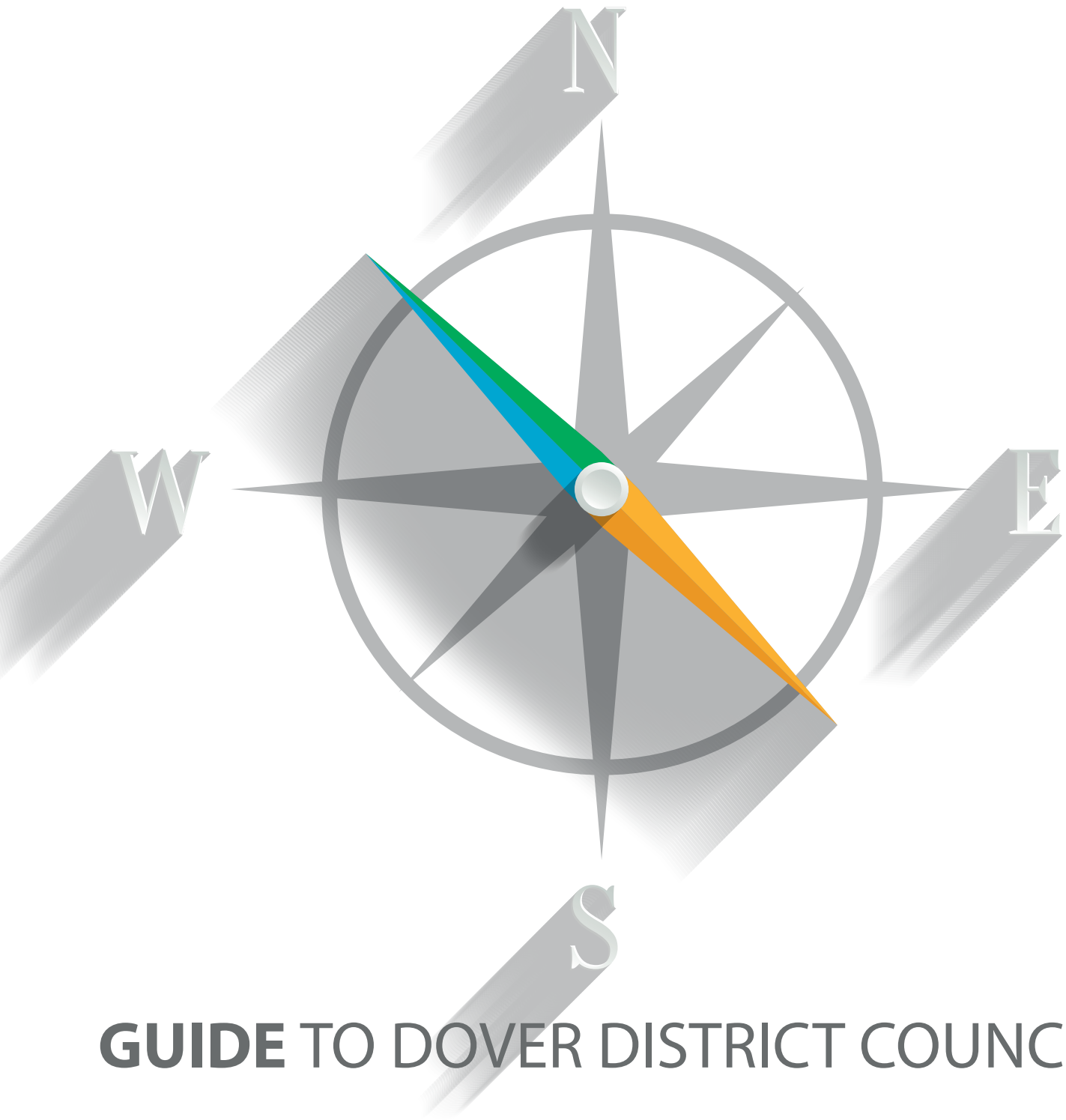




LIFE AS A DISTRICT COUNCILLOR & HOW TO BECOME ONE



GUIDE TO DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

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 electoral district (for other criteria see How do I Become a Councillor?).

Being a councillor is a rewarding, and often challenging, 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 commitment and hard work. On a daily basis, 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 your time – on top of the demands of your personal and professional life.

