



becoming a  
**co-operative councillor**  
scotland



the scottish co-operative party

local



# In this guide

Foreword	3	How do I become a Scottish Labour & Co-operative councillor?	10
Introduction	4	Being a Co-operative councillor	14
What is a councillor, and what do they do?	5		
What is involved in being a councillor?	7		

## Information and support

### The Scottish Co-operative Party

The Co-operative Councillor Hub provides information and support for Councillors and those seeking election

[www.party.coop/local](http://www.party.coop/local)

### Get active in your local party

Your local branch is the hub for much of the Party's activity, so it's a good idea to get active in yours as soon as you join.

Many organise campaign sessions, policy discussions and socials, as well as selecting and campaigning for Co-operative Party candidates. Your branch secretary should be able to let you know what is coming up and how you can get involved.

Got a question? Need help or advice? Contact Richard McCready, Scottish Co-operative Party Political Officer [scotland@party.coop](mailto:scotland@party.coop) or 07803 011693



# Foreword



At a time of unprecedented pressure on local government, co-operative councillors across the UK are pioneering a new approach that puts people before privatisation or profit.

They are at the forefront of engaging local communities, promoting the co-operative economy and finding solutions that promote collaboration. Everyday they are making the co-op difference in their community and council.

This pamphlet is aimed at those that want to follow in their footsteps. To take the next step to represent their community and seek solutions to some of the big issues facing local government. The Co-operative Party will help and support you on that journey and I look forward to working with you.

**Cllr Emma Hoddinott**

Local Government Officer

# Introduction

This guide has been produced for Co-operative Party members and supporters who are considering standing as potential Co-operative Party candidates in local council elections.

It contains information about how councils work, how councillors contribute to this, and how the Labour & Co-operative Party select and support its candidates. It also explains what's involved in being both a candidate and a councillor, and suggests steps you can take to help you decide whether getting involved is something you would be able to do.

Being a Scottish Co-operative & Labour Party councillor is both a great privilege and a great responsibility, carrying on an electoral tradition from 1927 of standing joint candidates.

The electorate and the Co-operative Party rightly expect high standards from its representatives, and the job of representing communities and co-operators can be time consuming and challenging, but it can also be hugely rewarding. It gives you an opportunity to be part of shaping the future of your community, and to be part of getting services and how they are organised and delivered right; whilst championing co-operative principles.

You may already be a campaigner, community activist, member of a supporters' trust or co-operative. If so, you have a great basis for taking up public office, and becoming a Co-operative councillor can be a great next step. But all kinds of other experiences

 **Baille Angela Blacklock**

City of Edinburgh Council



"In 2012 Labour took control of City of Edinburgh Council in coalition with a smaller SNP group. Labour in Edinburgh stood on a Cooperative manifesto and we have delivered on many of the promises we made. We have introduced an open budget process which goes out to consultation in the Autumn, months before any decisions are made. We have also introduced participatory budgeting in some areas where we award grants to local organisations for one off projects and we are looking at widening this out.

We have regular conferences in City of Edinburgh Council to see how far we are getting with our cooperative aims. Labour and Cooperative Councillors meet up on a regular basis to share good practice and ideas"

are also invaluable, and you should never underestimate what you have to offer.

As you will see from this guide, becoming a councillor can be both useful to your community and stimulating for you.

# What is a councillor, and what do they do?

Councillors are elected by communities (organised into geographic areas called wards) to represent them and to run their local authority.

Councillors are expected to be active in the life of their local community and act as the voice of their constituents, raising any local concerns with the local council on a range of matters related to the work of the council. This work includes raising income (mainly through the collection of council tax, but also through commercial activity), service provision (for example child protection, social services, dustbin collection, highway maintenance) and representing the authority's interests at local and regional level.

Co-operative councillors are also expected to represent the Party and its policies, and to feed back to local parties about what is happening.

Councillors are also often expected to work with politicians at a national level and to work with them on issues of local importance which have national implications.

