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Making a difference: Your guide to becoming a Conservative councillor

There has never been a better time to be a Conservative councillor. It is a uniquely rewarding experience where you can make a real difference to your local community.

With just over 8,700 Conservative councillors in England, we are the largest Party in local government and as a result hold the chairmanship of the Local Government Association (LGA).

But what does it mean to be a Conservative councillor?

Conservatives across Britain are working hard to build a country where people have more opportunity and power over their lives; a country where families are stronger and society is more responsible; and a Britain which is safer and greener. Conservative councils can be trusted to deliver high quality, value for money public services. You can help be a part of this by standing as a Conservative candidate in your area.

Perhaps you are already involved in your local community and want to take the next step. Or you may be looking for a worthwhile and rewarding way to help your local neighbourhood. Either way this booklet should help you decide whether to take the plunge and stand for election as a Conservative to your local council.

You may already have an idea of the type of people who stand as councillors, but this image could be outdated. You could be the fresh new talent that your council is looking for.

What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to a council to represent their local community, so they must either live or work in the area. Becoming a Conservative 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 and act as an advocate for your community.

Being an effective councillor requires both commitment and hard work. Councillors have to balance the needs and interests of residents, their political party, and the council. These will all make legitimate demands on a councillor's time, on top of the demands and needs of their personal and professional lives. 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.

Councillor Melanie Magee, Conservative, Cherwell District Council

As someone who has a passion for my local community, I wanted to get more involved, but didn't think I was the 'right sort of person'. As a qualified full-time HR professional I realised my skills were valuable to the community, so I started volunteering with my local job club providing practical advice to job seekers, specifically the young unemployed. This inspired me to stand as a local councillor and I was elected in 2011. I then became Chair of the Youth Liaison Group, and Lead Member for Apprenticeships and Employment Initiatives (the first in the UK) and have been able to make a real difference to local people by engaging with them and the business community. I'd like to think that I am proof that by having a passion and getting involved, you really can make a difference.



Spends time with family Walks her dogs Watches Formula 1 Local Councillor

How councils work

This depends on the type of council. There are several types of local council in England, for example district, borough, county, metropolitan and unitary councils. Sometimes these are referred to as local authorities. You may also want to consider standing as a councillor for your town or parish council. These are smaller organisations that have some money to spend for the benefit of people in a small geographical area (for example a town or village).

All councils have things in common in the way they work and make decisions on behalf of local communities. They are all led by democratically elected councillors who set the vision and direction of the council. Most are run on a system similar to that of central government, with an elected executive (or cabinet) to decide on policy and make decisions which other councillors then 'scrutinise' or examine in detail.

All councils (with the exception of town or parish councils) are large organisations which play a big part in the local economy and influence many aspects of the lives of the people who live or work there. A large proportion of the work councils do is determined by central government. Local councils vary widely in terms of their style, political leadership and approach to delivering these central government programmes, and it is here that your local knowledge and commitment could make a real difference.

Depending on the type of local authority it is, a council can be responsible for a range of services, such as:

- education and lifelong learning
- social services and health
- housing and regeneration
- waste collection
- recycling
- roads and street lighting
- arts, sports and culture
- community safety and crime reduction
- environment
- planning and regulation
- tackling disadvantage and building strong, stable communities
- taxing and spending
- transport.

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 income.

At the time of print, there are 188 Conservative controlled councils, 100 Labour, 12 Lib Dem and 52 other (Independent/NOC) in England.

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. Another important responsibility is community safety and crime reduction, usually achieved in partnership with the local Police and Crime Commissioner, the police and voluntary and community groups.

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 boards or committees for health, education, community safety or regeneration.

What is expected of a councillor?

The councillor's role and responsibilities include:

- representing the ward for which they are elected
- decision-making
- developing and reviewing council policy
- scrutinising decisions taken by the councillors on the executive or cabinet
- regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties
- community leadership and engagement.

Most 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.

When dealing with casework or council business you may need to meet with council staff. These meetings, and other visits to council offices, may need to take place during the working day.

