Dear

Complaint in respect of ATISN 27463, 27471 and 27472: Discretionary Assistance Fund

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of my internal review of the response issued on 2 October 2026 in relation to ATISN 27463, 27471 and 27472.

I am a Deputy Director in the Welsh Government and was not involved in preparing or approving the original response or in the original handling of these requests.

I have considered the original requests, the grounds set out in your request for an internal review, the further information you provided on 20 October, and the evidence supporting the original response.

Having completed my review, I have concluded that the decision to aggregate the requests and apply section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 was reasonable. I therefore **uphold** the original decision.

Aggregation of requests

I have considered your concern that ATISN 27304, 27463, 27471 and 27472 relate to distinct issues and should not have been aggregated simply because they all concern the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF).

My review found substantive overlap between the requests. This included information relating to DAF criteria and exclusions, including the exclusion concerning lost or stolen money; information about refusals and DAF finances; and records relating to data matching and Data Protection Impact Assessment considerations. The aggregation of the requests is in line with Regulation 5 of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004, which allows requests that relate to the same or similar information, received within 60 consecutive working days, to be aggregated.

I am therefore satisfied that there was a sufficient basis for treating the requests as seeking the same or similar information for the purposes of the section 12 cost calculation.

Cost estimate and search approach

I have considered the evidence supporting the estimated cost of complying with the requests. As part of my review, I examined further information from the team responsible for the original requests setting out the activities that would have been required to respond. This included work required within the Welsh Government and work by NEC Software Solutions in locating, retrieving and extracting potentially relevant information.

I also examined the basis of the search which returned 14,325 potentially relevant items. This was a search for records relating to “DAF criteria”, covering records from 2018 onwards. A separate search for “DAF exclusions” returned approximately 7,000 results. The requests sought information concerning substantive criteria and changes to those criteria over an extended period, together with associated supporting evidence, recommendations and decisions.

I have considered your concern about the estimate of two minutes to review each of the 14,325 results, and whether testing or sampling supported that estimate. The evidence available to me indicates this was an estimate based at least in part on the professional judgement and experience of the team.

However, I do not consider that the application of section 12 depends on the two minute estimate being precise. Even if an average of only 30 seconds were required to assess each of the 14,325 items, this exercise alone would take approximately 120 hours. This would substantially exceed the applicable cost limit.

The more important question for my review has therefore been whether it was reasonable to consider that the search results could require examination to identify information falling within the scope of the requests. Given the breadth and historical scope of the information requested, together with the specific task-based estimates provided by Welsh Government officials and NEC Software Solutions, I am satisfied that the original conclusion that the cost limit would be exceeded was reasonable.

I have also reviewed the work attributed to ATISN 27304 and the extent to which that work overlapped with the subsequent requests. Having considered the evidence supporting that estimate, I am satisfied that its inclusion in the aggregated cost calculation was reasonable and that the aggregated work would exceed the applicable cost limit.

Whether information is held and targeted searches

You also asked me to consider whether the Welsh Government had properly established what relevant information it held, including information held on its behalf by NEC Software Solutions, and whether the costs of establishing whether information was held had been properly distinguished from costs associated with locating, retrieving and extracting that information.

I have considered the more detailed information provided by the handling team, including the individual elements of the requests and the relevant information potentially held by NEC Software Solutions. I have also considered the further

correspondence that you provided on 20 October, including subsequent statements concerning records relating to the lost/stolen money exclusion and data-matching/DPIA assessment.

I have not identified evidence that undermines the basis on which section 12 was applied to the original requests.

Advice and assistance

I have considered your concern that you were not given sufficient practical assistance to enable you to formulate a request that could be answered within the applicable cost limit.

The original response invited you to consider narrowing and reframing your requests and sought to explain why the breadth of the information requested made it difficult to identify a more focused approach that could necessarily be answered within the cost limit.

I am satisfied that advice and assistance was provided for the purposes of section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act.

However, I have separately considered your concern about the wording in the response concerning “asking for everything in the hope of finding something” and the references to the use of AI. I recognise why you considered this wording dismissive. I understand that the intention was to explain that a more focused request, directed at the particular information required, might be more readily answered. However, I recognise that this could have been expressed more thoughtfully.

I do not consider that this issue in itself amounts to a failure to provide appropriate advice and assistance under section 16.

Further information provided on 20 October

I have taken account of the further information and correspondence you provided on 20 October where it is relevant to the issues within the scope of this review.

Your correspondence also requested specific recorded information concerning records retention, including the applicable retention schedule and period and details of any destruction, disposal or transfer of records. Those points seek additional recorded information that was not within the scope of the original requests being reviewed. They are therefore not matters that I can determine as part of this internal review and are being handled separately as a new request for information.

You also raised wider questions concerning the operation of the DAF. My role in conducting this internal review is to consider whether the Welsh Government complied with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act in responding to the requests concerned. It is not to determine the merits of the underlying DAF policy or other matters that fall outside the scope of the information requests.

Conclusion

Having considered the original requests, the grounds of your complaint, the evidence supporting the cost assessment and the further information you have provided, I **uphold** the decision to aggregate the requests and apply section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I am satisfied that there was sufficient substantive overlap between the requests to justify aggregation and that the evidence supports the conclusion that complying with the requests would exceed the applicable cost limit.

I am also satisfied that appropriate advice and assistance was provided under section 16. As explained above, I consider that some of the wording used in providing that advice could have been expressed more thoughtfully.

I have considered your complaint in accordance with the procedure outlined in the Welsh Government's Practical Guide for Making Requests for Information which is available by post on request or via the internet at: Freedom of Information (FOI): request from the Welsh Government | GOV.WALES

If you remain dissatisfied with this response you 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.

Yours sincerely

Deputy Director
Learning, Communities & Culture Group
Welsh Government