



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: Fol/Req/20/011

Date 04/02/2020

Dear Mr Deegan,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

'The total amount spent by the Dept of Foreign Affairs on capital/refurbishment works on the country's network of embassies in 2018.

A breakdown in the costs of the refurbishment works at the top eight embassies where the capital/refurbishment costs were highest in 2018.

The total amount spent by the Dept of Foreign Affairs on capital/refurbishment works on the country's network of embassies in 2019.

A breakdown in the costs of the refurbishment works at the top eight embassies where the capital/refurbishment costs were highest in 2019.'

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on the 15th of January 2019.

The Embassy network worldwide is used by the Department and state agencies in pursuit of its strategic goals on behalf of the State. They consist of offices and official accommodation which provide platforms for our Missions to promote Ireland's political, economic and cultural interests and values, provide services to our citizens, develop strategic stakeholder relationships and represent Ireland in international organisations.

The Department must ensure that its buildings meet security and health and safety standards, as well as providing universal access facilities as part of our duty of care to staff, users and visitors to our buildings. The Department maintains appropriate health, safety and security in our buildings and, in addition, complies with any additional national standards/requirements in local jurisdiction obligations.

Cost differences may arise due to currency fluctuations, possible higher local costs, and the need for expert advice and specialist contractors, in conjunction with the particular refurbishment needs of the project.

All refurbishment at Embassies are conducted in line with the Department's procurement obligations under Government public tendering and contracting rules, including both National and EU Public Procurement thresholds.

I have identified 4 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the attached schedule. I have made a decision to grant 2 and part-grant 2 of the records. The attached records have a breakdown of costs at seven out of top eight embassies where capital/refurbishment

costs were highest in 2018 and five out of the top eight embassies where capital/refurbishment costs were highest in 2019. These records are extracts from the Department's accounts, which were drawn down on the 17th of January 2019.

Total expenditure on refurbishment works on our Embassy network in 2018 amounted to €3,601,163 and total expenditure on refurbishment works on our Embassy network in 2019 amounted to €7,569,367.61.

Access has not been granted to one of the top eight embassies where capital/refurbishment costs were highest in 2018 and three of the top eight embassies where capital/refurbishment costs were highest in 2019. Access is not being granted under section 36 of the 2014 Act – Commercially Sensitive Information. The records relate to commercial information where disclosure could reasonably be expected to result in financial loss or gain to the person to whom the information related or could prejudice the competitive position of that person in the conduct of her/his profession/business/occupation. I have considered the public interest in releasing this information as the public have an interest in how the Department spends tax payers funds. However, on balance, I believe that the public interest is best served by not disclosing commercial information at this time where it could prejudice the competitive position of the Department. The Department is open to considering granting access to this record on conclusion of these projects.

Record 2 relating to the breakdown of refurbishment/capital costs in 2018 are as follows:

Property 1 relates to replacing the roof at the Embassy of Ireland in London.

Property 2 relates to required works at the State owned Official Accommodation in Lisbon. This involved works on the roof, security works, fire safety up-grading, provision of universal access and maintenance works necessary for creating a safe environment for promotional and other representational events.

Property 3 relates to the relocation of the Embassy of Ireland to The Republic of Turkey in 2017/2018. This has resulted in a modern, secure office for the Embassy staff, Irish citizens seeking to access services and guests attending promotional and other events. The office provides an improved space for Visa processing to support the trade relationship between Ireland and The Republic of Turkey. The redacted elements relate to specific security items and are redacted under 32 (1) (a)(ix) of the 2014 Act.

Property 4 relates to the State owned Chancery/Official Accommodation in Paris. Extensive upgrades were required in the form of asbestos removal, fire safety upgrading, air conditioning works and security upgrades in order to provide a suitable work environment for staff and improve facilities for engaging important contacts in the local area.

Property 5 relates to the relocation of the Irish Secretariat in Belfast. This office supports our engagement with Northern Ireland and our continued support of the Good Friday Agreement.

Property 6 relates to the required necessary refurbishment of the Official Accommodation and Embassy of Ireland in Washington, a State owned asset, including replacing the heating system to provide adequate work place for staff, creating additional works spaces, improving the outdoor event area for use for engagements with key interlocutors in Washington, health and safety works, fire protection and necessary maintenance works.

Property 7 relates to Ireland's new Ireland House in Sao Paulo in its permanent home in 2017. The records relate to the fit-out of the office space for both the department and Enterprise Ireland and the creation of an event space and promotional space for Irish businesses and stage agencies to use. The redacted elements relate to specific security items and are redacted under 32 (1) (a)(ix) of the 2014 Act.

Record 4 relating to the breakdown of refurbishment/capital costs in 2019 are as follows:

Property 2 relates to replacing the roof at the Embassy of Ireland in London. These works were required under the terms of the lease. Access is not being granted to entries relating to another ongoing project at the same property under section 36 of the 2014 Act – Commercially Sensitive Information

Property 4 relates to the relocation of the Ireland House in Hungary. This property provides space for both the mission and Enterprise Ireland. This has resulted in an improvement in working environment for staff and a modern event facility for Irish citizen, business and cultural events.

Property 5 relates to the Chancery/Official Accommodation in Paris. Extensive upgrades were carried out through air conditioning works, security upgrades, fire and health and safety improvements and maintenance in order to improve a State asset.

Property 6 relates to continued upgrade of the Embassy buildings in Washington.

Property 7 relates to a general upgrade of the State owned compound in Riyadh and works to improve the health and safety, fire, universal access and security.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857. You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely



Kenneth Byrne