularly as they are not relevant and do not impact on the substance of the information disclosed.

As release of the information would not therefore be legitimate under Article 6(1)(f), and as no other condition of Article 6 is deemed to apply, release of the information would not be lawful within the meaning of the first data protection principle. It has therefore been withheld under section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and not subject to the public interest test.