

18 May 2020
Our ref: FOI17042020

Dear

Re: OBR reference scenario report

Thank you for your recent FOI request, which we received on 17 April 2020.

You requested the following:

- a) The date when the OBR's coronavirus reference scenario report was commissioned;
- b) Who commissioned the OBR to produce the report; and
- c) All correspondence between the OBR and the Treasury concerning the report up to the date of this FoI.

We decided on 27 March to publish an illustrative scenario setting out the potential impacts of the coronavirus on the economy and public finances, consistent with our remit to inform public discussion and understanding of the public finances. Unlike our Budget and Autumn/Spring Statement forecasts, which are formally commissioned by the Chancellor, the decision to produce and publish the scenario was taken by the OBR. As the introduction to our reference scenario publication states, we hoped to provide a useful guide to developments that *'shines a light on the channels through which the economic disruption and the Government's policy response are likely to affect the public finances.'*

Prior to the publication of our scenario we received a request from the Treasury for the OBR's initial view on the emerging impact of the pandemic on the economy and public finances, to feed into their policy discussions with the Cabinet Office and other government departments. That early view formed a foundation for the analysis that we subsequently developed to produce our coronavirus reference scenario publication. As we stated in the publication, the Chairman of the OBR also discussed the findings of the analysis with the Chancellor of the Exchequer by phone on 7 April, prior to its release on 14 April.

I confirm that the OBR holds information falling within the description of your request in part c. However, we estimate that the cost of locating, retrieving and extracting the information within your request would exceed the maximum statutory limit set out in Section 12(1) of the FOI Act. Given the very high volume of email exchanges between OBR and Treasury, to meet this request would require searching and extracting relevant information from all the email and other communications of our staff over a

period of weeks. If you were to narrow the scope of this request, we would consider if it is possible to meet it within the statutory limit on costs. You should also be aware that many communications between the OBR and Treasury relating to the coronavirus analysis will likely contain discussion on the development and clarification of policy measures, as well as exchanges on the timing of announcements. As such, much may be exempt from release under Section 35(1)(a) of the FOI Act, particularly as the policy development under discussion remains in progress. But we would make that determination on the basis of any further FOI requests, and apply the public interest test for release as required by the FOI Act.

If you have any other queries about this letter, please send them to our enquiries inbox at obr.enquiries@obr.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Freedom of Information Unit
Office for Budget Responsibility

Copyright notice

Most documents supplied in response to a Freedom of Information request continue to be protected by copyright. You are free to use these documents for your information, including for any non-commercial research you may be doing. Documents can also be used for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Government officials will have produced most documents supplied by the OBR and so the information will be Crown Copyright. Crown Copyright is managed by HMSO and you can find out details on the arrangements for re-using Crown Copyright on <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/copyright/licences/click-use-home.htm>

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

If you are not happy with this reply, you may request a review by writing to OBR Enquiries, Office for Budget Responsibility, 14T, 102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ or by email to obr.enquiries@obr.uk.

Any review request must be made within 2 months of the date of this letter.

It would assist our review if you set out which aspects of the reply concern you and why you are dissatisfied.

If you are not content with the outcome your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the OBR. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.