**Local Elections – The Process and the Bigger Picture**

All Councils are governed by the Local Government Act 2000 which sets out governance models that must be operated by all Local Authorities.

These are, there must be:

* a Mayor and Cabinet Executive
* a Leader and Cabinet Executive
* the Committee System
* or other arrangements approved by the Secretary of State

**The main function of the City Council**

Southampton Council is a Unitary Authority Council, this means it is **responsible for *all* local services within the city**. They manage around 700 different services - from foster carers to archaeology, recycling and cycle routes to public health.

**Composition of Council**

There are 3 Parliamentary constituencies within the Southampton City boundary which are *Southampton Itchen*, *Southampton Test;* and *Romsey* *and Southampton North*.

There is one MP per constituency.

The 3 Members of Parliament representing Southampton at National Government level at present are as follows:

* Caroline Nokes Conservative – Romsey and Southampton North
* Royston Smith Conservative Southampton Itchen
* Alan Whitehead Labour – Southampton Test

There are 16 wards in Southampton (wards are areas like Redbridge, Shirley, Bassett and Bitterne) and the Local Council is made up of 48 Councillors (3 from each of the 16 wards)

The Council meets 6 times a year to make important decisions that affect the whole Council. It also agrees the Policy Framework. This is a series of important plans (such as the Local Transport Plan and Community Care Plan) setting out the Council's key policies.



The current political composition of elected councillors in Southampton is:

* Conservative - 25
* Labour - 22
* Vacancy -1

A Councillors role is to:

* Be a member of the council
* Represent their ward
* Take part in decision making
* Review and develop policies and strategies
* Attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings and inquiries
* Be a member of regulatory panels, including Planning and Licensing
* Engage with their local community and provide leadership
* Represent the city on over 100 boards, partnerships and outside bodies

**Local Electoral cycles**

There are a variety of electoral cycles around the country, these are the times when local elections are held, so that not all Councillors are elected at the same time.

The 3 methods of holding elections to local councils are:

* by whole council (all of the Councillors are elected every 4 years)
* by halves (half of the Councillors are elected every 2 years)
* by thirds (a third of the Councillors are elected every year for 3 years, with no elections in the 4th year)

Southampton Council is one of 17 Unitary Authorities which elects by thirds (i.e.in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 and so on)

Elections in Southampton are traditionally held on the first Thursday in May.

Councillors are elected for a 4-year terms using the first past the post system (the candidate who receives the most votes wins).

On the Southampton Council website you can find your local Councillor using a postcode search box, by name, by political party or by ward.

**The Leader of the Council**

The Leaders' job is to provide political leadership for the city and the council. The Leader is elected by the whole council, normally soon after the elections in May each year.

The Leader chooses a cabinet of between 2 and 9 Councillors (called Cabinet Members) who together make decisions on important subjects or matters affecting the city or council as a whole and supervise the work of the Council.

The Leader and Cabinet supervise the work of the council, making major decisions.

Each Cabinet Member has responsibility for a range of council activities, called portfolios.

Cabinet Members can make decisions individually for their portfolio area or in some areas (such as Planning applications, taxi licences) decisions are made by Committees or Panels of Councillors, these meetings are open to the public.

Decisions must be in accordance with the budget and plans in the Policy Framework, all of which have been agreed by the whole council.

**The Mayor and the Sheriff of Southampton**

Councillor Alex Houghton became the 799th Mayor of Southampton on 19 May 2021 following his term as Sheriff of the City.

Councillor Jacqui Rayment is the 584th Sheriff of Southampton.

Any candidate for Mayor must be a Councillor and the election of the Mayor takes place as the first item of business at the Annual General Meeting with the election being decided by a majority of Councillors present

The Mayor’s role is ceremonial role only and has no Council powers although the Mayor does Chair the Full Council meetings.

The Office of Mayor is held for one year from May to May and then the Sheriff who has held office of Sheriff for one year becomes the Mayor the following year.

The Sheriff is voted for in the same way and must also be a serving Councillor.  The main duties of the Sheriff is to be the Mayor’s Deputy to attend Events that the Mayor can’t attend for whatever reason.

**Voting procedures**

In local government elections you are voting for Councillors to represent your ‘ward’ (your local neighbourhood/area) on the local council.

You can find out information and policies regarding each candidates from the Southampton Council website link mentioned earlier.

**Polling station procedures**

Voting in Person – this will be at a Polling Station which is usually in a public building, such as a school or local hall.

You will be sent a poll card just before an election telling you when to vote and at which polling station.

You can only vote at the polling station location on your card.

If you have registered to vote but not receive a poll card contact your local [Electoral Registration Office](https://www.gov.uk/contact-electoral-registration-office) this is in the Council website.

You can still vote if you’ve lost your card.

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on the day of an election.

On arrival give your name and address to the staff inside the polling station.

You will be given a ballot paper containing a list of the people, parties or options you can vote for.

You do not need to bring any identification to vote and you do not have to take your poll card with you.

### Filling in your ballot paper

Follow the instructions on the notices in the polling booth and on the top of the ballot paper to vote.

You are essentially marking an X next to the person or party you wish to vote for – you then fold the paper and put it in the marked sealed box to be taken away for counting at the end of the day.

These votes will then be securely counted and the results announced as soon as possible.