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# 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.

The quotes used in this document are from councillors who are not members of Lichfield District Council but a sample of views taken nationally

For more information about how to become a councillor or to find out more about the role, visit [www.beacouncillor.co.uk/lichfield](http://www.beacouncillor.co.uk/lichfield)

# INTRODUCTION

What matters to you in your local area? Is it services such as affordable housing, sustainable development, making the area clean and green, or ensuring that local businesses can thrive?

Perhaps you are already involved in local affairs and want to take the next step. Or you may be looking for a worthwhile and rewarding way to help your local community.

Lichfield District Council can only be as effective, relevant and vibrant as the people elected to run it. The council needs councillors who are capable, energetic and engaged, with a commitment to local people and a passion for change.

Decisions made by councillors affect the lives of everyone in the area in countless ways. Representing the population of over 100,700 across the district, in the major settlements of Lichfield, Burntwood and the surrounding rural areas by understanding the issues and concerns they face. The most important task that any councillor undertakes is taking appropriate and affordable action to address them.

On Thursday 2 May 2019, all 47 seats within Lichfield District Council, the parish and town councils are up for election. This is an opportunity for you to stand as a representative of your local community and become a district or parish councillor. However, this session will focus on the role of a district councillor.

No other role gives you a chance to make such a huge difference to the quality of life to people in your local area and influence the way issues are dealt with locally and across Lichfield District.

If you think being a Lichfield district councillor is for you, further information is available online [www.beacouncillor.co.uk/lichfield](http://www.beacouncillor.co.uk/lichfield)

**Councillor Rich Michalowski**, Conservative Party

“Councillors come from a variety of backgrounds. They all believe that they can contribute positively to the community by representing residents, working through the issues and making the place we live in better. I’m no different and I would encourage you to do just that. Come and join in.”

## Why should I stand as a Lichfield district councillor?

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

- Wanting to make a difference and be involved in shaping the future of the local community.
- Being concerned about your local area and wanting to ensure that the community gets the right services.
- Wanting to represent the views of local people and ensure that community interests are taken into account.
- Having a concern about a specific issue and wanting to do something about it.
- In a time of scarce resources, having good ideas for doing more with less.
- To contribute your business or professional skills.
- As an extension to what you are already doing through a charity, voluntary group or school governing body – becoming a councillor can be a great ‘next step’.
- Pursuing your political ambitions and contributing to your community. Working in local government can also be a good stepping stone for those who are keen to further their careers in politics – many MPs began their political careers as councillors.
- It can be a career-enhancing activity, allowing you to develop leadership and analytical skills and to get practical, managerial work experience.

### **Councillor Jill Bray**, Residents Association

“I became a councillor because I wanted to protect and improve my local area.”

“Being a councillor can be very rewarding – helping people and seeing changes made for the better – but you do need to be persistent to see the job through.”

## What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to Lichfield District Council to represent the local community, so you must either live or work in the Lichfield District 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 political party you represent (if you have been elected as a member of a party) and the council. These will all make legitimate demands on a councillor’s time, on top of the demands and needs of your personal and professional life.

Over recent years the role of councils has changed. They now have additional responsibilities such as improving the health and wellbeing of local people through joint working with health services. Councils now deliver much of what they do in partnership with other councils, services and agencies, so as a councillor you may have opportunities to sit on partnership boards or committees

## What are the roles and responsibilities?

The councillor’s role and responsibilities include:

- developing strategies and plans including the financial strategy and budget setting
- serving the community
- representing the community
- working with others
- decision making or reviewing decisions
- talking to the community about what the council is doing
- attending relevant training sessions.

Some councillors hold regular drop-in surgeries each month. Surgeries are a chance for residents to meet you and discuss their problems or concerns. You may also need to spend time visiting constituents in their homes. On top of this you will be dealing with letters, emails and phone calls from constituents.



Councillors make or review decisions on how services are provided. This council has a leader and cabinet system of governance and operates a number of committees. Councillors are often required to attend formal committee meetings that are usually held during the evening.

