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Interested in becoming a councillor?

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## Introduction

Interested in becoming a councillor?

Then read on and find out what it's all about and how you can stand for election.

All North West Leicestershire District Council seats are up for election on Thursday 5 May 2011. This offers you the perfect opportunity to stand as a representative of your local community and become a District Councillor (also known as an elected member). We hope that this pack will be used by anyone who is thinking of standing for election and is interested in finding out about the role of the councillor.

The local election process for North West Leicestershire District Council begins in March 2011 when a Notice of Election will be published in public places throughout the District. If you are thinking about standing as a candidate you will have to formally submit your nomination papers. Information about the nomination process and what candidates need to do is available further on in this pack.

## Why are councillors important?

Councillors play a key role in the district:

- they are a voice of the community, representing local people and communities
- they are champions of the users of local services
- they help shape future services for the benefit of local people, working in partnership with other organisations such as the police, voluntary community sector, health and other public bodies and the private sector
- they play a major role in making local government work by developing a better quality of life for the people of North West Leicestershire.



## Why become a councillor?

There are many reasons why people decide to become a local councillor:

- they want to make a difference and be involved in shaping the future of the local community
- they are concerned about the local area in which they live and want to ensure that their local community get the services needed
- they want to represent the views of local people and ensure that local community interests are taken into account
- they want to pursue their political beliefs
- they are concerned about one particular issue, for example care for older people, the lack of facilities in an area, or traffic congestion

For some, it is an extension of what they are already doing, as they are active in a political party, trade union, or school governing body, and they see the next step is to become a councillor.



**Councillor Richard Blunt** Appleby Ward Councillor Leader of the Council

I became a District Councillor as I am interested in planning issues. Planning can affect so many people's lives and I wanted to help sort out planning problems in the district.



#### **Councillor Matthew Blain**

Hugglescote Ward Councillor Deputy Leader of the Council

I became a councillor because I decided it was time to put something back into the community, to try and help create the opportunities for other people that I have been privelidged to enjoy. I did it because I wanted to make a difference, and in my small way do my bit to improve the quality of life across North West Leicestershire. I never dreamt of becoming Deputy Leader, but in this role I have been able to do things like keep council tax low across North West Leicestershire, roll out door-step glass recycling, transform Coalville's Christmas lights, and adopt the new 'building for life' development standards for new housing. I have been involved in launching a feelgood events programme that includes Christmas, St George's Day and the Miner's Gala.



#### **Councillor Graham Allman**

Ashby Holywell Ward Councillor Chairman of Corporate Scrutiny Committee

I decided to become a councillor as a way to use my experience for the betterment of fellow residents of the district in particular those who are less able to assist themselves. Also for political influencing of local and national government decision making.

To help strengthen local democracy North West Leicestershire District Council is very keen to attract people from a broad range of backgrounds to stand as a candidate.

#### **Still interested?**

You should find all the information you need in this booklet.

## Who can become a councillor?

To stand for election, on the day of nomination, you must be:

- 18 or over; and
- a UK, EU or commonwealth citizen;
- registered to vote in the District of North West Leicestershire; or
- for the whole 12 months preceding, you must have occupied, as owner or tenant, any land or premises in the district; or worked (as principal employment) in the district; or
- lived in the district

# Do councillors need any qualifications?

No, you do not need any specific qualifications to become a councillor. Life experience is probably the best thing you can bring to the role.

# Do I have to belong to a political party or group?

No, although the majority of people become councillors as a result of joining a political party. However some people stand for election as independents (candidates who do not belong to any political party).

There are 38 councillors serving on North West Leicestershire District Council and they are spread across four political parties. The political makeup You cannot stand if you:

- work for North West Leicestershire District Council;
- hold a politically restricted post for another authority;
- are bankrupt;
- have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) of 3 months or more within 5 years prior to the election;
- have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices;

of the Council (as at Sept 2009) is as follows:

Conservative	27
Labour	5
Liberal Democrat	3
British National Party	2
Independent	1
Total	38

The Conservative Group is currently in control of the Council. The Leader of the Conservative Group is the Leader of the Council. Labour are in opposition.

If you are thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular political party then you will need to be a member of that party's local organisation. Contact details are at the back of this book under Useful Contacts.

## **About North West Leicestershire District Council**

#### Our Aim

"North West Leicestershire will be a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home"

## **Our Strategic Aims**

## **Strong and Safer Communities**

To build, develop and lead communities alongside developing a self confident and proud North West Leicestershire, enabling people to feel they live in strong and safe neighbourhoods.

#### **Healthy Communities**

To reduce health inequalities within the district and working with partners to address difficult and engrained societal problems such as obesity, mental health, sexual health, smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse.

