ANNEX A

FOI DOF/2026-0600

Request:

I am writing to request information held by the Department of Finance concerning the approved business case for the consolidation of Northern Ireland Civil Service accommodation in Ballymena and the proposed future disposal of County Hall, 182 Galgorm Road, Ballymena.

I note that the Minister of Finance confirmed in an Assembly answer dated 3 February 2026 that the business case for consolidation has been approved, with a fully refurbished Academy House identified as the preferred option, and that County Hall is intended to be disposed of following completion of the project.

I would be grateful if the Department could provide the following information:

1. Approved business case
A copy of the final approved business case, including its appendices, supporting financial appraisal and options appraisal, concerning the consolidation of Civil Service accommodation in Ballymena at Academy House.

2. Options considered
Details of all substantive accommodation options considered within the business case, including, where applicable:

- retention and refurbishment of County Hall, to include the cost of creating the hub at county hall.
- continued occupation of both County Hall and Academy House;
- consolidation at County Hall rather than Academy House;
- consolidation at Academy House;
- alternative public-sector uses or shared occupation of County Hall.

Please include the assessed advantages, disadvantages, costs and scoring attributed to each option where this information is held.

3. County Hall condition and refurbishment
Copies of, or the principal findings and estimated costs contained within, any building condition surveys, feasibility studies or assessments undertaken or relied upon since 2020 concerning the condition, refurbishment or continued occupation of County Hall.

4. Academy House refurbishment
The current estimated total capital cost of the proposed refurbishment of Academy House, including, where separately recorded:

- construction/refurbishment costs;
- professional and consultancy fees;
- ICT and fit-out costs;

- costs associated with temporarily relocating staff;
- contingency; and
- the overall approved project budget.

5. Comparative running costs
The annual property/operating costs used in the approved business case for:
- County Hall;
- Academy House in its existing condition; and
- Academy House following the proposed refurbishment.

6. County Hall valuation
The most recent valuation of County Hall and the surrounding government-owned site, together with the date of that valuation.
If the Department considers that disclosure of the precise valuation could prejudice a future disposal or the Department's commercial interests, please provide, at minimum, the date of the valuation and confirm whether the anticipated disposal receipt was included in the financial appraisal/business case and, if so, the amount used for appraisal purposes, insofar as it can lawfully be disclosed.

7. Staff numbers and building capacity
The number of NICS staff currently accommodated at County Hall and Academy House, together with the planned maximum/workstation capacity of the refurbished Academy House and the number of staff it is expected to accommodate following consolidation.

8. Car parking
The number of staff and visitor parking spaces currently available at County Hall and Academy House and the anticipated number of spaces available to staff at Academy House following refurbishment.

9. Wider public-sector occupation
A list of public-sector organisations, excluding individual employees, currently occupying County Hall and any documents or assessments concerning the possibility of County Hall being retained as shared public-sector accommodation following the relocation of NICS staff.

10. Disposal process Please
confirm:
a. whether County Hall has yet been formally declared surplus;
b. whether a D1 disposal form has been submitted to the Strategic Asset Management Unit (SAMU);
c. if submitted, the date of submission;
d. if not submitted, the anticipated date or stage at which the Department currently expects this to occur; and
e. whether County Hall has yet been entered, or is intended to be entered, on the D1 Register.

11. Consultation

Copies of any final reports, minutes or formal records of consultation with recognised Trade Union Side concerning the proposed consolidation and its implications for employees currently based at County Hall, subject to appropriate redaction of personal information.

12. Equality, sustainability and environmental assessment

Copies of any final:

- equality screening or Equality Impact Assessment;
- sustainability assessment;
- carbon/environmental assessment; and
- travel or transport assessment prepared in connection with the decision to consolidate accommodation at Academy House and ultimately dispose of County Hall.

DoF response:

I can confirm that the Department holds some of the information requested.

Please note, some of the information you have requested is being withheld because it is exempt under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would, amongst other things, contravene one of the data protection principles of the Data Protection Act.

In this case, I believe disclosure would contravene the first data protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed lawfully and fairly.

Having considered all the information contained within the Legitimate Interest Test – lawful, fairness and transparency test (attached as a separate document – **Annex F**), the department has established that, on balance, there is no lawful basis for the disclosure of third-party personal data falling within the scope of the request of which the requester is not the data subject.

