

BECOMING A BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

ON THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN
& WEST NORFOLK

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



This booklet gives you information about becoming a Borough Councillor on the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk. It tells you about the time commitments, demands and rewards of a four-year term of office as an elected member of the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk.

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1. ABOUT THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK

The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk has 62 Borough Councillors who represent 42 Borough Council wards.

2. INTERESTED IN BECOMING A BOROUGH COUNCILLOR?

Each councillor is elected for a four year term of office. The Council has "all out" elections once every four years with all councillors being elected at the same time.

Local elections are traditionally held on the first Thursday in May and the next "all out" elections will be held in May 2019, at the same time as the Parliamentary Election and any Parish Council Elections. This offers you the opportunity to stand as a representative of your local community and become a Borough Councillor for the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk.

The local election process for the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will begin in March 2019 when a Notice of Election will be published throughout the Borough and on the Borough Council website. If you are thinking

about becoming a councillor and standing as a candidate you will have to formally submit nomination papers. Information about the nomination process and what candidates need to do is available later in this booklet.

3. WHY ARE COUNCILLORS IMPORTANT?

Councillors play a key role in the Borough, representing the people that elected them and providing a voice for the community, shaping services for the benefit of local people.

4. WHY BECOME A COUNCILLOR?

Becoming a councillor is a rewarding form of public service that puts people in the position where they can make a difference to the quality of other people's daily lives.

There are many reasons why people decide to become a councillor. For example, some individuals stand because: -

- they want to make a difference and be involved in shaping the future of the local community;
- they are concerned about the local area in which they live and want to ensure that their local community is provided with the services needed;

- they want to represent the views of local people and ensure that local community interests are taken into account;
- they want to pursue their political beliefs;
- they are concerned about one particular issue, for example care for older people, the need for facilities in an area or traffic congestion.

For some, it is an extension of what they are already doing as they are active in a political party, trade union or school governing body and they see the next step is to become a councillor.

5. WHO CAN STAND FOR ELECTION?

Almost anyone can stand to be a Borough Councillor. However, you must:-

- be at least 18 years of age on the day of nomination.
- be a British subject, an Irish Republic or European Union citizen living in the United Kingdom, or a qualifying commonwealth citizen.
- be on the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk's electoral register or have lived, worked or owned property in the borough for at least the last 12 months.
- have your nomination paper signed by ten people who are on the electoral register in the ward you would like to represent as a councillor.

You can't stand for election if you:-

- work for the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk.
- are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- have a criminal conviction involving a prison sentence of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years.
- are otherwise specifically disqualified from holding office by order of the court.

We welcome people from all backgrounds. The greater the mix of people, the more effectively the council can reflect the views of its communities.

Unlike parliamentary elections, you do not need to pay a deposit before you stand for nomination in a local government election.

6. DO COUNCILLORS NEED ANY QUALIFICATIONS?

No, you do not need any specific qualifications to become a councillor. Life experience is probably the best thing you can bring to the role.

7. DO I HAVE TO BELONG TO A POLITICAL PARTY OR GROUP?

You do not have to belong to a political party or group to stand for election. It is possible to stand as an Independent (a candidate who does not belong to a particular political party). A website giving more detailed information about this is www.picx.co.uk

If you are thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular party then you will need to be a member of that party's local organisation. More information about political parties can be found on the register of political parties section of the Electoral Commission's website

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

The current (as of August 2016) political makeup of the council is as follows:

| Group | Councillors |
|---------------|-------------|
| Conservatives | 50 |
| Labour | 9 |
| Independent | 2 |
| Total | 61 |

8. WHAT DO COUNCILLORS DO?

The role of a councillor can be very varied and it is up to each individual how they carry out their work. Councillors have responsibilities to their ward, to the Council and to the community.

Being an effective councillor requires hard work. Every day, councillors have to balance the needs and interests of their residents, voters, political parties and the council. All of these groups place legitimate demands on a councillor's time on top of their personal responsibilities to family, friends and workplace.

It is important that councillors understand the role so they can perform responsibly and effectively for the council and maintain the quality of their personal lives.

Ward responsibilities –

- to listen to and represent the views of the residents.
- monitor effective delivery of services in the ward.
- to help individual constituents on specific issues, known as ‘casework’.

As a councillor you will find that much of your time is taken up by contact with local people. This could be in the form of dealing with enquiries or complaints. Your role will be to listen, explain council policy and make sure that the policy has been carried out fairly according to official procedures. You will get help and support from officers to deal with constituents’ enquiries and complaints.

