

The Guildford Community Engagement Strategy 2011

Have your say -
our commitment to engaging with you



www.guildford.gov.uk

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Alternative formats

A summary of the draft Community engagement strategy can be made available in alternative formats. For more information please contact Planning policy on 01483 444471 or email us at ces@guildford.gov.uk

1. The Community Engagement Strategy

1.1 What is this strategy about?

Community engagement is vital to make sure that Guildford borough is the best it can be.

To get involved in making Guildford a better place you need to let us know what you think. To do this you need consistent good quality, coordinated engagement by all the organisations who influence and provide services in Guildford. This includes the Guildford Local Strategic Partnership, which brings together many organisations and groups that are involved in making decisions that affect the future well-being of the people of borough. The voluntary, community, business and public sectors are all represented in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and will follow the commitments set out in this strategy.

This strategy outlines how we will work together to inform, consult and involve local people in decision making and improving public services in Guildford borough. It is for everybody who has a role to play or who wants to get involved in influencing Guildford's future and enhancing the quality of life for people across the borough.

This strategy sets out our community engagement values and standards. It is divided into three main sections:

- **The Community Engagement Strategy** - an overview
- **Visions and values** – our commitment to involving you
- **Involving you** – standards, types of community engagement, how to include everybody and how decisions are made

Individual organisations strategies for engagement or involvement, including Community involvement in planning, will be available on the website at www.guildford.gov.uk/ces.

We want you to have a stronger local voice and to have an impact on your local area and services. Examples of how we've started to go about this are included throughout this document – look out for the boxes.

Did you know...

The Local Strategic Partnership has interacted in many different ways with the community. To find out more click on guildford.gov.uk/lsp/casestudies

The Local Strategic Partnership includes representatives from the University of Surrey, Diocese of Guildford, National Health Service Surrey, Thames Valley Housing Association, Voluntary Action South West Surrey, Royal Surrey County Hospital, Guildford Youth Council, Surrey County Council, Guildford Business Forum, Guildford College, Guildford Borough Council, Surrey Police and the Federation of Small Businesses.

1.2 What is Community Engagement?

A community is a group of people who have things in common. Communities can be defined by location (such as a street or a neighbourhood), race, ethnicity, age, occupation, a shared interest (such as local businesses or hobbies) or affinity (such as religion, faith or belief) or other common bonds.

Essentially, community engagement is about making sure that people can get involved and take part in a range of ways in the planning, development and delivery of services. It goes further than informing and consulting local people by seeking to enable communities to take

an active part in influencing decision-making and service delivery. The main levels of community engagement are:



Everyone should be involved in making Guildford a great place to live, work and play. If you live in Guildford borough, you know what is happening in your community and how it can be improved. If you are a local group or business in the borough you will have information and ideas that can help shape the future of an area. By taking part you can make sure that decisions being made are the best for you and the borough.

1.3 Who is this strategy for?

This strategy is for anyone who is interested in playing a part in improving Guildford's future. This includes public and private organisations, voluntary and community groups, residents, workers, students and any individual with an interest in how their environment and community evolves.

This strategy is written for:

- **People who are involved in making decisions**
This includes individuals, community groups, businesses, voluntary organisations and anyone else who may get involved with helping to make a decision.
- **Organisations who involve people in making decisions**
This includes the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership, public organisations, private businesses, and the voluntary and community sector.

2. Vision and Values

2.1 Our Vision

The Local Strategic Partnership, in consultation with interested parties¹, agreed a vision for Guildford borough to 2026: *'An attractive, sustainable and prosperous Borough in which people fulfil their potential and the disadvantaged and vulnerable receive the support they need'*.

The vision includes a key objective that sustainable, integrated communities are empowered and engaged. We aim to be responsive to the needs of the community and to involve you in decision-making and shaping the services that affect you. To achieve this information consultation and involvement must be provided on the right issues targeted at the right people at the right time in an accessible way. The Guildford Local Strategic Partnership is committed to involve and empower Guildford's residents and communities and we will follow the principles set out in the following table.

