

Becoming a Local Council Candidate

Key Points

- People are encouraged to think of themselves as potential candidates
- Councillors represent local communities
- They work in Scotland's 32 Councils (also known as Local Authorities)
- Council services include planning, social work and refuse collection
- The method of voting for Councillors is changing to Single Transferable Vote (STV)

There are 1,222 Councillors working across Scotland's 32 Councils.

Most Councillors (around 80 per cent) are members of political parties. You don't have to be affiliated with a political party; candidates can stand as independents.

Scottish Ministers want to encourage as many people as possible to get involved in their communities and consider themselves as potential candidates.

Even if you are not ready to stand this time round, you might think about standing at future elections.

Young people, women and ethnic minorities are particularly encouraged to think about becoming candidates.

Professionals with either full-time or part-time careers are also encouraged to consider standing.

Why Become a Councillor?

There are lots of reasons why you might want to become a Councillor:

- To change things for the better
- To make a contribution to your community
- To make better use of your skills and experience
- To become actively engaged in local policies and fight for a particular cause
- Perhaps you have a sense of duty or you want to 'give something back'

It is a personal decision, as can be seen from the case studies available to read on www.votescotland.com

Powers of Local Government in Scotland

Local government powers can include:

- Mandatory powers - i.e. they must be provided by law. For example, primary and secondary education
- Voluntary - Local Authorities do not have to provide these by law but usually choose to. For example, sport and leisure facilities
- Flexible - Local Authorities may choose to give money to projects or groups in that area. For example, grants can be provided for small projects that aim to tackle poverty, vandalism or promote safety or community development

Unlike Parliament, which passes laws, Local Government implements policies and delivers services for local people. Councillors have the power, responsibility and influence to help them achieve results for the benefit of the people they represent.

Local Government provides an opportunity for people to participate in democracy at a closer level to their everyday lives than National or European elections.

What Does Being a Councillor Involve?

Councillors represent a ward within the Council area. Three or four Councillors will be elected to each ward.

They represent the people in the ward and are also responsible for making sure the council's statutory duties are carried out.

This involves being a member of various committees which makes decisions on matters such as council policies, strategies and budgets.

And means employing local knowledge to work closely with council officials.

Councillors also:

- Make decisions about the way the council is run and about the services the council provides
- Act as a point of contact with local groups
- Represent the views of local groups and individuals regarding council policies, services and the needs of the area
- Work with local people and organisations such as the police, health service and local business to develop and plan services
- Represent the community and the council on partnerships and outside bodies
- Hold open sessions – known as surgeries – when they meet the people they represent (their constituents) to discuss whatever issues they have about the neighbourhood

Salary

After May 2007, all Councillors will be guaranteed a basic salary of £15,452.

Council Leaders and other senior Councillors who have significant additional responsibilities earn proportionately more.

More Information

A National Code of Conduct for all Councillors, including rules on declaration of interests, was approved by the Scottish Parliament and published in May 2003. The Standards Commission is responsible for this National Code of Conduct. You can read the National Code of Conduct at www.scotland.gov.uk

You can find more information in the A-Z of Local Government compiled in May 2003 by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) available at www.cosla.gov.uk

Who Can Stand as a Council Candidate?

On the day you are nominated as a candidate and also on the day of election, you must be:

- Eighteen or over
- A citizen of the UK, Commonwealth, Republic of Ireland or another member state of the European Union

And you must meet at least one of the four following qualifications

- You are registered as a Local Government elector for the council area in which you want to be a candidate
- For 12 months before the date of nomination you have been the owner or tenant of any land or premises in the council area
- During the past 12 months your main or only place of work has been in the council area
- You have lived in the council area for the whole of the last 12 months

You cannot be a Councillor if:

- You are employed by the council or hold a paid office in the council or a joint board or committee (although you can be stand for election while employed by the council as long as you resign your post if successfully elected. You may also be a Councillor in one council area and employed by another)
- You have had your estate sequestered in Scotland, are subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order in England and Wales or are bankrupt in Northern Ireland
- During the five years before the date of the election, you have been sentenced to a prison term of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) without the option of a fine
- You have been disqualified under Part III of the Representation of the People Act 1983

How to Become a Councillor?

The official steps to becoming a Councillor are:

1. Official nomination is submitted to the Returning Officer
2. If nomination is valid, name appears on notice of election first, then as candidate on ballot paper
3. Candidate appoints Election Agent
4. Candidate and supporters campaign for votes
5. Votes are cast in the election using the Single Transferable Vote system (from May 2007 onwards)

Detailed guidance for prospective candidates and Election Agents will be available from the Electoral Commission from January 2007.

In the meantime, read on for more details about:

- Nominations
- Election Agents
- Campaign Material

Nominations

To stand for election to a particular ward, a nomination paper must be submitted to the Returning Officer on behalf of the candidate.

The candidate must agree to the nomination in writing for it to be valid.

The candidate must also declare that he or she is not disqualified from standing.

Returning Officers are not required to determine whether a candidate is disqualified from standing.

It is a serious offence to include false information on the nomination or consent, and a person found guilty of such an offence may face imprisonment for up to a year or an unlimited fine.

The nomination paper must contain:

- The candidate's full name and, if wanted, any name by which the candidate is commonly known e.g. Joanne Kathleen Rowling, commonly known as JK Rowling
- Full home address
- If he or she is standing as the candidate of a registered political party
- A description which must be either the name or description of a registered party or the word 'Independent'
- If a description is submitted, it must be accompanied by a certificate of authorisation from that registered party's Nominating Officer
- A signature of a witness

The description will appear on the ballot paper along with the candidate's full name and home address.

A registered emblem of the party can also appear on the ballot paper if it is requested in writing.

Full details on how nominations are handled are available from the Returning Officer for your Local Authority area.

Election Agents

Each candidate must appoint an Election Agent.

Candidates can choose to act as their own Election Agent.

The Election Agent is responsible for the proper management of the candidate's campaign.

Campaign Material

Campaign publicity material is subject to a number of restrictions under electoral law, and is also subject to the general civil and criminal law relating to published material.

All posters, placards and bills that refer to the election must carry an imprint on the face giving the name and address of each of the printer, the publisher, and the promoter of the material.

This also applies to all printed material distributed to promote the election of a candidate.