

# **Godshill Parish Council Freedom of Information Policy**

## **Purpose and Scope**

This policy sets out how Godshill Parish Council will meet its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). It applies to all recorded information held by the Council, regardless of format or storage medium.

The policy promotes transparency and accessibility while recognising the limited administrative resources of the Council. All requests will be handled by the Clerk, the Council's sole employee and Proper Officer.

## **Right of Access**

Any person has the right to request information held by the Council. Requests must:

- Be in writing (including email or social media)
- Include a name and contact address (email or postal)
- Clearly describe the information sought

## **Clarity and Specificity**

To ensure efficient handling, requests should be as specific and focused as possible. Broad or ambiguous requests may cause delays and could ultimately be refused if they exceed cost/time limits or cannot be reasonably interpreted. The Clerk will work with requesters to clarify vague requests where possible. However, the legal timeframes pause until clarification is received.

## **Publication Scheme**

Godshill Parish Council adopts the ICO Model Publication Scheme, which outlines routinely available information such as minutes, policies, and financial data. The publication scheme is maintained and updated by the Clerk and published on the Council's website.

## **Submitting FOI Requests**

Requests can be submitted via:

- Email to the Clerk
- Letter to the Parish Council address

The Clerk will acknowledge all valid requests within five working days where possible.

## **Response Times**

The Council will respond to requests within 20 working days, in accordance with the FOIA.

Please note: Godshill Parish Council employs a single Clerk who can respond to FOI requests. In periods when the Clerk is on annual leave or otherwise unavailable, email inboxes may not be monitored, and FOI response times may be temporarily suspended. The response clock will resume once the Clerk returns and is able to access correspondence.

Requesters will receive an out of office notification should the Clerk not be working for any period of time.

### **Handling Complex Requests**

Requests that are:

- Multi-part or involve large volumes of data
- Require redaction of sensitive or third-party data
- Raise public interest considerations will be deemed complex.

The Clerk will inform the requester within 20 working days and provide an estimated response time.

### **Managing Backlogs and Capacity**

Where statutory deadlines cannot be met due to backlogs, workload or absence:

- The Clerk will maintain a FOI request log, prioritising responses based on statutory deadlines and complexity.
- The Clerk will notify requesters of delays, giving reasons and a revised estimated response timeframe.
- Where the Clerk is absent for an extended period (e.g., annual leave), delays will be clearly communicated upon return.
- An annual update on any FOI backlogs during the year will be reported to the Parish Council.

### **Refusals and Exemptions**

A request may be refused if:

- The information is not held by the Council
- The request is too broad, ambiguous, or lacks sufficient detail
- Complying would exceed the appropriate cost limit (currently £450)
- The request is vexatious or repeated
- An exemption under FOIA applies (e.g. personal data, commercial confidentiality, security, or legal privilege)

In all cases of refusal, the Clerk will inform the requester in writing, stating:

- The reason for refusal
- The relevant exemption or cost basis
- The right to request an internal review

### **Escalation and Internal Review Process**

If a requester is dissatisfied with the Council's response or handling of their request, they may request an internal review by writing to the Clerk within 40 working days.

The review will be carried out by two Parish Councillors, not involved in the original response.

The outcome will be issued within 20 working days.

If unsatisfied, the requester may escalate the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

### **Fees and Charges**

Requests are normally free of charge. However, charges may apply for:

- Photocopying, printing, or postage
- Requests exceeding the appropriate cost limit (as defined in FOIA)
- The Clerk will inform the requester of any applicable charges before proceeding.

### **Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if there are changes in legislation, case law, or Council structure. Updates will be approved by Godshill Parish Council.

Date of review: May 2026

Date of next review: May 2027