

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*What title will I have?*

An elected member of a parish council is called a councillor, abbreviated to Cllr. Conventionally you will be known as, for example, "Cllr. Bob Smith" or "Cllr. Mrs Jane Smith". You can use your title whenever you act, or wish to give the impression of acting, for the parish council.

*What happens if I stand but am not elected?*

As in any contested democratic process there is a risk of not winning. If the number of persons nominated is less than or equal to the number of places available then the election is uncontested and you are automatically elected. If there are more candidates than places and you don't win enough votes on Election Day then you will have lost the election. Some people may feel awkward about this, particularly as the people voting are quite often your friends, neighbours and community associates, however there is no shame in losing a contested election – it's part and parcel of public life and there will be other opportunities to get on to the council, either at the next election or if a vacancy crops up. Don't let the fear of losing stop you from putting yourself forward. Just think of what you could achieve if you knew you couldn't fail!

*What support is there for newly elected councillors?*

Being a councillor is a respected and valued role in a community. There is lots of support available to councillors, from training and development courses run by the local County Association of Local Councils, to representation by the National Association of Local Councils, based in London. Councillors would in the first instance seek assistance from fellow colleagues and the council's clerk (chief officer). Some councils have developed one-to-one mentoring schemes or buddy systems, which are a great way to make sure that new councillors understand their role. The support and continuous professional development of councillors is open-ended these days.

*Can I get out of it if it's not for me?*

Yes. You can withdraw your nomination if you decide before the election that you don't want to go through with it (deadline for withdrawal is 4pm on Wednesday 8 April 2020). If you are elected and decide subsequently that council life is not for you then you are free to resign at any time. However, be warned that when you start to make a real difference to community life and see the benefits that being a councillor can bring to you and your community it may just suck you in for life!

*Am I personally liable for anything as a councillor?*

Generally speaking, no. The council is a corporate body, which means that in law it has an identity separate to that of its members. Anything that the council decides to do by resolution is the action of the corporate body and any land, property, leases and other contracts are in the name of the council. The exception would be in extreme cases of negligence where an individual councillor has acted contrary to council policy, which may lead to personal liability.

*Will my employer support me if I need time off for council business in work time?*

Yes. You are allowed reasonable time off to go to meetings or to carry out your duties. The time must be agreed with your employer beforehand and your employer can refuse your request if it is unreasonable. A specific amount of time off is not laid down in law. Your employer doesn't have to pay you while you take time off for public duties, although many do. Your employment contract will normally say whether you are paid for this time off.

*Does it take up a lot of time?*

It can, but it doesn't have to. You will be required to attend meetings of the full council (monthly or bi-monthly) which are normally 2 to 3 hours long. You should be well-prepared for meetings and preparation can sometimes take longer than the meeting itself! If you are really getting your teeth in to council business you may put yourself forward for any committees that the council has (e.g. finance or planning committees), which will involve further meetings and preparation. Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three hours a week.