

# Becoming a Councillor

## Frequently Asked Questions



### The role of a councillor

Councillors are elected to develop local policy, represent local people, make decisions and plan for the future. This includes:

- Representing the interests of the ward;
- Dealing with constituents' enquiries and representations, fairly and without prejudice;
- Listening to the needs of local people and key stakeholders to take their views into account when considering policy proposals and in decision-making;
- Championing the causes which further the interests, quality of life and sustainable development of the community;
- Developing a working knowledge of the organisations, services, activities and other factors important to a community's well-being and identity;
- Contributing to good governance and actively encouraging community participation and citizen involvement in decision-making;

Councillors will also need to ensure local people are informed about:

- services in their area
- decisions that affect them
- the reasons why decisions are taken by the Council
- the rights of constituents

### What areas of responsibility are Councillors involved in?

Councillors are responsible for devising and implementing policies which affect many areas of our daily lives. These include:

- Education, provision of after school clubs, play schemes and youth centres
- Street cleaning, rubbish collection, recycling and removal of abandoned vehicles
- Devise crime prevention strategies and fund community warden schemes
- Provide social services for young people, adults who need help and the elderly
- Maintain and repair roads and street lighting, cycle paths, footpaths and bridleways
- Upkeep local parks and play areas

### Who can become a Councillor?

Below are the main legal requirements to be a Councillor:

- 18 or over on the day of nomination
- Have property in or work connections in the city
- Are a UK, Irish Republic, Commonwealth or EU citizen
- Have not been declared bankrupt

However this is **not** a complete list. Contact Democratic Services at the Council for further details on (01642) 526196 or e-mail [democraticservices@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@stockton.gov.uk)

### Do I need to be a member of political party?

Councillors usually represent a political party, however they can be independent.

## **How much time would I have to commit to the role?**

Each Councillor works in their own way, therefore a fixed number of hours is not set. The number of hours would depend on your role within the council and the number of commitments you take on – which could vary from a few hours each week to a full time position.

Many councillors represent the Council on one or more 'outside bodies'. Background reading and attendance of meetings of these bodies would increase the time commitment, especially as the paperwork can be detailed and take a number of hours to read and understand.

Although a considerable commitment, being a Councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community, and helping to make it a better place to live, work or study.

## **Will I receive any form of recompense?**

Our Councillors receive no salary for the time they give up to serve their community. They do, however, receive allowances which are set by an independent remuneration panel. The current basic allowance for all councillors is £9,300. This allowance includes all local expenses.

The following councillors receive an additional allowance in recognition of their special responsibilities:

- Leader of the Council
- Executive Members (Cabinet)
- Opposition Leaders
- Chairs and Vice-chairs of Select Committees

## **Is there any training available for new councillors?**

This council offers an induction course for councillors and a full programme of training for their role. It is up to the individual councillor to decide if they would like to take advantage of training courses topics as:

- Computer skills training
- Personal Development
- Rapid reading and presentation skills
- Meeting skills and chairing skills
- Mentoring scheme for new councillors

Some training is mandatory for all councillors such as safeguarding, and some is mandatory for councillors who serve on specific committees where knowledge of the law is required such as licensing, planning and employee appeals.

## **Will my employer have to release me for council duty?**

Some employers understand the need for councillors to attend meetings during work hours and recognise the benefit of their staff undertaking civic duties. Those in employment may be entitled to some time off under the Employment Rights Act 1996, Section 50. However this is a matter best discussed with your employer.

## **When do elections take place?**

Stockton on Tees Borough hold elections every four years, so our councillors serve a four year term. In an election year, the formal election process begins with the publication of the 'Notice of Election' in the last week of March, after which you are able to submit 'nomination' papers to formally register your intention to stand for election. The next local elections in this borough are due to take place in May 2019.

## **Further information**

A great way to find out about the Council is to attend its meetings. By law, members of the public are allowed to be present at most council meetings and are encouraged to attend. You can find out information about [upcoming council meetings on the Council website](#).

You can also contact the Democratic Services team on **01642 526186** during office hours, or leave a message on the answerphone. You can also e-mail [democraticservices@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@stockton.gov.uk).

## **Other sources of Useful Information**

[The Electoral Commission \(EC\)](#) – provides advice and guidance to professionals involved in the running of elections and electoral registration services and to candidates and agents standing for election in European, UK Parliamentary and local government elections.

The EC is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections. The commission is independent of government and answerable to Parliament.

[Local Government Association \(LGA\)](#) – runs a national '[Be a Councillor](#)' campaign to make people more aware of the work of their local council, and councillors, with a view to encouraging more people to consider standing in future elections.

[LGA 'Independent Group'](#) - represents Councillors in England and Wales who are Independent, or of a political affiliation outside of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat. It ensures their voices are taken into account on all issues to do with local government, nationally and across the work of the works within the cross-party Local Government Association (LGA) to ensure that the values and interests of its members are promoted.

[Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) - Working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

[Centre for Women and Democracy \(cfwd\)](#) - The Centre for Women & Democracy is an independent, non-partisan organisation working to increase the representation of women at all levels of public life.

[National Association of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Councillors \(NABAEMC\)](#) - A Cross-Party-Association for BAME Local Councillors throughout the UK; supports members with training, seminars, national conferences and networking opportunities.

[National Black Women's Network](#) - The NBWN is a non-profit organisation dedicated to raising the status and position of black women in all walks of life.

[Fawcett Society](#) - Campaigns for equality between women and men in the UK on pay, pensions, poverty, justice and politics.