

Section 3 - Citizens and the Constitution

3.1 CITIZENS' RIGHTS: The Constitution explains citizens' rights to access information about the democratic process and opportunities to participate in it. For reasons of space, it does not detail all of the rights of citizens in respect of the work of the Council and much more information can be found on the Council's website.

3.2 VOTING AND PETITIONS: Somerset citizens registered on the electoral roll can:

- (a) Vote at the County Council elections.
- (b) Petition the Council (subject to meeting the minimum number of signatures required and published by the Council annually) for a referendum to request the election of a directly elected mayor model of governance for Somerset and the Council as an alternative to the Leader and Executive governance model.
- (c) Petition for a community governance review of the area to request changes to electoral division arrangements.

Also, if you live, work or study within Somerset you can submit or present a petition on any matter which relates to a function of the Council and you will receive a response. The Council has a petitioning scheme on its website together with the facility to submit on-line petitions.

3.3 ACCESSING INFORMATION: This is a summary of the provisions set out in Section 8 – Decision-making Access to Information Procedure Rules. Citizens can:

- (a) Attend formal member meetings and make representations;
- (b) Find out about decisions made and to be made and make representations to decision makers before decisions are taken (for all Member decisions and some Officer decisions);
- (c) Inspect the Council's accounts and submit views to the external auditor;
- (d) Access certain information held by the Council using the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- (e) Access personal information held about them by the Council, in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation.

3.4 COMPLAINTS: Citizens rights to make complaints or submit views on services are detailed on the Council's website. Complaints about Members are dealt with under a separate procedure and the process is also detailed on the Council's website.

3.5 **CITIZENS' RESPONSIBILITIES:**

3.5.1 Citizens must not be violent, abusive or threatening to Members or Officers (either physically or verbally), nor may they harass or victimise Members or Officers of the Council.

3.5.2 Citizens must not wilfully harm any property owned by the Council, Members or Officers. In addition they must not misuse information obtained in the course of their contact with the Council (e.g. for personal/commercial financial gain).

3.5.3 The Council take complaints very seriously but it also has a procedure – the **Unacceptable Customer Behaviours Policy** - which will only be used in exceptional circumstances, to respond to habitual and vexatious complainants.