

G. Access to Information Procedure Rules

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Access to Information Procedure Rules

1. Scope

Derivation -

These Rules implement the requirements of Sections 100A to K and Schedule 12 and 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, Sections 9G and 9GA of the Local Government Act 2000, and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Rules 1 -12 apply to all meetings of:

- The Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards Committee
- The Council
- The Planning Committee
- The Licensing and General Purposes Committee
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Any Consultative Committees established under section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 & The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Any sub-committees or panels of the above Committees

Any Area-Based Forums or Committees

Meetings of the Executive including the Cabinet, Executive (Cabinet) Committees, Consultative Forums and any Cabinet Advisory Panels

Other Statutory Committees

together referred to in these Rules as “meetings”.

Rules 13 - 21 apply only to meetings of the Executive, Executive Committees and executive decisions taken by individual Members of the Executive or by officers but do not apply to meetings of Consultative Forums or Advisory Panels.

2. Additional Rights to Information

These Rules do not affect any more specific rights to information contained elsewhere in the Constitution or the law.

3. Rights to Attend Meetings

Members of the public and representatives of the Press may attend all meetings subject only to the exceptions in these Rules. Members of the public and representatives of the Press may also attend when an individual Member of the Executive is determining a matter that is a Key Decision (see Rule 20.3).

4. Reporting of meetings

The reporting of meetings is permitted except where the press and public are excluded under Rule 12 of these Rules. A protocol on reporting of meetings is at Part 5O of the Constitution.

5. Notice of Meetings and Key Decisions

The Council will give at least five clear working days' notice of any meeting by publishing details of the meeting at the Harrow Council Hub, Station Road, Harrow.

Notice will also be given of when an individual Member of the Executive is to take a Key Decision. Key Decisions can only be taken by the Leader except where the Executive has delegated the decision to an individual Portfolio Holder.

At least 28 clear calendar days before a Key Decision is made, a Key Decision Schedule must be available for inspection by the public – at the offices of the Council and on the Council's website.

At least 28 clear calendar days before a private executive meeting, the Council must make available at the Council's Harrow Council Hub and published on the Council's website, a notice of its intention to hold the meeting in private. This notice will be included in the Key Decision Schedule and will apply to both Key and Non-Key Decisions to be taken. See Rule 12.5 for procedure.

6. Access to Agenda and Reports before the Meeting

- 6.1.** The Council will make copies of those agenda and reports which are open to the public available for inspection at the Harrow Council Hub, and on the Council's website, at least five clear working days before the meeting.
- 6.2.** Where the meeting is convened at shorter notice than set out in Rule 5, copies of the agenda and reports shall be open to inspection from the time the meeting is convened.
- 6.3.** Where an item is added to an agenda, copies of which are open to inspection by the public, copies of any report for the meeting relating to the item shall be available from the time the item is added to the agenda. Nothing in this Rule requires copies of any agenda item or report to be open to inspection by the public until copies are available to Councillors. Copies of agendas and reports must be made available at the meeting.

7. Late Reports

If there is a requirement to add an agenda item to an agenda after the statutory deadline for publication, that item may only be considered if the Chair agrees by virtue of the special circumstances set out either in the report or on the supplemental agenda, that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency and specified in the minutes of the meeting. If the report involves a Key Decision please also see paragraph 16 of these Rules.

For meetings of Advisory Panels/Consultative Forums, the Panel/Forum rather than the Chair shall decide at the start of the meeting whether an item should be considered as a matter of urgency.

This Rule does not apply to the Meetings of the full Council where Council Procedure Rule 7 applies.

Where a report is prepared after the agenda has been sent out the Director of Legal & Governance Services shall make the report available to the public as soon as the report is completed and sent to Councillors.

8. Supply of Copies of Agenda and Reports

The Council will supply copies and make these available on the Council's website:

- (a) any agenda and reports which are open to public inspection;
- (b) any further statements or particulars necessary to indicate the nature of the items on the agenda;
- (c) any other documents supplied to Councillors in connection with an item, if the Director of Legal & Governance Services considers it appropriate and practical;
- (d) in terms of the Executive and where a Key decision is to be taken by the Leader or an individual Members where this has been delegated to them by the Executive, when a copy of the report for a meeting is made available for inspection by members of the public, at the same time – a copy of a list compiled by the Proper Officer of the background papers to the report, must be included in the report and at least the title of each of the documents included in that list and a copy of the document to be made available on the Council's website.

