

Stonesfield Parish Council

Freedom of Information (FOI) Policy

1. Introduction

Stonesfield Parish Council is committed to openness, transparency, and accountability. Under the **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**, the public has a general right of access to recorded information held by the Council, subject to certain exemptions.

This policy sets out how the Council will handle FOI requests, the responsibilities of councillors and staff, and the standards the Council will apply when responding.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors who may hold or process information on behalf of the Council.

It covers all recorded information held in any form, including:

- Emails
 - Paper records
 - Electronic files
 - Minutes and agendas
 - Photographs, audio files, and digital documents
 - Information held on council devices or approved cloud services
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3. Principles of Access to Information

Stonesfield Parish Council will:

- **Comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000**
- **Disclose information proactively** through its Publication Scheme
- **Respond to written FOI requests within 20 working days**
- **Provide advice and assistance** to help applicants refine or clarify their requests
- **Maintain accurate records** to support effective disclosure

- **Apply exemptions fairly and consistently** where disclosure would breach legislation, confidentiality or data protection requirements
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4. Submitting a Freedom of Information Request

FOI requests must:

- Be made in writing (email or post)
- Include the applicant's name
- Provide a return email or postal address
- Describe the information requested

Requests should be submitted to:

The Clerk

Email: clerk@stonesfield-pc.gov.uk

Post: (Insert postal address)

If a request is unclear, the Council will contact the applicant to seek clarification.

5. Responding to Requests

The Council will:

- Acknowledge requests where appropriate
- Confirm whether it holds the requested information
- Provide the information unless an exemption applies
- Respond within **20 working days** (statutory requirement)
- Provide information in the applicant's preferred format where reasonable

Where information cannot be released due to a statutory exemption (e.g. personal data, commercial sensitivity, safeguarding), the Council will explain:

- Why the exemption applies
 - Whether it is an absolute or qualified exemption
 - If qualified, how the public interest test was applied
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6. Fees and Charges

Most information is provided **free of charge**.

Charges may apply for:

- Photocopying
- Printing
- Postage
- Disbursements
- Requests exceeding the statutory cost limit (£450)

Where charges apply, the Council will issue a fees notice.

The 20-day time limit pauses until payment is received.

7. Vexatious or Repeated Requests

The Council may refuse requests that are:

- Vexatious
- Repeated without reasonable justification
- Intended to disrupt or burden the Council's operations

Decisions to refuse a request on these grounds must be approved by the Clerk and reported to Council.

8. Personal Data (Data Protection Act & UK GDPR)

Information that identifies living individuals is protected under the **Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR**.

Such information will only be released where it is lawful and appropriate.

Applicants seeking their own personal data must make a **Subject Access Request (SAR)**, not an FOI request.

9. Records Management

The Council will maintain its records in an organised, secure, and accessible manner to facilitate:

- Transparency

- Legal compliance
- Accurate disclosure under FOI

Records will be retained and disposed of in accordance with the Council's **Retention Policy**.

10. Publication Scheme

Stonesfield Parish Council has adopted the **ICO Model Publication Scheme**.

The Scheme explains what information the Council publishes routinely and how it may be accessed.

This FOI Policy operates alongside the Publication Scheme.

11. Internal Review Procedure

If an applicant is dissatisfied with how the Council has handled their request, they may request an internal review.

Internal review requests must be:

- Submitted in writing
- Received within 40 working days of the Council's response

Requests will be reviewed by a member of the Council not involved in the original decision, usually the Chair or Vice-Chair.

12. Right to Complain to the ICO

If the applicant remains dissatisfied after the internal review, they may contact the Information Commissioner's Office:

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

www.ico.org.uk

Tel: 0303 123 1113

13. Training & Awareness

The Council will ensure that councillors and staff receive training on:

- FOI responsibilities

- Handling requests
- Information management
- Exemptions and public interest tests

Training will be refreshed periodically.

14. Compliance & Consequences

Failure to comply with FOI obligations may result in:

- Formal complaints to the ICO
- Enforcement actions
- Reputational damage to the Council

Councillors and staff must follow this policy. Breaches may be referred to the Monitoring Officer or dealt with under the Council's Conduct or Disciplinary procedures.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to legislative changes.

Adopted: 6 May 2026

Reviewed: