

East Suffolk Council

Guide to the Constitution

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PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

The Council is made up of different individuals and bodies, who work together to deliver the Council's functions. The Council's constitution describes the different people and bodies that make up the Council, their functions, and the procedure rules that govern how those bodies work together to deliver services.

It is intended to: -

- enable the Council to make decisions efficiently and effectively;
- support you to participate in decisions that affect you;
- help Councillors to represent their constituents more effectively; and
- enable you to hold the Council to account.

One of the main aims of the constitution is to set out clearly what you can expect from the Council, and what you can do if your expectations are not met.

This guide

This guide is designed to help you to understand how the Council makes decisions and works to deliver services in your area and how you can get involved. It provides an overview of the Council's constitution and explains key sections of the constitution in clear and simple language.

It may also be of use to those organisations that work with the Council to deliver services in the Council's area.

The first part of this guide explains why the constitution is important and how it is reviewed and updated.

The second part of this guide explains how the Council is structured. It describes the Council's democratic bodies as well as how decisions are made and by whom.

It explains the functions of the Council, its Cabinet and its committees, and which body of the Council is responsible for particular policies and decisions.

The third part of this guide explains the roles and responsibilities of elected members and paid officers of the Council. It describes the jobs they do, and how they work together to deliver the Council's functions and priorities. It also explains the codes of conduct that govern councillors' and officers' conduct and the standards of behaviour that you can expect from them.

The fourth part of this guide provides a summary of the key policies and procedures that govern how the Council carries out certain functions.

The final part of this guide explains how you can engage with, and get involved in, your Council and local democracy. It explains how your councillors are elected, how you can contact your

councillor, raise questions and speak at meetings, and how you can use petitions to raise issues that are important to you with the Council.

Signposts to the most relevant sections of the constitution and to additional resources available on the Council's website are provided throughout this guide to enable you to read more on a particular topic if you wish.

If there is anything in this guide which is unclear, or anything is missing, please let us know so we can improve it.

You can contact us by emailing democraticservices@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

The constitution

The constitution governs the way in which the Council, Councillors and officers working at the Council work together to deliver the Council's functions. It ensures that everyone at the Council acts lawfully, fairly and appropriately and that the Council's functions are performed properly and effectively.

- You can obtain a copy of the constitution from the Council's offices and view it on the Council's website. A copy of the constitution must also be provided to each Councillor when they are elected to the Council.
- You can access the Council's constitution on the [Council's website](#).

The Constitution Review Working Group, led by the Chair of the Council, is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the constitution. The Monitoring Officer is also responsible for deciding how the constitution should be understood and applied.

The Full Council is responsible for agreeing the constitution. Once the constitution has been agreed, it can only be changed by the Full Council. Usually, changes to the constitution are recommended to the Full Council by the Monitoring Officer.

In some circumstances, the Monitoring Officer may make changes to the constitution. For example, where there is a change in the law that affects the constitution, or where a minor change is needed to clarify a provision in the constitution that is unclear, or a change is needed to the management structure.

- Point 14 of the constitution explains how the constitution is agreed and how it can be changed.

The constitution also governs how meetings of the Council and its committees should be conducted. The person chairing a meeting will be responsible for ensuring that the constitution is followed during that meeting.

PART 2 THE COUNCIL'S DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES

The Council is made up of 55 Councillors who are elected every four years to represent people living in different parts of the Council's area (referred to in the constitution as 'electoral wards').

Councillors are responsible for everyone living in the Council's area, but they have a special duty to people living in their ward.

→ Point 3 of the constitution provides an overview of how individual Councillors work together as the Council.

All Councillors meet together regularly as the Full Council. The Full Council is responsible for setting the Council's budget, policy priorities and overall policy framework.

At the start of every year, the Full Council will elect one Councillor as its Chair. The Chair is responsible for chairing meetings of the Full Council and ensuring that decisions are taken properly and in accordance with the rules. You can read more about these roles in Part 3 of this guide.

