

It's your Council!

How does Hartlepool Council work and how you can get involved



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Introduction

Hartlepool Borough Council has 33 elected councillors who are each elected for a four year term. Each councillor represents an area of the town called a ward. There are 11 wards, with three councillors for each ward.

The system of elections in the Borough operates on a four-year cycle; three years of Councillor elections and no elections in the fourth year. In each election year a third of the places on the Council come up for election.

Following a referendum in November 2012, the way Hartlepool Borough Council is run has changed from an Elected Mayor and Cabinet system to one made up of committees of councillors. The majority of day-to-day decisions will now be undertaken by five policy committees.

Everybody who is over 18 years old and is a British or Commonwealth citizen is entitled to vote to elect their local councillors. Please use your vote when it's election time. You can register to vote at:
www.hartlepool.gov.uk/elections

The Full Council

Full Council meetings are the main 'debating chamber' of the Council and are open meetings for all to attend. The Full Council also approves the Council's budget, the annual Council Tax and the Council's main policy documents.

At most of these Full Council meetings there is a specific 30 minute section to enable Hartlepool residents to put questions to the Leader of the Council and the Chairs of the committees and to receive answers at the meeting. Councillors also have an opportunity to ask questions of the Leader and Chairs of committees at the meeting.

Each May Council meets to appoint the members of the Council's various committees, forums and other groups, as well as appointing councillors to represent the Council on external organisations.

If you would like to ask a question at a meeting of the Full Council please read the guidance that starts at page 13 of this booklet. There is also a question form in the centre of this booklet and further forms can be downloaded from the website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk/democraticservices or contact the Democratic Services Team on 01429 523568

The Leader of the Council

Each year, the Full Council appoints a Leader of the Council. This person is normally the leader of the majority political group on the Council. At the same time, the Full Council also normally appoints a Deputy Leader of the Council.

The Leader is the political leader of the Council and acts as the Council's principal public spokesperson. The Leader gives the overall policy direction to the Council and leads, together with the Chairs of the Council's committees, the implementation of policies, budgets and strategies approved by the Council.

The Ceremonial Mayor

At its Annual Meeting the Full Council appoints a councillor to serve for a year as the Ceremonial Mayor and one to serve as the Deputy Ceremonial Mayor. The Ceremonial Mayor chairs the meetings of the Full Council with the Deputy as Vice-Chair.

The Ceremonial Mayor is the first Citizen of the Borough, upholding and promoting the purposes of the Council's Constitution and promoting public involvement in the Council's activities.

The Ceremonial Mayor, together with his/her consort, attends a range of civic and ceremonial functions and wears the appropriate chains of office. The Ceremonial Mayor also represents the Council at a range of events, including royal visits and official openings.

The Council's Main Committees

The Council's main day-to-day decision-making is carried out by a number of committees of councillors which reflect the Council's main services. These committees meet regularly, usually each calendar month.

There are five main policy committees –

- Finance and Policy Committee
- Adult Services Committee
- Children's Services Committee
- Neighbourhood Services Committee
- Regeneration Services Committee

The Finance and Policy Committee is chaired by the Leader of the Council and consists of 11 councillors. The other Policy Committees are made up of 7 councillors.

The Children's Services Committee also has a number of Members who are not Councillors these include school heads, school parent governors and young people. The young people provide the Committee with a fresh perspective on children's services.

Details of the role, remit and membership of the committees are set out in the Council's constitution.

Members of the public can attend the meetings of all these committees to hear the discussions and see how the decisions are made. However, if the meeting is going to deal with confidential matters, the public may be asked to leave. The reasons for this will be set out on the agenda for the meeting. For further information on all these meetings go to www.hartlepool.gov.uk/democraticservices.

Other Committees

The Council has a number of other committees. These include the following: -

Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit and Governance Committee promotes the Council's internal governance and financial control and approves the Council's annual Statement of Accounts and Treasury Management Strategy. The Committee is made up of 7 councillors and is chaired by a councillor who is not from the majority political group on the Council. The Audit and Governance Committee is there to make sure that the Council manages its budget and finances in a proper and prudent way. It looks at the work of the Council's internal auditors and reviews the plans of the external auditor and the internal audit team to ensure that audit work is co-ordinated.

The Committee promotes the maintenance of high standards of conduct by councillors and additional independent members are included when standards issues are considered.

The Audit and Governance Committee also acts as the scrutiny committee of the Council in relation to the provision and operation of health services and is also designated as the Council's 'Crime and Disorder Committee'. These roles and responsibilities are detailed more fully in 'Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions' of the Council's Constitution.

The Audit and Governance Committee also has a Personnel Sub Committee which deals with staffing matters.

