

Barnet Council

Summary of Access to Information Procedures

Freedom of Information:

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 gives a general right to see recorded information held by public authorities, subject to a number of exemptions. Public authorities include central and local government (and any organisation deemed a public authority under the Act).

Barnet Council has two main responsibilities under the Act. The Council must adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme, and it must respond to individual requests for information.

A Publication Scheme provides a structured list of information routinely released and contains a commitment to make this information available to all. It must set out:

- The way the information is structured
- How the information will be made available – for example as a document in the form of a report or memorandum, or in electronic format such as a spreadsheet and
- Whether the Council intends to charge for providing the information

If you submit an Individual Access Request, the Council is legally required to provide the information within 20 working days of receipt, but will attempt to provide it sooner if possible. Your request will be acknowledged in writing, and the Council will then contact you to make suitable arrangements for you to view it or receive a copy. If it is going to take longer than 20 working days to collate the information, we will tell you why and how long it will take.

If the information cannot be released due to an exemption, or the expense of retrieving that information exceeds the cost threshold of £450 (the level beyond which you can be required to pay), or if the Council does not hold the information, we will tell you.

Examples of exemptions are listed below:

- Information is already reasonably accessible to the public by other means (for example, it may already be listed in the publication Scheme or available on the website)
- Personal information (this is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998)
- Information provided to the Council in confidence
- Information prohibited from disclosure under other laws, obligations or legislation

- Information which may prejudice law enforcement matters, legal professional privilege, information which would prejudice the commercial interests of any person

The Data Protection Act:

The Data Protection Act 1998 regulates the use of personal information and places duties upon the Council in terms of how we collect, process, store and disclose information about people.

The information can be held on computer or in certain cases in manual files. The reasons why the Council holds this information and to whom we can disclose it are listed in the Data Protection Register. This is a public document held by the Information Commissioner. If you have any queries about Data Protection or need any further information, contact the Council's Data Protection Officer on 020 8359 7080 or email data.protection@barnet.gov.uk.

The Audit Commission Act

Section 15 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 gives a right of inspection of accounts to be audited and related documents

Access to Meetings and Papers:

The Council welcomes residents to Council meetings and also to meetings of the Cabinet and Committees. Meetings normally take place at Hendon Town Hall (due to a major refurbishment of the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms at the Town Hall, it is anticipated that following the Annual Meeting of Council on 13 May 2008, all meetings will be held at Barnet House, 1255 High Road, Whetstone, London N20 0EJ) and start at 7.00pm. Details of meetings will be given at least five working days beforehand on the Town Hall notice board and on the Council's [website diary](#). You can inspect the agenda and papers for meetings (except a limited number of confidential items) in person at the Town Hall or on the Council's website. After the meetings you can inspect the minutes on request, subject to payment of photocopying and postage charges.

Occasionally we may ask you to leave a meeting, or part of it - if a confidential matter is to be discussed and we are permitted by law to exclude the public. This will only happen when such things as personal information, certain information regarding legal or criminal proceedings or the commercially sensitive terms of contacts and negotiations are involved where publicity would not be in the public interest. We would explain in these cases why you are being asked to leave.

Background papers used by officers in the preparation of reports listed at the end of committee reports can also be inspected. Requests to see these should be made to the author of the report. Again there may occasionally be some papers which contain confidential information which cannot be disclosed.

The Council's Committee report and decision making system provides access to committee reports, decisions, delegated powers decisions and has a search facility which allows you to access all agendas, reports and decisions for a particular meeting. You can also track the progress of reports and their associated minutes through the executive process. Even if you are not sure where to find a particular agenda, report of decision, our simple yet powerful search mechanism will allow you to find what you are looking for.