

A1 SUMMARY

1. How the Council operates

- 1.1 The Council is currently composed of 66 councillors elected initially for two years until 2011 and thereafter elected every four years. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their ward. 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.
- 1.2 Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Council has appointed a Standards Committee which is responsible for ensuring that training and advice is provided on the code of conduct and any breaches of the code are dealt with.
- 1.3 All councillors meet together as the Council. Meetings of the Council are open to the public, unless special circumstances apply. Here councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council appoints the Leader of the Council. The Leader appoints members who form the Executive and allocates their portfolio of responsibilities. The Council also appoints overview and scrutiny Committees, a Standards Committee, and regulatory and other committees.
- 1.4 The Council meeting is the forum for major debates and consideration of matters of interest to the whole community of Central Bedfordshire, as well as for holding to account the Executive members and committees. In addition to the annual and ordinary Council meetings, the Council has made provision for extraordinary meetings in its rules.
- 1.5 The functions of the full Council and the rules that govern the conduct of Council meetings are described in Part B of the constitution.

2. Executive Arrangements

2.1 The Executive is the part of the Council which is responsible for most day-to-day decisions. The Executive is made up of a leader plus at least two but not more than nine councillors, including a deputy leader appointed by the Leader. When major decisions (known as 'Key Decisions' which are defined in Part C2 of the constitution) are to be discussed or made, these are published in the Executive's forward plan in so far as they can be anticipated. If these major decisions are to be discussed with council officers at a meeting of the Executive, this will generally be open for the public to attend except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed. 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 (set out in Part B2 of the constitution), this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

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2.2 The Council's executive arrangements are described in Part C1.9 of the constitution.

3. Overview and Scrutiny

3.1 There are four themed overview and scrutiny committees that support the work of the Executive and the Council as a whole. They submit reports and recommendations which advise the Executive and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. Overview and scrutiny committees also monitor and scrutinise the decisions of the Executive, including powers to '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.

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3.2 The Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements are described in Part D1 of the constitution.

4. The Council's Staff

4.1 The Council has people working for it (called 'officers') to give advice, implement decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of its services. Officers also take operational decisions under the Council's executive arrangements. Some officers have a specific duty to ensure that the Council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. A protocol governs the relationships between officers and members of the Council. This protocol is contained in Part F4 of the constitution.

5. Citizens' Rights

- 5.1 Citizens have a number of rights in their dealings with the Council. These are set out in more detail in Part A4 of the constitution. 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.
- 5.2 Where members of the public use specific council services, for example as a parent of a school pupil or as a council tenant, they have additional rights. These are not covered in the constitution.
- 5.3 Citizens have the right to:-
- 5.3.1 Vote at local elections if they are registered;
 - 5.3.2 Contact their local councillor about any matters of concern to them;
 - 5.3.3 Obtain a copy of the constitution;
 - 5.3.4 Attend meetings of the Council, the Executive and committees except where confidential or exempt matters (for example personal, financial or commercial information) are being discussed;
 - 5.3.5 Petition to request a referendum on a mayoral form of constitution;
 - 5.3.6 Speak and ask questions, submit petitions and make deputations at meetings of the Council, the Executive and committees in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Procedure (Part A4 of the constitution);
 - 5.3.7 Participate in and contribute to investigations by overview and scrutiny committees;
 - 5.3.8 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;
 - 5.3.9 Apply to become a co-opted independent member of the Council's Standards Committee, whose role is to promote high standards of conduct amongst councillors and co-opted members, when vacancies are advertised;
 - 5.3.10 Complain to the Council about its services and receive a timely response;

- 5.3.11 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;
 - 5.3.12 Complain to the Standards Committee if they believe that a councillor has not followed the Council's Code of Conduct; and
 - 5.3.13 Inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.
- 5.4 The Council welcomes participation by its citizens in its work. For further information please see the Council's website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or contact the Council's Monitoring Officer at Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Beds, SG17 5TQ.
- 5.5 Details of the rights of citizens to inspect agendas and reports and attend meetings are included in the Access to Information Procedure Rules at Part G2 of the constitution.