



A guide to becoming a Conservative councillor



Conservative
Councillors' Association

Contents

A note from the CCA Chairman	5
The role of a councillor:	
Introduction	6
Decision-making	6
Representation	7
Staying in touch	8
Helping your constituents	8
Eligibility	9
What do councils do?	10
10 top tips for new councillors	10
Getting elected	13
What to expect once you have been elected:	14
The term of office	14
The Code of Conduct	14
Training	14
Support	14
The time commitment	15
The financial cost	16
Your role within the Conservative Party	17
Conclusion	17
Councillor profiles	18
Becoming a Parish councillor:	
Introduction	22
Getting elected	22
What do Parish councils do?	23
Eligibility	23
Your role as a Parish councillor	24
What to expect once you have been elected	24
Conclusion	25
Parish councillor profile	25
The Conservative Councillors' Association	26
Useful information	28
Useful websites	29

A note from the CCA Chairman



Being a councillor is an extremely rewarding experience. It gives you the opportunity to help your local community and be part of a dedicated team providing key services for your area. It is also a great way to gain political experience and develop useful skills in public speaking, debating and problem solving.

There has never been a better time to be a Conservative councillor. With over 9,000 Conservative councillors across Britain, we are now the largest party in local government and are in control of the national Local Government Association.

Conservative councillors underpin our Party. Across Britain our local councillors are showing how Conservatives can be trusted to deliver high quality, value for money public services.

By becoming a councillor you really can make a difference.

I hope you will find this guide a useful insight into what it means to be a councillor.

Cllr Merrick Cockell
Chairman of the Conservative Councillors' Association

The role of a councillor

Introduction

Are you a Conservative who wants to improve your local area? If so, you are an ideal candidate to become a Conservative councillor.

There are 410 local authorities in England and Wales with over 21,000 elected councillors. At present there are more than 9,000 Conservative councillors, making us the largest Party in local government. However, this progress can only continue if people are willing to stand for election and become councillors.



Becoming a Conservative councillor is a uniquely rewarding experience. You will be responsible for making decisions on behalf of local residents as well as having the opportunity to help your local community. It will also allow you to develop many different sides to your personality - the ability to speak in public; to debate and to persuade your fellow councillors of the benefits of your proposals; and the opportunity to work with council officers to help solve your constituents' problems. Although training will be offered to you as a new councillor, you will find that these abilities will develop naturally.

As a Conservative councillor you will discover that the more involved you are the more enjoyable and rewarding the work becomes.

Councillors have many different roles but the first thing to note is that all councils are different. Being a councillor is hard work; you have to find an equilibrium between the needs and interests of your residents, voters, political parties and the local council.

Most councils run a Leader and Cabinet system (often known as the Executive). Although the Leader and Cabinet system is the most popular, there are other options such as the elected Mayor and Cabinet system and the elected Mayor and Manager system.

Whilst carrying out your role as a councillor, it is important to remember that you have been elected by local people to represent, plan, run and develop council business. You will be working to make decisions about local issues and improving the quality of life for the people in your ward.

Decision-making

The policies and general direction of a council are debated and agreed by the elected members. Councillors then play a crucial role in scrutinising those policy decisions once they have been implemented and in monitoring the council's performance across a whole range of areas.

As mentioned earlier, most councils now operate a 'Cabinet' system. Several local councillors will be selected to serve in the Cabinet and take part in decision-making. Cabinet members tend to be full-time politicians who propose policy framework and ensure its implementation. Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet play a role in scrutinising policy decisions and suggesting improvements.

The number of members on a Cabinet will vary from authority to authority, but it will include the Leader of the Council and senior councillors responsible for particular aspects of policy/service delivery (housing, education, etc). These are known as 'portfolio holders'. Portfolio holders work closely with council officers and are responsible for the specific details of their brief as well as ensuring the implementation of agreed policy decisions. As these decisions affect the level and quality of services received by the people you will represent, they will have a significant effect on the way the council operates.

If you are not a member of the Cabinet you will still have a very important role to perform. Councillors that are not part of the Cabinet will conduct the majority of their business through committees where decisions are decided through a majority vote. Once the decision is made on a particular policy, it will be passed to the Cabinet for discussion and approval. Where the council acts as a quasi-judicial body, for example planning and licensing, it still operates the committee system.

Representation

Councils are divided up into electoral areas called 'wards' or, for County Councils, 'divisions'. These will usually cover a few thousand households although size varies from authority to authority. Some wards and divisions are represented by a single councillor, while others will have more than one representative.

