West Horsley Parish Council

Dealings Between Parish Council Staff and Members of the Public Protocol

This protocol is about dealings by Parish Council staff (hereafter referred to as 'staff') with members of the public on matters for which the Parish council has no direct responsibility, especially matters for which Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council are responsible (West Surrey Council from 1 April 2027).

- Staff are employed to assist the Parish Council in providing its services and are under no duty to assist members of the public in their dealings with third parties.
- In general, the appropriate response when staff are contacted on matters for which the Parish Council has no direct responsibility is to give the members of the public contact details for the appropriate authority.
- In general, staff should not offer to contact the appropriate authority on behalf of members of the public. This can lead to inappropriate involvement by the Parish Council and also runs the risk that time will be spent in following up any contact.
- Exceptionally, a member of the public may be unwilling to give their name to a public authority and in such a case staff may, at their discretion, agree to pass on their comment (but not to follow it up).
- There is, however, no objection to staff passing on purely factual matters such as defective streetlights, potholes and overgrown hedges on verges and public rights of way. Staff should make it clear that the involvement of the Parish Council will not necessarily lead to a quicker resolution of problems.
- Emails passing on factual information not within the remit of the Parish Council will be forwarded to the relevant principal authority, albeit personal details will be removed unless the authority of the resident to pass on their details has been obtained.
- Staff should be especially cautious in dealing with matters where different people could have different opinions, for example on planning or environment health matters, and especially where there is a disagreement between neighbours. It is important that the Parish Council is not seen as 'taking sides' unless the Parish Council has expressed a corporate view. If there is a disagreement between neighbours, emails will not be forwarded where it would amount to publication of defamatory material.
- Staff should not take action which could be viewed as lobbying on behalf of members of the public or acting as advocates for members of the public.
- Staff should not get involved in matters such as boundary disputes which do not involve any public authority.

Adopted: 17 November 2026

Next review: November 2028