

# Being a councillor

## What is a councillor?

Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or - mainly in smaller parishes - the entire parish or Town Council area. They are generally elected by the public every four years.

## What do councillors do?

Councillors have three main components to their work:

1. Decision making - Through meetings and attending committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.
2. Monitoring - Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.
3. Getting involved locally - As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available, and may include:
  - Going to meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations.
  - Going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community.
  - Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public.
  - Running a surgery for residents to bring up issues.
  - Meeting with individual residents in their own homes.

Visiting your council is the best way to find out what happens there. Give the council a call and find out when its next public meeting happens. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council business.

## How much time does it take up?

Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three hours a week. Obviously there are some councillors who spend more time than this and some less, but in the main, being a community, parish and town councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community, and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

# Am I Qualified

Yes - most people are. However there are a few rules.

You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and
- on the “relevant date” (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over;

and additionally:

- on the “relevant day” a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand; or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area; or
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area; or
- during that 12 month period resided in the council area.

In the case of a sitting member of a parish or community council you can also satisfy the criteria to be elected if you have lived in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole of the 12 months preceding the “relevant day”.

You cannot stand for election if you:

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine.
- you work for the council you want to become a councillor for (but you can work for other local authorities, including the principal authorities that represent the same area).

**But I'm too young...**

Some parish councils also run youth councils, which are comprised of a number of young people representing their local schools and colleges. They are granted their own political forum by having a space and a time to meet and discuss matters that affect them. These youth councils are in direct communication with their parish councils so they can also be involved in decision-making. Contact your parish council or speak to your school to find out if either is involved in such a scheme and you are interested in getting involved. If there is not a scheme, or a parish youth forum, get together with friends and put a proposal to your local community, parish or town council.

**I am not a member of a political party and do not want to be**

You do not have to be part of a political party to become a Town Councillor. The majority of community, parish and town councillors around the area are not party political.