Eldon Parish Council
Access to meetings and documents of Parish and Town councils

1. As is the normal requirement Parish and Town councils must give notice of their meeting at least 3 clear days before it takes place. Where an annual Parish meeting is called, at least 7 clear days' notice must be given. Notice of the meeting specifying the business to be discussed must be placed in a central conspicuous place within the Parish or area at least 3 clear days before the meeting. Parish councils and Parish meetings are also encouraged to place copies of the agenda, meeting papers and notice of meetings at offices and on their website, if they have these facilities.

2. All meetings of these councils must be open to the public, except in limited defined circumstances. These councils can only decide, by resolution, to meet in private when discussing confidential business or for other special reasons where publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest. Though not an exhaustive list, Government expects this to cover matters such as discussing the conduct of employees, negotiations of contracts or terms of tender, or the early stages of a legal dispute.

3. The press and the public can be asked to leave a meeting so that the council can discuss matters in private, but only in the limited circumstances described above. The rules also do not prevent the chairman from excluding any member of the public in order to maintain orderly conduct or prevent genuine disruption at a meeting.

4. The fact that anyone is unable to attend a public meeting of a Parish and Town council, its committees or sub-committees does not mean they cannot find out about the decisions made there. The national rules require the Parish and Town councils to make a copy of the minutes available for inspection after a public meeting, good practice would be to show them on your Parish noticeboards or placed on your website if you have one.

5. Where the Parish or Town council's rules allow an officer can take decisions the council is now required to let the press and the public have a means of knowing about decisions made by individuals.

   The rules require the recording of certain decisions taken by officers acting under powers delegated to them by a Parish or Town council, its committees or sub-committees or a joint committee.

   The written record should include:
   - The decision taken and the date the decision was taken;
   - the reason/s for the decision;
   - any alternative options considered and rejected; and
   - any other background documents.

6. The press and the public can see these records of decisions made by officers along with any other background papers because they have to be available for inspection at the council’s offices and on its website as soon as is reasonably practicable after the decisions are made.

7. Written records of officer's decisions must be available for inspection for six years beginning from the date of the meeting. The background papers should also be available for inspection for four years beginning from the date of the meeting. These may be kept in electronic format.

8. Not all decisions of an officer need to be recorded. The requirement to record applies to all decisions taken by officers whilst acting under a specific express authorisation, and only to three categories of decision taken whilst acting under a general authorisation. **These categories cover decisions to "grant a permission or licence"; that "affect the rights of an individual" (i.e. to change an individual's legal rights); or to "award a contract or incur expenditure which, in either case, materially affects that relevant local government body's financial position**". It is not possible to inspect some recorded decisions if the whole or part of the records contain confidential information or any other information, which its publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

9. Officers take many administrative and operational decisions on how they go about their day-to-day work within the council's rules. These decisions will not need to be recorded. Examples of decisions that should be recorded could include:
   - Decisions about awarding contracts above specified individual/total values (the values will vary according to the relevant Parish or Town council); and
   - decision to renew a lease to an Allotment Association.

10. Where decisions are already required to be published by other legislation, they do not need to be recorded again provided the record published has the date the decision was taken and the reasons for the decision.

11. Decisions that do not need to be recorded might include the following examples:
   - Routine administrative and organisational decisions such as the purchase of office supplies or repairs;
   - a decision to sign an allotment tenancy agreement;
   - decisions to allocate burial plots; and
   - decisions to book rooms or sports grounds; and decisions to approve works undertaken by a contractor.

   These are a few selected examples and not an exhaustive list. It is for the council to decide what information should be recorded on the basis of the national rules.

12. The press and the public can ask for a copy of any records of decisions taken by an officer of a Parish or Town council. They can ask for a copy of any documents relating to decisions taken by an officer acting under specific or general delegated powers once they have paid for the postage, copying or any other necessary charge for transmission which will be determined by your Parish or Town council.

13. **It is a criminal offence if, without reasonable excuse, a person with custody of a document which is required by the national rules to be made available to the public, refuses to supply the whole or part of the document, or intentionally obstructs any other person/s from disclosing such a document. If a person is found guilty of such a criminal offence, he/she may be fined up to £200.**