Then there are council and scrutiny meetings. Scrutiny is the crucial process of looking at the work and decisions of the executive. As well as the close examination of councillors, it can also involve the community and interested parties. Handled well, scrutiny procedures can stimulate real local involvement in how the council manages and delivers its business.

Councillors often also sit on quasi-judicial committees, for example the planning committee, which takes non-political decisions on planning applications. The number and length of these meetings varies from council to council. If you are selected as a Conservative councillor, you will be a member of the Conservative Group and as such will be expected to attend group meetings, party training and other events.

Councillor Ranil Jayawardena, Conservative, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

Localism is certainly today's buzz word but, for me, it has always been important. As a local person – and a localist – I was convinced to stand for election on local issues. I didn't want to see the Council Tax go up, I didn't want to see fortnightly bin collections, and I wanted to keep housing development in our rural area down, to name but three policies. Working with my Conservative colleagues, it is great to be able to have a real impact on these local issues. In less than four years I've also become Deputy Leader of the Council, so I am proof that it is possible for younger people to get involved in local government and make a real difference in their community. I'd highly recommend it!



Works for a FTSE100 company Plays golf Enjoys reading and theatre Local Councillor

Councillor Katharine Harborne, Conservative, London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames

Until the May 2010 local elections I was not a politician. In 2009, David Cameron called for different people to get involved in politics and so in May 2010 I stood for election. I am passionate about changing the way that people are involved in decisions that matter in our community, and to our lives. Making time to be an effective councillor is part of my personal commitment to social responsibility and changing things for the good. Since becoming a councillor I have been nominated as Richmond Borough's Champion of Cycling – I am keen to get more people cycling, more often. I have been able to champion various events to promote cycling including our 'Big Society with Wheels' project called 'Strictly Cycling' to get competitive cycling in local schools.



Mother of two teenagers Chartered environmentalist Cycling champion Local Councillor

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

Groups made up of diverse individuals tend to make better informed 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 necessarily have to have academic qualifications or a 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 skills**
These include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, the ability to consider alternative points of view and to negotiate, mediate, and resolve conflict.
- **Problem solving and analytical skills**
This includes being able to get to the bottom of an issue and to think of different ways to resolve it, including considering the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

- **Team working**
Being able to work with others in meetings and on committees and being able to complete any tasks that you agree to do on time.
- **Organisational skills**
Being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines.
- **Ability to engage with your local community**
You may have to make yourself available through meetings, the media, the internet, public forums, debates and on the telephone.

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 the council.

Don't worry if you don't yet feel that you have the skills or confidence to be a councillor. All councils provide support, information and training for new councillors, and you will receive support from Conservative colleagues.

Could I be a councillor?

If you care about the area that you live or work in and the issues facing local people, you could be a councillor. Perhaps you enjoy reading the local newspaper and often have a strong opinion on the issues you read about. You may enjoy talking to friends and colleagues about what's going on in the area. You may feel that certain sections of the community or people who live in a particular neighbourhood are getting a raw deal and need stronger representation. Research tells us that people are most concerned about issues such as crime, schools, transport and the environment. Your local council can make a difference on all these issues and many more, and so can you as a Conservative local councillor.

I don't have the time...

How much time you spend on your duties as a councillor depends on the particular commitments you take on. One council estimates the time commitment as ranging from five to 20 hours a week. Your role within the council will determine how much time you spend on council duties.

You will be expected to attend some council committee meetings, which are often held in the evening so that councillors can attend after work. 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.

Why should I become a councillor?

There are many reasons why people decide to become a local councillor. They include:

- 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
- wanting to pursue your Conservative political beliefs
- wanting to contribute your business or professional skills
- concerns about one particular issue
- as an extension of what you are already doing through the Conservative party, charity, voluntary group or school governing body – becoming a councillor can be the next step.

