



# How to be a councillor

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A guide for Members of  
Epping Forest District Council



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## Contested Elections

Since the implementation of the Boundary Commission Review on 2 May 2024, every district council ward is represented by three councillors. Epping Forest District Council elections are held by thirds. Each year, one of the seats held by the councillors in your ward will up for election. Essex County Council elections are held on the fourth year of each cycle.

Usually, councillors are elected for a four-year term. However, there may be exceptions to the four-year term.

- By-elections – usually held when a sitting councillor dies or resigns during their term of office. The successful candidate at the by-election serves the remainder of the four-year term.
- Boundary Reviews – The most recent review of the council's ward boundaries comes into effect with the Local Elections on 2 May 2024. Unusually, all 54 seats are up for election and three new councillors are elected to each ward. The candidate with the most votes will serve a four-year term. The candidate with the second most votes will serve three years, and the candidate with the third most votes will serve a two-year term. At the end of four years, the normal cycle of elections by thirds will have resumed.

Elections for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) are held once every four years.

General Elections must be held at least every five years.

## Uncontested Elections

Uncontested elections occur when only one candidate is nominated, and the formality of an election is unnecessary.

## Pre-Election Period (Previous known as 'Purdah')

The pre-election period of roughly 6 weeks between the notice of elections and the close of poll on election day is a time of heightened sensitivity. During this time, the Council must be especially careful not to issue publicity, run consultations or start anything else new that could influence the elections in favour of any group or individual over another,

The Council therefore avoids the inclusion of member quotes in media releases and photography. The Local Government Association elaborates:

“Pre-election rules restrict activity wider than just publicity. Use of council facilities and resources; the member's code of conduct, developing new policies and holding of events - including some meetings - featuring elected officials should all be carefully considered during a period of heightened sensitivity.”

However, the pre-election period is not meant to restrict the election campaigns of councillors and candidates. The process of public, face to face and online debate between candidates, including public political meetings and in the local media is an essential part of the democratic process.

Most other activities including Council, Cabinet and Planning meetings continue as business as usual. Find out more online:

- [LGA Pre-Election Guidance](#)

## Be a Councillor – The Local Government Association (LGA)

According to Gov.UK you will need commitment and hard work to become an effective councillor. Your role includes:

- Representing the ward for which you are elected
- Decision-making - developing and reviewing council policy
- Scrutinising decisions taken by the councillors on the Cabinet
- Regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties

Being a new councillor sounds daunting, especially if you're new to local government. This guide is designed to get you started, but there is other help out there too. The Local Government Association is the national association for councils, councillors and council officers. Find out more online:

- [Be a Councillor | Local Government Association](#)
- [Home | Local Government Association](#)

There are some important rules you should follow. All elected and appointed holders of public office are expected to follow the seven Nolan Principles

- [The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

For more information on standards of behaviour see the section on The Standards Committee and Codes of Conduct and the e-learning modules on Litmos.

## The Three-Tier System

Even people with experience of London and other areas can find the local government structure of Essex confusing. Essex has a three-tier system.

- Essex County Council, Southend and Thurrock Unitary Authorities
- District, City and Borough Councils – including Epping Forest District Council
- Town and Parish Councils

Unusually, Epping Forest District is further complicated by our relationship with two other organisations:

- The Corporation of London (The City of London, The Conservators)
- Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

Read more about each layer of local government below.

## Political Groups

The majority of councillors have stood for election as candidates for a political group or party. Most people are familiar with the main national parties:

- Conservative
- Green
- Labour
- Liberal Democrat

Residents Associations have become increasingly common in many councils.

- Loughton Residents Association has returned councillors to Epping Forest District Council

Some councillors choose to serve as Independents with no affiliation to any political group.

- Independent Group - Independent councillors can also join together in an Independent Group

Being a member of a political group may have advantages. You belong to a group of like-minded people, some of whom may have more experience as a councillor. Being part of a group may also open more opportunities to participate in committees and panels through the pro-rata allocation of places.

## Housekeeping - ID badges, parking, etc

Following your election, the Council will send you an invitation to your first induction day. There are acceptance papers to sign and people to meet. One of your first duties will be to sign your Declaration of Acceptance of Office and Code of Conduct. This must be signed before you can take up any of your duties or attend council meetings.

The Council has moved to paperless meetings as part of our climate change commitment to carbon neutrality. Staff from the Member Support Team and ICT will be on hand to explain how to access all your official paperwork via your personal device with the installation of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) on a laptop, smartphone or tablet.

They will set you up with apps and passwords as well as your official individual council email address.

In the unlikely event you do not own a device suitable for BOYD, you may need to buy one with your Members Allowance. Our ICT team will be happy to offer general advice, but a basic device such as a Chromebook should be adequate.

Maintaining good electronic housekeeping is essential. Your council accounts will stop working if you fail to keep them updated or lose your passwords.

Once set up – the Council only sends information to your official EFDC email address.

Your email is very important. There will be times when you send or receive sensitive information. You must avoid using your private email address for official council business. Using your official council email address will help you and the Council comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

We will also take your photograph. This will appear as part of your profile on the Council website [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk). It will also be added to your official Council ID/Security Badge.

Once received, you must wear your Council ID badge whenever you visit any of the Council offices. The ID incorporates an electronic door entry card allowing access to non-public areas of the buildings.