Your primary role as a councillor is to represent your ward and the individual citizens who live in it. You are the bridge between the community and the council. This applies to every councillor whether they are Leader of the Council or a newly elected backbencher. Your activities at a local level should include:

- Representing your ward within the council and other agencies.
- Holding surgeries: this is a good way of giving residents face-to-face contact. Surgeries are usually held in a local building people know such as a community centre.
- Undertaking casework on behalf of an individual - this is an essential part of your activities. The extent to which you are approached depends on many factors: the size of your ward, if you are on any committees (such as housing), and how often you put out regular leaflets listing your contact details.
- Campaigning on local issues and winning resources for your ward. Once elected, councillors often neglect campaigning for their ward but this should become even

more important. It is essential that you maintain regular contact with groups in your community and are seen to support them.

- Supporting local partnerships and organisations.
- Explaining council policy and ensuring that each policy has been carried out fairly.

Campaigning Literature Tip: Tell the community what you will do, do it and then tell them you have done it.

Staying in touch

In order to represent your constituents effectively, you will need to keep in constant touch with them to find out their concerns. This can be done in many different ways.

One of the most effective is producing regular newsletters. This will show that you are interested in people's views all year round (not just at elections) and, by publicising yourself and your work (including your successes), you will raise your profile. Newsletters also offer an opportunity to advertise your contact details so that residents can get in touch easily. If your ward is 'safe' you may be asked to concentrate your campaigning activities in more marginal wards within your area.

Surveys are another way of keeping in touch with your constituents. They make residents feel that their views are appreciated, help you gain information about local issues and provide you with contact details of many potential supporters.

You should also make a list of local community newsletters, contact the editors and see if they would be happy to publish contributions from you. As long as your contributions are free from party politics and concentrate on informing residents of local issues, most editors will be happy to include contributions. This will also help to increase your profile.

Many councillors are increasingly using websites (either individually, with their ward colleagues or through their group/Constituency Association). Email is also a good and efficient means of communication, especially with younger voters.

You should also of course help out and get involved in wider political campaigning, for example, at General and European elections. As well as helping the Party, such campaigning will help you maintain a visible presence within your community and keeps you informed of your electorate's concerns.

Helping your constituents

As an elected representative this is a role of fundamental importance. You will be contacted by your constituents with requests for help and you are likely to receive a lot of post, emails and phone calls.

In terms of helping your constituents with their problems, you are not expected to be familiar with every single detail across a range of policies (although as you gain experience you will inevitably become more knowledgeable). Your job is to represent your constituents' concerns to the council – either via officers or the elected member for the particular area of policy – and try to get the problem solved.

You will not be able to solve every single problem but you should be able to make a difference to many of those who request your help. However, you should bear in mind that many people contact their local councillor for help on issues that are not the responsibility of a local authority. In these cases you should try to put people in touch with other relevant agencies which can help.

Eligibility

To become a councillor you must be:

- A British subject or a citizen of the Irish Republic or the European Union and resident in the United Kingdom.
- 18 or over on the day of nomination.
- Either on the electoral register for the council area in which you are seeking election; or have lived or worked in that council area for at least the last twelve months.

You will not be able to stand for election if:

- You hold a paid office or employment made or confirmed by the council you wish to stand for.
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- You have been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to not less than three months imprisonment (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years.

You can also be disqualified from holding office, by order of the court, if you have incurred illegal expenditure (when acting as a councillor) of over £2,000 and if you have been found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices under the Representation of the People Act (1983) or the Audit Commission Act (1998).

What do councils do?

In Britain there are two distinct types of local government structure – when deciding whether (and where) to become a councillor it is important to bear in mind the differences between them.

In Scotland, Wales and the more urban parts of England there is a unitary structure of local government (i.e. each area has one council responsible for providing all the services).

For much of England there is a two-tier structure, with each area being covered by a District and a County Council. Outside of London there are also Parish and Town Councils.

More information on the different types of councils can be found on page 12.

Unitary Authorities

These are responsible for all powers delegated to local government. Their responsibilities therefore include: education, housing, social services, highways, street lighting, licensing, refuse collection, environmental and planning matters, leisure services etc. There are 46 unitary authorities in England. In Wales all 22 local authorities are unitary as are the 32 local authorities in Scotland.

