

**EPSOM
&
EWELL**



**BEING A
COUNCILLOR**

in

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&
EWELL**



BEING A COUNCILLOR IN EPSOM & EWELL

Introduction

Attracting people from a broad range of backgrounds to stand as candidates to represent their community as a councillor will strengthen local democracy in Epsom & Ewell.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has produced this guide for anyone who has ever thought of becoming a councillor or who would like to find out more information about the role and life of councillors here in Epsom and Ewell.

The four sections of the guide and their contents are listed below. An electronic version of this document is available on the Council's website (follow the "Council" link and click on "Councillors").

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THE ROLE OF A COUNCILLOR

1. Who can become a Councillor?
2. How many Councillors are there in Epsom and Ewell?
3. What is the current representation on the Council?
4. When do elections take place?
5. What is a Councillor's role?
6. What are the Council's main responsibilities?
7. How decisions are made at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

1. WHO CAN BECOME A COUNCILLOR?

These are the main requirements if you are considering standing for election, but it is not a complete list:

- 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

A person does not need any specific qualifications to become a councillor but you might be interested in visiting the website www.beacouncillor.org.uk, which provides a wealth of information and personal experiences of those who have chosen to become local councillors.

Whilst you do not need any specific qualifications, the Local Government Independent Group considers that having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help a councillor in their role:

- **communication skills**

These include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills and the ability to accept alternative points of view as well as the ability to negotiate, mediate and resolve conflict

- **problem solving and analytical skills**

This includes 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 and being able to complete on time any tasks that you agree to do

- **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

Candidates standing for election as councillors do not need to pay a deposit but they will need to get the signatures of other local residents on the nomination papers.

2. HOW MANY COUNCILLORS ARE THERE IN EPSOM AND 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).

3. WHAT IS THE CURRENT REPRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL?

The representation on the Council is made up as follows (as at May 2010):

- 22 Residents' Association
- 10 Liberal Democrat
- 4 Conservative
- 1 Labour
- 1 Independent

4. WHEN DO ELECTIONS TAKE PLACE?

Borough Council elections take place every 4 years in May. In an election year (i.e. 2011, 2015, 2019) 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 formally register your intention of standing for election.

5. WHAT IS A COUNCILLOR'S ROLE?

- 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.

You will also 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

6. WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL'S MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES?

- To collect refuse and keep the streets clean
- 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 services for older people and people with physical and learning difficulties, such as day centres, Meals-On-Wheels and transport
- To provide public car parks
- To plan the future use of land in the area and to decide planning applications
- To decide on housing strategy for the area and to provide help for people who are homeless
- To administer housing benefits on behalf of the Government
- To collect Council Tax that is due
- To collect Business Rates on behalf of the government
- 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.

7. HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE AT EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL

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 see the Constitution on the Council's website or ask to see a copy at the Town Hall or Bourne Hall Reception desks.

Code of Conduct

Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Standards Committee oversees advice and training for all new councillors on this. The Code is included in Part 5 of the Constitution.

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 Committees

The Council has appointed four policy committees to make decisions on its behalf – Environment, Leisure, Social and Strategy & Resources. Each of these is currently made up of ten councillors and meets four or five times each year. The meetings are open to the public and members of the public may speak about any of the items on the agenda by prior arrangement. There are also two regulatory

committees (Planning and Licensing) and three advisory panels. The Planning Committee meets 11 times a year.

Committees sometimes set up working parties to look at topics in more detail. These are less formal in the way they operate and can be useful for a councillor to follow an issue in which he or she is particularly interested. Information on the Committees is included in Part 3 of the Constitution.

Scrutiny

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

Details of the responsibilities of all the committees and advisory panels can be found in the Constitution.

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. Some officers have a specific duty to ensure that the council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. A Protocol governs the relationships between officers and members of the council. This is set out in Part 5 of the Constitution.