#### **Prosperous Communities**

Addressing the challenge of ensuring that North West Leicestershire's residents have the skills to benefit from the commercial opportunities that we help develop.

#### **Sustainable Communities**

Promoting the growth of North West Leicestershire within the constraints of our planet's finite resources. Sustainable communities are however, about more than just climate change and reflect the need for North West Leicestershire to grow but grow in a sustainable manner.

#### **Organisational Development**

Continually improving the Council to be efficient and effective in its work, gaining a reputation for the quality of whatever we set out to deliver.



Clock Tower, Coalville

## **Financial Accountability**

The Council operates a three-year budget strategy to give a degree of stability and direction in the Council's financial planning.

The budget strategy, flowing from the corporate plan, sets out the Council's over-riding financial policies and is revised on an annual basis.

## How decisions are made

All councillors meet together as the Council. These meetings are normally open to the public. Here, councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council appoints the Cabinet, which has, as a main role, the task of developing and implementing policy on behalf of the Council.

The Cabinet has to make decisions, which are in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision, which is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the full Council to decide. Key decisions, which are to be made, are published in the Cabinet's Forward Plan. Meetings of the Cabinet are open to the public, except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed.

A number of Scrutiny Committees monitor the decisions of the Cabinet and the implementation of policy. They can also recommend policies to the Cabinet and Council. They allow citizens to have a greater say in Council matters and are consulted by the Cabinet on developing policies.

Scrutiny Committees can call-in a decision that has been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Cabinet reconsiders the decision. The Council also appoints Regulatory Committees to perform the Council's regulatoryfunctionssuchasDevelopment Control (planning issues) and Licensing. The Council appoints other specialist committees from time to time.

The Council also has a Standards Committee to advise on the adoption and implementation of a Code of Conduct and Political Conventions for elected and co-opted Members. All Members have agreed to follow these so as to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Standards Committee ensures there is appropriate training and advice on the Code.



Planning Committee meeting

## What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to represent a number of local residents in an area called a ward.

The role of a councillor can be very varied and it is up to each individual councillor how they work.

Councillors have responsibilities to their ward, to the Council and to the community.

#### Ward responsibilities

- listen to and represent the views of the residents
- make sure services are delivered effectively in their ward
- try to secure extra resources for their ward
- help out individual ward members on specific issues, known as casework

As a councillor you will find that much of your time is taken up by contact with local people. This could be in the form of dealing with complaints or enquiries. Your role will be to listen, explain council policy and make sure that the policy has been carried out fairly according to official procedures. You will get help and support to deal with constituents' enquiries and complaints from officers in the Council.

As a ward representative you can represent views and issues associated with the Council on constituents' behalf. You could also be representing an individual or family at special appeals.

#### **Council responsibilities**

- help form policy
- help develop the Council's budget and agree the level of council tax
- make or scrutinise decisions

Your role on the Council as a whole is to plan, run, monitor and develop council business. Councillors are essential to deciding what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues and views.

As a councillor you will be a member of the Council, and could also be on the Cabinet, a Scrutiny Committee or a Regulatory Committee. You will meet with other councillors from all political groups, to debate and approve Council business in a formal setting. Most meetings are open to the press and public. There are written rules, which govern behaviour and procedures at these meetings called 'Procedure Rules' and these enable Councillors to take part effectively.

#### **Councillors as community leaders**

Over the course of the next decade, a number of changes are likely to occur that will impact on the way that society operates.

Addressing the changes will require strong local leaders able to listen to their community and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can improve their areas.

**Community leader** 

- stimulating local organisations and individuals to take up opportunities to express their views
- representing local level concerns and perspectives
- maintaining a link between the users and providers of services
- encouraging the community to organise services for themselves
- working with other community leaders in the voluntary, community and business sectors
- offering vision and direction to local groups an building support for that vision
- brokering agreements between different interests and partners
- contributing as an effective partner in neighbourhood arrangements, including those that deliver delegated function

As a front line Councillor, you will have a key role to play in this in representing and leading the communities in your ward, and working with neighbourhood governance arrangements such as the Area Committee or Neighbourhood Boards where they exist.

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have suggested that there are two key elements to this role:

#### **Community advocate**

- speaking up for and behalf on residents and groups
- encouraging residents to engage and participate
- participating in plan making and planning decisions
- communicating residents' concerns to the Council and other providers e.g. police

...but at the same time not losing sight of the strategic context of the Council area as a whole

Source: IDeA November 2005 The Neighbourhood Agenda and the Role of the Elected Member

#### **Community Forums**

One of the main ways you can engage with local residents, and work with partners to improve life in your ward is through your Community Forum. There are three areas in North West Leicestershire based on groupings of wards and are run by Leicestershire County Council. The Committees are chaired by councillors, but also involve other key agencies such as the police and health.