The Council appoints or elects a Leader (who may be the leader of the largest political group or coalition of political groups). Individual councillors may also be appointed to the Cabinet by the Leader. The Leader will generally appoint councillors from their own political group to the Cabinet.

Members of the Cabinet are responsible for specific policy areas, commonly referred to as portfolios. Where responsibility for a particular work area or function is given to a member of the Cabinet, it is described in the constitution as being delegated to that person. The Cabinet meets regularly to take collective decisions on those aspects of the Council's work which the Cabinet is responsible for.

Some of the Council's functions are carried out by committees. Committees are small groups of Councillors that meet together to carry out certain of the Council's regulatory and scrutiny functions. Subject to some exceptions, committees comprise councillors from each political group in the same proportion as they are represented on the Full Council.

All council meetings (whether of the Full Council, the Cabinet or a committee or sub-committee) have to take place in person and only those councillors who were physically present at the meeting can participate in discussions and vote.

The Full Council may engage such paid staff (referred to as officers) as it considers necessary. The Cabinet, Full Council and committees may delegate functions to officers.

→ Further information on delegations can be found in the scheme of delegations at point 33 of the Constitution.

COUNCILLORS

Councillors are elected by the people living in a particular ward to represent them on the Council. However, Councillors are also accountable to the wider community and must act in the best interests of everyone living in the Council's area.

If you want to raise an issue with the Council and are not sure who to contact, you may wish to contact your Councillor to ask for help.

→ You can find out who your local Councillor is and their contact details on the [Council's website](#).

All Councillors are members of the Full Council, and they may also be members of one or more of the Council's members bodies (such as the Cabinet or a committee). Where Councillors act as a member of a particular Council body, they are referred to in the constitution as 'Members'. Councillors have certain rights that are set out in the constitution, which enable them to raise issues and make representations on your behalf.

For example, Councillors may:

- see any information which they need in order to fulfil their role as a member of the Council;
- attend any meeting of the Council, its committees or the Cabinet;
- speak at any meeting of any Council body which they are a member of;
- with the permission of the chair, speak at any meeting of any Council body (even if they are not a member of that body);
- talk to the Leader, or members of the Cabinet or Council officers about any aspect of Council business; and
- raise complaints.
- Councillors may also raise questions at meetings of the Full Council and the Council's committees and sub-committees, submit motions to the Full Council and call-in decisions.

FULL COUNCIL

→ The Full Council Procedure Rules are found at point 46 of the Constitution.

What does the Full Council do?

The law requires that certain important decisions are taken by all Councillors meeting together as the Full Council. These are referred to in the constitution as functions of the Full Council. The Council may decide that other non-executive functions should be carried out by the Full Council too. These are referred to in the constitution as local choice functions because the Council has a choice about which person or body should carry them out.

→ Appendix F of the Constitution explains the different types of functions that are carried out by the Council and which part of the Council is responsible for carrying them out.

The Full Council is responsible for, amongst other things:

- agreeing the constitution, and any changes to the constitution;
- setting the Council's budget;
- agreeing key plans and strategies (referred to in the constitution as the 'policy framework');
- reviewing and reporting on the Council's performance;
- electing the Leader and the Chair; and
- appointing the Chief Executive and other Chief Officers.

Meetings of the Full Council are overseen by the Chair of the Council. They are responsible for ensuring that meetings are conducted in accordance with the constitution and that decisions are made properly, fairly and lawfully. You can read more about the role of the Chair of the Council in Part 3 of this guide.

What happens at meetings of the Full Council?

The Full Council will meet early in each financial year to elect Councillors to particular positions on the Council, to appoint Councillors to outside bodies and to establish committees and working groups to carry out the Council's business during the year. This is known as the annual meeting.

→ The timing of the annual meeting and the issues to be decided at that meeting are described in the council procedure rules under section 47.1 of the constitution.

