

Regional Partnership (WMLGA & WMRA)

Policy on Access to Information (inc FOI)

The purpose of this policy is to set down arrangements for public access to information held by the West Midlands Regional Partnership (which includes the West Midlands Regional Assembly and West Midlands Local Government Association).

1. Background

On 1 January 2005 the Freedom of Information Act 2000 came fully into force. The Act gives the public important new rights to the information held by public authorities. The Act also affects every private sector body doing business with the public sector. The Act is part of a new open information regime which also includes The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Data Protection Act.

The **Assembly** is a voluntary regional chamber under the RDA Act 1998. It is not however a public authority and does not therefore fall strictly within the frame of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Assembly's business is carried out under the auspices of West Midlands Regional Assembly Ltd, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.

The **Association** is a voluntary association of the 38 local authorities of the West Midlands and is also not covered by the Act.

Notwithstanding the status of the Assembly and the Association, we are committed to open governance and seek to operate with openness and transparency and within the spirit of the Act. This policy sets out how the Regional Partnership will implement this principle of openness in practice.

2. Published papers

With the exception of confidential papers, the agenda papers and records of all formal meetings (see 3 below) of the Assembly and Association will be published on their web sites. Routine e-mail alerts of the posting of meeting papers on the web can be arranged on request. Hard copies of these papers will also be made available to the public on request.

3. Formal meetings

Formal meetings are as follows:

- a. Full Assembly Meetings and Assembly Board of Directors
- b. Association Council Meetings and Association Executive Committee
- c. Regional Policy Partnerships (Assembly/Association-led)
 - i. Regional Planning Partnership and Planning Executive
 - ii. Regional Transport Partnership
 - iii. Regional Housing Partnership & Regional Housing Elected Members Forum
 - iv. Regional Environment Partnership
 - v. European and International Affairs Partnership

- vi. Regional Equality and Diversity Partnership
- vii. Regional Health Partnership
- d. Regional Policy Partnerships (Partner-led)
 - i. Rural Affairs Forum
 - ii. Regional Cultural Consortium
 - iii. Regional Skills Partnership

4. File papers

With the exception of confidential papers, all other papers held on file at the West Midlands Regional Secretariat offices will be available for personal inspection by a member of the public by appointment. Copies of file papers will be provided in response to a request made either in person, by telephone, in writing or by e-mail. The Chief Executive reserves the right to decline vexatious requests for access to files, and unreasonable volumes of copying.

5. Confidential papers

These are papers containing commercially or personally confidential information. Every effort will be made to minimise the incidence of confidential papers. The judgement as to whether papers are confidential will be a matter for the Chief Executive.

6. How to Apply for Information

First you should look to see if we already publish the information you want. You can do this by visiting our web sites www.wmlga.gov.uk or www.wmra.gov.uk

If you cannot find what you want please write to:

The Head of Communications
WMLGA or WMRA
Regional Partnership Centre
Albert House, Quay Place
92-93 Edward Street
Birmingham B1 2RA

You must;

- o State your name
- o Give an address for correspondence
- o Describe as fully as possible the information you are seeking and whether/which organisation you represent

7. Response time

All requests will be responded to within 20 working days, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. Where there may be issues concerning access to specific information, the Chief Executive will aim to provide an initial response within 15 working days. If the matter then proceeds for consideration by the Assembly Chairman, a decision will normally be made within 15 working days of that further request.

8. Costs and fees

A fee may be charged for processing a Freedom of Information access request. The fee will be calculated according to the Fees Regulations. Under the Act, fees may be charged in respect of the time spent in efficiently locating or copying records, based on a standard hourly rate. No charges may apply in respect of the time spent by the organisation in considering requests. However, if a fee is required, the 20 working days will be extended by up to 3 months until the fee is paid.

9. Challenging decisions

Where a member of the public wishes to challenge a decision concerning access to information they should communicate in the first instance with the Chief Executive. If they are not satisfied they should write to the Chairman who will rule on the matter on the Assembly's behalf.