Decision making and influencing policy –

- to help form policy.
- to help set the council’s budget and agree the level of council tax.
- to make or scrutinise decisions.

Councillors are essential to deciding what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues, views and pressures.

As a councillor you will be a member of council, and could also be part of the cabinet and/or various committees such as scrutiny, planning or licensing. You will meet with other councillors from all political and other groups, to influence and determine the development and review of council policies and strategies.

Community Leadership –

- to develop an understanding of the local community and the groups and organisations within it to build effective partnerships with those organisations.
- to respond effectively to local priorities
- to have a commitment to community engagement and empowerment.

Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government and councils work in partnership with other organisations from

the statutory, business and voluntary sectors, to improve services and the quality of life of citizens.

9. HOW MUCH TIME IS INVOLVED IN BEING A COUNCILLOR?

It is for you to decide the level of commitment you are able to give to being a councillor. It also depends on your role within the council and the number of commitments you decide to take on. It could range from a few hours each week to a few hours each day at busier times.

Some of the issues you need to consider are:-

- How your role as a councillor will impact on any family and personal relationships – you will need their support and understanding as you may be spending a lot of your spare time on council business
- The people you represent will look to you for help in dealing with their problems. You are likely to receive a lot of post, emails and a great many telephone calls, and not every caller will telephone at what you might think is a reasonable hour!
- You may find that a large proportion of your time is spent dealing with constituency and associated casework. You may spend some of your time visiting constituents in their homes or at the council offices, and you may also meet with officers of the council to help you with any issues.

You will need to attend some committee meetings, depending on the roles you volunteer for and are appointed to. The average length of a committee meeting is approximately an hour and a half but this could vary. Also :-

- for most meetings you attend there will be papers that you will need to read beforehand. These papers can be quite detailed and take time to read and understand.
- if you are elected as a chair, spokesperson or member of the cabinet, the role can be much more demanding
- if you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time to attend political group meetings.

In one week therefore you could have a scrutiny committee meeting, represent the council on an outside body or partnership, if you are a member of a political group have a political group meeting, and also be holding a ward surgery.

You will receive a lot of information as a councillor so managing this and prioritising it will be important if you want to make an impact and not spread yourself too thinly across too many areas.

In all of this it is worth remembering that there are lots of officers in the council who will be happy to provide you with support and advice and help with specific issues.

A job profile of a councillor is attached as an appendix to this booklet

10. CAN I BE A COUNCILLOR AND KEEP MY EXISTING JOB?

Yes you can. Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 says that an employer is required to permit an employee reasonable time off during the employee's working hours to perform any of the duties as a member of a local authority, which includes attending committee meetings.

However, there is no statutory right for time off with pay to be granted for this purpose. The amount of time off will depend upon your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making any decision about whether to stand as a councillor.



11. WILL I BE PAID FOR DUTIES AS A COUNCILLOR?

There is no salary for being a councillor. However, councillors are paid allowances to reimburse for time and expenses incurred whilst on council business. Every Borough Councillor is entitled to a basic allowance. This was set by the council at £5140 (taxable) a year for 2014/15.

Councillors who hold particular positions of responsibility within the council, such as a chairman or vice chairman, receive a special responsibility allowance as well.

Allowances are paid in monthly instalments throughout the year.

Councillors may use car park passes and claim travelling allowance for certain approved duties, such as attending council meetings or attendance at meetings of outside bodies.

12. WHAT SUPPORT WILL I RECEIVE IF I AM ELECTED?

The Democratic Services team provide dedicated support to councillors. Council officers are employed to carry out the decisions of the council and if you have a specific service related query procedures are in place to ensure that you get responses within 5 days – all you would need to do is ask. For urgent matters, senior officers including the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Service Managers can be contacted direct.

All new councillors are offered the chance, if they wish, to have an officer appointed as a mentor who will help you understand the workings of the council; how to get things done and, if necessary, to understand the limitations.

The Council will offer you IT facilities.

If you have any concerns over any potential barriers to becoming a Borough Councillor you can contact the Democratic Services Manager who will be happy to discuss anything with you in confidence.

If you are a member of a political group, support and assistance will be available from other members of your group. The larger groups have dedicated support from a political assistant.

You will have access, by prior arrangement to meeting rooms at King's Court which can be used for informal meetings.

