

Reference Number: DAERA/26-346
Request Details:
Communications regarding the department's draft action plan for the Ulster-Scots and Irish language strategies.

Strategic Planning & Corporate Services
Strategic Support Directorate



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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04 June 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your request for information received by the Department on 20 May 2026 that sought the following information:

Any Communications between the department and the Department for Communities regarding the department's draft action plan for the Ulster-Scots and Irish language strategies between 9 April 2025 and today.

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds the information you requested.

The Department has decided not to disclose the information you requested as it considers Section 35 (a)(1) to be engaged. In these instances, the Department is legislatively required to consider the public interest in disclosure. An associated Public Interest Test has been conducted and is attached for your information at **Annex A**.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

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We invest in people Standard

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



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Public Interest Test – FOI

Reference Number – DAERA/26-346

Requested Information

Any communications between the department and the Department for Communities regarding the department's draft action plan for the Ulster-Scots and Irish language strategies between 9 April 2025 and today.

Exemption / Exception under consideration

Formulation of government policy under section 35 (1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- There is a general public interest in promoting openness, transparency and accountability in relation to the development of government policy, particularly where it relates to cultural identity and language strategies which may attract significant public interest and debate.
- Disclosure would contribute to a better understanding of the decision making process, including how departments engage and collaborate in the development of cross-cutting policy areas.
- There is a public interest in demonstrating that policy is being developed in an informed, evidence based and inclusive manner, including engagement with relevant stakeholders and other government departments.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- The requested information relates to the ongoing development of policy, where no final decisions have been taken and discussions between departments remain active. There is a strong public interest in ensuring that officials and Ministers have a protected space in which to explore and refine policy options.
- Disclosure of internal communications at this stage would be likely to inhibit the candour and quality of advice provided, particularly in a policy area that is politically and socially sensitive, thereby adversely affecting the effectiveness of the policy making process.
- The information comprises draft proposals, options and developing positions which do not represent a settled view. Disclosure could lead to misinterpretation or undue public confusion, which may undermine confidence in the policy making process.

- Premature disclosure may also prejudice effective interdepartmental engagement, by discouraging full and open discussion between departments while policy proposals are being actively developed and refined.

Conclusion

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test, the department has concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs that in disclosure at this time.

While there is a clear public interest in transparency, particularly in relation to the development of language strategies, this is outweighed by the strong public interest in protecting the integrity and effectiveness of the ongoing policy making process.

In particular, disclosure would be likely to undermine the safe space required for officials and Ministers to develop and refine policy and could result in public misunderstanding of policy that is not yet finalised.

The department recognises that the balance of public interest may change once the policy development process is complete and will consider this in any future requests.



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