Freedom of Information Policy

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Introduction

S. 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the 2000 Act") gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. It also sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities. Local Councils are subject to the 2000 Act. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is the regulator of the freedom of information regime

Meriden Parish Council is committed to being open and transparent about the work that it does and services that it provides for the local community. The Council will make as much information available as possible, to promote a greater awareness and understanding of the Council's policies, decisions and actions. Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Meriden Parish Council has two main responsibilities – to produce a Publication Scheme and to deal with individual requests for information.

Scope

General requests for information will be considered as part of Meriden Parish Council's normal day to day business. However, there are also statutory information access regimes that can be used to access specific information. This Policy concerns itself with that information which can be accessed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Publication Scheme

Meriden Parish Council has a Publication Scheme. The Publication Scheme commits the Council to make information available to the public as part of its normal business activities. Wherever possible Meriden Parish Council will provide information through its website. Where information is available in a non-electronic form or when an individual does not wish to access information electronically, an individual can contact the Parish Clerk and ask for the information to be made available to them. Some information may only be available to view in person at the Parish Council office within specific working hours. In these circumstances an appointment to view the information will be arranged within a reasonable timescale.

Meriden Parish Council will ensure that members of the public are aware of the information that is made readily available to them and provide details of how this information can be accessed and any charges which may be applicable. This information is available through Meriden Parish Council's Publication Scheme which is available on the Council's website.

Requesting Information not found in the Publication Scheme

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public the right to access information held by Councils and other public bodies. The Act also explains what is expected of Councils and the types of information that needs to be made available.

Anyone can make a request for information – there are no restrictions on age, nationality or place of residence (they do not necessarily need to be a resident of Meriden Parish).

Making a Freedom of Information Request

Freedom of Information Requests need to be made in writing to the Parish Clerk who is responsible for responding to requests – either by letter or e-mail. When making a Freedom of Information request, the following information must be included:

- Name (requests sent using pseudonyms are not validly made requests (e.g. Mr Santa Claus, North Pole Lane);
- Contact details;
- A detailed description of the recorded information required in a legible form and capable of being used for subsequent reference.

When requesting information, the enquirer does not have to mention the Freedom of Information Act, nor the reasons why the information is sought. Most Freedom of Information requests will be free of charge. However, there may be a small charge for photocopies or postage. Meriden Parish Council will notify the enquirer in advance if there are any charges associated with the request. For requests not covered by an exemption, Meriden Parish Council will respond to all Freedom of Information Requests within 20 working days following its receipt.

Exemptions

Anyone making a request to a public authority for information must be informed whether the public authority holds that information and supplied with it. Some information does not have to be revealed, such as personal information or commercially sensitive data. You can view a full list of these exemptions on the Information Commissioner's website – www.ico.org.uk.

Public authorities are not obliged to deal with requests if the costs of finding the information exceed a set amount known as the appropriate limit. Under s.12 of the 2000 Act, an authority is not required to comply with a request if to do so means exceeding an appropriate cost limit as set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the 2004 Regulations). This is £450 for

local authorities, equivalent to 18 hours' work at £25 per hour regardless of actual hourly rates. Public authorities can only include certain activities when estimating whether responding to a request would breach the £450 cost limit. These are establishing whether information is held, locating and retrieving information and extracting relevant information from the document containing it. Councils that refuse to disclose the requested information can discuss with the requester whether they would like to modify their request so as to reduce costs to below the £450 limit.

Public authorities need not comply with vexatious or repeated requests, refer to Meriden Parish Council's Vexatious Complaints Policy.

Meriden Parish Council may ask for the request to be more specific in order for the information to be provided. If Meriden Parish Council refuses to provide the information requested, the enquirer can ask the Council to review their decision. If the enquirer is still not satisfied with the response received, they are advised to contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

Policy Review

Meriden Parish Council will review this Policy as is necessary and appropriate.