13. WILL I BE GIVEN ANY TRAINING TO HELP ME PERFORM MY DUTIES AS A COUNCILLOR?

After each election, successful candidates will receive a welcome pack and lots of useful information.

There is an induction programme for all councillors that initially involves attending a few sessions in the weeks following the election to help get you up and running.

This will be followed by sessions to help you with the basics such as understanding the councillors' code of conduct; introduction to local government finance and the workings of any particular committee you put yourself forward for, and are appointed to.

An on-going training and development programme designed by fellow councillors from all political parties will help you to deal with the role and all councillors are encouraged to attend as many events as possible to develop their skills and broaden their knowledge of the work of the council.

IT training is available throughout the year and can be tailored to individual needs.

Councillors are offered the opportunity to produce their own personal development plans (PDP's) to identify individual development needs. This will be a confidential statement of your skills and knowledge. The plan will help you to recognise and value skills, knowledge and experience you already have, and will help you make informed decisions about your future development needs.

14. HOW DO I BECOME A BOROUGH COUNCILLOR?

The next elections will be in May 2019 where councillors in each of the 42 wards will be elected.

All you have to do is decide to stand for election and win the public vote!

There is a formal nominations process and the closing date by which you must submit your nomination which is determined when an election date is set.

Sometimes by-elections take place between the election dates if a councillor retires prematurely. If you are elected at a by-election you will serve until the end of the four year term.

The calling of an election is published at King's Court as well as in the parishes throughout the borough, on the council's website and by formal notice at the Borough Council offices at which time you can apply for a nomination pack.

15. WHERE CAN I GET A NOMINATION PACK?

If you would like information and advice about nominations or any other aspect of the election process, please contact the council's elections office:-

Mary Colangelo
Electoral Services Manager
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn PE30 1EX
Tel: 01553 616281 or email
mary.colangelo@west-norfolk.gov.uk

Local Government Association:

www.lga.gov.uk

If you would like more information about the role of a councillor please contact:

Samantha Winter
Democratic Services Manager
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn PE30 1EX
Tel: 01553 616327 or e-mail
sam.winter@west-norfolk.gov.uk

Other sources of information on becoming a councillor include:-

Electoral Commission:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK BOROUGH COUNCILLOR JOB PROFILE

The following job profile has been prepared for guidance purposes and to raise awareness of the type of skills required to be a councillor. It is intended for use as a practical tool to help councillors undertake their roles and responsibilities and help to identify any further training requirements.

ALL COUNCILLORS

Purpose

- To participate constructively in the governance of the council.
- To contribute to the formation and scrutiny of the council's policies, budget, strategies and service delivery.
- To represent effectively the interests of their wards and deal with enquiries and representations from their constituents in an appropriate and timely manner.
- To champion the improvement of the quality of life of the community in terms of equality, economy and environment.
- To represent the council effectively when appointed to an outside body and regularly report back on issues relevant to the council via the appropriate channels.
- To act at all times with probity and propriety in the best interests of the council.

Duties and Responsibilities

- To fulfil the statutory and any locally determined requirements of an elected member of a local authority and the authority itself, including compliance with all relevant codes of conduct, and participation in those decisions and activities reserved to the full council e.g. agreeing the policy framework and setting the budget.
- To participate effectively as a member of any committee, panel or body to which the councillor is appointed.
- To participate in the activities of an outside body to which the councillor is appointed providing two way communication between the organisations. Also to develop and maintain a working knowledge of the council's policies and practices in relation to that body and of the community's needs and aspirations in respect of that body's role and functions.
- Except for cabinet members, to participate in the scrutiny or performance review of the services of the authority including, where the council so decides, the scrutiny of policies and budget and their effectiveness in achieving the strategic objectives of the council.

- To participate as appointed in consultative processes with the community and other organisations.
- To provide a link between the authority to the community through the various forums available.
- To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the council's services, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints and to develop good working relationships with relevant officers of the council.
- To develop and maintain an understanding of other organisations and services that serve the area.
- Be responsible for continuous personal development. Take advantage of learning opportunities to build on understanding and knowledge, and to develop relevant skills.
- To contribute constructively to open government and democratic renewal through active encouragement the community to participate generally in the democratic process.
- To conduct the business of the council within the council and not through the written, broadcast or social media.

Skills Required

- Good communication and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to relate and deal with the public in a professional and timely manner.
- Ability to work effectively with council officers and outside organisations.
- Community and civic leadership skills.