Be honest and open	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make clear the purpose of any engagement activity and use the right methods (proportionate to the significance of the issues) to engage local people• Be clear about what can be influenced• Use honest, accurate and unbiased information
Listen to each others views	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen and respond to individuals and communities, enabling and empowering the boroughs residents to play an effective role in setting priorities, designing services and influencing decisions to shape their local area.
Include everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertake fair and impartial engagement to a high standard to ensure that Guildford boroughs residents are offered equal opportunities to participate in issues that may affect them and make a difference.
Work together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Act together when appropriate with a consistent approach to community engagement.• Create a central log of partners engagement activities to provide an overview of what consultation has and will be undertaken, and use the findings where applicable to avoid consultation overload.• Share knowledge and information openly with residents and partner organisations, whilst respecting confidentiality. Use what we have learnt from contact with local people to better understand and engage with our communities, and to improve the services we deliver.
Keep in touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide feedback and demonstrate the changes that are made as a result of engagement.

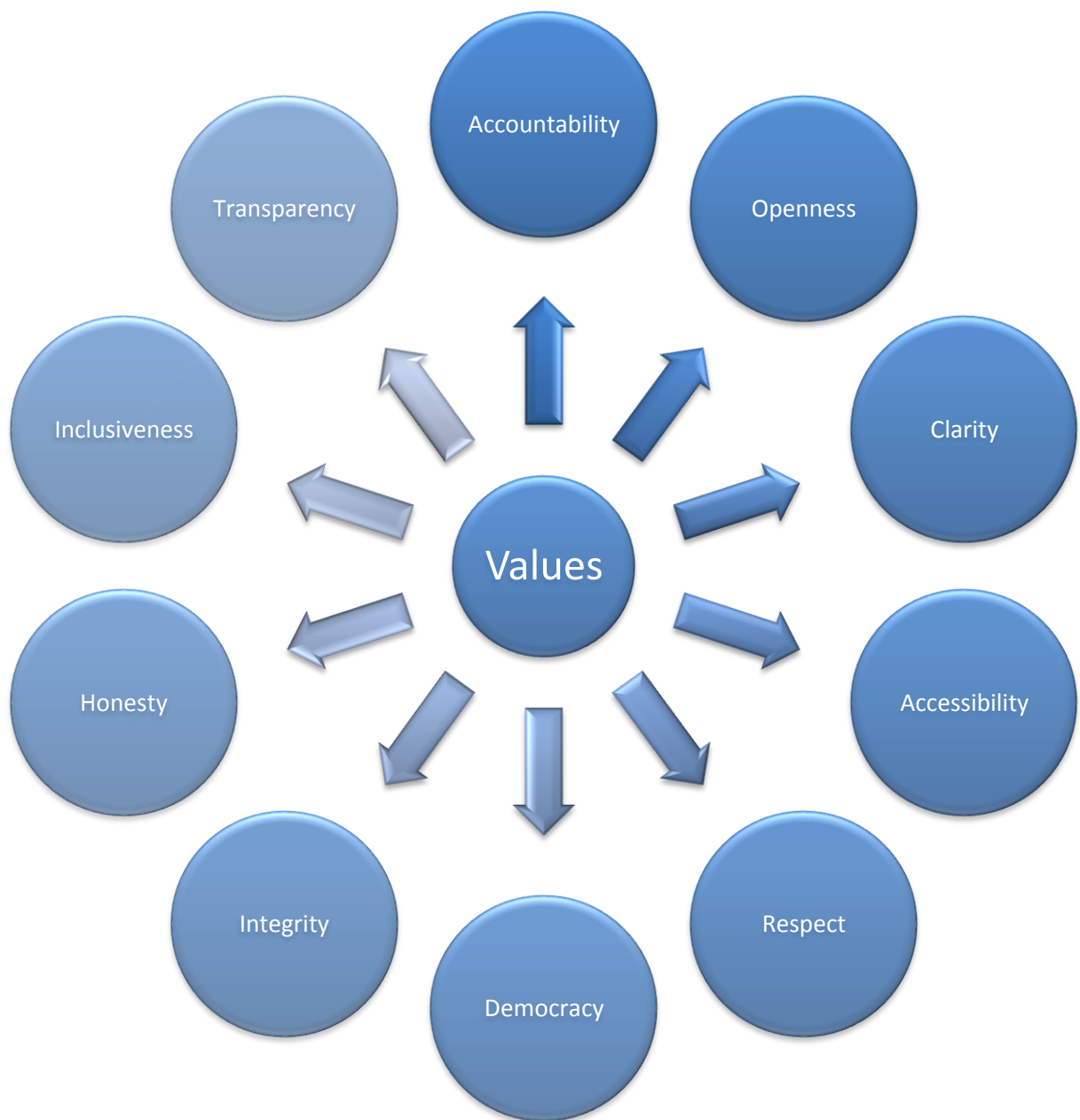
¹ The vision contained in the sustainable community strategy was developed at a community assembly in February 2009. This was attended by representatives of the public, voluntary, business and community sectors. In total, 75 people representing 46 separate organisations attended and the vision reflects the aspirations for 2026 expressed at that event.

