



Could you be a Councillor?

Guidance for prospective
Borough Councillors

2019-2020



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SECTION 1 - BECOMING A COUNCILLOR

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the work of Woking Borough Council and in standing as a Borough Councillor. The purpose of this guidance is to provide you with background information about the role of a Borough Councillor and how to stand for election. Becoming a Councillor is both a rewarding and privileged form of public service. You will be in a position to make a difference to the quality of other people's daily lives and prospects. Being an effective Councillor requires both commitment and hard work.

Before being elected as a Councillor, you will have thought about what you want to achieve and made plans for dealing with the demands. However, the reality of becoming a Councillor may be different. New responsibilities, new ways of working, new relationships, legal and financial frameworks and many complicated duties and obligations will face you.

Woking Borough Council

Woking Borough Council is part of the two-tier structure of local government in Surrey. In Surrey, the functions of local government are divided between Surrey County Council and the eleven District Councils. The County Council is responsible for more strategic functions and larger services such as education and social services, whilst the Borough and District Councils are responsible for more local services such as development control (determining planning applications) and housing. Although Woking has been granted "Borough" status by charter, in terms of structure and functions it is a District Council.

The main powers and responsibilities of Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council are shown below:-

Woking Borough Council	Collection of Council Tax, Environmental Health, Public and Private Housing, Local Plans, Planning Applications, Public Conveniences, Arts and Museums, Sports and Sports Centres, Parks and Countryside, Car Parks and Parking, Footpaths, Waste Collection and Recycling, Street Cleaning.
Surrey County Council	Education, Fire and Rescue, Highways, Libraries, Recreation, Arts and Museums, Strategic Planning, Trading Standards, Transport, Waste Disposal, Social Services.

Woking Borough Elections

Woking Borough Council comprises 30 Councillors (also referred to as Members). The Borough is divided into ten Wards, each one of which is represented by three Councillors. The ten Wards are:

Byfleet and West Byfleet	Horsell
Canalside	Knaphill
Goldsworth Park	Mount Hermon
Heathlands	Pyrford
Hoe Valley	St Johns

The Council elects its Members by thirds. A regular election of ten Councillors is held, usually on the first Thursday of May, in three out of every four years. There are no elections for the Borough Council in the fourth year, when the County Council Elections are held. Each Councillor is elected for a four year term. For the 2019/20 Municipal Year, the make-up of the Council is as follows:

Conservative	14 Councillors
Liberal Democrat	10 Councillors
Labour	3 Councillors
Independent	3 Councillors

Who can become a Councillor?

To be able to stand as a candidate at a local government election in England and Wales you must:

- Be a British, Commonwealth, Irish or European Union Citizen
- Be 18 or over on the day of the nomination
- Live or work in the Borough of Woking.

However, you cannot stand in a Borough Council election if you:

- Are a Woking Borough Council employee or are employed by a company under the control of the Council.
- Are employed by another council in a job that has been designated as politically restricted.
- Have, in the last five years, had a prison sentence (whether suspended or not) of three months or more.
- Have been declared bankrupt.
- Are disqualified from standing for election for some other reason, such as having been convicted of an election offence.

Applying to be a Councillor

If you are a member of a political party, or thinking of joining one, and you want to stand as their candidate then you need to contact the local branch of that party. You can only stand as a representative of a registered political party if you are their authorised candidate. If you are not a member of a political party, then you can stand as an independent candidate. The Electoral Commission provides links to all the main political parties and information on how to stand as an independent.

You do not need to have an election agent – you can take on the role yourself – but most people standing for election find that having an agent is a great help. It is the agent's responsibility to make sure that all the necessary forms are sent in at the correct times, and to keep a record of financial expenditure to be submitted after the election.

To become a Councillor you must complete the official nomination form, your legal application to become a Councillor. A nomination pack can be requested from the Borough Council and will include nomination forms, timetables and guidance notes. You will need to complete it carefully, ensuring the accuracy of the information provided. The nomination forms must be received by the published deadline; however, it is strongly

recommended that you arrange a meeting with the Elections Manager to submit the form at the earliest opportunity in case amendments are required.

You will need to gain the support of ten people who are on the electoral register for the Ward in which you will stand. These can be anyone who wishes to support you, including family members, friends or neighbours. Two of these people will need to be identified as your proposer and seconder.

