

WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

PUBLICATION SCHEME

Introduction: The Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 received Royal Assent on 30 November 2000. It gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, including West Sussex County Council. It sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on the Council.

The Act came into force in two stages. From February 2003 West Sussex County Council has been required to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme setting out the classes of information that it routinely publishes or intends to publish; the manner in which information in each class is published; whether the information is available to the public free of charge or on payment.

From January 2005 any person making a request to the County Council for information must be informed whether it holds that information and, subject to exemptions, supplied with that information.

West Sussex County Council's approach to Freedom of Information and to its Publication Scheme

The County Council sees the Freedom of Information Act as a welcome opportunity both to improve the ways in which it informs the public it serves and to improve the ways in which it manages the enormous amount of information it holds. Information is one of the most important assets the County Council has, and Freedom of Information provides a catalyst to make it more widely available and manage it more efficiently.

The County Council wishes to conduct its business in an open and honest fashion. Occasionally the County Council has to make decisions which are not popular, but it is important that the public is informed of how those decisions have been made and the reasons for making them. The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act will enable the public to understand further the County Council and its work through improved access to information.

West Sussex County Council's Policy on Access to Information

The County Council is committed to a policy of open access to information under the Scheme. This policy proposes:

- to make information available to all those who need or request it, wherever possible in the form that is most convenient for them

- to publicise information already made available by maximising the use of the County Council's Publication Scheme
- to make access to the Publication Scheme (and information referred to in it) as easy as possible, particularly through the Council's website
- to presume that information is available unless a cabinet member, committee or officer can demonstrate a legitimate reason for withholding it; and
- to restrict the scope of information withheld from the public, by interpreting exemptions restrictively, and separating exempt from non-exempt material.

West Sussex County Council's Publication Scheme

The Council's Publication Scheme is a guide to the information that this Council publishes or intends to publish. It is not an exhaustive list of all the information published by the Council, but it is a catalogue of information that the public should expect to be readily available.

The Scheme is based on a model published by the Information Commissioner and commits this Council to make information available to the public as part of its normal business activities. That information is described under seven broad classes of information listed below. Environmental information is not listed as a distinct class, but will feature within the classes listed.

As stated in guidance from the Information Commissioner, the Council will publish what is expected of a local authority unless:

- the Council does not hold the information
- the information is exempt under one of the Freedom of Information exemptions or Environmental Information Regulations exceptions, or its release is prohibited under another statute
- the information is in draft form, or archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible; or,
- it would be impractical or overly resource-intensive to prepare the material for routine release.

Information held by the Council that is not published under this Scheme can be requested in writing. That request will be considered in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

How information published under this scheme will be made available

Where possible, information will be provided on the Council's website.

Where that is impracticable or when a person does not wish to access the information through the website, information can be provided through other means. Please note, however, that charges may apply for photocopying,

printing, postage and packing, or for other transcription or other services. For further information about charging, please see below.

In exceptional circumstances, some information may be available only by viewing in person. Where this is the case, contact details will be provided, and an appointment to view the information will be arranged within a reasonable timescale.

Information will be provided in the language in which it is held or in such other language that is legally required. Where the Council is legally required to translate any information, it will do so.

Obligations under disability and discrimination legislation and any other legislation to provide information in other forms and formats will be adhered to when providing information in accordance with this Scheme.

Charging for information in the Publication Scheme

The purpose of this Scheme is to make the maximum amount of information readily available at minimum inconvenience and cost to the public. Charges made by the authority for routinely published material will be justified and transparent and kept to a minimum.

Material which is published and accessed on the Council's website will be provided free of charge.

However, charges may be made for information subject to any charging regime specified by Parliament, or for actual disbursements incurred such as:

- photocopying
- postage and packaging, and
- costs directly incurred as a result of viewing information.

Charges may also be made for information provided under this Scheme where they are legally authorised, they are justified in all relevant circumstances - including the general principles of the right of access to information held by public authorities - and are in accordance with a published schedule or schedules of fees readily available to the public.

If we have to deliver this service through a third party (including postal services), we will only charge what we are billed.

For anything other than non-commercial research or private study, reuse of material for which the Council owns the copyright will require a licence. Further information about licensing for re-use of the Council's copyright material is held on the website.

If a charge is to be made, confirmation of the payment due will be given before the information is provided. Payment may be requested before we provide the information.

Classes of Information

The list that follows is not an exhaustive list of all the information published by this Council. It is, however, a catalogue of information that the public should expect to be readily available. Further information can be obtained simply by searching on the Council's website.

- **Who we are and what we do**

Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts:

- Council constitution
- Council democratic structure
- Council directorate structure
- Location and opening times of Council properties
- Currently elected councillors' information and contact details
- Contact details for all customer-facing departments
- Results of previous elections
- Relationships with other authorities.

- **What we spend and how we spend it**

Financial information about projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit:

- Financial statements, budgets and variance reports
- Capital programme
- Spending reviews
- Financial audit reports
- Members' allowances
- Staff allowances and expenses
- Pay and grading structure
- Election expenses (returns or declarations and accompanying documents relating to election expenses sent to the Council)
- Procurement procedures
- Details of contracts currently being tendered
- List of contracts awarded and their value
- District auditor's report, financial statements for projects and events, funding for partnership arrangements

- Internal financial regulations.

- **What our priorities are and how we are doing**

Strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews:

- Annual reports
- Strategies and business plans for services provided by the Council
- Best value local performance plan
- Internal and external organisation performance reviews
- Strategies developed in partnership with other authorities
- Economic development
- Forward plan
- Capital strategy
- Comprehensive performance assessment
- Inspection reports
- Local Area Agreements
- Statistical information produced in accordance with the Council's and departmental requirements
- Impact assessments
- Service standards.

- **How we make decisions**

Decision-making processes and records of decisions:

- Timetable of Council meetings
- Agendas, officers' reports, background papers and minutes of Council committee, sub-committee and standing forum meetings
- Major policy proposals and decisions, and facts and analyses of facts considered when framing major policies
- Public consultations
- Internal communications guidance, criteria used for decision making, internal instructions, manuals and guidelines.

- **Our policies and procedures**

Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering our services and responsibilities:

- Policies and procedures for conducting Council business
- Policies and procedures for delivering our services
- Policies and procedures about the recruitment and employment of staff

- Customer service
- Records management and personal data policies
- Charging regimes and policies.

- **Lists and registers**

Information held in registers required by law and other lists and registers relating to the functions of the Council:

- Public registers and registers held as public records
- Asset registers and information asset register
- Disclosure logs
- Register of councillors' financial and other interests
- Register of gifts and hospitality
- Highways, licensing, planning, commons, footpaths etc
- Register of electors.

- **Services provided by the Council**

Information about the services that the Council provides, including leaflets, guidance and newsletters:

- Regulatory and licensing responsibilities
- Services for local businesses
- Services for other organisations
- Services for members of the public
- Services for which the Council is entitled to recover a fee, together with those fees
- Information for visitors to the area, leisure information, events, museums, libraries and archive collections
- Leaflets, booklets and newsletters
- Advice and guidance
- Media releases
- Election information.

For further information, email foi@westsussex.gov.uk, or write to:

Freedom of Information
West Sussex County Council
County Hall
West Street
Chichester
West Sussex PO19 1RQ