Other Committees

Planning Committee

The Planning Committee manages the Council's planning services. It meets every four weeks to consider any significant planning applications or to examine and resolve objections to planning applications which have been received.

People affected by the planning applications can ask to speak at these meetings. For more information, contact the Development Control Team on 01429 284317 or e-mail developmentcontrol@hartlepool.gov.uk

You can also view the most up-to-date planning matters on the Council's website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk/planning



Other Committees

Licensing Committee

The Licensing Committee meets every three months and manages the Council's licensing services and licensing policy including alcohol licences (for pubs, clubs and retail outlets) and taxi and private hire drivers' licences. Much of the committee's work is done by the Licensing Sub-Committees. The Licensing Sub-Committees are responsible for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire driver licensing and the consideration of alcohol licensing matters as set out in the Licensing Act 2003. These sub-committees meet as and when they are required.

People affected by licensing applications can ask to speak at these meetings. For more information contact the Public Protection Team on 01429 523354 or e-mail: licensing@hartlepool.gov.uk

Members of the public can attend the meetings of all these committees to hear the discussions and see how the decisions are made. However, if the meeting is going to deal with confidential matters, the public may be asked to leave. The reasons for this will be set out on the agenda for the meeting.

To find out more about which meetings are being held and when, visit the Council's website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk/democraticservices or see the notices which are posted outside the Civic Centre, in the Central Library and publicised monthly in the local press.

Partnership Boards

Health and Wellbeing Board

Following the transfer of public health duties to the Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the Health and Wellbeing Board was set up to advise the Council, local health organisations and Clinical Commissioning Groups on improving the health and wellbeing of the people of Hartlepool through integrated health and social care services. The Board is responsible for preparing a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

The Board is a partnership involving the Council, the National Health Service and a range of public and voluntary partner organisations.

Safer Hartlepool Partnership

The Safer Hartlepool Partnership is a partnership of the Council and a range of other public and voluntary agencies which aims to create a confident and safe local community by working together to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and substance misuse in Hartlepool. The partnership is responsible for the development and implementation of a range of plans including the Community Safety Plan and the Youth Justice Strategic Plan.

Community Forums

There are two Community Forums covering the borough:

North and Coastal – covering the Council wards of Hart, De Bruce, Jesmond, Headland & Harbour and Seaton.

South and Central – covering the Council wards of Victoria, Burn Valley, Foggy Furze, Fens & Rossmere, Manor House and Rural West.

The forums meet throughout the year at the Civic Centre and are open to everyone to attend.

The Forums are a focal point for local consultation on the provision of Council services through 'Face the Public' and other events.

Residents are actively encouraged to attend these meetings to ask questions on any aspects of the Council's services. In tandem with the Community Forums there will also be a separate opportunity to pose questions to the Council's Policy Committee Chairs.

For more information on the Community Forums and the Policy Chairs Question Time please contact the Democratic Services Team
democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk or 01429 523568.

The Democratic Services Team

The Democratic Services Team is based in the Chief Executive's Department of the Council.

It is responsible for producing the agendas and minutes of all the Council's official meetings.

The team also provides advice to councillors and Council staff on the Council's Constitution and matters relating to meetings.

The agendas for all the Council's meetings are published and are available for inspection five working days before the meeting, and can be seen either at the Civic Centre, the Central Library or on the Council's website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk/democraticservices or follow the 'Agendas, Meetings and Minutes' link on the front page of the council's website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

(Before completing this form please read the accompanying note carefully)

Your question (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Please indicate the Council meeting date that the question is to be considered

.....
....

This question will be put to the Chair of the Committee which is responsible for the particular function as set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.

Name

Address

.....

Postcode Contact telephone number

E-mail address

Signed Date

If under 16 years of age:

Name

Address

Signature of Parent or Guardian

For office use only

Date received Checking in by Accepted Y / N

ER number: PW

Accepted

Ballot result Attended Council Y / N Written response sent

Check by ..

Rejected

Reasons:

Written response sent

Checked by

Hartlepool Borough Council Public Questions at Meetings

Introduction

Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Council, its Committees, Sub-Committees and Neighbourhood Forums, except when the meetings are considering items classed as 'confidential' or 'exempt'. Those matters that may be considered as confidential or exempt are set out in the Access to Information Procedure Rules in the Council's Constitution. If you would like to attend a meeting, or would like further details of a meeting, you are advised to contact our Democratic Services Team. To confirm details of the meeting call 01429 523568 or e-mail democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk

Council Meetings

The Council's Constitution states that during a period of 30 minutes, or a longer period at the discretion of the Chair, residents of Hartlepool may ask questions of Chairs of Committees at ordinary meetings of the Full Council in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules.