Some councillors are also appointed to represent the council on outside organisations such as charities and public bodies.

If you are a member of a political party you will also be expected to attend political group meetings, party training and other events.

Councillors are often invited to lots of other meetings and events in their communities, such as parish council meetings or meetings about community safety and policing. While councillors don't have to go to these meetings, many find it helpful as a way of finding out what's happening locally and also telling the community what's happening in the council.

For more information about the roles and responsibilities and how you would go about carrying out the duties of councillor, please refer to the Be a Lichfield District Councillor: learning and development workbook.

## What do councils do?

Depending on the type of council, local councils run many services. Lichfield District Council is part of what is known as two tier, where the county council and district council provide different services for the local residents in your area. We also have parish councils that provide some more local community based services.

Lichfield District Council has responsibility for services including:

- waste and recycling collection
- planning – policy and development control
- housing benefits and revenue collection
- environmental health
- tourism
- street cleaning
- sports and active lifestyles
- economic development
- financial and resource management.

These activities are mainly funded through central government grant, business rates and council tax. Council tax makes up about 11 per cent of the council's net budget.



## What does Lichfield District Council do?

The district council exists to serve everyone who lives or works in Lichfield, helping people to be healthy, happy and enjoy a good quality of life. They also protect the most vulnerable members of our communities who need some extra support.

Some district council services are very visible to everyone in the district, but there are many others you may only know about if you come into direct contact with them. These include:

- working with others to attract employers to the district and create new jobs, offering a range of advice and support to people starting up their own business
- aids in emergency planning to deal with major incidents
- compiles and maintains the electoral register and administers elections
- provides support for people who are homeless.

### **Former candidate Toby Brampton,** Labour Party

“I stood to become a councillor to ensure we had a vibrant local democracy where people truly felt their vote mattered and they had a range of candidates and parties to choose from. I wanted to ensure that a broad range of views were represented in our local democracy and especially that the values of my party were strongly represented.”

### **Councillor Anna Tarrant,** Liberal Democrats

“When I first stood as a candidate in a borough election, my four children were aged between one and seven years old, I had a part-time job, did some voluntary work and my friends thought I was mad!”

## Do I need any special skills or experience to be a councillor?

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 have to have any particular formal qualification or profession. Skills gained through raising a family, caring for a sick or disabled relative, volunteering or being active in faith or community groups can be just as valuable. While you don't need any special qualifications to be a councillor, 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 and to think of different ways to resolve it, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

**Team working** – being able to work with fellow councillors and officers in meetings and on committees and being able to complete tasks on time.

**Organisational skills** – being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines.

**ICT literacy** – Lichfield District Council is 'going digital' and relies increasingly on information and communications technology both internally and externally. Councillors are expected to play a full role in this, for example, accessing information on line, communicating electronically through social media and other channels and minimising the need for printed material.

**The ability to engage with the local community** – being available through meetings, the media, the internet, public forums, debates and on the telephone and through social media to provide information and advice to people.

You may have gained skills and knowledge through your professional, personal or community experience. These could include:

- knowledge of the needs of specific groups such as children and young people, older people or people with health problems
- an understanding of financial management and reporting processes
- legal and regulatory systems or procedures
- housing, regeneration or environmental issues
- any other skills that relate to the work or facilities provided by Lichfield District Council.

Don't worry if you don't yet feel you have the skills or confidence to be a councillor, the district council provides support, information and training for new councillors.

## 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 particular commitments you take on. The precise amount of time will depend on the roles and commitments each councillor takes on and can vary. On average councillors can spend up to twenty five hours a week in leading roles, such as a cabinet member or scrutiny chairs.

You will be expected to attend some council committee meetings, which are often held during the evening. 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 to it 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' which is intended to recognise the time devoted to their work on behalf of the people of Lichfield District and in connection with council business.

Each council sets its own rate for members' allowances. You can find out more information on Lichfield District Council's website:

[www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk)

In 2018/19 the basic allowance is £4,131.