Some information is also considered to be exempt from release under section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Commercial Interests). The Act states that ‘’Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it)’’. Section 43 is a qualified exemption and is subject to a public interest test (see **Annex G**).

Please see below responses to each question:

Query 1: Approved Business Case Response:
A redacted copy of the approved Business Case is attached at **Annex C.** Certain information has been withheld where disclosure may engage provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The redactions relate to personal data, car registrations and information considered commercially sensitive in the context of ongoing project development, procurement activity and potential future property disposal.

Query 2: Options Considered Response:
Details of the accommodation options considered, together with the associated advantages, disadvantages, benefits, risks, option appraisal and preferred option selection, are contained within Section 2 of the attached Business Case. Certain detailed financial and commercially sensitive information has been redacted.

Query 3: County Hall condition and refurbishment
Response:
Information falling within the scope of this request is contained within the attached Business Case, specifically Section 2 of the main document and Section 2.2 of Appendix 11.

Query 4: Academy House Refurbishment Response:
Information within the scope of this request is contained within Section 2 of the attached Business Case. Certain commercially sensitive information has been redacted where disclosure would be likely to prejudice the Department's commercial interests in relation to ongoing procurement and future project delivery.

Query 5: Comparative Running Costs Response:
Information within the scope of this request is contained within Section 2 and Appendix 8 of the attached business Case. Certain commercially sensitive information has been redacted where applicable.

Query 6: County Hall Valuation Response:
The valuation for County Hall used in the Business Case was confirmed in August 2025. Valuation information relating to County Hall was considered as part of the development of the Business Case, including within the options appraisal and financial appraisal process. The Business Case also includes an assumed future disposal receipt for appraisal purposes. The valuation information and associated disposal receipt figures have been redacted from the attached Business Case as disclosure would be likely to prejudice the Department's commercial interests in relation to any potential future disposal of the property.

Query 7: Staff Numbers and Building Capacity
Response:
Information on existing & proposed staff numbers is contained within Appendix 8 and Appendix 15 of the attached Business Case.

Query 8: Car Parking Response:
Academy House currently provides approximately 83-85 parking spaces and County Hall approximately 442 parking spaces. The parking provision at Academy house is to remain unchanged following any proposed refurbishment.

Query 9: Wider Public-Sector Occupation
Response:
Information on the public sector organisations occupying County Hall is contained within Table 0.1 of the attached Business Case. The Business Case considered options involving the retention and refurbishment of County Hall as part of the options appraisal process. Relevant information can be found within Section 2 and Appendix 11 of the Business Case. The Department does not hold any separate documents or assessments specifically examining the retention of County Hall as shared public-sector accommodation following the relocation of NICS staff beyond those contained within the Business Case and supporting appendices.

Query 10: Disposal Process Response:
a. County Hall has not been formally declared surplus.
b. A D1 disposal form has not been submitted to the Strategic Asset Management Unit (SAMU).
c. Not applicable.

d. Should the project proceed as currently envisaged, consideration of surplus declaration and submission of a D1 form would be undertaken following completion of the project and vacation of the building. No date has been set at this stage.
e. County Hall has not been entered on the D1 Register. Any decision regarding entry onto the D1 Register will be considered as part of the future disposal process should the property become surplus to operational requirements.

Query 11: Consultation Response:
A redacted copy of the relevant Whitley Committee meeting minutes and associated action log relating to the Ballymena Consolidation Project are attached at **Annex D** and **Annex E.** Personal information has been redacted where appropriate.

The Department's wider Estate Strategy included engagement with Departmental Accommodation Officers and Central Trade Union Side (CTUS). Local Trade Union Side engagement has also formed part of individual estate rationalisation projects.

Query 12: Equality, Sustainability and Environmental Assessment Response:
Information relating to sustainability, environmental and carbon considerations is contained within Section 1 and Appendix 16 of the attached business case. Following searches undertaken for the purposes of this request, the Department has not identified any separate final Equality Screening, Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), Sustainability Assessment, Carbon/Environmental Assessment or Travel/Transport Assessment beyond the information contained within the attached Business Case and supporting appendices.