

BE A COUNCILLOR

A Guide to Becoming a Conservative

Inside you'll find information on:

The role of a councillor

Getting selected

What to expect



**Conservative
Councillors' Association**

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FOREWORD

WELCOME TO YOUR GUIDE

If you have a passion for where you live, care deeply about your community and have a desire to make a real difference - then being a councillor is one of the most rewarding undertakings you can do.

Councillors are at the heart of our communities, whether it's sorting out potholes, managing bin collections, driving regeneration or championing climate change and the environment.

As a councillor you will use your experience and knowledge to help make a real difference, and you'll learn new skills along the way too.

We have over 5,000 councillors across the country, making a difference everyday, and we'd love for you to join us. There's plenty of help and advice available through your local association, as well as training through the CCA - ensuring you have the support you need every step of the way.

Hopefully this booklet will answer some of your questions, and persuade you to join our winning team. We need people like you, but most importantly your community needs passionate hard working

councillors delivering for them.

So make that choice today, and become a Conservative councillor.



Councillor Philip Broadhead,
Chairman of the Conservative
Councillors' Association



BEING 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 over 350 local authorities in England and Wales with over 19,400 elected councillors. At present there are more than 7,000 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 as well as a committee 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.

BEING A COUNCILLOR CONTINUED

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.

Most councils operate a 'Cabinet' system. Several local councillors will be selected to serve in the Cabinet and take part in decision-making. Cabinet members sometimes are full-time politicians who propose policy framework and ensure its implementation, whilst others will balance the role with part or full time work outside of politics. Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet play a role in scrutinising policy decisions and suggesting improvements.

The number of Cabinet members will vary from authority to authority, but it will include the Leader of the Council and senior councillors responsible for particular aspects of policy (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



Clr Bobby Alden asking a question to Rishi Sunak during a CCA Councillor exclusive hustings during the last Conservative Leadership election.

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. Where the council acts as a quasi-judicial body, for example planning and licensing, it still operates the committee system. The scrutiny committees of a council are also made up of councillors who do not sit on the Cabinet.

Other councils run a committee system, where the decisions are made by a small sub-set of councillors who make up individual committees, that send recommendations to full council (a meeting of all councillors on the authority) for ratification.

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, just like how the Prime Minister still has a constituency. 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. A number of councillors have also begun holding virtual surgeries. This allows for greater flexibility more effective use of councillors' time.

- 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 licensing), 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.

BEING A COUNCILLOR CONTINUED

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 you are interested in people's views all year round (not just at elections) and, by publicising yourself and your work (including your successes), 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' (in a strong Conservative area) 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 them. This will also help to increase your profile.

Many councillors use websites (either individually, with their ward colleagues or through their group/Constituency Association).

Many residents are on social media, and this can be an extremely useful tool. Check out CCHQ's guides on using social media effectively! If you are a CCA Member, you can also ask for dedicated support with making graphics for local government campaigns.

You should also, of course, help out and get involved in wider political campaigning, for example, at General 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 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

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.



WHAT COUNCILS DO

COUNCIL STRUCTURES

In Britain there are two distinct types of local government structure. Firstly, in Scotland, Wales, and in a growing number of areas in England, there is a unitary structure of local government (i.e. each area has one council responsible for providing all the services).

Secondly, for the rest of England there is a two-tier structure, with each area being covered by a District and a County Council, although more and more unitary councils are being created. There are also a number of consultations underway on further restructuring. Outside of London there are also Parish and Town Councils.

A single tier authority responsible for all local government functions:

Unitary Authorities are responsible for all powers delegated to local government. Their responsibilities therefore include: education, housing, social services, public health, highways, street lighting, licensing, refuse collection, environmental and planning matters, leisure services, etc.

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 the police and fire service. There are 32 London Boroughs and a City of London Corporation.

Metropolitan Districts have the same responsibilities to Unitary Authorities but cover the areas served by the six former Metropolitan Counties (i.e. Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Merseyside, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire).

