How your Council works

The London Borough of Havering was set up in April 1965 by the London Government Act 1963. The Council of the borough is one of the 32 London Borough Councils that, with the Greater London Authority and Corporation of London, provide local government services in London.

The Council comprises 54 elected Members (known as Councillors). The Borough is divided into 18 Wards, each with an electorate of about 10,000, represented by three Councillors elected to serve for four years; the next Council elections being in May 2014.

As a local authority, the Council is responsible for a vast range of activities that affect everyone, every day: from emptying dustbins and street cleaning to providing education to looking after the most vulnerable members of society. Services are delivered by professional staff (referred to as Officers), who are employed to work on policies decided, within the law, by the democratically elected Councillors.

The democratic work of the Council is carried out by the Councillors at meetings of the Council itself, at Cabinet, and in the various Committees, whose memberships reflect the political balance of the Council. This leaflet briefly describes those bodies and explains their roles, and explains also how residents and other members of the public can observe what goes on and, in some cases, participate in proceedings.

Public involvement is a vital ingredient in local democracy. Local government services cover a range of activities affecting each and every citizen, whatever their age and whatever their background. Understanding how democracy works is essential to understanding how society works.
Council

Council is the full meeting of all Councillors:

- The **Annual Meeting**, normally held in late May, is when the Mayor is elected for the coming year, and at which the Council’s various Committees are appointed, and their Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen are elected. There may be a continuation of the Annual Meeting in June.

- **Ordinary meetings** of the Council are held in July, October, December, late January or early February and late March or early April.

- **The budget and Council Tax** for the coming financial year are set at a meeting in late February or early March.

- **Extraordinary meetings** are occasionally necessary, to deal with urgent business. Only the business specified in the agenda may be dealt with at an extraordinary meeting.

Mayor

The Mayor is the borough’s First Citizen. He or she is elected from among the 54 Councillors. The role of the Mayor is to take the Chair at meetings of full Council and to act a “Civic Ambassador” for the borough as a whole. The Mayor has no executive authority.

The Mayor appoints a Deputy Mayor from among the Councillors.
**Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council heads the Council’s Executive, which is responsible for most day-to-day operational decisions. The Leader is a Councillor and holds office until the Annual Meeting of the Council following the next election, in May 2014. He appoints a Cabinet of between 2 and 9 other Councillors, who hold office for up to four years but can be replaced by the Leader at any time.

**The Cabinet**

The Cabinet is the Council’s main decision making body. It currently consists of the Leader and 8 other Conservative Councillors who are known as Cabinet Members and meets monthly, usually on the third Wednesday (although no meeting is normally held in August). The Leader is the Chairman of the Cabinet and can call additional meetings at any time.

Cabinet makes executive decisions, within frameworks set by the Council on policy and financial issues and within the powers delegated to it by the Leader, about the delivery of services. Most routine decisions are taken by individual Cabinet Members acting under delegated powers, rather than at full Cabinet meetings.

Each Cabinet Member has a “portfolio” of services for which he or she is responsible (as Lead Member) and works within a range of responsibilities delegated to her or him by the Leader.

**Overview & Scrutiny Committees**

Overview & Scrutiny Committees generally scrutinise the activities of Cabinet and Cabinet Members. They also carry out reviews of service policies, make recommendations for improvements and act as a “check and balance” on executive decision making by the Cabinet.
Most of the Council’s Overview & Scrutiny Committees are aligned to its five goals:

- **Children and Learning**, which scrutinises the Council’s education service and services for children and young people
- **Environment**, scrutinising a range of Council services that deal with the environment in which people live
- **Individuals**, looking at services for vulnerable adults
- **Towns and Communities**, scrutinising a range of services that provide cultural, leisure and other community-based services
- **Value**, scrutinising the Council’s central, business and financial services

There are two other Overview & Scrutiny Committees, dealing with issues outside the Council’s own services:

- **Health**, which scrutinises local NHS services and
- **Crime & Disorder**, which works with other agencies including the police, to scrutinise what is being done to reduce crime and public disorder in the borough.

