



Blackburn with Darwen Council
POL012
Freedom of Information Policy

CIRCULATION LIST

For Consultation	Date Reviewed
ITM&G EMT	19/11/2014
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RELATED DOCUMENTATION

Title	Version
Publication Scheme	V2

VERSION CONTROL

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AUTHORISED BY

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Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 came into effect in January 2005, for the purpose of increasing the operational transparency of public authorities. Blackburn with Darwen Council is defined as a public authority under the Act, and is committed to managing the associated obligations in an effective manner.

The two principal responsibilities set out in the Act are to:

- Maintain a publication scheme which functions as a guide to information that is routinely published by the Council
- Respond to individual requests for information.
- Comply with DCLG Transparency Code of Practice in relation to the mandatory publication of Dataset information.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has adopted and applies the fundamental principles of:

- Openness and inclusivity
- Integrity
- Accountability

The Council is committed to implementing the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in a way that reinforces these principles

Strategic Objectives

In line with government guidelines the Council has five strategic objectives:

1. To ensure that the authority has the necessary leadership in place to co-ordinate action and deliver the level of commitment required by the act.
2. To ensure that all elected members and staff receive training and aware of the policy and the implications of the act and its impact on their work. In order to ensure compliance all staff need to be able to recognise and deal with requests made under the act and to deal with them in compliance with it.
3. To ensure that the Council has in place information management systems and practices which allow the authority to know what information it holds, know where that information is and be able to retrieve and distribute information in a timely and efficient manner.
4. To ensure that the Council Publication scheme is available, regularly reviewed and as comprehensive as possible. The Council also has in place a communications strategy that raises awareness of the act with our customers and with our partner organisations.
5. To ensure that all requests for information are handled promptly and efficiently, in line with government guidelines and the timescales set within the act.

Steps have been taken to ensure that organisational structures are in place to ensure that these objectives are met. The Council has an Information Governance Manager in place to co-ordinate all aspects of this policy and each department has identified individuals who have specific responsibility for the handling of requests and implementation of this policy.

Publication Scheme

The Council has a duty to adopt and maintain a 'publication scheme' that details the information which is readily available to the public, where that information is held and how to gain access to it.

This scheme is published on the website:

<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/data-and-information/freedom-information-requests/publication-scheme>

The scheme is also available in hard copy from the Council's Information Governance Section. The scheme will be reviewed annually and requests for information will be monitored, the results being reflected in amendments to the scheme.

The Council will make available as much information as possible in as many formats as are technically feasible, in line with the act. It will maintain links with the Information Commissioners' office and follow guidelines issued by the Commissioner.

Complaints will be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedure, a copy of which can be found in the appendices of the publications scheme.

In the event that the applicant is not content with the outcome of their complaint, they may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless the applicant has exhausted the Council's complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Responding to Individual Requests for Information

The Act gives the right to any individual to request information held by the Council.

A request must:

- be made in writing,
- state the name of the applicant,
- provide an address (postal or email) for correspondence, and
- describe the information requested.

It need not explicitly state that the request is being made under the Act, nor explain why the information is being requested.

Requests submitted electronically (i.e. by email or fax) are acceptable provided that they satisfy the above criteria, are legible and are capable of being used for subsequent reference.

Under the Environmental Information Regulations Act 2000, requests for Environmental Information may be made by telephone if so desired. To register a request in this way please contact Information Governance on 01254 585852.

Upon receipt of a request the Council is required to provide a substantive response within 20 working days.

Further Information in relation to accessing information can be found on the Council's Publication Scheme or by contacting the Information Governance Team on 01254 585226.