London Boroughs

London Boroughs have very similar responsibilities to unitary authorities but have some of their powers transferred to the Greater London Authority, with whom they work in close co-operation. The Greater London Authority also has responsibility for police and fire service. There are 32 London Boroughs and a City of London Corporation.

Metropolitan Districts

Metropolitan Districts have the same responsibilities as unitary councils but comprise the areas covered by the six former Metropolitan Counties (Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Merseyside, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire).

10 top tips for new councillors

1. Keep in touch with your electorate.
2. Communicate regularly with fellow councillors and officers.
3. Make an impact on the council. Find out how the council takes decisions and learn how you can influence them.
4. Organise yourself/manage your time – learn how to manage your paperwork, set up a good filing system.
5. Take advantage of formal training offered by the council.
6. Learn how the council works and read their corporate plan.
7. Concentrate on areas that you have an interest in and become knowledgeable in them.
8. Talk to the media.
9. Don't take on too much too quickly or you will burn yourself out.
10. Keep in touch with the Party - **join the CCA!**

District Councils

District Councils have various responsibilities including: refuse collection, housing, licensing, planning, supporting voluntary organisations, leisure facilities, town centres, environmental health, car parking, markets and protecting the environment. There are 238 District Councils.

County Councils

County Council responsibilities include: education, social services, libraries, roads, street lighting, the fire service, planning and consumer protection. There are 34 County Councils. It is possible to serve as both a County and a District councillor.

Parish and Town Councils

There are 10,000 Community (found in Wales), Parish and Town Councils in England and Wales which are made up of nearly 100,000 councillors. Parish Councils can exist where there are anything from 100 residents to over 50,000.

Local government services and local authority responsibility

	Metropolitan/London authorities			Shire/Unitary authorities		
	Joint	Met councils	London	District councils	Unitary	County councils
Education		▪	▪		▪	▪
Housing		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Planning applications		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Strategic planning		▪	▪		▪	▪
Transport planning		▪			▪	▪
Passenger transport	▪				▪	▪
Highways		▪	▪		▪	▪
Fire	▪				▪ ¹	▪
Social Services		▪	▪		▪	▪
Libraries		▪	▪		▪	▪
Leisure & recreation		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Waste collection		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Waste disposal	▪				▪	▪
Environmental health		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Revenue collection		▪	▪	▪	▪	

¹ Joint fire authorities in counties that have unitary authorities in them. These are combined fire authorities. There are three combined fire authorities for Wales.

Getting elected

The first stage in getting elected is to get in touch with your Constituency Association. They are responsible for deciding who is nominated to stand for election as a Conservative councillor.

Once you have been successfully nominated you will need to prepare and organise your campaign and you will be required to sign an agreement to stand as a Conservative candidate. Your local branch and Constituency Association will help with your campaign.

The most important elements will be a timetable, budget and a team. While your timetable should cover the official dates of the election period, you will have to plan your campaign well in advance and do much of the work before the formal campaign. Your budget will make sure you do not go over the legal election expenses limit.

Building a team need not be difficult, your local branch will help you, as will supporters, family and friends. Don't be afraid to ask people to help.

You need to get to know your voters; this can be done in several ways:

- Reading the local paper – especially the letters page
- Canvassing – by knocking on doors and by phone
- Compiling a questionnaire/survey to find out the issues which concern voters the most

Once you have found out about your electorate you will need to spread your message. There are several ways of doing this:

- Leafleting
- Coverage in local newspaper articles and the letters page
- Organising a petition or survey
- Talking to the electorate about issues on a street stall or door-to-door
- Lobbying other councillors



Polling day

Make full use of polling day - you should carry on knocking on doors and delivering targeted leaflets right up until the close of poll. Make sure your pledge voters actually go to the polling station and vote. A 'good morning' or 'good day' leaflet or personalised letter may make all the difference in getting out the known Conservative vote.

What to expect once you have been elected

Term of office

Councillors are elected for four years unless they are elected at a by-election or in exceptional circumstances such as a boundary change. If you are elected at a by-election you will have to stand again at the next normal election for the seat.

County Council and London elections are held once every four years when all the seats are up for election. County Councils are divided up into electoral divisions with up to three county councillors representing a division. Metropolitan Councils have elections for a third of the council three out of four years.

District and Unitary Councils are slightly more complicated. Some have all-out elections meaning that every four years every councillor is up for re-election. Others elect by thirds where every year for three years a third of the council is up for re-election and in the fourth year there are no elections. Finally some councils have elections by halves where every other year half the council is up for re-election.