You can ask a question by completing a Public Question Time form attached to this centre of this guide. The completed form must be delivered or sent by e-mail to the Chief Executive no later than noon on the Thursday of the week before the meeting (or in the case of a meeting held on a day other than a Thursday, on the expiry of the fifth clear working day before the meeting). Alternatively, if you would prefer to send your question by e-mail, please send it to democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk You must include the name and address of the questioner.

If the questioner is under 16 years of age, the notice must include the name, address and signature of the parent or guardian of the questioner.

The day before the meeting, the order in which the questions will be asked will be determined randomly by the Chief Executive. The determination of the order will take place at the Civic Centre and will be open to the public.

At any one meeting no person may submit no more than two questions but a question may consist of a number of parts.

A question should fulfil the following criteria:-

- (i) The name of the person wishing to ask the question should be on the Hartlepool Register of Electors;
- (ii) The question should be concise (both in length and number of parts), direct and should be about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the borough;
- (iii) The question should not be the same as one asked at a meeting of the Full Council in the last six months (unless there has been a significant change in circumstances)

The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Council, may reject a question if it

- is considered to be defamatory, frivolous or offensive,
- seeks the disclosure of confidential or exempt information,
- is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Full Council in the past six months and since when there has been no change of circumstances justifying the resubmission of the question,
- is unreasonably excessive because of its length or its number of parts,
- the name of the person wishing to ask the question is not on the Register of Electors.

Copies of all questions will be circulated to all councillors and will be made available at the meeting. At the Council meeting the question will be put by the Chief Executive to the Committee Chair named in the notice.

Any question which cannot be dealt with during public question time, either because of lack of time or because of the non-attendance of the Chair to whom it was to be put, will be dealt with by way of a written answer.

Council meetings are usually held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool. Dates of Council Meetings and any further information can be obtained from the Democratic Services Team on 01429 523568 or from the Council's website at www.hartlepool.gov.uk

Committees and Sub Committees

All meetings of the Council's committees and sub committees are open to the public to attend except when the meetings are considering items classed as 'confidential' or 'exempt'. These meetings may consider issues that will be of interest to residents who may wish to ask questions or express their views on the matters being considered. On such occasions anyone wishing to speak at a committee or sub committee meeting should seek the permission of the Chair in advance of the meeting. This can be done directly with the Chair or via the Democratic Services Team by calling 01429 523568 or e-mailing democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk

Planning Committee

There are different rules applying to public speaking at the Planning and Licensing Committees. 'A Guide to Public Speaking at Planning Committee' is available on the Council's website. Essentially, only applicants and registered objectors to planning applications can speak at these meetings. For more guidance contact the Development Control Team on 01429 523280 or e-mail developmentcontrol@hartlepool.gov.uk

Licensing Committee

Licensing Committee considers licensing and other applications in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and other matters, i.e. gambling etc. Individual licensing applications are dealt with by the Licensing Act Sub-Committee and if you wish to speak at a meeting of the Sub-Committee in relation to an application that affects you, contact the Public Protection Team on 01429 523354 or e-mail licensing@hartlepool.gov.uk



HBC Constitution - Summary and Explanation

The Council's Constitution

1. Following a referendum held on 15th November 2012, Hartlepool Borough Council has agreed a revised 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 has been developed in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and the Localism Act 2011. These Acts, along with the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, are the key statutory references for the provisions of this Constitution. Any changes to the Constitution are likely to be initiated by both legislation and local experience.

What's in the Constitution?

2. The Constitution is divided into 16 Articles that set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are provided in separate rules, codes and protocols set out in the document.
3. Article 1 sets out the purpose of the Constitution. Articles 2 – 16 explain the rights of citizens and sets out a framework for how the key parts of the Council operate, these are:

Members of the Council (Article 2).

Local People and the Council (Article 3).

Full Council (Article 4).

The Ceremonial Mayor (Article 5).

The Leader of the Council ([Article 6](#)).

Policy Committees (Article 7).

Regulatory and other Committees (Article 8).

Joint Committees and Partnership Boards ([Article 9](#)).

Community Forums (Article 10).

Joint Arrangements (Article 11).

Officers (Article 12).

Decision Making ([Article 13](#)).

Finance, Contracts and Legal Matters ([Article 14](#)).

Review and Revision of the Constitution ([Article 15](#)).

Suspension, Interpretation and Publication of the Constitution ([Article 16](#)).

How the Council operates

4. The Council is composed of 33 Councillors (often called Members), with one-third elected three years in four. As a result of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England review as concluded in 2011, all Members of the Council resigned in 2012 and their seats were filled in an all-out election that took place in May 2012. The Councillors elected served for 2, 3 or 4 years according to the election results. 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.
5. Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Council has a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted Members of the Authority. The Monitoring Officer will contribute to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct through the provision of support to the Audit and Governance Committee when the Committee discharges standards functions.
6. 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. Further details of how meetings of the Council operate can be found in Article 4 and the Council Procedure Rules, contained within Part 4 of this Constitution.

