

A GUIDE TO BECOMING A COUNCILLOR



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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 (and employer, if appropriate) 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.

DO I QUALIFY TO BE A COUNCILLOR?

To be eligible to stand for election as a councillor to Plymouth City Council, you must be:

- A UK, EU or Commonwealth citizen
- Aged 18 or over on the day of nomination
- Either be on the Electoral Register in Plymouth, or have lived or worked or have owned property in Plymouth for at least one year.

You will not be able to stand for election if:

- You work for Plymouth City Council
- You hold a politically restricted post in another local authority
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy order or interim order
- You have been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to not less than three months imprisonment (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years
- You have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A COUNCILLOR?

A councillor's role can be varied, but there are three distinct but related main areas of responsibility:

- Representing the residents of the ward to which you have been elected
- Decision-making and formulating policy
- Providing community leadership

Constituents will be in contact via telephone calls, emails and letters, and some councillors hold regular drop-in surgeries each month. When dealing with casework or Council business, there will be a need to meet with Council officers. These meetings and any visits to Council offices will usually be during the working day.

Councillors may sit on quasi-judicial committees; for example, the Planning Committee, which takes decisions on planning applications. The scrutiny process enables councillors to challenge the decision-making of the Cabinet and hold it to account, monitor the quality of service delivery and review and contribute to policy development. The scrutiny function extends beyond the Council

with a responsibility for holding to account key partner agencies, including a statutory role to scrutinise health issues.

If you are a member of a political party, you will also be expected to attend political group meetings as well as party training and events.

A COUNCILLOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

If elected, you must sign the declaration of acceptance of office. By doing so, a commitment is made to follow the Code of Conduct, which sets out the rules for how councillors carry out their duties and makes sure they do not abuse their position or the Council's resources. In addition, enhanced Criminal Bureau Records checks will be undertaken and you will also be asked to sign a data controller form.

WILL I GET PAID FOR BEING A COUNCILLOR?

Councillors are not paid a salary. However, they do get allowances as a contribution towards the costs of being a councillor. The Basic Allowance is paid in recognition of your time and expenses incurred while on Plymouth City Council business. Each council sets its own rates and this is paid in 12 monthly installments. Plymouth City Council's current Basic Allowance is £10,044.84. If you take on a special responsibility, such as being appointed as a Cabinet member, you will receive an additional allowance which takes into account the additional responsibilities connected to the role. If you have caring responsibilities, either child or adult, expenses that are incurred while on 'approved' Council business will be met by the Council on production of receipts. You can claim for travel and meals while on 'approved' Council business outside the city boundaries.

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.

HELP FOR COUNCILLORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Council House is accessible for mobility-impaired people, and the committee rooms and Council Chamber are fitted with a loop system. Specialist office equipment may also be purchased for councillors with a visual or hearing impairment. You should contact the Democratic and Member Support Manager following the election to discuss any personal needs.

IS AN ELECTION DEPOSIT REQUIRED?

A deposit is not required for local government elections.

WHAT IS THE NOMINATION PROCESS?

Persons wishing to become candidates are either nominated by their registered political party or can act independently of any registered political party. Every candidate must be nominated on a Nomination Paper, which must be signed by 10 local government electors for the ward concerned in support of the nomination.

For further information on the candidate nomination process, please go to <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/councilanddemocracy/electoral/electedrepresentatives/howtobecomeacouncillor.htm>

WHAT IS THE TERM OF OFFICE?

The term of office is four years.

HOW DOES PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL WORK?

What type of council is Plymouth?

Plymouth is a complex and diverse organisation which provides over 300 services, involving thousands of products and activities, to the more than 250,000 residents of the city and other users. Plymouth is a unitary authority and as such is responsible for a variety of services –

- Statutory (services a council must ensure are provided, such as refuse collection)
- Regulatory (services that a council monitors and controls, such as licensing and planning)
- Discretionary (services that a council chooses to provide, such as leisure services)

The Council is also responsible for the implementation of a wide range of national legislation and regulation.

What are our goals and priorities?

The Council has adopted the vision statement of Plymouth 2020, along with public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, to work towards common aims for the city, as follows:

'By 2020 Plymouth will be one of Europe's finest, most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone.'

The aim is to make the city one that is healthy, wealthy, safe and wise.

The Council has agreed four priorities with its partners to achieve this. These are to:

- **Deliver growth:** Develop Plymouth as a thriving growth centre by creating the conditions for investment in quality new homes, jobs and infrastructure.
- **Raise aspirations:** Promote Plymouth and encourage people to aim higher and take pride in the city.
- **Reduce inequality:** Reduce the inequality gap, particularly in health, between communities.
- **Provide value for communities:** Work together to maximise resources to benefit customers and make internal efficiencies.

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out how these priorities will be delivered. The Corporate Plan can be accessed on the Members' Room.

The Council has a strong track record of achievement and in 2010 it won one of the top awards in local government, the Municipal Journal (MJ) Best Achieving Council of the Year.

The Budget

The Council has an annual budget which is made up by income received from a number of sources including Council Tax, a general Formula Grant and other government grants. Also the Council charges for some services, such as parking and planning applications. In 2010-2011, the Council will have spent £612 million on services for people in Plymouth.

WHAT SUPPORT WILL I GET?

Personal development and training

Plymouth City Council is committed to supporting the ongoing development of all its councillors. A structured programme of learning opportunities is provided to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for councillors to perform effectively as community leaders and as representatives of the Council, and to meet the challenges of ongoing change within local government.

Services and equipment

Councillors are offered the option of either a BlackBerry or a laptop (with home broadband connection unless you already have this facility at home), and will be provided with an access card to use the Theatre Royal car park and a permit for the Civic Centre car park.