

Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council

Freedom of Information Policy

FEBRUARY 2026

This policy sets out how Widdrington Station & Stobswood Parish Council will meet its obligations under the **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**, the **Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)**, and associated guidance issued by the **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)** and the **Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)**.

The policy applies to all councillors, employees, contractors, and anyone acting on behalf of the Council.

1. Policy Statement

The Council is committed to openness, transparency, and accountability in the conduct of its business. It recognises the public's statutory right to access information held by public authorities and will respond to requests in a timely, lawful, and consistent manner.

The Council will:

- Provide information proactively wherever possible;
 - Respond to requests for information courteously and efficiently;
 - Ensure exemptions are applied appropriately and only where justified;
 - Comply with statutory timescales.
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2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all recorded information held by the Council, regardless of format, including:

- Paper records;
- Electronic documents and emails;
- Audio and visual recordings;
- Information held on behalf of the Council by third parties.

The policy covers requests made under:

- The Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- The Environmental Information Regulations 2004;
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR (where requests relate to personal data).

3. Publication Scheme

The Council has adopted the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Model Publication Scheme** and will publish information routinely in accordance with it.

The Publication Scheme sets out:

- The classes of information the Council publishes or intends to publish;
- How the information can be accessed;
- Any charges that may apply.

The Publication Scheme will be reviewed periodically and kept up to date.

4. Making a Request for Information

Requests for information must:

- Be made in writing (including email);
- State the name of the applicant;
- Provide an address for correspondence;
- Clearly describe the information requested.

Requests may be sent to the Clerk or via the Council's published contact details.

Applicants do not need to state that their request is being made under the Freedom of Information Act.

5. Timescales for Responses

The Council will respond to requests promptly and, in any event:

- Within **20 working days** for FOIA requests;
- Within **20 working days** for EIR requests, extendable to 40 working days where the information is complex or voluminous.

Where clarification is required, the statutory time limit will pause until clarification is received.

6. Exemptions and Exceptions

The Council recognises that not all information can be disclosed.

Where applicable, the Council may withhold information using:

- **Exemptions** under the Freedom of Information Act; or

- **Exceptions** under the Environmental Information Regulations.

Where a qualified exemption applies, the Council will carry out a **public interest test** and will only withhold information where the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Where information is withheld, the Council will explain the reason and provide details of the applicant's right to request a review.

7. Personal Data

Requests for personal data will be handled under the **Data Protection Act 2018** and **UK GDPR**, not the Freedom of Information Act.

Applicants may be asked to provide proof of identity where appropriate.

The Council will ensure that personal data relating to third parties is not disclosed unlawfully.

8. Fees and Charges

Most information will be provided free of charge.

Where charges apply, they will be calculated in accordance with:

- The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004;
- The Council's Publication Scheme.

Applicants will be informed in advance of any fees payable.

9. Vexatious or Repeated Requests

The Council may refuse requests that are considered vexatious or repeated in accordance with Section 14 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Such decisions will be made carefully and in line with ICO guidance.

10. Internal Review and Complaints

Applicants who are dissatisfied with the handling of their request may request an internal review.

Requests for review should be submitted in writing within **40 working days** of the response.

An internal review will be carried out by the Council and a response provided promptly.

If the applicant remains dissatisfied, they may complain to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

The Clerk is the Council's designated **Freedom of Information Officer** and is responsible for:

- Coordinating responses to requests;
- Ensuring compliance with statutory requirements;
- Advising councillors and staff on FOI matters;
- Maintaining the Publication Scheme.

All councillors and employees are responsible for:

- Assisting with the identification and retrieval of information;
 - Ensuring records are accurate and properly managed;
 - Referring FOI requests promptly to the Clerk.
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12. Records Management

The Council recognises that good records management is essential to effective compliance with FOIA.

Records will be managed in accordance with the Council's retention policies and relevant legislation.

13. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains compliant with legislation, ICO guidance, and NALC/SLCC best practice.

Any updates will be approved by the Council and communicated as appropriate.