Those elected to leadership roles in the council will be expected to take the lead on strategy for the future of the local area (for example, regeneration and planning) and to articulate a vision for that local area.

Councillors are normally elected for a four year term, however those elected in 2017 will serve for five years.

 Cllr Mary Montague

East Renfrewshire Council



"I am proud to be part of the co-operative movement and to show this in my title as 'Scottish Labour and Co-operative Councillor', my values and in my practice. I believe that through mutualism we create fairness, social justice and a better society locally and internationally. As a co-operator I am a strong advocate of the value of co-operative working, Fair Trade, credit unions, housing and other co-operatives."

They are often referred to as 'members' of the council. Being an elected member is a uniquely rewarding experience where you can make a real difference to the lives of local people.

The local authority (or council) is controlled by either the political party which has a majority of councillors (overall control) or if no one party has a majority there may be a coalition of parties or a minority administration. The councillor's role will vary depending on who is in control and who is in opposition, but

generally speaking will include some or all of the following broad responsibilities:

- Developing strategies and plans for the area, balancing different needs, identifying priorities and ensuring that resources are used wisely and effectively.
- Providing democratic accountability for public services and ensuring that those who deliver services are accountable in delivering quality and value for money.
- Bringing together individuals and agencies in the area – and across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors – to tackle social, economic and environmental challenges.
- Carrying out specific legal or ‘regulatory’ duties and ensuring sufficient scrutiny of council plans, policies, decisions and spending.
- Acting as community leaders in getting local people involved in all aspects of decision making and the shaping of services in line with our co-operative values.

Councillors are also expected to hold advice surgeries for constituents, attend regular Labour Group meetings and play a full part in the life of the Labour and Co-operative parties locally.

A significant part of all these responsibilities is the work that councillors do at a neighbourhood level, representing the people of their electoral ward. There is good evidence that councillors who develop and nurture a good reputation in their ward earn the respect of the electorate, who – in turn – repay them at the ballot box. In itself, this is a compelling

reason for those involved in co-operative action at a local level to take forward the role of the ward councillor.

But the need to be effective as a ward councillor is about much more than this. Representing people, understanding the issues and concerns they face and being equipped with the skills, confidence and ability to take action and make a difference is the most important task that any councillor undertakes. Significantly, it is also often the role that local people value most.

Think about the ward you would like to represent. How much do you know about it, and about the communities that live in it? Most wards cover more than one village, area or community:

- How much do you know about the ones you don’t live in?
- What are the issues that people are concerned about?
- What are the particular challenges and problems they face?

### Action Point

Explore the Co-operative Party Local Government Hub [local.party.coop](https://local.party.coop) and find out what other Co-operative Councillors are doing to make a difference in their area.

Remember that you don’t need to have the answer to everything, but people will expect you to know what the questions are.

# What is involved in being a councillor?

Being a Co-operative councillor can be a rewarding experience. It requires individuals who are able, willing, and prepared to scrutinise or take decisions about matters that affect the lives of citizens and who are prepared to be accountable for those decisions.

Being democratically elected gives councillors a special status in public life; it brings with it opportunities to contribute to society, but also responsibilities to act fairly and within the law.

Together with Labour & Co-operative MPs, MSPs, AMs, town and parish councillors, Co-operative councillors are also responsible for the public reputation of the Co-operative Party in the area. There are therefore a number of things you need to think about before you decide you want to take this on.

## What's the time commitment?

Being a councillor is very worthwhile, but it does also require time. You will need to balance your council, Labour Party and Co-operative Party commitments with your personal and professional life, and this can sometimes cause conflict. For this reason, you need to talk to the people around you before you stand and make sure that they understand (as far as possible) what you are intending to take on.

You will also need to talk to your employer, if you have one, and explain that you will need some time off to carry out public duties if you are elected.

There are legal requirements about this, which the council will be able to advise you about, but you will still need to manage your time carefully.

