

# STAND FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN

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If you care about the area that you live or work in  
and the issues facing local people, we need you.

For more information about how to become a councillor or to find out more about the role, visit:

# INTRODUCTION

## Why should I stand as a councillor?

There are many reasons why you might like to become a councillor:

- to make a difference and help shape the future of the local community
- concern about your local area and wanting to ensure the community gets the right services
- to represent the views of local people and ensure that community interests are taken into account
- concern about a specific issue and wanting to do something about it
- having good ideas for the council and community in a time of scarce resources
- to contribute your skills
- to build on other community work through a charity, voluntary group or school governing body – becoming a councillor can be a great ‘next step’
- to pursue your political ambitions and contribute to your community
- it can be a career-enhancing activity, allowing you to develop leadership and analytical skills and to obtain practical and managerial work experience.

## What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to represent the local community, so you must either live or work in the council area. Becoming a councillor is both a rewarding and privileged form of public service. You will be in a position to make a difference to the quality of other people’s daily lives and prospects.

Being an effective councillor requires both commitment and hard work. You will have to balance the needs and interests of residents, the council and (if you represent one) your political party.

Over recent years the role of councils has changed. They now have additional responsibilities and work in partnership with other councils and organisations.

A councillor’s role and responsibilities include:

- developing strategies and plans for the area
- serving the community – helping with problems and ideas
- representing the community
- working with others
- decision making and reviewing decisions
- talking to the community about their needs and about what the council is doing.

Councillors do this by:

- Talking to constituents by phone, email and letter, social media, home visits, drop-in sessions, street or community meetings, local events.
- Attending formal council meetings.
- Managing casework – where people come to you for help with problems.
- Working on specific council projects with other councillors and council officers.
- Representing the council on outside organisations such as charities and public bodies.
- As a member of a political party attending political group meetings, party training and other events.
- Participating in community meetings and events, such as parish council meetings or meetings about community safety and policing. Whilst councillors don’t have to go to these meetings, it can be a helpful way to find out about what’s happening in the community and also telling the community about what’s happening in the council.

## What do councils do?

Councils run more than 800 services, depending on the type of council. Many are visible to everyone but some you may only know about if you come into direct contact with them.

- Education and lifelong learning
- Social services and family support
- Housing and regeneration
- Parks, playgrounds and open spaces
- Tackling disadvantage
- Building cohesive communities
- Leisure centres and sports
- Environment
- Health and wellbeing
- Supporting vulnerable residents
- Refuse, recycling and street cleaning
- Economic growth, business support and advice
- Arts, libraries, museums and heritage sites
- Transport, roads and street lighting
- Community safety and crime reduction
- Planning and building regulations

These activities are mainly funded through payments from central government and the collection of council tax, although council tax makes up only about a quarter of a council's budget.

You may also have a parish council providing some additional local community services such as allotments, footpaths, public seating and litter bins.

## Do I need any special skills or experience?

Groups made up of people from different backgrounds and with different skills tend to make better decisions. It is important that councils have councillors who not only reflect and represent the communities they serve, but also have a broad range of skills and life experience.

You don't need any special qualifications. Skills gained through work, raising a family, caring for relatives, volunteering or being active in faith or community groups are highly valuable. However, having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help you in the role.

- Communication and influencing skills – these include listening and interpersonal skills, facilitation, public speaking, advocacy, the ability to consider alternative points of view and to negotiate, mediate and resolve conflict.
- Problem solving, questioning and analytical skills – the ability to get to the bottom of an issue, look at evidence and research, and think of different ways to resolve the issue, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- Team working – being able to work with other councillors and council officers in meetings and on committees and being able to complete any tasks given to you.
- Organisational skills – being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines.
- Ability to engage with the local community – being available to provide information and advice to people.
- Knowledge of the local area – the needs and concerns of communities and awareness of local community groups, events and activities.
- Technology skills – councils rely increasingly on information and communications technology and councillors are expected to play a full role in this, eg using email.