As well as dealing with residents' letters, e-mails and telephone calls, you will want to go out and talk to people in the community and, sometimes, meet residents at home. Some councillors also hold regular drop-in surgeries, where residents can discuss their problems or concerns face to face. As well as attending Council and committee meetings, you will be expected to attend meetings of your political group (if you have one). All of these duties are likely to take up sizeable tracts of your time and should not be underestimated. That said, how much time you devote to Council work is largely up to you, and depends upon the number of commitments you take on.

HOW DO I BECOME A COUNCILLOR?

The majority of people become councillors as a result of joining a political party. However, a small number stand for election as Independents. The nomination process commences between five and seven weeks prior to the election, and will begin on 21 March and end on 4 April for the May 2023 election.

Are there any restrictions?

You must be:

- 18 years of age on the day of your nomination **and**
- a British citizen, Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a Member State of the European Union and not require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom or have leave to remain in the United Kingdom **and**
- registered as a local government elector for Dover District **or**
- have occupied, as owner or tenant, land or premises in the District during the preceding twelve months **or**
- have had your principal or only place of work during the preceding twelve months in the Dover District **or**
- have resided in the Dover District during the whole of the preceding twelve months.

You cannot:

- be a paid officer of Dover District Council
- be holding a politically-restricted post (as defined under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989)
- be subject to a bankruptcy restriction order
- have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 3 months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years prior to election day
- have been convicted of corrupt or illegal practices by an election court
- stand as a councillor if you have been disqualified under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 78A of the Local Government Act 2000 or Section 34 of the Localism Act 2011

Are any qualifications needed?

Diverse groups tend to make better-informed decisions, so it is important that councils not only represent the communities they serve, but also have a wide range of skills and experience.

There are no specific formal qualifications required to become a councillor. However, having or being able to develop the following skills, knowledge and attributes will help you in your role:

- **Communication Skills** These include listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, the ability to accept alternative points of view as well as the ability to negotiate, mediate and resolve conflict
- **Ability to Engage with your Local Community**
The ability to relate to and deal with the public in a professional and timely manner; having regard to all aspects of equality and diversity
- **Problem-Solving and Analytical Skills** This includes being able to get to the root of an issue and thinking of different ways to resolve it
- **Ability to Work Professionally and Effectively with Council Officers and Outside Organisations**
The ability to maintain a good working relationship with officers and outside organisations is essential in order to be a productive and effective councillor
- **Community Leadership** Councillors have a key role to play in helping their residents shape the place they live in
- **Organisational Skills** These include being able to plan and manage your time, keep appointments and meet deadlines

You might also have specific skills and knowledge acquired from professional experience or from working with other groups, such as:

- An understanding of the needs of specific groups such as children or senior citizens
- An understanding of financial management and reporting processes
- Legal and regulatory systems or procedures

As well as the skills outlined above, familiarity with e-mail and the internet is important as a good deal of correspondence is exchanged electronically. If you think that you do not have all the skills and competences required, you will be helped to acquire them through training courses (including on-line courses). A Councillor Job Profile is available separately.

NOMINATION AS A COUNCILLOR

Once you have decided to stand for election as a district councillor, you will need to be proposed and seconded by 2 people, and have a further 8 people act as assentors to your nomination. All of these people must be on the register of electors for the ward in which you wish to stand. In addition, they may not subscribe to more nomination papers than there are vacancies to be filled in the ward. Please note that the elector number of each of the people nominating you must be shown correctly against the person's name; a mistake could invalidate the nomination paper. A copy of the Nomination Form should be completed, with the name and signature of each assentor. You may not stand for more than one ward in the same district.

At the same time as submitting the Nomination form, you will need to complete a Home Address form which comes in two parts, and a Consent to Nomination form. The second part of the Home Address form is optional, and allows you to have 'Dover' as your address instead of your actual address, in case you do not wish those details to appear on public notices and ballot papers. The first part of the Home Address form and the Consent to Nomination form are compulsory; they set out the grounds on which the candidate is qualified to stand and require the signature of a witness. The consent must be signed within one calendar month before the last day for delivery of nomination papers.

