

DRAFT (19/01/09): Constitution Review - Verbatims

Are there any changes you would like to see to the Council's Constitution/decision-making process?	Do you have any suggestions to improve the public interest and involvement in the decision-making process?
The old system was far more democratic and I would welcome a return to it.	
Yes. The councillors and councillor Cabinet post holders should be paid. The system relies upon dogged scrutiny by non post holders and these are "part time" and that is a handicap. Councillors now have more responsibility and they should be recognised as such. I do not want my ward Cllr to be scrambling to balance a job and represent my interests.	Yes. Cabinet holders should be placed under a code of conduct where they are not allowed to directly pressure non political executive officers with party political considerations. This is important because with increased power and influence Cabinet post holders must be made aware that executive officers have a duty to the whole council and should not feel under pressure from a particular Member who wields increased power.
There seems to be an obvious way that minority parties or community groups can influence the decision making process. It is a closed book to most of us.	Some decisions should be taken at neighbourhood level.
Return to the previous committee system	
The Council is more distant and unresponsive since the cabinet system came in. We should reconsider having a City Mayor in view of this.	I don't think many people realise that a very small number of votes can significantly affect the make-up of their local council and that their vote is really worth while especially in local elections.
I would like to feel that when members of the public are consulted it was more than just a box being ticked by the Council in a process that has already been decided. There are a lot of people in Brighton with a far more detailed knowledge of the city than some members of the planning department have, and they have something useful to contribute, given a chance.	
I prefer the old committee system. I think that the present system distances the public from the decision making process, as a result even fewer people may vote in local elections.	Officers must first learn the difference between giving members of the public information and true consultation. It is only true consultation when plans may be changed as a result of the views submitted by members of the public. In the majority of cases minds have been made up, shown to the public, and described as consultation, whereas they are merely informing the public of decisions which have already been made. This makes members of the public fed up and they are put off getting involved again as they regard it as a waste of time.

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I think there are problems inherent in the "pyramid" structure of the council. The only people who truly know what is going on are those at the top. In the lower ranks there is a sense of being "in the dark", confusion and even paranoia.	Yes. I think the council needs to discard its perception of being an "Authority" and see itself as "Public Servant". Public interest and involvement increases with positive results to involvement. The council should be there to administer decisions taken by the public.
I do not believe that investing executive power into the hands of the leader of the council and cabinet is as democratic or accountable as the standard/previous constitution.	Revert the constitution to the previous, more democratic system as the current constitution concentrates power into one individual and then a small minority.
Regular Area committees attended by local councillors should be held (monthly?) to discuss local issues and councillors should report concerns and decisions to full Council. The Cabinet set-up inevitably means that there is little cross-party discussion and all decisions are made simply by a few senior members of the ruling party. Even their own back-benchers are sidelined.	More time for questions from the public should be allowed at full Council meetings -- and at the start of the proceedings.
Neighbourhood forums	More accessible council meeting times - not during the working day, so all people can attend.
I do not feel the current 'cabinet' structure is very democratic. I felt that no notice at all was taken of the questions asked at the Environment Cabinet Member meeting I attended - minds had already been made up - very poor.	Improve the public consultation process. BHCC regularly fails to give proper prior notice of consultations and inadequate time for responses. And in the recent North Street MPR consultation regarding Ship Street, BHCC disregarded the most popular option and opted for a scheme which was not in the questionnaire. No wonder the public loses faith in decision making processes!!!
Greater openness	Consultation standards need to be far higher and adhered to.

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<p>I strongly support greater devolution to the constituent parts of the city. Probably, the most practical way to do this would be by the establishment of committees consisting of all the councillors from a particular group of wards. This might help resolve such of the concerns felt by Hove residents opposed to the merger of the two towns, and might be easier to implement than establishing Parish Councils. This change could also be applied to other areas of Brighton, Patcham and the North of the city, East Brighton, Portslade, Central Brighton etc. If felt appropriate, the community committees could have a small budget and input into local decisions, or similar functions to a Parish Council. It was my understanding that both the campaigns for the directly elected executive Mayor system and the Committee system, prior to the last constitutional referendum, included community committees as part of their proposals.</p>	
	<p>Decisions that affect the public - like allowing Fatboyslim's beach party to go ahead at unacceptable volumes for locals and with unexpected restrictions to public spaces should be given public consideration before gaining approval.</p>
	<p>Make it known more.</p>
<p>Make it more democratic.</p>	<p>Return to committees.</p>
<p>Yes... can't think...er...mmm</p>	<p>Oh yes...absolutely...er mmm... New Year resolution - to be more aware of opportunities for involvement in "the forward plan" and the "decision making process/constitution". Sorry to come a cross "clueless" but I think you may find me typical of many housing tenants. Keep trying we are far from a lost cause - OK?</p>
<p>Would like to see an elected mayor.</p>	

