

Making decisions within the council

West Suffolk Council is responsible for more than 80 different services that we deliver to members of the public and local businesses. Each year, we undertake millions of transactions – collecting bins, processing business rates payments and considering planning applications. This would not be possible for 64 councillors to do themselves – so the council employs staff, known as officers, who do the day-to-day work and decision making. Councillors then make more significant and controversial decisions.

Most councillors join a political group. Each group is allocated seats on the different committees of the council that make decisions (as explained below). Councillors in political groups then decide between them who will sit on each committee. Most councillors will have one or two committee roles. Independent councillors, who are not in a group, may be allocated a seat on a committee.

Some councillors take on particular roles, such as chairing a committee or being part of the Cabinet. These posts can be very demanding on a person's time as they will be expected to attend a number of additional meetings.

The following explains the main committees within the council.

Council

All councillors meet every six to eight times a year at full Council meetings. Council makes the most significant decisions – for example, setting the budget and Council Tax, determining the Local Plan (future development sites) and setting the overall Strategic Plan. It is chaired by the Council Chair, who is elected annually and acts as the civic figurehead for the council. The full Council meetings usually take place on a Tuesday at 7pm.

Cabinet

Cabinet is chaired by the Leader of the Council, who is elected by full Council. They are usually the Leader of the political group which has most members in the council. The Leader then selects up to nine further councillors to form their Cabinet; these councillors are known as portfolio holders and each looks after a different area of council activity. Cabinet makes strategic decisions about the way the council operates and the Leader and Cabinet members can also make individual decisions themselves. The Cabinet meets every four to six weeks, usually on a Tuesday at 6pm.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Firstly, this committee holds the Cabinet to account. If Cabinet does something that members disagree with, members can 'call-in' the decision to be considered in further detail by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Secondly, they can look in depth at particular issues, whether within the council, by looking at whether

something is working as it should or could be done differently, or by looking at more general issues in local communities to see if they can make recommendations to improve the way that things work for people. The committee meets every six to eight weeks, usually on a Thursday at 5pm.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

This committee takes a detailed review of the financial and non-financial performance of the council. The committee meets quarterly, usually on a Thursday at 5pm.

Development Control Committee

This committee makes decisions on significant and high profile planning applications. The committee usually meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 10am. The committee also undertakes site visits of forthcoming developments it will consider. All decisions have to be made based on relevant policies, which councillors need to know and understand. Local councillors and members of the public have the right to attend and speak on planning applications in their area.

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The council is responsible for licensing certain activities in its area, such as taxis and pubs. This committee advises on policies for licensing and will hold sub-committee meetings to consider some licence applications and variations to applications. The Licensing and Regulatory Committee meets quarterly, usually at 5.30pm. The frequency and timings of the sub-committee meetings vary significantly and can be held during the day.

In addition, councillors may be appointed as representatives on other organisations, such as Suffolk-wide organisations or more local community organisations.