

# PM confident of success in Woking

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Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was “confident” that Conservatives will hold onto Woking in the upcoming local and general elections, when he was grilled about why people should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

The PM was at Woking Community Hospital April 11th where he was grilled about the fate of the Conservative party by reporters.

The PM pointed to the UK economy in response to questions about why Woking residents should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

Woking Council declared bankruptcy in June 2023 after it admitted a risky investment spree into hotels and skyscrapers by its former Conservative administration.

Calling Woking’s investments a “cross-party” decision, Rishi said local councils are “in control of their own finances”, and urged they run their budgets “in a sensible manner to deliver to their residents”.

Citing the national picture, Rishi said inflation has “more than halved” to 3.4% in February 2024, wages have increased ahead of inflation, taxes have been cut and free childcare has been expanded to working families.

He added: “While we have been through a tough few years as a country, that’s been difficult for families in Surrey, I do believe that the start of this year we have turned a corner and we’re now heading in the right direction.

“Our plan is working, if we stick to our plan we can give everyone in Surrey and Woking the peace of mind that there is a brighter future for them and their family.”

Woking is set to go to the polls on May 2 to vote for a third of the council (10 seats) in the local elections. Since news first emerged about the borough’s financial crisis, his party lost control of the council, and saw its share of councillors drop to four (from 17 in 2016).

MP Jonathan Lord won 48.9% of the vote in the 2019 election, with Liberal Democrat candidate Will Forster coming second at 30.8%. One poll from Electoral Calculus predicts Jonathan will win a narrow victory of just 30.8%, with Lib Dem and Labour closely at its heels with 27.6% and 23.6% respectively.

Although the Woking MP was present during the media pool, he made no further comment.

The PM argued central government has put more funding into councils, claiming local councils have on average 7.5% more funding than 2023. A further £600m has also been put into local authorities for 2024-25.

He said: “Central government is doing its bit to support [local councils] with considerably more funding.” Despite the added funding Woking Council said it has to make £8.4m savings for year one of its five-year financial strategy. Closing most public toilets, ending grants to voluntary and community groups, reducing dial-a-ride services and losing up to 60 staff are some of the cuts the council has made to make ends meet.

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