Code of Conduct

The conduct of councillors is formally governed by the Code of Conduct which came into force in November 2001. Since May 2002 every authority has been required to adopt the Code of Conduct that sets out the rules members should abide by.

Your 'Declaration of Acceptance of Office' requires you to abide by the Code of Conduct and you are legally obliged to register your interests within 28 days of taking office (these details will be open to public inspection). Areas covered include councillors not abusing their position and not misusing their authority's resources. Councillors are bound by the code whenever they are conducting council business or representing the council. You can breach the code if at any time you act in a way that brings the authority into disrepute or if you use your position to improperly secure for yourself or any other person an advantage or disadvantage.

Training

Most local authorities provide basic training for new councillors and some even run courses for prospective candidates. The CCA also holds regular training events for its members and produces a Guide for New Conservative Councillors.



Support

As a councillor you will rely heavily on council officers to provide you with information on

both general and specific matters. You are most likely to turn to officers when you need information in relation to a constituent's enquiry, but they will also provide administrative support in relation to any committees that you sit on and anything else that relates to your role as a councillor.

In terms of support, you are unlikely to have your own office (although most councils do have a Members' Room) or a secretary. However, an increasing number of Conservative groups do employ political researchers/administrative assistants and some councils provide members with computers and telephones to help them carry out their duties. You will probably be given a council email address.

The Conservative Councillors' Association, to which all Conservative councillors are required to belong, supports councillors in various ways: conferences and events, policy briefings, email bulletins, publications, guidance and advice etc. (Please see page 26 for more information on the CCA).

Another valuable source of advice and research support is the Conservative Group on the Local Government Association, the national body that represents local councils.

The time commitment

Before making your final decision about whether you want to become a councillor you should find out the typical pattern of meetings at your council to see whether they could be accommodated into your lifestyle. It is worth speaking to someone who is already a councillor for advice on this.



Remember that in a sense you will become public property - your name and address will probably be available to the public. The amount of your time taken up with council business will depend on the extent of your involvement, your political activities and what role you take on the council. Most councillors serve on at least two committees as well as the full council. Also bear in mind preparation time for meetings; agenda and papers will be sent to you in advance.

As a member of the council you will be expected to attend its meetings. There will also be workshops, briefings and occasional training seminars which you will be invited to attend with officers and other councillors.

Outside the council meeting, your representative role will involve you making yourself available to your electorate. As previously mentioned there are various ways you can do this such as holding ward surgeries. The people of your ward will expect you to lead local projects to improve and protect your area. You will also be expected to have regular contact

with the Parish and Town Councils operating within your ward.

An understanding employer is a definite advantage, and you may be entitled to some time off under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act (1996). If you are self-employed ensure that your business can allow you time for council duties.

There is no fixed time that you are expected to spend on council business - the time spent preparing for and attending meetings, dealing with casework etc will be anything from a few hours each week to a few hours each day. Some periods will be less busy than others, for example most councils scale down meetings during the summer (although your constituents will continue to contact you). As a rough guide, it has been estimated that councillors spend an average 16 hours a week on council business (University of Birmingham, Institute of Local Government Studies, 1998).

Although the time commitment may appear to be daunting, the key thing to remember is that the vast majority of councillors (from all parties) are volunteers who do manage to juggle their role as a local representative with the competing demands of family, work and other commitments.

The financial cost

Councillors do not get a salary for the work they do. It is regarded as voluntary and therefore councillors are paid an allowance which is designed to reimburse costs incurred doing council business.

While allowances for councillors vary from council to council, you should not be left out of pocket. Allowances are agreed by each council independently and are then approved by an independent assessment process.



Each councillor is entitled to a basic allowance (which is subject to tax) and this is paid in monthly instalments. It is designed to cover your costs such as travel to and from meetings, dealing with your casework and administration costs. (The council may provide stationery, business cards and perhaps computing equipment).

You can also claim for travel and subsistence allowances when you represent the council at external meetings or special conferences. In addition, there is also a child care and dependants' carers' allowance payable on production of receipts, up to an agreed maximum cost per hour.

Your council will also provide a special responsibility allowance to those who undertake additional duties such as Leader of the Council, portfolio holders, overview and scrutiny chairs and opposition leaders.

Your role within the Conservative Party

Once you are elected as a Conservative councillor it is important to remember that you have been elected to speak in support of Conservative principles. You need to consider your actions whether making a speech or voting in council to ensure that it reflects our overall objectives.

