



BEING A COUNCILLOR
in
EPSOM & EWELL

Ever thought of becoming a local councillor but not sure what it might entail?

The aim of this guide is to provide some key information about what it means to be a councillor here in Epsom and Ewell and if you are interested, what you need to do.

The guide is divided into five sections:

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1. Introduction to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

- **How many Councillors are there in Epsom & Ewell?**
- **When do elections take place?**
- **What is a Councillor's role?**
- **What are the Council's main responsibilities?**
- **How decisions are made at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**

How many Councillors are there in Epsom & Ewell?

There are currently 38 councillors. Councillors are elected to represent a number of local residents in an area called a "Ward". Three councillors represent each of the Borough's 13 wards (except Auriol Ward, which is represented by two councillors).

Overall representation on the Council is made up as follows:

- 31 Residents' Association councillors
- 4 Conservative councillors
- 3 Labour councillors

When do elections take place?

Elections take place every 4 years in May. In an election year (i.e. 2019, 2023) the formal election process begins with the publication of the Notice of Election in the last week of March, after which you may submit nomination papers to register formally your intention of standing for election.

What is a Councillor's role?

The role of a councillor is to:

- To represent the interests of the Borough as a whole;
- To represent the interests of the constituents in your ward, including those who did not vote for you;
- To deal with constituents' enquiries and representations, fairly and without prejudice;
- To meet key local stakeholders;
- To listen to the needs of local people and partner organisations and take their views into account in policy-making and when taking decisions on particular projects;

- To contribute to good governance and actively encourage community participation and involvement in decision-making;
- To participate in the activities of any outside body to which you may be appointed and report back to the council;
- To champion the causes which further the interests, quality of life and sustainable development of the community;
- To support the most vulnerable people in the community.

This will mean you will need to ensure that local people are informed about:

- Services in their area;
- Decisions that affect them;
- The reasons why decisions are taken by the council
- The rights of local residents

What are the Council's main responsibilities?

The Council has a lot of responsibilities, some it must carry out and some it chooses to do. Some of the key ones are:

- To plan the future use of land in the area and to decide planning applications
- To collect refuse and keep the streets clean
- To administer housing benefits on behalf of the Government until the introduction of Universal Credit
- To collect Council Tax
- To collect Business Rates on behalf of the Government
- To provide and maintain parks and other public open spaces
- To provide other leisure facilities such as the Epsom Playhouse
- To manage venues such as Bourne Hall and Ewell Court House
- To provide public car parks

- To work with other agencies, as community leader to secure the best practical outcomes for the community in relation to issues such as crime, prosperity, sustainable development, pollution and health.
- To provide services for older people and people with physical and learning difficulties, such as day centres, Meals-On-Wheels and transport

Structure and decision making at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

The Council

The full Council is the sovereign body with power to approve or reject the budget and policy framework proposed by the committees. The Council has ultimate responsibility for establishing the local political decision making process. It is responsible for electing the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, the Chairmen of committees and for appointing committees (details of these can be found in the Constitution). The Council's rules also provide for councillors to ask questions on matters of local concern or propose matters for debate. The Council usually meets five or six times each year and is open to the public

The Constitution

The Council's Constitution sets out how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others have been decided by the Council. You can view the Constitution on the Council's website or ask to see a copy at the Town Hall.

Ethical Framework

Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. Breaching the Code in certain circumstances is a criminal offence. The Code and other protocols, which set out how councillors must conduct themselves when acting as a councillor, are included in Part 5 of the Constitution.

The Committees

The Council operates a committee model. It has four policy committees to make decisions on its behalf – Environment & Safe Communities, Community & Wellbeing, Licensing & Planning Policy and Strategy & Resources. Each of these is currently made up of ten councillors and meets between four and six times each year.

There are also two regulatory bodies (Planning Committee and Licensing Sub Committee) and three advisory panels. With the exception of Licensing Sub Committee, all committees generally meet in evenings, with meetings starting at 7.30pm.

Information on the Committees is included in Part 3 of the Constitution.

Scrutiny

The Council's Audit, Crime and Disorder & Scrutiny Committee is charged with examining decisions and the way they are implemented to ensure they are sound and efficient. This Committee also undertakes in-depth reviews of topics of importance to the local community.

