

BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (DRAFT) PUBLICATION SCHEME

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to the freedom of information, in promoting a shared understanding of the work we undertake within the Council, and with our partners. Through this publication scheme we aim to provide clear and timely information about the way we make and carry out our decisions. We will deal with individual requests for information by providing clear advice and assistance courteously, promptly and effectively.

ABOUT BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council serves a population of some 183,000 and is the fourth smallest of the 36 Metropolitan Districts in England. It has a small but growing ethnic population (3.6% of the total population) and the second largest Jewish community outside London (an estimated 19% percentage of the population living in the Prestwich and Whitefield areas of the Borough are Jewish). The Metropolitan Borough of Bury was established in 1974 and comprises six townships – Bury, Prestwich, Radcliffe, Ramsbottom, Tottington and Whitefield. It includes City suburbs, urban centres and semi-rural areas. It covers an area of 9,919 hectares of which the majority (just under 60%) is open land. Communications are excellent, with the M60, M62 and M66 serving the Borough and the Metrolink passenger system providing a quick and easy link to Manchester and beyond. The Borough has a diverse local economy, which combines a manufacturing sector with service industries. The Council operates on a “Leader and Cabinet” model of political management. The political arrangements are also based on an “Executive/Scrutiny” split (basically the Executive takes most of the major decisions whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions develop policy and hold the Executive to account). The Council has also established six Area Boards to allow local communities to have their say about Council Services and policies affecting their areas.

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council delivers a full range of services typical of the Metropolitan Borough Council including:-

- Education
- Social Services
- Housing
- Planning
- Highways
- Environmental Services
- Trading Standards
- Waste Collection and Management
- Licensing
- Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF INFORMATION?

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies to the Council, as it does to all other public authorities. The Act gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by the Council. It sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on the Council.

Any person who requests information from the Council will, from January 2005, be entitled:

- to know whether the Council holds that information and, if so
- to be supplied, subject to exemptions, with that information.

The Act requires the Council also to adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out the classes of information that it publishes or intends to publish; the manner in which the information in each class is or is intended to be published, and whether the material is, or is intended to be, available to the public free or on payment of a charge. The amount of any charge is limited by regulation.

WHAT IS A PUBLICATION SCHEME?

A publication scheme is a guide to the information that the Council publishes or intends to publish in the future, whether on paper, over the internet or by any other means.

WHAT ARE "CLASSES" OF INFORMATION?

In order to help you find the information you need, the information which the Council publishes, or intends to publish, through this Scheme is divided into a number of 'classes' These classes are grouped into the following categories, reflecting the various services we provide, and the different kinds of work we do. You can trace the information you are looking for from these categories which are divided into sub-categories, and then into classes which describe in more detail what is available in the scheme.

These are the categories of information covered by this Scheme:-

- Council and Democracy
- Policies, Strategies and Management Information
- Jobs and Careers
- Council Tax Benefits, Debts and Grants
- Regeneration, Business and Partnerships
- Health, Welfare and Social Care
- Art, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage
- Education and Training
- Housing
- Transport and Streets
- Environmental Management, Green Space and Parks
- Libraries
- Customer Services, Advice and Complaints
- Trading Standards, Shopping and Consumer Advice
- Planning, Regulation and Enforcement
- Corporate Publications and News
- Community, People and Living

HOW WILL I REQUEST THE INFORMATION?

You can request information from the Council by contacting*(details to be included for one nominated officer and contact centres?)*

Under the Freedom of Information Act, you do not need to have any particular reason for requesting information, but it might help the Council to identify and provide you with the information you need if you can be as specific as possible.

The Act is retrospective so that you can request information which the Council already held when the Act came into force.

You will be able to use information provided under the Act for any purpose, and pass it on to any one else.

WILL THERE BE A CHARGE FOR THIS INFORMATION?

There will normally be no charge for making a request for information.

However, charges may be applied if significant amounts of work or copying of printed material is required. These charges will be calculated in accordance to the fees regulations under the Act and will be published as part of the publication scheme.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE PROVIDED?

Information will if possible be provided in a variety of formats - for example Braille, audio, different languages - upon request. You can express your preference for the information to be provided to you in a particular way which can be:-

- a copy in permanent form, or other form acceptable to you or
- provision of a reasonable opportunity to inspect a record containing the information or
- provision of a digest or summary.

CAN I SEE ALL BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S INFORMATION?

The Council is committed to including as much information in the Publication Scheme by 2005 as it can.

Therefore, once the Freedom of Information Act is fully in force, if you have searched the publication scheme and cannot find what you are looking for, you can make a request for the information.

However, where some of the information comes within an "exempt" category under the Freedom of Information Act or other relevant legislation, it will be published with the exempt material deleted.

Exemptions in the Act can be absolute or qualified. Absolute exemption means that the exempt information will not normally be made available to you at all. Qualified exemption means that the information will be made available to you, unless the public interest in not disclosing it outweighs the public interest in disclosure. This means that the Council will have to consider and decide where the public interest is greater.

Some of the absolute exemptions include information which is or relates to:-

- accessible by other means (including information included in this Scheme)
- national security
- court records
- personal data (which is protected under the Data Protection Act)
- prohibited from disclosure by law

Qualified exemptions include information which is or relates to :-

- investigations and proceedings
- law enforcement
- health and safety
- commercially confidential

WHO DO I CONTACT?

Assistance will be given in respect of the Authority's Scheme and these will be:-

- CONTACTS
- WEB ADDRESS
- CUSTOMER SERVICE POINTS
- ETC *(any other)*