As a councillor you are not just a representative of your ward but also a key player within the Conservative Party. You will, for example, be expected to support the constituency Association's social and fundraising events and to represent the Party within your locality (by writing letters to the local paper, fielding media enquiries etc).

Above all, you should remember that one of the most important units in the Party is the Branch. Branches provide the campaign team to help you win and retain your seat. You should support your ward organisation by attending Branch meetings and participating in any events, for example, drives for new members. You will be expected to be involved in all these activities if you want the necessary support and hard work from members when you stand for re-election.

Conclusion

Being a councillor allows you to pursue your political beliefs and contribute to your community. It can be a career enhancing activity, allowing you to develop leadership and analytical skills and to obtain practical, managerial work experience. Working in local government can also be a good stepping stone if you desire to further your career in politics; many MPs began their political careers as councillors.

Becoming a Conservative councillor is an important achievement. Most councillors enjoy the fact that they have the opportunity to take decisions that will improve the quality of life in their local community. Having the opportunity to represent constituents and speak and act on their behalf is a unique privilege.

Councillor profiles

The role of a councillor is challenging and demanding; yet the responsibility is both rewarding and worthwhile. But don't take our word for it - these are the views of just a handful of the 9000 Conservative councillors who are currently serving their communities day in, day out:



'Being a councillor is one of the most fulfilling community roles you can undertake. Since being elected in 2006, it has brought me into contact with a huge number of different people, other community leaders, local organisations, community groups and local residents associations. As a councillor, you really can shape the way the council carries out its services on your patch and directly influence the way the council spends your money.'

Holding down a full time job and being a councillor is certainly not impossible in today's world. Thanks to email, I can easily liaise with council officers on behalf of my residents. I would strongly encourage more young professionals to stand as councillors in their local area.

So what's the best bit? There's nothing like the buzz of helping local residents solve their problems and knowing that you have been able to change something to improve their quality of life.'

Cllr Stephen Holland is a councillor on Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and a CCA Board Member



'I was 24 when I was first elected in 1976. I had been active in the Young Conservatives and it was a natural progression. We became the largest party on the council at that election and I started off immediately as a Vice-Chairman of a Committee.'

Younger councillors are extremely valuable in that they have lots of fresh new ideas about how the council should be doing its utmost to help its community. As a senior councillor, I try to be open to new or revived ideas put forward by younger councillors.'

If you are a Conservative Future member you may have already considered becoming a councillor. I would strongly encourage you to do so, I have greatly enjoyed my 31 years as a Conservative councillor.'

Cllr Brian Silvester is a councillor on Crewe and Nantwich Council



'I am really pleased and honoured to be the first Conservative councillor to represent the Kursaal ward in Southend-on-Sea. This is probably the most working-class ward in Essex, scoring high on the national index of multiple deprivation. I beat my Labour opponent by just six votes on a campaign of community social action using many forms of media to assist where possible.

Our ward suffers with visible levels of street prostitution, drug addicts, houses of multiple occupation, to name but a few of the challenges. Representing my constituents on the council is for me an opportunity of a lifetime. I am part of the town's leading Conservative administration. I sit on the community services scrutiny committee; children and lifelong learning committee and our local ALMO housing board. I am making contributions where practical and try to keep constituents informed of my activities via my blog on www.blainerobin.com. The local Conservative Future movement have chosen me to be their President for the next year. This is another responsibility that I am humbled by.

Before becoming a councillor I had the opportunity to spend one year at Conservative Campaign Headquarters as a part-time Social Action Manager. Thanks to this experience I am a more zealous and skilled campaigner than ever before.'

Cllr Blaine Robin is a councillor on Southend-on-Sea Borough Council



'Life is never dull in an inner London borough where the challenge of juggling many competing demands from a myriad of different people and interests keeps local politicians on their toes. If ever any space becomes available, it is the local politicians who need to influence whether it is used for a school, a swimming pool, housing or healthcare. What does our local population need? How can we pay for it? How can we champion the cause of those less able to fight for themselves, let every voice be heard and then make good, Conservative, decisions?

I became involved because I cared passionately about failing local care homes, yet in 1989 I would never have become a councillor if I hadn't been asked. I would like to encourage all of those with a passion for their local area not to wait to be asked but to put themselves forward. We need people from all backgrounds and all walks of life, to ensure our Conservative councillors, whether in administration or opposition, reflect the communities we serve.'

