

The Council's Constitution

Summary and Explanation

The Ribble Valley Borough Council has agreed a 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 the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.

The Constitution is divided into 12 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 within this document.

What's in the Constitution

Article 1 of the Constitution commits the Council to provide clear leadership to the community and improve the delivery of services. Articles 2 – 12 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 Meetings (Article 4)
- chairing the Council (Article 5)
- policy and other committees (Article 6)
- joint arrangements (Article 7)
- officers (Article 8)
- decision-making (Article 9)
- finance, contracts and legal matters (Article 10)
- review and revision of the Constitution (Article 11)
- suspension, interpretation and publication of the Constitution (Article 12)

How the Council Operates

The Council is composed of 40 Councillors, 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 all their constituents.

Councillors have to agree to follow a Code of Conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Accounts and Audit Committee trains and advises them on the Code of Conduct.

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 appoints policy committees. The Council operates a public participation scheme under which residents may ask questions or make comments on any matter affecting the borough.

Most day-to-day decisions are made by policy committees. The Council has the following committees: Community Services Committee; Planning & Development Committee; Health & Housing Committee; Economic Development Committee; Personnel Committee; Licensing Committee; Policy and Finance Committee; Accounts and Audit Committee and Parish Councils' Liaison Committee.

Meetings of the Council's committees are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters or other exempt items are being discussed.

The Council resolved pursuant to section 9J of the Local Government Act 2000 that it would not have an overview and scrutiny committee.

The Council's Staff

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 Protocol governs the relationships between officers and Members of the Council.

Citizen's Rights

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 process. The local Citizens' Advice Bureau can advise on individuals' legal rights.

Where members of the public use specific Council services they have additional rights. These are not covered in this Constitution.

Citizens have the right to:

vote at local elections if they are registered;

contact their local Councillor;

obtain a copy of the Constitution;

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 mayoral form of executive;

participate in the Council's public participation session;

complain to the Council about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Council or its staff;

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;

complain to the Monitoring Officer if they have evidence which they think shows that a Councillor has not followed the Council's Code of Conduct; and

inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.

The Council welcomes participation by its citizens in its work. For further information on your rights as a citizen, please contact Diane Rice, Head of Legal and Democratic Services on 01200 414418.