Thieves and other criminals target public buildings. All councillors, employees and official visitors must wear an ID badge in the buildings to protect us from unauthorised entry. Do not be offended - expect to be challenged and possibly refused entry if you do not wear your badge.

Your ID badge will also raise the barrier to the carpark. Day-time parking is restricted. You must book your space before you arrive. Member Support can show you how. If you use one of the blue bays, be sure to leave your mobile phone number clearly visible on the dashboard and be prepared to move your car if another person needs to leave the carpark.

Please do not park in the bays reserved for our office partners Regus. If there is no space available, use one of the public pay and display carparks.

## Accessibility

Equality of opportunity does not mean treating everyone the same. We are all different and sometimes need different forms of support to fulfil our roles. Please speak with us if you have any special needs or requirements. There are many ways in which we may be able to help or adapt to support you.

## Allowances and expenses

Councillors are volunteers, but your responsibilities should not put you out of pocket. All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance. This covers your costs for attending meetings, home broadband, postage and other basic expenses incurred as part of your council responsibilities such as IT consumables.

You may also receive an additional allowance for special or extra responsibilities. These usually apply to members of the cabinet and committee chairman. A few councillors such as the Chairman of Council and Leader of Council receive additional special responsibility allowances.

Allowance levels are recommended by an independent remuneration panel. Not every councillor accepts their full allowance. The choice is yours.

You can also claim for other legitimate expenses such as some travel costs and food associated with official business. No expenses will be paid without production of a valid VAT receipt.

Expenses are reimbursed through the Council's payroll service. Talk to Member Services for more information.

## Attending meetings

Meetings are where councillors debate reports and make decisions. Many of our councillors work during the day, so most of our meetings are held in the evening, usually at 7pm.

Most of our meetings take place in the Council Chamber where cameras and webcasting equipment are installed. Most of our evening meetings are webcast to the public and press. Occasionally, a meeting may be held in private. Members of the public and press are asked to leave, and the webcast is turned off.

According to English law, councillors must be in physical attendance to vote. However, since the Pandemic, we have also used hybrid technology with MS Teams. It allows councillors to join the meeting remotely. You can't vote when you join remotely, but you may be able to ask questions and contribute to debate.

Your ability to join hybrid meetings depends on your IT skills, broadband and technology. You need to be seen and heard. You also need to be able to hear what's said.

Good decision making requires knowledge and preparation. Read the reports before the meeting. Democratic Services usually send out the electronic agenda and reports at least a week ahead of the meeting. This gives you time to read and digest the reports. You can then make informed comments and ask pertinent questions before you vote on the recommendations.



## Attending meetings continued

You must attend a minimum number of meetings. Without good reason and an explanation to the Council, failure to attend meetings for more than six months could lead to loss of your seat and a by-election.

You will be allocated places on a variety of committees. This is usually done at the first meeting of the Council after the elections in May – known as Annual Council. The number of councillors from each political group is allocated to the committees on a pro rata basis. In other words, the larger your group, the more seats your group gets on each committee.

As a new councillor, you may want to discuss your interests and expertise with your group leader before they nominate you to different committees.

You can attend any meeting (with a few rare exceptions), but you can only vote if you are a member of the committee.

Agenda will usually be sent to you by email a week before each meeting. You can also check what meetings are coming up at any time on the Council website.

- [Calendar of Meetings](#)

## The Member Portal

We will send you information via your official EFDC email. But for access to wider information, you have access to a range of resources, including the agenda and minutes of all meetings (including confidential reports) in the Members Portal.

The Portal is your electronic gateway to your council resources. It will be set up on your device as part of your induction.

Please be sure to follow the instructions for updates, especially passwords to maintain your access.

## The main meetings

**Full Council** – you are automatically a member of Full Council along with all 53 other councillors.

**Cabinet** – sometimes known as the Executive. Members of the Cabinet are appointed by the Leader of Council, usually from the largest political group. Members of the Cabinet are also known as Portfolio Holders. They are usually experienced councillors of longstanding.

**District Development Management Committee** – the ‘parent’ planning committee that deals with the most important planning applications. Many councillors serve on the area planning sub-committees covering their area. You could well be asked to serve on:

- Area Plans Sub-Committee East\*
- Area Plans Sub-Committee West\*
- Area Plans Sub-Committee South\*

\*The number and coverage of area plans sub-committees is under review and may change.

## The main meetings continued

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee** – chaired by a member of the largest opposition group. Monitors, scrutinises and sometimes challenges the policies and decisions of the Cabinet. Cabinet Portfolio Holders also come to O&S routinely to engage and consult with fellow councillors before major decisions such as the setting of the budget. O&S is supported by two sub-committees:

- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Place Scrutiny Committee

**Licensing Committee** – also supported by a sub-committee to consider entertainment, alcohol, taxi and other statutory licence applications. Unlike other committees, Licensing meetings are usually held during the day.

## Other committees

As well as the main meetings, you might be asked to serve on smaller committees and panels.

- Appointments Panel
- Audit and Governance Committee
- Constitution Working Group
- Epping Forest Local Highways Panel
- Local Councils' Liaison Committee
- Member Remuneration Panel
- Parish Remuneration Panel
- Senior Management Appeals Panel
- Senior Management Selection Panel
- Standards Committee

## The Constitution

All the rules of the Council are enshrined in the Constitution. It includes rules for managing meetings, delegation of powers and codes of conduct.