Cllr Clare Whelan is a councillor on the London Borough of Lambeth



'As a Conservative Party activist and a registered nurse, it became quite obvious to me that becoming a councillor was the best way to serve the community and address their concerns. Being self-employed and working from home I could devote more time to council work and political activities.

In 1986 I was elected to the London Borough of Harrow and since then I have served on various committees, including social services, education, community relations and the environment.

I have enjoyed being a councillor - the caring aspect fits in with my background in nursing and medicine. It is very rewarding when results are successful and challenging when they are not. I would find it difficult not to continue to be a councillor.'

Cllr Lurline Champagnie is a councillor on the London Borough of Harrow



'I first got involved in my local Conservative Association by helping the Parliamentary Candidate (Oliver Colville) in the 2005 General Election when I was President of the University of Plymouth Student's Union.

When my term of office had finished as President in Plymouth I started working in East London, helping long-term unemployed people into work in Tower Hamlets. I then got a phone call from the Plymouth Conservative Association saying the local elections were coming up and would I stand?

We were third in the polls the last time around in 2003 behind the Lib Dems and Labour. I knew if I could go knocking on doors in twenty storey tower blocks in Tower Hamlets in one of the most deprived areas in Britain I could win a council seat in Plymouth! So I took a massive gamble, left London for Plymouth and duly won.

The most problematic issues are waste/parking and planning issues. The list is endless and I am sure that this list is generic across Britain.

Why is the role vital? You are the people's mouth piece and you must do your utmost to represent your constituents to the best of your ability. Difficulties arise when a vocal minority 'claim' to represent the rest of the community and you have to do what you believe is best. It's vital that we have local councillors to represent the people. Democracy is a gift so let's be part of it!'

Councillor Steve Ricketts is a councillor on Plymouth City Council



'I came to England when I was eleven, unable to speak a word of English. My achievements are the product of efforts by kind and wonderful people such as my Headteacher, who devoted time and gave me assistance and direction.

As a direct result I have always believed that you need to give something back to the community that you have extracted so much from. The rest is history.

I thoroughly enjoy Group discussions and Council meetings that are often very heated, only because people are very passionate about where they live and we all want the best for people in our respective districts and/or wards.

I strongly believe that we all have a responsibility to create an environment conducive to integration, respect and friendship amongst all communities. One should not always leave it to others. One should join and contribute to the Party, become a councillor and make a difference to the community.

It is extraordinarily rewarding when one is able to assist local people and they go away smiling.'

Cllr Arif Hussein is a councillor on Wycombe District Council

Becoming a Parish councillor

Introduction

Despite the name, parish councils have nothing to do with the church. Parish and town councils represent the first tier of local government and there are approximately 70,000 parish and town councillors in England.

It is the most local level of government - local people elected by local residents to tackle purely local issues. While they may be responsible for smaller areas and fewer people than district and county councils, they are recognised as the grassroots layer of democracy and are, for around 14 million people, the most 'local' level of local government.

Many parishes are 'unwarded' (not divided into wards), so parish councillors represent the whole parish. Where parishes are warded, these wards do not necessarily have the same boundaries as the district wards. In warded parishes, the councillors represent the electors of their ward.

Some parish councils are allowed to use the description of 'town council'. Councillors will then be known as town councillors rather than parish councillors and the council will have a town mayor rather than a parish chairman. The legal status of town and parish councils is the same.

Parish and town councils exist in most parts of the country, although there are none at present in London. They have small budgets and a limited number of powers, but they provide an important link between individual communities and the principal councils in that particular area.

If you live in a parish, your views and opinions on the future of the parish are important. All sorts of people become parish councillors – a broad spread of ages from eighteen upwards with a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations.

Getting elected

Parish council elections are held every four years, usually on the first Thursday in May. You do not have to have experience of local government to get involved with your parish council.

If you would like to stand for election, you will need to obtain a nomination paper from the parish council Clerk and arrange for someone (who is an elector for the locality in which you wish to serve) to propose and another to second your nomination. If you wish to stand as a Conservative candidate, you will need to contact your local Conservative Association to gain their permission and backing.

Eligibility

To become a parish councillor you must be:

- A British subject or a citizen of the Irish Republic or the European Union and resident in the United Kingdom.
- 18 or over on the day of nomination. On the electoral register for the area in which you are seeking election; or living within three miles of it, or working, owning/leasing land or property in that parish for at least the last twelve months.