At the annual meeting, the Council will also decide how often all Councillors should meet as the Full Council. These regular meetings of the Full Meetings are known as ordinary meetings.

- Ordinary meetings are carried out in accordance with the council procedure rules in point 47.2 of the constitution.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the Full Council to meet before its next scheduled meeting to discuss an issue that is particularly urgent or important. This is known as an extraordinary meeting of the Council.

- The process by which an extraordinary meeting may be called and the issues that may be discussed there are set out in point 47.3 of the constitution.

The Full Council is responsible for deciding when and where meetings of the Full Council will be held. The Monitoring Officer must notify Councillors of this by issuing them with a summons. The Monitoring Officer is also responsible for ensuring that the public are told about meetings of the Full Council, by publishing a notice in advance of each meeting. The notice must include certain information such as the date and time of the meeting and where it will be held.

You can read more about participating in meetings of the Council in part 4 of this guide.

How does the Full Council make decisions?

Meetings of the Full Council are carried out in accordance with an agreed set of rules that are designed to ensure that debates are conducted fairly and efficiently, and that every Councillor can raise questions and to make comments on the public's behalf.

- The rules of debate are set out in point 51.4 of the constitution.

Decisions are made by Councillors casting votes for or against a particular decision (referred to in the constitution as a motion). Councillors may also propose amendments (changes) to a particular motion, which must then be voted on.

Votes are conducted by a show of hands, with Councillors asked to raise their hand to indicate whether they were voting for or against a particular motion, or whether they wished to abstain (i.e. to vote neither for nor against the motion).

Decisions will usually require a simple majority of those present voting for a particular motion. In other words, more Councillors must vote for a motion than against it. Where a vote is tied once all Councillors have voted, the Chair will have a second, casting vote.

Councillors may request a recorded vote on a particular issue. In a recorded vote, the Councillors voting for and against a particular motion, and those abstaining, will be written down and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Councillors may also request that their individual vote on a particular motion is recorded in the minutes.

- The Council's voting arrangements are set out in point 51.10 of the constitution.

Does every Councillor need to be present before a decision can be taken?

Not every Councillor needs to vote on every decision. In fact, in some circumstances it may not be appropriate for a Councillor to vote on a particular issue (for example, where they have a personal interest in a decision). You can read more about this in part three of this guide.

However, in order for the Council to make a lawful decision a minimum number of Councillors must be present at a meeting. The minimum number of Councillors that must be present at a meeting is referred to in the constitution as the 'quorum' for that meeting.

- Point 46.1.5 of the constitution sets out the minimum number of Councillors that must be present so the Full Council can make a decision.

Are meetings recorded?

Meetings of the Full Council are broadcast live on the Council's YouTube channel.

A record of each meeting will be kept in the form of minutes. The minutes will contain a record of the motions that were put to the meeting, and the decisions that were taken. They will also record who was present at the meeting.

The minutes of a meeting of the Full Council will be agreed by the next meeting of the Council and published on the Council's website in accordance with the Council's access to information procedure rules.

If you want to find out what the Council decided about an issue that affects you, you can read the minutes for the meeting where that issue was discussed.

- Information on minutes can be found at point 46.4 of the constitution.
- The access to information procedure rules can be found at point 56 of the constitution.
- Minutes of meetings are available on the [Council's website](#).

THE CABINET

The Cabinet is made up of the Leader and individual Councillors appointed to the Cabinet by the Leader.

- Point 25 of the constitution explains the composition of the Cabinet and how Councillors are appointed to the Cabinet.
- Appendix D to the constitution gives more information of the areas of work in each Cabinet portfolio.

What does the Cabinet do?

The Leader is responsible for carrying out the Council's executive functions. However, in practice the Leader cannot personally carry out every one of these functions, so the Leader delegates responsibility for certain functions to the Cabinet, to members of the Cabinet, to officers of the Council or to other bodies.