You should try to make yourself familiar with its main themes sooner rather than later.

It is available on the [website here](#)

## Apologies

If you are unable to attend a meeting as a member of a committee, please give your apologies to Democratic Services in advance using the Member Portal. Alternatively, you can also ask a fellow councillor to give apologies on your behalf at the start of the meeting.

## Meeting Etiquette

The rules of debate are governed by respect and good behaviour towards fellow councillors and staff. Some of the basics:

- The Chairman is always in charge.
- Follow their lead and do as they say.
- Indicate you wish to speak by raising your hand.
- When invited, address your remarks to and through the Chairman.
- Always use the microphone when speaking. It helps other people in the room. It is also essential for anyone listening via Teams or Webcast.
- Always turn your microphone off when you have finished speaking to allow others to speak. Leaving your microphone open can also result in unintended comments being picked up, broadcast and recorded by the webcast.
- When speaking at Full Council, always stand as a mark of respect for the office of the Chairman.
- Remain seated when speaking in all other meetings.
- Keep your questions and points of debate relevant and succinct.
- Give your fellow councillors the courtesy of remaining silent and listening to them.
- Always remember the webcast. Think of yourself as a guest in the home of your residents. Dress and conduct yourself accordingly.

Open meetings are vital for democratic transparency and accountability. Public reports are published for everyone to read online. Meetings are usually held in public.

Members of the public and press can attend meetings to hear the debates in person. Since the advent of webcasting, fewer people attend meetings, preferring to watch online in the comfort of their own home.

However, sometimes it is not appropriate to share information in public. Some reports are confidential, and some meetings are held in private.

## Private and Confidential – Part II

Exclusion of Public and Press is a standing item for most meetings, although it is rarely used. Private items are the exception.

Private items are usually discussed in Part II at the end of the agenda. Reasons for moving into private session include:

- Commercially sensitive information – often associated with the consideration or award of large contracts.
- Private and personal information – sometimes involving employees.
- Legal restrictions – where the law forbids publication of information.
- Legal advice – where publication could undermine the council's position to defend or enforce a legal position.

Any reports associated with Part II are sometimes referred to as 'Pinks', the colour of paper used to distinguish them from public documents before the transfer to electronic agenda.

Contents of Part II reports are also confidential and must not be shared.

Public minutes are published after the meeting to provide as much public transparency as possible.

## Serving your residents

You attend the Council to debate and make decisions on public services for the whole district. You are also the directly elected representative of the residents in your ward. As their councillor, they will expect you to be available to them, to help them, and to represent them with their personal requests or problems.

You will be able to choose how best to engage with your residents. You may choose to hold regular surgeries, publish your phone number or encourage residents to get in touch online.

Sometimes, your residents will need information and advice. Less frequently they may ask for your direct help and support. You will become the go-between for them and the Council.

Democratic Services may be your first point of Council contact. Fill in the online form and your request for help or information will be redirected to the service or department best able to help you. Putting your requests in writing via the form also provides a helpful audit trail, recording what and when you requested help, along with the Council's response.

Hopefully, your resident will receive a swift and helpful response. If they do not, you will have the audit trail to show how we let you down, and what we need to do to put things right.

Before you contact Member Services, finding information can be a simple matter of checking the website. Common questions can often be answered on the website, especially for:

- Planning Applications
- Refuse and Recycling
- Council Tax and Benefits
- Housing
- Environmental Health
- Building Control
- Community Safety
- And many other services

Fellow councillors are another source of advice and support. New councillors often find the best people to ask are other members of their own political group. Political groups also usually hold Group Meetings to share information and agree items of policy.

As you become more used to the Council, you may also find friends and acquaintances across the political divide. Regardless of political colour, most councillors, most of the time, are only concerned with doing what's best for residents. You may be surprised by the offers of support and assistance you receive from the 'old-hands', regardless of political affiliations. Sometimes all you need to do is ask.

We go into some of the areas with a bit more detail below.

## The Chairman and Full Council

Borough and City councils have mayors. District councils have chairmen. Beyond the title, there is essentially no difference.

The Chairman of Council holds a unique position within the Council. On appointment, they set aside most of the political considerations of other councillors. They remain above politics and ensure all other councillors receive fair and equal treatment in Full Council meetings.

The Chairman also holds an important ceremonial position as a leading citizen of the district. The role involves non-political representation in ceremonies and events within and beyond the boundaries of the District.

Full Council is the place where all councillors meet to make the most important decisions. It is also an opportunity to put questions to the Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

## The Leader and Cabinet

This is the most powerful executive office of the Council. The Leader of Council appoints and chairs the Cabinet. Usually, the Leader of Council is also the leader of the largest political group (although not always). Unlike the Chairman, the Leader has powers to make executive decisions and spend money. The Leader delegates specific areas of responsibility to Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

Most decisions are taken in Cabinet. Only the most important decisions are reserved for Full Council. Notably, Full Council sets the annual budget and the Council Tax. It adopted our Local Plan.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S)

Good governance requires checks and balances on the power of the Leader and the Cabinet. Decisions of the Leader and Cabinet are subject to 'Call-In'. This is a five-day period following the publication of the notice, when other councillors can challenge a Cabinet decision.