A deposit is not necessary to stand as a candidate in a local authority election. Deposits are only necessary at Parliamentary and European Elections. You will, however, have to pay for your own publicity material, property, services or items used for your election campaign. If you are a member of a political party or some other group, you may find that it will provide some financial help with your campaign. You must keep all your receipts as you will need to submit a statement of election expenses shortly after the election. This is done to make sure that the money you spend on the campaign does not go over the set limit.

All Candidates and their agents are invited to attend a Briefing by the Returning Officer which will provide key information on the Council's approach to the election. All Candidates are strongly advised to attend the Briefing, normally held shortly after the deadline for nominations has passed.

SECTION 2 - BEING A BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

The Roles of a Councillor

Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their Wards. The overriding duty of Councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them, as well as the residents of the Borough as a whole.

All Councillors will be expected to fulfil the following roles:-

- (i) collectively be the ultimate policy-makers of the Council and make decisions on a number of strategic and corporate management functions;
- (ii) represent their communities and bring their views into the Council's decision-making process;
- (iii) deal with individual casework and act as an advocate for constituents in raising or resolving particular concerns or grievances;
- (iv) balance different interests identified within the Ward and represent the Ward as a whole;
- (v) be involved in decision-making;
- (vi) be available to represent the Council on other bodies; and
- (vii) maintain the highest standard of conduct and ethics.

Councillors will have certain rights of access to documents, information, land and buildings of the Council to assist them in discharging these functions.

For many councillors, representing residents is the most important part of their role. This can involve lots of different things, but usually means councillors will spend time:

- listening to the views of local people so that they know what problems and issues exist in their area
- ensuring that the needs of their residents are taken into account when the Council is making decisions about how it is run, what services it should provide and how it should spend its money
- working with the council officers to bring about improvements to their area
- holding surgeries where local people can drop in with questions
- getting involved in local campaigns
- offering support to local schools, community groups, businesses and other organisations.

The Skills of a Councillor

Diverse groups tend to make better informed decisions, so it is important that the Council not only represents the communities it serves, but also has a wide range of skills and experience. That is where you come in.

The knowledge and experience you have picked up through your personal and professional life are important. While you don't need any special or formal qualifications

to be a councillor, having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help you in your role:

- **communication skills** - these include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, the ability to accept alternative points of view as well as the ability to negotiate, mediate and resolve conflict
- **problem solving and analytical skills** - being able to get to the bottom of an issue and to think of different ways to resolve it, including advantages and disadvantages of each.
- **team working** - including being able to work with others in meetings and on committees. Scrutinising and challenging decision makers, acting as a critical friend who provides constructive feedback. Building positive relationships with colleagues, council workers and the wider community by working together
- **organisational skills** - these include being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines
- **ability to engage with your local community** - you may have to make yourself available through meetings, the media, the internet, public forums, debates, on the phone and face to face at regular sessions, called surgeries.

You might also have specific skills and knowledge gained from professional experience or from working with other groups. These might be:

- housing, regeneration or environmental issues
- the needs of specific groups, such as children and young people, disabled people, older people or those with health problems
- an understanding of financial management and reporting processes
- legal and regulatory systems or procedures.

But don't worry if you think you don't yet have some of the skills or confidence to be a Councillor. Woking Borough Council has achieved the Charter for Member Development and offers wide-ranging support, training and information to new and experienced Councillors. All Councillors are encouraged to participate in an extensive training programme, and to be proactive in asking for any support they need.

Workloads for Councillors

The workload of Councillors can vary depending on their responsibilities. All Councillors can expect to be appointed to serve upon two or possibly three Committees and/or Working Groups. These meetings are usually held in the Civic Offices in Woking in the evening and the Calendar for Committee meetings is agreed each December for the following municipal year. Working Group meetings may be held during the day or in the evening.

Meetings can last for two to three hours, but may be longer. Councillors can expect to attend between 2 and 4 such formal meetings each month, depending on how many Committees or Working Groups they are appointed to. However, this time commitment can increase significantly with attendance at seminars, training and informal working groups, or with appointments to external organisations as the Council's representative. Appointment to official positions such as Leader of the Council, Chairman of a Committee or Political Group Leader will also increase the time commitment involved.

Preparation for meetings is very important and Councillors need to have read the agenda and any attached papers before the meeting. Proper preparation enables Members to raise matters of uncertainty or concerns with Officers prior to the meeting. Members may also wish to consult local groups and constituents or party colleagues on certain issues before discussing them at the meeting.

Councillors who are members of political groups are also required to attend group meetings and agree action prior to meetings. Most councillors also attend meetings in their wards and residents contact them frequently about matters of concern.