Each year, the Leader decides which functions to delegate to whom. This is known as the Council's scheme of delegation.

- Point 28 and 29 of the constitution explain how functions are delegated by the Leader.
- The Council's scheme of delegation can be found in point 33 of the constitution.

Meetings of the Cabinet

The Leader will decide when the Cabinet will meet, and for how long. They will also chair meetings of the Cabinet.

The constitution prescribes certain matters that must be considered at every meeting of the Cabinet. Additionally, the Leader, members of the Cabinet and certain Chief Officers may require that an item of business is added to the meeting agenda.

Meetings of the Cabinet are carried out in accordance with the rules of procedure and debate set down in the constitution.

- Point 52 of the constitution governs how meetings of the Cabinet are conducted.

How does the Cabinet make decisions?

The Cabinet is obliged to consult with individual Councillors and with certain committees before it makes certain decision on matters that are not urgent.

The Cabinet is also required by law to consult with the public in advance of taking certain decisions. Even where legislation does not require public consultation, as a matter of good practice the Cabinet may also consult the public in advance of taking other significant decisions. Where the Cabinet undertakes public consultation, the Cabinet must have regard to the consultation responses received when taking their decision.

The Cabinet must keep a record of every decision it makes, including decisions made by an individual member of the Cabinet and the Cabinet committees.

- You can find minutes of Cabinet meetings on the [Council's website](#).

What are key decisions?

Some decisions made by Cabinet are referred to as 'key decisions' In East Suffolk a Key Decision is any decision made by the Cabinet which will cost or produce an income over £250,000 or which affects two or more wards.

The Council is required to publish a list of all key decisions the Cabinet is going to make 28 days before the meeting when the decision will be taken.

If a decision has not been included in the forward plan but needs to be taken urgently this must be agreed by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- Point 17 of the Constitution gives more information on Key Decisions.
- Point 56.14 of the Constitution sets out the rules governing the forward plan.
- Point 56.16 sets out the process for making an urgent decision.
- The Forward Plan can be viewed on the [Council's website](#).

Why does the Council have committees and what do they do?

The law requires the Council to establish committees for the purpose of carrying out certain legal functions of the Council.

The Council may also decide to establish other committees and working groups for the purpose of assisting the Council to conduct its business efficiently and effectively.

What does the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee do?

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding the Cabinet and other bodies of the Council to account.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can:

- review and scrutinise decisions made by the Cabinet and other parts of the Council;
- make reports and recommendations to the Council or to the Cabinet; and
- make proposals regarding changes to the Council's policies and procedures.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must be told about meetings of other Council bodies. They have special rights to see Council documents.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may also require any member of the Cabinet or any senior paid officer of the Council to attend a meeting of the committee to explain a decision that they have taken or their performance.

- The terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are set out in Appendix A the constitution.

What does the Council's Audit and Governance Committee do?

The Audit and Governance Committee advises Full Council, the Cabinet and their respective committees and members on matters relating to good governance, financial oversight, risk management and complaints.

The Audit and Governance Committee monitors the effectiveness of the Council's rules and procedures for ensuring that the Council acts lawfully, responsibly and that it is accountable to the public. The committee is also responsible for ensuring that the Council's decisions and finances are audited in accordance with agreed procedures. Lastly, the Governance and Audit Committee must review and comment upon the Council's own corporate self-assessment reports.

The Audit and Governance Committee also determines any code of conduct complaints referred to it by the Monitoring Officer and receives reports on gifts and hospitality.

- The terms of reference of the Audit and Governance Committee are set out in Appendix A the constitution.

What do the Council's regulatory and other committees do?

Planning Committee

The Council is responsible for operating the planning system in its area. This involves preparing local development plans and local planning policies (which govern development in the Council's area) and managing development (by granting or refusing permission for new development).

East Suffolk Council has two planning committees. One covers the north area and one covers the south of the district.

