

Section 3 – Getting information and getting involved

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1 Getting Information

1.1 Information available to Members of the public

Members of the public can obtain information in the following ways:

- a) When Meetings of Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees will take place

A programme of meetings is available by contacting the Council direct or viewing the notice of public meeting at the civic centre or on the website.

- b) Forward Plan/Scrutiny Work Programme

From the Forward Plan and Scrutiny Work Programme, see what decisions will be taken by the Cabinet or Council and what issues the Scrutiny Committees will be considering and when these matters will be discussed.

- c) Information Available Prior to a Meeting

5 clear days before a meeting, the agenda, any report likely to be discussed and background papers to that report shall be available for inspection at the offices of the Council and on the website. If an item is added to the agenda later, the revised agenda will be open to inspection from the time when the item is added to the agenda and any report will be made available to the public as soon as it is available and sent to Councillors.

- d) Information Available at a Meeting

The Council will make available to the public present at a meeting a reasonable number of copies of the Agenda and of the Reports for the

meeting (save during any part of the meeting to which the public are excluded).

e) Information Available After a Meeting

For a period of six years the agenda, reports and the minutes of the meeting shall be available for inspection. The background papers shall remain open for inspection for a period of four years.

f) Council's Accounts

Inspect the Council's accounts and make views known to the external auditor. The accounts will be available for public inspection for twenty working days after the date appointed by the auditor.

Information which is confidential or exempt (as defined in Section 18) will not be disclosed to members of the public at any time.

2 Getting Involved

2.1 Members of the Public

Members of the public can get involved in the following ways:

a) Vote

If they are over 18 years and registered as a local elector with the area of the Borough, citizens have the right to vote and sign a petition to request a referendum for an elected mayor form of Constitution.

b) Meetings

Citizens have the right to attend meetings of the Council and its Committees except where confidential or exempt business is discussed. Citizens can also ask questions at meetings of the Council (see section 4)

c) When are Meetings Open to the Public?

Meetings will be open to the public wherever possible. The public must be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely that confidential information will be disclosed. The public may be excluded from meetings where it is likely that exempt information will be disclosed and it is in the public interest that the information is not disclosed. (See section 18 for definition of exempt information and section x for definition of public interest.)

d) Making Comments/Complaints

A member of the public may comment or complain about Council services by:

- (i) Using the Council's complaints process
- (ii) Complaining to the Local Government or Social Care Ombudsman should the Council's complaints process not resolve the problem
- (iii) Complaining to the Council's Monitoring Officer about a breach of the Member's code of conduct.

2.2 Citizen's Responsibilities

Citizens must not be violent, abusive or threatening to councillors or officers and must not wilfully harm councillors or officers or damage things owned by the Council.