

Reedham Parish Council

Freedom of Information Policy

1. Introduction

Reedham Parish Council is committed to openness and transparency in its decision-making and administration. This policy sets out how the Council will comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), and associated legislation.

The Parish Council recognises the public's right to access information it holds, subject to certain exemptions, and will deal with requests in a professional, timely, and lawful manner.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All recorded information held by the Parish Council, regardless of format (paper, electronic, emails, photographs, audio, etc.)
- All councillors, the Clerk, and any contractors acting on behalf of the Council

It covers requests made by members of the public, organisations, journalists, and other bodies.

3. Legal Framework

The Parish Council will manage requests in accordance with:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Local Government Transparency Code

4. Making a Request

A valid Freedom of Information request:

- Must be in writing (including email)
- Must include the requester's name and a correspondence address (email is acceptable)
- Must clearly describe the information requested.

Requests do not need to mention the Freedom of Information Act explicitly.

Requests for environmental information will be managed under the Environmental Information Regulations, even if not stated as such.

5. Exemptions and Refusals

The Parish Council may refuse a request, in whole or in part, where a lawful exemption applies. Common examples include:

- Personal data (to protect individuals' privacy)
- Confidential or commercially sensitive information
- Information subject to legal professional privilege
- Vexatious or repeated requests.

Where an exemption applies, the Council will:

- Explain the reason for refusal
- Cite the relevant exemption
- Provide advice and assistance where possible.

6. Timescales

The Council will aim to respond to all requests under FOIA within 20 working days from the date of the request.

Requests under EIR will normally be responded to within 20 working days, extendable to 40 working days for complex requests.

If additional time is required, the requester will be informed.

7. Charges

Most requests will be handled free of charge.

The Parish Council may charge:

- Reasonable disbursement costs (e.g. photocopying, postage)
- Fees permitted under the FOIA Fees Regulations

Any charges will be communicated to the requester in advance.

8. Publication Scheme

The Parish Council operates an Information Publication Scheme, setting out information routinely made available, including:

- Agendas, minutes, and meeting papers
- Financial information and accounts
- Policies and procedures
- Contact details and governance information

Information routinely available under the Council's Publication Scheme will normally be provided without the need for a formal Freedom of Information request.

9. Handling Requests

The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Officer for Freedom of Information requests.

The Clerk will:

- Log all requests
- Coordinate responses
- Consult councillors where appropriate
- Ensure compliance with statutory timescales

Councillors must:

- Forward any FOI requests received to the Clerk
- Not respond to FOI requests individually unless authorised by the Clerk (as the Proper Officer).

10. Internal Review and Complaints

If a requester is dissatisfied with the response, they may request an internal review.

The review will consider whether the response complied with the law and whether the correct exemptions were applied. This review may be conducted by the Clerk in conjunction with the Chair or another councillor not involved in the original decision. An internal review will normally be completed within 20 working days.

If the requester remains dissatisfied, they may complain to:

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF

11. Records Management

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

The Council will:

- Retain records in accordance with its retention schedule
- Ensure records are accurate, accessible, and secure
- Avoid using private messaging platforms for Council business where records cannot be retained.

12. Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed by the Parish Council at least every three years, or sooner if legislation or guidance changes.

Adopted: 12th January 2026

Review Period: 3 Yearly

Review Date: January 2029