

Access to Information Policy

Document Control

Document Ref:	WBC:SS:SCB:0812AtI	Date Created:	February 2013
Version:	Replaces Access to Information Policy V1 approved 2007	Date Modified:	
Revision due	February 2015		
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Owning Service	Strategic Support		
Equality Impact Assessment: (EIA)	Date undertaken:		
	Issues (if any):		

Corporate Director (Resources Directorate)	Sign & Date:	
Corporate Director (Communities Directorate)	Sign & Date:	
Corporate Director (Environment Directorate)	Sign & Date:	

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1	2007	Access to Information Policy	
2	2011	Access to Information Policy	
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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that West Berkshire Council complies with the requirements of the existing access to information legislation, including the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, and the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A, and with any subsequent legislation.
- 1.2 The Access to Information Policy has been approved by Individual Executive Member Decision on [date].
- 1.3 This Policy applies to all requests for information made to West Berkshire Council, whether written or verbal, and to the security, confidentiality and administration of all personal information.

2. Applicability

- 2.1 This Policy applies to:
 - 2.1.1 All non-school based employees working for the Council, including those working from home or at non-Council locations.
 - 2.1.2 Other persons including Elected Members, Consultants, Agency staff and Contractors working for the Council, external organisations working with the Council, whilst engaged on Council business .
- 2.2 It is the responsibility of each employee and other person mentioned in Section 2.1.2 to familiarise themselves with and adhere to this Policy.
- 2.3 Adherence to this Policy is a condition of working for the council or using its assets.
- 2.4 This document is published separately on the Council's website www.westberks.gov.uk/informationmanagement
- 2.5 This Policy has had consultation with Heads of Service and Trade Unions and has been ratified by Individual Executive Member Decision.

3. Policy

- 3.1 It is the Policy of the Council to ensure that:
 - 3.1.1 All requests for information are acknowledged and dealt with promptly, and within the statutory timescales.
 - 3.1.2 Advice and assistance shall be offered to help any enquirer frame their request.
 - 3.1.3 Requests will be assessed to ensure that where applicable; the confidentiality of personal or commercially sensitive information is not breached; disclosure is in the public interest; and provision of the information would not be prejudicial to the provision of essential Council services.

- 3.1.4 Information shall only be withheld where a legitimate exemption applies, and in such a case, (where appropriate) the application of the exemption will be explained to the enquirer.
 - 3.1.5 Any enquirer shall be kept informed of the progress of their request, and of any delays to which it may be subject.
 - 3.1.6 Assistance shall be offered to any enquirer to help them understand the information they receive.
 - 3.1.7 All enquirers shall be advised of their rights to question the information received and request a review of what has not been provided.
 - 3.1.8 All enquirers shall be advised of their right to take any complaint to an internal review process (where appropriate) or to the Information Commissioner, if they are dissatisfied with the service received or the information provided.
 - 3.1.9 Information which can be made publicly available shall be published under the provisions of the Publication Scheme to the West Berkshire Council website, or, where provided in response to a request, shall be published to the Council's Disclosure Log.
 - 3.1.10 All requests shall be monitored and performance indicators made available to demonstrate compliance with the legislation.
 - 3.1.11 All staff shall be provided with training, guidance and procedures to enable them to manage requests for information.
 - 3.1.12 Guidance will be provided for Members to enable them to identify, and respond to, or pass on to the public authority, requests made by their constituents.
- 3.2 Personal information, sensitive personal information and confidential information shall be stored, updated, transferred and protected as required by law, and as required for personal privacy, commercial sensitivity, and corporate security.
- 3.3 An officer or officers shall be appointed with specific responsibility for the administration of all requests for information made under the legislation cited in 1.1 (above).
- 3.4 The management of the access to information and Data Protection regimes shall be regularly audited to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and that relevant national codes of practice are followed.
4. **Implementation**
- 4.1 This Policy will be supported and implemented by the development and publication of Standards (requirements), Procedures (how to) and Guidance (advice) where required.

5. **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 5.1 The overall responsibility for access to information and Data Protection within the Council rests with the Chief Executive.
- 5.2 The responsibility for day-to-day management of access to information throughout West Berkshire Council rests with the Head of Strategic Support, who is also responsible for maintaining this Policy, for reviewing related procedures and for providing advice and guidance on their implementation.
- 5.3 All managers are directly responsible for implementing this Policy and any sub policies and procedures within their service areas, and for the adherence of their staff and others (2.1.2).
- 5.4 All personnel detailed at 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 have an individual responsibility to adhere to this Policy and any relevant Standards and/or Procedures.

6. **Failure to comply with the Access to Information Policy**

- 6.1 This document provides staff and others with essential information regarding access to information and sets out conditions to be followed. It is the responsibility of all to whom this Policy document applies to adhere to these conditions. Failure to do so may result in:
- withdrawal of access to relevant services
 - informal disciplinary processes
 - formal disciplinary action (in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure)
- 6.2 Additionally if, after internal investigation, a criminal offence is suspected (for example under the Data Protection Act 1998), the Council may contact the police or other appropriate enforcement authority to investigate whether a criminal offence has been committed.

7. **Review**

- 7.1 This policy will be reviewed to respond to any changes and at least every 2 years.
- 7.2 The Service responsible for reviewing and maintaining this Policy is Strategic Support.

Glossary

Data Protection Act 1998 – An Act to make new provision for the regulation of the processing of information relating to individuals, including the obtaining, holding use or disclosure of such information.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – An Act to make provision for the disclosure of information held by public authorities or by persons providing services for them and to amend the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Public Records act 1958; and for connected purposes.

Other Relevant Documentation

Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations Requests Procedures (in revision)

Data Protection Act Requests Procedures (in revision)

Security Policy

Standard - Protective Marking

Secure (Encrypted) Email Guidance