

Become a Councillor

Community, parish and town councillors represent the people living in their local area at the closest level to the community. When decisions are being made they are there to put your views across.

Further information can also be found [here](#).

What is a Councillor?

Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or (mainly in smaller parishes) the entire parish or town council area. They are generally elected by the public every four years.

What do Councillors do?

Councillors have three main components to their work:

- decision making
- monitoring
- getting involved locally

Decision Making

Through meetings and attending committees with other elected members, councillors decide:

- which activities to support
- where money should be spent
- what services should be delivered
- what policies should be implemented.

As well as attending meetings, councillors should be prepared to get involved in the meetings.

Monitoring

Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.

Getting Involved Locally

As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their community and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available.

This may include:

- going to meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations
- going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community
- taking up issues on behalf of members of the public
- running a surgery for residents to bring up issues
- meeting with individual residents in their own homes

Visiting your council is the best way to find out what happens there. Give your local parish council clerk a call and find out when its next public meeting happens. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council business but not participate unless the council agrees to this. Most councils have a public participation section on their agenda.

How Much Time Does it Take Up?

Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three to four hours a week. Obviously there are some councillors who spend quite a lot more time than this - and some less, but in the main, being a community, parish and town councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community, and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

Am I Qualified?

Yes - most people are. However there are a few rules. You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and
- on the “relevant date” (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over; and additionally:
- on the “relevant day” a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand; or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area; or
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area; or
- during that 12 month period resided in the council area

In the case of a sitting member of a parish or community council you can also satisfy the criteria to be elected if you have lived in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole of the 12 months preceding the “relevant day”.

You cannot stand for election if you:

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine
- you work for the council you want to become a councillor for (but you can work for other local authorities, including the principal authorities that represent the same area)

Councillors can be automatically disqualified if they do not attend meetings for six consecutive months. To avoid this councillors need to submit reasons for their non attendance **and** their council has to accept and minute the reasons for non-attendance. If their reasons are not accepted they face automatic disqualification.

How to Become a Councillor

Parish councillors are elected by the public and serve four-year terms. Following elections, councils appoint a chair, or town mayor in town councils.

Parish councillors were unpaid positions until 2004 when allowance schemes were introduced to encourage more people to stand. Allowances tend not to be very large and are paid at the discretion of the individual councils. More often than not parish councils choose to maintain a strictly unpaid status.

The Election Procedure

Ordinary elections of local councillors take place on the first Thursday in May every four years.

If you are interested in becoming a councillor it is advisable to attend a few parish council meetings to make sure the role of a councillor is what you expect and of interest to you. You will then need to complete a nomination form and be aware of the election process for May 2014.

Nomination Process

A prospective candidate must deliver or send by post to the Returning Officer a valid nomination paper. This form is obtained from the Officer employed by Rugby Borough Council. The candidate's surname, forenames, residence and description (if required) must be entered and his or her number and prefix letter from the current register of electors. The Returning Officer has a copy of this register, and the clerk of the local council normally has one.

The nomination paper must also contain similar particulars of a proposer and a seconder. They must be electors for the area for which the candidate seeks election (i.e. the parish, community or town or the ward if it is divided into wards): they must sign it.

What Next?

The Rugby Borough Council Returning Officer is the person responsible for the conduct and arrangement for community, parish and town council elections. If you are considering becoming a candidate for election it could be wise to contact the Returning Officer to obtain more detailed information.

For more information about what life is like as councillor contact the [Warwickshire Association of Local Councils](#) or alternatively the clerk to your local community, parish or town council. To contact the Clerk to Wolston Parish Council [look here](#).

By-Elections

Occasionally a seat becomes vacant mid-term due to reasons such as resignation or death. If so the council can hold a by-election.

By election notices must be prepared by the council and advertised for 14 days (not including Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday, a Bank Holiday and a day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning) in conspicuous places within the parish or community.

If within 14 days after public notice has been given, at least ten electors give written notice to the proper officer of the principal authority of a request for an election to fill the vacancy, then a by-election must be held.

This need not be the case where the vacancy occurs within six months before the date when the councillor in question would have regularly retired (e.g. four days after the next ordinary election).

If no by-election is called by electors of the parish area then the council may then co-opt members to the council. The council may co-opt whom it pleases to fill a vacancy, provided the person is qualified to be a councillor (see "Am I Qualified" above). The person co-opted must receive a majority of the votes of those councillors present and voting at the meeting where the co-option takes place.