Councillor Kelham Cooke, Conservative, South Kesteven District Council

I was encouraged to stand for election after being involved with the General Election campaign 2010. I was 20 years old at the time and also in my final year at University so it was interesting switching between canvassing and studying! Since being elected I have had fantastic support with training from the CCA and South Kesteven District Council in public speaking, effective communication, and problem solving. The job is hard work but incredibly rewarding. I can't imagine getting the range of experience, knowledge, and skills in any other role. It is key that younger individuals get involved in local government as it helps give fellow councillors a different perspective. I would encourage anyone interested in their local area to apply to become a Councillor.



Keen skier Works in marketing Enjoys cycling and swimming Local Councillor

Councillor Katy Bourne, Conservative, Mid Sussex District Council

Being a councillor gives me the ability to influence my local area and benefit the people I represent. Whether I am deciding upon future infrastructure in my town or helping a family overcome housing issues, the enjoyment is the challenge of seeing a problem through from beginning to end and the reward comes from playing my part. Whenever the work becomes demanding, I am always encouraged by a letter I received from a lady just one month after my election which reads: "Thank you, thank you, thank you. When I found your letter I was so surprised it put tears in my eyes. You are the first person to have given me hope". Does any job get better than that?



Enjoys swing dancing Enjoys running – ran the London Marathon 2009 Private investor Local Councillor

Who can be a councillor?

The easy answer is almost anyone, as long as you are:

- British or a citizen of the Commonwealth or European Union
- at least 18 years old
- registered to vote in the area or have lived, worked or occupied property as an owner or tenant there for at least 12 months before an election.

You can't be a councillor if you:

- work for the council you want to be a councillor for, or for another local authority in a politically restricted post
- are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- have been sentenced to prison for three months or more (including suspended sentences) during the five years before election day
- have been convicted of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court.

If you are in any doubt about whether you are eligible to stand as a councillor, you should contact the returning officer in the electoral services department at your local council for advice.

Standing as a Conservative?

Standing as a Conservative? Over 95 per cent of councillors are members of political parties. Your local Conservative Association is there to fight elections and will be interested to hear from you. They will be able to support your election campaign and your work as a councillor. Please visit <http://www.conservativecouncillors.com/content/become-councillor> to register your interest in becoming a Conservative council candidate.

Your local Conservative Association and the Conservative Councillors' Association will be in touch with further details once you have filled in the online form.

Don't worry if you're not already a Conservative party member as they will be able to go through all the options with you.

Will I get paid for being a councillor?

Councillors do not receive a salary. However, they do get a 'member's allowance' in recognition of their time and expenses incurred while on council business. Each council sets its own rate for members' allowances, and you can find out more information about allowances from your local council or through its 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.

I have a disability – can I be a councillor?

If you fulfil the general criteria for being a councillor, you can stand for election. Until now, disabled candidates have not been entitled to extra funds or support from the council to help them canvass potential voters, although political parties sometimes provide extra support. However, in 2011 the Government ran a consultation on providing extra support to help people with disabilities to stand as MPs, councillors, or other elected officials. As a result, it has announced its commitment to a number of steps, including funding for training and development and establishing an 'access to elected office' fund to support disability-related costs. The Home Office publication 'Access to elected office for disabled people: a response to the public consultation' outlines the proposals. At the time of publication of this booklet, this was work in progress (see the 'useful contacts' section for further information).

Once you become a councillor, your council will work with you to overcome any barriers you come across as a result of your disability, and will make sure you can be fully involved. Being a councillor is not a full-time job and may not affect any benefits you receive, but individual cases will vary so do check this with your benefits office.

What support is available to councillors?

Councils have staff available to provide support and assistance to councillors, regardless of whether you belong to a political party or group. Exactly what facilities you will get depends on the council. Many will provide a computer for your home and some may provide paid-for internet access and an additional telephone line and/or mobile phone. You will be using email and the internet, and many councillors now choose to keep in touch with local people through social networking services such as Twitter and Facebook. You can expect full IT training tailored to suit your needs. Councils also provide induction and training for new councillors on many other aspects of the job.

The Conservative Councillors' Association (CCA) exists to support all elected Conservative councillors on primary authorities. Further information on the CCA can be found on page 11.

