

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 **QUICK GUIDE – WHAT DOES THE ACT MEAN FOR ME**

The Freedom of Information Act has been in force since 1st January 2005. This gives people a new 'right to know'. Any member of the public has the right to ask the Council for the recorded information it holds, to be told whether the Council holds it and to have access to the information the Council holds, as long as the information isn't exempt from being provided.

Where is information available?

The Council already tries to make as much information available as it can. If the information is already publicly available, for example in Council leaflets and publications such as in public registers, on the Council's Publication Scheme, or on the Council's website at www.sunderland.gov.uk, then you should look there first for the information.

The information isn't available – how can I ask for it?

Requests should be made in writing. The Council has a standard form to help you fill out a request, or you can write a letter, or e-mail if you prefer. It will help the Council if you mark it clearly 'Freedom of Information Request'. You can post or hand your request in at any Council office, addressed to the Information Governance Team, Law and Governance, Commercial and Corporate Services, Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR2 7DN, or by e-mail to (freedom.information@sunderland.gov.uk). If you would like help with making a request, you can call in to a Council office, telephone or e-mail and ask Council staff for help in completing the request form.

What will happen next?

Once your request has been made, you will be told whether the Council holds the information you have asked for, and you will be able to see the information the Council does hold. The information will be provided promptly and, in any case, within 20 days unless it is, or may be 'exempt' from being provided under the Act. If the request is large and may exceed the fees limit of 18 hours officer time we may ask you to refine or refocus your request. The cost of photocopying and postage may also be charged if paper copies are required. Sometimes the Council may need to contact you to check we have understood your request. If you are able to give us a telephone number, or e-mail address to get in touch with you, this will save time and the cost of writing to you. By working together we can keep down the cost of giving you the information you need.

Will I be given all the information I ask for?

Some information is exempt from disclosure, for example, if it is personal information about someone else, or if the information is confidential for another of the reasons set out in the Act, and it is not in the public interest to publish the details. For example, it would be unlikely to be in the public interest for a public authority to publish confidential plans for dealing with a security alert. Other information, for example, commercially confidential information, or information provided in confidence may be exempt. The Act does not, generally, require a public authority to duplicate work already carried out or ongoing, and information that is already available to the public will not be provided separately. Where

information is intended for future publication you may be asked to wait until it is published.

What if I think my request hasn't been dealt with properly?

You can use the Council's review procedure. The Council will attempt to resolve any concerns with you as soon as possible. If this does not deal with your concerns, you can ask the Council to review how it has handled your request. If you are not satisfied with the Council's response at that stage, you may want to refer your concerns to the Information Commissioner.

Where can I get further information?

Further information on making a request can be obtained by e-mailing the Council at freedom.information@sunderland.gov.uk

The Information Commissioner is responsible for monitoring public authorities' compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. The Commissioner's office can be contacted at:-

Office of the Information Commissioner,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

Helpline: 08456 306060

01625 545745

Fax: 01625 524510

Web address: www.ico.gov.uk