At least five councillors must sign a call-in with reasons, at which point the decision is deferred and sent to Overview and Scrutiny.

O&S provides a breathing space for councillors to take stock. It can give the Cabinet Portfolio Holder an opportunity to review their decision and take soundings from colleagues. This can lead to subtle changes and more nuanced policies.

O&S is a good place to listen, learn and put questions to members of the Cabinet. Portfolio Holders also consult O&S (and its other scrutiny committees) by bringing early versions of draft policies and reports for review and advice.

You don't need to be a member of a committee to attend and take part in a debate. O&S is one of the best places (along with meetings of the Cabinet) to find out more about the most important council business as well as some of the smaller projects and policies that interest you.

O&S comments are often included within Cabinet reports. The Chairman of O&S can also make verbal reports to Cabinet.

## Place and Community Scrutiny Committees

As well as the 'parent' Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Council has two sub committees of O&S:

- Place Scrutiny Committee
- Communities Scrutiny Committee

These handle much of the scrutiny 'leg-work' associated with O&S.

The scrutiny committees also provide an important place for policy development, often utilised by Cabinet Portfolio Holders to test new ideas and improve the policy before reports come to Cabinet.

See the Budget Setting section for more on one of the most important contributions the O&S and the scrutiny committees make to policy development.

## District Development Management Committee

Planning law is one of the most important parts of your induction as a new councillor. You should also take care to keep yourself updated on any changes to planning law and policy.

Your role on DDMC and Area Planning Sub-Committees is 'quasi-judicial'. In other words, the decisions you make on planning applications are governed by law such as the Town and Country Planning Act, and planning policy (see the Local Plan section for more information).

Any divergence from law and policy could lead to planning refusal being overturned at appeal by a planning inspector. Legal costs can also be awarded against the Council.

Professional planning officers usually provide recommendations to approve or refuse planning applications. You must therefore have good legal and policy planning reasons in rejecting the professional advice.

DDMC is the 'parent' planning committee where the most significant planning applications are debated and agreed.

In very rare cases, DDMC may even refer a planning application up to Full Council for a final decision.

DDMC also manages other areas of planning policy and consultation affecting the whole district.

Most of the routine planning business of the Council takes place in the Area Planning Sub-Committees, East, West, and South.

## Area Planning Sub-Committees

Your planning decisions have far-reaching environmental consequences for local communities. Setting personal preference aside, councillors must take an objective and unbiased view of each application.

Comparing each application against a set of laws and policies may seem simple, but in truth it can be complicated. For example:

- When could special circumstances of a new school outweigh protection of the Green Belt?
- When could affordable housing targets be set aside for lower levels of much needed development?
- When could historic architectural merit outweigh community need?

You must also take account of consultees including neighbours, local parish and town councils, and statutory authorities such as Essex County Council Highways, Natural England and the Corporation of London. Public opinion may be strong. You may receive lots of representations to your inbox. You must listen to applicants, agents and objectors in the meeting.

Predetermination is when a councillor has made up their mind before they have heard all the facts. If it can be shown that you decided how to vote before the meeting (eg through public statements), the decision could be overturned by Judicial Review. It is therefore essential to keep an open mind until you have heard all the evidence.

Whatever your decision, you must be able to back it up with sound reasoning or the Council will lose on appeal and your Council Tax paying residents will pick up the bill.

Most small routine planning applications never come to committee. They are delegated to planning officers to make some decisions on your behalf. However, that still leaves a full agenda for frequent meetings of 'Plans South, East and West'.

The Local Government Association has a good online guide:

- [A councillor's workbook on planning](#)

Make sure you attend the mandatory training course before you attend as a member of a planning committee.

## Licensing Committee

Licensing is another of the Council's quasi-judicial functions. Similar to Planning, councillors on Licensing and its sub-committees must set personal opinion aside in favour of objective decision making based on law, policy and evidence. Among the licence applications the Council considers are:

- Premises Licenses for pubs and restaurants
- Off-Licences
- Taxi Drivers
- Music and Entertainment

Opening hours are a common cause of consideration for businesses operating in the night-time economy. Legal background checks are routinely made to ensure taxi drivers and pub landlords are fit and proper licence holders.

Essex Police are among the regular consultees on many applications. The Police are also a potential source for requests to review, suspend or withdraw a licence.

Like DDMC the parent Licensing Committee convenes only for policy and to consider the most significant issues.

Unlike other committees, licensing meetings tend to be held during the day.

## Licensing Sub-Committees

Many licence applications are decided by officers under delegated powers. However, most decisions by councillors are made in Licensing Sub-Committees.

Most Licensing Sub-Committees consist of a small group of councillors supported by technical officers. Applicants and objectors may attend to present their case under cross-examination by councillors. Meetings adjourn for councillors to discuss and agree their decisions in private.



## The Budget

Public sector finance is complicated. The culmination of the annual budget setting round always takes place in February at Full Council, but the process starts long before.

The budget covers several main accounts.

- The General Fund
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- The Capital Programme

Strict accountancy rules govern how money is raised for each account and what it can be spent on.