Councillor James Anderson, Conservative, Reading Borough Council

Within the first month of being a Councillor I helped a young mother find a new house after severe flooding, held a residents' meeting about planting new trees in their road and on behalf of residents lobbied Government ministers on issues ranging from elderly care to education. And this variety of work has continued ever since! Holding down a full-time 'day job' as well as having other responsibilities and pressures on your time, sometimes the last place you want to be is stuck in a council meeting listening to political point scoring about an issue that doesn't affect you. However, when an issue arises which will directly affect the residents that you represent, it is a great feeling to be able to stand and have your say.



Football manager Volunteer Husband Local Councillor

The timescale

Most councillors are elected for four-year terms, but councils run different electoral cycles. Some elect the whole council once every four years, while others elect a proportion of members each year. To find out when local elections are due to take place in your area, contact your local council or visit its website. **The political parties like to have their candidates in place at least a year before an election.** This is so that there is time for the candidate to get to know the important local issues, meet as many voters as possible, visit community groups, and raise their profile in the local media before the election takes place.

Next steps

Once you decide you want to take it further and put yourself forward as a candidate, what's the next step? Get involved with your local Conservative Association as soon as possible. This will help you find out more about what the role entails, who you will be working with, and what it takes to win elections.

Ultimately it's up to the local Conservative Association to decide whether to select you as a candidate, so you need to make contact with them as soon as possible and get involved with their work. The Conservative Party will expect you to be, or become, a party member. Further sources of information and support are listed in the 'useful contacts' section of this booklet.

You must make sure that you are officially nominated as the election date draws nearer. This means getting 10 people to sign your nomination papers (signatories must be registered electors in the ward where you wish to stand). These papers are available from your local council's democratic services department. You must also give your consent in writing to your nomination. All the necessary documents must be submitted 19 working days before the day of the election. For more information on this visit: www.beacouncillor.org.uk

Useful contacts

The Local Government Association (LGA) represents councils in England and Wales and information on its work can be found at: www.local.gov.uk

The Department for Communities and Local Government website provides news and information on the local government sector: www.gov.uk/government/topics/local-government

To find the name of your local council or councils, visit www.councillor.info and enter your postcode. The website www.writetothem.com also provides information on your local councils and councillors along with your MP and MEPs (Members of the European Parliament).

Every council in England has a comprehensive website including details about the services it runs, who the current councillors are and contact details for different council departments. For more information on when elections will take place, or for advice on becoming a councillor, contact the democratic services department. Your local council can also tell you of any town or parish councils in your area.

Guidance for candidates and information on the electoral cycle is available on the Electoral Commission website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

To find out more about the Conservative Party or becoming a Conservative Councillor

Conservative Councillors' Association:

www.conservativecouncillors.com

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.

All Conservative councillors elected to primary councils are required by the Party Constitution to become members of the CCA. Membership of the CCA costs just £30 per year for which members receive a wide range of services including news, information and events, campaigning support and training, online resources, and staff on hand to help with your questions and campaigning needs.

Further information can be found on our website www.conservativecouncillors.com or you can contact us on cca@conservatives.com or 020 7984 8144.

Conservative Party:

www.conservatives.com/get_involved/

Please visit the 'Get involved' section of the Conservative Party website for more information on volunteering, becoming a member and much more.

Conservative Women's Organisation

www.conservativewomen.org.uk

The Conservative Women's Organisation (CWO) is one of the oldest political women's organisations in the world. It is run by an annually-elected body of officers and a National Executive who are all volunteers operating at national and regional levels.

Women Conservative Party members are automatically a member of the CWO at no extra cost and CWO membership gives you access to a wide range of important benefits from training and development specifically for women to a proud heritage of promoting women in public life. To register for further CWO updates and details of future events and development programmes, contact:

Twitter: [@conswomen](https://twitter.com/conswomen)

Facebook: Conservative Women's Organisation

forums: www.cwoforums.co.uk

Conservative Disability Group

www.conservativedisability.org

email: via 'contact us' link at bottom of website home page.



Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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