SUPPORT SERVICES FOR COUNCILLORS

- 1. Is There Any Training Available For New Councillors?**
- 2. Will My Employer Release Me For Council Duty?**
- 3. Can I Get Help With Office Work?**
- 4. What Support Will I Get From Council Officers?**
- 5. Will I Need To Work From Home?**

1. IS THERE ANY TRAINING AVAILABLE FOR NEW COUNCILLORS?

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

It is then up to the individual councillor to decide if he/she would like to take advantage of training courses on such topics as:

- Computer skills
- Meetings skills, presentation and Charing meetings
- Equalities and Disabilities

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.

2. 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. 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. However the majority of Council meetings are arranged during the evenings to avoid difficulties for those in full time employment.

3. WILL I GET HELP WITH OFFICE WORK?

All councillors can expect a range of services to help them carry out their role. Councillors have access to a Members' Room and meeting facilities at the Town Hall. The Members' Room contains a PC from which you will be able to view and respond to emails from constituents and council staff, telephone, magazines, periodicals and brochures and a tea and coffee machine. Each Councillor will also be supplied with a parking permit for use when on council business. There are a limited number of designated spaces available for councillors at the Town Hall.

4. 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.

5. WILL I NEED TO WORK AT HOME?

There will be work for you to do at home – reading your papers, preparing for meetings and dealing with enquiries from the public. The provision of I.T. equipment for councillors at home and how best to support councillors in this regard is currently being reviewed but agendas and reports are available on-line. You will need to allocate some space for Council papers at home, but council officers keep copies of all documents going back for several years and the Council will recycle old papers for you.



LIFE AS A COUNCILLOR

- 1. See For Yourself**
- 2. How Long Is The Term Of Office?**
- 3. How Much Time Would I Need To Commit?**
- 4. When Do Council Meetings Take Place?**
- 5. Will I Receive Any Payment?**

1. 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. A limited number of copies of the agendas for the meetings are free on the night for those who attend and available on the Council's website prior to the meeting. The dates of meetings for the year are published on the Council's website and there are posters outside the Town Hall, at Bourne Hall and on Borough notice boards in every ward showing the current month's meetings. You might like to talk to an existing Councillor to find out more about serving the community.

2. HOW LONG IS THE TERM OF OFFICE?

Borough councillors serve a four-year term. If you are elected at a by-election you serve until the next scheduled borough council elections.

3. 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 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.

4. WHEN DO COUNCIL MEETINGS TAKE PLACE?

- Meetings of the Council take place approximately five times a year
- Meetings of the policy committees take place 4 or 5 times a year
- In any 6 month period a councillor must attend at least one meeting.
- Meetings of the Council and its committees take place at the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom.
- Meetings of other groups may take place at a range of times and venues.
- 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.

5. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT?

Borough councillors receive no salary for the time they give up to serve their community. They do, however, receive allowances 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. It generally meets annually and reports to Council. Every councillor currently receives a basis allowance of £3,308.31 a year.

The following councillors receive an additional allowance in recognition of their special responsibilities:

- The Mayor and Deputy Mayor
- Committee Chairmen
- Party and Residents' Association 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.



FURTHER INFORMATION/LOCAL CONTACTS

Party	Contact	Telephone or Website/e-mail
Conservative	Local party office	01372 277066 e-mail: office@epsomconservatives.com
Labour	Vince Romagnuolo	020 8786 7911 vince.romagnuolo@btinternet.com
Liberal Democrat	Nigel Pavey	020 8394 0472 e-mail: nigelpavey@hotmail.com
Residents' Associations of Epsom & Ewell	Keith Lugton	0208 642 1303 e-mail: keith.lugton@virgin.net
UK Independence Party	Robert Cane	01372 272998 e-mail: bobmcane@aol.com
Other political parties: See Register of Political Parties at: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/regulatory-issues/registers.cfm		

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.

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
LGA House, Smith Square
London
SW1P 3HZ

Tel: 020 7664 3131

2. About the Council and elections

- See the Council's website at: www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk
- Contact your local ward councillors – see the Council's website for names, wards and contact numbers or ring the Council on **01372 732000**.
- Contact Electoral Services on **01372 732152**, via e-mail: electoralservices@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or in person at the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom.