

Freedom of Information Policy

Wirral Council has adopted and applies the fundamental principles of:

1. openness and inclusivity
2. integrity
3. accountability

The Council is committed to implementing the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in a way which reinforces these principles.

The Freedom of Information Act came fully into force for local authorities in January 2005. It created significant new rights of access to the Council's recorded information. It enables the Council to serve our customers, stakeholders, and the wider public more effectively and increase the current levels of public trust and confidence in the way we carry out our responsibilities.

The Act creates two general rights in relation to information. One is the right to be told whether or not the Council holds information which has been requested. The second is the right to be given that information within 20 working days. There are exemptions, some of which require the public interest in disclosing the information to be weighed against the prejudice to the Council in making the information public. The Council will act fairly and transparently when conducting any balancing exercise and, if an application is refused, will always tell applicants why.

The Council also has a duty to adopt and maintain a 'publication scheme' that details the information which is readily available to the public, where that information is held and how to gain access to it. This scheme is published on the website. The scheme will be reviewed annually and requests for information will be monitored, the results being reflected in amendments to the scheme.

The Council will make available as much information as possible in a variety of formats in line with the act. It will maintain links with the information commissioner's office and follow guidelines issued by the commissioner. Complaints will be dealt with by following the Council's complaints procedures.

In order to comply with the act and in line with government guidelines the Council has five strategic objectives:

- To ensure that the authority has the necessary leadership in place to co-ordinate action and to deliver the level of commitment required to comply with the act.
- To ensure that all elected members and staff receive training and are aware of the policy and the implications of the act and its impact on their work. In order to ensure compliance all staff need to be able to recognise and deal with requests made under the act and to deal with them in compliance with it.
- To ensure that the Council has in place information management systems and practices which allow the authority to know what information it holds, know where that information is and be able to retrieve and distribute information in a timely and efficient manner.
- The Council will ensure that its publication scheme is available, regularly reviewed and as comprehensive as possible.
- To ensure that all requests for information are handled promptly and efficiently, in line with government guidelines and the timescales set within the act.

Organisational structures are in place to ensure that these objectives are met. The Council has an Information and Records Manager in place to co-ordinate all aspects of this policy and each department has identified individuals who have specific responsibility for the handling of requests and implementation of this policy.

Document to be reviewed every 2 years or sooner if required by legislation changes.
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