

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Hadstock Parish Council is committed to openness, transparency, and accountability. We aim to make as much information as possible available to the public to promote understanding of our decisions, policies, and services.

1.2 Under the **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**, the Council has two main responsibilities:

- To **publish information proactively** through a Publication Scheme.
- To **respond to individual requests** for information.

1.3 This policy explains how the Council meets its obligations under FOIA and how members of the public can access information.

## 2. Scope of the Policy

2.1 This policy applies to all recorded information held by Hadstock Parish Council, regardless of format (paper, electronic, audio, etc.).

2.2 General enquiries for information will be handled as part of normal business. However, where a request falls under FOIA, the Council will follow the statutory process.

2.3 Some information is covered by other access regimes:

- **Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)** – for environmental matters such as planning, land use, flooding, and environmental impact.
- **UK GDPR / Data Protection Act 2018** – for personal data about the requester (handled as a **Subject Access Request**).

This policy focuses on FOIA, but the Council will route requests to the correct regime.

## 3. Publication Scheme

3.1 Hadstock Parish Council adopts the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Model Publication Scheme**.

3.2. Wherever possible, information will be made available on the Council's website. Where information is not available electronically, the Clerk will provide it in another format on request.

3.3 Some information may only be available for inspection by appointment. The Clerk will arrange access within a reasonable timescale.

#### 4. Accessing Information Not in the Publication Scheme

4.1 Anyone can request information under FOIA.

4.2 Requests must:

- be **in writing** (email or letter)
- include the requester's **name and contact address**
- describe the information requested clearly

4.3 Requests should be sent to:

##### **The Parish Clerk**

Hadstock Parish Council via email [clerk@hadstock.org.uk](mailto:clerk@hadstock.org.uk) or postal address on request

#### 5. How the Council Will Assist Applicants

5.1 Under Section 16 FOIA, the Council has a duty to provide **advice and assistance** to help individuals make or refine their request.

This may include:

- helping to clarify the information sought
- explaining what information is held
- advising if the request should be made under UK GDPR instead

#### 6. Fees and Charges

6.1 Most FOI requests are free of charge.

6.2 The Council may charge for:

- photocopying or printing
- postage
- costs permitted under FOIA where the request exceeds the statutory cost limit

6.3 If the estimated cost of compliance exceeds **£450** (equivalent to 18 hours staff time), the Council may:

- refuse the request, or
- offer to provide the information and recover full costs

6.4 The Clerk will notify the requester in advance of any charges.

## 7. Responding to Requests

7.1 The Council will respond to all valid FOI requests **within 20 working days**.

7.2 The response will confirm:

- whether the Council holds the information
- whether the information can be provided
- any exemptions that apply
- any fees payable

7.3 If more time is needed to consider the public interest test, the Council will inform the requester and provide a revised timescale.

## 8. Exemptions

8.1 FOIA contains exemptions that allow the Council to withhold certain information.

Common exemptions include:

- personal data
- commercially sensitive information
- information provided in confidence
- information that would prejudice law enforcement or investigations

8.2 The Council may refuse a request if:

- it exceeds the cost limit
- it is **vexatious**
- it repeats a previous request

8.3 If an exemption applies, the Council will explain the reason and cite the relevant section of the Act.

## 9. Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)

9.1 Environmental information will be handled under the **Environmental Information Regulations 2004**, which provide similar rights of access but with different rules.

9.2 Requests may be made verbally or in writing under EIR.

## 10. Requests for Personal Data (Subject Access Requests)

10.1 Requests for personal information about the requester are handled under the **UK GDPR**, not FOIA.

10.2 The Council has a separate **Subject Access Request Procedure and Form**.

## **11. Internal Review (Complaints)**

11.1 If a requester is dissatisfied with the Council's response, they may request an **internal review**.

11.2 The review will be carried out by the Chair or another councillor not involved in the original decision.

11.3 The Council will aim to complete the review within **20 working days**.

11.4 If the requester remains dissatisfied, they may contact:

### **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**

[www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)

## **12. Record-Keeping**

12.1 The Council will maintain a log of all FOI requests, including:

- date received
- summary of request
- outcome
- exemptions applied
- response date

12.2 This helps ensure compliance and supports the annual governance review.

## **13. Policy Review**

13.1 This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if legislation or guidance changes.