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4 November 2022

Dear Ian Rex-Hawkes

Ref: FOI2022/19547

## Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your enquiry of 9 October 2022, which we have considered under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the FOI Act).

You asked for the following information:

*"I would like to see the OBR reports on the impact of the statement of 23 September 2022. It is vital to the democracy of the country that we as citizens are allowed to see the impact of fiscal policies introduced by the government, so hiding these documents from inspection is immoral at best."*

Following a search of our records, we can confirm that HM Treasury does hold information within the scope of your request.

The information that we have identified engages section 35(1)(a) of the FOI Act (formulation and development of Government policy). This is a qualified exemption and we are required to balance the public interest between disclosure and withholding the information.

In relation to the release of this information on the draft economic forecast produced by the OBR, we recognise that there is an inherent public interest in accountability of public authorities and transparency in public finances and understanding of the economic outlook.

Balanced against this is the public interest in protecting the Government's ability to discuss and develop policies and to reach well-formed conclusions. The policy process is an iterative one and the Information Commissioner has recognised that policy development needs some degree of freedom to enable the process to work effectively and we consider that there is a strong public interest in protecting information where release would be likely to have a detrimental impact on the ongoing formulation and development of policy. There is a strong public interest in protecting against encroachment on the ability of ministers and/or officials to formulate and develop policy options freely and frankly.

In this particular case, the information you have requested is still live as it is part of an ongoing forecast process which, as has been announced, will conclude with the OBR publishing an official fiscal and economic forecast on the 17 November ([link](#)). The forecast process involves the OBR producing multiple draft iterations of the forecast, which will evolve throughout the process as it refines judgements and incorporates new information – for example, new published statistics or any new policy decisions. The information requested is a preliminary part of this process which will conclude and be published on the specified date. It would not be appropriate to publish interim analysis during this process

as it would not reflect the final forecast and premature exposure would be detrimental to the final formulation of the forecast.

Furthermore, as is set out in the Charter for Budget Responsibility, “the OBR’s forecast are essential inputs to the government’s ongoing policy making”, and the OBR is required to “provide the government with timely access to the information necessary to reach policy decisions ahead of fiscal policy events.” The iterations of the OBR’s forecast received by the Government play an essential part in the policy making cycle during the forecast process which is not finalised until the end of the process. Publishing this information would be detrimental to the freedom of the Government to develop policy proposals informed by the information provided by the OBR ahead of the publication of the final forecast (within which the impact of any new policy measures will be included).

The Chancellor took the decision on 17 October to bring forward measures from the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan ([here](#)). The government will publish our Autumn Statement on 17 November, accompanied by an independent Office for Budget Responsibility economic and fiscal forecast ([link](#))

Given the above considerations, we conclude that the public interest lies in favour of withholding this information.

The information also engages section 29(1)(a) (prejudice to UK’s economic interests); and section 29(1)(b) (prejudice to the financial interests of the UK) of the FOI Act. These exemptions are engaged, as we consider that disclosure would or would be likely prejudice the economic and financial interests of the United Kingdom.

Section 29(1) is a qualified exemption and we are required to balance the public interest between disclosure and non-disclosure of the information.

As above, we recognise that there is an inherent public interest in transparency and accountability of public authorities. We also recognise the broad public interest in furthering public understanding of the issues with which public authorities deal, including relating to the UK’s fiscal and economic forecasts.

The public interest in transparency of information is met by the publication of the forthcoming forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which will be published on their website ([link](#)) in due course.

However, we consider release of the information would be detrimental to the Government’s ability to protect the economic and financial interests of the UK. This is because the information requested is interim analysis which will evolve throughout the forecast process as the OBR refines judgements and incorporates new information – for example, new published statistics or any new policy decisions. Publishing this information would provide an outdated outlook for the economy and public finances which does not include an assessment of the impact of announced government policy. Despite being a draft, this information may still be interpreted as an official OBR forecast or view and lead to a misunderstanding of the current fiscal and economic outlook which could have a detrimental impact on the economy and financial markets.

Having set out our public interest considerations, we conclude that the public interest lies decisively in favour of withholding this information

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

Yours sincerely

Information Rights Unit

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