The Leader and Cabinet Members are not able to serve on Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

Each Overview & Scrutiny Committee normally meets six times a year.

**Quasi-Judicial and Administrative Committees**

The Council has a number of other Committees, each concerned with a specific area of activity. The “quasi-judicial” committees exercise judgement over matters that affect individuals’ rights, while “administrative” committees are concerned with the internal organisation of the Council.
Quasi-judicial committees

Regulatory Services Committee

The Regulatory Services Committee deals with planning applications and other regulatory functions. It generally meets every three weeks, except during the Christmas/New Year period when timescales vary.

Licensing Committee

The Licensing Committee deals mainly with applications for alcohol, entertainment and gambling licences. Its work is carried out generally through Sub-Committees hearing individual applications, which meet when required, usually during normal office hours.

Highways Advisory Committee

The Highways Advisory Committee considers a variety of highway schemes, including giving the opportunity to members of the public who wish to support or object to such schemes to address the Committee before making its recommendations.

For legal reasons, the Committee cannot make final decisions, but makes recommendations on schemes to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement.

The Committee meets monthly.

Adjudication & Review Committee

The Adjudication & Review Committee deals with complaints about Councillors’ conduct or Council services and with certain appeals (but not appeals that are made to other bodies, such as legal action in the courts or appeals against planning decisions).
Its work is carried out mainly through Hearings Panels, which deal with individual cases and meet when required. **Administrative Committees**

**Governance Committee**

The Governance Committee deals with constitutional matters, such as how the Council is structured and works, and appointments to other organisations on which the Council is represented. The Committee meets six times a year.

**Audit Committee**

The Audit Committee considers reports regarding the performance of the internal and external audit processes, risk assessment procedures, anti-fraud issues and the Council’s accounts and management practices. It meets four or five times a year.

**Pensions Committee**

The Pensions Committee deals with the Council’s obligations as an employer to invest wisely in order to obtain the best returns, in the interests not only of employees and former employees but in order to reduce to a minimum the cost of the mandatory pensions scheme.

It meets four or five times a year.

**Special meetings of Committees**

The Chairman of any Overview & Scrutiny or other Committee may call a “special” meeting of that Committee at any time. As with extraordinary meetings of the Council, only the business notified in the agenda can be dealt with at such a meeting.
Meeting places

Most meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees are held at the Town Hall, Romford. Occasionally, meetings are held elsewhere.

Quorum

Meetings may only go ahead if a “quorum” is present – a minimum number of Councillors sufficient to transact the business of the meeting. The precise number varies according to the size of a Committee but is one-third of its membership, with a minimum of three.

The agenda

Formal notice of any meeting is given in the agenda, which is published about a week before the meeting is due. The agenda will indicate where a meeting is to be held and what business will be dealt with. Agendas can be viewed on the Council’s website (www.havering.gov.uk) and at libraries. They also are available from the Town Hall in hard copy before or at the meeting.

Apart from the agenda paper itself (which will includes the order of business), in the agenda will be found the minutes of the previous ordinary meeting and of any special meetings held since then, and reports on which decisions are needed.

At Council meetings, in addition, Councillors may ask Questions of Cabinet Members and also debate issues of current concern through motions and amendments. Such debates are not necessarily supported by reports or other documentation.

Formal notice of each week’s meetings is given on a list on the public notice board outside the Town Hall and details of forthcoming meetings are given on the Council’s website.
Minutes

The Minutes of a meeting are not a word-for-word account of what is said at it but summarise the business transacted at the meeting. They will include details of reports submitted and any key comments made in response, and the formal record of the decisions reached.

At a meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting (and any subsequent special meetings) are confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor or Chairman. If there are any errors in the minutes, they are corrected before the being signed and a note of the correction is recorded in the new minutes.

Reports

Reports give the name and contact details of their author. The Council’s Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer (the officer who is chief legal adviser) or Chief Finance Officer (who is in charge of the Council’s financial affairs) have statutory rights to report to Council though rarely need to do so.