Community Forum meetings are for everyone living in the area, and are open to anyone to attend.



## How much time is involved in being a councillor?

It is for you to decide the level of commitment you are able to give to being a councillor. It also depends on your role within the Council and the number of duties you decide to take on. It could range from a few hours each week to a few hours each day at busier times.

Some of the issues you need to consider are:

- how your role as a councillor will impact on any family and personal relationships – you will need their support and understanding as you may be spending a lot of your spare time on Council business
- the people you represent will look to you for help in dealing with their problems. You are likely to receive a lot of post, emails and a great many telephone calls, and not every caller will telephone at what you might think is a reasonable hour!
- most councillors hold at least 1 drop in surgery each month, some hold 2 or even 3 surgeries each month. You may spend some of your time visiting constituents at their homes, or at the Council offices, and you may also have to meet with officers of the Council to help you with any issues
- there are usually 7 full Council meetings each year, which you will be expected to attend. These are formal meetings with other Council colleagues from all political groups and meetings start at 6:30pm and could last up to 3 hours, sometimes longer

you will be a member of at least one committee or be on Cabinet. Nearly all committee meetings are held in the evenings from 6.30pm. Your meetings/commitments may not be evenly spread out over the cycle so some weeks you may be out more evenings than others. If you would like more information on the current year's cycle of Council meetings please contact Democratic Services on 01530 454530.

The average length of a committee meeting is approximately 2 hours but this could vary.

- many councillors represent the Council on one or more outside bodies. Background reading and attendance at meetings of these bodies would increase your time commitment
- for most of the meetings you attend there will be papers that you will need to read beforehand. These papers can be quite detailed and take time to read and understand
- if you are elected as a chair, spokesperson or member of the Cabinet, the role can be very demanding as you will take responsibility for some of the Council's expenditure each year

If you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time to attend political group meetings. Political groups require their members to attend group meetings in advance of Council meetings and possibly training events/seminars organised by the political party

#### A councillor's typical week

In one week you could have a scrutiny committee meeting, a seminar, be representing the Council on an outside panel or partnership, if you are a member of a political group have a political group meeting and be holding your monthly ward surgery!

- you will receive a lot of information as a councillor so managing this and prioritising it will be important if you want to make an impact and not spread yourself too thinly across too many areas
- it is worth remembering that there are lots of officers in the Council who will be happy to provide you with briefings and help on specific issues

#### **Managing your time**

To give you some idea we asked some of the serving councillors how they manage their time and they said:



**Councillor Richard Blunt** Appleby Ward Councillor Leader of the Council

You can spend as much or as little time as a Councillor as you can give. If you are busy with work and can only attend one Council meeting a week you can still be a good Councillor.



**Councillor Matthew Blain** Hugglescote Ward Councillor Deputy Leader of the Council

With a full time job, the council, a young family and a doctorate to

complete, life can be pretty full on! You have to be prepared to work hard, to be available late into the night, and to make full use of technology to stay in touch. I tend to devote Tuesday's to council meetings, which can range from briefings with the Chief Exec and Senior Directors through to Cabinet, Full Council, Committee meetings, and attending outside bodies as our representative. Many Council meetings also run in the evenings (which helps with availablity), and I answer emails and take phone calls throughout the week and at weekends. You have to run your diary like a military-style operation!



**Councillor Graham Allman** Ashby Holywell Ward Councillor Chairman of Corporate Scrutiny Committee

I manage my time by keeping a tight diary of meetings and commitments, prioritising requests from those seeking my time and utilizing the experts within the council available to me as an elected member.

## Will I get paid for duties as a councillor?

There is no salary for being a councillor. However, you will be paid an allowance to reimburse you for time and expenses incurred whilst on Council business.

Every District Councillor is entitled to a basic allowance, currently £3,626 a year, paid into a bank account in 12 monthly instalments along with additional re-imbursement money to cover all Council related travelling and subsistence when carrying out 'approved duties'.

Some councillors are given an additional allowance to cover any special responsibilities such as Cabinet member, scrutiny chair/spokesperson etc. Childcare costs are also addressed.

There is also an annual support package which covers items such as land-line and broadband rental, loan of a laptop and printer and purchase of items to help in your work as a councillor e.g. fax, filing cabinet.

For more information about the Members' Allowance Scheme please download the Council's Constitution by visiting the Council's website at www.nwleics.gov.uk.

