



# Could you be a Councillor?

Guidance for prospective  
Borough Councillors

2025-26



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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.

### Local Government Reorganisation 2025/26

Earlier in 2025 the Government announced plans for local government reorganisation across a number of areas in England. Included in the plans is the reorganisation of the two tier arrangements in Surrey (1 x County and 11 x Borough and District Councils), seeking to create one or more unitary authorities across the County. The proposals are at an early stage and at present the impact on the 2026 Borough and District elections in Surrey is not known. However, there is a possibility that the 2026 Borough and District elections will be cancelled and that elections would instead be held to elect Councillors to a newly established shadow authority. Further details should be known in the Autumn of 2025.

### 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, sports and sports centres, parks and countryside, car parks, footpaths, waste collection and recycling, street cleaning.

#### Surrey County Council

Education, fire and rescue, highways, libraries, recreation, strategic planning, on-street parking, 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 2025/26 Municipal Year, the make-up of the Council is as follows:

Liberal Democrat	24 Councillors
Independent & Others	5 Councillors
Independent	1 Councillor

## 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 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 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 2024/25 is £7,380 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 Special Responsibility Allowances are prorated to the Leader Special Responsibility Allowance. The Leader Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) 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
Scrutiny Committee Chairmen	10% of Leader SRA	£1,200
Licensing Committee Chairman	5% of Leader SRA	£600
Employment 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 Audit and Governance 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 three Scrutiny Committees.

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

### Scrutiny

The three Scrutiny 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 Scrutiny Committees 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 Scrutiny Committees. The Committees meet three to four times a year, unless extra meetings are required to deal with specific issues.

The other functions of the Committees 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 Governance**

The Audit and Governance 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 two Co-opted Members – the Co-Opted Members are not Councillors or employees of the Council. The Audit and Governance Committee is also responsible for monitoring the audit of the Council's services.

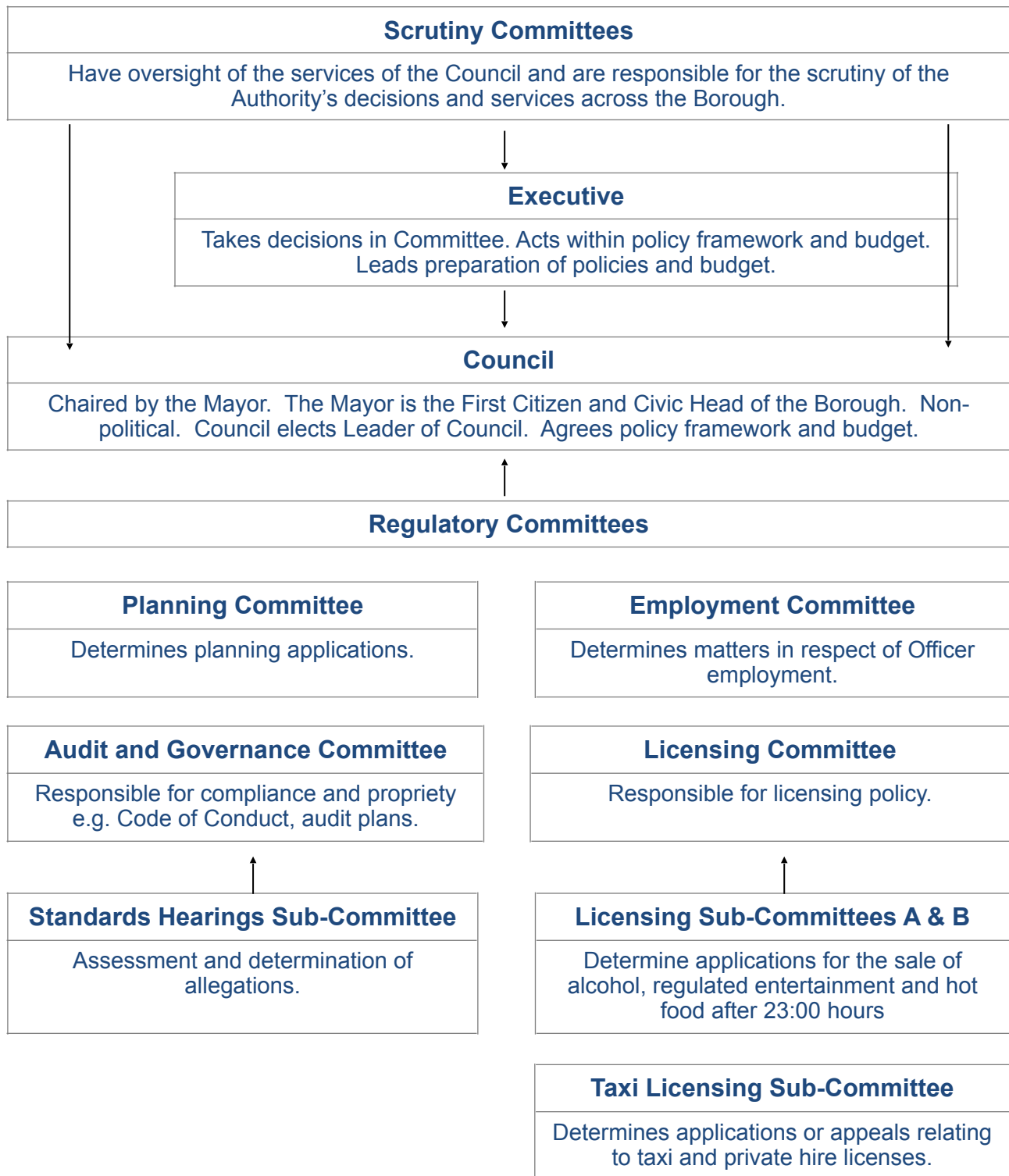
## **Other Committees**

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 Employment, Licensing and Planning Committees are summarised below:-

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Employment Committee</b> | - oversee the recruitment and selection process of the Council's Head of Paid Service, Strategic Directors, the Monitoring Officer, and Section 151 Officer and make recommendations to Council in this respect. Keep under review local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding the annual local pay award. |
| <b>Planning Committee</b>   | - Determines planning and related applications, enforces development and building control.   |
| <b>Licensing Committee</b>  | - 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, Richard Carr, is the Head of the Paid Service with responsibilities for all paid employees. There are three Strategic Directors; Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director - Communities; Kevin Foster, Strategic Director - Corporate Resources; and Beverley Kuchar, Strategic Director - Place. The Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal and Democratic Services is Adesawe Omoregie and the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer is Stephen Fitzgerald. The six Officers make up the Council's Corporate Leadership Team which meets frequently to discuss the corporate management of the Council. The Corporate Leadership Team 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 – 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 the Elections Team, Woking Borough Council, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking GU21 6YL, e-mail [elections@woking.gov.uk](mailto:elections@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](mailto:info@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)

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## **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 and any 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.