These principles ensure that:

- Engagement is effective and influential
- People are linked to decisions being made
- Decisions better relate to community aspirations and needs
- There is trust and confidence in engagement processes.

In following these principles, we hope to, strengthen community leadership and relationships, build upon our reputation, improve customer service and ultimately make Guildford borough a better place.

2.2 Our values (see below):



3. Involving you

3.1 Levels of engagement

There are three main levels of engagement: informing, consulting, involving. Details are set out in the following sections.

Informing

In order to get involved in influencing services, policies and decisions in Guildford you need to know what is going on and when. You need clear and accurate information relating to when and how decisions affecting services and future policy are made. Communications should enable you to:

- understand the way partners perform their duties and use their resources
- be aware of the services provided
- be involved in decisions that affect you
- find out about proposed policies in a timely and transparent way
- be at the heart of the continual improvement of services.

To achieve this, information must be:

- open and honest
- clear, relevant, accurate and easy to understand
- up-to-date and easy to find
- as accessible as possible to everyone in the community
- two-way where possible so that everyone's views can be heard
- clear in providing contact details for any further enquiries
- coordinated with partners
- available in alternative appropriate formats (e.g. large print, Braille, other languages).

Information should highlight the key facts and where to find further information (e.g. websites, helpline numbers, leaflets). This will enable you to take responsibility for what and how much information you wish to acquire.

Consulting

Consultation allows you to have your say about the decisions and local services that affect you. It needs to provide genuine opportunities for you to take part and for your views to be heard and acted upon.

Consultation can vary from surveys to discussions, such as focus groups and panels. The key principles of good consultation that we follow are:

- It should be meaningful and relate to a decision, service or policy that can be affected by the results.
- It should have a clear purpose, saying why it is being carried out and how the results will be used, so that everyone understands how their involvement will influence the final decision.
- It should be well timed so that decisions are informed at the earliest stage possible.
- It should represent a balanced cross-section of the local community, including those who work, live, visit and study in the borough, as well as groups, organisations and businesses if appropriate.

- It should be clearly written and presented.
- It should be co-ordinated and linked with other relevant services or partners to avoid 'consultation fatigue' and duplication of effort, time and cost.
- Consultation responses should be analysed and used to inform decisions, with clear feedback showing we have listened and what has changed as a result of the consultation.

Involving

Involvement is the most interactive form of engagement, over and above being informed and consulted. It should give genuine influence over decision-making and service delivery and can include influencing or directly participating in decisions, co-designing or commissioning services and working with partners to judge how good services are. The ultimate aim is to give you direct influence over decisions so that the right services are offered in the right way for the people who use them.

You can be involved through expressing your opinion at meetings, working with Local Strategic Partnership partners or organisations to design policies and services and potentially running some services. You can also work with senior staff or representatives of organisations or councillors through scrutiny reviews to look at services and policies.

The key principles of involvement that we will follow are that it should:

- be the norm rather than the exception, so that we all seek to include interested parties and representatives of local people in the design of policies and services as a matter of course;
- encourage direct participation in decision-making, empowering people where possible;
- encourage aspects of services to be delivered directly by the users of those services;
- encourage people to work with partners in assessing services;
- be inclusive and accessible; and
- be transparent so that it is clear how involvement has fed into the final decision.

The Wanborough Barns Management Committee is a voluntary organisation that has direct hands-on involvement and responsibility for the management of the Council owned barns.

3.2 Engaging with you

There are many different ways to consult and run research, depending on the reasons for the engagement and who it is aimed at. All types have their advantages and disadvantages. For example, questionnaires may ask a lot of questions, but can only go so far into why people think what they think.

On the other hand, focus groups can go into a lot of detail about why people think something, but will involve fewer people. Clearly, research through questionnaires allows for greater analysis of the responses received, whilst methods seeking opinions may give greater insight.