9. Access to Minutes and Committee Documents after the Meeting

The Council will make available copies of the following for six years after a meeting:

- (a) the minutes of meetings (or the record of all decisions taken at a meeting, together with the reasons, for all meetings of the Executive), excluding any part of the minutes of proceedings when the meeting was not open to the public and which disclose exempt or confidential information;
- (b) a summary of any proceedings not open to the public when the minutes open to inspection do not provide a reasonably clear and coherent record;

- (c) the agenda for the meeting; and
- (d) reports relating to items when the meeting was open to the public.

10. Background Papers

10.1 List of Background Papers

The Chief Officer responsible for the drafting of a report (or in the case of joint reports, the first named Chief Officer) shall set out in the report a list of those documents (called the background papers) relating to the subject matter of the report which in his/her opinion:

- (i) disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- (ii) which have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report

but will not include in such list published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information (as defined in Rule 11) and in respect of reports to a meeting of the Executive, any advice given by a political advisor.

10.2 Public Inspection of Background Papers

The Council will make available for public inspection for at least four years after the date of the meeting a copy of each of the documents on the list of background papers. In the case of the Executive, the background papers will also be available on the Council's website.

11. Summary of the Public's Rights

A written summary of the public's rights to attend meetings and to inspect and copy documents is included in paragraph 3 of the Summary and Explanation in this Constitution.

12. Exclusion of Access by the Public and Press to Meetings

12.1 Confidential Information – requirement to exclude the public from a meeting

The public and press must be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that confidential information would be disclosed.

12.2 Exempt Information – discretion to exclude the public and press from a meeting

The public and press may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that exempt information would be disclosed.

When the meeting will determine any person's civil rights or obligations, or adversely affect their possessions, Article 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 establishes a presumption that the meeting will be held in public unless a private hearing is necessary for one of the reasons specified in Article 6.

Extract from Article 6 'Right to a fair trial - in the determination of his or her civil rights and obligations ... everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time.'

12.3 Meaning of Confidential Information

Confidential information means information given to the Council by a Government Department on terms which forbid its public disclosure or information which cannot be publicly disclosed by any enactment or Court Order.

12.4 Meaning of Exempt Information

Exempt information means information falling within the following seven categories (subject to the relevant condition)

| Category | Condition |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Information relating to any individual</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 1 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> |
| <p>2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 2 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> |
| <p>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)</p> <p>“Financial or business affairs” includes contemplated as well as past or current activities.</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 3 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> <p>Information falling within paragraph 3 is not exempt information if it is required to be registered under</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the Companies Act 1985 b. the Friendly Societies Act 1974 c. the Friendly Societies Act 1992 |

| Category | Condition |
|---|---|
| | <p>d. the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to 1978</p> <p>e. the Building Societies Act 1986</p> <p>f. the Charities Act 1993</p> |
| <p>4. Information relation to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under the authority.</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 4 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemptions outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> <p>“Labour relations matter” are as specified in paragraphs (a) to (g) of section 218(1) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (matters which may be the subject of a trade dispute, within the meaning of that Act or any dispute about a matter within this paragraph.</p> |
| <p>5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 5 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> |

| Category | Condition |
|---|--|
| <p>6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes</p> <p>(a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person</p> <p>or</p> <p>(b) to make an order or direction under any enactment</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 6 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> |
| <p>7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.</p> | <p>Information falling within paragraph 7 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p> |

Information is not exempt information if it relates to proposed development for which the local planning authority may grant itself planning permission pursuant to regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992.

12.5 Procedures prior to Private Meetings of the Executive

At least 28 clear days before a private meeting, the Council must—

- (a) make available at the Council’s Harrow Council Hub a notice of its intention to hold the meeting in private; and
- (b) publish that notice on the Council’s website.

The notice must include a statement of the reasons for the meeting to be held in private.

- At least five clear days before a private meeting, the Council must—
- (a) make available at the Harrow Council Hub a further notice of its intention to hold the meeting in private;
 - (b) publish that notice on the Council's website.

