



Frodsham Town Council Procedure for Dealing with Correspondence

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The term “correspondence” covers a wide variety communication received and sent out by Frodsham Town Council (FTC). It is not possible to prescribe hard & fast rules for dealing with each piece of paper or email received or sent out. The vast majority of messages are electronic.
- 1.2. This Procedure for dealing with incoming and outgoing communications incorporates FTC’s commitment to.
 - i Providing good quality information & services
 - ii Fairness & equality of treatment
 - iii Identifying & responding to need
- 1.3. The aim of staff dealing with correspondence must be to ensure that:
 - i Any necessary action is taken promptly, and
 - ii A complete and accurate reply is sent as soon as possible.

2 Incoming Correspondence

- 2.1. It is essential to adopt a systematic approach to preliminary consideration of all correspondence received. The aim is to establish priority of each letter (or email) and to decide whether or not it needs to be referred.
- 2.2. The few paper documents received in the Council Office will be stamped with the date of receipt.
- 2.3. If the incoming letter contains an FTC Reference, it will be necessary to associate it with previous correspondence to establish its priority. Electronic correspondence seldom carries a reference, but is often associated with the earlier correspondence through the mail chain.
- 2.4. Where necessary/appropriate, acknowledgement of receipt of a letter or an enquiry (including email) must be sent promptly. The acknowledgement will, where appropriate, inform the sender when he/she will receive a full response. Such email acknowledgements will normally only be required where a significant delay is likely.
- 2.5. Processing of correspondence (including email & telephone enquires) will be as follows:
 - i Notwithstanding the necessity for issuing prompt replies, it is essential that any information provided by FTC is accurate and has a sound basis.
 - ii *Requests for inspection of FTC’s documents*: Inform the enquirer when he/she can inspect the requested documents. [NOTE: PERSONAL DATA, AS DEFINED BY THE DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998 IS EXEMPT FROM THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 AND, AS SUCH, MUST NOT BE RELEASED]
 - iii *Correspondence addressed to external organisations and copied to FTC*: Treat as "For Information" and file without action unless Council's action is indicated.
 - iv *Correspondence addressed to FTC* (including items that need action as per iii above): where he judges appropriate, the Town Clerk will distribute electronically to councillors or, exceptionally, include in the agenda for a full Council meeting where for example, a response is needed.
 - v *Correspondence concerning issues that are within the remit of a Committee*: Again, papers circulated electronically by Clerk, to be included in the Agenda for the next meeting of the respective Committee where appropriate.
 - vi *Issues considered urgent (requiring attention/response before the next FTC meeting)*: Consult the Chair (Vice-chair in the Chair’s absence).

vii *A letter/email addressed directly to a member of staff.* Emails are accessed only by the addressee. Letters will be opened unless marked personal.

2.6. If a Councillor receives a letter/email dealing with Council's business from a member of the public (including trades/business people), he/she must ensure that the document, and any response sent by him/her, is copied to the Town Clerk for the purposes of completeness & audit of records

3 **Outgoing Correspondence**

- 3.1. Letters sent on behalf of FTC must include the date of dispatch and, where appropriate, a unique reference number, including the initials of the sender...
- 3.2. The Council uses plain English and first person as far as possible, and avoids jargon where it can. Where appropriate, include details of where further information can be found.
- 3.3. Errors & undue delays clearly caused by FTC should be admitted and apologies offered. Any serious delays that might have consequences should be referred to the Town Clerk.
- 3.4. Carry out a final check before sending: is the letter clear, and are enclosures correct?