The Council also has a Strategic Planning Committee which receives updates on matters which impact the whole of the district. The Strategic Planning Committee also monitors the work of the area planning committees and the planning service.

- The terms of reference of the Planning Committees and Strategic Planning Committee are set out in Appendix A the constitution.
- Information on the planning service can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Licensing Committee

The Council is responsible for deciding whether to grant licences for a wide range of different businesses, services and activities in its area. The Council's licensing functions are delegated to the Council's Licensing Committee.

The Council will appoint individual Councillors to the Licensing Committee and agree terms of reference for, and the delegation of powers to, the Licensing Committee to enable it to discharge those functions.

Licensing Sub-Committees are made up of three members of the Licensing Committee to determine individual applications and licences referred to it by officers.

- The terms of reference of the Licensing Committee and Licensing Sub-Committees are set out in Appendix A of the constitution.
- Information on the licensing service can be found on the [Council's website](#).

PART 3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What roles do Councillors perform?

The key roles of all Councillors is to:

- collectively be the ultimate policy makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate management functions;
- represent their communities and bring their views into the Council's decision-making process
- deal with individual casework and act as an advocate for constituents in resolving particular concerns or grievances;
- balance different interests identified within the electoral division and represent the electoral division as a whole;
- contribute to the improvement of council services;
- be involved in decision making through council meetings;
- be available to represent the authority on other bodies;
- maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

Councillors may also be elected or appointed to specific roles including:

- Leader and Deputy Leader;
- Chair and Deputy Chair;
- Cabinet Member;
- Assistant Cabinet Member;
- Elected Member (Councillor);
- Chair, Vice Chair and / or member of the Audit and Governance Committee;

- Chair, Vice Chair and / or member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Chair, Vice Chair and / or member of a regulatory committee;
- Leader of the Opposition;
- Outside Bodies.

Chair and Deputy Chair

The Chair and Deputy Chair of Council are elected by the Full Council every year.

The Chair is responsible for: -

- promoting and upholding the constitution;
- presiding over meetings of the Full Council;
- ensuring that meetings of the Full Council are quorate and conducted in accordance with the Council's procedure rules; and
- ensuring that decisions are taken in accordance with the constitution.

The Deputy Chair performs the Chairs functions in their absence.

Leader and Deputy Leader

The Leader is elected by the Full Council.

The Deputy Leader is appointed by the Leader to exercise the Leader's functions in their absence.

The Leader is responsible for appointing Councillors to the Cabinet and for allocating specific policy areas and responsibilities (portfolios) to members of the Cabinet.

The Leader is also responsible for preparing a scheme describing which functions are to be carried out by which members of the Cabinet.

The Leader also chairs meetings of the Cabinet.

The Leader may appoint other members of the Council to sit on other outside bodies.

→ The role description for the Leader and Deputy Leader can be found in Appendix C.

Cabinet Members

Cabinet Members are responsible for: -

- taking decisions regarding issues that fall within their area of responsibility;
- playing an active role in Cabinet meetings and decision making;
- contributing to the development of the Council's forward work programme and to policies and procedures in their area of responsibility;

- providing political leadership to the Council's paid officers on matters they are responsible for;
- reporting to the Full Council, the Leader, the Cabinet and others on the performance of services which they are responsible for; and
- participating in the Council's scrutiny processes and procedures, including by explaining decisions they have made and the performance of functions within their area to the Scrutiny Committee.

→ The role description for Cabinet Members can be found in Appendix C

Assistant Cabinet Members

Assistant Cabinet Member support members of the Cabinet by taking on certain tasks and responsibilities on their behalf. They may attend meetings, prepare reports, review papers and draft comments for the member they support.

Assistant Cabinet Members are not members of the Cabinet and cannot vote at Cabinet Meetings or Cabinet Committee Meetings. However, they are entitled to attend and to speak at meetings of the Cabinet and its committees.