Support for Councillors

To be efficient and effective, elected Members need a range of support services. Information to help you deal with ward matters and all other work you do as a Councillor will be provided by Officers, with senior Officers including the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Senior Managers providing guidance and assistance. The Democratic Services Team provides full time support to meet the needs of Councillors.

After the elections, there will be an induction programme for new and returning Councillors. This will include briefings, training sessions and opportunities to meet other Councillors and Council Officers.

In Woking, facilities offered to Councillors include a personal computer and printer, use of the Members' Room in the Civic Offices, training and development opportunities, political group offices, car parking pass valid for all Council owned car parks and the use of meeting rooms and accommodation for surgeries.

Allowances for Councillors

There is no salary for being a Borough Councillor. However, you will be paid an allowance to reimburse you for time and expenses you incur while on Council business. These fall into the following categories:

- **Basic Allowance** - All councillors receive a basic allowance which is paid monthly. The allowance for 2019/20 is £7,200 a year, with a further monthly payment of £28 to cover the costs of phone and broadband charges.
- **Special Responsibility Allowances** - Councillors who hold particular positions of responsibility, either within the Council or within their political group, are paid an additional annual allowance. The Special Responsibility Allowances for 2019/20 are to be prorated to the Leader Special Responsibility Allowance. The Leader Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the 2019/20 Municipal Year is £12,000. Special Responsibility Allowances are as follows:

❖ Deputy Leader of the Council	30% of Leader SRA	£3,600
❖ Leader of the Opposition	10% of Leader SRA	£1,200
❖ other Executive Members/Portfolio Holders	20% of Leader SRA	£2,400
❖ Planning Committee Chairman	20% of Leader SRA	£2,400
❖ Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman	10% of Leader SRA	£1,200
❖ Licensing Committee Chairman	5% of Leader SRA	£600
❖ Group Leader	5% of Leader SRA	£600
- **Travelling and Subsistence Allowances** - Councillors may claim travel and subsistence allowances for certain approved duties, such as attending committee

meetings. A carer's allowance is also paid if a councillor needs to cover the cost of caring for a dependent relative while they attend Council business.

Conduct of Councillors

Councillors must at all times observe the Council's Members' Code of Conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. Following elections Members are asked to sign the declaration of acceptance of office including an undertaking to be guided by the Code of Conduct. This duty to observe the Code primarily applies to situations where Members are undertaking official duties or acting as a representative of the Council.

Whilst each Council may adopt its own code, it must be based on the Committee for Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life. These were developed by the Nolan Committee which looked at how to improve ethical standards in public life. Often referred to as the 'Nolan' principles, the seven principles are listed below:

- Selflessness.
- Honesty and Integrity.
- Objectivity.
- Accountability.
- Openness.
- Personal Judgement.
- Respect for Others.

Members are also required to register a range of financial and personal interests, details of which are contained in the Code of Conduct. The Register of Members' Interests is available for public inspection. These interests will include employment and business activities, property and share ownership and membership of other organisations.

Alongside the Register, Members are also required to disclose any financial or personal interest they may have in any matter being considered at a Council meeting. This may prevent a Member from speaking on the issue concerned or require them to leave the meeting whilst it is being considered.

The Council's Standards and Audit Committee provides training and advice on compliance with the Code and Officers will be prepared to offer advice when required. However, ultimate responsibility for compliance with the Code will rest with the individual Member.

SECTION 3 - THE DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE

The Constitution

The Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures to be followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Parts of the Constitution are predetermined by law, whilst other parts are unique to Woking Borough Council.

The Council

All Councillors meet together as the Council, and its meetings are open to the public. The Council meets seven times in each municipal year and is presided over by the Mayor, who is elected annually by the Council. The Council has jurisdiction over matters including adopting or changing the Council Constitution, approving and adopting the Policy Framework and Budget, overseeing appointments to and terms of reference for Committees and electing the Leader of the Council.

The Executive

The Executive is responsible for most day-to-day decisions and typically meets every four weeks. The Executive carries out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council and leads preparation of policies and budgets. The Executive has to make decisions which are in line with the Council's overall policy framework and budget and may be guided by recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive consists of the Leader together with six Councillors and, unlike other Committees, does not have to be politically balanced; the current Executive is made up of Conservative Councillors.

