

Annex

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

### **Section 30(c) – effective conduct of public affairs**

An exemption under section 30(c) of FOISA applies to a small amount of the information requested. This exemption applies because revealing the source of the Scottish Government's legal advice would be likely to lead to conclusions being drawn from the fact that any particular lawyer has, or has not, provided advice. This would constitute substantial prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs in terms of the exemption.

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 enabling the Scottish Government to determine how and from whom it receives legal advice, without facing external pressure or concerns that particular conclusions may be drawn from the fact that any particular lawyer has or has not provided legal advice on a particular matter. Releasing information about the source of legal advice would also be a breach of the long-standing Law Officer Convention (reflected in the Scottish Ministerial Code) which prevents the Scottish Government from revealing whether Law Officers either have or have not provided legal advice on any matter. There is no public interest in breaching that Convention by divulging which lawyers provided advice on any issue.

### **Section 36(1) – confidentiality of communications**

An exemption under section 36(1) of FOISA (confidentiality in legal proceedings) applies to some of the information requested because it is legal advice and disclosure would breach legal professional privilege.

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 some public interest in release as part of open and transparent government, and to inform public debate. However, this is outweighed by the strong public interest in maintaining the right to confidentiality of communications between legal advisers and clients, to ensure that Ministers and officials are able to receive legal advice in confidence, like any other public or private organisation.

There is a very strong public interest in maintaining confidentiality of communications between legal adviser and client on administration of justice grounds. It is clearly in the public interest for lawyers to be able to provide free and frank legal advice to

their clients, considering and discussing all issues and options, without fear that the advice might be disclosed and potentially taken out of context. It is also in the public interest that decisions are taken by the Government in a fully informed legal context. Ministers and officials therefore need high-quality, comprehensive legal advice for the effective conduct of their business. That advice needs to be given in context, and with a full appreciation of relevant facts. Without such legal advice, which can only be provided frankly and comprehensively in the knowledge that it will be kept in confidence, the quality of the Government's decision-making would be much reduced since it would not be fully informed.

### **Section 38(1)(b) –personal data of a third party**

An exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (personal information) applies to a small amount of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, i.e. names/contact details of individuals, 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.