FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

Policy and Procedure for Handling Requests for Information

Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is the legal responsibility of local authorities and other public organisations. It is part of a wider group of national policies which aim to modernise government and show people how it is working on their behalf. Since January 2005 people have had a right to know what decisions are taken on their behalf, and how services are run. They can ask to see not only printed leaflets and other publications, but also any background files and other records relating to the business of the organisation, unless statutory exemptions apply.

1. West Keal and Keal Cotes Parish Council has created and publicised a Publication Scheme, detailing which information is accessible and listing any applicable fees for providing such information.

2. Additional information not covered by the Publication Scheme can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3. Requests for information must be submitted by letter or email to the Clerk to the Council and should include a contact name, correspondence address, and a clear description of the information sought.

4. The Clerk to the Council is responsible for handling all information requests.

5. The council will first determine if it holds the requested data; if not, the applicant will be notified.

6. If the information is available, a fee notice (when relevant) will be issued, estimating costs up to £450. Requests exceeding this amount may be refused, with a refusal notice provided. No information will be supplied until payment is received, and the response time may be extended up to three months while awaiting payment. Once paid, a reply will be sent within 20 days.

7. Where information is held and no exemption applies, it will usually be provided within 20 working days, unless clarification is needed or a fee is required.

8. If a request lacks clarity, the Clerk will contact the applicant for further details. The 20-day period starts once clarification is received.

9. If the Council does not hold the information but knows of another authority that might, either the request will be forwarded, or the applicant will be informed of the correct public body.

10. When disclosure is not possible, a refusal notice will specify the exemption and any rights to appeal. Refusals may occur if:
    - The cost is over £450
    - The information cannot be located despite reasonable efforts,
    - The request is considered vexatious,
    - The information is already available or freely accessible.

    Appeal details directed to the Information Commissioner will be included in these cases.

11. If information falls under a 'qualified exemption' in the FOI Act, the 20-day deadline may be extended to assess the public interest test for withholding or releasing the information.

12. Any complaints regarding information requests are referred to the full Council for review.

13. Correspondence from the Information Commissioner's Office concerning FOI matters will also be forwarded to the full Council.

14. The Parish Council will keep records of all FOI requests.