### The General Fund

As the name suggests, the General Fund is the account from which most council expenses are paid. It comes from a variety of sources, including:

- Council Tax
- Business Rates
- Fees and Charges
- Commercial property rents
- Interest on loans and investments
- Government and other grants
- Section 106 payments from planning approvals

It helps to pay for services as diverse as Waste and Recycling, Environmental Health, Community Safety and Planning. Most (but not all) employee salaries are paid by the General Fund.

### The Housing Revenue Account

The HRA is 'ring-fenced'. It's main source of income is rent from council housing, and the Council is only allowed to spend this money on council housing. That includes the housing estates and facilities associated with council housing such as parks, playgrounds, estate parking and the salaries of housing employees.

The Council can supplement the HRA with money from the General Fund, but the HRA cannot supplement the General Fund.

### The Capital Programme

The General Fund and the HRA are revenue accounts. They meet the annual ongoing costs of services. The Capital Programme pays for one-off costs such as the construction of new buildings, the purchase of new vehicles, and large equipment costs.

Costs within the Capital Programme have HRA or General Fund status to protect the ring-fence for housing.

Money for the Capital Programme comes from a variety of sources including:

- Return on investments
- Contributions from the General Fund and HRA
- Receipts from sales of land, property and council housing
- Borrowing (often from the Public Works Loan Board)

## Reserves

The Council also holds Reserves – money in the bank as insurance against unexpected costs or to smooth cash-flow between financial years.

## Setting the Budget

The budget is about so much more than money. Without money, there can be no services.

The Council sets a budget each year, but it looks much further ahead when making its decisions. The Medium-Term Forecast attempts to predict income and expenditure over the next four to five years. The Capital Programme plans spending, and repayments spread over decades. The annual budget therefore takes account of the long-view, as well as short-term requirements.

Following years of low stable inflation and interest rates, the cost-of-living crisis following the pandemic and invasion of Ukraine has considerably complicated the picture.

Preparation starts almost as soon as the previous budget has been agreed. Members of the Cabinet are in continuous conversation with service managers. Finance managers monitor income and expenditure against predictions. Inflation, interest rates, pay awards and new projects change the figures. Solutions to close any gaps between income and expenditure are developed.

Members of the Cabinet work with the Finance Portfolio Holder towards initial papers in the Autumn. As soon as a first draft is available, the Finance Portfolio Holder starts to bring proposals to Overview and Scrutiny. The first report sets the scene for the next budget. Subsequent reports start to outline and refine proposals.

The process is inclusive. Every councillor has a voice in the discussions as the Cabinet seeks the best way forward.

The first draft budgets come to Cabinet and O&S before Christmas, when the Government usually publishes its Financial Settlement – the amount of grant it will make towards each Council's costs.

The debate includes whether, or how much to raise Council Tax and income from fees and charges. Councillors also look to save money, preferably through efficiencies, but sometimes through cuts.

The Finance Portfolio Holder continues to engage other members as the Cabinet welcomes further debate and suggestions from all councillors.

The process culminates with the meeting of Cabinet in February to agree the draft budget recommendations. From there, the final recommendations go to Full Council where every one of the 54 members gets to vote on final adoption.

## Council Tax

The Council Tax is one of many ways the District Council funds services. In fact, other income has become more important. Council Tax is a relatively small part of the District Council's overall income.

However, Council Tax makes up a much larger proportion of income for other organisations. EFDC also collects Council Tax for:

- Essex County Council
- Essex Police
- Essex Fire and Rescue
- Town and Parish Councils

Each organisation sets its own budget and Council Tax Precept before Epping Forest District councillors approve the overall Council Tax for the District.

### Council Tax Base, Bands and other factors

The 'Council Tax Base' is the number of people who pay Council Tax. A complex calculation analyses the number of payers in each Council Tax band (A to H), before setting the overall precept – or amount that needs to be collected for each organisation.

The Council Tax each of your residents pay depends on several factors including:

- Council Tax Band based on the value of the property from A (cheapest) to H (most expensive).
- Different Parish or Town Council precept depending on where the property is located.
- Discounts, such as the single person discount, and means-tested benefits.

Other charges may apply for empty and second or holiday homes.

With so many possible variations, debate usually focuses on an 'Average Band D' property.

## The Standards Committee and Codes of Conduct

You are responsible for upholding the standards of public office enshrined in the [Nolan Principles](#). You are also governed by a local Council Code of Conduct, reviewed and updated by the Standards Committee. You should read and regularly remind yourself of the Code within the [Constitution](#).

Follow the Principles and the Code, and you will rarely go wrong. They will safeguard you against unwarranted complaints.

Most of the guidelines are common sense such as showing courtesy, fairness and equality, and respect for others.

The Code also provides guidance on when to declare a pecuniary (financial) or non-pecuniary (non-financial) interest, and whether to leave or stay in a meeting when you have a personal interest in the outcome. These are important personal decisions. You are personally responsible for the choices you make when the Code applies to you.

Perception matters. Follow the spirit as well as the letter of the Principles and Code. Be seen to do the right thing.

When a complaint is made the Council's Monitoring Officer arranges an initial assessment. If there is substance worthy of investigation, further inquiries follow.

Alleged breaches of the Code are heard by the Standards Committee. Non-councillors are co-opted to ensure fair and balanced independent consideration of all the evidence. If proved, sanctions can vary from an apology or training, to censure by the Council.

