



So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

One hour online session on the basics of being a
local councillor

Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) 2023

info@oalc.org.uk

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

Are you eligible to stand? To be a candidate you must:

- Be 18 years or over, no top age limit (!)
- Be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any member state of the EU;
- **and** meet at least one of the following four qualifications:
 - a. You are registered as a local government elector for the parish in which you want to stand
 - b. You have occupied (as owner or tenant) land or other premises in the parish in the past 12 months

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

c. Your main place of work in the past 12 months has been in the parish

d. You have lived in the parish or within three miles of it in the past 12 months.

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

Disqualifications are:

- You are employed by the council
- You are subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order
- You have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more
- You have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt electoral practices)
- You are subject to the notification requirement, Part 2 Sexual Offences Act 2003

(It is your responsibility to ensure you are eligible. You have to sign the nomination paper to confirm eligibility. It is a criminal offence to make a false statement.)

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- If you are elected, the term of office is 4 years until the next 'ordinary election'
- 'Casual vacancies' do arise during the 4-year term
- All members of the council stand down at the end of their term
- All seats become available whatever the size of your council
- Existing councillors who want to continue in office have to stand for re-election
- If there are more valid nominations than seats then an election will be held
- If there the same number of nominations as seats, those candidates will be elected unopposed – it is an election but an uncontested one.

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

What is a councillor expected to do?

- Technically you are an elected representative. You hold a public office, you are not a volunteer
- Listen to **all** the views of your community, not just those who shout the loudest!
- You are **summoned** to attend meetings
- Make informed positive contributions to discussions, listen to all views in a respectful & civilised way
- Individual councillors have no executive power

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- It is the council as a corporate entity that makes the decisions
- So no personal liability unless you act individually in an unreasonable way
- Must sign and abide by the Code of Conduct (Nolan Principles of Conduct in Public Life) & fill in your Register of Interests which will be publicly available
- Act in an open, professional and democratic way in the best interests of the whole community

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

Skills that make a good councillor

- Patience – things move slowly if you only meet monthly
- Have an open mind – over my dead body = predetermination
- Calm – things can get very heated (planning)
- Be organised – separate council email account; separate the public (cllr) from the private
- Do your homework – read the papers before (not at) the meeting; be informed about all sides of a project
- Undertake training: budgeting, council as an employer, allotments, burials, planning, audit – internal & external, FoI, GDPR, footpaths, climate change, play, litter, dogs, byelaws, trees, village hall, social media.....

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- Turn up to meetings – 6 month rule
 - Corporate responsibility
 - Keep up to date, be enthusiastic, be proactive
 - Political/apolitical
 - *'Don't you know who I am?'* – keep it in perspective 😊
-
- Be realistic.....

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- Bottom tier of local government. In Oxfordshire there are 249 PC's, 5 District Councils and a County Council (budget £450m)
- Parish councils only comment on planning applications; they are not the Local Planning Authority
- Parish councils **not** responsible for planning (although they can do a Neighbourhood Development Plan), highways, planning, waste, education, etc.
- Parish council is funded by the precept. Do a budget, set precept and the district council (billing authority) collects it and pays it to parish council

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- May be other sources of income – lettings, fees, etc.
- Subject to audit, internal & external. It's public money, you are accountable for spending it wisely.
- Parish councils are local authorities; they can only do what legislation allows them to – Local Government Act 1972. Created in 1894 split from ecclesiastical parishes
- It is not a business, no decisions by email – open, transparent and democratic
- Clerk (proper officer) does 95% of the work

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

This election will be 4th May 2023.

- Nomination papers have to be submitted to your district council, Democratic Services by 4pm 4th April – your responsibility, not clerk's
- The nomination form will ask for full name, home address, political party (if there is one), 2 subscribers on electoral role; more info from your district council or parish clerk
- Don't leave submitting it to 3.45pm on 4th April
- Notice of poll Tuesday 25th April. A lot of parish council elections are not contested 😞

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

If it is contested, then polling will be on Thursday 4th May 7am-10pm

Counting - slightly complicated by Coronation on Saturday 6th May
and bank holiday on Monday 8th May

District council elections counted first, parish councils afterwards

Councillors retire from office four days after the ordinary election

At the first meeting of the council year, the Annual Meeting, to be held between 9th -23rd May, the new Chair is elected and all councillors have to sign their Acceptance of Office at or before that meeting.

So you think you'd like to be a parish/town councillor?

- Congratulations - you can now do exciting things for and on behalf of your community!
- Attend several meetings before putting yourself forward
- Don't worry you should receive an induction pack from the Clerk
- Ask for an experienced councillor to be your buddy/mentor for the first six+ months
- Ask questions

Congratulations – you might now stand as a parish/town councillor!

But you must have questions...

- I'll look silly because I might not get many votes
- I don't want to sign the Code of Conduct
- I haven't lived in the village very long
- I don't understand how it works
-?