Don't worry if you don't yet feel that you have the skills or confidence to be a councillor, the council and the Local Government Association (LGA) provides support, information and training for new councillors (and ongoing support for councillors of all levels). See the LGA's website for further information: [www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development](http://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development)

## What is the time commitment?

How much time you spend on your duties as a councillor is largely up to you and will depend on the roles and commitments each councillor takes up. On average councillors can spend up to 25 hours per week in leading roles, such as a cabinet member.

You will be expected to attend council meetings – some of which may be held during the day, some in the evening. Some meetings occur only a few times each year, others take place on a more regular basis.

Time will also be needed to read agendas and reports and become familiar with the issues at hand so you can make informed decisions.

As with most things in life, what you get back will depend on how much you put in. But remember, the amount of time you give is almost entirely up to you.

Before you consider becoming a councillor you may want to discuss it with your family and friends to make sure they understand what you are taking on. You will need their support as you'll have to spend some of your spare time on council business.

## Will I get paid for being a councillor?

Councillors are not paid a salary but they are entitled to receive a 'basic allowance'. This ensures they are not left out of pocket by covering costs such as travel to and from meetings and recognises the time devoted to council business on behalf of local people.

Each council sets its own rate for members' allowances, which you can find on your council's website.

## Can I be a councillor and have a job?

Yes. By law if you are working, your employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a councillor. The amount of time given will depend on your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business.

You should discuss this with your employer before making the commitment to stand for election.

## What support is available?

The council and the LGA provides advice and support to councillors for all aspects of their role, such as:

- training to familiarise oneself with the work of the council, the expectations of councillors, and ways in which they can carry out their role
- ongoing learning and development to broaden knowledge, skills and confidence
- opportunities to meet council officers
- IT support.

[www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development](http://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development)

## Independent or political?

Most councillors are members of political parties, but you can also stand as an independent candidate.

If you choose to stand as an independent, the LGA's Independent Group has resources you can use: [www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent)

If you choose to stand for a political party you will need to be a member of the party, commit to getting involved locally and go through their selection process before you can be put forward as their candidate.

## Next steps and support

To become a councillor you have to stand at local elections and compete with other candidates to gain the most votes from the local electorate.

1. Find out when the next local government elections are in your area (check with your council).
2. If you are interested in independent politics, you can get resources and advice from the LGA's Independent Office.
3. As an independent, you will also need to start working out your views on local issues and services.
4. To stand for a political party, you'll need to be a member of the party, get involved locally and go through their selection process before you can be put forward as their candidate for election.
5. Almost anyone can be a councillor but to check that you are eligible, take our eligibility quiz.
6. Hear more about the role as well as tips and inspiration from existing councillors.
7. Watch the Be a Councillor film.
8. Use our Be a Councillor worksheets to see how you would handle life as a councillor.
9. Explore, research and keep up to date about your local area, different communities, services, issues and ideas.
10. Attend a council meeting and other council events to find out more about local government and your local area.
11. Read the guidance from the Electoral Commission about the process of standing for election: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england)
12. Contact the council's democratic services department to get the necessary paperwork and find out the deadlines to submit.
13. You will need to get 10 people (in the ward where you wish to stand) to sign your nomination papers.
14. Build your local profile, reputation and campaign.

**Becoming a councillor can be both rewarding and stimulating. And while there is no template for an 'ideal' councillor, those who excel in the role are likely to be committed, determined, talented and willing to learn. Could that be you?**

## Useful contacts

### Local Government Association (LGA)

Virginia Ponton  
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### Labour

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### Conservatives

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### Liberal Democrats

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Terry Stacy  
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Rob Banks  
020 7664 3204  
[rob.banks@local.gov.uk](mailto:rob.banks@local.gov.uk)  
[www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk](http://www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk)  
skype: lgalibdems

### Independent or Alternative Parties

Independent Group, LGA  
020 7664 3206  
[independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk](mailto:independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk)

### Electoral Commission contact

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)  
0333 1031928  
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