



LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)
20TH OCTOBER 2005

KEY ISSUE:

This report describes the Local Government Association (LGA) initiative 'Local Democracy Week' (17-23 October 2005) and invites Members to consider a range of issues relating to local democracy and engagement in Guildford borough.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to

- (i) Note the report and the details of the Local Democracy Week initiative
- (ii) Consider ways in which the Local Committee and its linked structures might be able to promote local democracy and improve local engagement.

1. Local Democracy Week

The Local Government Association (LGA) has been running the Local Democracy Week initiative for several years. For the last three years the campaign has focussed on the theme of young people, and it is likely that this will remain a target group for the campaign. It is the only national campaign that promotes the role of local government to young people; last year over 350 local authorities and 4000 youth groups and schools took part. The campaign has the broad aims of promoting local democracy and encouraging participation in the processes of local and national decision-making.

This year, the campaign has been extended over the whole year to run events associated with the General and local elections in May and to join up with parallel events and initiatives (e.g. UK Youth Parliament annual sitting in July, British Youth Council annual conference in August).

(More details can be found on the website: www.localdemocracyweek.info or www.lga.gov.uk.)

2. Local Democracy week in Guildford

Local Authorities across Surrey have participated in various events in previous years as part of Local Democracy Week. In Guildford the Local Committee has had a stand at a Local Democracy 'fair' at the Guildhall (October 2002) and hosted a 'question time' debate with the subject "*Why Democracy? - does it make any difference?*" at Pirbright village hall (October 2004).

This year, in addition to this report to raise awareness of the issues of local democracy in Guildford, Members of the Committee will be visiting schools in their divisions to listen to young people's concerns and to explain ways in which they can have an influence on local services.

On Monday 17th October Guildford Borough Council will be holding a 'political speed-dating' event in association with Guildford Youth Council and Surrey University.

3. Measures of Local Democracy

Election turnout

County Council Elections

Divisions	% Turnout 2001	% Turnout 2005
Ash	59.57	60.36
Guildford East	68.36	72.53
Guildford North	59.51	60.8
Guildford South	60.85	-
Guildford South-East	-	70.36
Guildford South-West	-	64.24
Guildford West	48.07	51.21
Horsleys	68.17	72.64
Shalford	65.37	67.48
Shere	69.14	72.6
Worplesdon	62.82	66.63
Average	62.43	65.89

General Elections

Constituency	% Turnout 2001	% Turnout 2005
Guildford	62.9	68.3
Woking	60.3	63.4
Mole Valley	69.5	72.5
Surrey Heath	59.5	62.9
Average	63.05	66.78
United Kingdom	59.17	61.28

Turnout in the County Council elections has increased in Guildford between 2001 and 2005, in line with increases in General election turnouts locally and nationally. The increase in Guildford is slightly more than the national increase in turnout. (The national turnout figure for previous General elections has been significantly higher: 78% in 1992, 71% in 1997. The average turnout between 1945 and 2001 was 75%.)

Turnout remains substantially lower in Guildford West division than in other areas of Guildford, but the divisional boundary changes make direct comparisons problematic. Turnout in every division in Guildford increased over the 4 years.

Borough Council Elections

Wards	% Turnout 1999	% Turnout 2003
Ash	30.47	-
Ash South & Tongham	-	49.69
Ash Vale	31.52	45.46
Ash Wharf	-	48.81
Burpham	-	55.51
Christchurch	52.56	67.64
Clandon & Horsley	36.49	58.59
Effingham	54.78	68.84
Friary & St Nicolas	31.6	46.57
Holy Trinity	36.92	55.8
Lovelace	44.06	57.5
Merrow	-	59.49
Merrow & Burpham	41.52	-
Normandy	43.14	62.14
Onslow	33.35	41.57
Pilgrims	34.93	58.41
Pirbright	41.96	50.89
Send	38.23	58.28
Shalford	43.52	59.38
Stoke	30.47	49.93
Stoughton	27.32	47.27
Tillingbourne	45.48	62.26
Tongham	33.22	-
Westborough	25.46	46.95
Worplesdon	38.2	54.43
Average	37.87	54.79

Turnout in recent Borough Council elections has been lower than County elections, mainly due to the coincidence of the County elections with General elections, which tend to attract higher public interest, media coverage and voter turnout. Turnout in all wards increased substantially between 1999 and 2003; this is likely to be due in large part to the 100% postal vote in Guildford in 2003.

(More information can be found on the Electoral Commission website: www.electoralcommission.gov.uk.)

4. Voter registration

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
95.56	95.63	94.49	92.59	91.71

The proportion of Guildford residents on the election register has decreased slightly over a 4-year period.