The **Forward Plan of Key Decisions** is published at least 28 clear days before each Executive and covers a period of four months and contains decisions that are to be discussed or made by the Executive. If the Executive wishes to make a decision which is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

The existing Executive arrangements of the Authority were reviewed in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. New Executive arrangements, based on a Leader with Cabinet Model (commonly referred to as the 'Strong Leader' option), were introduced in the Council in May 2011.

Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews and scrutinises decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions and exercises the right to call-in for reconsideration decisions made but not yet implemented by the Executive. This enables the Committee to consider, for example, whether the decision is consistent with the budget and policy framework and they may recommend that the Executive reconsiders the decision. Members of the Executive cannot serve on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee meets seven times a year, unless extra meetings are required to deal with specific issues.

The other functions of the Committee include developing and reviewing Council Policy, scrutinising the performance of the Council and its Committees and considering any matter of local concern affecting the Borough. Recommendations can be made to the Council or the Executive.

Standards and Audit

The Woking Borough Council Standards and Audit Committee is responsible for the promotion and monitoring of high standards of conduct and advising on the local Members' Code of Conduct within its authority. The Committee is made up of five Councillors and one Co-opted Member – the Co-Opted Member is not a Councillor or an employee of the Council. The Standards and Audit Committee is also responsible for monitoring the audit of the Council's services.