Association with a Political Party

If you wish to use the name and emblem of a registered political party, you will first need to obtain a certificate of authorisation, issued by or on behalf of the registered nominating officer of the party. This, together with a written request to use a registered party's emblem, must be delivered to the Returning Officer by close of nomination. Details of registered political parties and their registered emblems, together with links to their websites, can be found at:

<http://search.electoralcommission.org>

Independent Candidates

The law limits the description candidates can use. Unless you are standing on behalf of a political party, you may only use the word 'Independent' or have no description at all.

Election Agents

A candidate may appoint an election agent, but equally can opt to act as his/her own agent. It is the agent's responsibility to ensure that forms are returned on time, and that a clear and accurate record of financial expenditure is maintained. If an election agent's appointment is not received by 4pm on the 19th working day before the day of election, the candidate is deemed to be his or her own agent. Please note that candidates acting as their own agent will have their home address printed on a public notice even if they have completed part two of the Home Address form.

Register of Electors

Every candidate is entitled to receive a copy of the Register of Electors for the ward for which they are standing. However, you may only use it for your election work. (Please note: It will not be available until after the Notice of Election has been published). In order to obtain your copy you are required to read and sign an undertaking regarding restrictions on the use of the register.

Election Expenses

Expenses incurred by candidates on publicity material, property, services or items for the election campaign will not be reimbursed and are the candidate's responsibility. However, if you are a member of a political group, you may find that financial help is available from the group. It is important that you keep all receipts for expenditure incurred, since all candidates are required to submit an election expenses return. There is a limit on the amount that can be claimed for election expenses; candidates will be advised of this at the time.

Information and Advice

You will receive all the necessary paperwork in a Nomination Pack. There is a significant amount of paperwork involved in nomination but help, advice and guidance will be provided by the Council's Electoral Services staff from the outset. For more information on how to stand as a councillor, please contact our Elections Team on 01304 872344

The rules and regulations governing candidature can be complex. You are therefore also advised to look at the website of the Electoral Commission

(www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-in-england)

and review the relevant legislation where appropriate.

AND AFTER I HAVE BEEN ELECTED?

The role of the councillor is varied. The essential tasks and responsibilities shown below have been taken from guidance issued by the Local Government Association.

Representing the People

As a councillor you have been elected to represent your community. This will mean being the voice for your area and standing up for groups and individuals within that area, whether they voted for you or not. You will be expected to undertake enquiries on behalf of individual constituents with personal problems or concerns (known as 'casework') and, on occasions, surgeries and home visits. In your role of community representative, you will need to be aware of the wider needs of the community, as well as individual concerns. You will also be responsible for communicating Council policy and decisions to people in your community. Whilst you will not be expected to be on duty 24 hours a day, you will need to manage constituents' enquiries in such a way that they feel you are available to listen to their views or concerns. For more information, it would be worthwhile speaking to a current councillor on how they manage their workload and keep in contact with their constituents.

Code of Conduct

One of the most important things to bear in mind is that, as soon as you have been elected, you will be open to public scrutiny, and expected to maintain very high standards when acting as a councillor. You must sign to agree to abide by the Model Code of Conduct, the purpose of which is to ensure that councillors meet the highest standards of probity and accountability. The implications of this will be explained to you, as will the concept of declarations of interest.

Decision-Making

Councillors have a central part to play in making decisions that affect their ward and the district. Those councillors not on the Cabinet will be involved in decision-making through their participation at full Council meetings and membership of regulatory committees such as Planning or Licensing. In addition, you will be able to influence the Council's policies and strategies by participating in Overview and Scrutiny Committees, other committees such as Governance and the Dover Joint Transportation Advisory Board, Advisory Groups and by interaction with Cabinet members.

You will be required to attend Council meetings, which are held according to a yearly schedule www.dover.gov.uk/meetings

In addition, you will normally be a member of at least one of the committees. As a newcomer, familiarising yourself with committee work will take time but, once established, you may be asked to take on extra commitments, such as becoming a member of the Cabinet or the Governance Committee. Details of the Council's committees and their membership may be found at www.dover.gov.uk/committees

Community Leadership/Forming Partnerships

A major element of a councillor's role is getting involved with the local community, and passing on your knowledge and contacts through which residents can try to influence what happens in their environment. By working with other groups and organisations you will be better equipped to serve your community. Creating links, and establishing good relations, with organisations such as the police and the health service will make it easier to speak to them on behalf of your constituents. Effective partnership working is often a real challenge for all those involved, but councillors play a key role in ensuring that the interests of their communities are served by the numerous partnerships that exist across local government.