If you have caring responsibilities you will also

need to think about how to manage those. That said, there are many people looking after children or dependent adults who make excellent local councillors, particularly since they often have direct personal knowledge of the services they are responsible for providing or overseeing. Help and advice is also often available from a variety of sources.

### Action Point

Make a list of all the things you currently do. Think about how you could manage your activities and commitments so as to add council and political work.

Is everything you do essential? Could you combine things? Who might help you with some of them? Who do you need to talk to about it?

## Can I afford to do it?

Councillors in Scotland receive a salary, the basic rate for 2016-17 is £16,893, further payments are made to councillors who take on roles with more responsibility.

Think about your own financial situation, taking into account what you might lose (for example through having to take unpaid leave, or through benefit changes) as well as what you might gain. Make sure that you understand the financial implications for both you and your family of you becoming a councillor.

Your local Co-operative Party may also provide some financial assistance with your election campaign.

## What training do I need?

It is important that both the Co-operative and Labour Party have councillors who reflect and represent the communities they serve, and have a broad range of skills and life experience.

You don't have to be highly educated or have a profession. Co-operators have transferable skills to help them become good Councillors. Skills gained through being part of a co-op or supporters' trust, being active in community work, helping out your local credit union are all extremely helpful.

However, although you don't need any particular training to stand for election, you do need to think about what skills and attributes you have, and how they might help.

For instance, councillors are expected to be available to enable constituents to come to them with problems. This means that councillors need to have good listening skills,

the ability to represent someone, to keep confidences, and to resolve conflict.

Generally speaking, you need to have at least some of the following skills:

- communication
- public speaking
- negotiation
- problem solving and analysis
- team working
- time management
- community activity
- political.

Remember that knowledge and skills are not the same thing; it does not matter at this stage if you do not have a detailed working knowledge of how local government finance works, because the council will make training on that available to you if you are elected. What does matter, however, is that you have a willingness to learn and an ability to bring together many of the different strands and demands that go to make up the annual budget process.

### Action Point

Make a list of the skills (as opposed to knowledge) you think you have. Ask friends and relations what they think. Think about how all the things you do in different areas of your life have helped to develop the kinds of skills listed above.

Be honest, but don't underplay yourself – most people have a much wider range of skills than they think they have.

## **Cllr David Rodgers** – From co-op to council

I became involved in the Co-operative movement while I was a student training to be a biology teacher in the early 1970s, setting up housing co-operatives for students and other young people. For 32 years, I was the chief Executive of CDS Co-operatives, which I grew to become the largest co-operative housing association and service agency in England.



I also represented the UK on the board of Co-operative Housing International, the global organisation that represents housing co-operatives that are members of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). In 2014 I was asked to edit the ICA's new Guidance Notes to the Co-operative Principles. In recognition for this work I was appointed by the Board of the ICA to be an expert member of its Principles Committee.

That year, my wife and I were asked if we would stand in the ward where we live because the local Labour Party did not have any 'credible' candidates who wanted to stand. This was because ours is a ward that had not elected a Labour councillor for fifty years and was therefore considered 'unwinnable'. There

is a message here: never consider any ward to be unwinnable. We ran a brief but effective campaign and won two out of the three council seats there.

As a Co-operative councillor the first difference you can make is as a good local councillor responsive to the needs of residents and enabling them to deal with matters that have a real impact on their lives.

Housing cases are the most common. Even where it is not possible to prevent a family losing their home because there is currently no security of tenure in the private rented sector, a local councillor can help people cope and navigate the bureaucracy. Road safety, schools, parking, planning applications and the refuse service are also key local issues.

I have also persuaded my colleagues in the Labour Group to look at the potential of co-operative enterprise and what the council can do to support its development. This is an important part of our vision for the borough's economy and a way of achieving our council's objective of making Ealing a more prosperous borough for our residents. This year I chaired a scrutiny panel on co-operative enterprise which has made positive recommendations about what our council can do to support the development of co-operatives, particularly credit unions, housing co-operatives, social care co-operatives and worker co-operatives.