This further notice must include:

- (a) a statement of the reasons for the meeting to be held in private;
- (b) details of any representations received by the Council about why the meeting should be open to the public;
- (c) a statement of its response to any such representations.

Where the date by which a meeting must be held makes compliance with this paragraph impracticable, the meeting may only be held in private where the Council has obtained agreement from:

- (a) the Chair of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee;
- (b) or if the Chair of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee is unable to act, the Mayor;
- (c) where there is no Chair of either the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Mayor is not available, the Deputy Mayor may give agreement.

As soon as reasonably practicable after the Council has obtained agreement to hold a private meeting, it must:

- (a) make available at the Harrow Council Hub a notice setting out the reasons why the meeting is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred; and
- (b) publish that notice on the Council's website.

13. Excluding Public Access to Reports

The public may be denied access to reports if the Chief Officer responsible for drafting the report believes that the report relates to matters which, in

accordance with Rule 12, will not be considered in a public meeting. Such reports will be marked “Not for publication” together with the category of information likely to be disclosed.

14. Procedure before taking Key Decisions

Subject to Rule 16 (general exception) and Rule 17 (special urgency), a Key Decision may not be taken unless:

- (a) the “Key Decision Schedule” has been published in connection with the matter in question;
- (b) at least 28 clear days have elapsed since the publication at the Harrow Council Hub and the Council’s Website of the Key Decision Schedule;
- (c) where the decision is to be taken at a meeting of the Executive, a notice of the meeting has been given in accordance with Rule 5 (notice of meetings) and a written report providing all relevant and necessary information has been considered by the body taking the decision; and
- (d) where the decision is to be taken by an individual Member of the Executive at least five clear working days have elapsed following receipt of the report required under Rule 20.1 and notice of the consideration of a Key Decision has been given under Rule 5 (notice of meetings) and in accordance with (b) above.

15. The Key Decision Schedule (KDS)

15.1 Period of the Key Decision Schedule

The KDS will be prepared by the Director of Legal & Governance Services to cover a period of three months and published 28 clear days prior to the decision being taken by that meeting.

The KDS must be published at least 28 clear days before the date of the meeting taking that Key Decision.

15.2 Contents of the Key Decision Schedule (KDS)

The KDS will contain matters which the Monitoring Officer/Director of Legal and Governance Services believes will be the subject of a Key Decision to be taken by the Executive or under joint arrangements. Items which relate to the discharge of an Executive function must be included, but other items may be included. It will describe the following particulars in so far as the information is available:

- (a) the matter in respect of which a decision is to be made;
- (b) where the decision taker is an individual, their name and title, if any, and where the decision taker is a body, its name and a list of its Members;
- (c) the date on which, or the period within which, the decision is to be made;
- (d) a list of the documents submitted to the decision-maker for consideration in relation to the matter in respect of which the Key decision is to be made;
- (e) the address from which, subject to any prohibition or restriction on their disclosure, copies of, or extracts from, any document listed is available;
- (f) a list of the other documents relevant to those matters that may be submitted to the decision maker;
- (g) The procedure for requesting details of those documents (if any) as they become available.

16. General Exception

If a matter which is likely to be a Key Decision has not been included in the Key Decision Schedule, then subject to Rule 17 (special urgency), the decision may still be taken if:

- (a) the Director of Legal & Governance Services has informed by written notice the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or if there is no such person, each Member of that Committee, by notice in writing of the matter to which the decision is to be made;
- (b) the Director of Legal & Governance Services has made available to the public at the Harrow Council Hub and on the Council's website, a copy of that notice; and
- (c) at least five clear working days have elapsed following the day on which the Director of Legal & Governance Services complied with (b).

Any such decision taken by the Executive must be taken in public unless it relates to a matter which is confidential or exempt pursuant to paragraph 11 above.

17. Special Urgency

If by virtue of the date by which a decision must be taken Rule 16 (general exception) cannot be followed, then the decision can only be taken if the decision maker (if an individual) or the Chair of the body making the decision, obtains the agreement of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the taking of the decision is urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred. If there is no Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or if that Chair is unable to act, then the agreement of the Mayor, or in their absence the agreement of the Deputy Mayor is required.

