

Public Interest Test – FOI and EIR

Reference Number – DAERA26-772 - Requested Information

Provide the minutes of ministerial meetings with the following people that took place between 1 April and 30 June 2026.

Hilary Benn

Hon Chris Thomas MHK, Isle of Man Minister for The Treasury

Dr Derek Evans, Senior Scientific Officer AFBI, leading on Eel work programme.etc at same meeting

Lee Reynolds, Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and Ulster British Tradition.

Pól Deeds, Irish Language Commissioner.

Mark Horton

Gregory Campbell, MP and Foyle MLAs about Mobuoy

Michelle McIlveen and DUP MLAs

PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Ryan Henderson Responsible for Local Policing Command

UFU

Chris Brown on masterplan for airport

FOI EXEMPTION UNDER CONSIDERATION

FOI Section 35(1)(a) exemption formulation or development of government policy.

Exemption engaged:

Information requested relates to the development of Government policy in relation to veterinary medicines supplies.

Arguments in favour of disclosure

Transparency on post-EU exit arrangements

- Disclosure would improve understanding of how veterinary medicines policy is being shaped under the Windsor Framework.
- There is strong public interest in clarity on regulatory arrangements affecting Northern Ireland.

Impact on public health, animal welfare and food supply

- Veterinary medicines policy directly affects antimicrobial resistance, food safety, and animal health.
- Disclosure would support scrutiny of decisions with cross-border and supply chain implications.

Accountability for UK–EU engagement

- There is a legitimate public interest in how the Government represents UK and Northern Ireland interests in discussions with the EU.
- Transparency supports confidence that policy is evidence-based and proportionate.

Arguments in favour of maintaining the exemption

Protecting safe space in a live and sensitive policy environment

- Policy development is taking place alongside ongoing UK–EU discussions, where positions are evolving.

- Officials and Ministers require space to develop negotiating positions, test options and refine policy without external pressure.

Prejudice to UK negotiating position

- Disclosure would risk revealing UK policy thinking, negotiating lines, or areas of flexibility.
- This could undermine the UK's position in discussions with the EU, reducing its ability to secure favourable outcomes.

Risk to effective UK–EU relations

- Premature disclosure of internal policy development could damage trust between negotiating partners.
- This may make it more difficult to conduct constructive and candid discussions, particularly on technically complex regulatory issues.

Misinterpretation of evolving policy

- The information is likely to reflect incomplete, provisional or exploratory positions.
- Disclosure could lead to public confusion or concern, particularly where proposals are not finalised or subject to negotiation.

Impact on regulatory certainty and markets

- Veterinary medicines policy under the Windsor Framework has direct implications for supply chains and market access in Northern Ireland.
- Premature disclosure could create uncertainty for industry and stakeholders, potentially affecting behaviour ahead of final decisions.

Inhibition of frank advice

- Disclosure would be likely to inhibit the candour of advice, particularly where officials are assessing risks, trade-offs, or potential concessions in a negotiation context.
- This would weaken the quality and robustness of policy development.

Conclusion

Section 35(1)(a) exemption applies as while disclosure would promote transparency and support informed debate on veterinary medicines policy under the Windsor Framework, this is outweighed by the need to protect a safe space for the formulation and development of policy in a live and sensitive international context. Disclosure would be likely to prejudice the UK's position in ongoing discussions with the European Union, inhibit the candour of advice provided to Ministers, and risk misunderstanding of evolving policy positions before decisions are finalised.

FOI EXEMPTION UNDER CONSIDERATION

FOI Section 43(2) Prejudice commercial interest

Exemption engaged:

Information relates to commercial information that could prejudice commercial operations.

Arguments in favour of disclosure

Transparency in policy development

- Disclosure would increase openness around how veterinary medicines policy is informed, including the role of industry and stakeholder engagement.

Accountability for stakeholder influence

- There is a public interest in understanding how commercial stakeholders contribute to policy discussions, particularly where decisions may affect costs or access to medicines.

Informed debate on a high-impact sector

- Veterinary medicines affect animal welfare, public health, farming costs, and food production.
- Disclosure would support scrutiny of decisions with economic and societal implications.

Arguments in favour of maintaining the exception

Protection of commercially sensitive information

- Working group discussions are likely to include commercially confidential material, such as:
 - pricing structures
 - supply constraints
 - market strategies
- Disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of participating organisations.

Damage to fair competition

- Release of sensitive information could distort the market, giving competitors insight into:
 - pricing approaches
 - supply positions
 - strategic intentions
- This could lead to competitive disadvantage or market manipulation.

Impact on future stakeholder engagement

- Stakeholders participate on the expectation that commercially sensitive views will be handled appropriately.
- Disclosure would be likely to:
 - reduce willingness to engage
 - lead to more guarded or incomplete input
- This would weaken the evidence base for policy-making.

Undermining effective policy development

- High-quality policy in this area depends on detailed industry insight.
- If stakeholders limit what they share, it would:
 - reduce the accuracy of analysis
 - impair the effectiveness of decisions affecting supply and regulation

Potential impact on supply and availability

- Premature disclosure of issues such as supply constraints or regulatory changes could:
 - influence purchasing behaviour
 - create market instability or shortages

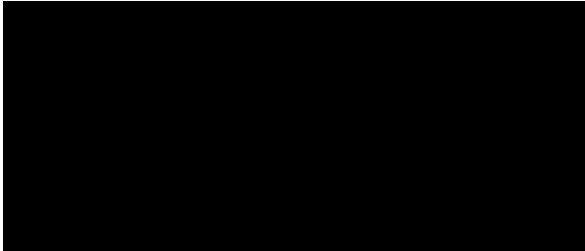
Conclusion

Section 43(2) applies as while disclosure would promote transparency and accountability in relation to the veterinary medicines working group, this is outweighed by the need to protect commercially sensitive information, the disclosure of which would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of participating organisations. Disclosure would also risk undermining stakeholder engagement and

the effective development of policy by limiting the willingness of industry to provide full and frank input.

Balance of the public interest

Having considered all the arguments for disclosure and for maintaining the EIR exceptions and FOI exemptions I have concluded there is a stronger argument for maintaining the EIR exceptions and FOI exemptions. Therefore, the information should not be disclosed.



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