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## Could you be a West Sussex County Councillor?

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This short guide explains what councils do, the role councillors play and the process for standing for election.

Being a councillor is a unique role in which you can give back to your community through your energy, passion and commitment. You can make a real difference as a councillor. You could be representing the views of local people to ensure people get the right services from the Council. You could help a resident with an issue or help shape your community by driving new ideas. You could influence some of the bigger decisions that affect the residents and businesses across the whole of West Sussex.

- If you're interested in becoming a councillor, more information is available on the West Sussex County Council 'Be a Councillor' website at [www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/councils/west-sussex-county-council/](http://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/councils/west-sussex-county-council/)
- You can contact Democratic Services at the County Council by email at [democratic.services@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westsussex.gov.uk)
- There is also information on the Local Government Association website at [www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/](http://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/)

### What does West Sussex County Council (WSCC) do?

WSCC has an annual budget of over a billion pounds and provides around 80% of public services in the county, including roads, education, social care, libraries, public health, waste disposal and recycling and the Fire & Rescue Service. Its work is shaped by the Council Plan which sets out its priorities and the outcomes it wants to achieve for the people who live and work in West Sussex. WSCC has close partnerships with many other organisations in this task, including Sussex Police, the NHS, the voluntary and community sector and other local councils.

- See the WSCC website ([www.westsussex.gov.uk/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/)) for more about what the Council does and the services it provides
- To see the Council Plan, go to [www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/corporate-policy-and-reports/our-council-plan](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/corporate-policy-and-reports/our-council-plan)

### What do other local councils do?

Most of West Sussex has three levels of local government. Alongside the County Council there are seven district and borough councils which are responsible for environmental health, housing, leisure, street cleaning, tourism, waste collection and planning (the County Council has some planning responsibilities too). There are also 158 town and parish councils (apart from Crawley, Worthing and parts of Adur and Horsham). Their responsibilities include allotments, bus shelters, cemeteries, village halls, some open spaces like children's playgrounds and sports fields, noticeboards and war memorial maintenance.

- To find out more about district and borough councils go to [www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/your-other-local-councils/district-and-borough-councils/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/your-other-local-councils/district-and-borough-councils/)
- To find out about town and parish councils go to [www.westsussex.gov.uk/find-my-nearest/parish-or-town-council/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/find-my-nearest/parish-or-town-council/)

### **What do county councillors do – and what’s the time commitment?**

There are 70 county councillors. Their main role is to provide a link between the community and the County Council, acting as an advocate for the 12,000 or so residents in their division (local area). They do this by keeping themselves informed about issues affecting their community, communicating with local people, attending events, dealing with questions and complaints and attending meetings of local organisations (including the other local councils in the area). Some hold surgeries where residents can raise issues with them. All county councillors have a strategic role in taking policy and spending decisions that impact on the whole of West Sussex.

County councillors attend formal committee meetings (all held during the daytime, mainly at County Hall in Chichester) as well as a range of informal activities. Most spend around 22 hours a week fulfilling their role, but those with leadership roles may spend more time than this. Some county councillors are also councillors at district/borough and town/parish councils.

- A detailed county councillor role profile is available at [www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/county-councillors/become-a-county-councillor/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/county-councillors/become-a-county-councillor/)

### **How does the County Council work?**

The Council’s democratic structures ensure it is publicly accountable, carrying out its business transparently. It has a Leader and Cabinet system, where the full County Council elects a Leader from the majority political group who then appoints a Cabinet of up to 10 councillors. The Cabinet takes most of the bigger decisions within the priorities and budget set by the full County Council. There are also various committees to manage other areas of Council business and to scrutinise Cabinet decisions. Full County Council meetings take place six times a year and are the main place for political debate for all 70 councillors. Meetings are held in public, and many of them are webcast, so can be watched live or through the archive of previous meetings.

- Webcasts of meetings are available at [www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/watch-county-council-and-committee-meetings-online/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/watch-county-council-and-committee-meetings-online/)

### **Could I become a county councillor?**

To be a councillor you need to be British or a citizen of the Commonwealth, at least 18 years old and registered to vote in the area or have lived, worked, or owned property in West Sussex for at least 12 months before an election.

