

engage with the local community developing and reviewing council

# The Role of Councillors

community leadership and engagement  
negotiate, mediate & resolve conflict  
drop-in surgery  
local involvement diverse individuals  
scrutiny meetings  
The Role of Councillors  
developing and reviewing  
statutory duties  
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Kirklees Councillors  
scrutinising the decisions taken by the Councillors  
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be a Councillor and have a job  
developing policy  
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engage with the local community



# The Role of Councillors

## What do Councillors do?

Councillors are people who are elected to the local Council to represent their local community. They must either live or work in the area.

Becoming a 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. However, being an effective Councillor requires both commitment and hard work.

Every day, Councillors have to balance the needs and interests of residents, their political party (if any) and the Council. These will all make legitimate demands on a Councillor's time – on top of the demands and needs of a Councillor's personal and professional lives. Your role as a Councillor often depends on your experience and commitment. Before you consider becoming a Councillor you may want to discuss it with your family and friends to ensure that they understand that you will need their support and understanding. You may be spending a lot of your spare time on Council business.



## 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 the decisions taken by the Councillors on the executive or cabinet
- regulatory, quasi-judicial, and statutory duties
- community leadership and engagement

The Council now delivers a lot of what they do in partnership with other services and agencies. So you may have opportunities to sit on partnership boards or committees for health, education, and regeneration. This will often involve additional meetings and background preparation.

Most Councillors hold regular drop-in surgeries each month. Surgeries are a chance for residents to meet you and discuss their problems or concerns face to face. You may also need to spend time visiting constituents in their homes. On top of this you will also deal 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 any visit to Council offices will often need to be 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 may also sit on quasi-judicial committees, for example a planning committee, which takes no-political decisions on planning applications. If you are a member of a political party you will be expected to attend political group meetings as well as party training and events.

## What kind of skills and experience do Councillors need?

Groups made up of diverse individuals tend to make better informed decisions, so it is important that Councils not only represent the communities they service but also have a wide range of skills and experience. That's where you come in.

The knowledge and experience you have picked up through your personal and professional life are important. While you don't need any special or formal qualifications to be a Councillor, having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help you in your role:

- communication skills

These include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, the ability to accept alternative points of view as well as the ability 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 advantages and disadvantages of each.

- team working

Including being able to work with others in meetings and on committees and being able to complete any tasks on time that you agree to do.

- organisational skills

These include 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, on the phone and face to face at regular sessions called surgeries.

Councillors need to have specific skills and knowledge gained from professional or personal experience or from working with other groups.

These might be:

- the needs of specific groups, such as children and young people, older people or those with health problems.
- an understanding of financial management and reporting processes.
- legal and regulatory systems or procedures
- housing, regeneration or environmental issues.
- or related to any of the many services and facilities provided by your local Council.

## **Who can be a Councillor?**

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

- 1 are British, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union
- 2 are 18 years of age or over
- 3 are registered to vote in the area or if you have lived, worked or owned property there for at least 12 months before an election.

## **Who can't be a Councillor?**

Some people can't be a Councillor because....

- 1 They work for the Council they want to be a Councillor for, or work for another Council in a politically restricted post.
- 2 They are bankrupt or have been surcharged in excess of £2,000
- 3 They have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) of three months or more in the five years before the election.
- 4 They have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

## **Independent or political?**

There are two basic options – you can stand for an election as an independent candidate or as a group/party political candidate.

The local political parties are already looking for people interested in representing them. Don't worry if you are not already a member of a party as they will be able to go through all the options with you. Some have special training and encouragement schemes for new people.

## **Will I get paid for being a Councillor?**

Councillors do not receive a salary. However, you will be paid a 'member's allowance' in recognition of your time and expenses incurred while on Council business.

Each Council sets its own rate for members' allowances. Kirklees' rate is £12,566

## **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 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.

## **Can I be a Councillor if I'm disabled?**

Yes. As long as you can answer yes to the 3 questions under 'Who can be a Councillor?'. As a disabled candidate in an election you don't get any additional funds or support from your local Council to help you canvass potential voters, although a political party may be able to provide some support.

However, once you become a Councillor, the Council will work with you to overcome any barriers there are to you being fully involved.

Being a Councillor is not a full time job and may not affect any incapacity benefit you receive however individual cases will vary so please do check this with Department for Work and Pensions.

## What support is available to Councillors?

Councils have staff available to provide support and assistance to Councillors, regardless of which political party or group they belong to.

Exactly what facilities you get depends on the Council. The Council will provide you with 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, the Internet and Microsoft Office packages but you can expect full IT training tailored to suit your needs. All Councils also provide induction and training for new Councillors on many other aspects of the job.

## Councillor Development in Kirklees

Councillor Development in Kirklees is a structured way of working, which is councillor-led. It aims to help councillors meet their development needs to make them become 'the most effective councillor they can be'.

## How does it work?

Each political group has a Group Business Manager who is responsible for the development of their Group members. Where requested, the Councillor Development Officer works with the Group Business Managers by assisting them to carry out Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) with their Councillors. In these PDRs, councillors discuss the skills and knowledge they need/would like to develop – and they may also make offers to become more involved in sharing their existing skills and knowledge with other councillors.

## How are development needs met?

Councillors' development needs may be met in a variety of ways:

- One-to-ones with KMC officers
- Development sessions commissioned internally
- Development sessions with external providers
- Development sessions with other authorities
- 'Good practice' visits to other authorities
- Computer-aided learning
- Audio learning
- Coaching
- Mentoring

## For further information please contact:

Angie Aspinall, Councillor Development Officer

Tel. 01484 416930 or 860 2930

Email: [angie.aspinall@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:angie.aspinall@kirklees.gov.uk)

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## For further information

Tel: **01484 416268**

email: **[policy.governance@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:policy.governance@kirklees.gov.uk)**