→ The role description for Assistant Cabinet Members can be found in Appendix C

What roles do paid officers of the Council perform?

The elected members of the Council are supported by paid officers of the Council, who are accountable to the Council and responsible for delivering services to the public in accordance with the policies and procedures agreed by the Full Council, the Cabinet and their committees and bodies.

The **Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service)** has overall corporate and operational responsibility for the work of the Council and for all paid officers of the Council.

→ The Chief Executive's role and responsibilities are described in point 36 of the constitution.

The **Monitoring Officer** is responsible for ensuring lawfulness and fairness in the Council's decision making, maintaining and upholding the constitution, receiving reports of alleged breaches of the Council's duties and obligations and conducting investigations into such allegations.

→ The Monitoring Officer's role and responsibilities are described in point 38 of the constitution.

The **Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)** is responsible for ensuring that the Council makes lawful and financially prudent decisions. They are also responsible for the

administration of the Council's financial affairs and providing advice to Councillors on the Council's budgetary and other financial procedures.

- The Chief Finance Officer's role and responsibilities are described in point 37 of the constitution.

The Council also employs a number of officers to carry out certain functions, known as 'Proper Officers'.

- A list of Proper Officers and their functions are listed at Appendix H of the constitution.

How should Councillors and Officers behave?

Councillors should comply with the Members' Code of Conduct

Councillors are expected to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct. Those standards are described in the Suffolk Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct is intended to help and guide Councillors in maintaining appropriate standards of conduct when serving their community. In turn, it provides reassurance to the public and helps build their trust in, and respect for, their local representatives.

The Code of Conduct is based upon the 7 Principles of Public Life, which were first set out in the 1995 Nolan Report on Standards in Public Life. The Code of Conduct for Members is consistent with, and provides for the practical application of, these principles.

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must disclose and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful

reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Councillors are expected to ensure that they understand their obligations under the Code and act in a way which shows that they are committed to meeting the high standards of conduct that are expected of them. However, Councillors are provided with training when they are first appointed, and on a regular basis, to support them to comply with the Code of Conduct.

→ The Code of Conduct can be found in full on the [Council's website](#).

Officers should comply with the Officers' Code of Conduct

Paid officers of the Council are responsible for serving the council by providing advice to Councillors, implementing the Council's policies, and delivering services to the local community. In performing their duties, they must act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all those who work for the Council. The Code of Conduct for Officers outlines the rules and conditions of service which apply to the Council's employees. It is designed to provide clear guidance to assist them in their day to day work and to allow the public to understand what they can expect when they interact with a Council employee.

→ You can read the Code of Conduct for Officers in full in point 68 of the constitution.

How should Councillors and Officers work together?

Councillors and Officers have different roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, but it is imperative that they work effectively together to perform the Council's functions and to deliver services to residents living in the Council's area.

The Protocol on Member and Officer Relations is designed to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of Councillors and Officers and to guide them in their dealings with one another. It explains what Councillors and Officers can reasonably expect from one another and how they should work together to achieve their common purpose.

Councillors are entitled to express political views and to support the policies of the party or group to which they belong. Conversely, officers are expected to carry out the Council's business in a politically impartial way and many are restricted from engaging in political

activity. The protocol therefore explains how officers can support the policy deliberations by political groupings, while remaining politically neutral.

- You can read the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations in full under point 67 of the constitution.

PART 4 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

THE COUNCIL'S KEY PLANS AND STRATEGIES (THE POLICY FRAMEWORK)

Where can I find the Council's key plans and strategies?

The Full Council is responsible for setting the Council's key plans and strategies, which together form the Council's policy framework.

- The plans and strategies which form the Council's budget policy framework are listed in section 18 of the constitution.
- Individual plans and strategies are published on the Council's website.

Additionally, the Council's strategic plan presents the key ambitions and priorities until 2028.

- The strategic plan is published on the [Council's website](#).

