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Caistor Town Council

Working towards Quality Council Status

A Guide to Your Local Council

A GUIDE TO CAISTOR TOWN COUNCIL

What is the Town Council?

Town/Parish councils have been in existence since 1894 and are statutory organisations. Caistor Town Council was formed in 1974, following the government review of 1972. Its predecessors were Caistor Parish Council and Caistor Rural District Council; a number of its facilities and responsibilities were inherited from both authorities.

A Council is known as the first tier of local government, is closest to the electorate and must represent and serve all its community fairly and impartially. It is responsible for the policies, performance, activities and decisions made under its name and must only operate within the powers and duties laid down for it. Caistor Town Council works with the principle authorities (Lincolnshire County Council and West Lindsey District Council) on issues relating to the Town.

Who makes up the Town Council and what do they do?

- a) **Councillors:-** Caistor Town Council is made up of fourteen elected councillors, this number being fixed by the District Council. Councillors serve and are responsible to their electorate. The ordinary term of office for councillors and the Council is four years.

Before acting, every councillor must sign an approved declaration of acceptance of office. It is their responsibility to serve the community fairly and impartially, keeping within the law and abiding by the Council's Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct, contained in the 2000 Local Government Act. Councillors must declare interests, be it personal or prejudicial, regarding any item on the agenda or any discussion thereafter. A written record is kept of all declarations of interest.

All councillors work as a team and, through their debates, proposals and voting, they contribute to making Council decisions. Councillors will make themselves ware of public opinion, responding to the needs of the community and planning for the future. It is their duty to give consideration to all opinions put forward.

- b) **The Chairman of the Council:-**

The Chairman (also legally called the Mayor) is a Council

member, elected by councillors at the Annual Council Meeting. He/she liaises closely with the Clerk to ensure that the Council operates smoothly and efficiently. The Chairman leads/controls meetings, including the Annual Town Meeting. During meetings he is the link between the public and Council, keeping discussion to the point, giving every councillor the chance to speak and ensuring that all decisions made are clear. He/she is the proper person to represent the Town on official occasions and must portray the Council's image. An allowance is available to the Chairman to represent the civic face of the Council.

- c) **The Clerk to the Council:-**

The Clerk is the Council's Chief Executive and Proper Officer, appointed to a statutory position and employed on a part-time basis by the Council. He/she is generally the Council's first point of contact. The Clerk will ensure the smooth administration of Caistor Town Council, liaising with the Chairman and the Responsible Financial Officer and will ensure that legal, statutory and other provisions governing, or affecting the running of the Council are observed. Responsibilities include:- Ensuring that the Council acts within the law, advising and implementing policy, managing resources, handling enquiries from electors, overseeing other Council employees, dealing with all correspondence and receiving goods, organising the Council's insurance, preparing/displaying notices, dealing with election matters and recruitment, preparing and distributing Agendas, attending meetings and producing and distributing accurate Minutes. It is also the Clerk's duty to liaise with other statutory bodies and with local organisations.

- d) **The Responsible Financial Officer:-**

The Responsible Financial Officer is also employed on a part-time basis, with the responsibility of providing financial and administrative support and advice to the Council. He/she must ensure that the Council has sufficient checks in place to prevent fraud, mistakes, etc. occurring and must constantly monitor income and expenditure against the budget. He/she prepares monthly financial reports, giving details of all receipts and payments, together with a bank reconciliation. He/she is responsible for budgetary control, making sure that all money due to the Council is billed and collected promptly, whilst arranging for all money received to be banked regularly. An

annual budget must also be prepared for consideration by the Council. The Responsible Financial Officer produces the Council's Annual Return and must ensure that there is an adequate and efficient system of internal audit in place.

Other Council Employees

The council employs two maintenance staff:-

- General Maintenance Operative:- He is responsible for the general upkeep of all the play areas, sports field, grass cutting in the cemetery and church yard and litter picking in and around the Town. He is also the appointed officer for the enforcement of the bye-laws.
- Assistant Maintenance Operative:- He assists the General Maintenance Operative with his duties.

Council Meetings:-

Monthly Council Meeting:-

Caistor Town Council meets on the second Thursday of every month, when it sits as a full Council. Meetings are generally held at Caistor Town Hall, commencing at 7.00 pm.

Agendas for meetings are prepared by the Clerk, liaising with the Chairman of the Council and these must comply with current legislation. Prior to the start of the formal agenda, there is a ten minute period of public participation, with the time being split equally between those who wish to speak. However, once the Council meeting is in session, members of the public are not permitted to speak. The Council is duty bound to meet in public, but when there are confidential matters which need discussing, e.g. tenders, employee issues, nominations for the Council's Citizens Award and other matters where there is a good and lawful reason for not discussing the matter in public session, members of the press and the public will be asked to leave the meeting room.

The Annual Council Meeting:-

It is a legal requirement that the Council holds an Annual Council

Meeting. This is always held in May, unless it is an election year, in which case it must be held between the fourth and eighteenth day inclusive after the election day. The first item on the Agenda and the first business to be carried out must be the election of the Chairman. In an election year, following the election, all members must sign their Declaration of Office before being allowed to take their seat on the Council.

Following the election of the Chairman, the Council then appoints a Vice Chairman, Committee Chairmen, Vice Committee Chairmen, an Allotments Liaison Officer, a Press Officer and various Council representatives.