Criminal investigations led by the Police always take precedence over internal Code of Conduct hearings.

## In-House

Epping Forest District Council provides dozens of different services on behalf of our residents. Most of our services involve 'in-house' staff employed directly by the Council.

Many of our in-house staff work with a range of partners including Essex County Council, Essex Police, the Corporation of London, and the NHS. We also work with many commercial suppliers for goods and services to help us do our jobs. Increasingly we work with people in the voluntary sector including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Epping Forest Food Bank and Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

Our most significant partners are:

- Qualis
- Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
- Places Leisure
- Our Waste and Recycling Collection partners (Biffa and Terra Verde Services)
- Our Shared Services Partners

## Qualis

Qualis is the commercial company group created in 2020 and wholly owned by Epping Forest District Council to deliver a range of property services.

The group comprises:

- **Qualis Commercial** – The development arm building new residential and business, combined with asset management and property investment generating income through commercial and residential rent.
- **Qualis Homes** – a subsidiary of Qualis Commercial, marketing new developments for sale and rent.
- **Qualis Property Solutions** – day to day and planned maintenance and repair for the council's housing stock and associated housing estates, plus grounds maintenance managing trees, grass verges and other 'green' items.
- **Qualis Community** – investment in local community projects.

Qualis brings the advantages of the private commercial sector to the delivery of services on behalf of the public service sector. As the only shareholder, EFDC has ultimate control over Qualis.

Qualis is accountable to the Council and makes regular information and progress reports to the Council. Income derived from Qualis makes an increasingly important contribution to the Council's budget.

Many current Qualis employees are former council employees who transferred across including housing repairs, grounds maintenance and commercial lettings. Other Qualis employees have been recruited directly.

Council tenants contact Qualis directly for housing repairs.

## Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

The development of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town is a joint initiative by:

- East Herts District Council
- Epping Forest District Council
- Essex County Council
- Harlow District Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

The project will create many new homes and jobs in and around Harlow. The single largest development of 10,000 new homes is planned for the Gilston Villages in East Herts. These will be connected to Harlow by new and upgraded crossings across the River Stort. Further new homes are planned in Harlow itself.

Three strategic sites are also planned on the borders of Harlow in Epping Forest District at:

- Water Lane (2,100 new homes),
- Latton Priory (1,050 new homes),
- East of Harlow (3,350 new homes of which 2,600 will lie within Harlow and 750 in Epping Forest).
- Land within the Epping Forest portion of East of Harlow near Junction 7A of the M11 has been earmarked for the brand-new Princess Alexandra Hospital.

Extensive infrastructure will support the development of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. Each of the four sites around Harlow will be connected through the town by sustainable transport corridors. Active and sustainable transport plans are geared to reduce reliance on cars and carbon emissions linked to climate change.

New schools, leisure and environmental projects will support the growing population. Employment will provide high skilled local jobs. Around half of the Garden Town will be natural and open green space to support the health and wellbeing of residents as well as the environment.

Local health facilities are planned as well as the new hospital.

HGGT has its own employees, chairman and chief executive. The board of directors is made up of two councillors each from the five councils. HGGT officers work in collaboration with planning and other officers from the associated councils.

## Places Leisure

Places Leisure manage four sports and leisure centres under contract for Epping Forest District Council at:

- Epping Sports Centre
- Loughton Leisure Centre
- Ongar Leisure Centre
- Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre

Epping Sports Centre is being replaced. Places Leisure and Pellikaan Construction Ltd are building a new leisure centre at Bakers Lane in Epping. Completion is expected in 2025/26. It follows the successful opening of the new Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre in 2018. When completed, Epping will have the most energy-efficient leisure centre in the district.

The new Epping Leisure Centre will include a public swimming pool for the first time in Epping. The centre has been facilitated by the construction of a new multi-storey carpark at Cottis Lane.

## Terra Verde Services – (TVS)

From November 2024 Terra Verde Services, a new company set up and wholly owned by the Council, will take over the domestic waste and recycling contract from Biffa. TVS will operate from a brand-new operations hub (depot) at North Weald Airfield, with vehicles supplied and maintained under contract to the Council. The new arrangements will give the Council more control over both long-term planning and day-to-day operation of waste collection and street cleansing services.

## Shared Services – Fit for the Future

Recruitment and retention of highly skilled and qualified employees is a growing local government concern. As councils struggle with greater demands and diminishing resources, more focus is being given to sharing people, technology and expertise.

Epping Forest District Council has developed a close shared services partnership with Braintree District Council and Colchester City Council. The three councils are also part of a larger group – North Essex Councils (NEC). Beyond Essex, EFDC also shares services with Broxbourne and other councils in Hertfordshire.

Some of our shared services:

- Section 151 Officer and Chief Financial Officer
- ICT
- Legal and Monitoring Officer
- Audit
- Procurement
- Payroll

Further development of shared services is planned including Finance, HR, and Revenues and Benefits.

## North Essex Economic Board – NEEB

The North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) is a partnership of Braintree, Maldon, Tendring, Uttlesford, and Epping Forest district councils, Colchester and Chelmsford city councils, and Essex County Council. Each has committed to working together as a catalyst for economic growth. NNEB funding supports local businesses with advice, guidance and training as well as skills programmes to boost the life chances of local residents and help them into work.

