

The Council's Constitution

- 1 Slough Borough Council has agreed a new constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 2 The Constitution is divided into 17 articles 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.

What's in the Constitution?

- 3 Article 1 of the Constitution commits the Council to provide clear leadership within the local community through involving others in a transparent and accountable process of effective decision-making which will support improvements in the delivery of services. Articles 2 - 17 explain the rights of citizens and how the key parts of the Council operate. These are:
 - Members of the Council (Article 2)
 - Citizens and the Council (Article 3)
 - The Council meeting (Article 4)
 - Chairing the Council (Article 5)
 - Overview and Scrutiny (Article 6)
 - The Executive (Article 7)
 - Regulatory and other committees (Article 8)
 - Audit and Corporate Governance Committee (Article 9)
 - Champions (Article 10)
 - Joint arrangements (Article 11)
 - Officer Roles and Statutory Officer Functions (Article 12)
 - Decision making (Article 13)
 - Finance, contracts and legal matters (Article 14)
 - Review and revision of the Constitution (Article 15)
 - Suspension, interpretation and publication of the Constitution (Article 16)
 - Petitions Scheme (Article 17)

How the Council operates

- 4 The Council is composed of 42 Members. With effect from May 2023, there are 21 Wards in Slough. All wards have two members representing them. These members are elected for a period of four years. Members are democratically accountable to residents of their ward. The overriding duty of Members is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.
- 5 Each Member must give a written undertaking that he will observe the Council's code of conduct for the time being. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for training members in relation to the code of conduct.

- 6 Meetings of the Council shall be open to the public save where exclusion of the public is required or permitted. Here Members decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council appoints the Leader of the Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee responsible for holding the Executive publicly accountable, the Regulatory Committees which deal with non-executive functions and other committees. The Leader appoints the Deputy Leader and Executive members who together comprise the Cabinet.

How Decisions are Made

- 7 The Executive is the part of the Council which is responsible for most day-to-day decisions. The Executive is made up of the Leader elected by the Council and no more than nine members appointed by the Leader. When key decisions are to be made or discussed, these will be published in the Executive's forward plan in so far as they can be anticipated. Meetings of the Executive will be held in public. The public will be excluded where confidential information is to be discussed and may be excluded by the resolution of the Executive where exempt information is to be discussed. The public may also be excluded to maintain orderly conduct or prevent misbehaviour. The Executive has to make decisions which are in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision which is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

Overview and Scrutiny

- 8 There is one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which supports the work of the Executive and the Council as a whole. It allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters by holding public investigations into matters of local concern. These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Executive and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also monitor the decisions of the Executive. They can 'call-in' a decision which has been made by the Executive but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Executive reconsider the decision. They may also be consulted by the Executive or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

The Council's Staff

- 9 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.

Citizens' Rights

- 10 Citizens 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.

- 11 Where members of the public use specific Council services they may have additional rights. These are not covered in this Constitution.
- 12 Citizens have the right to:
- vote at local elections if they are registered;
 - contact their local Member about any matters of concern to them;
 - view a copy of the Constitution on the Council's website;
 - attend meetings of the Council and its committees except where, for example, personal or confidential matters are being discussed;
 - petition to request a referendum on a mayoral form of Executive;
 - participate in the meetings of the Council and contribute to overview and scrutiny investigations according to the Council's scheme;
 - find out, from the Executive's forward plan, what major decisions are to be discussed by the Executive or decided by the Executive or officers, and when;
 - attend meetings of the Executive where key decisions are being discussed or decided;
 - see reports and background papers, and any record of decisions made by the Council and Executive;
 - complain to the Council about any aspect of the services provided by the Council. A leaflet will be provided on request;
 - complain to the 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;
 - complain to the Monitoring Officer if they have evidence which they think shows that a Member has not followed the Council's Code of Conduct; and
 - inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.
- 13 The Council welcomes participation by its citizens in its work.