

FIRST CHOICE HOMES GUIDANCE ON PUBLICATION SCHEMES, CLASSES OF INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE TO INFORMATION

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – PUBLICATION SCHEME

In implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000 First Choice Homes promotes an understanding of the work undertaken within the Council to foster a spirit of trust with the public and other organisations. We achieve this by promoting transparency in the way we make our decisions and by providing clear information about our policies and processes through our publication scheme. We deal with individual requests for information courteously and promptly and provide advice and assistance if necessary.

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF INFORMATION?

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. It lists exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities.

The Act came into force in two stages: -

- The first stage was in 2004 when First Choice Homes adopted a Publication Scheme.
- The second stage came into force in January 2005. Any person now making a request to a public authority for information must be informed whether the public authority holds that information and supplied with that information. This is subject to a number of exemptions listed in the Act.

WHAT IS A PUBLICATION SCHEME?

A Publication Scheme is a guide to the classes of information that First Choice Homes publishes or intends to publish routinely. The term “published” is broad and is not limited to information produced in paper forms. As far as the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is concerned, information made publicly available has been published. Therefore any information on the First Choice Homes website is as much part of the Publication Scheme as printed documents.

WHAT ARE CLASSES OF INFORMATION?

A requirement of the Act is to specify “classes” of information that First Choice Homes will publish within its Publication Scheme.

The Information Commissioner has issued a ‘**Model Publication Scheme**’ and from 1ST January 2009 First Choice Homes has adopted the ‘Model Scheme’.

The Model Scheme contains 7 classes of information and these are as follows: -

- **Who we are and what we do**
- **What we spend and how we spend it**
- **What our priorities are and how we are doing**
- **How we make decisions**
- **Our policies and procedures**
- **Lists and registers**
- **The services we offer**

Examples of the type of information available are given below under the **Guide to Information**.

By adopting the Information Commissioner's 'Model Scheme' First Choice Homes is committed to the following: -

- To proactively publish information (including environmental information which is held by it and contained within each class).
- To provide a means by which the Authority can ensure the public are aware of the sorts of the information First Choice Homes has committed to make readily available, how they can access and whether they will have to pay for it.
- To review and update the information on a regular basis and in accordance with The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Publication Scheme Review Guidance.

HOW WILL I REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NOT COVERED BY THIS SCHEME?

First Choice Homes includes as much information in the Publication Scheme as it can however, if you cannot find what you are looking for you can make a request for the information.

The Act is retrospective and information requests can be for information created before the Act came fully in to force in 2005. However, where any of the information comes within an exempt category either under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or other relevant legislation, it will be published with the exempt material deleted.

WILL I BE CHARGED FOR INFORMATION?

Material which is published and accessed on the website can be downloaded free of charge. Some information may only be available in hard copy and some information will only be available for inspection. Charges may be made for information subject to a legal charging regime. Charges under the publication scheme may be made for actual disbursements such as: -

- Photocopying
- Printing
- Postage and packaging
- The cost directly incurred as a result of viewing information

Any charges will be in accordance with First Choice Homes policy.

WHO DO I CONTACT?

For information concerning the scheme or if you wish to make a request for other information you can contact the following:

David Smith
Director of Development & Finance
First Choice Homes Oldham
1 Media Square
Phoenix Street
Oldham
OL1 1AN

Tel 0161 770 4590

e-mail fcho.david.smith@oldham.gov.uk

or Alison Gregory
Customer Services Manager
At the same address as above

Tel 0161 770 4626

e-mail fcho.alison.gregory@oldham.gov.uk

The information can be found under the AUTHORITY's website at the following:

www.fcho.co.uk

or alternatively on the Oldham Council website at

www.oldham.gov.uk

MAKING A COMPLAINT, SUGGESTION OR COMPLIMENT

If you are not satisfied with First Choice Homes' response to a request for information you may make a complaint to the address below: -

First Choice Homes Oldham Ltd
1 Media Square
Phoenix Street
Oldham
OL1 1AN

Or e-mail us at fcho.corporate.support@oldham.gov.uk

If after going through the First Choice Homes formal complaint and appeals system you are still not satisfied then the Freedom of Information Act 2000 makes provision for you to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office: -

Wycliffe House,
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

<http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

If you have any suggestions or compliments, we need to know so that we can improve our service to you. Feedback forms are available by contacting:

David Smith or Alison Gregory as detailed above

Or from any FCHO housing office

Or via our website at http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_home.htm

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

If you need help to make a request for information you may contact David Smith or Alison Gregory at the addresses shown previously.

REVIEWING AND MAINTAINING THE SCHEME

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 states that a publication scheme should be reviewed from time to time. First Choice Homes is responsible for reviewing and maintaining this guide to information and the data it contains. Material will be updated and any outdated information will be removed. This guide and operation of the scheme will be reviewed annually in accordance with The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Publication Scheme Review Guidance.

