



Definition document for district councils in Northern Ireland

This guidance gives examples of the kinds of information that we would expect district councils in Northern Ireland to provide in order to meet their commitments under the model publication scheme. We would expect district councils to make the information in this definition document available unless:

- they do not hold the information;
- the information is exempt under one of the FOI exemptions or Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) exceptions, or its release is prohibited under another statute;
- the information is archived, out of date or otherwise inaccessible; or,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.

The guidance is not meant to give a definitive list. The legal commitment is to the model publication scheme, and authorities should look to provide as much information as possible on a routine basis.

Who we are and what we do.

Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts.

We would normally expect information in this class to be for the current year only

- **Council democratic structure chart**
- **Council directorate structure chart**
- **Location and opening times of council offices**
- **Currently elected Councillors' information and contact details**
- **Contacts for all customer-facing departments**

Local authorities should already be publishing as much information as possible about how they can be contacted. This should give some indication at least of the role of the contact, phone number and where used e mail address. It always assists to provide a named contact where this can be done.

- **Most recent election results**

The results of the most recent elections for councillors on the council should be available.

- **Relationships with other authorities**

It will assist members of the public to appreciate the role of a local authority if the respective roles of different local authorities are explained, partnership arrangements with other authorities are detailed and the relationship with

government departments is outlined. Where a local authority has responsibility for the provision of facilities for office holders who are not themselves part of the local authority, for example the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, the role of the local authority should be explained.

What we spend and how we spend it

Financial information relating to projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit.

We would expect as a minimum that financial information for the current and previous two financial years should be available. We would expect information to be available not only for the council as a whole but also for directorates or departments as cost units.

Where money is allocated to specific cost centres within a council and it assists in understanding how public money is spent, councils should consider publishing information at this level.

- **Annual statement of accounts and accompanying report**
- **Annual revenue budget estimates**
- **Budget reports, actual and variance reports**

We would normally expect this information to be readily available under the publication scheme in order to provide current information about the management of financial affairs. Preferably, budget reports should be available quarterly or in accordance with the manner in which they are reported within the council.

- **Capital programme**

Information should be made available on major plans for capital expenditure including any public private partnership contracts, together with expenditure.

- **The members' allowances scheme and the allowances paid under it to councillors each year**

Details of the allowances and expenses that can be claimed or incurred. It should include the total of the allowances and expenses, by reference to categories, paid to individual councillors produced in line with the council's policies. Categories will be such headings as travel, subsistence, accommodation.

- **Staff pay and grading structure**
- **Procurement procedures**
- **Details of contracts currently being tendered**
- **List and value of corporate and departmental contracts**

We do not expect that all information about all contracts however small to be included in this scheme. We would normally expect there to be ready access

to information about contracts that are large enough to have required a tendering process in accordance with financial regulations.

- **NI auditor's annual letter and report**
- **Financial regulations**
- **Funding for partnership arrangements**

Where the council takes the lead role in a partnership arrangement, we would expect details of the funding arrangements for the partnership to be available. Where a council contributes funding to a partnership arrangement managed by another authority, we would expect details of the funding provided to be published.

- **Grant aid scheme and payments**

What our priorities are and how we are doing

Strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews.

We would expect as a minimum that information for the current and previous two financial years should be available. We would expect information to be available not only for the council as a whole but also for directorates or departments where this is available.

- **Annual reports**
- **Strategies and plans for services provided by the council**
- **Best value performance plans, priorities and improvement reports**
- **Strategies developed in partnership with other authorities**
- **Economic development strategy and plan**
- **Forward plan**
- **Statistical information about the activities of the authority and its departments**
- **Statutory Returns**

How we make decisions

Decision making processes and records of decisions.

We would expect information in this class to be available at least for the current and previous three years.

- **Timetable of council meetings**
- **Agendas, officers' reports, background papers and minutes of council committee and sub committee meetings**

This will be the information that is required to be publicly available under local authority access to information rules.

- **Major policy proposals and decisions**

Information that can be made available to the public without damaging

relations with other public bodies or internal policy development.

- **Background information relating to major policy proposal and decisions**

This will include facts, and analyses of facts, relevant and important to the framing of major policy proposals and decisions.

- **Summaries of results of consultations with the public and other stakeholders**

Our policies and procedures

Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering our services and responsibilities.

We would expect information in this class to be current information only

- **Policies and procedures for the conduct of council business**

Procedural standing orders, internal guidance about the division of responsibilities between committees, delegated authority, policies on communications between councillors and members of staff.

- **Policies and procedures for the provision of services**

Policies of the council that affect the manner in which services are provided. This will include any policies and procedures for handling requests for information.

- **Policies and procedures about the recruitment and employment of staff**

If vacancies are advertised as part of recruitment policies, details of current vacancies will be readily available.

A number of policies, for example health and safety, will cover both the provision of services and the employment of staff. The Equality Scheme/Statement published in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998 should be included.

- **Customer service**

Standards for providing services to the council's customers, including the complaint procedure. Complaints procedures will include those covering requests for information and operating the publication scheme.

- **Internal instructions, manuals and guidelines**

Where access to internal instructions, manuals and guidelines for dealing with the business of the council would assist public understanding of the way

decisions are made these should be readily available. We would not expect information that might damage the operations of the council to be revealed.

- **Records management and personal data policies**

This will include information security policies, records retention, destruction and archive policies, and data protection (including data sharing) policies.

- **Charging regimes and policies**

Details of any statutory charging regimes should be provided. Charging policies should include charges made for information routinely published and clearly state what costs are to be recovered together with the basis on which they are made and how they are calculated.

Lists and registers

We would expect information in this class to be information in currently maintained lists and registers only.

- **Public registers**

Where a public authority is obliged to maintain a register and to make the information in it available for inspection by the public, it is accepted that in most circumstances that the existing provisions covering access will suffice. We would expect however that authorities do publicise which public registers they hold and how the information in them is to be made public. Where registers contain personal information, authorities must ensure that this is protected by the data protection principles.

- **Register of councillors' financial and other interests**
- **Register of gifts and hospitality**
- **FOIA disclosure log**

Where a council produces an information disclosure log indicating the information that has been provided in response to requests it should be readily available. Disclosure logs are themselves recommended as good practice.

- **Asset registers including information asset register**

We would not expect councils to publish all details from all asset registers. We would expect some information from capital asset registers to be available. If a council has prepared an information asset register for the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005, it should publish the contents.

The services we offer

Information about the services we offer, including leaflets, guidance and newsletters.

We would normally expect information in this class to be for the current year only.

- **Regulatory and licensing responsibilities**
- **Services for local businesses**
- **Services for other organisations**
- **Services for members of the public**
- **Services for which the council is entitled to recover a fee together with those fees**
- **Information for visitors to the area, leisure information, events, museum and archive collections**
- **Leaflets, booklets and newsletters**
- **Advice and guidance**
- **Media releases**

Generally this is an extension of part of the first class of information. While the first class of information provides an overview of the responsibilities of the council and its departments, this class includes details of the services which are provided. The starting point would normally be a list or lists of the services that fall within the responsibility of the council, linked to details of these services.

We would expect to see details of all the services provided by councils, for example such things as environmental health, building control, and waste collection, disposal and recycling.