A two-tier system with both separate and shared responsibilities:

District Councils have various responsibilities including: refuse collection, housing, licencing, planning leisure facilities, town centres, environmental health, entertainment, car parking, public conveniences, markets and protecting the environment.

County Council responsibilities include the following: waste disposal, education, social services, public health, libraries, roads, street lighting, the fire service, planning and consumer protection.

WHAT COUNCILS DO CONTINUED

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

There are around 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.

There were several mayoral elections in May 2022, where candidates stood for election in the same way an MP or councillor would by representing a political party or standing as an Independent candidate. There are more mayoral elections in May 2023, on the same day as the other local elections.

DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYORS

Following the Government's pledge to lead a devolution revolution, the Government has stated that significant powers will only be devolved down to local areas if they first agree to establish a directly elected mayor.

Many neighbouring councils are working together towards devolution deals with a directly elected mayor, and a number of mayors are already in place.

The mayor, in conjunction with the combined authority, exercises the powers and functions devolved from Government.

The Government believes the role ensures clear accountability over the powers, functions and funding that is devolved from national government to a local level.

GETTING ELECTED

ELIGIBILITY

To Become a Councillor You Must Be:

- A British or Commonwealth citizen, 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).

LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSIBILITY

	Metropolitan/ London authorities			Shire/Unitary authorities		
	Joint Authorities	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		▪	▪	▪	▪	
Public health		▪	▪		▪	▪

1. Joint fire authorities in counties that have unitary authorities in them. These are combined fire authorities.

FIRST STEPS

The first stage in getting elected as a Conservative councillor is to get in touch with your Constituency Conservative Association. They are responsible for deciding who is nominated to stand for election as a Conservative councillor. If you're thinking about standing, you can also join the CCA as an Associate Plus Member via our website to attend training.

Once you have completed the application process and have been successfully nominated you will need to prepare and organise your campaign and will be required to sign an 'Agreement to Stand' as a Conservative candidate. Your local branch and Association will help in your campaign.

As an Approved Candidate, you will then be able to join the CCA as a Candidate Member. Membership allows you to attend our training events and receive our regular mailings to keep you up to date with everything in local government. Candidate Members are also able to apply for a CCA Campaign Grant.

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 survey to find 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 residents about issues on a street stall or door-to-door.
- Lobbying other councillors.

GETTING ELECTED CONTINUED

WHO PAYS FOR YOUR ELECTION?

If you become a council candidate, your local Conservative Association will normally print and pay for leaflets and other campaign materials. If you are elected it is not unusual for Associations to ask for a contribution towards the election costs. This is outlined in the 'Agreement to Stand' which candidates are required to sign.

If you raise money yourself, or pay personally for leaflets to be printed etc, then restrictions apply as to whom you can accept sums of more than £500 from, and if you receive donations over £1,500 whether as a single contribution or smaller sums from the same source each of which is over £500, you need to declare the donations to the Electoral Commission. This is not as scary as it sounds, and your Association will be able to help check what donors are allowed to give.

If somebody provides something for you, such as a photocopier, free leaflets or use of office space etc, then a commercial value has to be determined for it and, if over £500, the same restrictions and reporting requirements will apply.

Note that at election time, the threshold for checking a donor is permissible drops to £50 (fifty pounds), and each donor must be listed on your Return of Election Expenses instead. It is therefore generally advised that donors should give to your Association's fighting fund, where the threshold remains £500 at all times.

For further information please contact the Financial Compliance Department at CCHQ via financialcompliance@conservatives.com or 0330 056 8298.

POLLING DAY

Make full use of polling day - you should be 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.

More information on campaign materials can be found on Campaign Toolkit.

WHAT TO EXPECT

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 or the election being delayed due to a lockdown. 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. 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.

TRAINING

Along with the CCA, most local authorities provide basic training for new councillors.