- [NEEB website](#)

## North Essex Parking Partnership – NEPP

The North Essex Parking Partnership is a council-run organisation which brings together street-based parking services in Essex. Epping Forest District is one of five partners with Braintree, Colchester, Harlow, Tendring and Uttlesford. NEPP works in partnership with EFDCs own car-park team.

- [NEPP website](#)

## The Local Plan

All local authorities produce Local Plans. They set out a vision for the future of each area and a framework for addressing housing need, employment, health, education and business needs alongside environmental and climate change priorities.

Local plans are a key defence against inappropriate development.

The Epping Forest District Council Local Plan was adopted in 2023 following an independent examination and approval by a government-appointed planning inspector. Development of the Local Plan involved extensive consultation with local residents, statutory organisations and stakeholders.

It is one of the key council policy documents, shaping the future of the district through the allocation of land for the new homes (including affordable homes), jobs and infrastructure.

Local Plan policies help councillors to assess planning applications and other related development proposals. It also provides protection for the district's important open spaces, and the natural and historic environment, setting a high bar for creating safe, healthy and accessible places.

Land allocations within the Local Plan have identified areas suitable for the development of 11,400 new homes between 2011 and 2033. These include the three Harlow and Gilston Garden Town strategic sites at Water Lane, Latton Priory and East of Harlow.

The Local Plan can be viewed on the EFDC website:

- [Adopted Local Plan March 2023 - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

The Local Government Association has useful Local Plan guidance:

- [A councillor's workbook on planning](#)

## Climate Change

In the last 100 years, the earth's average temperature has increased faster than we have ever seen. The effects of Climate Change (Global Warming) include more and longer heatwaves, droughts, extreme rainfall and rising sea levels.

Epping Forest District Council declared a Climate Emergency in September 2019. It passed a motion to do everything within its power to become a carbon neutral district by 2030.

From reducing the carbon footprint of our offices, to building more energy efficient housing, there are many ways Epping Forest District Council can contribute directly towards carbon reduction. We can also encourage our residents, businesses and other stakeholders to do more through environmental and planning policies. Reducing, reusing and recycling, driving less and moving towards less polluting forms of transport involve behaviour change.

Environmental improvements are good for people's pockets, whether reducing fuel costs at home or in business. They are also good for our personal health and the environment in which we live.



## Other Authorities

Epping Forest District Council sits within a ‘three-tier’ local government structure. However, our district also hosts two of the most important areas of natural conservation, Epping Forest and Lea Valley Regional Park. Let’s look at some of the things each organisation does:

### Essex County Council

Essex County Council provides a wide range of high-profile services including:

- Highways (including potholes and street-lighting)
- Adult and Children’s Social Services
- Schools, Education and Young People Services
- Trading Standards
- Libraries
- Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths
- Waste Disposal

These services are also provided in their areas by Southend and Thurrock Unitary Councils.

### Town and Parish Councils

Town and Parish Councils specialise in the delivery of the most local services including:

- Town and Village Halls
- Public spaces and playgrounds
- Allotments
- Cemeteries

### The Corporation of London (The City – The Conservators)

The City of London Corporation is the governing body of the Square Mile. Following a series of Acts of Parliament passed in the 1870s, the Corporation is also the custodian of Epping Forest.

- [How we manage Epping Forest - City of London](#)

The Forest is ancient woodland of international importance. Covering an area of many miles from our district, down into the heart of North London, Epping Forest is protected for the enjoyment of local people and the conservation of its natural flora and fauna.

The conservation of the Forest extends the rights and influence of the Corporation of London into many of the things Epping Forest District Council does, such as Planning, and Essex County Council, such as Highways.

You may also see the City of London referred to as the Corporation of London and the Conservators of Epping Forest.

## Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

Lee Valley Regional Park Authority was created by Act of Parliament on 1 January 1967. From the Olympic Park, it stretches north into Essex and Hertfordshire, forming the western boundary between Epping Forest District and Broxbourne.

- [Sport, Leisure & Open Spaces | Lee Valley Regional Park Authority | England \(leevalleypark.org.uk\)](https://www.leevalleypark.org.uk)

Similar to the Corporation of London, the Park Authority has extensive control within its own boundaries and is an important statutory consultee to district council functions concerning planning and conservation. However, unlike the Corporation and Epping Forest, Lee Valley Park also celebrates a rich industrial heritage interwoven with natural greenspace and wildlife conservation.

## The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

At present, the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner – PFCC is elected to office every four years. The PFCC works with the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to deliver the policing and fire and rescue services to 1.8 million people across Essex.

- [Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex \(pfcc.police.uk\)](https://www.pfcc.police.uk)
- [Home | Essex Police](https://www.essex.police.uk)
- [Homepage | Essex County Fire and Rescue Service \(essex-fire.gov.uk\)](https://www.essex-fire.gov.uk)

If the Essex, Southend and Thurrock devolution bid to central government is successful, the role of the PFCC will become part of the new devolved arrangement.

## Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of central government money, powers, and responsibility to a new Essex-wide local authority, potentially with an elected Mayor. County, unitary, district and borough councils would continue to operate as they do now.