You cannot be a councillor if you work for the council you want to be a councillor for. The other restrictions are that you are not the subject of bankruptcy restrictions, 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 or are subject to any relevant notification requirements, or a relevant order in respect of a sexual offence.

- Information on the eligibility criteria for councillors is available from the Electoral Commission at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england)

### **Can I work at the same time as being a councillor?**

Many councillors have jobs as well as other responsibilities, like being carers. If you are working, by law 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. Employers can choose to pay you for this time, but they don't have to. We would encourage you to discuss as soon as possible with your employer before making the commitment to stand for election.

### **Do councillors get paid?**

Being a councillor is a voluntary role, so councillors do not receive a salary. An annual allowance in the region of £13,500 is provided as some recompense for the time spent on Council business and to cover the various costs likely to be incurred (e.g. use of your home, telephone calls, travel on local business and any civic events). Some councillors take on additional leadership roles and receive additional allowances for these. Travel, subsistence and carers allowance may be claimed under certain circumstances. The allowance received counts as taxable allowance and may impact on any benefits you receive. Councillors are not provided with a pension by the Council.

- Details of the allowances that may be claimed are set out in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution, available on the WSCC website ([www.westsussex.gov.uk](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk))

### **What is the term of office of councillors?**

Councillors are elected for four years unless they're voted in at a by-election (when there is a vacancy for a councillor). The next County Council elections take place in May 2025.

### **Do I need experience to be a county councillor?**

You don't need any specific experience or qualifications to be a county councillor. People from all backgrounds and walks of life can put themselves forward for election. Your work and life experience, everyday skills, passion and commitment to people and communities are vital, and it's important that

councils reflect the local population that they serve. However, there are some specific skills which help councillors carry out their role, such as being a leader in your community; having good communication skills; team working; problem solving, questioning and analytical skills; being organised and having good time management; and having political understanding.

### **What support is available?**

The Council holds a number of events in the run up to elections to help people find out more about being a councillor (see the WSCC 'Be a Councillor' website or contact Democratic Services). We may also be able to arrange for you to shadow a current county councillor. If you are elected, a comprehensive induction programme is provided, as well as on-going training and development. You will also be provided with an officer 'buddy' to support you in the first few months after election, and if you are a member of a political group, peer to peer mentoring may be available. You'll also be provided with the necessary IT equipment so that you can send and receive emails, access a diary to help you manage your commitments and attend virtual meetings.

### **Can I be a County Councillor if I have a disability?**

If you have a disability, we can make reasonable adjustments to ensure you are not disadvantaged. Before you decide to stand for election, we recommend you talk to Democratic Services to gain a full understanding of the role and what support could be put in place for you.

- The Local Government Association has a guide to encourage disabled people to become councillors and bring new experience into local government, available on its website ([www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/resources/improving-access-local-government-elected-office-disabled-people](http://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/resources/improving-access-local-government-elected-office-disabled-people))

### **What to be aware of as a person in a public position**

Standing for election and serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and highly fulfilling. However, some councillors and candidates can be subject to abuse, especially on social media, and this can deter people from putting themselves forward for election. Support is available from other councillors and candidates, political parties, councils and the Local Government Association (LGA). The LGA is running a campaign called 'Debate Not Hate', encouraging civility in public life, which the County Council has signed up to.

### **How to I stand for election?**

To stand for a political party, you'll need to be a member of that party, get involved locally and go through their selection process to be put forward as their candidate for election. You can find out more on each party's website. Depending on which party you are interested in, this can take up to about a year, so please contact them as soon as you can to start getting involved. If you are interested in becoming an independent candidate (not in a political party),

you can get resources and advice from the Local Government Association:  
[www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent).

District/borough councils manage all elections, so you can contact them for more information and to get the necessary paperwork, confirm the deadlines, and find out what help they can give you to submit your papers correctly. The contact details of the district/borough council elections offices are available on the WSCC 'Be a Councillor' website (see 'useful contacts').