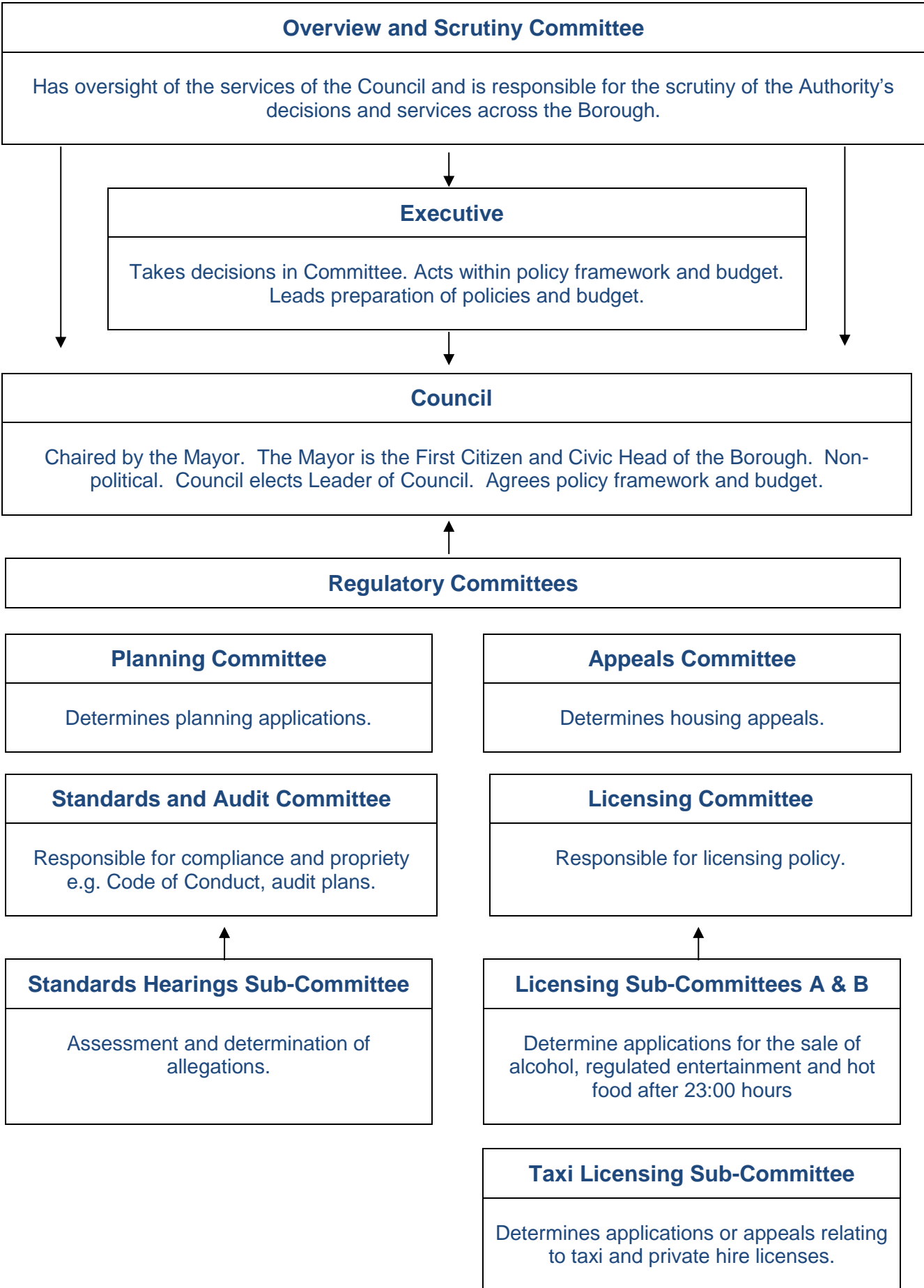
Other Committees

The Council also appoints a number of Committees to perform specific legislative or quasi-judicial functions. In most cases, these Committees may take decisions without reference to the Executive. The functions of the Appeals, Licensing and Planning Committees are summarised below:-

- Appeals Committee** - Determines housing appeals.
- Planning Committee** - Determines planning and related applications, enforces development and building control.
- Licensing Committee** - Determines Licensing applications or appeals relating to taxis and hire cars, public entertainment licensing, street trading, house-to-house and street collections, food preparation, health and safety at work and animal establishments.

A diagram showing the Council's committee structure is set out overleaf.

The Committee Structure



The Council's Employees

The Council employs Officers to give advice, implement decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of its services. Officers may also take decisions on matters where authority has been delegated to them by a Committee.

The Chief Executive, Ray Morgan, is the Head of the Paid Service with responsibilities for all paid employees. The Deputy Chief Executive is Douglas Spinks. We also have a Director of Housing – Louise Strongitharm. The Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic and Legal Services is Peter Bryant and the Chief Finance Officer is Leigh Clarke. The five Officers make up the Council's Corporate Management Group which meets frequently to discuss the corporate management of the Council. The Corporate Management Group and other senior officers will advise the Executive, Committees and Working Groups on policy and other required decisions.

Officers are employed to manage the Council's business and to help Councillors achieve their policy goals. However, from time to time, Officers may advise Members that a certain course of action cannot be carried out. Officers have a duty to give unbiased professional advice – even if it is not what Members want to hear. Mutual respect is the key to establishing good Member-Officer relations and close personal familiarity should be avoided.

SECTION 4 – PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working with a strong focus on outcomes for citizens is embraced by the Council. Business partners including Serco, Joinst Waste Soltuions, Freedom Leisure, Skanska and New Vision Homes deliver operational services throughout the Borough. Strong and effective partnerships have been forged with the Voluntary Sector and Faith Communities. Affordable housing is provided in partnership with Housing Associations, Registered Social Landlords and the Council's Thameswey Housing Company. Woking Local Agenda 21 is a thriving environmental partnership and the Council's role in encouraging and supporting start up businesses is well established.

Partnership working is enshrined in the Council's ethos. This is demonstrated by the sharing of the Civic Offices with the Woking Neighbourhood Police Team, Job Centre Plus, Surrey County Council's Adult Social Services Area Team and employees of some of our contracting partners.

Woking Joint Committee

Woking Joint Committee is a committee between Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council, established on 1 June 2014. The Committee is responsible for a number of areas previously considered under the former Surrey County Council Local Committee, as well as a number of new areas previously under the remit of Woking Borough Council. Local Borough and County Councillors meet to discuss and decide jointly many of the issues that matter to the people who live, work or study in Woking. The Joint Committee can make decisions about:

- activities for young people
- how certain funding will be spent
- roads and road maintenance including road safety, speed limits and parking restrictions
- library opening hours
- public rights of way in Woking, including footpaths and bridle paths
- local concerns about Council services under the remit of the Committee.

Safer Woking Partnership

Woking is one of the safest places to live, work and visit in the country, as Surrey has the lowest level of recorded crime in England. However, we know that residents have concerns about community safety issues, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, and the Council seeks to address these issues locally in a coordinated way by working with other partners to develop an annual Safer Woking Partnership Plan which identifies priorities from strategic assessment as well as review of current issues and challenges. Working through a range of existing partnership delivery mechanisms (such as CIAG, JAG, MAPPA, MARAC, Town Centre Action Group; Licensing etc.) the Partnership seeks to address new and emerging areas of concern in a proactive manner.

Integrated Youth Strategy for Woking

Based on a needs analysis and extensive consultation with Young People as well as Youth Practitioners, an Integrated Youth Strategy has been developed. The first of its kind in the County, the Strategy seeks to align resources and join up services across a two-tier authority structure to ensure a 'Woking Youth Offer' that meets the identified need of

young people at both strategic and operational levels and facilitates a joined up approach to commissioning and planning of services that avoids duplication and double funding. Young people themselves are directly involved in working groups to deliver the programme of work.