## What support will I receive if I am elected?

- information to help you deal with ward matters and all other work you do as a councillor will be provided from officers of the Council but it is more likely that the senior officers including the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Services, will be helping you and providing guidance
- Members' Services, situated in the Legal and Democratic Services Department, provides full-time dedicated support to meet the needs of councillors
- you will be offered a PC or laptop and printer for use at home for Council business with email and Internet access
- you will have access to fully equipped members' rooms and meeting rooms based at the Council offices. The members' rooms have facilities for both formal and informal use, telephones, computers and printers
- if you need any other help or assistance after you have been elected don't be afraid to ask

#### **Councillor's health and well-being**

A councillor's role can sometimes be stressful, which is why you will also be able to have the following: -

- access to confidential telephone counselling
- training on stress management

## Will I be given any training to help me perform my duties as a councillor?

When you are newly elected there will be an induction training period when you can attend several induction courses.

If you are a member of a political or other group there could be training and support from your political group.

The training programme provided by the Council is decided by the Member Development Working Party and will include:

 an opportunity to meet Corporate Directors and officers within Members' Services.

A series of induction courses on topics such as:

- members' allowances and support from Members' Services
- dealing with constituents' enquiries
- local government finance
- Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts
- probity and integrity
- speaking in public
- ethical conduct for members
- IT training
- tour of departments
- Elected Members' Mentoring Scheme: Councillors who wish to join the scheme will be linked to a senior officer within the Council who will be best able to meet the needs of the councillor and able to share

his or her knowledge with a first time councillor

- councillors can also request Personal Development Plans to identify individual training needs. This will be a confidential statement of your skills and training. The Plan will help you to recognise and value the skills, knowledge and experience you already have, and will help you make informed decisions about your future training and information needs
- individual training sessions identified within your Personal Development Plans
- there will also be optional training, workshops and seminars and an opportunity to attend seminars organised by other public bodies, local government organisations and other local authorities
- training for scrutiny committee members

## Will I get time off work?

If you are working, by law 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 off will depend upon your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making the commitment.

## **Probity and Integrity**

The conduct of councillors is formally governed by the Code of Conduct, which every council has adopted. The Code of Conduct sets out the rules that members should work to. All councillors are required to sign the declaration of acceptance of office, which includes an undertaking to observe the Code of Conduct. Breaches of the rules may be considered by the Standards Committee.

The General Principles for England, which all councillors must follow, are:

#### Selflessness

Members should serve only the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

#### **Honesty and Integrity**

Members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned; should not behave improperly; and should, on all occasions, avoid the appearance of such behaviour.

#### **Objectivity**

Members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.

#### Accountability

Members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.

#### **Openness**

Members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of their authority, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.

#### **Personal Judgment**

Members may take account of the views of others, including their political groups, but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions.

#### **Respect for Others**

Members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the authority's statutory officers, and its other employees.

#### **Duty to Uphold the Law**

Members should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.

#### Stewardship

Members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authority uses its resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

#### Leadership

Members should promote and support these principles by leadership, and by example, and should always act in a way that secures or preserves public interest There are also two very important provisions by which Members are bound at all times:

These are:

- they should not do anything which brings their Council or Office into disrepute.
- they should not misuse their official position to their own advantage or to the disadvantage of others

## I'd like to become a councillor, what do I do next?

#### Nominations

Once you have decided to stand for election as a District Councillor you will need to be proposed and seconded by 2 people and also to have 8 further people as assentors to your nomination.

Full details of the electoral process including the nomination procedure will be available upon request from the section of the Council which deals with Elections and which can be contacted at:

Electoral Services Section Council Offices Coalville Leicestershire LE67 3FJ

Tel: 01530 454503

Fax: 01530 454506

E-mail: louise.beeston@nwleicestershire. gov.uk

The nomination pack will include nomination forms, timetables and guidance notes. As a candidate you will be invited to a meeting held by the Council to hear about postal votes, where the count of the votes will be held, where the polling stations are going to be and to ask any questions you may have.

It is your responsibility, or your Agent's, (see below) to present nomination

papers to the returning officer before the statutory deadline.

#### **Nomination forms**

What you may need to know before you complete your nomination form

Some points you should consider:

- do not leave this task until the last minute, as there may be a mistake in your papers and you will need time to rectify this
- when collecting your 10 signatures, it is useful to take a copy of the voters' list with you. You can then compare the name with that on the nomination form and write down the assentor's number. The name and number should be exactly the same
- it is important to read the nomination papers and supporting material and make a careful note of when each of the various papers need to be returned. The Returning Officer can help with any queries
- make sure the people nominating or seconding you have nominated only you

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#### **Electoral register**

In the run up to the election candidates can have a free copy of the electoral register for the ward for which they are standing, which lists residents who can vote at the next election and a map showing the ward boundaries.

