

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

This Freedom of Information Policy sets out the arrangements under which information will be provided to applicants who request information in writing from Bewdley Town Council ('the Council') under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act") and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

A request by an individual for Personal Information the Council holds about them is not covered under this policy but instead can be requested under the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation 2018; see the Council's Data Protection Policy. Personal Information does not include information about a deceased person.

The Freedom of Information Act requires the Council to publish a Publication Scheme and ensure it is available to view either on the Council's website, bewdleytowncouncil.org or as a hard copy which is available from the Town Council office, Borough House, 6 Load Street, Bewdley, DY12 2AF or by email at admin@bewdleytowncouncil.org

The Publication Scheme commits the Council:

- To proactively publish or otherwise make available as a matter of routine information, including environmental information, which is held by the council and falls within the classes set out in bold type below
- To specify the information held by the council which falls within the classes below
- To produce and publish the methods by which the specific information is made routinely available so that it can be easily identified and accessed by members of the public
- To review and update on a regular basis the information the council makes available under this scheme
- To produce a schedule of any fees charged for access to information which is made proactively available
- To make the publication scheme available to the public

Classes of Information

- 1. Who the council is and what it does**
- 2. What the council spends and how it spends it**
- 3. What are the priorities of the council and how are these achieved**
- 4. How council makes a decision**
- 5. Council policies and procedures**
- 6. Lists and Registers**
- 7. The Services the Council offers**

The classes of information will not generally include:

- Information the disclosure of which is prevented by law, or exempt under the Act
- Information in draft form, unless this contradicts legislation
- Information that is no longer readily available as it is contained in files which have been placed in archive storage, is difficult to access, or has been disposed of under the Town Council's Document Management Policy.

Charges which may be made for Information published under the scheme

The publication scheme contains information relating to the charges that may be made for providing information that is not available online or is requested in a different format. These costs are subject to the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004.

Procedure for applicants requesting information

1. Applications requesting information in the first instance should be in written form such as letter or email and sent to the Town Council. The applicant is required to provide their name (not needed if requesting environmental information), a contact address or email and a detailed description of the information wanted, for example whether asking for all the information on a subject, or just a summary.
2. The applicant can ask for the information to be provided in a particular format such as paper or electronic copies, audio format, large print.
3. As soon as it is received the request for information will be marked with the date of receipt.
4. The council's reply to acknowledge receipt will be sent to the address provided, either by email or by post depending on the media in which the request was received or the applicant's wishes, with a copy of this policy and the attached Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) information for applicants. This acknowledgement will be sent within five days of receipt of request whenever possible. Office closure due to annual leave or similar circumstances may delay the acknowledgement.
5. Requests should include a clear statement of the information required; if the request is unclear the Council may ask the applicant to be more specific which may delay the Council's response. Town Council staff will endeavour to advise the applicant within five working days whether the application is sufficiently clear to enable the provision of a full response or whether additional information is required.
6. Where the information is contained within the Council's Publication Scheme and is published online, the applicant will be directed to the Council's website.
7. The Council will aim to respond to a request for information from an applicant under the above Act and regulations within 20 working days.
8. If payment is required under the scale of charges the 20 working-day period referred to in paragraph 7 starts on receipt of the payment.
9. The Council is not obliged to comply with repeated or vexatious requests.
10. Certain information held by the Council may be classified as exempt under the Act, in which case the Council staff will advise the applicant.
11. In some instances, in order to comply with Data Protection regulations, the information provided may exclude (redact) anything that will identify a living person.
12. After responding to the applicant, the Town Council will publish a summary of the Fol request and the Council's response on the Council's website.
13. The Council will review its Publication Scheme and this policy on an annual basis.

Do	Don't
Find out who to send your request to. If you address your request directly to the appropriate contact within the authority then you may receive a prompter response.	Use offensive or threatening language.
Include your name, address and other contact details in the request.	Level unfounded accusations at the authority or its staff.
Clearly state that you are making your request under the Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations.	Make personal attacks against employees.
Be as specific as possible about the information you want rather than asking general questions. Try to include details such as dates and names whenever you can. It may also assist the authority in identifying the information if you explain the purpose behind your request.	Use FOI to reopen grievances which have already been fully addressed by the authority or subjected to independent investigation with no evidence of wrongdoing being found.
Re-read your request to check for any wording which is unclear or open to interpretation.	Make assumptions about how the authority organises its information or tell them how to search for the information you want.
Use straightforward, polite language; avoid basing your request or question on assumptions or opinions or mixing requests with complaints or comments.	Bury your request in amongst lengthy correspondence on other matters or underlying complaints
Specify whether you have any preferences as to how you would like to receive the information, for example if you would prefer a paper copy or to receive an email.	Use requests as a way of 'scoring points' against an authority
Give the authority ample opportunity to address any previous requests you have made before submitting new ones.	Send 'catch-all' requests for information (such as 'please provide me with everything you hold about 'x') when you aren't sure what specific documents to ask for. If in doubt, try searching on the authority's website or enquiring whether any indexes and file lists are available. Alternatively, ask the authority for some advice and assistance in framing your request.
Stay focused on the line of enquiry you are pursuing. Don't let your attention	Submit frivolous or trivial requests; remember that processing any

start to drift onto issues of minor relevance.

information request involves some cost to the public purse.

Think about whether making a request is the best way of achieving what you want. If you have an underlying complaint, then it may be better to just take your complaint to the relevant ombudsman and let them investigate.

Disrupt a public authority by the sheer weight of requests or the volume of information requested. Whether you are acting alone or in concert with others, this is a clear misuse of the Act and an abuse of your 'right to know'.

Aim to be flexible if the authority advises that it can't meet the full request on cost grounds and asks you to narrow it down. Try to work with the organisation to produce a streamlined version of the request which still covers the core information that is most importance to you.

Deliberately 'fish' for information by submitting a very broad or random requests in the hope it will catch something noteworthy or otherwise useful. Requests should be directed towards obtaining information on a particular issue, rather than relying on pot luck to see if anything of interest is revealed.

Make repeat requests unless circumstances, or the information itself, have changed to the extent that there are justifiable grounds to ask for the information again.

From ICO: Information request dos and don'ts

<https://ico.org.uk/your-data-matters/official-information/>

ICO: Information Commissioner's Office