You will not be able to stand for election if:

- You hold a paid office or employment made or confirmed by the council.
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- You have been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to not less than three months imprisonment (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years.
- You can also be disqualified from holding office, by order of the court, if you have incurred illegal expenditure (when acting as a councillor) of over £2,000 and if you have been found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices under the Representation of the People Act (1983) or the Audit Commission Act (1998).

Parish councillors may also be elected if there is a 'casual vacancy', due, for example, to a current councillor's resignation. This vacancy may be filled by holding a by-election or by 'co-option' (co-opting is where a parish council finds someone who might be suitable and then votes to select them, without a ballot of local electors). Co-option usually occurs if there are not enough candidates to fill the vacant council seats.

If you are interested in being co-opted the next time there is a vacancy, make yourself known to the parish council Clerk or Chairman. Contact details will usually be available on the parish council website or in some cases on your district council website.

What do Parish Councils do?

As well as their basic responsibilities to represent the whole electorate within the parish, deliver services to meet local needs and strive to improve quality of life in the parish, parish councils can also be responsible for providing a range of community services such as: street lighting; allotments; local transport and traffic services; and tourist information centres.

They can make a particularly important contribution to tourism; planning; legal proceedings; licensing; community halls; representation; transport; management of town and village centres and providing community centres. Parish Councils have few restrictions on the use

of their powers but expenditure does have to be paid by the parish. As Parish Councils do not face 'capping' or receive any government grants they have much more freedom than principal councils from government interference on their spending.

The Parish also has a reasonable amount of power. A prime example of this is in planning applications. The planning authority is the District or Borough Council, but they often give details of every planning application within the parish to the Parish Council and will take into account the councillors' comments when coming to a decision. Similarly the County Council is often the highway authority, but it often consults the Parish when it is considering any road scheme, for example the placing of double yellow lines, or implementation of a cycle path.

Parish Councils are also consulted by both Central Government and the higher tier council(s) through consultative documents and draft policy documents. Their powers to work with other councils have been increased under the Local Governments Acts of 1997 and 2000.

Your role as a Parish councillor

- To represent the ward and your electorate's views at grassroots level.
- To ensure that council business is planned, run, improved and monitored correctly.
- To work in areas of community leadership.

What to expect once you have been elected

- **Term of office.** The term of office is four years unless you were elected at a by-election where you serve until the next scheduled election.
- **Code of Conduct.** Prior to, or at the first meeting of the council after election or co-option, councillors are requested to sign a Declaration that they will undertake their duties in accordance with the law. They are also required to complete forms relating to the Code of Conduct which requires a declaration of interests. When completed and countersigned these documents are open for inspection by any member of the public and must be available at every meeting of the Parish Council.
- **The time commitment.** There are regular meetings, usually at least once a month and you will be expected to work in and for your local community. Parish and Town Councils usually meet in the evenings and each council will have its own meeting pattern and venues. It is worth checking this with your local council to ensure you will be able to attend these meetings. The Parish Council has a number of committees which you can join if you wish. You may also be approached by villagers asking you to help them with their problems, especially in things like planning matters.

- **The financial cost.** Some Parish or Town Councils pay allowances to their councillors. Others do not have allowances but reimburse councillors for expenses if they attend meetings outside the parish, with the approval of the council. This role can be extremely rewarding and there is great satisfaction to be gained in serving your community at grassroots level.

Conclusion

Being a Parish councillor brings no special privileges other than the satisfaction of working for the parish in which you live. Becoming a local councillor is career enhancing - it shows you can make decisions, work in a team, are community minded and pro-active.

Parish councillor profile



'Some years ago I persuaded my husband to become a Parish councillor (I thought he was spending too much time at work and it would be good for him). He then became a Borough Councillor at a by-election and was hooked!

He spent some time trying to persuade me that I, too, should join the 'club' and in May 2000 I stood for our Parish Council and was duly elected. Like most new councillors I put my name down for one committee, which meant one meeting a month. That soon increased as I became more involved in what was happening locally.

At the end of two years I became Deputy Mayor and following the May 2007 elections I was re-elected. I love every minute (well nearly!) and look forward to many more years, electors permitting! I meet so many interesting people and actually feel part of our community.'

Cllr Jean Bettison is a councillor for Sandhurst Town Council



What is the Conservative Councillors' Association?

Introduction

The Conservative Councillors' Association (CCA) exists to provide a strong and unified voice for all Conservative councillors within the Party and in the wider community. The CCA supports councillors in their important role and provides them with the tools to both work effectively on behalf of local residents and to campaign successfully as Conservatives.

