

A GUIDE TO BECOMING A COUNCILLOR IN PLYMOUTH



WHAT DOES PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL DO?

The Council has three roles in delivering the vision for the city:

- Providing community leadership and advocating for the city
- Facilitating partnerships at all levels and connecting communities
- Commissioning services and delivering them through the most appropriate means

WHAT DO COUNCILLORS IN PLYMOUTH DO?

Plymouth councillors care passionately about the city they live or work in and the issues facing local people. They care deeply about tackling issues facing their communities. They want to make a difference on issues such as schools, crime, transport and the environment. They want to create a prosperous future for Plymouth people by supporting jobs and homes.

HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS?

Plymouth City Council is a unitary Council so this means it provides all the Council services within the city. Increasingly the Council works closely with its partners in health and wellbeing to take a whole system approach. The Council uses the Cabinet system where the Council Leader and a group of appointed councillors form a Cabinet which makes many of the decisions relevant to the work of the Council. Scrutiny committees act as the check and balance to the Cabinet which is essential in a democratic system. The City Council as a whole debates many key issues and has to ratify the most fundamental decisions.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A COUNCILLOR?

Councillors are expected to work within their ward to help residents and communities with issues, this is known as casework.

Councillors also sit on committees and discuss and debate issues to ensure that the way the Council delivers services meets the needs of local residents and businesses. This requires reading background papers, attending briefings and debating issues. Some Councillors undertake additional duties such as Charing Committee meetings or, if they are appointed to a Cabinet position, undertake duties relevant to their portfolio such as education, environment or finance

WHY BECOME A COUNCILLOR?

People usually become councillors because they want to make a difference in their community or city. Often they feel that the role the Council has in shaping the vision for the city combined with the fact that they are elected by local people gives them a unique opportunity to make a contribution.

DO I NEED ANY SPECIAL SKILLS OR EXPERIENCE?

No, councillors should reflect the composition of their community or city and bring the everyday experiences of their families, friends and community to help shape services.

WHO CAN BE A COUNCILLOR?

Anyone over 18 who is a British, Commonwealth or European Union citizen and is registered to vote in Plymouth or has lived, worked or owned a property in the city for at least 12 months before an election can stand.

However you can't be a councillor if you already work for a council in a politically restricted post, are subject to a bankruptcy, restrictions or interim order, have been sentenced to prison for three months or more (including suspended sentences) during the five years before election day or have been convicted of corrupt or illegal practice by an election court.

HOW MUCH TIME WOULD I NEED TO SPEND?

When we did a survey of our Plymouth councillors the average amount of time they spent on casework, preparation and committees was about 25 hours a week. It will vary. Those councillors who take on roles within the Cabinet or Chair a Scrutiny Committee would spend more time than this.

CAN I BE A COUNCILLOR AND HAVE A JOB?

Many Plymouth councillors are employed or self-employed. In recognition of that, many of our meetings start late-afternoon. There are, however, some meetings such as full Council which start earlier in the afternoon to ensure there is enough time for a full and frank debate. By law your employer must allow you reasonable time off to undertake your civic duties. The amount of time varies with the level of responsibility you take on. It is worth having a discussion with your employer before deciding to stand for election.

WILL I GET PAID FOR BEING A COUNCILLOR?

Councillors are not paid but receive an allowance in recognition of the work they undertake on behalf of the Council. Each council sets its own allowances. There is a schedule of Plymouth City Council allowances which varies with the responsibilities that individual councillors accept. The schedule can be found at Appendix One (1) of the Council's Constitution: www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PCC_Constitution.pdf

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE A COUNCILLOR?

We want to ensure that people with disabilities are positively encouraged to be councillors. This can include adaptations to equipment. We would encourage anyone with a disability with an interest in standing to be a councillor to discuss their potential needs with Democratic Services.

Being a councillor is not a full-time job and may not affect any benefits you receive, but individual cases will vary so do check this with your benefits office.



WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO NEW COUNCILLORS?

All new Plymouth City Councillors receive an induction programme to explain how things work. The Welcome and Induction Day will be on Tuesday 7 May. They also have the full support of the Democratic Services staff who are happy to help. All councillors receive a mobile phone and computer to support their work as a modern councillor. We help support councillors to use this equipment and to use social media as an additional way of engaging their residents.

ELECTORAL CYCLE IN PLYMOUTH

Plymouth City Council holds elections in three out of every four years. At each election a third of the seats are contested. The Councillors elected will each serve a four year term in office. The Council has 20 wards and 57 Councillors so in most years each ward has a councillor up for election.

NEXT STEPS TO BECOMING A PLYMOUTH COUNCILLOR

If you are interested in standing for election to be a councillor you can do so as a candidate for a political party or as an independent. Many parties do select their candidates to stand for Council seats well in advance but it is worth getting in touch to find out. The parties will help candidates with the nomination process.

HOW TO BE NOMINATED TO STAND FOR ELECTION?

Whether you have been selected by a party or are standing as an independent candidate, you must make sure that you are officially nominated as the election date draws nearer. This means getting 10 people to sign your nomination papers. These people must be registered to vote in the ward where you want to stand. You can get the papers from Plymouth City Council's Electoral Service. You must also give your consent in writing to your nomination. All the necessary documents must be submitted 19 working days before the day of the election which for City Council Elections in May will be the Wednesday 3 April at 4pm. For more information on this contact Electoral Services on 01752 304866 or email ero@plymouth.gov.uk



