

ANNEX - REASONS FOR NOT PROVIDING INFORMATION

Section 30(b)(ii) – Free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation

Exemptions under section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA (free and frank advice and exchange of views) apply to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit substantially the free and frank provision of advice and exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation. The exemption recognises the need for Ministers to have a private space within which to seek advice and views from officials before reaching the settled public position. Disclosing the content of free and frank briefing material and advice will substantially inhibit such briefing in the future, particularly because discussions on the issue are still ongoing and final decisions have not been taken, and these discussions relate to a sensitive or controversial issue. This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemptions. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing a private space within which qualified advisers can provide free and frank advice and views to Scottish Government officials and Ministers. Premature disclosure of this type of information could lead to a reduction in the comprehensiveness and frankness of such advice and views in the future, which would not be in the public interest.

Section 30(c) of FOISA (effective conduct of public affairs)

This exemption applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, cause substantial prejudice to the to the effective conduct of public affairs in relation to communications and engagement with external stakeholders. This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in maintaining good relations between the Scottish Government and GFG Alliance and in protecting the free exchange of information between both to ensure that we keep each other fully and regularly informed about matters of mutual interest which may impact on the Scottish Government’s guarantee or associated securities. There is no public interest in disclosing information when that will damage relationships and disrupt future engagement.

Section 33(1)(b) – Commercial Interest and the Economy

An exemption under section 33(1)(b) of FOISA applies to some of the information you have requested because it is likely to prejudice substantially the commercial interests of the GFG Alliance and the Scottish Government as an interested party. This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking into account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is some public interest in release to ensure full transparency. However, this is outweighed by the public interest as there is a risk to the companies commercial interests and those of the Scottish Government and the taxpayer.

Section 38(1)(b) – Personal data

This exemption applies to some of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, i.e. names and contact details, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption is not subject to the 'public interest test', so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption