## Becoming a Rother District Councillor –

### Representing your local community

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This information is available in different languages, large print, Braille or audio tape.

Si desea este informe en español, por favor contactar a Sompriti: 01273 477550

Bu bilgiyi Türkçe olarak istiyorsanız, 01273 477550 numarasından Sompritiyi arayınız.

آپ نار برخی این مال کے لئے تلفن حل کر ایک

Se desajer esta informação em português, é favor contactar a Sompriti: 01273 477550

此信息有普通话版本如有需要请致电
Sompriti: 01273 477550

此信息有廣東話版本如有需要請致電
Sompriti: 01273 477550

For all enquiries please contact
lisa.anderson@rother.gov.uk
Tel: 01424 787813
Introduction

Councillors play a key role in improving the quality of life for all those who live or work within the 200 square miles of the Rother District.

As a local Councillor you will:

- act as the voice of your local community
- help shape Council services
- work with other authorities and service providers to agree and achieve common goals
- look after services with a revenue budget of around £13.7 million a year
- act with the utmost integrity and honesty in carrying out your work as a Councillor

All 38 seats on the Council are due for election in May 2011 giving you the perfect opportunity to get involved and exert some influence on future decisions for your local community.
We hope that this booklet will help you make up your mind about becoming a Councillor for Rother. If you are interested, this booklet tells you what you need to consider and what steps you need to take to make that a reality.

Rother District Council

TOWN HALL

THIS WAY!
Rother District Council is committed to playing its part in delivering a good quality of life for all who live and work in the District.

The Council’s current main aims are:

- Putting Customers First
- Delivering Value for Money
- Building Stronger, Safer Communities
- Working in Partnership

Further details of the work we do can be found in our Annual Performance Plan on our website at [http://www.rother.gov.uk/1069](http://www.rother.gov.uk/1069).

The Council operates a 5 year financial strategy to give stability and direction to financial planning. The budget is reviewed annually and the level of Council Tax is set by the full Council.

Rother District Council is committed to developing its elected Members in order to assist the Council in achieving its aims and priorities in accordance with the Corporate Plan. Member development
and training is a joint commitment between officers and elected Members and by working in partnership, appropriate investment in relevant training and development will be identified and resourced.

At Rother we value our elected Members and ensure that they are all given an equal opportunity to develop their knowledge and learn new skills. This enables them to promote partnership working and community engagement in order to become effective Ward Councillors and lead a modern and progressive District Council.
Why become a Councillor?

People become Councillors for different reasons; the most common theme is their wish to “make a difference” and to help their local community.

You may already be involved in your community as a Parish Councillor or a school governor. You may have specific issues that you would like the Council to address. You may wish to challenge the way the Council has operated in the past or influence the way it operates in the future.

Whatever the reason, no specific qualifications are required other than a commitment to serve your local community to the best of your ability and a willingness to give up your time.

The Council is keen to attract candidates who are representative of all sections of the communities that make up the District of Rother and candidates who also have a
range of skills and experience to add value to the Council as an organisation.

**Rother District Councillor quotes**

“The main reason I decided to become a Councillor was my desire to help the community I was elected to serve, improve facilities and generally improve the welfare for everyone, both young and old.”

“The most enjoyable thing about being a Rother District Councillor is being involved with the wider community, working within a team to help make aspirations a reality.”

“The main reason I decided to become a Councillor was that I wanted to make a difference for and on behalf of other people.”

“The most enjoyable thing about being a Rother District Councillor is getting to
know the local residents in my Ward and finding some resolution to local problems.”

Do I have to belong to a political party?

No. Some people stand as independent Members. However, if you wish to stand as a candidate for a political party you will need to be a member of that party’s local branch. Contact details for each of the main political parties are given at the end of this booklet.

Rother District Council is currently composed of 28 Conservative, 8 Liberal Democrat and 2 Independent Councillors.

Each District Councillor represents a Ward. The Wards in Rother fall in 2 different parliamentary constituencies: Hastings and Rye and Bexhill and Battle.
This map shows the Wards and boundaries for the rural Wards outside Bexhill-on-Sea. Wards are either represented by 1 or 2 Councillors, being determined by the size of the population.

This map shows the Wards within Bexhill-on-Sea, each of which are represented by 2 Councillors.
Who can become a Councillor?

To stand for election in Rother, you must, on the day of the election be

- 18 or over; and
- a UK, EU or commonwealth citizen

and satisfy at least 1 of the following:

- be registered to vote in the Rother District or have occupied land or premises in the district for the whole of a period of 12 months preceding the election as an owner or tenant; or
- be working in the Rother area; or
- be living in Rother

A person cannot stand for election if they:

- work for Rother District Council; or
- hold a politically restricted post for another authority such as East Sussex County Council; or
- are bankrupt; or
- have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) for 3
months or more within 5 years of the election; or
• have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices; or
• are of unsound mind; or
• have been surcharged in excess of £2,000 by the auditor or court

How decisions are made

Rother’s 38 Councillors are elected every 4 years and they meet together regularly as full Council. These meetings are open to the public and are led by the Chairman of the Council. He or she is appointed at the annual Council meeting in May and serves a term of 1 year.

The decision making structure itself is subject to scrutiny and may change from time to time, to ensure efficient and effective decision making; any proposed changes have to be agreed by full Council.
Full Council
The Council decides overall policies and sets the budget each year. It also appoints the Leader. From May 2011 this will be for the life of the Council – a 4 year term of office. The Leader appoints the Cabinet which develops and implements policies on behalf of the authority.

Cabinet
Cabinet makes decisions that are in line with overall policies and budgets. If it wishes to make a decision outside this framework it must report to full Council for ratification.

Cabinet meetings are monthly – and are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters are being debated.

Overview and Scrutiny
The Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees monitor the decisions of Cabinet and the implementation of policies. They also recommend policies to Cabinet and Council and may be
asked by Cabinet to review particular areas of activity. They can also ‘call - in’ a decision made by Cabinet but not yet implemented - enabling them to consider whether the right decision has been taken.

**Scrutiny Working Groups** are appointed to carry out particular tasks and may invite representatives from other external organisations or interested members of the public to assist them in their deliberations.

**Planning Committee** makes decisions regarding planning applications and other planning related matters.

**Licensing and General Purposes Committee and Panels** make decisions on liquor and taxi licensing and Human Resources issues, amongst other matters.

**Standards Committee** advises on the adoption and implementation of the Code of Conduct for elected and co-opted Members. All Councillors must agree to
follow this Code to ensure high standards are followed and maintained. The Standards Committee also deals with the local assessment of complaints when a Member of the District Council or a Parish Council, within its area, is alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct.

**Audit Committee** monitors financial and audit matters and risks.

**Rother District Councillor quotes**

“I have enjoyed my time as a Member of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees because it offers an important role for opposition Members to comment on and even influence policy making.”

“The Scrutiny role at Rother presents an opportunity to hold the Council to account and to bring the rural perspective into debate.”

“I have enjoyed my time as a Member of the Council's Scrutiny Committees
because I have been able to discuss important issues for Rother residents.”

“The Scrutiny role at Rother presents an opportunity to examine the operations of the Council’s services; and often to join with colleagues in recommending new policy.”

**What do Councillors do?**

Roles can be very varied and to a great extent depend on the amount of time individuals can give to the role. A considerable amount of time will be taken up dealing with local people - this could be complaints or enquiries about Council work. Councillors represent their residents’ views on issues associated with the Council.

Every Councillor is a Member of full Council and will also sit on some of the Committees and working parties to debate and approve Council business. Most meetings are open to the press and public
but all are governed by written ‘procedure’ rules.

Councillors have a responsibility to their Wards, to the Council and to the general community of Rother.

To the Council:

- help form policy
- help develop the budget and set Council tax levels
- make and scrutinise decisions

To the Ward:

- represent the views of the community
- ensure services are provided in the Ward
- try to secure resources for their Ward
- help individual residents on specific issues
- attend Parish Council meetings if representing a rural Ward
- attend meetings of the Bexhill Town Forum if representing a Bexhill Ward
To the community:

Councillors are local leaders, able to listen to their communities and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can improve their areas.

Councillors have a key role to play in leading communities and working to resolve local issues. The Improvement and Development Agency suggests there are two key elements to the role - leaders and advocates:

As leaders.....

- stimulating local organisations and individuals to take up opportunities to express views
- representing local concerns
- maintaining a link between the users and providers of services
- encouraging the community to organise services for themselves
• working with other community leaders in the voluntary, community and business sectors
• offering vision and direction to local groups and building support for that vision
• brokering agreements between different interests and partners

As advocates…

• speaking up for and on behalf of residents and groups
• encouraging residents to engage and participate
• taking part in making plans and planning decisions
• communicating residents’ concerns to the Council and other providers

How much time is involved?

Each Councillor will decide their own level of commitment to the role - and how much time they can devote. It can range from a few hours a day or a few hours a week -
or even a few days a week - but it will depend on which Committees they sit on and whether they hold a position of responsibility, such as a Committee Chairman or Cabinet Portfolio Holder.

Some of the issues to consider before committing to the role are:

- how being a Councillor will impact on family and personal relationships - you will need support as some of your free time will be occupied with Council business
- the people you represent will look to you for help so expect more post, e-mails and telephone calls - at all times of the day
- you may need to spend some time visiting your constituents in their homes or at Council offices
- you may also need to meet Council officers to discuss key issues
- there are 5 full Council meetings a year which you are expected to attend
- meetings start at 6.30 pm and last for up to 2 hours

- you will be a Member of at least one Committee or be on Cabinet – meetings are held both during the day and in the early evening and may typically last for up to 2 hours. These meetings may not be spread evenly over a month so some weeks may need more time than others. For more information on the current year’s meetings visit the Council and Democracy pages on our website http://www.rother.gov.uk/103

- many Councillors also represent the authority on outside bodies

- background reading for most meetings is essential before attending

- if you are elected as Chairman of a Committee more work and time will be involved

- there is an expectation for rural District Councillors outside Bexhill-on-Sea to attend meetings of their local Parish / Town Councils on a regular basis
• if you are a member of a political party there will be political group meetings - usually in advance of Council meetings
• You may also be expected to hold regular ‘Ward surgeries’ with constituents

Allowances

There is no salary for being a Councillor, this is a voluntary post. There are allowances paid to reimburse time and expenses incurred while on Council business.

Every Rother Councillor is entitled to a basic allowance, paid monthly, £ along with reimbursement of travelling and subsistence expenses incurred within and outside the District, when appropriate.

Some Councillors also get additional allowances to cover special responsibilities such as Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen. Childcare and other dependent costs are also met up to
a maximum amount with qualifying criteria.

For more information on members allowances go to the Council and Democracy pages on our website http://www.rother.gov.uk/103

Training and Support

All newly elected Councillors go through an induction training programme where you can attend sessions designed to help you understand the role and functions of the Council and its structure.

Each Member is required to complete a Training Needs Analysis to identify the areas where further training and support would be of assistance to them in fulfilling their new role.

The Council is committed to delivering a training programme that is owned by and meets the needs of its Members. The training available may also
benefit Members in their employment or private lives.

In recognition of our work in developing Members, the Council holds the South East Employer’s Charter for Member Development.

In addition to the various training opportunities a range of support is offered to Councillors:

- information to help deal with Ward matters and all other work done as a Councillor will be provided by Council officers who will point you in the right direction if they are unable to help
- senior officers and the Chief Executive will also provide guidance
- the Democratic Services Team provides limited administrative support to Members
- you will be expected to communicate electronically with
the Council and the community and appropriate IT equipment and support will be given

- in the future you may be provided with your own website pages to publish information about your work as a Councillor
- you will have access to the Members’ Room and meeting rooms based at Council offices in connection with your role as a Councillor
- a range of training materials, including DVDs (audio and visual) and books within the Members’ Library are also available for self learning at your own pace

Rother District Councillor quotes

“The support I received as a new Councillor following the last elections was excellent. Democratic Services are there to help and advise every step of
the way and always point you in the right direction for further help and support, if needed.”

“The support I received as a new Councillor following the last elections gave me the ability to be effective as a leader in the community.”

**Working / Employment as well as being a Councillor**

By law, if you are working, your employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a Councillor. The amount of time depends upon your responsibilities and the effect it will have on your employer’s business. This should be discussed with them before making the commitment to being a Councillor.
Code of Conduct

Councillors’ conduct is formally governed by the Code of Conduct adopted by every Local Authority. It sets out the rules Members should work to. On election all Councillors are required to sign the declaration of office and undertake to observe the Code. Breaches may be considered by the Standards Committee.

Councillors must make sure they do not do anything to bring the Council into disrepute and not misuse their official position to their own advantage or the advantage of others.

Councillors must at all times act with the utmost honesty and integrity in serving the public and never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

Councillors should make all decisions on merit and are accountable to the public for
their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities.

They are expected to promote equality by not discriminating against any person and treat people with respect regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

**Getting elected – the process**

Once you have decided to stand for election as a Councillor you need to be proposed and seconded by 2 people and have a further 8 people as assentors to your nomination. It is your responsibility - or that of your agents - to present nomination papers to the Returning Officer at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea before the closing deadline.

**Selection** - Political groups have their own selection procedures.
Electoral Register

In the run up to the election, candidates can have a free copy of the electoral register for the Ward for which they are standing. This lists residents who can vote at the next election and maps the ward boundary.

Election Agents

You can take on this role yourself but it can be helpful to have an Agent. Some political parties will supply an agent - some take on the role for several candidates. It becomes the Agent’s responsibility to ensure all the forms are lodged at the correct times and to keep an accurate record of election expenses which must be submitted after the election.

Before completing the nomination form make sure you:

- do not leave it until the last minute - your papers will need verifying so give
yourself enough time to correct mistakes
- take a copy of the electoral register with you when collecting the 10 signatures needed - this will enable you to compare the name with that on the nomination form and get their assentors number
- read the nomination paper and supporting material carefully
- make sure the people nominating and seconding you are only backing you and not several candidates

Full details of the nomination process are available from:

The Electoral Services Manager
Rother District Council
Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 3JX
Tel: 01424 787826
Email: elections@rother.gov.uk
Useful Contacts

Rother District Council
Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 3JX
Tel: 01424 787000
Website: www.rother.gov.uk

Chief Executive
Derek Stevens – 01424 787800

Head of Corporate Services
Suzanne Collins – 01424 787716

Democratic Services Manager
Lisa Anderson – 01424 787813

Political Parties

Conservative

Bexhill & Battle Conservative Association
6a Amherst Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, TN40 1QJ
Tel: 01424 219117
Fax: 01424 218367
Email: office@bbca.uk.com
Hastings & Rye Conservative Association
383 Battle Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea,
TN37 7BE
Tel: 01424 850828
Fax: TBA
Email: hastings.rye.conservatives@googlemail.com

Labour

Bexhill & Battle Labour Party
5 Elizabeth Court, 65 Amherst Road
Bexhill-on-Sea, TN40 1QN
Phone: 01424 222 761
E-mail: paul.c.labour@btinternet.com
Website: www.bexhillandbattlelabour.org.uk

Liberal Democrat

Hastings & Rye Liberal Democrat Centre
9 London Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea,
TN37 6AE
Tel: 01424 715176
Email: info@har0ld.org.uk
Website: www.har0ld.org.uk
Bexhill & Battle Liberal Democrats
Millwood, Mackerel Hill, Peasmarsh,
TN31 6TB
Tel: 01797 230324
Mobile: 07789 420841
Email: jals@millwood324.fsnet.co.uk
Website: www.bexhillandbattlelibdems.org.uk

Other political parties are accessible through the Register of Political Parties on the Electoral Commission’s website:

Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street,
London, SW1P 2HW
Tel: 0207 2710500
Email: info@electoralcommission.org.uk
Website: www.electoralcommission.gov.uk