
LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Information Assurance

Freedom of Information Policy

V2.9

Document Control

Reference	Freedom of Information Policy V2.9
Issue Date	6 June 2019
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Version History

Date	Version Number	Revision Notes	Author
20 March 2014	V2.0	Document structure changed. Removed procedure and guidance.	David Ingham
25 March 2014	V2.1	. Addition of principles. Clarification of request process; refusal process; and complaints and review process	David Ingham
20 June 2014	V2.2	Para 7.3 amended – added legal and deleted CSC.	David Ingham
16 October 2014	V2.2	Published	David Ingham
20 October 2014	V2.3	Minor amendments at: 6.1.3; 7.2; 9.2	David Ingham
12 October 2015	V2.4	Document review, format change. Published	Sally Ward
30 June 2016	V2.5	Word Issue and next review date to publish added to document control section and policy review statement included	Sally Ward
28 March 2017	V 2.6	Reviewed.	Kathryn Irwin-Banks
5 May 2018	V2.7	Annual review	David Ingham
05 May 2019	V2.8	Annual Review	Kathryn Irwin-Banks
06 June 2019	V2.9	Updated new SIRO details and revised EIR information	Kathryn Irwin-Banks

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Freedom Of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 came into force on 1 January 2005 and provide the public with a general right of access to information held by the council.
- 1.2 The council has introduced a framework under which FOI requests are received, processed, and completed in accordance with the Act.

2. Aim

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure the council meets its obligations under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to any recorded information that is held by the council.

4. Training & Awareness

- 4.1 The Council shall provide Freedom of Information training to all staff.
- 4.2 Individuals shall maintain a good awareness of Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations

5. Principles

- 5.1 The following principles shall apply:
 - 5.1.1 FOI covers any recorded information held by the council. Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.
 - 5.1.2 FOI covers information that is held on behalf of the council even if it is not held on council's premises.
 - 5.1.3 People shall have a right to know about the activities of the council, unless there is a good reason for them not to.
 - 5.1.4 An applicant (requester) shall not be required to provide a reason for requesting information. The council however, shall justify refusing a request.
 - 5.1.5 The council shall treat all requests for information equally, except under some circumstances relating to vexatious requests and personal data.
 - 5.1.6 The council shall treat all requestors equally regardless of who they are, for example journalists, local residents, public authority employees.

6. Requests for Information under the Freedom of Information Act

- 6.1 Any written request for information shall be regarded as a request for recorded information under the Act unless:
 - 6.1.1 Information can be dealt with as a normal customer enquiry and therefore more sensibly under the usual customer service procedures;
 - 6.1.2 It forms a request for personal data relating to the individual requesting the information. This shall be dealt with under data protection legislation, and consequently shall be processed in line with the councils Data Protection Policy (Subject Access Requests.)
 - 6.1.3 If the person is asking for 'environmental information', the request shall be considered under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.
- 6.2 A request shall only be accepted if made in writing, for example online forms; letters; emails; faxes and twitter.
- 6.3 Requests for information shall be met within 20 working days of receipt. A request under EIR can be extended to 40 days but only for complex or voluminous requests.
- 6.4 Ambiguous requests shall be clarified with the requestor.
- 6.5 A request for information shall not be refused because the recorded information is out of date, incomplete or inaccurate.
- 6.6 The council shall not make any changes or deletions to records as a result of a request.

7. Refusing a request

- 7.1 The council shall consider refusing a request for information under certain circumstances:
 - 7.1.1 It would cost too much or take too much staff time to deal with the request.
 - 7.1.2 The request is vexatious.
 - 7.1.3 The request repeats a previous request from the same person.
- 7.2 The council shall consider refusing a request for information if the request meets an exemption under the Act. The council may also refuse to confirm or deny whether it holds information where the Act allows.
- 7.3 Legal advice shall be sought before refusing a request to ensure the grounds for refusal are robust; justification will be required should the refusal be challenged.
- 7.4 A written refusal notice shall be issued to the requestor if the council either refuse to say whether it holds information at all or confirms that information is held but refuses to release it.

8. Publication Scheme

- 8.1 The council shall publish information on the council website proactively via a Publication Scheme.
- 8.2 The council shall make a disclosure log available on the council website that sets out responses to previous FOI requests.

9. Charges

- 9.1 The council shall make no initial charge for making an FOI request.
- 9.2 In some circumstances the council shall charge an appropriate fee for complying with some requests for information.
- 9.3 Advice shall be sought from the FOI team if a fee is being considered and a detailed breakdown and explanation of charges will be supplied to the requester in all cases where a fee is requested.

10. Complaints & Review Process

- 10.1 The council shall carry out a review of a request whenever the requestor expresses dissatisfaction with the outcome.
- 10.2 The review shall not be limited to the first decision but shall provide a new decision based on all available evidence that is relevant to the date of the request.
- 10.3 The review shall be done by someone who did not deal with the original request, and where possible by a more senior member of staff.
- 10.4 The council shall conduct a review within 20 working days; in exceptional circumstances this time limit shall be extended to 40 working days.

11. Policy Review

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.