Freedom of Information Policy

GREAT WAKERING PARISH COUNCIL

**Freedom of Information**

The Parish Council adopted the Model Publication Scheme with effect from 21st January 2009. This scheme will enable members of the public to view and access information held by the Parish Council.

**Obtaining Information and Information held**

There are three ways to obtain the information:

* Parish Council website

The website holds the type of information which the Council routinely publishes e.g. minutes and agendas. The information you want may already be included in the publication scheme – so please check the documents on the website first.

* Inspect Documents held by the Clerk

If you wish to view certain documents, you should contact the Clerk, either via the facility on the website or by telephone, or in writing. Some documents require some time to locate, so it will be necessary to make an appointment. Please note the office is open Monday to Friday from 9.00am until 12pm.

* Individual Written Request

If the information is not included in the publication scheme or on the website, you may send a written request to

* The Parish Clerk, Great Wakering Parish Council, Council Offices, Little Wakering Hall Lane, Great Wakering, Essex, SS3 0HH.
* Your request must include your name, address for correspondence, and a description of the information you require.

**Council’s Response to a Written Request**

Within 20 working days of receipt of your written request the Council will:

* Confirm to you whether or not it holds the information
* Advise you if a fee will be charged
* Provide you with the information (after any relevant fee has been paid) unless an exemption applies (see ‘Exemptions’ paragraph below).

**Fees**

The Act only allows the Council to charge for answering Freedom of Information requests in the following circumstances:

1. Disbursement costs such as printing, photocopying and postage; and
2. When estimated staff costs involved in locating and or compiling the information exceed £450. Under these circumstances, the Council can refuse the request on the grounds of cost, or charge the applicant £25 per hour, plus disbursements for the estimated work.

For the majority of requests, or a series of requests from the same applicant or by different persons who appear to be acting in concert in pursuance of a campaign within a period of sixty consecutive working days, it is expected that the charge for locating and compiling information will be less than £450 and therefore, except for disbursement costs, no reimbursement can be sought. However, where costs are estimated to exceed £450, (based on an hourly charge-out rate of £25 per person per hour), the Council can decide to:

* Refuse the request; or
* Comply with the request and charge for allowable costs as prescribed in the regulations; or
* Comply with the request free of charge.

If the estimated cost of a request is more than £450, and it is decided to release the information and make a charge for the information then:

* A fee notice will be sent to the applicant requesting the appropriate fee. This will be sent within 20 working days and will state the amount and methods of payment.
* The request will not be answered until the fee has been received. The deadline for receipt of payment is three months, after which the request for information will lapse.
* If the actual cost of completing the request is more than the estimate then the Council will incur the additional cost.
* Where the cost is less than the estimated cost then the difference will be refunded to the applicant

For disbursement costs, the Council will charge 25p per sheet for photocopying and printing documents, Dvd’s or other electronic means of storage etc. will be supplied at cost price and the Council will recover all costs including the actual cost of postage or any other transmission costs from the applicant in advance of distribution. Costs will apply to Councillors and members of the public.

**Exemptions**

Some information may not be provided by the Council as there are 23 exemptions in the Freedom of Information Act, for example, personal data about individuals which is protected by the Data Protection Act 1998, or commercially confidential information.

**Further Help**

If you need help in accessing information from the Council under the Freedom of Information Act, please contact the Parish Clerk (address as before).

You will also find more detailed guidance on the website of the Information Commissioner.

**Complaints**

If you are dissatisfied with the response from the Council then you should put your complaint in writing to the Clerk (address as before). If you are still dissatisfied, you may contact the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner’s Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

Tel: 01625 545700

Email: mail@ico.gov.uk