

16 April 2026

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Kia ora [REDACTED]

Official information Request: Access to Public Records at Council Offices

I am writing to you in response to your request received 18 March for information regarding access to public records at the South Wairarapa District Council offices.

I have recently been advised that I am no longer able to view public records in person without incurring a fee. My understanding has always been that public records should be available for inspection, and I would appreciate confirmation of the Council's current policy in this regard.

Could you please clarify:

- *Whether members of the public are still able to view records onsite at the Council offices*
 - *Under what circumstances fees may apply*
 - *If there have been any recent changes to policy or procedures around accessing public information*
- If possible, I would also appreciate being directed to any relevant policy documents or guidelines that outline these requirements.*

In a phone call on 18 March, you clarified that this request relates to property files and that previously, members of the public could look at them (on the computer at the front desk in reception prior to the recent renovation of the main office). You also noted that you came into the office on 17 March and 18 March to view files and the Enquiries team were unable to assist with your request.

We have assessed your request under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA). I have received information to provide the following response:

Section 217 of the Building Act 2004 requires that members of the public be given access to the information referred to in section 216 during ordinary office hours. The Act does not prescribe how that access must be delivered only that access must be made available. Our interpretation of this requirement is that by providing files electronically on request, the Council continues to meet its obligations under s217. Council is also investigating appropriate IT solutions that may enable improved online access to building files in the future.

Because the Council no longer provides onsite, in-office viewing of physical records, we instead supply electronic copies of requested files, ensuring the public continues to have access to building related information as required by the Act. Any future online access platform would be intended to complement, not replace, the Council's current processes for meeting statutory access obligations.

Under section 219, a territorial authority may impose a fee or charge for the performance of any function or service under the Act. This includes providing electronic copies of documents or undertaking the administrative work involved in retrieving, preparing, and supplying those records. These fees are set by Council.

While s217 requires that access be provided, it also expressly allows councils to charge reasonable fees for photocopying facilities or similar services, and s219 extends this to other functions carried out when fulfilling requests.

There have been no recent policy or procedure changes around accessing building file information.

Our current fees and charges are published on our website here:

<https://swdc.govt.nz/services/council-fees-and-charges/>

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. If this request is selected it will be published at <https://swdc.govt.nz/lgoima-proactive-release/>, with your personal information removed.

You have a right to request a review by the Ombudsman on this response. Further information about this process can be found on <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/what-ombudsman-can-help/complaints-about-government-agencies/how-make-complaint> or email info@ombudsman.parliament.nz

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Vins', written in a cursive style.

Matt Vins
Manager, Corporate Support
Corporate Services