

My name is Huw Oxburgh. I am a reporter with the licence fee funded Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS). As part of this role, I cover both Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council. I work for a number of different news organisations in this role.

For more information on the LDRS see here:

[https://www.bbc.com/lnp/ldrs#:~:text=The%20Local%20Democracy%20Reporting%20Service%20\(LDRS\)%20is%20a%20public%20service,publishing%20into%20the%20same%20system.](https://www.bbc.com/lnp/ldrs#:~:text=The%20Local%20Democracy%20Reporting%20Service%20(LDRS)%20is%20a%20public%20service,publishing%20into%20the%20same%20system.)

In my experience, the shared communications team for both councils is excellent. Cobb PR are well-informed about the councils' business and highly effective at responding to queries both promptly and fully. They are also exceptionally proactive at highlighting the councils' business.

The councils' joint democratic services team is also brilliant. They run meetings very effectively and in my experience are always exceptionally helpful to attendees. Minutes are available promptly after meetings and are of a good quality. They were exceptionally good at ensuring access to meetings taking place during the pandemic; at first by enabling members of the public to view meetings taking place online and later by running in-person meetings in a safe way.

Access to council information is generally good. The councils' websites are relatively easy to navigate and public meeting papers usually appear to be written with a layman in mind.

I think the councils generally have a good understanding of balancing public interest with the occasional need for confidentiality. But I would hope that this balance could be considered carefully in every instance, ideally with a presumption in favour of transparency. There have been some (thankfully rare) occasions where I do not feel this has been the case.

One area I feel the councils could improve is in their webcasting of public meetings. I appreciate there may be technological or financial limitations I am not fully aware of, but both councils are noticeably behind their neighbouring authorities in this regard. Generally speaking, LDC is the better of the two. Its planning committee and full council meetings (which usually take place at County Hall in Lewes) are more often webcast than not. However, its other meetings — most noticeably its cabinet meetings — are rarely if ever webcast. This absence is more conspicuous post-pandemic as there is usually some form of hybrid meeting structure with officers often taking part via Microsoft Teams. It is noticeable that these non-webcast meetings usually take place during the day.

EBC seems to have an even more inconsistent approach, as it is rare for any meetings to be webcast at all.