London Borough of Southwark: A brief overview of what it is and what it does

What is the London Borough of Southwark?
Southwark is one of 32 boroughs in the Greater London area. London boroughs are administered by London borough councils (sometimes abbreviated LBCs) which are elected every four years. They are the principal local authorities in London and are responsible for running most local services, such as social services, environmental health, waste collection and roads. Some London-wide services are run by the Greater London Authority (GLA), and some borough services and lobbying of government on their behalf is pooled within London Councils. Some councils develop partnerships together to deliver services, such as waste collection and disposal (e.g. the West London Waste Authority). Each borough council is a local education authority.

History of Southwark Borough Council
Southwark borough council provides the majority of local government services to residents in its area: this is in contrast to the strategic GLA, which has limited authority but works across all of Greater London. Southwark came into existence on 1 April 1965 as a consequence of the merging of the old boroughs of Bermondsey, Camberwell and Southwark. Like every borough, it is divided into smaller areas called ‘electoral wards’, subject to periodic review, for the purpose of electing councilors. Council elections take place every four years, with the most recent elections in 2014 (and the next elections due in 2018). For more details about the Council, wards and current councilors, visit http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/10058/about_southwark_council.

What Do Councilors Do?
Councilors are elected to the local council to represent their local community, so they must either live or work in the area. Becoming a councilor is both a rewarding and privileged form of public service; they are in a position to make a difference to the quality of other people’s daily lives and prospects.

Being an effective councilor requires both commitment and hard work. Councilors have to balance the needs and interests of residents, the political party they represent (if any) and the council. These will all make legitimate demands on a councilor’s time, on top of the demands and needs of their personal and professional lives. If you are considering becoming a councilor you should discuss it with family and friends to make sure they all understand what you are taking on; their support will be invaluable to you.

What do Council Officers Do?
Councils appoint a range of paid staff, to organise and deliver the range of services that address local people’s needs, which have been approved by the Councilors. In Southwark, staff are headed by a Chief Executive whose main focus is on regeneration, planning, human resources and corporate strategy (and has a small department to manage those functions): she is supported by four strategic directors, each heading a department which
How Southwark Council makes decisions

Southwark uses a Leader and Cabinet model for decision-making, one of a number of approaches (such as a directly elected Mayor) that could be introduced following the Local Government Act 2000. It consists of the Leader (an individual who politically heads the council) and the Cabinet itself, which is usually formed by the majority party in the local authority (assuming there is one), or by a coalition coming together to elect a Leader. The Council (i.e. all elected councillors) elects the Leader, and the Leader appoints the members of the Cabinet, each of whom holds a separate area of responsibility (portfolio), such as housing, finance, economic development, or education. Decisions may be delegated to the individual members, or taken by the Cabinet as a whole: these decisions are scrutinised by one or more scrutiny committees, which may be dedicated to one or more service areas.

The Leader and Cabinet are responsible for policies, plans, and strategies, which must be within the budget adopted by the Council; and reported to them at regular Council meetings. Ordinary committees follow and scrutinise the policies, etc., that have been taken by the Cabinet. An overview and scrutiny committee holds the Cabinet to account for its decisions and is responsible that the democratic checks and balances are maintained.

The principle executive decisions taken by the Council are to appoint the Leader, to approve the Leader's budget, to adopt development plan documents, and to agree the Council's constitution. Beyond that it may raise issues; urge the Leader, Cabinet, or Cabinet members to take actions; or pass a vote of no confidence in the Leader.

The current arrangements specific to Southwark Council can be found here … http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200494/how_we_work/3159/how_the_cabinet_works.

If you want to contact your local councilor for advice and information, or for help with a problem relating to the council, you can find contact details and surgery times here … http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200038/councillors_mps_and_meps/1367/your_councillors.

Local Services and Regional Services: Southwark Council v GLA

This table provides a comparison between local services for which Southwark Council has lead responsibility, and strategic services provided by the GLA:

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<th>Service</th>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Planning applications</td>
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<td>Strategic planning</td>
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<td>Transport planning</td>
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<td>Social services</td>
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A detailed directory of the local services provided by Southwark Council can be found here … http://www.southwark.gov.uk/a_to_z.

Services provided for Southwark through London Councils

London Councils is the local government association for Greater London, and is a cross-political party organisation that represents the 32 London borough councils and the City of London. It is primarily a think tank and lobbying organisation, but also provides some services directly through legislation that allows multiple local authorities to pool responsibility and funding:

- **Lobbying** - London Councils fights for more resources for London and is committed to getting the best possible deal for London's 33 councils. It also develops policy, lobbies government and others, and represents London local government to national government, European institutions, business and other bodies, lobbying for investment and funding.

- **Service provision** - The direct services London Councils provides on behalf of the boroughs, include:
  - the **Freedom Pass**: providing more than a 1.2 million older, disabled and blind people free travel on London’s buses, tubes and trains;
  - the **Parking and Traffic Appeals (PATAS) Service**: provides administrative support to the Environment and Traffic Adjudicators who consider appeals against Penalty Charge Notices issued by the London local authorities: the service receives and processes appeals and schedules hearings.
  - the **Taxicard** scheme; aims to provide door-to-door transport for disabled and older people who have mobility impairments and difficulty in using public transport: operated by Computer Cab;
  - **London Care Placements**: secure database of services, quality, vacancies and fees of foster care, residential care and residential special schools; used by London boroughs and partner authorities to secure quality children’s services for children/young people placed away from home.
  - **NOTIFY**: the service that helps homeless families to access services.

In addition, the **London Councils Grants Committee** provides funding for many voluntary and community sector groups who work across London boroughs on issues such as employment, domestic violence, poverty and advocacy and also is one of the distributors of European Social Fund grants in London.

Further information and resources:

- For more on being a councilor, visit - [http://beacouncillor.co.uk/](http://beacouncillor.co.uk/).
- To learn more about London Councils and the roles it performs on behalf of the London boroughs, visit - [http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/who-we-are/about-us](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/who-we-are/about-us).
- For more information on Taxicard visit - [http://www.transportforall.org.uk/d2d/taxicard/](http://www.transportforall.org.uk/d2d/taxicard/).

For further support or information on Southwark Council and what it does, contact the **Volunteering and Engagement Team** at Community Southwark on 020 7358 7288, or email us at engage@communitysouthwark.org.uk.