How is the Council's policy framework decided?

The Council will be responsible for the adoption of a budget and policy framework. The policy framework and Budget adopted by the Council will be based on that proposed by the Cabinet.

Once a policy or Budget has been adopted it will be the responsibility of the Cabinet to implement it.

Once adopted, the Cabinet, their committees, individual Councillors and the Council's paid officers are bound to act in accordance with the policy framework.

- The process by which the Full Council adopts a policy framework is described in Section 55 of the constitution.

BUDGET SETTING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

How does the Council set its budget?

The Full Council is responsible for agreeing the Council's Budget, and for agreeing changes to the Council's Budget once it has been formally adopted.

The Council's budget is in two parts:

- the revenue budget provides for day-to-day operating costs and expenditure like staff salaries, rent, and the ongoing costs of providing services.
- the capital budget provides for one-off costs (for example car park improvements, leisure facilities).

The Cabinet is responsible for developing initial proposals for the Council's budget and consulting over these.

Once this consultation has been completed, the Cabinet is responsible for preparing a final budget proposal for consideration by the Full Council.

The Full Council may adopt the Budget without making any changes, amend the Budget, or ask the Cabinet to reconsider it before adopting it.

- The process by which the Full Council adopts its budget is described in point 55.2 of the constitution.

DECISIONS OUTSIDE THE BUDGET OR POLICY FRAMEWORK

Can decisions be taken that do not comply with the budget or policy framework?

The Full Council may decide to make changes to the policy framework.

Other bodies and individuals may only take decisions that do not comply with the policy framework in a limited number of exceptional circumstances, which are set out in the constitution. For example, where an urgent decision must be taken to safeguard the Council's interests and it is not possible to arrange a meeting of the Full Council in time.

- The Council's arrangements for urgent decisions which do not comply with the policy framework are set out in section 60.5 of the constitution.

Can money be moved from one budget head to another once the budget has been adopted?

During the year the Cabinet and Chief Officers may need to transfer budgets from one service area to another to reflect changed service needs or priorities to deliver the Council's policy framework within the financial limits set by the Council.

- The mechanism by which the Cabinet and Chief Officers may move money between budget heads is set out in section 60.2 of the constitution.

What other policies and procedures govern how the Council manages its budget?

The Council is bound by a number of different financial rules and procedures that govern how the Council's spending is planned, committed, reviewed and audited.

- The Council's detailed financial procedure rules are set out in Section 58 to 66 of the constitution.

Are there any restrictions on how the Council buys in goods and services?

The Council can enter into contracts to purchase goods and services in much the same way as any other person or organisation. However, the Council must comply with the contract procedure rules in the constitution when it does so.

The purpose of the contract procedure rules is to ensure that the Council complies with relevant legal requirements and secures the most economically advantageous (best value) goods and services for taxpayers.

If you regularly sell goods or services to the Council then you may wish to familiarise with these rules and procedures.

- The Council's contract procedure rules are set out in point 57 of the constitution.
- More information on procurement is available on the [Council's website](#).

How does the Council enter into contracts and agreements?

The rules and procedures that govern how agreements, contracts and deeds are authorised and executed on behalf of the Council are set out in point 57 of the constitution.

Part 5 How can I get involved?

How is the Council engaging with local people to encourage them to participate in local democracy?

The Council will:

- promote awareness of the Council's functions;
- highlight how the public can be involved in Council decisions through consultation and co-production;
- promote awareness of how people can become a Councillor and what the role entails;
- facilitate access to information about decisions made, or to be made, by the Council;
- promoting arrangements by which people may make representations to the Council about decisions it has made or will make in the future;
- promote awareness amongst Councillors of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people.

The Council also engages with local people through Community Partnerships, surveys and consultations around specific policies and services. These may be initiated by the Council, teams within the Council or through the work of the Council's committees or sub-committees.

Can I send a petition to the Council?

