

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000: Would the Department for Communities be able to provide the following information:

1- How many clubs in Northern Ireland were set to benefit from the Sub Regional Funding set aside for local football teams, which is yet to be released?

2- Out of these clubs, would the Department be able to provide a percentage breakdown in terms of what clubs were getting what proportion of the funding.

3- Does the department believe that the funding amount (£36.2m) is enough and if not, what amount does it believe is now required to meet its commitments?

4- Does the Department believe it is able to provide the additional money required on top of the original £36.2m if a Stormont Executive is restored?

Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for
Soccer
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Belfast
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Phone:
email: subregionalstadia@communities-
ni.gov.uk

Our Ref: DfC/2024-0014

Dear

Date: 1 February 2024

Freedom of Information Act 2000

I wish to confirm that the Department has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 10 January 2024. My response to your queries is outlined below.

How many clubs in Northern Ireland were set to benefit from the Sub-Regional funding set aside for local football teams, which is yet to be released?

The Department is considering a range of options to deliver the long-standing Executive commitment to investment in modernising football facilities in Northern Ireland. The Department is still developing the programme and this information is not held. The Programme remains policy under development and this work is on-going.

Out of these clubs, would the Department be able to provide a percentage breakdown in terms of what clubs were getting what percentage of funding?

The information you have requested is not held. The Sub-Regional Stadia Programme remains policy under development and this work is on-going.

Does the Department believe that the funding amount (£36.2m) is enough and if not, what amount does it believe is now required to meet its commitments?

The budget allocated in 2011 is unlikely to be sufficient to deliver the expected outcomes for the programme. The Department has established options on the amount required to meet its commitment. I wish to advise you that the Department has decided not to disclose this information as it falls under the exemption in **Section 35(1)(a), the Formulation or Development of Government Policy**, of the Freedom of Information Act. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information.

The attached annex to this letter sets out the exemption in full, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lay. It also includes a list of the types of documents analysed when considering your request.

Does the Department believe it is able to provide the additional money required on top of the original £36.2m if a Stormont Executive is restored?

It is for an Executive to consider and agree any changes in the funding available for this programme.

If you are dissatisfied with this response and wish to request a review of our decision or make a complaint about how your request has been handled, you may ask for an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. You should write to the Information Access Manager, Department for Communities, Level 5, Nine Lanyon Place, BELFAST, BT1 3LP, or send an email to foi@communities-ni.gov.uk.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a review of our original decision.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST	
<p>Regulation 35(1)(a) – Information held by a government department or by the Welsh Government is exempt information if it relates to—</p> <p>(a) the formulation or development of government policy</p>	
Factors for Disclosure	Factors for Withholding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate accountability and transparency • Accountability for the use of public funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any change to the current budget of £36.2m would have to be agreed by an Executive. To share any information specifying the amount the Department believes is required to deliver its commitments would not be in the public interest for the following reasons: • The information is still policy in development. The information could generate an expectation of the money available, which may not come to fruition, affecting clubs' actions/inactions moving forwards. • Disclosure of this information would hinder the ability of the Department to take forward a policy based on any variance to the information disclosed. • The Department does not have the authority to change the budget. The information gathered is used to inform a Minister. It would not be in the public interest to share information regarding

	<p>Programme that are for consideration by an incoming Minister.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any changes to the Sub-Regional budget would result in a change of direction for the Programme and its deliverables. Access to this information while the policy is still under development would hinder the ability of the Department to take forward any agreed policy as intended.• The varied nature of stadia and facilities considered within the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme, along with inflationary pressures, make it difficult to be specific on the level of potential need. The information held is an estimate at a point in time. Disclosure of estimated information may close off discussion and the development of better options.• A headline figure stating the amount required to meet the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme commitments may be misleading as there are other factors to be considered. The SRSPS is expected to be a competitive grant scheme, the final level of demand cannot be known until all applications have been assessed. Furthermore, not all applications are guaranteed to be
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	<p>successful. The programme will be subject to eligibility and assessment criteria and those applicants who do not meet these criteria may not be developed).</p>
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The Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer remains policy under development. Information regarding costs are estimates at a point in time. There is a strong public interest in ensuring that the Department has safe space to work candidly and freely without being concerned that information could be released, which may be subject to change, and where it could be potentially misleading. The information held is dependent on the shape and scope of the Programme. Proposals are being prepared for an incoming Minister and may change. Any disclosure of this information could harm the decision-making process to a significant or substantial degree without any compensating benefit to the public.

In view of the above, the Department believes that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Type of Document	Applicable Exemption
Draft Strategic Outlined Case	Section 35 – formulation of government policy
Submission to Permanent Secretary	Section 35 – formulation of government policy
Programme Documentation – High Level Figures	Section 35 – formulation of government policy