### **David's Top Tip**

Be prepared to work hard to represent your constituents who put their trust in you and gave you a democratic mandate to represent them. But if you work hard and are a responsible and rational local politician, local politics being the art of the possible in applying the resources available to the council, you can achieve a great deal to help constituents and promote the development of co-operatives.



# How do I become a Labour & Co-operative councillor?

Before you can be a councillor you must get selected then elected. The Scottish Labour Party stands candidates in every ward, and is always looking for good new people to get involved.

The local Co-operative Party then decides if it wants to support selected candidates to also stand as a joint candidate for the Co-operative Party. Like everything else, there is a procedure to go through, but it is not complicated and there are lots of points at which you are offered help and support.

## Getting selected as a Scottish Labour Party candidate

The first thing that will happen is that the Labour Party will invite people to express an interest in becoming candidates, and some training will be provided. After that, there is a more formal (but straightforward) process in which you fill in an application, and are then interviewed by the Labour Party so that they

can decide whether you are suitable to be a Labour candidate, and, if so, if you are ready. If you are accepted – which most people are – your name will then be added to the Panel of Candidates.

The application form will ask you about your knowledge of local government, the political situation in your area, and your campaigning experience. It will also ask you to agree to accept the Labour whip (i.e. to maintain collective responsibility and discipline if you're elected as a councillor), as well various questions around probity issues.

The interview will follow much the same lines, so be prepared to expand on whatever you have said in your written application rather than just repeat it.

The interview should not be too alarming; the Labour Party is keen to be understanding and helpful, and they also want to see as wide a diversity of people standing as possible.

Once you've been accepted onto the Panel of Candidates your name, contact details and statement will be circulated to Labour Party branches in the area for them to select candidates for the next set of elections. In a number of cases, branches may have existing councillors who may be re-selected, but others will be looking for new candidates.

The exact process varies from area to area but it is likely that it will involve you having to pitch to members at meetings about why you are the best person to be their candidate.

### Action Point

Start making notes for your application form and identifying your strengths and weaknesses – use examples that you have gained through being involved in the Co-operative movement.

## Getting selected as a Co-operative Party candidate

The Co-operative Party and the Labour Party have an electoral agreement meaning that we don't stand candidates against each other. As the Labour Party stand candidates in most elections, that means we stand joint candidates who seek election as 'Labour & Co-operative Party'.

To stand for election as a Labour & Co-operative Party candidate, you must be a member of both parties and have been formally selected by local parties in your area. Therefore, there are many Labour Councillors who are members of the Co-operative Party, but there are 600 who have been endorsed by both parties as a candidate and stood as Labour & Co-operative.

Your local Co-operative Party Council decides which candidates to select and will have a process in place to decide who to support – they might ask you to complete a short application form, come for an interview or address a meeting of members.

Normally you will apply to be a Co-operative Party candidate after you have been selected as a Labour Party Candidate, however some local Co-operative Parties may select a panel of potential candidates before the Labour selection is made.

### Tip

If you are unsure who to contact, visit [party.coop/local/register](https://party.coop/local/register) to register your interest. Your details will be passed on to the local Party for follow-up.

## Eligibility

Candidates should normally have been a member of the Co-operative Party for six months at the time of their selection and also be a member of a recognised co-operative society (like the Co-operative Group, Scotmid, a credit union or a supporter trust). Local parties may waive these rules, particularly if they discourage younger candidates or other under-represented groups.

You are more likely to be selected as a Co-operative Party candidate if you have been involved and supported the work of your local branch and campaigns, so it's a good idea to attend meetings and other local events. You will normally be expected to have attended at least one branch meeting in the last twelve months.

Candidates applying for repeat support should have attended and/or submitted reports to at least one party council or branch meeting in the past twelve months.

### Action Point

If you're not used to making speeches find someone who can help you practice.

Remember that you don't need to be an inspirational professional speaker, but you do need to be able to get your point across clearly and show people why you would be a good person to be their candidate for councillor.