November 2023

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## County Councillor Role Profile

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As a democratically elected local representative, county councillors (or elected members) hold a unique position and have the potential to make a real difference to people's lives. Councillors provide a bridge between the needs and interests of their community and the responsibilities of the Council. They are expected to champion the interests of all who need or may call upon the services the Council is responsible for. Councillors enable the interests of local people to influence decision making and contribute to service planning but need to balance the needs of their local residents with the wider needs of all residents across the county.

### Local role

A councillor's primary role is to represent the 12,000 or so residents in your division by engaging with them to understand issues of local concern, being an advocate for them and signposting when required. To fulfil your local role you will need to:

- Be accessible locally by offering various ways for your local community to get in touch with you, including hard to engage groups,
- Develop and maintain communication links through various means (such as through attending community events/meetings, holding surgeries, using social media and producing newsletters) to engage with your community, local businesses and community groups.
- Help to solve local issues (known as casework) in liaison with Council officers, partners and other organisations, signposting, managing expectations, offering alternatives and explaining what can/cannot be done as required.
- Be an advocate for the local community, including through visiting local community organisations.
- Be able to explain how Council policies and decisions impact your local community, how the community can influence change and keep them informed of changes/decisions taking place that affect them.
- Make the views of your local community known to the County Council at the appropriate time and through the appropriate channels.
- Gather and maintain an awareness of the performance of the County Council's services and those of its partners in the local community and take action to resolve issues and address performance issues as appropriate.

### Strategic role

As one of the 70 elected members of the County Council, you are not only responsible for representing your division but you also have an overriding duty to the whole community of West Sussex, all of its 882,000 residents, local business and those who work in and visit the county. To fulfil your strategic role you will need to:

- Participate in the effective and responsible management of the County Council by contributing to or scrutinising its budget, strategies and policies, its commissioning activity and the services it delivers.
- Develop and maintain a good knowledge of Council services, functions and duties.
- Work in partnership with others and develop good working relationships with officers.
- Act as the County Council's representative on any outside bodies or organisations to which you are appointed by the County Council.
- Act as a corporate parent for children who are looked after by the Council, ensuring they are provided with the support that any good parents would give to their children and promoting their interests.

### **Expectations**

You will need to:

- Dedicate adequate time to fulfil the role and attend all meetings you are expected to attend whenever possible.
- Carry out your duties in the public interest, equally, with respect for others and without discrimination, leading by example as defined by the [Nolan principles](#) and in accordance with the [Council's code of conduct](#).
- Register any interests as appropriate (including those of a spouse or live-in partner, where relevant).
- Provide the relevant documentation to enable a DBS check to be carried out (and as appropriate to the roles to which you are appointed).
- Participate in induction training and ongoing training and development to maintain your skills and knowledge. You will need to complete any mandatory training within the first year of your election.

### **Skills you will need to develop to be an effective councillor**

- **Political Understanding:** Regardless of whether you have been elected to represent a political party or are independent, you will need to work across political boundaries when required whilst still maintaining your own political integrity. Through your local role you should aim to increase public engagement in local democracy.
- **Partnership working:** The County Council works collaboratively to achieve shared goals for the benefit of the residents of West Sussex. You need to be able to work proactively in order to build good relationships with others (e.g. across the tiers of local government). You also need to develop the ability to know when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility.
- **Regulating and monitoring:** You need to understand protocols and processes in place (e.g. as set out in the Council's Constitution), comply with these and ensure they are being followed by others, challenging when appropriate.

- **Scrutiny and challenge:** Scrutiny and challenge are an important day-to-day aspect of your role. To be effective in this you need to analyse information quickly, be able to ask challenging but constructive questions and present arguments that are concise, meaningful and easily understood.
- **Communicating:** You need to be able to identify appropriate ways of communicating with your community (including those who are vulnerable or hard to reach) and be able to speak confidently in public settings (e.g. in council and community meetings) using appropriate language and avoiding jargon.

**Reviewed by the Member Development Group October 2023**