



## **BOX PARISH COUNCIL**

# **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY**

Drawn up by: **Box Parish Council**

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Signed by:

### **Statement of objectives**

Box Parish Council supports the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and its objectives of openness and accountability in the public sector. The purpose of this policy is to assist employees in meeting the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.

### **The Freedom of Information Act – a summary**

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a statutory right to access the majority of records held by public authorities. In doing so it aims to make public authorities more accountable and bring about a change in the provision of information to the public from need to know to right to know.

### **The Right of Access**

The Act gives any individual (or organisation) the right to request information held by the Parish Council. Provided the request is made in writing, the Parish Council must either confirm or deny whether or not information of the description sought is held. The Parish Council must also provide applicants with such advice and assistance as may reasonably be expected.

### **The Publication Scheme**

The Parish Council is required by the Act to operate a publication scheme. This is a guide to information that the Council publishes or intends to publish routinely. It is intended that information will be made accessible unless there is a valid justification for not doing so. Effective implementation of the publication scheme will lead to fewer resources being required to fulfil access requests made under the Act. The publication scheme is available from the Council office and on the website and will be reviewed annually.

### **Applicable Fees**

Where information is published in hard copy there may be a charge. Information available on the Council's website will generally be free, although a charge may be made for printing. Charges may be levied for both the material costs (paper, printing etc.) and staff time involved in responding to requests. The calculation of these fees will be based upon the published advice of the Ministry of Justice. The Parish Council undertakes to inform the applicant of the likely cost

within a reasonable time. Requests will be deemed to have expired after three months of notification of the charges if no payment is forthcoming.

### **Timescale**

The Council will endeavour to provide the information requested within the statutory time limit of 20 working days. Where a fee is required, the information will be provided within 20 working days of the receipt of the request (excluding any time period between the notification to the applicant of any fees and the receipt by the council of those fees). In the event that operational reasons make compliance with the 20 working day time limit impossible, the applicant will be contacted, offering them as much information as possible and giving a timeframe for the provision of the outstanding information.

### **The Provision of Information**

The Council will provide advice and assistance where appropriate. In complying with the legislation, the Council may provide the information contained in its records in a different format to the one in which it is held. The Council will provide information in different formats where this will increase access to the information provided that the costs of doing so are within reason.

### **Complaints and Appeals**

Should access to information be refused, the applicant may appeal in accordance with the Parish Council's complaints policy. Applicants have a further right of appeal to the Information Commissioner. The Parish Council will work together with the Office of the Information Commissioner to resolve such appeals.

### **It is a criminal offence to alter, deface, block, erase, destroy or conceal information to prevent disclosure.**

### **Applying the Exemptions**

When responding to a request, the intention will always be to provide as much information as possible. Where an exemption applies, the Council will endeavour to still provide as much information as possible, either through editing out the exempt information or suggesting alternative sources of information.

### **Vexatious or Repeated Requests**

The Council is not obliged to respond to vexatious or repeated requests. Requests that are judged to be vexatious or repetitive in nature will be answered by the Chairman of the Council or Parish Council as deemed appropriate. Applicants have the right to appeal against such judgements through the Parish Council's complaints procedure.