Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council

Freedom of Information (FOI) Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council ("the Council") is committed to openness, transparency, and accountability in the delivery of its services and decision-making. The Council aims to make as much information as possible publicly available to support public understanding of its work.

1.2 Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Council has two principal duties:

- To adopt and maintain a **Publication Scheme** outlining the information that is routinely available.
- To respond to **individual requests for information** that is not otherwise published.

1.3 A current copy of this Policy and the Council's Publication Scheme will be available on the Council's website and in hard copy upon request.

2. Scope

2.1 General enquiries and requests for information may be dealt with informally as part of the Council's day-to-day operations.

2.2 This Policy applies specifically to requests made under the **Freedom of Information Act 2000**, which provides a legal right for any person to request access to recorded information held by the Council.

3. Publication Scheme

3.1 The Council maintains an approved Publication Scheme in line with guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the "Model Publication Scheme for Parish Councils."

3.2 Whenever possible, information will be made available through the Council's website. Where information is not available online, or where an individual requests an alternative format, the Clerk will assist in providing access.

3.3 In some cases, information may only be accessible for inspection in person. Where this is necessary, an appointment will be arranged within a reasonable timeframe.

3.4 The Council will ensure that the public is aware of the information available through the Publication Scheme, the methods of access, and any applicable charges.

4. Requesting Information Not in the Publication Scheme

4.1 Any person may make a request for recorded information held by the Council under the FOIA.

4.2 There are **no restrictions** regarding the requester's identity, nationality, or place of residence.

5. Making a Freedom of Information Request

5.1 Requests must be made **in writing** (email or letter) and sent to the **Clerk**, who is responsible for coordinating responses.

5.2 A valid request must include:

- The requester's **name**
- **Contact details** (email or postal address)
- A clear **description** of the information requested

5.3 The requester does **not** need to mention the FOIA or state the reason for the request.

5.4 The Council will normally provide information **free of charge**. However, reasonable charges may be applied for:

- Photocopying or printing
- Postage
- Costs permitted under FOIA where the request exceeds the statutory cost limit

5.5 The Council will respond to all FOIA requests **within 20 working days**, unless an extension is permitted under the Act.

6. Exemptions

6.1 Some information may be withheld if it falls under a **lawful exemption**, such as:

- Personal data relating to individuals
- Commercially sensitive or confidential information
- Information prejudicial to law enforcement or security

6.2 The Council may refuse a request where the estimated cost of compliance **exceeds £450**, in line with statutory guidance.

6.3 The Council may request clarification if a request is unclear.

6.4 If a request is refused, the requester will be provided with a written explanation and advised of:

- The right to request an **internal review**
- The right to complain to the **Information Commissioner's Office**

7. Policy Review

7.1 This Policy will be reviewed **at least annually** or sooner if legislation or guidance changes.

8. Contact Details

All Freedom of Information requests should be made in writing to the Clerk.

Clerk to Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council

Contact details (email, postal correspondence address, and telephone number where applicable) are published and kept up to date on the Council's website:

https://highcliffewalkford-pc.gov.uk/

Requests may be submitted using the contact form or via the Clerk's published email address: Clerk@highcliffewalkford-pc.gov.uk

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