Any such decision taken by the Executive must be taken in public unless it relates to a matter, which is confidential or exempt pursuant to paragraph 12 above.

As soon as reasonably practicable after agreement has been obtained, the decision maker must make available at the Harrow Council Hub a notice setting out the reasons for urgency and publish the notice on the Council's website.

18. Requirement for a Report to be made to Council

18.1 Request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thinks that a Key Decision has been taken which was not included in the Key Decision Schedule, they may require the Executive to submit a report to the Council within such reasonable time as the Committee specifies. The report must include details of the decision and the reasons for it, the name of the decision maker and the Executive's reasons for its opinion that the decision was not key.

18.2 The timing of the report to Council

The Executive will prepare a report for submission to the Council at such intervals as may be determined by the Council. The report to Council will set out particulars of each decision, and a summary of the matters in respect of which each decision was made. The Leader must submit at least one report on special urgency annually, unless otherwise determined by the Council.

18.3 Requirement for quarterly reports on special urgency decisions

In any event the Leader of the Council will submit quarterly reports to the Council on the Executive decisions taken in the circumstances set out in Rule 17 (special urgency) in the preceding three months. The report will include the number of decisions so taken and a summary of the matters in respect of which those decisions were taken.

19. Record of Decisions

After the meeting of the Executive or any of its Executive (Cabinet) Committees, Advisory Panels or Consultative Forums, the Director of Legal & Governance Services or a Chief Officer present, will produce as soon as practicable and make available for inspection by members of the public and on the Council's website:

- (a) a record of the decisions taken;
- (b) a statement of the reasons for each decision; and

- (c) any alternative options considered and rejected at that meeting
- (d) a record of any conflict of interest declared by any Executive Members and a note of any dispensation granted.

20. Key Decisions taken by Individual Members of the Executive or by Officers

20.1 Reports

A Key Decision shall not be taken by an individual Member of the Executive or by an officer until twenty eight clear days after the publication of the Key Decision Schedule and five clear working days have elapsed from receipt of a report which includes relevant and necessary information for the making of the decision.

20.2 Provision of copies of reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

On the giving of such a report to an individual decision maker, the person preparing the report will at the same time give a copy to the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and make it publicly available.

20.3 Notice of the Decision

Notice of the taking of a Key Decision by an individual Member or officer shall be given in the same way as a notice of a meeting of the Executive (Rule 5). Members of the public and representatives of the Press may attend the taking of a Key Decision by an individual Member.

21. Record of Individual Decisions

As soon as reasonably practicable after any Executive decision has been taken by an individual Member or after a Key Decision has been taken by an officer they will instruct the Director of Legal & Governance Services or the relevant Director to prepare a record of the decision, a statement of the reasons for it, any alternative options considered and rejected (see Rule 19), a record of any conflict of interest declared by any Executive Member and in

respect of any declared conflict of interest, a note of dispensation granted by the Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards Committee.

22. Inspection of Documents and Background Papers

The provisions of Rules 9 and 10 (access to documents after meetings and background papers) will also apply to the making of decisions by individual Members of the Executive and Key Decisions by officers. This does not require the disclosure of exempt or confidential information.

23. Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Access to Documents

23.1 Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including its sub-committees) will be entitled to copies of any document which is in the possession or control of the Executive, Executive (Cabinet) Committee, a Portfolio Holder, Advisory Panel or Consultative Forum and which contains material relating to:

- (a) any business transacted at a meeting of the Executive, Executive (Cabinet) Committee, Advisory Panel or Consultative Forum; or
- (b) any decision taken by a individual Member of the Executive;
- (c) any decision that has been made by an officer of the authority in accordance with Executive Arrangements.

23.2 These documents should be provided by the Executive as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 10 clear days from the Executive receiving the request.

23.3 No Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is entitled to a copy of any such document as contains exempt or confidential information unless the information is relevant to:

- (a) An action or decision that the Member is reviewing or scrutinising.
- (b) Any review contained in any programme of work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

No Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is entitled to any such document as contains advice from a political adviser.

- 23.4** Where the Executive determines that a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is not entitled to a copy of a document (for reasons under Rule 22.3) it must provide a written statement of the decision to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.