Your background in the Co-operative movement will help show your skills to be a Councillor.

## Support

There may be some financial support available for standing as a Co-operative Party candidate. The amount of financial support will depend on the budget set by the local Party and how many candidates they approve. Any money to support your campaign will be paid to the local Labour Party election fund.

The party has an online Co-operative Councillors Hub that will provide advice and guidance on issues you may encounter and current campaigns. We also send regular email updates and hold events of interest to local government.

## The local Labour party selection meeting

Your speech is your opportunity to tell people about yourself, your achievements, and why you would be the best person to represent the Labour Party in that ward, so make sure that you prepare it thoroughly. Ask relatives and friends to help you with it – successful speeches are rarely solo efforts. You will have been told a time limit for the speech (usually five minutes, though it may sometimes be more) but you do not have to use up the whole time. Just make sure that what you do say counts!

Think, too, about the kind of questions you might be asked; what are the important issues in the area, and what kind of challenges is the council facing?

You don't need to know all the answers, but you should be able to demonstrate that you understand the question, and that, on key issues, you have an opinion.



## Getting elected as a councillor

Once you are selected, you then need to be elected. Between your selection and election day you will be expected to lead Labour's campaigning in your ward, and, in particular, to talk to voters and listen to their concerns. This can be done on the doorstep or by phone, and there are various kinds of events you can hold as well as leaflets and letters you can distribute.

You will have an agent (or campaign manager), and that person will be responsible for organising the detail of the campaign.

As polling day approaches things will get busier, and more will be expected of you, so remember to be proactive in making sure that you still have time for family and work.

If you are elected you will be expected to start immediately, so make sure in advance that people such as your family and employers know this.



### **!** Action Point

Look at the current Co-operative Party campaigns to help you get started in your local area. For example, if bus services are a concern, download our campaign pack which will help you raise the issue.

# Being a Co-operative Councillor

If you are elected you will take up office immediately, and although it may seem a little intimidating at first there will be training and support to help you settle in.

The council will run an induction for new councillors, and, in terms of the work in the ward, you will find that much of it will follow on naturally from the work you were doing before the election. You'll become part of the Co-operative Party Councillors network, which provides access to information and best practice from across the country, as well as providing opportunities to link up with existing Co-operative Party Councillors.

As indicated earlier, there are a number of key roles that councillors are involved in:

- serving the community
- representing the community
- working with others
- making rules and regulations

## Serving the community

Providing public services is the main function of the council. Local councils provide around 800 different services, from highways and adult social care services to education and refuse collection. Providing services to meet community needs requires the development of policies for services, as well as the planning, delivery and resourcing of them.

Councillors, therefore, have a key role as:

- policy-makers
- decision takers
- 'scrutineers' of the effectiveness of the council in delivering services.

### Fair Tax

The Fair Tax mark is a recognised standard that is awarded to organisations that are transparent about their tax affairs and pay their fair share of tax.

If your Labour Group is in control of the council, you could consider passing a model motion pledging your support to the initiative and aligning your council's procurement policies to support it.

If your Labour Group is in opposition, you can still ask questions in scrutiny about the council's policy on tax and how they promote good tax practice amongst the businesses they deal with. There is a Councillor's guide to Fair Tax here :

[www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/tax-justice/](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/tax-justice/)

## Representing the community

Councillors are elected and have democratic legitimacy. They represent all of the people within their community including those who did not vote for them.

Councillors, therefore, act as:

- representatives of their constituents
- community leaders, providing a focus for development and improvement within their ward and, in some cases, the council as a whole

The task of representing a group of several thousand local people can be complex because of the patterns of change in social and political life in recent decades. Understanding the nature of a ward is not always as easy as it seems.

The way that councillors carry out their ward duties can vary enormously, depending on their time, energy, interests and commitment. The sorts of activities that can help councillors to act as a bridge, or conduit, between the council and its communities will also be heavily influenced by the make-up and nature of the constituents concerned.