SUPPORT

As a councillor you will rely heavily on council officers to provide you with information e.g. for help with a constituent's enquiry, but they will also provide administrative support in relation to any committees that you sit on and anything relating to your role as a councillor.

You are unlikely to have your own office (although most councils do have a Members' Room), or a secretary. However, a number of groups do employ a political researcher/admin assistant and some councils provide members with laptops and mobiles to help them carry out their duties. You will be given a council email address.

The CCA supports councillors in various ways: conferences and events, public speaking workshops, policy briefings, email bulletins, publications, guidance and advice etc.

Another valuable source of support is the LGA Conservative Group, the national body that represents local councils. You can find further details here:

www.local.gov.uk/lga-conservatives.

WHAT TO EXPECT CONTINUED

TIME COMMITMENT AND FINANCIAL COST

Before making a decision about whether you want to become a councillor you should find out the typical pattern of council meetings to see whether they could fit into your lifestyle. Speak to someone who is already a councillor for advice. As a rough guide, it has been estimated that councillors spend an average 16 hours a week on council business.

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 a committee as well as the full council. Also bear in mind preparation time for meetings; papers will be sent to you in advance.

Outside the council meeting, your representative role will involve you making yourself available to your electorate. Residents 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/Town Councils.

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. The key thing to remember is that most councillors are volunteers who do manage to juggle their role as a councillor with the competing demands of family and work etc.

Councillors do not get a salary. It is regarded as a voluntary position and therefore councillors are paid an allowance (which is subject to tax) to reimburse costs incurred doing council business which is paid in monthly instalments. Allowances vary from council to council but you should not be left out of pocket. The council may provide stationery, business cards and I.T. 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.

Your council will also provide a special responsibility allowance to those who undertake extra duties such as Council Leader and portfolio holders.

YOUR ROLE WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Once you are elected as a 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 the Party's 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, if you have one in your area.

TEN TOP TIPS FOR COUNCILLORS:

- 1 Keep in touch with your voters.
- 2 Communicate regularly with your fellow councillors and officers.
- 3 Make an impact - find out how the council takes decisions and influence them.
- 4 Organise yourself/manage your time - learn how to manage your paperwork.
- 5 Take advantage of formal training offered by your council.
- 6 Learn how the council works and read their corporate plan.
- 7 Concentrate on areas that are of interest to you.
- 8 Talk to the media.
- 9 Don't take too much on too quickly.
- 10 Keep in touch with the Party - Join the CCA!

CONCLUSION

ABOUT BEING A COUNCILLOR

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. It can also be a good stepping stone if you wish to further your career in politics; many MPs began 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.



CONCLUSION CONTINUED

TIPS FROM OUR YOUNGEST AND LONGEST-SERVING COUNCILLORS

Being a councillor can be challenging; but it is also rewarding and worthwhile. Don't take our word for it - we asked some of our longest-serving and newest councillors to offer advice and tell us why they became councillors.

What made you decide to stand as a councillor?

I had a lot to say on local issues, so I thought it was time to "put up or shut up!" I was further prompted by a phone call from a ward chairman at an ungodly hour one Sunday morning asking me to stand. I was too young and naïve to see through those immortal words: "It won't take too much of your time...!" By that Sunday evening, I was selected.

Cllr Rory Love,
Kent County Council (27+ years of service)

Becoming a Councillor was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Is it hard work? Yes. However, it's worth it to be able to make genuine change. I've also learnt a lot about some very niche topics, from hedgehog highways to basement impacts. Oh, and I did a bin round - you really do learn a lot!

Cllr Maria Higson,
Camden Council (Elected in 2018).

What advice would you give someone who is considering standing for council?

Deciding to become a councillor was certainly the best decision I have made so far in my career.