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FIRST CHOICE HOMES - GUIDE TO INFORMATION

The First Choice Homes website provides a guide to the information available.

http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_home.htm

The guidance below is intended to assist you by giving some examples of the type of information First Choice Homes routinely makes available. Where a document is indicated within this guidance it will be the current version.

About FCHO

- Our Aims and Objectives
- Our Business Plan
- Dealing with Freedom of Information
- Our Governance Arrangements and Boards
- Board Papers and Reports

Homelessness

- Our Legal Duties
- Services Available
- Oldham's Homeless Strategy
- Looking for a New Home
- Temporary Accommodation & Support Services

Access to Housing Services

- Housing Options (including rehousing)
- Retirement & Older Peoples Services
- Aids Adaptations for disabled people
- Furnished Tenancies
- Dealing with Race & Hate Crime
- Dealing with Domestic Violence
- Evictions from tenancies
- Squatters
- Advice for private landlords and tenants
- Tenancy Relations Services
- Estate Walkabouts
- Digital TV & the big switchover

Finding a Home

- Current Homes to Let
- Bidding for Homes
- Recent Lettings
- Garages
- Direct Exchanges
- Homes with Housing Associations
- Moving out of Oldham

Help & Support for Vulnerable Customers

- Housing Options
- Housing Support Services
- Asylum Support Services
- Retirement Home support and services for older people
- Tenancy Relations Services
- Helpline Services

Repairs Services

- Reporting Repairs
- Recharging for repairs
- Right to Repair
- Heating Services
- Gas Safety
- Gas Servicing
- Energy Efficiency
- Energy Suppliers
- Caretaking
- Asbestos
- Condensation

Home Improvements

- Decent Homes
- Compensation & Right to Improve
- Contractors

Rents and other charges

- Rent Account Balances
- Rent Arrears
- Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme

Anti-social behaviour

- Reporting
- Procedures
- Prevention
- What to expect
- Evidence Gathering
- Graffiti
- Working with other Agencies
- Respect Standards
- Respect our Communities Awards

Security Services

Cleaner, Safer, Greener

Home Ownership

- Right to Buy
- Leaseholders
- Debt Advice

Getting Involved

- Strategy
- Young People
- Participation Agreements
- Tenant Groups
- Funding and Training
- Improving Estates and Services

Equalities and Diversity

- BME Strategy
- Race Equality Scheme
- Equality Standard
- Equality Impact Assessments
- Community Cohesion

Tell Us What You Think

Publications

Useful Links

Contact Us

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts.

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

- **Roles and responsibilities**

FCHO's primary role and responsibilities are to provide the housing management and maintenance services for most of Oldham Council owned homes. This primarily includes preventing and assessing homelessness, providing temporary homes for those to whom the Council owes a duty to rehouse, allocating and letting homes to new applicants for rehousing, collecting rents and other charges, providing tenancy and estate management services, right to buy and home owner services, repairs and maintenance services, support services to vulnerable customers, Helpline services, tenant participation and community development services, caretaking and security services. FCHO also provide some housing management and housing/general maintenance services to other registered social landlords and clients.

- Articles of Association
- Board membership

Our Main Board consists of:

6 elected tenant representatives from our 6 areas.

6 nominated Council representatives

6 appointed independent Board members

In addition FCHO also have 6 constituted local boards representing the 6 areas of Oldham. These local Boards also have equal number of elected tenants, nominated Councillors and appointed independents with some delegated powers.

Further Details are available at http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_about_us.htm

- Senior executives

FCHO Senior Executive team consists of:

Hugh Broadbent – Chief Executive

Hugh has been Chief Executive from FCHO's inception in 2002. He was previously Director of Housing in Oldham from 1995. Prior to this he was Deputy Director of Housing in Bolton MBC.

David Smith – Director of Development & Finance

David was appointed to this post in 2003. Previously he was Deputy Director of Operations at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.

Steve Yorke – Director of Management & Operations

Steve was appointed to this post in 2003. Previously he was Director of Operations for Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing.

Catriona Povey – Head of Organisational Development

Catriona was appointed in 2007. She was previously Organisational Development Manager at Bolton Council.

John Berry – Head of Finance

John was appointed to this post whilst with Oldham Council in 1995. Prior to this he worked in the private sector.

Rachel Mills – Head of Customer Services

Rachel was appointed in 2006 to this post. Prior to this she was FCHO's Policy and Performance Manager.

Diane Thompson – Head of Repairs and Maintenance

Diane was appointed to this post in 2007. Prior to this Diane was a repairs Manager with FCHO.