5. Younger voters

In the 2001 General election just 39% over 18-24 year olds voted compared to 68% in 1997 (Electoral Commission, March 2005). (About 70% of the over 65s voted in 2001.) In a survey of young people's views on local government 50% of young people believed their council has no direct control or relevance to their lives and only 2% thought that their council has any power. It is apparent that many residents across all age ranges do not associate local government with the services that they use in their everyday lives; Appendix 1 shows a light-hearted example of how a resident uses a range of services provided by just one of the public service organisations in Guildford.

While it is often said that young people are 'turned off' by 'politics', many young people however do want to be heard and involved in the way their 'issues' could be addressed.

6. Other measures of Local Democracy

Voter turnout at elections is but one indicator of the extent to which people are engaged with public services and decision-making. Appendix 2 lists of a number of other activities that might indicate people's engagement.

In Guildford there are several ways in which residents can participate in different aspects of decision-making, for example:

- Responding to consultations and surveys
- Volunteering to join the Guildford Youth Council
- Attending residents association or parish council meetings
- Speaking at public meetings
- Discussing Community Safety issues at Neighbourhood Panels

- Bringing a question or petition to a Local Committee meeting or Borough Council committee meetings
- Giving feedback on public services to local Members and officers

7. Questions and challenges

1. Should local authorities be trying to achieve an ongoing connection with residents in between 4-yearly elections? If so, how?
2. Are residents able have their views heard on a wide range of issues, and not only those highlighted during elections?
3. Are the local democratic fora in Guildford such as the Local Committee receiving views held by the majority, or the diversity, of Guildford residents?
4. Is the Local Committee doing enough to engage with local residents on the delivery of local services?
5. How can the Local Committee and its Members, together with linked public service structures (e.g. Guildford's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Local Strategic Partnership) improve local engagement?

8. Next steps

There are to be further discussions on the way the Local Committee operates for the remainder of 05/06 and into 06/07 in light of the restructuring of all services within Surrey County Council, but particularly the Guildford Local Partnerships Team and the Guildford Transportation Service. Members are invited to comment on how the Local Committee can operate most effectively while at the same time improve local engagement.

At the next meeting of the Committee on 1st December 2005 there will be a presentation by young people on the results of the Youth Voices project – a consultation exercise funded by the Guildford Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Committee (Cllr Barker's proposal). Young people across Guildford have produced a DVD film detailing their views and issues, which will be shown at the meeting and used to inform and influence the Local Committee and other decision-making groups.

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(With thanks to Lynda Murlewski, GBC Electoral Services manager.)

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: none

A day in the life ... of a voter

"I don't do politics... I don't use any services anyway..."

Common quotes around election time –but unless you stay in bed each day, you can almost guarantee you are using services. How? See below...

8am – Mary, a mother of two from Guildford, get up and gets her children ready for school.

8.30am – Mary walks the children to the nearest bus stop and gets on the bus to drop them at school. The path she walks and the bus service she uses are both provided, paid for and maintained by SCC.

8.45am – Mary drops her eldest child off at junior school, then gets back on the bus and takes her youngest to a local nursery. Both schools and the bus service, again, are provided by SCC. The roads that bus travels on are also provided and maintained by SCC.

12midday - After nursery, Mary takes the youngest child to the shops to buy a treat or toy. Anything she purchases from a shop in Surrey has been subjected to SCC Trading Standards scrutiny to ensure it is safe, harmless to health and not overpriced.

2pm – a quick trip to the library (another SCC-provided facility) to get some books out for her eldest child is Mary's last job before again using the SCC bus service to go and pick up her child from her SCC school.

3.15pm – Picks up eldest from school, using the SCC bus service and travelling on the SCC-maintained roads to get to her elderly mother's house, where she takes the children to visit gran each afternoon.

4pm – Mary arrives at her mother's house. As a vulnerable adult, her mother received home-based care from SCC and also uses many of the council's other social services to help her with meals and transport.

5pm – Mary needs to be home by 5pm as a plumber is due to arrive to check the boiler. She could face overcharging, being ripped-off or shoddy workmanship. Thankfully, Surrey Trading Standards is again on hand to ensure the work is of good quality and to provide protection against any rogue traders attempting to pull a fast one.

7pm – With the kids safely in Dad's care, Mary finally gets time to herself and goes to her evening class – she wants to get a better qualification and start a career. So she goes (again via the SCC bus service) to a local adult learning centre or college, where SCC is providing adult education classes all year round.

9pm – Gets bus home, falls into bed shattered!

Taken from SCC's website (www.surreycc.gov.uk) before the May 2005 elections.

A SURVEY FROM THE RESEARCH REPORT 'AN AUDIT OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT' (ELECTORAL COMMISSION, MARCH 2005)

Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?

	%
Been to any political meeting	6
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	20
Contacted my local council	28
Discussed politics or political news with someone else	38
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	44
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	6
Done voluntary work	28
Helped organise a charity event	21
Served as a school or hospital governor	2
Signed a petition	44
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a general election	2
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a local election	2
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	6
Taken part in a sponsored event	22
Taken part in a strike	2
Voted in the last local council election	50
None	16