As such, there are no hard and fast rules about the best ways of representing people's views or engaging with them. However, some of the most common activities include:

### Understanding the ward

The demographics, the key issues facing local people and the way that services are being delivered.

## Representing local voices

Being a channel of communication between the communities served and the council and speaking up for the unheard, for example younger, older or disabled people.

### Communicating and influencing

Ensuring that the views of local people are taken into account when decisions are made by the council or outside bodies and matters are reported in the media.

### Managing casework

Listening and responding to requests from individuals and groups in the community, resolving problems and identifying failures in service delivery.

## Representing the Labour Party

You will also be expected by the Party to attend regular Labour Group meetings. The Labour Group consists of all the Labour councillors in the area, plus representatives from the local Party. The Group considers matters of policy (including the budget) and takes decisions about them which may be binding on members, and for which you will be expected to vote on at council meetings.

The Group will also elect a Leader and other office-holders to help run it. The Group may sometimes hold planning and away days to help members think through the practical and political implications of decisions. The only issues upon which the Group cannot take a collective decision are those known as 'quasi-judicial' or regulatory – that is, in areas like planning applications and licensing, or on issues which are deemed to be matters of conscience.

## Representing the Co-operative Party

As a Co-operative Party representative you are encouraged to promote co-operative solutions within your ward, Labour Group and Council. The Co-operative Councillor's Hub provides plenty of examples of what other Councillors are doing across the country.

You should also report back regularly to your local Co-operative Party about the work you are doing.

### Fairtrade Fortnight

Fairtrade Fortnight is the annual promotional campaign, when everyone from commercial partners to schoolchildren, producers to politicians, come together to talk about and raise awareness of Fairtrade.

Fairtrade Fortnight has been going since 1997 and happens every year around February /March time. It is a good opportunity to run events in your ward, for example holding a local Fairtrade coffee morning, or support events your local Co-operative Group are holding.

## Working with others

Councils not only need to plan and deliver its own services, but will often take the lead in drawing together the activities of a whole range of public bodies and the business and voluntary sectors in the area. This means identifying a common agenda and linking the plans of partner organisations with those of the council, to address the needs of communities collectively and effectively. A key

part of this is ensuring that partner agencies work collaboratively in sharing information and resources where it is feasible and sensible to do so.

## Making rules and regulations

Councils have a distinct role in acting as a legal and regulatory authority. This includes administering rules that Parliament and central government have laid down and making and administering its own rules (for example determining and enforcing local planning policies). Much of this work is carried out by the council's regulatory boards and committees and will vary depending on whether you are a Councillor on a parish, district, metropolitan or county council.

In making or administering rules that affect the rights and responsibilities of local people - and which include the granting or refusal of permissions - councillors who sit on relevant committees and panels, must:

- pay attention to relevant considerations (and ignore irrelevant ones)
- consider and weigh up the evidence on each issue on its merits
- act fairly and within the law.

## Knowing your ward

As we have seen, knowing as much as you need to about your ward is not always as easy as it seems. You may have lived in the area for many years. But the chances are that you will not know all of the communities who live there or all of their issues and concerns. If you are a new councillor, it is essential that you get to know the area you represent. The people who come to you looking for help can tell you quite a lot about the area, but you will need to find other ways of getting to know the key facts.



## **i** Local campaigns

Co-operative councillors may become involved in or lead local campaigns. This could include anything from campaigning for better buses to starting a credit union and might involve:

- some consultation to find out how widespread support for the idea is
- helping to organise a campaign group of those who can assist
- organising petitions or public meetings
- helping people to make presentations or ask questions at committees
- engaging the local media and publicising the campaign on websites or blogs.

### **Buses for people, not profit**

A half-hour drive from Oxford, on the edge of the Cotswolds lies the town of Witney, the heart of former Prime Minister David Cameron's parliamentary constituency.

Faced with huge cuts in funding from Conservative-run Oxfordshire County council, the existing bus operator argued it was no longer economical to run routes around the town and surrounding area.