Council Staff

The Council's staff (known as "officers") are employed to give advice, implement decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of council services. The Head of Paid Service, which is the Council's Chief Executive, is responsible for the management of the staffing structure. A Protocol governs the relationships between officers and members of the council. This is set out in Part 5 of the Constitution.



2. Steps to becoming a Councillor

- **Who can become a Councillor?**
- **How much does it cost to stand for election?**
- **What qualifications and skills do I need?**
- **What do I need to think about before standing for election?**
- **Next steps**

Who can become a Councillor?

Before you can stand for election, you will need to meet a number of requirements. Some of these include that you:

- Must be 18 or over on the day of nomination
- Be a UK, EU or Commonwealth citizen
- Have property, live or work in the Borough
- Have not been declared bankrupt

How much does it cost to stand for election?

If you stand for election as local councillor you do not need to pay a deposit but you will need to have the support of other local residents who will need to put their signature on your nomination papers.

What qualifications and skills do I need?

Whilst you do not need any specific qualifications to become a councillor, it is considered important to have the following skills, knowledge and attributes, as they are a necessary part of the role:

- communication skills
- problem solving and analytical skills
- team working
- organisational skills

- ability to engage with your local community

It is worthwhile visiting the website www.beacouncillor.org.uk, as it provides a wealth of information and personal experiences of those who have chosen to become local councillors.

What do I need to think about before standing for election?

There are a couple of key matters highlighted here for your consideration.

If elected some of your personal information, such as your contact information will need to be in the public domain. You will be required to list certain information as a part of transparency about interests both you and your partner (if any) holds in the Borough.

There is a programme of regular training and briefing sessions for Councillors during the course of a year. These are in the evenings and start at 7.30pm. Some of these sessions are compulsory. There will be an induction programme after the elections in May 2019, which Councillors will be required to attend. A draft timetable is available on request.

The Council meetings are almost all in the evenings starting at 7.30pm.

Next Steps

There is a strict timetable running up to elections and nominations need to be received by a specific deadline. This is normally during the first week in April.

Further information about the Council and elections can be found on the Council's website at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk and the Council's Electoral Services Team can be contacted on 01372 732000 or via email: electoralservices@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

It is important to get involved as soon as possible and local contacts known to this Council are set out in section 5 of this guide. If you plan to stand as an independent candidate, the Electoral Services team at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council can advise you about what you will need to do to get your name on the ballot.



3. Life as a Councillor

- **See for yourself**
- **How long is The Term of Office?**
- **How much time would I need to commit?**
- **When do meetings take place?**
- **Will I receive any payment?**

See for yourself

You can get a very good idea of what life is like as a councillor if you attend one of the Council's committee meetings. Agendas for the meetings are available on the Council's website and Mod.Gov App prior to the meeting. Meeting dates for the year are published on the Council's website. You might like to talk to an existing Councillor to find out more about serving the community.

How long is the Term of Office?

Borough councillors serve a four-year term. If you are elected at a by-election, you will serve until the next scheduled elections for this Council.

How much time would I have to commit to the role?

It is for you to decide the level of commitment you are able to give to being a councillor. It also depends on your role in the Council and the number of commitments you take on. It could vary from a few hours a week to almost full time work.

For most meetings you attend there will be papers that you may need to spend some time reading and understanding beforehand.

If your outside commitments allow, you could devote a large proportion of your time, in addition to attending committee meetings, at site meetings, meeting constituents or dealing with Council activities at home. You are likely to receive some post, e-mails and telephone calls from constituents looking for help in dealing with a problem. Not every caller will telephone at what you might think is a reasonable hour and some residents will not be aware of which problems a Councillor can help with and which he or she cannot solve. Being on the Planning Committee could involve regular site visits as well as attending the Committee's 11 meetings each year.

Many councillors represent the Council on one or more outside bodies. Background reading and attendance at meetings of these organisations would increase the time commitment and you would be expected to act as a facilitator between the work of the outside body and the work of the Council.

When do meetings take place?

Meetings of the Council take place approximately five times a year. Meetings of the Council and its committees take place at the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. Meetings of the policy committees take place between 4 and 6 times a year. However, there can be external meetings and committees you may need to attend and they are likely to be outside the Borough.

In any 6-month period, a councillor must attend at least one meeting.

Most council meetings take account of the fact that councillors and the public have full time jobs and can only meet during the evening. They usually start at 7.30pm.