How decisions are made

7. Most day to day decisions are made by Policy Committees, Sub-Committees or through Officers. The Council has 5 Policy Committees which deal with those functions, plans and strategies and service areas as set out within Article 7 and Part 3 (Functions and Responsibilities) of this Constitution. When major decisions (called key decisions) are to be discussed or made, then these are published in the Council's Forward Plan insofar as they can be anticipated. The public are entitled to attend meetings of Policy Committees when major decisions are discussed, except where personal or confidential matters are being considered. Any decisions that are outside the budget and policy framework must be referred by a Policy Committee to Council for a decision. A Policy Committee also has the discretion to refer any matter to Council for determination. In addition, not less than 17 Members of Council (at least one half of the composition of Council) may request the referral of a major decision to Council for debate and decision in accordance with the Rules of Procedure set out within Part 4 of the Constitution. Committees also carry out a number of regulatory functions, including dealing with planning applications, licensing and most other regulatory business. Meetings of the Council's Policy, Regulatory and other Committees are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed.

Statutory Scrutiny

8. The Council has a number of statutory scrutiny responsibilities in relation to health and crime and disorder, as defined within the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and Police and Crime Act 2006. In fulfilling these roles, the Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for the review and scrutiny of matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services. It is also designated as the Council's 'Crime and Disorder Committee' with responsibility for the review and scrutiny of crime and disorder matters. These roles and responsibilities are more fully set out within Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions.

Community Forums

9. The Council has two Community Forums; 'North and Coastal' and 'South and Central'. These Forums (operating on neighbourhood management boundaries) bring an area dimension to the work of the Council. They allow local people to raise issues of concern, principally relating to neighbourhood management services, and act as a very important mechanism for community involvement and engagement for the Council, its Committees, and the Strategic Partners Group. Both meetings of the Forums take place in the Civic Centre on the same day on a quarterly basis.

The Council's Staff

10. 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 and can be found in Part 5 – Codes and Protocols of this Constitution.

People's Rights

11. People 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 processes. Solicitors and local advice agencies can advise on the legal rights of individuals.
12. Where members of the public use specific Council services, for example as a parent of a school pupil, they have additional rights. These are not covered in this Constitution.
13. People have the right to:
 - vote at local elections if they are registered;
 - vote at any Council Tax Referendum ;
 - contact their local Councillor about any matters of concern to them;
 - 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 a constitutional change as to how the Council should be run (5% of the number of local government electors within the Borough are required to support a petition and there can only be one referendum in any period of 10 years);
- participate in the Council's question time and contribute to inquiries in accordance with the relevant procedure rules;
- participate in the Community Forums in accordance with the relevant procedure rules;
- find out, from the Council's Forward Plan, what key decisions are to be discussed by the Policy Committees or by Council, and when;
- see reports and background papers, and any record of decisions made by the Council and its Committees in accordance with the relevant procedure rules;
- complain to the Council about the way in which services are being delivered;- complain to the Ombudsman if they think the Council has not followed its procedures properly. However, they should normally do this after using the Council's own complaints process;
- complain to the Council's 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.

Further information

- 14.** The Council welcomes participation by the town's people in its work. For further information on your rights or about this Constitution, please contact:

Democratic Services Team
 Chief Executive's Department
 Hartlepool Borough Council
 Civic Centre
 Hartlepool. TS24 8AY
 Telephone: 01429 523193
 E-mail: democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk

Useful Contacts

The best starting point for any information about the Council is its website - www.hartlepool.gov.uk
If you don't have internet access at home, it is available free of charge in your local library.

You can also phone the Council's Contact Centre, Hartlepool Connect, on 01429 523333 or e-mail customer.service@hartlepool.gov.uk

For more specific queries in relation to issues raised in this leaflet you may find the following numbers and e-mail addresses useful.

The Democratic Services Team

01429 523568 democratic.services@hartlepool.gov.uk

The Scrutiny Team

01429 523087 scrutiny@hartlepool.gov.uk

Electoral Registration

01429 523017 elections@hartlepool.gov.uk

Development Control (Planning)

01429 284317 developmentcontrol@hartlepool.gov.uk

Licensing

01429 523354 licensing@hartlepool.gov.uk

North and Coastal Neighbourhood Area

01429 523258 philip.hepburn@hartlepool.gov.uk

South and Central Neighbourhood Area

01429 523258 philip.hepburn@hartlepool.gov.uk

**If you don't understand this leaflet, the Council
can provide information in other languages or
alternative formats.**

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www.hartlepool.gov.uk

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Information for local help and support**