Yes, you can submit petitions to the Council using the Council's petition scheme. The Council is obliged by law to operate a petition scheme, which sets out:

- how a petition can be submitted to the Council;
- how and when the Council will acknowledge receipt of a petition;
- the steps the Council will take in response to a petition; and
- how and when the Council will make available its response to a petition to the person who submitted the petition and to the public.

→ You can read more about submitting a petition to the Council in section 56.5 of the constitution.

→ The Council publishes details of its petitions scheme on [its website](#).

How can I find out when meetings of the Council and its committees and bodies are taking place?

The Council publishes notices of meetings of the Full Council and its committees.

You can find out more about notice requirements in Section 56 of the constitution.

→ The Council publishes [notices of meetings and a programme of upcoming](#) meetings on its website.

How can I find out what will be discussed at a particular meeting?

The Council will publish agendas for meetings, together with any background papers and reports in advance of the meeting taking place.

Hard copies of agendas and background papers and reports will also be available at the meeting for those members of the public who wish to attend in person.

→ You can find out more the information that is made publicly available in advance of a Council meeting in Section 56.7 of the constitution.

→ The Council publishes [meeting agendas, reports and supporting documents](#) on its website.

How can I find out when an issue I am interested in will be decided?

The Council publishes a forward plan, which sets out what decisions will be taken by the Cabinet and when these matters will be discussed.

→ The Council publishes the [forward plan](#) on its website.

Can I ask a committee or body of the Council to look into a particular issue?

Yes, you can contact your councillor about matters of interest, and you can also ask the chair of a particular body to add an item to the agenda for a future meeting.

Can I observe meetings of the Full Council?

Yes, members of the public can come to observe meetings of the Full Council so long as they are being held in public.

Meetings of the Full Council are also broadcast live on the Council's YouTube so you can watch them in real time remotely if you wish to do so.

The public will only be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely that confidential information would be disclosed to them if they were able to attend. The Council may also exclude the public from a meeting, or part of a meeting, where exempt information would be disclosed. Exempt information includes information that relates to a particular individual or their financial or business affairs, information that is legally privileged or information relating to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of a crime, or other information specified in the constitution.

If you interrupt a meeting of the Council, then you are likely to be warned by the Chair about causing a disturbance. If you continue to disturb the meeting, then you may be removed.

Can I observe other meetings?

Yes, members of the public can come to observe any meeting which the Council has resolved should be held in public.

Can I speak at a meeting?

Members of the public can speak at any meeting which the Council has resolved should include participation by members of the public either through asking a question or making representations.

Can I ask a question at a meeting?

You can ask formal questions of Councillors at meetings of Full Council.

However, you may only ask a question if you have given the Monitoring Officer notice in writing (including by email) that you wish to raise a question in advance of the meeting taking place. Questions must be received at least five working days before the meeting.

Time for questions is limited, and questions are permitted in the order in which they were notified to the Monitoring Officer. If time for questions runs out before you are able to ask your question, then you may be provided with a written answer to your question instead.

- You can find more information on asking questions under point 48 of the Constitution.
- Questions can be sent to the Monitoring Officer by sending an email to democraticservices@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

How can I find out what the Council decided?

The Council publishes the agenda, reports and the minutes of meetings once they have been agreed. These papers are available for inspection by the public for a minimum of six years from the date of the meeting. The background papers are available to the public for at least six years. Webcast recordings of meetings are available on the Council's YouTube channel for six months.

The Council also has arrangements in place for publishing written records of decisions taken by the Cabinet and the Council's committees and other bodies.

- You can read [meeting minutes and reports](#) on the Council's website.

Can I view the Council's accounts to understand how my council tax is spent?

Yes. The Council is required to publish its accounts and to make them available for inspection by the public. You may raise questions of concerns about the Council's accounts with the Council or with the Council's external auditor.

- You can find out more about how to view and comment on the Council's website [here](#).