In Greater Essex this could mean more funding and greater control over health, planning, transport, skills, economic growth, and infrastructure.

In March 2023, Essex County Council submitted an [expression of interest in devolution](#) on behalf of all the authorities. The document opened the conversation with the government on a 'Level 2 Devolution Deal', and to fully understand how local people, businesses and communities could benefit from such a devolution deal.

The Government placed further discussion on-hold in early 2024 – to be reviewed and potentially restarted after the general election.

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

Ideas have circulated for many years that would amalgamate existing district and borough councils into new larger unitary authorities. Southend and Thurrock are local examples. As well as all the functions of a district or borough, they are also responsible for highways, education, social services, and other functions performed by Essex County Council for the rest of the county.

There are currently no plans to amalgamate any other districts or boroughs into unitary authorities in Essex.

Local Government Reorganisation is not Devolution and Devolution is not Local Government Reorganisation.

## Glossary

**Annual Council** – the first council meeting held after the local elections in May.

**By-election** – an unscheduled election, caused by the death or resignation of a sitting councillor.  
**Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)** – Personal IT equipment such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops equipped for official council applications.

**Capital Accounts** – Money to be spent on major one-off expenditure such as enhancement and construction of council housing and Epping Leisure Centre.

**Chairman of Council** – a councillor appointed by fellow councillors to chair meetings of the council and attend ceremonial functions. Similar in all but name to a Mayor.

**Combined Authority** – a council with responsibility for services usually provided by several different councils.

**Council** – Local Authorities such as Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council and a range of Town and Parish councils within the EFDC area.

**Council Tax** – A local tax levied by Councils and the PFCC on local householders to fund public services.

**Constitution** – The document containing the rules and guidelines for the conduct of council business.

**Democratic Services** – The team of employees that support the business of councillors and the council, including the production and distribution of agenda and minutes of meetings.

**Devolution** – the transfer of power and money from a higher level of government to a lower level.  
**Executive Function/ Cabinet** – A group of councillors appointed by the Leader of Council with special responsibilities for managing council services.

**Financial Settlement** – the annual government grant made to the council to support local services – usually announced around Christmas.

**General Fund** – The revenue account that pays for all on-going non-Housing Revenue Account costs.

**Harlow & Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)** – a partnership of Essex and Hertfordshire Councils delivering strategic housing developments around Harlow.

**Head of Paid Services** – usually the Chief Executive and most senior employee of the Council.  
**Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** – The rent-funded ring-fenced revenue account dedicated to providing housing services.

**Leader of Council** – usually the leader of the largest political group and chairman of the Cabinet.  
**Local Authority** – another name for council.

**Local Government Association (LGA)** – The ‘trade’ body representing the interests of councils at a national level.

**Local Government Reorganisation** – legislative changes to the structure and responsibilities of councils.

**Local Plan** – local policies to inform planning decisions based on areas of land allocated for different purposes such as residential, commercial and environmental.

**iTrent** – The HR Payroll system that manages councillors allowances.

**Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)** – A five-year estimate of income and expenditure.

**Member** – ‘Member of the Council’. An alternative form of description for ‘Councillor’.

**Member Portal** – An online gateway to council information and services for councillors

## Glossary

**Member Services** – direct assistance to councillors, located within the Democratic Services Team.

**ModGov** – The content management system (CMS) hosting agenda, minutes, and website information about councillors.

**Monitoring Officer** – a statutory designated officer with legal responsibility for the proper conduct of councillors and the council.

**Nolan Principles** – a set of seven principles outlining the standard of conduct expected of people such as councillors in public life.

**North Essex Councils** – A partnership of councils working towards common aims and interests. Braintree District, Chelmsford City, Colchester City, Epping Forest District, Harlow District, Maldon District, Tendring District and Uttlesford District Councils.

**North Essex Economic Board** – NEEB – A council partnership promoting economic growth.

**North Essex Parking Partnership** – NEPP – A council partnership supporting the administration of carparks and parking.

**Places Leisure** – provider of management services to the councils sports and leisure centres.

**Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC)** – an elected official responsible for Essex Police and Essex Fire and Rescue.

**Portfolio Holders** – councillors with responsibility for specific council services appointed to the Cabinet.

**Precept** – the overall amount of money to be collected in Council Tax by a council.

**Predetermination** – forming a decision prior hearing all the facts and debate on a planning application.

**Pre-Election Period** – previously known as ‘Purdah’. The period of between notice of poll and an election when publicity restrictions apply.

**Qualis** – A commercial company wholly-owned by Epping Forest District Council.

**Regus** – An office letting franchise providing accommodation at the Council’s Civic Offices in Epping.

**Remuneration Panel** – An independent panel of local citizens to make recommendations of the level of councillors allowances.

**Reserves** – Money held in reserve against unforeseen events. Minimum levels of reserves are recommended.

**Scrutiny Function** – Monitoring of council Cabinet, services and policies by officially appointed councillors.

**Section 151 Officer/Deputy Section 151 Officer** – a statutory designated officer with legal responsibility for the financial probity of the council.

**Terra Verde Services** – A waste collection and recycling company wholly-owned by Epping Forest District Council.

**Ward** – (from 2 May 2024) a defined area of the district represented by three elected district councillors.

**Webcasting** – video recording and transmission of meetings of the council and its committees, available to view online.