

Summary and Explanation

1. The Council's Constitution

- 1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council has a constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 1.2 The Constitution is divided into fifteen articles as set out in Part 2, which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are provided in separate rules and protocols at the end of the document.

2. What's in the Constitution?

- 2.1 Article 1 of the Constitution commits the Council to its core values of working in partnership with the public, businesses and other organisations, always acting in an open, transparent and accountable manner, producing value for money and continuous improvement of its services and ensuring equity in allocation and delivery of services.

2.2 The Council's core values are:

- Accountability;
- Respect;
- Integrity;
- Value for money;
- Equity;
- Excellence.

2.3 Articles 2-15 explain the rights of the public and how the key parts of the Council operate. These are:

- Members of the Council (Article 2);
- The Public and the Council (Article 3);
- The Full Council (Article 4);
- Chairing the Council (Article 5);
- The Statutory Scrutiny Function (Article 6);

- The Council Leader, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees and Lead Members (Article 7);
- Committees (Article 8);
- Advisory Process (Article 9);
- Joint Arrangements (Article 10);
- Officers (Article 11);
- Decision Making (Article 12);
- Finance, Contracts and Legal Matters (Article 13);
- Review and Revision of the Constitution (Article 14);
- Suspension, Interpretation and Publication of the Constitution (Article 15).

3. How the Council Operates

- 3.1 The Council is composed of 61 councillors elected every four years. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their electoral division. The overriding duty of councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.
- 3.2 Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Constitution and Ethics Committee trains and advises them on the Code of Conduct.
- 3.3 All councillors meet together as the Council. Meetings of the Council are normally open to the public. Here councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council allocates seats on committees, considers items referred from the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee and makes appointments of Chief Executive, executive directors and service directors (through a Staffing and Appeals Committee).

4. How Decisions are Made

- 4.1 Committees are responsible for most major decisions. They comprise up to fifteen councillors. When major decisions are to be discussed or made, these are published in the Council's Forward Plan insofar as they can be anticipated. If these major decisions are to be discussed with Council officers at a meeting of a committee this will generally be open for the public to attend, except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed. The committees have to make decisions which are in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If they wish to make a decision which is outside the approved budget or Policy Framework this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

5. The Council's Staff

5.1 The Council has people working for it (called 'officers') to give advice, implement decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of its services. Some officers have a specific duty to ensure that the Council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. A Code of Practice governs the relationships between officers and members of the Council.

6. Rights of the Public

6.1 The Council welcomes public participation in its work. Members of the public have a number of rights in their dealings with the Council. These are set out in more detail in Article 3. Some of these are legal rights, whilst others depend on the Council's own processes. The local Citizens' Advice Bureau can advise on individuals' legal rights.

6.2 Where members of the public use specific Council services, for example as a parent of a school pupil, they have additional rights. These are not covered in the Constitution.

Members of the public have the right to:

- (a) Vote at local elections if they are registered;
- (b) Contact their local councillor about any matters of concern to them;
- (c) Obtain a copy of the Constitution;
- (d) Attend meetings of the Council and its committees except where, for example, personal or confidential matters are being discussed;
- (e) Petition to request a referendum on a mayoral form of executive;
- (f) Find out, from the Council's Forward Plan, what major decisions are to be discussed by the committees or decided by the officers if delegated by the committees, and when;
- (g) See reports and background papers and any record of decisions made by the Council and its committees;
- (h) Submit petitions in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme;
- (i) Complain to the Council about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the Council, its staff or contractors affecting an individual customer or group of customers;
- (j) Complain to the Local Government Ombudsman if they think the Council has not followed its procedures properly. However, they should only do this after using the Council's own complaints process;
- (k) Inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to an external

auditor.