- Staff structure
- Contact points

The main contact points for FCHO are:

For Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Corporate Enquiries, Complaints and Compliments:

David Smith or Alison Gregory

1 Media Square, Phoenix St, Oldham, OL1 1AN

Tel 0161 770 4590

Fax 0161 770 4606

fcho.david.smith@oldham.gov.uk

fcho.alison.gregory@oldham.gov.uk

For General Service Enquiries Telephone 0161 770 3576

For All Repairs Enquiries contact 0161 770 6699

For Rehousing Enquiries contact 0161 770 7788

For Our Local Offices Contact:

Chadderton 0161 770 3612

East Oldham 0161 770 3604

Failsworth & Hollinwood 0161 684 8888

Royton & Shaw 0161 770 5421

Saddleworth & Lees 0161 770 4579

West Oldham 0161 770 4600

WHAT WE SPEND AND HOW WE SPEND IT

Copies of our annual accounts and annual company reports are available on our website at http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_publications/fcho_reports.htm Alternatively a hard copy can be made available by contacting David Smith as above.

In summary in 2007/8 FCHO's annual income was £34.65m (2006/7 £36.84m). FCHO's overall expenditure in 2007/8 was £35.1m (2006/7 £34.13m). Most of FCHO's income comes from management fees from Oldham Council. In 2007/8 this amounted to £26.3m (2006/7 £26.9m).

The 2007/8 deficit of £448k was planned by FCHO and was largely as a result of meeting one off major staff restructuring and redundancy costs to reduce our on going revenue

costs as our income has and will continue to reduce over the economic cycle. The deficit was resourced using previous years revenue surpluses retained precisely for this purpose.

The main areas of expenditure for FCHO are:

Staffing Costs (including repairs)	£18.25m
Rents, rates and utility costs	£ 2.48m
Transport	£ 1.24m
Materials & Eqpt	£ 1.97m
Contractors	£ 1.49m
District/Grouped Heating	£ 2.1m
Other Supplies & Services	£ 2.04m

FCHO internal auditors, appointed until 2010, are Deloitte Touche LLP POBox 500, 2 Hardman St, Manchester M60 2AT.

FCHO's External Auditors, also appointed until 2010, are KPMG LLP UK, St James Square, Manchester, M2 6DS.

FCHO currently use over 200 sub contractors and suppliers. For further details on Contracts and Procurement contact Fiona Summerscales, Procurement and Business Development Manager on 0161 770 2029 or e-mail fcho.fiona.summerscales@oldham.gov.uk.

- **Annual accounts**
- **Loans sanctioned**
- **Procurement procedures**
- **Staff and board members' allowances and expenses**

Board members are unpaid volunteers. Board members are allowed to claim reasonable travel and subsistence costs when on Board business. This applies not only to our 18 Main Board but also our 54 Local Board members. In 2007/8 our 72 Board members claimed a total of £3 555 in expenses between them.

The aggregate emoluments payable to FCHO's 6 Directors (including pensions and other benefits) in 2007/8 was £383k. The remuneration for FCHO's Chief Executive (including pensions and other benefits) was £109k.

WHAT OUR PRIORITIES ARE AND HOW WE ARE DOING

Our over Business Plan, annual and 3 year Delivery Plans and related strategies and action plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews are all available on the website at http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_about_us/fcho_our_business_plan.htm. Hard copies are also available on request.

- **Any reports indicating main priorities and progress against them**
- **Annual Report**

HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS

Full details of FCHO's Board & Committee Structures, Board membership, dates and venues of forthcoming meeting are all available on our website or by request.

Minutes of meetings of the Board http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_about_us.htm

In addition copies of all minutes and board reports are also available by request (unless restricted by virtue of Paragraph 9 of the Access to Information Rules).

OUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

All FCHO Customer Services Policies and Procedures are available below http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_publications/fcho_policies_and_procedures.htm

- Policies and procedures for conducting departmental business
- Policies and procedures for delivering our services
- Policies and procedures for recruiting and employing staff
- Customer service http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_tell_us_what_you_think.htm
- Records management and personal data policies
http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_about_us/fcho_freedom_of_information.htm
- Charging regimes and policies
http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_rent_and_other_charges.htm

LISTS AND REGISTERS

- Any lists or registers that may be required to produce in the conduct of their business
- Any property asset list
- Disclosure logs

THE SERVICES WE OFFER

Details of company services http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fcho_home.htm

- Services for which the company is entitled to recover a fee, together with those fees
- Leaflets
- Media Releases

APPENDIX III – Information Commissioner guidance

1. Model Publication Scheme –
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/generic_scheme_v1.0.pdf
2. Sector Specific Definition Document for the Model Publication Scheme:
 - (i) Local Authorities (County Councils, Unitary Authorities, District Councils, Metropolitan District Councils, the Council of the Isles of Scilly) -
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/local%20authorities%201.0_web_version.pdf
 - (ii) Joint Authorities (Fire, Waste, GMPTE, GMPTA, AGMA, PATROL etc)
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/joint_authorities_v1.0.pdf
 - (iii) Schools in England
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/schools_england_v2.pdf
 - (iv) Wholly publicly owned companies (e.g. OEDA etc)
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/woc_v1.0.pdf
3. Charges for information in a publication scheme –
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/practical_application/chargingforinformationinapublicationscheme.pdf
4. How to operate a publication scheme -
http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/how%20to%20operate%20final%20draft_v2.0.pdf