Who runs the CCA?

The CCA is a separate organisation run independently from Conservative Campaign Headquarters. The organisation is managed by the Local Government Board, with nearly all positions being elected annually by members of the CCA.

Membership of the CCA

All elected Conservative councillors are required to become members of the Conservative Councillors' Association. Council candidates, Parish/Town councillors and members of the Party who have a strong local government connection may also join the CCA as associate members.

The annual subscription is fixed by the AGM of the CCA - our membership year runs from June 1st to May 31st.

Candidates membership

In 2009 the CCA will be offering a special membership for council candidates. Between 1st January and 1st May 2009 selected candidates can apply to join the CCA for the special rate of £10.

Along with the usual benefits of CCA membership (weekly news emails, 'Input' magazine, access to the CCA website/forum, etc.), candidates will receive our 'Working to Win' candidate's pack and access to campaigning workshops.

If you think you would benefit from this membership, further information and an application form can be obtained from our website or by calling us on 020 7984 8144.

Membership services

Membership of the CCA costs just £30.00 per year for which members receive a wide range of services including:

- Weekly news bulletins containing the latest campaigning information and news updates from the Conservative Party.
- CCA members' magazine 'Input' which includes articles written by our members.
- CCA campaign support including our 'Localiser' campaign packs which provide information and templates to help you run issue-based campaigns.
- Access to online resources in the secure area of our website including information on best practice, by-elections and CCA events as well as briefings and campaigning templates/guides.
- Access to the CCA Community Forum where councillors have the opportunity to discuss best practice with council colleagues across the country.
- CCA publications including 'How to Win Local Elections' and our Group Leaders Guide.
- Discounted rates at CCA events such as the CCA Local Government Conference, Best Practice Weekend and training workshops.
- CCA Staff on hand to help with your questions/queries and campaigning needs (the CCA employs two full-time members of staff to administer the Association as well as a local government by-election campaigner and a legal officer).

Contact details

For further information or to join the CCA please contact us at cca@conservatives.com or on 020 7984 8144. Or visit our website www.conservativecouncillors.com.

Useful information

The Conservative Party

30 Millbank
London SW1P 4DP
020 7222 9000
www.conservatives.com

Audit Commission

1st Floor Millbank Tower
London SW1P 4HQ
020 7828 1212
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ
020 7664 3000
www.lga.gov.uk

London Councils

59 Southwark Street
London SE1 0AL
020 7934 9999
www.londoncouncils.gov.uk

The Standards Board for England

1st Floor Cotton Centre
Cotton Lane
London SE1 2QL
0845 078 8181
www.standardsboard.co.uk

Communities and Local Government

Eland House, Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
020 7944 4400
www.communities.gov.uk

The Greater London Authority

City Hall, The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
020 7983 4000
www.london.gov.uk

The House of Commons Public Information Office

London SW1A 0AA
020 7219 4727
www.parliament.uk

The House of Lords Information Office

London SW1A 0PW
020 7219 3107
www.parliament.uk

The Improvement and Development Agency

Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
020 7296 6600
www.idea.gov.uk

Local Government Chronicle

Greater London House
London NW1 7EJ
020 7978 0200
www.lgcnet.com

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

Roseberry House, 9 Haymarket
Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5XZ
0131 474 9200
www.cosla.gov.uk

Electoral Commission

1st Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
020 7271 0500
www.lgce.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association

Local Government House, Drake Walk
Cardiff CF10 4LG
029 2046 8600
www.wlga.gov.uk/syniad

Useful websites

www.conservativecouncillors.com

The official Conservative Councillors' Association Website

www.conservatives.com

Provides campaign information, news updates, events, contact information and is a good first port of call for all enquiries.

www.lga.gov.uk

Latest news and information about English local government and the LGA.

www.idea.gov.uk

This site is a good source of help and advice for all those in local government.

www.publicwhip.org.uk

Provides information about MPs, counts MPs' votes for you so they can be held to account. Provides a newsletter.

www.lgnnet.co.uk

All the latest news from the world of local government.

www.outwood.com

The local government website index, provides council minutes and web page designs and an English councils index.

www.wlga.gov.uk

Latest news and information about Welsh Local Government and the WLGA.

www.parliament.uk

Provides information on current work of Select Committees plus records of Hansard.

www.lgcnet.com

The local government chronicle website which also has information and statistics available.

Notes



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