

# Cambridge City Council Guide to Decisions



## **Introduction**

The Council is run by 42 Councillors, three from each of the City's 14 wards, who are elected by the residents of Cambridge and serve a 4 year term of office. They are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the local community about services provided by the Council. As the Council is funded by public money, it has to make sure that the decisions it takes are transparent, open and accountable to the people it serves.

### **What are Council meetings and what do they do?**

All 42 Councillors meet formally as the Council at least five times a year. At these meetings the Council sets a budget for services, the Council Tax and the Council's policy plans are agreed.

The Council also deals with licensing and planning issues and appoints smaller groups of Councillors (committees) to deal with these areas of work.

### **What is the role of the Mayor?**

The Mayor chairs meetings of the Council. They will undertake ceremonial duties in their Mayoral Year in their role as the civic figurehead of the city.

### **Who makes decisions?**

It depends on the decision that needs to be made. The big decisions are made by the Councillors. Council officers make most of the smaller day to day decisions.

The Council appoints a Leader, a Deputy Leader and Executive Councillors.

These Councillors make decisions individually and these are usually at a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee relevant to their executive area of responsibility. They also meet once a year to recommend a budget to the Council.

The Executive consists of:

- Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Strategy and Climate Change
- Executive Councillor for Arts, Sport and Public Places
- Executive Councillor for Planning and Sustainable Transport
- Executive Councillor for Community Development and Health
- Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources
- Executive Councillor for Environmental and Waste Services
- Executive Councillor for Housing

### **What is the function of a Scrutiny Committee?**

The remit of a Scrutiny Committee is to advise the Executive Councillors and review and/or scrutinise their decisions.

Scrutiny Committees can also make recommendations to the Executive and/or the Council, and assist in the development of the budget and policy framework.

Scrutiny Committees consist of non-executive Councillors with composition reflecting the political balance on the Council.

## **How can I find out in advance what decisions are going to be made?**

If you want to know what issues Councillors are discussing, you can look at the Forward Plan, which is published monthly by the Leader of the Council.

We also publish papers (agendas, reports and minutes) for meetings at least five days beforehand and these are available on our website or at the Guildhall Reception.

Minutes of meetings summarising the decisions made are also available.

## **What do other Councillors do?**

Whilst most major decisions will be made by members of the Executive or by the Council itself, there are other non-executive functions that have to be administered like:

- Making decisions about planning or licensing applications (Regulatory Decisions).
- Administration of elections
- Reviewing and approving the Council's Accounts and Audits

## **Can the Councillors take decisions which might benefit them personally?**

**No.** When Councillors are first elected, they sign a Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct requires high standards and sets out the rules for how they should carry out their duties. The public can complain about any Councillors conduct.

## **Who monitors Councillors conduct?**

The Standards Committee will look at conduct of Councillors and make sure that they work to high ethical standards. It also considers other issues that relate to whether work is being carried out in an ethical manner. The Standards Committee is separate from the Executive. It contains three people who are not Councillors, one of whom is the Chair. There are also six Councillors on the committee.

## **How can I get involved and have my say?**

There are many ways you can have your say and get involved in local decisions, for example by attending meetings, organising a petition or by raising questions during a question time at the meeting. Area Committees have an open forum item on every agenda so that local people can raise issues of concern or interest.

## **Area Committees**

There are four Area Committees.

Area Committees meet every eight weeks to make decisions about local issues. All meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity to speak on local issues. Typical issues discussed include planning applications, grants for community development, leisure and environmental improvement projects, and police priorities.

County Councillors from the area attend the meetings as well. They take an active part in all discussions and add valuable input and feedback from the perspective of the County Council, but cannot vote on City Council matters.

## Petitions

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. We adopted a new public petition scheme in May 2010, in response to new legal requirements. From 15 June 2010 we have a duty to provide a public petition scheme. It must also be available as an online facility by December 2010.

If a petition contains more than 500 signatures it will be debated by the full Council - unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting.

Further details on the new petition scheme can be obtained by visiting our website at:

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/content/contact-us/petitions.en;jsessionid=AE7412F17060C96671AA872AC6BBC9F7>

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