Family Support Programme

Responding to the Government's Troubled Families agenda Surrey County Council and all the District and Boroughs have, after successfully delivering on the first phase of the programme, committed to Phase 2 of the programme over the next 5 year period. Key to the success of the programme has been the 'whole family' approach to delivery at a borough level with a range of statutory and voluntary partners.

Surrey Waste Partnership

In support of the Council's environmental agenda the Council is an active partner in the Surrey Waste Partnership (SWP) which includes all 11 district and borough waste collection authorities and Surrey County Council as the disposal authority. The Council has endorsed the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Surrey 2015-2020, the overall aim of which is to make Surrey the leading county area in England for Waste Management. The Strategy includes three main targets: reducing household waste per person, improving recycling and recovery rates and reducing the percentage of waste sent to landfill.

SECTION 5 – FURTHER INFORMATION

Woking Borough Council

Guidance notes are provided by the Council for prospective candidates at local government elections on various aspects of the elections process itself. Copies are available from Charlotte Griffiths, Electoral and IS Manager, Woking Borough Council, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking GU21 6YL, telephone 01483 743215 or e-mail charlotte.griffiths@woking.gov.uk.

Details are also available on the Council's website, www.woking.gov.uk.

Further information and advice is available through the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association.

The Electoral Commission

The independent elections watchdog and regulator of party and election finance.

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: info@electoralcommission.org.uk

Website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

The Local Government Association

The LGA is the national voice of local government. The Association works with Councils to support, promote and improve local government.

Tel: 020 7664 3000

Email: info@local.gov.uk

Website: www.local.gov.uk

The Role Profile of a Woking Borough Councillor

Purpose of Position

- To listen to people in Woking and represent their views.
- To represent effectively the needs and interests of the Ward.
- To promote engagement with all citizens and groups, and ensure that there are opportunities for the views of under-represented groups to be heard.
- To be an active community leader and promote social, economic and environmental well-being and sustainability.
- To support access to services:
 - > Ensuring good communication between the Council and its customers
 - > Trouble-shooting when things go wrong and ensuring that complaints are properly dealt with
 - > Mediating fairly and constructively between people with conflicting needs.
- To contribute actively to decision-making on the Council's policies, plans and budgets, and to continuously review and improve Council services and performance.
- To promote continuous improvement in service delivery by monitoring and identifying shortfalls and encouraging appropriate action.
- To engage constructively with Officers in delivering Council objectives.
- To build collaborative working relationships with local partners, including the Police.

Specific Tasks

- To deal with enquiries and case work on behalf of constituents, representing their interests or enabling them to take action themselves as appropriate.
- To participate fully in the work of the full Council, the Joint Committee and any other committee to which appointed.
- To develop knowledge of relevant specialist work areas as well as a wider general understanding of other strategic and corporate issues.
- To liaise with other Members, Officers and partner organisations to ensure that the needs of the local communities are identified, understood and supported, and agreed local actions are carried out.
- To identify individual learning and development needs and participate fully in training opportunities provided.
- To be actively involved with local organisations in order to keep up-to-date with local concerns.
- To act as the Council's representative on any outside bodies and joint organisations to which appointed, ensuring effective two-way communication.

Personal Attributes

- Committed to the role, public service and representing the local community.
- Professional – acts in keeping with the responsibilities of the role and upholds the Council’s Code of Conduct, Constitution and ethical standards.
- Committed to and demonstrates the Council’s Values.
- Open-minded, patient and creative.
- Represents all constituents equally and without prejudice, and committed to equal opportunities and diversity.
- Works in partnership.
- Recognises the political dimension
- Seeks continuous personal development.
- Respects and maintains confidentiality.
- Supports transparency in decision-making processes.
- Approachable, empathetic and understanding.
- Encourages trust.
- Manages workload effectively.
- Makes clear decisions.

Skills/Knowledge

- Good communication skills:
 - > Concise.
 - > Confident public speaking.
 - > Effective listening.
- Confident use of ICT, and a willingness to further develop skills and knowledge.
- Knowledge of own local area and issues, as well as corporate and service- specific plans and budgets.
- Ability to present relevant and well reasoned arguments.
- Ability to work effectively with Council officers, the public, the media and outside organisations.
- Ability to work as part of a team.