## 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.

### **Councillor Jonathan Essex, Green Party**

"It has been a great privilege, meeting all sorts of interesting people and being able to help with their projects and try to turn community ideas into reality. I've worked on a range of issues: from where houses are planned, recycling to potholes, from improving our cycling and community facilities."

## What support is available?

Lichfield District Council is committed to providing councillors with advice and support for all aspects of their role. After an election, all new councillors are required to attend an induction programme to enable them to meet the key officers who will support them in their role and attend learning and development events to familiarise themselves with the work of the council, the expectations of councillors and ways in which they can carry out key tasks.

Councillors are also provided with ongoing learning and development support to broaden their knowledge, skills and confidence. A councillor working group meets regularly with officers to ensure that councillors are getting the training they need.

In the first few weeks experienced district councillors will be available to guide you in getting to know the workings of the district council and your role within it.

You are given an IT allowance as part of your basic councillor allowance and you are expected to have or buy a suitable device (desktop/laptop/smart mobile device) to enable you to receive electronic communications.

## Independent or political?

Over 95 per cent of councillors are members of political parties, but you don't have to be a member of a political party to stand for election. You can either stand as an independent candidate or as a group or party political candidate.

If you choose not to represent a political party, you can stand as an independent candidate or choose not to have a description to your name.

If you choose to stand for a party you will need to go through their selection process before you can be put forward as their candidate.



## How to become a district councillor – next steps?

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.

To stand at the elections you must first get a candidate information pack from the elections officer from the district council, which explains the nomination process. These will be available nearer the election date. Relevant forms including a set of nomination papers will be in the pack for you to complete.

It is advisable to appoint an election agent to act on your behalf. Your agent would, among other things, ensure that your forms are sent in correctly, keep a detailed record of financial expenditure for submission after the election and generally organise your campaign to make sure it is lawful.

## Further guidance

There are resources you can use to find out more about being a Lichfield district councillor, the support on offer, and how to stand for election.

A day in the life of councillor film which gives an insight into the role of a councillor.

A learning and development workbook, which goes into more detail about the role of a councillor and provides some exercises to get you thinking about what it means in practice.

Lichfield District Council Be a Councillor webpages which provide details of forthcoming training events for prospective candidates.

Make contact: key contact details of LGA, district council electoral officers and the Electoral Commission are available overleaf.

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

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### **Make contact**

#### **Local Government Association (LGA)**

Michael Barrett  
Adviser – Leadership and Localism  
020 7664 3162  
[michael.barrett@local.gov.uk](mailto:michael.barrett@local.gov.uk)

#### **Electoral Commission**

For advice and guidance in relation to eligibility and electoral requirements.  
3 Bunhill Row  
London EC1Y 8YZ  
0333 1031928  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)

## Main political group contacts

### **Local Government Association (LGA) Conservative Group**

020 7664 3264

[www.lgaconservatives.local.gov.uk](http://www.lgaconservatives.local.gov.uk)

@LGACons

### **The Conservative Councillors' Association (CCA)**

[www.conservativecouncillors.com](http://www.conservativecouncillors.com)

### **Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Group**

020 7664 3224

[www.lgaindependent.local.gov.uk](http://www.lgaindependent.local.gov.uk)

@LGA\_Independent

### **Local Government Association (LGA) Labour Group**

020 7664 3263

[www.lgalabour.local.gov.uk](http://www.lgalabour.local.gov.uk)

@LGA\_Labour

### **Association of Labour Councillors (ALC)**

[councillors@labour.org.uk](mailto:councillors@labour.org.uk)

### **Local Government Association (LGA) Liberal Democrat Group**

020 7664 3235

[www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk](http://www.libdemgroup.lga.gov.uk)

@libdemlocalgov

### **Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC)**

[www.aldc.org](http://www.aldc.org)

If you are interested in other political parties, please view the Register of Political Parties: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/PEF-online-registers](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/PEF-online-registers)



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