Local Labour & Co-operative Councillor Laura Price organised a public meeting on her local estate, so people could voice their concerns.

Alongside Labour & Co-operative colleagues on the district council they're developing proposals for community transport in Witney, run for people rather than profit. Under their plans, a co-operative would be created to run the services on a not-for-profit basis.

They're using the Co-operative Party's #PeoplesBus campaign as inspiration. Drawing attention to the part that not-for-profit operators can play, and working to influence the government's upcoming Buses Bill to give community transport the support it needs to expand further.

Learn more at [act.party.coop/scotbuses](https://act.party.coop/scotbuses)

## Representing local voices

The task of representing a diverse and mobile mix of communities, groups and individuals can be tricky. But generally speaking, the broader your range of approaches to community contact, the more people you are likely to reach.

While representing individual voters, councillors often try to keep in touch with as wide a range of people in the ward as possible. This will involve going to meetings and events, meeting people on a one-to-one basis, and listening to different views about what is needed or what should be happening.

Occasionally there will be conflicts of interest requiring sensitive judgement, for example dog owners, parents of young children and walkers might disagree on the use of a local park. Representing these different views in an open and reasoned way will require you to be proactive in finding out as much as you can about the situation before coming to a view.

Because councillors represent all the people in the ward, not just the people who voted for them (or indeed who voted at all), you may well find yourself having to advocate for people whose views are under-represented, unspoken or frequently ignored, or with which you are not in complete agreement.

You may also find that local Labour or Co-operative members are in disagreement with

### Action Point

Find out if there are any co-operatives, mutuals or social enterprises in your ward and introduce yourself as the local Councillor.

what others in the local community want, or with what the council is doing. Navigating between differing opinions, and, where possible, bringing people together to find a way through is a key part of a councillor's job.

Because councillors are often one of the main link points between local people and the council, you will also need to be able to provide information as clearly as possible to help them to understand local government services and processes. This becomes easier once you are a councillor and understand them better yourself.

## Communicating and influencing

The biggest challenge for ward members is often in getting the council or an outside body to take local views into account when making decisions.

There are various ways of doing this, but the first requirement is to understand what those views are yourself.

People are much more inclined to listen and pay attention if they feel that the person speaking to them knows what they are talking about, is committed to getting the best outcome, and has credibility as an elected representative. Ways in which you can achieve this include:

- Preparing for meetings by studying the agenda and making sure you are properly informed and fully prepared about the issues to be discussed. Avoid 'hijacking' a meeting and raising issues which are pertinent to you but irrelevant to the debate.
- Playing an active part in the debate and forming sound conclusions based on

what is best for the community – and abiding by any majority decisions.

- Ensuring, with others, that the council's deliberations and decision-making procedures are properly managed – being robust in your scrutiny.
- Representing the whole electorate and not just those who voted for you; listening, and then representing, the views of the community when discussing council business and working with outside bodies.
- Maintaining proper standards of ethical behaviour as an elected representative of the people.

Another key feature of the communicating and influencing role is the impact that councillors have in the local media.

In a democracy, the media is a vital mechanism for ensuring the transparency of local political decision-making and for holding councils and elected members to account. Local press, television and radio journalists want a story to cover. These may

often be the main source of information on local government for both interested and disinterested citizens and councillors can use their communication and influencing skills to ensure that a balanced and accurate account is given to the media in the first instance.

## Managing casework

Some councillors find casework the best part of their role – the opportunity to sort out problems for people who are experiencing difficulties engaging with the council. For other councillors casework is a challenge. Casework can come from a variety of sources but all needs to be dealt with promptly and effectively.

Remember that you cannot please all of the people all of the time, and that you will not be able to solve all the problems people come to you with. Sometimes you will have to say 'no' to things people want you to do, and at others you will feel overwhelmed by the scale of some of the issues you are dealing with. Try to remember that so long as you do your best you will have done as much as anyone can reasonably expect of you.

## Acknowledgements

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# politics for people

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