



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

how you can make a difference



introduction



This guide explains how to become a councillor and what this important role is really about. We hope it will encourage you and people from all walks of life to take an interest in local democracy and to think about putting yourself forward for election.

More detailed and specific information can be obtained from the Democratic Services department at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and from the various contacts listed at the back of this publication.

what do councils do?



Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council provides local services to people living, working or visiting our area. The Borough is made up of smaller areas known as 'wards'.

There are different types of council: unitary, metropolitan and London boroughs, which are responsible for all local services; and county councils and district councils – where responsibilities are shared between them.

In general terms, elected councillors make the decisions that guide the council and paid council staff carry these out, according to laws and guidelines.

Councils work in partnership with other local organisations such as health, fire and rescue and police authorities. Councillors make sure that these organisations work together to meet the needs of local people.

Some areas also have parish and town councils, with delegated responsibility for some local services. They are often involved in managing parks and playing fields, planning, promoting tourism, licensing or providing community halls and the management of town and village centres.

what do councillors do?



People are elected as councillors to represent everyone in their area – not just those who voted for them – and to serve the council as a whole. There is often more than one councillor for each council ward.

Councillors represent their wards by meeting people who live or work there and working to resolve local issues, problems and concerns. This is often achieved by working with council staff or people from other organisations who may have expertise or knowledge concerning the matter in hand.

Councillors serve the council as a whole by taking an overview and making decisions on wider issues and opportunities affecting the area covered by the council and sometimes the wider regional area.

Some councillors take on responsibility for leading local policy on such things as planning, education, waste collection and so on.

how much of my time will it take up?

The amount of time you spend on your work as a councillor is entirely up to you, although there will be a minimum number of meetings that you should attend.

The time a councillor will spend on council work will vary depending on the size of the area they represent and any special duties they may have.

will it cost me anything and will I be paid?

Councillors receive an allowance set by the council. Councillors with special responsibilities receive greater allowances. Councillors can claim for travel, subsistence and carers allowances. Your council sets these allowances and can tell you what they are.

when is the next election?

After their election, councillors usually serve for a four year period but councils have different election cycles and different proportions of seats up for election at any one time. You can stand again at the end of your four year term and you can give up your seat at any time. Local elections are usually held in May; your local council can tell you about its electoral system and when the next elections will be held.

can I be a councillor?

You do not need any formal qualifications to become a councillor.

You can be a councillor for more than one council – such as your district or borough council and your parish/town council.

You are able to be a councillor if you:

- are 18 years of age or over
- are British, or if you are a citizen of a member country of the European Union or the Commonwealth
- and are either registered to vote with your local council

or

- have either lived (or worked) in the council's area for one year
- have been an owner or tenant in the council's area for one year.



You may not be able to be a councillor if you:

- work for the council
- have been told you hold a politically restricted post
- have received a prison sentence or suspended sentence of three months or more within five years of the election
- have been disqualified under any legislation relating to any corrupt or illegal practices or are bankrupt.

To find out if you are eligible to become a councillor for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council contact Democratic Services on (01642) 526196.

what about the boss?

The Employment Rights Act 1996 requires employers to allow staff a reasonable amount of time off for their work as a councillor. The details obviously have to be worked out between employer and employee but many employers see the importance of this work and do what they can to support their councillor employees. Many employers also recognise that the skills people develop as councillors are also very useful in the workplace. You may wish to talk to your employer to gauge how supportive they would be.

what do I do now?

The majority of people that become councillors do so through a political party that they may feel a natural affinity with; however, some people choose to be independent of any formal political group. We have listed the main contacts below to help you find out more.

Conservative Councillors' Association
www.conservativecouncillors.com

Association of Labour Councillors
www.labouronline.org/councillors

Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors
www.aldc.org

LGA Independent Group Office
www.independentgroup.lga.gov.uk

more specific information on local government

Local Government Association
www.lga.gov.uk

The LGA exists to promote better local government

National Association of Local Councils
www.nalc.gov.uk

The national body for parish and town councils

Audit Commission
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Department of Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk

Directgov
www.direct.gov.uk

Electoral Commission
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Improvement and Development Agency
www.idea.gov.uk/makeadifference

(See the IDeA's Councillor's Guide for in depth information on what you can expect after your election)

Contact details for Democratic Service at Stockton Council

address:

Democratic Services,
P.O. Box 11,
Municipal Buildings,
Church Road,
Stockton-on-Tees,
TS18 1LD.

telephone:

(01642) 526196

fax:

(01642) 528162

e-mail:

electoral@stockton.gov.uk

website:

www.stockton.gov.uk

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