



Sturminster Newton Town Council

Freedom of Information Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Sturminster Newton Town Council (“the Council”) is committed to openness, transparency and accountability in all its activities. The Council will make as much information as possible available to the public, in order to promote greater awareness and understanding of its policies, decisions and actions.

1.2 Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Council has two main responsibilities: to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme; and to deal properly with individual requests for information.

1.3 This policy applies to all recorded information held by the Council, regardless of format, including information created by the Council or held on its behalf by contractors, consultants, or other third-party service providers.

1.4 Requests for environmental information will be handled under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), which provide similar rights of access.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

2.2 Requests for access to personal data will be handled as Subject Access Requests under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

2.3 General requests for information will be considered as part of the Council’s normal business wherever possible. However, where a statutory right of access applies, requests will be handled under this policy.

3. Publication Scheme

3.1 In accordance with the FOIA, the Council has adopted the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) Model Publication Scheme.

3.2 The Publication Scheme commits the Council to make information available proactively as part of its routine business.

3.3 Wherever possible, information will be made available through the Council's website. Where information is available only in non-electronic form, or where an individual prefers not to use electronic means, copies may be requested from the Town Clerk.

3.4 Some information may only be available to view in person at the Council's offices. In such cases, an appointment will be arranged within a reasonable timescale.

3.5 The Council's Publication Scheme and "Guide to Information" describe what information is routinely available, how to access it, and any applicable fees. These documents are available on the Council's website or by request from the Town Clerk.

4. Requesting Information Not in the Publication Scheme

4.1 The Freedom of Information Act gives the public the right to request information held by public authorities. Anyone, anywhere in the world, may make a request; there are no restrictions based on age, nationality, or residence.

4.2 Under section 16 of the Act, the Council has a duty to provide reasonable advice and assistance to anyone making, or thinking of making, a request for information. This may include helping the requester to clarify or narrow the scope of their request.

4.3 The Council will normally respond within 20 working days of receipt. Where a qualified exemption applies and a public-interest test must be carried out, or consultation with a third party is necessary, the Council may extend this period by up to a further 20 working days. The requester will be notified in writing if an extension is required.

5. Making a Freedom of Information Request

5.1 Requests must be made in writing (including by email) to the Town Clerk, who is responsible for responding on behalf of the Council.

5.2 A valid request must include: the requester's real name; a contact address for correspondence (postal or email); and a clear description of the information sought.

5.3 The requester does not have to mention the Freedom of Information Act or explain the reason for their request.

5.4 Most requests will be free of charge. However, there may be a small charge for photocopying, printing, or postage. The Council will notify the requester in advance of any charges.

5.5 Information will be provided in the format requested, where reasonably practicable.

5.6 The Council is not required to create new information to answer a request, only to disclose information that already exists and is recorded.

6. Exemptions and Refusals

6.1 The Council must confirm whether it holds the requested information and supply it unless an exemption applies. Some exemptions are absolute (e.g. personal data about another individual); others are qualified, meaning the Council must apply a public-interest test to decide whether the information should be released.

6.2 A request may also be refused if it would exceed the cost limit of £450 (equivalent to 18 hours of staff time at £25 per hour); it is vexatious or repeated; or it does not describe the information sufficiently clearly to identify it.

6.3 Where a request is refused, the Council will issue a written Refusal Notice explaining: the reason for refusal; the relevant exemption(s) relied upon; and the requester's right to seek an internal review or complain to the ICO.

6.4 Internal Review Procedure: Requesters dissatisfied with the handling of their request may ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the Council's response. The review will be carried out by a senior officer or councillor not involved in the original decision. A response will be issued within 20 working days wherever possible.

6.5 If the requester remains dissatisfied after the internal review, they may complain to the Information Commissioner's Office: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Website: www.ico.org.uk

7. Fees and Costs

7.1 The Council may charge for disbursements such as photocopying, printing, or postage, in line with its published fees schedule.

7.2 If the estimated cost of compliance exceeds the statutory limit of £450, the Council may: refuse the request; or assist the requester to refine the request to bring it within the limit.

8. Roles, Responsibilities and Training

8.1 The Town Clerk is the Council's Freedom of Information Officer and is responsible for logging and coordinating all FOI and EIR requests; ensuring statutory deadlines are met; and maintaining records of requests and responses.

8.2 All councillors and employees share responsibility for supporting compliance and must promptly assist with locating information when requested.

8.3 The Council will ensure staff and councillors receive appropriate guidance and training on handling information requests and protecting information rights.

8.4 Contracts with suppliers and service providers will include provisions requiring cooperation with FOI and EIR requests relating to information held on the Council's behalf.

9. Monitoring and Review

9.1 The Council will monitor the number, timeliness, and outcome of FOI and EIR requests to ensure continuous improvement and compliance.

9.2 This policy will be reviewed at least every two years or sooner if required by changes in legislation or guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office.

9.3 This policy should be read alongside the Council's: Publication Scheme and Guide to Information; Records Retention and Disposal Policy; and Privacy and Data Protection Policies.

Adopted: October 2025

Next Review Due: July 2027