Political Accountability

As a councillor you will take part in collective decision-making, and are therefore accountable for your actions. If you are part of a group within the Council, you will need to be prepared to answer for the actions of the group as well as yourself.

Representing the Council

A councillor can be asked to represent the Council on an outside body, for example an environmental management body or a charity. In some cases you will be required to represent the views of the Council and report back to the Council on what has happened, but in others (e.g. as a charity trustee) you will be expected to act solely in the body's interests. Guidance will be provided for councillors serving on outside bodies.

Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010 and gives protection from discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and gender reassignment. Public bodies are required under the legislation to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Understanding equality issues and being aware of some of the steps the Council is taking to challenge inequality is a key part of a councillor's role.

Sources of Information

The following sources of information may be of help:

- (i) Local Government Information Unit - www.lgiu.gov.uk
- (ii) Local Government Association - www.lga.gov.uk
- (iii) National Association of Local Councils - www.nalc.gov.uk
- (iv) Operation Black Vote (black democracy pressure group) - www.obv.org.uk
- (v) The Electoral Commission - www.electoralcommission.org.uk

PAYMENT, TAX AND SOCIAL SECURITY

How much does a Councillor get paid?

Councillors all receive a basic allowance which is designed to defray the cost of being a councillor. However, some Members of the Council receive an additional allowance to reflect the fact that they hold positions of greater responsibility. For 2022/2023 these are currently:

Basic Allowance - £5,000 per annum

Special Responsibility Allowance - from £232 to £18,000 per annum (according to the position held)

Do allowances count as income for taxation or social security purposes?

Most allowances do. It is important that they are declared as income for the purposes of any tax return or social security claim.

Am I allowed to take time off from my employment to carry out my council duties?

Yes, employers are required under the Employment Rights Act 1996 to provide reasonable time off for public duties.

Will I get paid time off?

There is no legal requirement for an employer to pay a councillor for the time they take off for public duties. Most employers do pay their staff, but will often expect an employee to make up the time lost.

Travel and Subsistence Allowance

You are able to claim reimbursement for attendance at meetings when you are a member of that committee, or have been appointed as substitute for another Member who cannot attend. There is a standard claim form, which will be given to you either on paper or electronically. This must be returned to Democratic Services Section by the 25th of each month, together with any relevant receipts, and within three months of the claim arising. Travel and subsistence allowance may also be claimed for attendance at some outside bodies meetings (to which you have been appointed by the Council), training courses and specified seminars/conferences. Unless arranged by Democratic Services Section, attendance at external training courses and seminars/conferences not detailed in the Council's Constitution should be cleared in advance with the Democratic Services Section.

Dependants' Carer's Allowance

This allowance is payable for expenses incurred by Members for the care of their children or dependants whilst attending meetings. Democratic Services Section can provide further information.

WHAT HELP WILL I GET?

Who will support me?

Before, during and after the election you will be advised and helped by officers in the Council's Democratic Services Section, which is responsible for Councillor induction, training, development and support, as well as a wide range of duties associated with the administration of Council meetings and elections.

What kind of help can I expect?

Those elected will be required to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, and will be given an information pack to take away. This has been developed by the Democratic Services Section, and contains both general information and details specific to Dover District Council.

Shortly afterwards there will be a full induction programme for all councillors which will introduce you to senior officers and give you an outline of the council's work.

Is there any training?

Councillors are provided with a variety of development opportunities throughout their 4-year term of office. These will usually be delivered in-house, by either officers or external facilitators. We occasionally run courses in conjunction with neighbouring authorities in order to reduce costs and increase networking. This may therefore mean travelling to Canterbury, Folkestone or Thanet. From time to time members are sent on courses outside the county.

This Council has determined that every councillor who is appointed to serve on a quasi-judicial committee must first have received appropriate training. The Planning, Regulatory and Licensing Committees are classed as quasi-judicial committees. In addition, members of the Governance and General Purposes Committees are also required to have undergone training before sitting on the committee.



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