

Part 1 – Summary and Explanation

The Council's Constitution

Bishop Auckland Town Council ("the 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 11 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?

Article 1 of the Constitution commits the Council to providing clear leadership and support for the local community; making decisions efficiently and effectively, in a way which is transparent, accountable, does not discriminate and delivering continuously improving services which meet the needs of diverse communities.

Article 2 – 11 explain the rights of citizens and how the key parts of the Council operate.

These are:

Article 2	Members of the Council
Article 3	Citizens and the Council
Article 4	The Full Council
Article 5	Chairing the Council
Article 6	Committees
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

How the Council operates

The Council is composed of 11 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 their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

Councillors follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. Responsibility for dealing with complaints that a Councillor may have breached the code lies Durham County Council's Monitoring Officer.

All Councillors meet together as the Town Council. Meetings of the Town Council are normally open to the public. Here Councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year.

How decisions are made

All formal meetings of Council and its committees are subject to statutory notice being given, and the Council publishes an annual programme in May each year. All formal meetings are open to the public and press and reports to those meetings and relevant background papers are available for the public to see.

Occasionally, Council or committees may need to consider matters in private. Examples of this are matters involving personal details of staff, or a particular member of the public, or where details of commercial sensitivity are to be discussed. This will only happen after a formal resolution has been passed to exclude the press and public. Minutes from all formal meetings, including the confidential parts are public documents.

The Council's Employees

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 relationship between Officers and Members of the Council.

Citizens' Rights

Citizens have a number of rights in their dealings with the Town 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. The local Citizens' Advice Bureau can advise on individuals' legal rights.

Citizens have the right to:

- vote at local elections if they are registered;
- contact their local Councillor about any matters of concern to them;
- obtain a copy of the Constitution;
- attend meetings of the Council and Committees except where, for example, personal or confidential matters are being discussed;
- under the direction of the Mayor or Chair of a Committee and in accordance with the relevant procedure rules speak or ask questions at any meeting on any matter in which they may have an interest except where exempt or confidential information is involved.
- submit a petition under the Council's Petition Scheme
- participate in the Council's public question time, subject to the procedure rules of the Council and those Committees;
- see reports and background papers and any record of decisions made by the Council and Committees subject to any restrictions in connection with exempt or confidential information;
- complain to the Council about the way in which services are being delivered and the conduct of Officers and Members;
- complain to the Local Authority Standards Committee 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 within the given timeframes.

The Council welcomes participation by its citizens in its work. For further information on your rights as a citizen, please contact the **Town Clerk**.

Citizens' Responsibilities

Citizens must not be violent, abusive or threatening to Members or Officers and must not wilfully harm things owned by the Town Council.