

25 August 2026

Dear

ATISN 27352 – Free Prescriptions

Thank you for your request to Welsh Government for information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) which was received on 15 August 2026, relating to the Welsh Government's policy introduced in April 2007 to provide free NHS prescriptions in Wales.

You requested Welsh Government to provide details of any research, evaluations, reports or analysis held which examines the following information:

- 1. Whether the abolition of prescription charges in Wales has resulted in a measurable reduction in hospital admissions, A&E attendances or other secondary-care use.*
- 2. Whether improved access to prescribed medicines following the abolition of charges has produced measurable financial savings elsewhere within NHS Wales.*
- 3. Any cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness or other health-economic assessment of the free-prescription policy undertaken since its introduction in 2007, particularly any assessment comparing the cost of providing free prescriptions with savings elsewhere in the NHS.*

Our Response

Welsh Government holds some information falls into scope of your request. We have concluded that this information is exempt from disclosure under the following sections of the Freedom of Information Act:

- section 35 1(a)— the formulation or development of government policy.

An explanation of our application of this exemption is set out 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

Engagement of Exemptions

When considering the release of information captured by a request we are required to consider the potential effects of disclosure of the information to the wider world. This is because information released in response to a FoI request is released to the world, not just to the person submitting the request. As such we need to consider how any other individual may use, or misuse, the information if it is placed into the wider public domain. So, whilst the requestor may have a legitimate, and benign, interest in accessing the requested information, we could conclude that the risk that the information could be misunderstood or misused by others is more compelling and thus the information should be withheld.

This Annex sets out the information you have requested and the corresponding reasons for the engagement of: Section 35, Information held by a government department or by the Welsh Government is exempt information if it relates to— (a) the formulation or development of government policy and where required, our subsequent consideration of the Public Interest Test.

Section 35(1)(a)

Section 35(1)(a) covers any information relating to the formulation or development of government policy. This exemption is only engaged by information being used in the formulation of government policy.

The information requested has been generated to inform the formulation of continuing government policies with regards to prescription charges in Wales.

Public interest arguments in favour of release

We recognise there is public interest in the public understanding the ongoing development of our policies and what if any consideration has been given to the reintroduction of prescription charges in Wales. We also recognise the public interest in making this information available for the sake of greater transparency and openness.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding

We take the view that section 35(1)(a) is intended to ensure that the possibility of public exposure does not deter from full, candid, and proper deliberation of policy formulation and development, including the exploration of all options. We take the view this is particularly important in situations where policies may be politically sensitive, financially significant or controversial.

The withheld information relates to the consideration of policy changes by a previous government and to information shared with Ministers for the purposes of exploring potential changes to the policy of free prescriptions in Wales. The Welsh Government needs to be able to openly discuss the implications of a range of policy options and assess their feasibility, affordability, and the operational implications in Wales with its partners before advice is drafted and a final decision is made by the Minister on the way forward.

The disclosure of the information requested would have a prejudicial effect on engagement between Ministers, officials, devolved governments and the NHS as it would remove the secure environment which allows Welsh Government to gather information from partners. Releasing information would inhibit free and frank discussion among officials, which in turn undermines the quality of the policy being formulated. Early disclosure may damage trust between departments or with external stakeholders involved in policy development.

Removing the safe space in which officials and partners can express views openly could result in advice being less robust. It would be likely to result in a reduction in the frankness

and candour of those involved in the process if they believed discussions and other information would be made public. This could have a detrimental effect on any potential change to prescription charge policy and, in turn, the Welsh Government's implementation of prescription charges in the future. Releasing information on the detail and potential outcomes of a policy which did not lead to a Ministerial decision would be ill advised, as no information is held which relates to the views of Ministers on the proposals and the information did not inform any change in policy. Disclosure could lead to confusion or a misinterpretation of the policy position. This in turn would impact on the public perception of how prescription charges could operate in the future and has the potential to not only falsely raise expectations but could tie the Government into a position before a full analysis is complete.

In conclusion, it is within the wider public interest to withhold the information related to this request to provide the government with a safe space to consider and form policy and plans to manage the prescription charges in Wales. The Welsh Government has endeavoured to ensure the organisation is as transparent as possible, through the media, publication of documents, Ministerial Written Statements, and public statements in the Senedd. In so doing, we believe this public interest has been satisfied. Accordingly, the information requested has been withheld under section 35(1)(a) of the Act for the reasons set out above.