Reports provide the policy, technical, legal and financial information necessary to ensure that any decision is made on an informed basis and complies with all relevant requirements and is properly made.

Reports include a recommendation. In most cases, this will be that a particular course of action be followed but sometimes the meeting is asked to decide on options. It is important to remember that Councillors are not obliged to accept any recommendation – they are free to decide upon a different course of action if they so wish (provided that in doing so they will not breach relevant legal or financial obligations).
Conduct of meetings

Meetings are presided over by the Mayor (as Chairman of the Council) in the case of full Council, by the Leader (as Cabinet Chairman) for Cabinet or by its Chairman in the case of each Committee.

The Chairman is in charge of the meeting and ensures that it proceeds in an orderly fashion.

Meetings are generally held in the evening and begin at 7.30pm but, occasionally, will begin at other times. The time a meeting is due to start is always shown on the agenda, as is the date of the meeting. Meetings normally last for no more than two and a half hours (Council meetings last for up to three hours, with a short break half-way through) but can continue beyond that time limit if those present specifically agree to do so.

Public attendance and participation

Members of the public have a right to attend all meetings, unless specifically excluded to enable some business to be considered in private (for example, because they refer to individuals’ personal information, or are commercially sensitive). For meetings held at the Town Hall, staff at the reception desk will advise in which room a meeting is being held; when a meeting is held elsewhere, there will be signs to advise those attending where to go.

It should be noted, however, that although there is a right to attend meetings, there is no automatic right to participate in them by speaking or asking questions.

- At Council meetings, members of the public are never allowed to participate.
- At Cabinet meetings, members of the public may apply in advance to speak at the meeting about an item on the agenda, but are able to speak only if the Chairman of the meeting permits them to do so.
At Regulatory Services Committee meetings, one person representing objectors can speak for a short time – usually two minutes – against an application (and whoever is proposing the development has a right of reply) but no one else is able to speak.

At Licensing Sub-Committee hearings, people who have submitted valid representations may speak for up to 10 minutes.

At Highways Advisory Committee meetings, one objector and one supporter may address the Committee for up to 6 minutes when objections to a scheme are being considered.

At Overview & Scrutiny Committee and other meetings, the Chairman has discretion to allow public participation if he or she considers that it is appropriate to do so.

The Council does not allow the making of audio or video recordings of any meeting without permission. Meetings of the Council and Cabinet are webcast live (go to www.havering.gov.uk/webcasts for details).

Members of the public whose conduct is disorderly may be asked to leave a meeting. In extreme circumstances, the Chairman has a right to ask for police assistance in dealing with disorderly conduct as disturbing a Council, Cabinet or Committee meeting can be a public order offence.

**Viewing agenda papers**

Agenda papers are open to public inspection and are generally available on the Council’s website, unless they have been designated “confidential” or “exempt” and will be dealt with in private. They are published on the website and in hard copy about a week before the meeting at which they will be considered but, occasionally, some papers may only become available at shorter notice.
Hard copies of agenda papers are available for inspection at the Town Hall.

In addition, copies of Council, Cabinet and Committee agendas can be posted to residents who ask to be put on the mailing list. There is no charge for this.

**Committee Administration**

Committee Administration is one of the Council’s core functions that are the Chief Executive’s direct responsibility. Committee Administration staff arrange, attend and make a formal record of all meetings of the Council, the Cabinet, the various Committees and complaints and licensing hearings. Among other things, Committee Administration staff also support the Mayor, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen to carry out their functions (including involvement in administering Parliamentary, European and Greater London Authority elections, as well as those for the Council).

In addition to supporting the Council’s democratic processes, Committee Administration provide support to a number of other bodies including various partnerships in which the Council participates, and are secretariat for school admission appeals and exclusion reviews. Committee Administration also acts as the contact point for complaints about the Council made to the Local Ombudsman.

**Other information**

Full information about current and past meetings is available from the Council’s website, [www.havering.gov.uk](http://www.havering.gov.uk) at the Council and Democracy pages. You can also contact Committee Administration for information, either in general or about specific meetings, by telephoning 01708 433076.