Each type of engagement is important and different methods should be used depending on the activity and circumstances. People should be engaged in a way that considers their

needs and takes account of local circumstances. The approach and resources required should be proportionate to the issue and likely benefits. Engagement should take place as early as possible to ensure that services are shaped around the needs and aspirations of local communities. A coordinated approach should also be adopted across the borough by working with partners through the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Surrey Community Engagement Framework and Toolkit (March 2010) sets out in detail some of the various ways and forms of community engagement. Further information can be found at www.surreyimprovement.info

In Guildford the principal ways that we can inform, consult and engage with you (dependant upon the type of decision being made) are set out in the following table:

Forms of community engagement

• Informing

Providing information to keep you informed about what is happening, and help you understand an issue, service or a planned action, the alternative options and the available solution.

- Posters, postcards, fliers, banners, advertising and publications.
- Local newspaper press releases, publications, radio and TV interviews.
- Newsletters, letters, leaflets or summaries.
- Information stalls/open days/roadshows/exhibitions.
- Public and specific meetings, presentations, briefings.
- Website updates.
- Email, texts alerts, Twitter, webpage subscription, Facebook, MySpace, podcasts, aural cd's.

• Consulting

Asking you for feedback, advice or opinion on a particular issue – stating what can and cannot be changed, often offering a number of options and listening to feedback.

- Questionnaires and surveys, structure feedback form, polls, surveys.
- Online surveys and e-consultation (via the internet).
- Face to face interviews/telephone interviews/video soapbox.
- Residents', citizens', user panels and community groups.
- Discussion/focus groups/forums/e-forum.
- Written consultation through letter or email.
- Consultation events/workshops/roadshows/world café/exhibitions/general events/festivals/shows/videocube.
- Online consultation, discussion groups and blogs.
- Mystery shoppers (undercover check on quality of service provision).
- Public, neighbourhood or specific meetings or surgeries.
- Documents or information available in offices, public buildings or online.
- Verbal consultation with community representative acting as a scribe.

Continued on next page....

Forms of community engagement continued...

• **Involving**

Working together throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered, encouraging people to put forward ideas, options, initiatives and actions.

- Activity weeks.
- Ballots and referenda.
- Public or specific targeted discussion meetings with interested parties
- Public or stakeholder workshops to identify issues and shape options, Planning For Real events.
- Public visioning events, ideas competitions, interactive displays.
- Consensus conference (questioning experts before making recommendation).
- Online discussion forums.
- Review sessions.
- Participatory appraisal (undertake own assessment, analysis and planning).
- Citizens' juries (structured process where public 'jury' issues a verdict).
- Community led plans (e.g. parish plans/neighbourhood plans)/community action plans.
- Co-production (design a service).
- Community development and capacity building.
- Participatory budgeting.
- Providing opportunities for community run services/land management.
- Comments and complaints.
- Interact with Members of Parliament, members of the Local Strategic Partnership Board, elected Guildford Borough Councillors and Surrey County Councillors, Parish Councillors, employees.

3.3 Who should be involved?

Good engagement needs a defined audience. This can be drawn up from a group of interested people, which might be all residents or businesses in the borough, people from a particular area or group, or users of a particular service.

There are many groups, organisations and individuals that represent different interests in the borough. The contacts to be considered depend upon the subject matter but can include those with an interest in environmental or health matters, geographical areas such as neighbourhood groups or those with an interest in designated land such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, voluntary groups or faith groups, community groups, youth or later life groups, business forums, civic societies etc. Various organisations and individuals also represent or have various interests in specific areas of the borough. These include:

- Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament (MPs and MEPs)
- local borough and county councillors
- parish councils
- residents associations
- neighbourhood watch groups

Engagement should be considered as a whole in relation to borough-wide issues or selectively on more specific matters, to avoid consultation over-load. Consultation should be

on issues that can be influenced and are meaningful to people, and focused on those with an interest in the topic.

Before undertaking an engagement exercise we will consider the following:

CHECKLIST FOR INVOLVEMENT ✓

Who should be involved?

- List who should be involved, who will be directly affected by the decision, who has expertise to offer, and who may need extra help to get involved.
- Take advice on who to involve and how from other relevant groups.
- Resources should be focused on making sure the people identified have a chance to get involved.
- Think about who could work with you to share resources and make involvement more comprehensive.

Why are people being involved?

- Be clear why people are involved in making a decision.
- Be clear what decision is being made.
- Make sure everyone is properly informed of the facts and background.
- Be clear what can and can not be changed.

Timing of involvement

- Focus on early involvement when people can influence the process.
- Consultation should be open for **12 weeks** unless there are clear reasons such as statutory guidelines that say otherwise (e.g. there are shorter statutory time periods for planning consultations).
- Give plenty of notice of events and hold them at various times to ensure a wide range of people can attend.
- Co-ordinate with other consultations by partner organisations.

