

## **Caterham on the Hill**

### **Procedures for handling enquiries and correspondence**

*Approved by the Finance and General Purposes Committee: October 2019*

*Review date: October 2021*

#### **Introduction**

This document details procedures covering the following internal control areas specified in Governance & Accountability for Local Councils and General Data Protection Regulations.

- 1) enquiries received from the public
- 2) consultation requests
- 3) document receipt, circulation, response, handling and filing

#### **Related documents**

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Complaints procedure

#### **Filing and retention of documents**

Specific rules about the retention of certain documents in hard copy, notably signed minutes, are followed. All significant original documents are scanned to the council laptop and, if permissible, the original hardcopy destroyed.

Emails, if significant and required for a long period are saved to the laptop's C Drive, which is backed up onto onedrive. Routine emails are deleted when finished with or kept for reference in temporary email files with a periodic review and cull. Emails relating to individuals are kept no longer than necessary.

Councillors should not retain contact details of private individuals & related correspondence on their own files and electronic devices once a matter they are dealing with is closed. Printed papers must be securely shredded, if not passed to the Clerk. It is recommended by the data protection officer that councillors do not use private emails but have a Parish Council email address.

#### **Process for enquiries received from the public**

1. Enquiry received by the Clerk, requiring factual or policy information.  
Enquiry acknowledged and reply given. The enquirer may be redirected to another source of information if not applicable to the council. The enquiry is reported in general terms to the council at its next meeting. The enquirer is usually only identified as "resident/ member of the public".  
The enquirer's name and contact details are not passed to a non-council 3<sup>rd</sup> party without their express permission.
2. Enquiry requiring input from a Parish Councillor.  
Enquiry acknowledged. Enquirer informed of the referral. Unless it would be inappropriate or unnecessary to do so e.g. against the known wishes of the enquirer or Councillor does not need to be

directly involved, any written communication may be forwarded to the relevant Lead Councillor &/or the Chair for comment back to the Clerk to respond or for the Councillor to contact the enquirer direct. Written communication between the public and a Councillor is copied to the Clerk or a summary of any verbal communication is given to the Clerk. The contact is either reported to the Council by the Clerk or by the Councillor at the meeting, when it will be minuted in general terms.

3. Enquiry received by a Councillor.  
See the Communications Strategy.  
The Councillor, as a minimum, acknowledges receipt if the enquiry is written/emailed to them. The subsequent courses of action are:
  - i. The enquiry may be passed to the Clerk to reply on behalf of the Council or
  - ii. The Councillor may respond personally, subject to adhering to the Communications strategy policy statement, copying the Clerk and reporting to the Council at its next meeting. The Councillor is encouraged to seek the advice of the Clerk and the Chair prior to responding.

### **Process for consultation requests directed at the Council**

1. Consultation request of no relevance to Caterham on the Hill or its residents  
This is reported to the Council by the Clerk.
2. Consultation request of limited relevance to Caterham on the Hill  
This is emailed to Councillors with a request to consider for the next agenda. If no response or the response is negative, no further action. Reported to the Council via the Clerk.
3. Consultation request on matters relevant to Caterham on the Hill.  
This is emailed to Councillors, identifying it as a future agenda item. Add to website.
4. Consultation discussed at council meeting.  
The Council may agree a response at the meeting or agree not to respond. If deciding to respond, as a minimum, the Council outlines its approach. The Council may agree to feedback to the Clerk as individuals or designate one of their number to liaise with the Clerk in order for the Clerk to produce a consolidated reply. The Clerk circulates the draft response to all Councillors, giving a deadline for final comments, and unless objections are received, issues the final response by the deadline. The Council's response is available to the public on request to the Clerk.

### **Process for other documents**

1. Junk/Spam email - delete, block, unsubscribe
2. Sales material  
If by email and relevant to current council activities/the Parish Plan, this is forwarded to the appropriate Lead Councillor. If hard copy by post and relevant, it is reported by the Clerk and either passed to the appropriate Lead Councillor or the Clerk retains it for a maximum of one year. If not required, dispose of/delete/unsubscribe from mailings.
3. Planning applications  
Notification received by email forwarded to all Councillors promptly and noted for agenda. Hardcopy plans to Lead Councillor promptly and prior to relevant meeting. See also Planning Terms of Reference.  
Spreadsheet of applications and results maintained and updated version provided to each Council meeting for noting.  
The Clerk/Planning Chairman drafts and submits the planning responses as agreed and minuted by the Council at its meeting.  
Planning application papers, particularly for large or complex or controversial developments may be retained temporarily by the Clerk for ease of reference and convenience, but otherwise are disposed of.

As they are public documents, available on the PA's website, no special security measures are required. A copy of the response, if the council objects or has comments, is retained electronically for a time. If no objection and no comment, the copy email is not retained.

4. Administration/governance matters

- i. Correspondence is dealt with by the Clerk in accordance with statutory responsibilities, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Guidelines on Governance & Accountability for Local Councils.
- ii. Items expected to have a material impact on management of the Council e.g. costs or process, are forwarded to Councillors by email and noted at a meeting.

5. Information from bodies to which the council subscribes or sector bodies

This is forwarded to Councillors by email if the content is of relevance to Caterham on the Hill and/or current and planned activities. The Clerk has discretion to delete or dispose of items considered not to be relevant. Relevant hard copy items, which cannot be emailed, are brought to the Council's attention at a suitable meeting.

6. Grants & donations requests

These are dealt with by the Clerk in accordance with the Grants & Donations policy. Approaches are reported to the Council. A specific approach by a local organisation is acknowledged and policy explained. Any papers received are filed electronically. Requests, which could meet the criteria, are added to the agenda. No response is given to general mailshots requesting support & donations.

## Complaints

See separate procedure.

## Publicity

- i. County and District Councils requests to publicise campaigns: posters are placed on the Council noticeboards on the Clerk's next scheduled visit, if space permits; information is also added to the website if appropriate and facebook; if timing and space permits information may be included in the newsletter.
- ii. Local organisations' requests to add info to or update website are passed to the Clerk.
- iii. Local charities requesting posters be displayed and editorials published are assisted, if possible. Posters are placed on the Council's noticeboards at the Clerk's next scheduled visit, if space permits. This may also be included on the website, facebook and in the newsletter (depending on suitability, space and timings)