Information Governance
Support Services
by Stockport Council

Freedom of Information Act

How to complete the publication scheme for schools

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Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) requires all schools to adopt and maintain a publication scheme.

The legislation commits a school to:

'produce and publish the method by which the specific information will be available so that it can be easily identified and accessed by members of the public'.

To help schools meet this obligation we have produced a template guide to information held. This is based on the ICO's 'Guide to Information provided by schools under the model publication scheme' and forms the basis of the schools' commitment.

A school is in breach of FOIA if it has not adopted the model scheme (guide to information held) or is not publishing in accordance with it.

Information included in the guide to information

The template guide to information held, lists the information we think that schools should hold and make available within each class. When completed this will provide a list of all the information the school will make routinely available, explain how it can be accessed and whether or not a charge will be made for it. Schools must:

- State how the specific information can be obtained and if there is a cost involved.
- Complete the relevant columns in the template guide.
- Ensure the public can access the completed guide and the information listed in it.

This guide is intended to assist schools by giving examples of the kinds of information that we would expect them to provide in order to meet their commitments under the FOIA model publication scheme.

Schools should note that they are not expected to routinely publish all information; for example, where they do not hold it or where it is publicly available elsewhere or is exempt. We list such circumstances below.

We would expect schools to make the information in the guide available unless:

- they do not hold the information;
- the information is exempt under one of the FOIA exemptions or Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) exceptions, or its release is prohibited under another statute;

- the information is readily and publicly available from an external website; such information may have been provided either by the school or on its behalf. The school must provide a direct link to that information;
- the information is archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible; or
- it would be impractical or resource-intensive to prepare the material for routine release.

If the information is only held by another school, the school should provide details of where to obtain it.

Completing the columns

We realise that not all schools are the same size or carry out the same functions. Therefore, if a school holds, and can make routinely available, more information than that is listed it can be added. Equally, if information listed is not held it can be removed.

Example

Curriculum circulars and Statutory Instruments	**Website** www.school.sch.uk/cc/docs **Hard copy** Contact School Business Manager	Free 10p per sheet
~~Disclosure logs~~		
Asset Register	Inspection only	Free

In this example, the school would be making information about curriculum circulars and statutory instruments available without charge on its website as well as in hard copy. Asset registers are available by inspection only. The school here does not currently have a disclosure log, so it has been removed.

Manner of publication

It is important that schools make access to information covered by the scheme as easy as possible.

On the school website

The guide to information and a large part of the information covered by the scheme should be made available on the website. If required, information should also be available in hard copy.

In exceptional circumstances schools may need to provide information through means such as allowing visits to the school. How to make arrangements to do this should be made clear.

Fees and charging

Information available through a school's guide to information held should be readily available at a low or at no cost to the public. If a school does charge for this information, the charges should be justifiable, clear and kept to a minimum. Providing information under FOIA should not be done for profit.

Charges may be made for activities such as printing, photocopying and postage as well as information that the school is legally authorised to charge for. Anyone requesting information must be informed of any charge before the information is provided. Schools may ask for payment before providing the information.

The actual charges should be entered in the column on the guide to information. A schedule of charges is attached to the template and this should be used to set out the basis on which the charges are being made. The Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO) provide guidance on this, Charging for information in a publication scheme on their website.

FOI requests and the publication scheme

Example:

Annual Report	**Website** www.school.sch.uk/reports **Hard copy** Contact School Business Manager	Free £2
Staffing Structure	**Website** www.school.sch.uk/staffing **Hard copy** Contact School Business Manager	Free 10p per sheet

The school in the above example has a website and is therefore able to make information available at no cost online. For hard copies it is only charging for the actual costs incurred. If required, they must be able to justify why they have calculated the charge to be 10p per sheet or £2 for the report.

It is important to note that a publication scheme simply sets out the information that is routinely available. Information that is not listed in the guide to information can still be requested and should be made available unless it can be legitimately withheld.

More information

If you need any more information about this or need assistance with any other aspect of freedom of information, please don't hesitate to contact us.
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