The Annual Town Meeting:-

The Council also has to organise an Annual Town Meeting. This takes place between 1st March and 1st June inclusive and it provides the opportunity for annual reports to be given to members of the public. There may also be presentations from guest speakers and other organisations. During this meeting parishioners are able to ask questions and raise any issues with the Council relating to the Town.

Precept Meeting:-

The Precept Meeting takes place in October each year. This is when the Council works out the Precept to be levied for the ensuing financial year. Detailed estimates of all receipts and payments for the year are prepared by the Responsible Financial Officer, in the form of a budget, which the Council considers at this meeting. Each Committee Chairman submits proposals for consideration by the Council in respect of revenue and capital for the following financial year. The precept is ratified at the November Council meeting and the Responsible Financial Officer then issues the agreed figure to West Lindsey District Council, the billing authority.

Committees:-

The Local Government Act 1972, section 101, gives Councils the power to appoint committees and these in turn may appoint sub committees. Caistor Town Council has appointed five committees, each of which has a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman. Every member of the Council is a member of the committees and each committee reports to full Council.

The five committees are:-

- a) **Planning Committee:-** This committee carries out an assessment of all planning applications in the Caistor area. The Council's views are sent to West Lindsey District Council and, if applicable, to Lincolnshire County Council.
- b) **Sports Ground Committee:-** This committee covers the upkeep and development of all areas of the Sports Ground, including the cricket and football pitches, the bowling green and the tennis courts. There is also 3.5 acres of "free play" area which the Committee is responsible for.
- c) **Parks Committee:-** This committee covers the upkeep and development of the South Street and Millfields Parks.
- d) **Churchyard, Cemeteries and Field paths Committee:-** This Committee is responsible for the maintenance of the closed churchyards at the Parish and Congregational Cemetery and the North Kelsey Road Cemetery and keeps a watching brief on all field paths.
- e) **Economic Development and Tourism Committee:-** The purpose of this committee is to support and promote business and employment in the Town and to attract visitors to it.

The Chairman of the committees are responsible for managing the assets and functions related to their areas and they prepare budgets on a yearly basis for the upkeep and development of the said portfolio.

Working Parties:-

Working Parties are created by the Council to deal with short lived, single task projects. They have no decision-making powers and must report back to the committee that created them or to Council.

Press Officer:-

At the Annual Council Meeting, the Council elects one member to be its Press Officer. He/she will liaise with the Clerk and Chairman

to produce press releases relating to Council matters throughout the year.

Representation on Other Organisations:-

The Council elects members to be representatives on other local organisations, including the Caistor Development Partnership, Caistor Sports and Social Club Committee, Caistor Town Hall Management Committee, Caistor Youth Club and the Caistor Multi-use Centre Management Committee.

Assets and Property Owned by the Council

The Council owns the following:-

- Sports ground and property, etc. therein
 - South Street Park and property etc. therein
 - Millfields Park and property etc. therein
- Central area of the market place, the paved area around the Lion and the lamp post. There is a market every Saturday and on Christmas Eve. Charges are per parking space used and these are booked through the Clerk, with rents collected by the Responsible Financial Officer.

- Cemetery, North Kelsey Road
- War memorial
- Two electricity pillars in the market place
- Finger posts in the central island in the market place
- Notice board adjacent to Caistor Loco
- Town Hall car park (excluding the ramp and toilets)
- The old fire station
- Allotments (North Kelsey Road)
- The Council is responsible for the Churchyard and Congregational Cemetery

Inspection Book

All councillors take it in turn to carry out a monthly inspection of the parks and sports ground and a written record is kept. The purpose of this is to ensure that the grounds and equipment are all kept in good order and that any work needed is identified as soon as possible.

Similarly, a monthly inspection of the market place is carried out by the assistant maintenance operative.

Legislation

Bye-laws:-

Bye-laws were made by the Town Council in January 2003 under section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875, section 15 of the Open Spaces Act 1906 and sections 12 and 15 of the Open Spaces Act 1906 with respect to pleasure grounds, public walks and open spaces. These relate to:-

- a) The Sports Ground, North Kelsey Road
- b) The South Street Park
- c) The Millfields Play Ground

Dog Control Orders:-

On 16th February 2007, under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, Caistor Town Council made Dog Control Orders at the following sites which come under its jurisdiction:-

- a) The Sports Ground, North Kelsey Road (including the 3.5 acres of "free play" area:- Dogs on Lead Order.
- b) The South Street Park:- Exclusion of Dogs Order.
- c) The Millfields Play Ground:- Dogs on Lead Order.

Freedom of Information

The Council is registered under the Freedom of Information Act. This permits members of the public to have access to the majority (non-confidential) of the Council's records. If copies are requested, a fee of 10p per side copied is charged.

Reward Scheme

The Council operates a reward scheme which pays out £100 for information which leads to the conviction or caution of offenders who have caused damage to Council property. The offender(s) is then billed for the damage.

Where possible, the Council makes use of young offenders to carry out small tasks around the Town, i.e. painting and weeding, grass cutting, general maintenance, etc. They are supervised by the Council's Maintenance Operative, who liaises with the Probation Service.

Citizens Award

The Council created the Citizens Award with the aim of showing how they value a person's service to the community. Nominations for the Award can be sent to the Clerk at any time, in writing or by email, with a reason for the nomination. All nominations received will be listed on the Agenda as a confidential item and members will vote on them using secret ballot.