

REQUEST UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002 (FOISA)

Our Reference: 202300344572

Response to your request

Most of the Scottish Government's information (since 2004) is held digitally, including official records. These are held in our corporate records and document management system and subject to review, retention and disposal as set out in the Records Management Plan under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011. A copy of the plan is available on the Scottish Government website (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-records-management-plan-2/>).

This means that, apart from retained paper files created prior to 2004, paper versions of documents are usually printed convenience copies of items held digitally, for example, copies of papers for meetings or printed versions of emails. After usage, and with the master copy of a document or email being digital, it is normal practice to dispose of the printed copy.

In line with Government Data Handling Standard policy, all paper items are deemed to be classified as OFFICIAL unless marked as OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE or above. Paper items deemed to be OFFICIAL can be placed in our general mixed recycling containers and do not have to be physically shredded or destroyed before disposal. Paper items marked as OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE or above are placed in Confidential Waste bags for destruction and often shredded before being placed in these bags. Confidential Waste bags are then collected and destroyed.

1. Your current request covers the financial years 2020/21, 2021/22 and, 2022/23. When the figures derived for 2020/21, from my current investigation, were compared with those for provided to you, for the same period, in our reply of 2 April 2022 a discrepancy was noted. Further investigations revealed a similar discrepancy for 2018/19.

I have been unable to recreate the figures previously provided to you in our replies of 23 October 2019 (our ref Fol/19/02226) and 2 April 2022 (our ref: 202200277002) and, given the singular means by which documents are securely destroyed, I cannot account for these discrepancies.

Therefore, I have run reports for the full years covered by your previous enquiries and I have presented them (along with those figures provided previously) in the table below. As we do not hold figures for the number of documents the figures provided are metric tonnes:

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	01/04/22: 22/02/23
Figs provided in reply of 23 Oct 2019 for period:	Full Year	214.000				
	Part Year ¹		81.000			
Figs provided in reply of 27 Apr 2022 for period:	Full Year			25.980		
	Part Year ²				66.415	
Corrected figs for all documents destroyed³	Full Years Except 22/23	127.361	140.143	20.307	71.731	95.221
Corrected figs with AiB and SSS removed ⁴		120.861	133.893	17.032	68.306	85.786

¹ 01/04/19 – 10/10/19

² 01/04/21 – 31/12/21

³ Total of all documents destroyed through contract – does not include local shredding.

⁴ Total of all documents destroyed through contract excluding buildings where there are no core Scottish Government staff (Accountant in Bankruptcy and Social Security Scotland) – does not include local shredding.

As noted in previous responses, it is not possible to provide figures for documents shredded by just the Scottish Government. Several buildings managed/owned by the Scottish Government also accommodate Executive Agencies and other public sector bodies. As collections are carried out by building, it is not possible to disaggregate the Confidential Waste produced by core Scottish Government from that produced by these other bodies.

While this remains the case, I have noted that the figures provided can be brought closer to the figures that you have requested by removing the waste destroyed from buildings where there are no core Scottish Government staff present. These buildings are used by Accountant in Bankruptcy and Social Security Scotland – both of which are Executive Agencies. These refined figures are provided at the bottom of the table above.

No data is recorded for the use of local shredders. Shredded documentation is sent for recycling.

2. Our reply of 23 October 2019 stated that the overall tonnage of waste collected from the First Ministers Office as:

- 2018/19 – 0.03 metric tonnes
- 2019/20 (up to 4 October 2019) – 0.08 metric tonnes

These figures were estimates based upon requests received from the First Ministers' Office for the uplift of Confidential Waste bags to be taken for shredding. As these requests, and the figures developed from them, do not form part of the overall contract Confidential Waste figures there is no reason to revisit them.

Our reply of 27 April 2022 explained that the software used to process requests for uplifts was not available by Help Desk staff while they were working from home and therefore that no information on Confidential Waste originating from the First Minister's office had been collected. Although Help Desk staff returned to our offices earlier this year, when their access to the software was reinstated, they have not received any requests for the uplift of Confidential Waste from the First Minister's Office. This is because a supply of surplus bags has been held locally and uplifts have been undertaken on an ad hoc basis by House Team staff. No records are kept of these uplifts and therefore I am unable to answer this part of your enquiry.

Under the terms of the exception at regulation 17 of FOISA (information not held), the Scottish Government is not required to provide information which it does not have. The Scottish Government does not have the information you have requested because it is not collected.

3. As stated above, the figures provided in the table are metric tonnes.
4. No reason is kept of the nature of documentation being destroyed or the reason for its destruction.

Grahame Anderson

21 March 2023