#### Do I need an election agent?

- you can take on this role yourself but it is helpful to have an agent
- if you are in a political party, it may be that one person takes on the role of agent for several candidates it is the agent's responsibility to ensure that forms are sent in at the correct times and to keep a clear and accurate record of financial expenditure, to be submitted after the election
- you should work closely with your agent as a double check

## What are Polling Agents and Counting Agents?

- these are all safeguards to ensure a fair election
- Polling Agents are people you can nominate to go into the polling stations to ensure that the polling stations are being run fairly. They cannot ask the polling clerks who has or has not voted
- Counting Agents are nominated to attend the count to ensure a fair and accurate count of votes
- you do not have to nominate either of these, though you may find friends and helpers are keen to attend the count

#### **Election Expenses, who pays?**

If you decide to become a councillor and spend money on your campaign, it is important to note that you have to pay for your own publicity material, property, services or items used for the campaign. However, if you are a member of a political group or some other group, you may find that financial help is available. You will need to check this with your political party or group.

Furthermore, although you or your party/ group pays for the election expenses, you must keep all your receipts. You will need to submit a statement of election expenses, supported by receipts, shortly after the Election. This is done to make sure that the money you spend on the election campaign does not go over the set limit of £600.00, with an additional 5p for every entry in the ward register of electors for which you are seeking to be elected.

If you have any queries about election expenses please contact the

#### **The Electoral Commission**

Trevelyan House Great Peter Street London SW1P 2HW

Tel: 020 7271 0500 (switchboard)

Fax 020 7271 0505

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

## **Useful contacts at North West Leicestershire District Council**

#### **Main switchboard**

01530 454545 www.nwleics.gov.uk E-mail: customer.services@nwleicestershire. gov.uk

#### **Corporate Director**

Alan Davies Tel: 01530 454520 E-mail: alan.davies@nwleicestershire.gov.uk

#### **Democratic Services Manager**

Melanie Philips Tel: 01530 454511 E-mail: melanie.phillips@nwleicestershire. gov.uk

## **Political Party Useful Contacts**

#### Conservative

North West Leicestershire Conservatives Office 1, The Springboard Centre Mantle Lane Coalville Leicestershire LE67 3DW Tel: 01530 277820 www.conservatives.com

#### Labour

Labour Party Regional Office (East Midlands) Harold Wilson House 23 Barratt Lane Nottingham NG9 6AD Tel: 0115 943 1777 www.eastmidslabour.org.uk (For election queries including nomination packs) **Senior Electoral Services Officer** Louise Beeston Tel: 01530 454503 Fax: 01530 454506

E-mail: louise.beeston@nwleicestershire.gov. uk

(For information about Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee meetings and Members' Services)

#### **Democratic Services Officer**

Rachel Levy Tel: 01530 454530 Fax: 01530 454506 E-mail: memberservices@nwleicestershire. gov.uk

#### Liberal Democrats

North West Leicestershire Liberal Democrats 188 Bardon Road Coalville LE67 4BL Tel: 01530 810 319 www.eastmidslibdems.org.uk

If you are interested in other political parties, please visit the Register of Political Parties accessible via the Electoral Commission's website

#### **The Electoral Commission**

Trevelyan House Great Peter Street London SW1P 2HW Tel: 020 7271 0500 (switchboard) Fax 020 7271 0505 www.electoralcommission.org.uk

## **Local Government Useful Contacts**

#### Local Government Association (LGA)

Tel: 020 7664 3131 LGconnect Local Government Association Local Government House Smith Square London SW1P 3HZ www.lga.gov.uk

#### **Audit Commission**

Tel: 020 7828 1212 1st Floor Millbank Tower Millbank London SW1P 4HQ www.audit-commission.gov.uk

#### Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

Tel: 020 7554 2800 22 Upper Woburn Place London WC1H 0TB www.lgiu.gov.uk

#### Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA)

Tel: 020 7296 6600 Layden House 76-86 Turnmill Street London EC17 5QU www.idea.gov.uk/knowledge

#### **The Electoral Commission**

Trevelyan House Great Peter Street London SW1P 2HW Tel: 020 7271 0500 (switchboard) Fax 020 7271 0505 www.electoralcommission.org.uk

#### **COUNCIL'S VISION**

North West Leicestershire will be a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home

North West Leicestershire District Council, Council Offices, Whitwick Road, Coalville, Leicestershire, LE67 3FJ.

This document is available in other formats on request