Will I receive any payment?

Councillors do not receive a salary for the time they give up to serve their community. They do, however, receive a basic allowance and expenses to ensure they are not out of pocket. The Council has established an Independent Remuneration panel to advise on the appropriate level of allowances which periodically reports to Council. The following councillors receive an additional allowance in recognition of their special responsibilities:

- Committee Chairmen
- Party and Residents' Association Chairman/Group Leaders
- Members of the Planning Committee

Councillors may claim a payment if they have to make arrangements for childcare or other dependent care in order to attend council meetings. They are reimbursed for the cost of any travel on council business that takes them outside the Borough. For details of the allowances paid to councillors please see Part 6 of the Council's Constitution.



4. Support for Councillors

- **Is there any training available for new Councillors?**
- **Will my employer release me for Council duty?**
- **What support is available if I have a disability?**
- **Can I get help with Council work?**
- **What support will I get from Council Officers?**
- **Will I need to work from home?**

Is there any training available for new Councillors?

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council provides an induction programme for new councillors and a full range of training events to help them in their roles. Newly elected councillors should be prepared to be quite busy during their first month or so in office.

Depending on your role, some training will be mandatory and some will be discretionary. For example, a course on computer skills will be discretionary; however, training on meetings skills, presentation and chairing meetings might be mandatory. Training on equalities and safeguarding, member officer relations is mandatory.

There are specific courses and seminars available on Local Government Finance, Planning, Licensing, Environmental Health as well as opportunities to attend national conferences and workshops on topics of relevance to local authorities.

Will my employer release me for council duties?

People in employment may be entitled to some time off under the Employment Rights Act 1996, Section 50. This is a matter best discussed with your employer before you stand for election. Some employers understand the need for councillors to undertake some council duties during the day and recognise the benefit of their staff undertaking civic duties. Currently, the majority of Council meetings are arranged during the evening but this may not always be the case.

What support is available if I have a disability?

The Council will make any adjustments that are considered reasonable in assisting you to be fully involved. Whilst being a councillor is not considered full-time employment, you should check whether this might affect any benefits you receive.

Will I get help with Council work?

The Council has a small dedicated Democratic Services team, which manages the administration of council meetings. Councillors have access to a Members' Room and meeting facilities at the Town Hall for conducting council business. The Members' Room provides basic office facilities: a computer from which you will be able to access your council network account, a telephone, magazines, periodicals and brochures and a tea and coffee machine. Each Councillor will also be supplied with an ID badge and parking card to gain access to the Town Hall and barrier controlled car parks when on Council business.

What support will I get from Council Officers?

Council officers are employed to advise councillors and to carry out their decisions. They are committed to assist you fulfil your role; including helping you deal with the problems raised by your constituents. There will almost certainly be someone who is able to offer advice or support on any issue and all you need to do is ask – a useful first point of contact is often Democratic Services.

Will I need to work at home?

There will be work for you to do at home – reading, preparing for meetings and dealing with enquiries from the public. A significant amount of communication with Officers and residents will be via email.

All councillors are provided with an iPad on which they can access emails and papers for meetings, and the ability to log on securely to the Council's I.T. network for access to office software. Agendas and Minutes are also available on the Council's website. The Council has and continues to reduce printed documentation but you may wish to allocate some space for Council papers at home.

5. Further Information

Party	Contact	Telephone or Website/e-mail
Residents' Associations of Epsom & Ewell	Hugh Ricketts	0208 394 1251 e-mail: hugh.ricketts@btinternet.com
Conservative	Local party office	01372 277066 e-mail: office@epsomconservatives.org.uk
Labour	Vince Romagnuolo	07557 534752 e-mail: vince.romagnuolo@btinternet.com
Green Party	Dr Janice Baker	e-mail: jbaker2311@hotmail.co.uk
Liberal Democrat	David Gulland	07801 573431 e-mail: davidgulland@virginmedia.com
UK Independence Party	Robert Cane	07973 138105 e-mail: bobmcane@aol.com
<p>Other political parties: See GB Register of Political Parties on the Electoral Commission website at:</p> <p>http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk</p>		

The Independent Group of the Local Government Association may also be a useful source of information and can be contacted at the following address:

Independent Group Office, 18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ
 Web: www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent Tel: 020 7664 3224