How people will be involved

- Consultation should be planned in an environmentally sensitive way.
- Consultation should be planned in a culturally sensitive way.
- Involvement should be at an appropriate scale depending on the impact the decision or policy will have.
- Accessible venues should be used when possible. Consider physical access, proximity to those most affected by a decision, and access to services such as buses and childcare.
- Use a range of methods to inform, consult and involve people.
- Communication should be clear, well-organised and simply written and communicated.
- Creative and interactive methods should be used where possible to encourage people to take part, particularly seldom heard groups.

3.4 In the know

We support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making. To enable people to get involved, groups, communities and individuals need to have the opportunity to learn about the relevant processes, and develop skills and knowledge on how to influence decisions. This is called building capacity. This can have added benefits, as organisations learn more about communities' needs as well as communities learning more about the decision making process. Over time this helps to improve relationships and the quality of involvement that takes place. Opportunities to do this should be provided at appropriate times to ensure people can prepare for their involvement. This is particularly important for people representing community groups who often have very limited time and resources.

Thames Valley Housing Association recognises the importance of resident involvement. It runs training designed to equip residents with skills, knowledge and confidence, whether they want to set up a local residents group, become a resident auditor, community organiser or a board member.

Community development approaches can often increase community influence. Community workers can help provide local people and groups with the information, skills and knowledge to voice their views and influence changes to services. They can also promote community priorities to partners.

Top tip: If you want to run your own consultation about a plan, perhaps with a group of people you know, ask the people producing the plan whether there is any support, information or resources to help you.

3.5 Including everyone

We want to empower and engage local people in the way we deliver local services and make local decisions. It is important to engage with those who are most likely to be affected by services, policies and decisions. This may be residents, people who work in the borough, visitors, voluntary organisations, businesses, parish councils or residents' associations.

There are some people that very rarely get involved with what is happening in their local area or in the borough. These may be people who do not know about what's happening, are not confident or able to get involved, may not wish or have the time to be involved or may be happy with the decisions being made. These people are sometimes called 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear' groups.

Seldom heard groups are groups of people that may be or feel excluded from engagement due to their personal circumstances or previous experiences. Disadvantaged groups may find it more difficult than normal to get involved.

The involvement of people whose voices may not be heard or who can be marginalised must be given particular consideration. Age, gender, disability, race, religion/belief, pregnancy, marital/partnership status and sexual orientation should not stop someone from getting involved. Public bodies have a duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people from the

The Guildford borough heritage team toured with an exhibition of plans to develop the museum site. As part of the engagement several sessions were held with SAVI (those with visual impairment) and Headway (adults who have suffered head injuries). As a direct result a number of recommendations and improvements were made.

different groups protected under the [Equality Act 2010](#). We should also carefully consider and monitor [equality](#) in the engagement we do and the documents we produce.

Resources need to be directed towards monitoring and identifying those who are not involved and steps taken to make sure that they have the opportunity to be involved if they wish. This is particularly important where a specific community may be directly affected by the decisions made.

We are keen to involve under-represented groups of people such as those detailed below:



Different approaches are often required to draw out the views of different sections of the community. Our approach is to identify who the seldom heard groups are and the possible barriers they have to community involvement and address them.

Potential barriers to engagement may include language or culture, literacy levels and dyslexia, visual impairment, access, transport, commitment and time constraints. Possible solutions are using a variety of formats such as Braille, large print, visual [easy to read](#) format using symbols photographs and pictures and allowing size and colour of font to be altered, podcast, audio cd and languages other than English for documents and literature. Using a range of engagement methods and formats (see the Forms of Community Engagement box) and meeting with groups at times and venues that suit may also help overcome barriers to

engagement. Considering different ways to engage and communicate helps seldom heard groups but also benefits everyone and is good practice.

It is important to enable different ways of responding rather than just by writing, for example by asking a community representative to act as a scribe for verbal opinions. Community representatives, who may have built up trust and a relationship with those classed as seldom heard, can also be approached to plan and undertake a consultation with you.

Top tip: Please let us know how we can include you or your organisation in any consultation we organise in the future.

This might include telling us where you meet, whether you have a newsletter or a way of sharing information, the types of venue you are happy to attend, or producing information in a format that suits you e.g. large print. Contact us at ces@guildford.gov.uk or call 01483 444471.

