



# 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 Surrey Heath 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.

### Surrey Heath Borough Council

Surrey Heath Borough Council is part of the two-tier structure of local government in Surrey. The main functions of local government in the Borough are divided between the two principal authorities, Surrey County Council and the Borough Council. The County Council is responsible for more strategic functions such as education and social services, whilst the Borough Council is responsible for more local services such as development control (determining planning applications) and housing.

However in the Borough there are also four parish councils which form the most local tier of local government. The parishes cover the villages of Bagshot, Bisley, Chobham, Lightwater, West End, and Windlesham. The rest of the borough is un-parished.

The main powers and responsibilities of local government are shown below:-

<b>Surrey County Council</b>	Adult Social Care, Education, Fire and Rescue, Highways, Libraries, Recreation, Arts and Museums, Strategic Planning, Trading Standards, Transport, Waste Disposal, Social Services.
<b>Surrey Heath Borough Council</b>	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.
<b>Bisley, Chobham, West End and Windlesham Parish Councils</b>	Maintenance of recreational areas, footpaths and cemeteries. Parish councils are also consulted on highway and planning applications.

## Surrey Heath Borough Elections

By the 2019- 2023 term of office, Surrey Heath Borough Council will comprise of 35 Councillors (also referred to as Members). The Borough will be divided into 14 wards, each one of which is represented by two or three Councillors. The 14 wards are:

Bagshot (3)	Old Dean (2)
Bisley & West End (3)	Parkside (2)
Frimley (2)	St Michaels (2)
Frimley Green (3)	St Pauls (2)
Heatherside (3)	Town (2)
Lightwater (3)	Watchetts (2)
Mytchett & Deepcut (3)	Windlesham & Chobham (3)

The Council elects its Members in all-out elections every four years. County Council Elections are held every 4 years. Each Councillor is elected for a four year term. For the 2018/19 Municipal Year, the make-up of the Council is as follows:

Conservative	35 Councillors
Labour	1 Councillor
Liberal Democrat	1 Councillor
Independent	3 Councillors

N.B. The Council currently has 40 Members but will reduce to 35 Members in May 2019.

## 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 Surrey Heath.

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

- Are a Surrey Heath 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. <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-in-england>

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 Democratic Services 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, European, and Police & Crime Commissioner 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 in the March prior to the election.



## 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. Surrey Heath Borough Council 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 a number of Committees and/or Working Groups. These meetings are usually held in Surrey Heath House in Camberley in the evening and the Calendar for Committee meetings is agreed each December for the following municipal year.

Meetings generally last for up to two hours, but may be longer. Councillors can generally expect to attend 2 formal meetings each month, depending on how many Committees or Working Groups they are appointed to. However, this time commitment can increase 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, Portfolio Holder, Chairman of a Committee or Political Group Leader will also increase the time commitment involved. Meetings are usually held in the evening, although some meetings are held during the daytime.

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 and members of the Corporate Management Team providing guidance and assistance. The Democratic Services Team provides 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.

Facilities offered to Surrey Heath Councillors include a Council owned iPad, use of the Members' Room in the Council Offices, training and development opportunities, car parking at Surrey Heath House car park whilst on Council business, 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 in recognition of the time and out of pocket expenses you may 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 2018/19 is £5,087.08 a year.
- **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 allowances are:
  - ❖ Leader of the Council (£13,864)
  - ❖ Group Leaders (£4,626)
  - ❖ Deputy Leader of the Council (£8,686)
  - ❖ Other Executive Members (£4,626)
  - ❖ Planning Committee Chairman (£4,283)
  - ❖ Planning Committee Vice-Chairman (£2,141)
  - ❖ Scrutiny/ Select Committee Chairman (£3,700)
  - ❖ Scrutiny/ Select Committee Vice-Chairman (£1,478)
  - ❖ Licensing Committee Chairman (£3,700)
  - ❖ Licensing Committee Vice-Chairman (£1,478)
  - ❖ Audit & Standards Committee Chairman (£3,700)
  - ❖ Audit & Standards Committee Vice-Chairman (£1,478)
- **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. The responsibility to comply with 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. Your interests will also include those of a spouse or civil partner; or a person with whom you are living as a husband or wife or civil partner.

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 Monitoring Officer provides training and advice on compliance with the Code and 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 Surrey Heath Borough Council.

### The Council

All Councillors meet as the Council, and its meetings are open to the public. The Council meets six 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's 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 once a month. 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 Scrutiny/ Select Committees.