Cllr Holly Ramsey,
Croydon Council

I had a demanding job in the City. I had just had a baby and was bored. A friend who was a serving Town Councillor asked if I was interested in taking up a casual vacancy on the Town Council. Anything to get me out of the house and my husband could take over in the evening. So off I toddled to this aged male gathering! Thirty years on, now a County Councillor as well as a former District Councillor... I love what I do.... giving something back to the community. Remember you are not there for your own gratification. There is no better feeling than being able to make a difference to people's lives.

Cllr Teresa Heritage,
Hertfordshire County Council (30+ years of service)

ABOUT THE CCA

INFORMATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The 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.

Full Membership of the CCA costs just £35.00 per year, whilst Approved Candidates can join for £20.00, 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 which includes articles written by our members and Ministers.
- CCA and CCHQ campaign support including campaigning guides such as Writing to Win and Winning your Local By-Election.

- 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.
 - Numerous training and network sessions held throughout the year, allowing CCA Members to connect with fellow councillors, the DLUHC Team, and CCHQ's professional campaigning staff.
 - CCA publications including Effective in Opposition and Councillors and the Law.
 - Various events throughout the year focusing on being an effective councillor, campaigning and policy.
 - Discounted rates at large CCA events including the annual Conservative Local Government Conference.
 - CCA staff and Board Members on hand to help with your queries and campaigning needs (the CCA employs three members of staff).
- ...and much more!

ABOUT THE CCA

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

The CCA holds a number of events throughout the year from training and skills workshops to the annual Local Government Conference and Councillor Development Weekend.

Many of these events are exclusive to members, with tickets heavily subsidised to ensure as many members as possible can attend.

Here you will find a number of events that we hold throughout the year. The 'Events' page of the CCA website is regularly updated and you can find an up-to-date list of events at: www.conservativecouncillors.com/events.

The Roe Public Speaking Course

The CCA holds Public Speaking Courses for members throughout the year. These are held with the Roe Project and are led by Dame Marion Roe and professional trainer Dilwyn Scott. We have been arranging these courses for over five years, and feedback has been excellent, with attendees saying the courses gave them a new found confidence when speaking in public.

Councillor Development Weekend

The Development Weekend is always a popular event for members. Attendees can look forward to a packed programme full of sessions focused on improving their skills in their important role as both a Conservative councillor and a campaigner. It is also a great opportunity to meet with fellow councillors from across the country.

Conservative Local Government Conference

The annual Conservative Local Government Conference is a great weekend for councillors from across the country to come together and discuss policy ideas, network and get motivated ahead of elections.

Policy Seminars

We are lucky to hold a number of events throughout the year where we welcome Ministers from the DLUHC Team to speak to members about key policy issues that affect their work as councillors. Previous seminars have focused on local government finance, social care and housing.

ABOUT THE CCA CONTINUED

HOW WE HELP COUNCILLORS AND CANDIDATES

CCA Candidates' Membership Scheme

Each year the CCA offers a special membership for council candidates. Once selected candidates can join the CCA for a reduced rate.

Please visit the 'Subscribe' section of www.conservativecouncillors.com for further information or contact the CCA on **0330 056 8144** or by email at cca@conservatives.com.

Candidate Members receive the same membership benefits as Full Members but they are not eligible to vote in the annual CCA Local Government Board elections.

Alternatively, there is the CCA Associate Membership Scheme for Party Members, details of which are available on the CCA website.

CCA Bursary Scheme

The CCA is able to offer a number of bursaries to members. The Scheme's focus is on assisting those councillors from groups who are less well represented amongst our members. Those accepted onto the Bursary Scheme benefit from free or reduced price tickets to some of the CCA's most popular

events as well as a mentor to guide and advise them in their professional role of a councillor.

CCA Campaign Grants

Every year, the CCA invites submissions for our Campaign Grant Scheme. Through the grants, we look to support target ward/division campaigns with funding for specific projects to assist your campaign.

Applications are open to both Full and Candidate Members.

Please look out for more information regarding the schemes in CCA Mailings or on our social media channels.

WWW.CONSERVATIVECOUNCILLORS.COM



**Conservative
Councillors' Association**