3.6 How are decisions made?

Many different considerations are taken into account before a decision is made. Your comments and involvement will form one part of the information used to make a decision. Other sources of information may be from specialists or experts, research studies, national or local guidance, professional opinions, local knowledge, facts and circumstantial or related influences. All these considerations are taken into account and weighted accordingly before a decision is reached.

Each organisation will have its own individual criteria and protocol for finalising and agreeing a decision. For example, significant council decisions often require the approval of councillors at formal public meetings. Members of the public are able to speak or ask questions at many of these meetings, or present petitions on topics of local concern. More information on this is available at Surrey County Council website www.surreycc.gov.uk and Guildford Borough Council website www.guildford.gov.uk.

3.7 What happens to the results?

Effective community engagement will help us to understand local communities' needs and aspirations, which will help us deliver good quality services and better outcomes.

To show that we have listened after a formal consultation we will:

- publish a summary of feedback received and our response to it.
- show how the results have been used to influence final decisions.
- feed back the results and the decision to those who took the time to get involved.

3.8 Data protection – your details

When we deal with your feedback we will keep to relevant data protection laws. Your details will be entered onto a consultation database but we will not disclose personal information to third parties for marketing purposes. In all our dealings with the public, we are committed to following the Human Rights Act 1998.

3.9 Your representatives

If you want to raise issues or have support getting involved in influencing decisions of concern or interest to you, the following people may be worth contacting:

Your councillors

Surrey county comprises 11 borough and district council areas, of which Guildford Borough Council is one.

Your county and borough councillors are your elected representatives for county-wide or borough-wide issues. Their role is to represent the concerns of the community. They are regularly updated on the progress of community issues from a range of sources. They can raise matters directly with organisations on your behalf if appropriate. They can also tell you about local meetings that are happening that might be of interest.

County councillors cover Surrey-wide issues such as education, fire and rescue, highways, libraries, passenger transport, minerals highways and school planning issues and associated planning applications, social services, highways and transport, trading standards and waste disposal.

Borough councillors represent your ward and may serve on select Guildford Borough Council committees. Borough councils cover local issues such as council tax, environmental health, elections, housing, leisure and recreation, planning policy and most development planning applications, building regulations, waste collection and recycling, street cleansing, parking, support services, day centres and meals on wheels, dial-a-ride, licensing, parks and countryside and cultural services.

All councillors are keen to encourage involvement at a local level. Local councillors attend local events and drop-in sessions wherever possible within their area. They can support you if you feel that a consultation has not been carried out in accordance with this Community engagement strategy.

Find out who your county councillor is at: www.surreycc.gov.uk²

Find out who your local borough councillor is by going to: <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1> or contact the Legal and Democratic Senior Administrative Officer on 01483 444102 or email committeeservices@guildford.gov.uk. You can also try 'My Guildford' on the website, just tap in your postcode.

Parish Councils

Much of the rural part of the borough is represented by Parish Councils dealing with issues of local concern. There are 24 Parish Councils in Guildford borough.

Find out more about Parish Councils: <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/mgParishCouncilDetails.aspx?Is=17&SLS=5&bcr=1> or contact the Legal and Democratic Administrative Officer on 01483 444102 or email committeeservices@guildford.gov.uk.

Your Member of Parliament

The job of a Member of Parliament (MP) is to represent the people of his or her constituency in Parliament. You only have one MP so even if you voted for another candidate and you disagree with the views of your MP's party, your MP is still there to help you with all matters for which Parliament or central government is responsible.

Find out how to contact your local MP by going to: www.parliament.uk or by calling 020 7219 4272

² [www.surreycc.gov.uk/your-council/councillors and committees/Surrey County Councillors](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-and-committees/Surrey-County-Councillors)

3.10 Is this Strategy working?

If you are not happy with how you have been involved in making a decision you can:

- Go to the relevant organisation or department in the first instance and raise your concerns
- Use their formal complaint procedures if necessary
- Register your concern where statutory procedures have not been followed correctly.

If you would like more support with this it may be worth contacting your local Councillor or Member of Parliament (see previous section for details).

3.11 Want to get involved or find out more?

There are lots of ways to get involved, many of which have been mentioned already. A good starting point is adding your details to the Guildford Borough Local Development Framework contact database (contact details below)

Some examples of the good community engagement work Local Strategic Partnership partners are already doing can be found at www.guildford.gov.uk/ces . Further contact details are also available on the website if there is a particular topic or area that you are interested in.

3.12 Let us know what you think...

Email us



ces@guildford.gov.uk

Call us



call: 01483 444052 or 444471