The Executive currently consists of the Leader together with eight Councillors. Unlike other Committees, the Executive does not have to be politically balanced and is currently 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

Surrey Heath has 2 Overview and Scrutiny Committees: Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee and External Partnerships Select Committee. These committees review and scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions and exercise 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 Committees.

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.

## Audit and Standards

The Council's Audit and Standards 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 Audit and Standards Committee is also responsible for monitoring the audit of the Council's services and approving the annual accounts. The Committee is made up of seven Councillors.

## Other Committees

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

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Appointments Committee -</b>         | Interviews and appoints Executive Heads of Service and Heads of Service and makes recommendations to the Council in respect of the appointment of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer.   |
| <b>Planning Committee -</b>             | Determines planning and related applications.  |
| <b>Licensing Committee -</b>            | Determines policy relating to taxis and private hire vehicles, public entertainment licensing, licensing, street trading, house-to-house and street collections, food preparation, health and safety at work and animal establishments. Members of this Committee are appointed to Licensing Sub Committees, which determine applications in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005, Sexual Entertainment Venue licences and Scrap Metal Dealer licence appeals. |
| <b>Joint Staff Consultative Group -</b> | Agrees changes to Staff Terms and Conditions.  |

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 the Council or the Executive.

The Chief Executive, Karen Whelan, is the Head of the Paid Service with responsibilities for all paid employees. The Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services is Karen Limmer and the Chief Finance Officer is Kelvin Menon. The Council's Corporate Management Team comprises the above officers and all Executive Heads of Service and Heads of Service. 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 - KEY PRIORITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

### Key Priorities

The Council's Key Priorities are as follows:

- To deliver an improved Camberley Town Centre
- Keep the borough a safe place to live
- To promote high quality building and design standards across the borough
- To provide quality leisure facilities

### Annual Plan & 5 Year Strategy

The [Annual Plan](#) sets out the objectives and key priorities for the Council and is published. The [5 Year Strategy](#) sets out the priorities for each of following themes over the coming 5 years which, in turn, will inform the Annual Plan.

- **Place** – continued focus on our vision to make Surrey Heath an even better place to live. Clean, green and safe. Where people enjoy and contribute to a high quality of life and a sustainable future.
- **Prosperity** – to sustain and promote our local economy so people can work and do business across Surrey Heath, promoting an open for business approach that attracts investment and complements our place.
- **Performance** – to deliver effective and efficient services better and faster.
- **People** – to build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily in an environment that the Community is proud to be part of.

If you would like to receive a hard copy of the documents please use the contacts on page

### The Arena Leisure Centre

The Arena Leisure Centre in Camberley is owned by the Council and is currently managed by Places for People. The Centre offers a wide range of sports and leisure facilities, including a 25 metre swimming pool, learner pool, main indoor multi-sports hall, three squash courts, two dance studios, fitness suite, X-Press room training room, indoor climbing wall, Cafe/bistro and Crèche facilities.

There is a comprehensive plan underway for its refurbishment.

### Joint Waste Contract

The Council has entered into a waste contract jointly with Elmbridge, Mole Valley and Woking Councils to deliver waste collection, recycling and street cleansing in the borough.

### Surrey Waste Partnership

The Council is a partner in the Surrey Waste Partnership 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.

## **Community Safety Partnership**

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) bring agencies and communities together to tackle crime within the local community. CSPs were set up as statutory bodies under Sections 5-7 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and there is one in each local authority area. Each CSP is made up of representatives from the police and police authority, the local council (county and district council in two tier areas), and the fire, health and probation services. CSPs work together to develop and implement strategies to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safe. They work out local approaches to deal with issues including:

- antisocial behaviour
- drug or alcohol misuse
- re-offending

In Surrey Heath the CSP is attached to, and works closely with, the Surrey Heath Partnership.

## SECTION 5 – FURTHER INFORMATION

### **Surrey Heath 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 Rachel Whillis, Democratic Services Manager, Surrey Heath Borough Council, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, GU15 3HD, telephone 01276 707319 or e-mail [vote@surreyheath.gov.uk](mailto:vote@surreyheath.gov.uk).

Details are also available on the Council's website, [www.surreyheath.gov.uk](http://www.surreyheath.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](mailto:info@electoralcommission.org.uk)  
Website: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://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](mailto:info@local.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

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## SECTION 6 – NOTES